

**An Investigation Into New Labour Education Policy:
Personalisation, Young People, Schools and Modernity**

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ABSTRACT

The New Labour government's (1997-2010) policy of personalised learning was announced as an idea 'exciting' the profession and promising 'radical implications' for the shape of education in England. The policy attracted much debate and criticism and its enactment is a site worthy of research. This study makes a contribution to knowledge through researching the rarely heard stories of young people in this policy enactment. It makes a further contribution to policy scholarship through the interplay of the data from school practices and moral philosophy drawn from Alasdair MacIntyre.

Qualitative interviews and focus group activities were conducted with young people in three different secondary schools in order to understand their stories of personalised learning some two years into New Labour's third term of government. To understand more of the context for the stories of the young people, some strategic actors in policy dissemination were interviewed, as were the headteachers of the three schools.

Personalised learning promised to engage the voice of the learner in learning practices. The research finds a young peoples' story that is consistently one of a mute and invisible identity within the schools. An argument is presented that the purposes of schools ought to be judged on standards of excellence definitive of, and extended by, a concept of virtues. A distinction is made between effectiveness in producing exam results and a richer sense of excellence in education practice. It is argued that virtues that define standards of excellence at the institutional level of practice can enrich and prefigure wider concepts of justice than are contained in policy. Young peoples' stories in this research indicate that, contrary to policy ideals, they often perceived unfairness and arbitrariness in their school experiences.

Personalised learning needs to be set within the narrative of the personalisation of public services: a reforming rubric, employing the motif of the citizen-consumer as a proposition about social justice and modernisation. New Labour's ideology and models of governance are explored and related to the testimony of headteachers to understand more about the young peoples' perceptions. Literatures are drawn upon to place personalisation in a historical context, linking it to moral orders of contemporary social imaginaries. New Labour made a case for personalised learning as furthering the cause of social justice and is thus a policy in need of ethical examination. Following MacIntyre, it is argued that modernity has left few moral resources by which to evaluate the personal, but the experiences of young people suggested that a richer moral agency is glimpsed within their stories of schooling. The social practice at the level of schools is thus critical but requires policy to enable ethical spaces for schools to re-invigorate their purposes. I argue that in the light of some critical fault lines, such as neoliberalism and a reconfiguration of tiers of local governance, personalisation as a 'modernising' policy proposition could do little to extend the goods of schooling beyond some narrow conceptions of effectiveness.

DECLARATION

No portion of work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED

(Explanations are provided in the text where appropriate)

| | |
|--------|--|
| AfL | Assessment for Learning |
| CERI | Centre for Educational Research and Innovation |
| BECTA | The British Educational Communications and Technology Agency |
| DCSF | Department for Children Schools and Families |
| DfE | Department for Education |
| DfES | Department for Education and Skills |
| E-bac | English Baccalaureate |
| ippr | Institute for Public Policy Research |
| L | Location, substitutes for page when quoting unpaginated e-book sources |
| NCSL | National College for School Leadership |
| NDPB | Non-Departmental Public Body |
| OECD | Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development |
| OFSTED | Office for Standards in Education |
| QCA | Qualifications and Curriculum Authority |
| SEU | Standards and Effectiveness Unit |
| SST | Specialist Schools Trust |
| SSAT | Specialist Schools and Academies Trust |
| TLRP | Teaching and Learning Research Programme |
| UFA | University of the First Age |

CHAPTER ONE

PERSONALISATION, YOUNG PEOPLE, SCHOOLS AND MODERNITY: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This thesis centres on New Labour's (1997-2010) concept of personalisation and its implications for the experiences of young people in schools. New Labour policy advanced personalised learning as "a matter of moral purpose and social justice" (Gilbert 2006, p. 7). Personalised learning also promised to engage the voice of the learner more deeply in the pedagogical processes of schools (Gilbert 2006). Using qualitative methods, the study seeks to understand policy enactment through the stories of young people, particularly in relation to practices of learner voice and social justice in schools. Personalisation promotes a moral argument and attempts to draw upon what government perceived as contemporary cultural notions of personal identity (Blair 2003, 2004a). Therefore, in order to research the policy narrative more fully the study also draws upon literatures to explore the historical context of late Western modernity and the moral orders of its "divergent social imaginaries" (Taylor 2007, p.3). After describing the research questions and the rationale for the study this chapter then proceeds to summarise the argument and outline how the thesis unfolds.

As a point of entry into the puzzle of personalisation I aim to investigate policy documents and speeches, literatures from thinktanks associated with policy making, and writings from a variety of critical voices in order to understand more of the political and policy story from the way it was written at the time. In addition, I conduct empirical fieldwork to investigate the following questions:

- 1) What are the experiences of young people as learners within the practices of schools who seek to enact personalised learning?
- 2) How is the enactment of personalised learning in schools framed by the ways that headteachers interpret and reproduce policies of personalised learning?

A strategic aim of the thesis is to ask questions about personalisation within the context of late Western modernity in order to understand more about its place and prominence in New Labour's policy making and how this might then contextualise the practices of schools and the experiences of young people within them. I argue the necessity of this aim because education entails a series of ethical questions about what ought to be done within schooling. Such a proposition suggests some moral philosophy is required and this in turn entails a sociological and historical context (MacIntyre 1991).

By examining the social and moral contexts of personalisation I am committed to a policy scholarship that looks 'behind' and 'around' the policy texts and which aims to seek possible connections between the stories of headteachers and young people and social trends in order to examine the practical consequences for young peoples' experience in schools that sought to enact personalised learning. To conduct this policy scholarship I examine primary documentary sources and conduct fieldwork at three levels: the macro by interviewing heads and some key strategic figures in the dissemination and translation of personalised learning; the meso by working in three school sites where I interviewed headteachers and studied school policy regarding personalisation; and micro, where I worked with groups of young people to develop understandings of their stories of policy enactment. Additional literatures are drawn upon to examine the dilemmas of late modernity in order to provide a cultural

context for understanding both why personalisation could be a potential compelling political narrative and for also examining the moral conditions of policy enactment.

1.2 Rationale for the study

There is a policy scholarship imperative for the research in that the claims of personalised learning to carry “radical implications” (Knight 2007b, unpaginated speech) have been little understood in relation to the stories and experiences of young people. This particular interest arises from the story of my professional background and has in turn prompted ongoing research commitments. The personal curiosities are thus part of the research stimulus and will be briefly explained below.

The case for researching the policy enactment is compelling. As a political narrative personalisation is a rubric that covers a number of public service reforms and tries to define a unique position for New Labour. Personalisation in New Labour policy is essentially defined as the system built round the needs of the individual as opposed to the individual having to bend to the needs of the system (Clarke 2004; Miliband 2004). Two key motifs emerge: the citizen-consumer (‘voice’) and social justice, and their mode of presentation is through the ideology of modernisation. Their presentation can be seen as ideological in the sense that personalisation has echoes in education history but New Labour strenuously sought to present it as a modern departure from previous ‘failures’. Personalisation can be seen as part of the “third way” self-definition of New Labour (Blair 1998; Giddens 1998) that attempts to match their social-democratic past as the party of an organised English labour movement with the constraints and obligations imposed by neoliberalism (Harvey 2007). Neither pole of citizen or consumer is coherently conceived within the New Labour programme (Clarke et al 2007; Newman 2006). The

personalisation narrative was given the backing of two Labour Prime Ministers and members of the Labour Cabinet, it was elaborated through approved policy networks and as a concept received much critical discussion. In education, such discussion ranged from the supportive, to the cautious to the highly critical. In addition, while the citizen-consumer motif in the school context is aimed at parents and carers, personalised learning promised a greater 'voice' for young people in their learning (Gilbert 2006). However, little research into the dimensions of this 'voice' in relation to personalisation and young people has been conducted (although see Rudduck et al, 2006). Personalisation is thus a site worthy of research.

I describe how personalisation is a key rubric to try and define a political story for New Labour's public sector reform programme and attracted major ministerial support for its promotion. As I will go on to describe in Chapter Two, the year 2004 witnessed a proliferation of conferences and publications devoted to personalised learning. Commentators speculated as to whether this was to be the "big idea" in education (Pollard and Jones 2004, p.4) or the potential "harbinger" of a "revised code of education" (Hartley 2007a, p.629) or indeed a forerunner of some "new totalitarianism" (Fielding 2006a, p. 347). Jim Knight, Minister of State for Schools and Learners at the time of addressing an Innovation Unit conference, suggested that personalised learning raised questions with "radical implications" for the delivery of education (Knight 2007b, unpagged speech). Personalised learning made claims about "moral purpose and social justice" (Gilbert 2006, p.7). Therefore a study of the impact of the claims to moral purpose, and the policy's 'radical implications', upon the school experiences of young people makes a worthwhile contribution to policy scholarship.

The study represents also my professional story and it is this that led to my initial curiosity. In September 2003 I attended a policy group meeting with David Miliband (then Minister of State for School Standards in the New Labour Government)¹ to discuss Extended Schools² and what was then known as “Study Support Policy” but which refers to school learning beyond the classroom (DfES 2003a; Rogers 2003). At the meeting Miliband “suggested there should be a need to move towards a more personal education in conjunction with wider government priorities” (DfES 2003a, p.1). In the same meeting Miliband articulated the notion “of a viral strategy” (DfES 2003a, p.2) in which the Department³ and schools would enter a new relationship. In a subsequent speech to education professionals Miliband (2004) reiterated more fully these notions about the need for personalised learning and a “new relationship with schools”. The meeting and speech stimulated my curiosity, for while the details were sketchy and unclear, “personal” or “personalised learning” represented a government strategy to which some thought had been seemingly devoted.

In my role as a director of a national charity⁴ whose objectives were to engage young people more fully with learning in all its guises, I was frequently asked to comment upon personalised learning. Since part of the work of the charity involved securing funding from the department for enabling aspects of policy (DfES 2003a) I also needed to understand the pedagogical and structural parameters of what I was supposed to be promoting in order to maintain the security of the organisation. Securing funding by promoting government policy is not always a comfortable place for a third sector organisation to be in, especially when the more I became acquainted with personalised learning the less clear and uncertain I became as to both the details and the strategic narratives it represented. Thus this thesis begins

life as an intellectual curiosity in my professional life and a desire to critically understand the policy story of personalisation.

As my work outside academic research is focused on young people and learning my first consideration was to investigate the impact of personalisation on the learning of young people in schools. However, a microanalysis of pedagogy and learner identity cannot be separated from macro trends of history and social change and my curiosity about personalised learning extends to its appearance as a motif in reflexive stages of modernity (Beck 2010). There is thus a further research imperative and the study has already prompted my further lines of enquiry. I have written about the scope and nature of learner voice proposed by personalised learning and actually experienced by young people (Rogers and Gunter 2012). In addition, research has been conducted into the important issues of trust in schools as mediated by the policy of personalised learning (Gunter, Rogers and Woods 2010).

1.3 Outlining the argument

I argue for a critical scholarship suggesting that policy represents processes that work behind and beyond the literal face of texts and speeches. Social stratification, power and questions of the positioning of knowledge are key themes in such scholarship. However, the “sociological imagination” (Wright-Mills 1980, p.14) suggests that there is a hermeneutic element in which the accounts of agents need to be understood in historical and social contexts. The model for this thesis is that the historical context enables a moral critique of modernity. Social practices and an account of the virtues they embody in institutions such as schools are sites of study that enable policy enactments to be evaluated in relation to critical moral theory as

developed by Alasdair MacIntyre (1994, 1999a, 1999b, 2001). Interpretative and narrative methodologies that draw upon notions of plot and metaphor lead to the use of interviews and focus group activities to 'illuminate' the theoretical work.

From the data gathered there emerges a strong consistency in young peoples' stories suggesting that they perceived themselves to be 'invisible' to the school and often unable to engage in dialogue with teachers, particularly about issues of pedagogy. Drawing upon the testimony of young people it is argued that one of the key mechanisms for producing this sense of invisibility arises from the targets and data held by the school on student performance, ironically designed to enhance the visibility of students and render their education more personalised.

The validation of this perspective is advanced through elaborating MacIntyre's (1994) neo-Aristotelian concepts of social practice and virtues. Using MacIntyre's framework it is argued that there is a difference between effectiveness and excellence and that in pursuit of targets for individual students, excellence in the internal goods of education was often sacrificed to the external reputation of the school. I find that young people desire an expression of the virtues of social justice and democracy in their relationships with teachers and the institution. The data further suggests that their desire for something beyond their self-interest could be drawn upon to provide a richer content to their school curriculum and their democratic participation in key decisions of the school.

While acknowledging that the complexities of social and cultural determinations and discursive constructions have not been explored in this thesis, it is suggested that

an account of virtues in relation to enriched concepts of excellence in education can develop evaluative tools through which to pursue more just practices. The virtues of just generosity, independent practical reasoning (MacIntyre 1999a), care, trust, courage, honesty, integrity, constancy, compassion and respect are examples of relational qualities that if practised more extensively in the relationships of teaching and learning would serve to prefigure wider civic qualities of justice. Social justice is more likely to be served by non-manipulative modes of moral engagement. The mythical metaphor of Procrustean schooling is drawn upon to summarise how young people felt that their schools, on the whole, offered a 'one size fits all' learning experience, contrary to the promise of personalised learning policy.

Some of the reasons for young people inconsistently experiencing virtuous practice in this sample may lie within the competing values of school governance and New Labour's construction of 'modernisation', for which personalisation is a key rubric. In New Labour's governing project one can discern competing values of governance at work from the dispersal of more autonomy in the system through to central control over governance, from long-term shifts in the system to short-term improvements. The rational goal model of governance maintains central control over policy while allowing some local innovation and change. This model of governance it could be argued is very much the home of school improvement and school effectiveness but it has a key driver in the production of data for government and public consumption in order to facilitate the citizen-consumer in playing the supposed market. This market mechanism is adopted from Hirschman's (1970) concepts of Exit, Voice and Loyalty and is designed as a lever of change in order to realise New Labour's purposes of greater social justice. As such, personalised learning in the view of at least one government minister (Jim Knight 2007b) was said to hold radical

implications but this research suggests that this impact is not realised in policy enactment.

I argue that personalisation in appealing to headteachers' values about the 'whole child' (Hartley 2009) promised something new and offered to trust headteachers to define their own learning journeys. Personalisation supported the securing of New Labour's discourses of 'rigorous standards' as a moral purpose that would be difficult to defy. After all, who could reasonably argue against higher education standards and more just outcomes for young people? However the models of governance under which English schools are expected to organise themselves, and answer to, are often working against each other (Newman 2006). This competition of values suggests that headteachers' educational beliefs and their need to comply with a central audit culture (Power 1999), while at times coinciding, might not always sit comfortably with each other. Evidence from headteacher interviews in this research suggests that this can be the case in the translation of personalised learning into school practices. Headteachers and policy makers are caught in a complex web of values, for example: needing to 'get things done', 'make a difference', belief in pushing the potential of each student, systemic reform and accounting for public expenditure. In this complexity there will be turbulence between the various priorities and values and perhaps it is not surprising that young people in this research often felt that the school's effectiveness in getting them good exam grades did not engender a richer and more engaged learning experience. Personalisation does not seem to be a policy that bridged the gap between 'effectiveness' and a deeper educational engagement for young people.

Thus the 'moral purpose' of personalised learning requires further examination and since personalisation is a proposition about social justice, a critical understanding of it as a narrative of reform has to be placed within the larger historical stories of modernity. Some features of modernity relevant to the story of personalisation are the social imaginaries (Taylor 2007) of the self-realising individual. This imaginary is understood as a moral order linked to 1) freedom and dignity in economic activity and 2) a political sphere in which the ideal of popular representation is maintained, if not practised. Personalisation is not a programme for constructing a consuming individual but a reflection, or precipitation of, historical tendencies that pre-exist the policy. A key imaginary of contemporary modernity is reflected in the possibility of an unresolved division between the hermeneutics of trust versus suspicion (Ricoeur 1970) about the function of consumption in society and the moral status of the consumer. Both positions are possible given modernity's plotline of the self-determining individual and both attempt to answer the dilemmas of ontological anxiety (Giddens 1991): the question of "who needs me?" (Sennett 1998, p.116).

However, social imaginaries from which policy draw are shaped within narratives of contending economic and cultural forces, especially class oppositions and hegemony of cultural ideas has to work at maintaining an elite power (Gramsci 2007; Harvey 2007). In recent history a new, and not uniform phase of capitalism, neoliberalism has come to dominate economic and cultural life (Harvey 2007). Neoliberalism presents compelling arguments about human dignity and freedom that play into the social imaginary. Personalisation via the exponential power of digital communication has promised freedom for the individual but does so based on algorithms of consumption that aggregate personal preferences into standardised forms. The exponential power of the World-Wide-Web (the web) offers some paradoxical possibilities: for instance, personalisation through greater

standardisation (Giddens, 1991). Personalisation offers a compelling narrative role through bridging a number of contemporary paradoxes in the culture of modernity. One paradox is that the moral status of the consumer is open to a number of competing and irreconcilable discourses, an agonism of modernity. In drawing upon a partial and one-dimensional model of the consumer New Labour's state has left spaces for neoliberal hegemony to draw upon contemporary social imaginaries in a compelling way. In their ambiguity over the role of local tiers of government in public services (another 'fault line') New Labour's policy enactment could serve to undercut the potential of reform by squeezing the spaces for richer ethical debate and innovation in the telos of schooling. The result is possibly a grave undercutting of personalised learning as a policy to impact positively on social justice, especially if criteria for justice were to be broadened from one of redistributing wealth to those of recognition and political participation (Fraser 2003, 2010).

The thesis places itself as critical scholarship because it contrasts the current state of practices witnessed in the research with what 'ought to be' given the arguments drawn from MacIntyre's (1991) virtue ethics. Drawing on Charles Taylor's (2003) argument about authenticity judged against "horizons of significance" (p.35), I argue that institutional sites such as schools are critical to public services that can offer possibilities for enriched concepts of learning and civic engagement. Amartya Sen (2010) and Martha Nussbaum (2003) offer examples of ideas about human capabilities that can be aligned to the relational qualities of virtues and by which the excellence of school practices in working towards justice can be morally evaluated. Social justice is a slippery and "malleable" phrase capable of meaning many things to different people (Thrupp and Tomlinson 2005, p.549), in this thesis I argue for a 're-invigoration' of ethics in the social practices of teaching by arguing for conceptions of justice in the democratic and relational virtues that characterise

excellence in learning. Models of learning that can struggle with and negotiate the difficulties of building learning practices more accountable to the young people in them (Smyth 2006) are more likely to prefigure democratic and just virtues and contribute to human goods than the precepts of personalised learning (Fielding and Moss 2011). These practices are to be located not just in rules and codes and grades of attainment but in stories of how young people and adults work together in schools. The critical theme of the thesis is therefore to contribute to what Gerald Grace has called the “new paradigm” of “complex hope” (2011, pp. 855/856) in policy scholarship.

1.4 the structure of the thesis

Chapter Two describes the story of New Labour’s policy of personalisation: how it is explained and promoted by New Labour. The history and dynamics of the policy are examined, demonstrating its importance as a policy site. The chapter then examines the confusing story of the pedagogical messages for the teaching profession. As personalised learning is also part of a wider political reform programme, this context is explored, especially in relation to the notions of voice and social justice. The examination of the political and pedagogical stories is completed by looking at the critical reception of the policy and who, outside government, was drawn into the narrative. The chapter concludes by arguing that although personalisation is a New Labour discourse, its underlying themes are entirely relevant to an understanding of policy enactment in contemporary English schooling.

Chapter Three begins to set out the model for the research design by outlining the ethical orientation of the approach to the investigation and subsequent analysis.

The model of the research makes a case for critical policy scholarship with a particular contribution drawn from MacIntyre's (1994) intellectual framework and sources that enrich this version of neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics. In addition, the use of the competing values model of organisational life (Quinn 1999) is presented, as is Janet Newman's (2006) adaptation of this to models of governance. The model enables an examination of the paradoxes of contemporary schools and governance and it is also employed to frame evaluative summaries of the ethical arguments.

From the theoretical models in Chapter Three certain methodological consequences are drawn and Chapter Four then details the fieldwork questions and the process of their investigation. Detail is provided about the sampling and sites for the research, the participants, what took place and the methods of data analysis. Chapter Four concludes by explaining issues of trustworthiness, ethics and generalisability arising from the design.

Chapter Five presents testimony from the young people in relation to questions of learner voice using the cultural allusion "crouching target, hidden child" to reflect upon the problematic positioning of students in relation to the propositions of personalised learning. The chapter reflects on the data using MacIntyre's (1994) analytic framework.

A similar format with the interplay of data and analysis is employed in Chapter Six, which examines young peoples' stories in relation to issues of social justice. I relate young peoples' perceptions to those in the previous chapter to argue that contrary to the promises of personalised learning they experience a sense of invisibility and

unfairness in the practices of schooling. The myth of Procrustes is used as a metaphor to suggest that a 'one size fits all' notion of schooling can work in morally manipulative modes. The argument builds again on MacIntyre's work to suggest that the virtues of justice and democratic engagement ought to be more richly developed and modeled in the education of young people.

It is assumed in this study that headteachers are important links between policy makers and young people and Chapter Seven provides something of the headteacher story in relation to policy enactment. It does so by drawing upon Newman's (2006) competing models of governance and incorporating the stories of headteachers into that framework. This work contextualises the gap between the ideas in personalised learning policy and the stories of young people.

Chapter Eight then takes this contextualisation towards more 'remote' transformations further by examining the social imaginaries (Taylor 2007) that frame the possible moral orders of late modernity and how personalisation comes to be a compelling and paradoxical narrative. I examine some fault lines that undercut the potential to create radically new spaces for school practices to innovate in terms of an authentic learner voice engaged in more just forms of participation. A key paradox is consumerism and the motif of the consumer-citizen suggested a concept of social justice achieved through redistribution, voice and participation. But consumerism runs across another key fault line: that of neoliberalism. This theme is explored along with the ambiguous place of local tiers of government within the narrative. The chapter works in a more abstract discursive style, a necessary adjunct to understanding the context of institutional space for a practical and ethical philosophy. However, where relevant, fieldwork testimony is drawn upon, especially

that of strategic players in the policy story of personalisation. The chapter introduces the notion of ethical spaces and how oscillations in policy may well pressure schools out of room for enriched notions of their purposes.

Chapter Nine draws the work from the thesis into a conclusion by summarising the analysis in response to the strategic aims of the thesis and each of the two research questions posed at the beginning of this chapter. It also highlights the contribution of the study to critical policy scholarship and further possible avenues of research.

Footnotes to Chapter One:

- 1) New Labour Secretaries of State (SoS) were: 1) for Education: David Blunkett 2/5/97-8/6/01 – then for Education and Skills: 2) Estelle Morris 8/6/01-24/10/02 3) Charles Clarke 24/10/02-15/12/04 3) Ruth Kelly 15/12/04-5/5/06 4) Alan Johnson 5/5/06-27/6/07 then 5) Ed Balls: SoS for Children Schools and Families 27/6/07-11/5/10

Ministers serving under these Secretaries of State that are particularly relevant and influential in personalised learning policy are 1) David Miliband, 'Head' of the Prime Minister's Policy Unit 1997 – 2001, and Minister of State for Schools and Standards June 2002-December 2004 and 2) Jim Knight, Minister of State for Schools and Learners 2006, then Schools and Families June 2007 – June 2009. Then Margaret Hodge, as Minister for Children from 2003 – May 2005, was particularly responsible for the Every Child Matters strategy. Beverley Hughes as Minister of State for Children, Young People and Families, May 2005-June 2009, was particularly responsible for Extended Schools Policy.

Other strategy actors include:

Gordon Brown, Chancellor of the Exchequer from 2/5/97-27/6/07 and Prime Minister until the general election, May 11th 2010, made several interventions on public service reform, modernisation, 'localism' and communities, in which personalisation was a feature.

Localism and communities were features of strategies headed up by: Hazel Blears, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government 27/6/05-5/6/05 and Tessa Jowell, Minister for the Cabinet Office 5/6/09-11/5/10

Rt. Hon. Anne McGuire MP, appointed to the Privy Council in 2008 and became Cabinet Advisor on Third Sector Innovation November 2008, with a specific remit on the third sector's contribution to personalising public services.

- 2) Extended Schools: New Labour introduced a policy of adding to existing schools a wide range of services and offers, often beyond the school day, in order to further 'help meet the needs of their pupils, their families and the wider community'. See DfES (2002) *Extended Schools: providing opportunities and services for all*, (London: DfES)

- 3) The “Department” will be used as a generic term for all Government Education Departments. There have been several changes of Department title:

Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) 1995 – 2001

Department for Education and Skills (DfES) 2001 – 2007

Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) 2007 – 11th May 2010

The Conservative/Liberal Democrat Coalition Government is currently the Department for Education (DfE)

- 4) The University of the First Age (UFA): a national charity started in Birmingham in 1996 by Professor Sir Tim Brighouse to extend and enrich learning for young people aged 11-16 beyond the school day. From 1999 the UFA became a national project, working with all young people to the age of 25 and was supported by a grant from the Education Department to contribute to the development of Study Support and Extended School learning activities.

CHAPTER TWO

PERSONALISING LEARNING, DESCRIBING THE NARRATIVES

2.1 Introduction

This chapter argues for the importance of personalised learning as a site of research and sets out to establish the context that enables links to be drawn later in the thesis between more abstract social transformations and the experiences of young people in schools. Personalisation is a key policy story in New Labour's public service reform and it is impossible to view the narrative of personalised learning in education as distinct from the drive to modernise public services.

Therefore, I describe New Labour's political time-line of personalised learning within the story of English education policy (section 2.2). However, the pedagogical translation of personalisation into learning is a story of muddle and confusion (2.3) and one of much discussion. So part of the story that also needs telling is that personalised learning received a considerable amount of critical attention (2.4). From those offering definitions, to entrepreneurs, to cautious supporters, and to critical scholars, the range of the debate illustrates its resonance in the education system.

One of the reasons for the confusions that arise in the pedagogy of personalised learning is that it is of a piece with New Labour's political rubric for public service reform called personalisation and suffers from its antimonies. New Labour proposed a thorough going reform of public services and each sector had its own version of personalisation (Newman 2006) so it is both a broad a story to describe

their desire to change a public sector culture but a detailed one in each of the services. Given a drive to radically transform cultures, while professing to avoid central prescription, it is little wonder that paradox and tensions crept into the detail. In this chapter I briefly outline the links between personalising learning and the wider policy narrative (2.5). The argument in this section is that personalisation proposed three important, interwoven, themes: the 'citizen-consumer' as part of a 'modern' public service that then drives greater depths of 'social justice'. The thesis will later, through the fieldwork, examine what impact was perceived by young people upon their sense of voice and justice with schools some six to seven years into New Labour advancing and reinforcing ideas of personalised learning.

Although the concepts of personalised learning are distinctively New Labour in their linguistic register, I will argue later in the thesis that they can be linked back to trends in the social understandings that constitute the "multiple modernities" (Taylor 2007, p.1) within which these narratives play out. Furthermore, the Conservative led-coalition government (from May 2010) maintain many of the inherent logics of personalisation in their social and education policies and 2.6, briefly, updates this narrative in order to stress again the relevance to policy research of the concept of personalisation.

In this thesis I use the terms personalised learning and personalising learning interchangeably; Professor David Hargreaves advanced the use of "personalising learning" as opposed to "personalised learning" because it provides the sense of journey rather than completed task; doing rather than being 'done to' (Demos 2004a). Although personalising learning has particular policy inflections, I agree that it was an "incoherent" and "inchoate 'introductory' offer" (Hartley 2007 p.639)

and the exactness of the terms matters little. The term ‘personalisation’ I have tried to use to indicate broader context.

2.2 Personalising learning: New Labour’s narrative

This section provides an outline of the history of the policy under New Labour and argues for its place as a site of research interest. The history is reconstructed from analysing key Department policy papers and guidance documents, Ministerial speeches and articles, and documentation from thinktanks and non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) associated with personalised learning discussion and promotion.

In policy history, David Miliband (Minister of State for School Standards) first advanced personalised learning in an *Observer* newspaper article, in June 2003 (Miliband 2003). The main thrust was that computers and individualised systems of assessment could support personalised learning, a position he later clarified by stating that personalisation is not “individualised learning” “sitting alone at a computer” “pupils left to their own devices” (Miliband 2004, unpagged speech). Miliband (2004) advanced these statements in a speech to the North of England Conference that launched personalised learning. Miliband’s themes were subsequently translated into a document, a “National Conversation” with the profession (DfES 2004a, in title) and became enshrined in education policy as a “Central Characteristic” (Charles Clarke, Secretary of State for Education, foreword to DfES, 2004b). The “National Conversation” informed its readers that:

“Personalised learning is an idea that is capturing the imagination of teachers, children and young people across the country” (DfES 2004a, p.3).

This document went on to suggest that although it would look different in every school, the “key components” (p.8) of personalised learning are: Assessment for Learning, Effective Teaching and Learning Strategies, Curriculum Entitlement and Choice, School Organization, and Strong Partnership Beyond the School.

However, these headings provided only broad outlines of meaning and for the teaching profession, specific and detailed definition seemed to be particularly lacking (Hastings 2004). In part this was because personalised learning was an abstract proposition about “an education system where the system is molded around the child, not the child around the system.” (Miliband 2004, unpagged speech). Strong rumour suggested that one Secretary of State, Ruth Kelly (December 2004 –May 2006), considered the phrase “jargon” (Slater 2005, unpagged web) but the phrase appeared in her 2005 White Paper (DfES 2005a) aligned with an increased policy emphasis on the role and choices of parents in driving up education standards.

To translate this abstract proposition into something more tangible for the profession, the “Teaching and Learning in 2020 Review Group” was organised to “establish a clear vision of what teaching and learning in our schools might look like in our schools in 2020” (Gilbert 2006, p.3). Chaired by Christine Gilbert, Chief Executive of Tower Hamlets, then to become HM Chief Inspector, the “2020 Review Group” (known henceforth as the Gilbert Review) proposed a summary definition:

“Put simply, personalising learning means taking a highly structured approach to each child’s and young person’s learning, in order that all are able to progress, achieve and participate. It means strengthening the link between learning and teaching by engaging pupils –and their parents- as partners in learning” (Gilbert 2006 p6.)

On the back of the Gilbert Review former Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown promised a “mentor” or “Director of Studies” to guide every student as “personalisation fulfilling aspirations” (Brown 2007, unpagged speech).

Great pains were taken in the Gilbert Review to stress that personalised learning builds upon what ‘good’ schools already do and subsequent policy tends to adopt a tone that is almost trying to reassure the teaching profession. For example, in 2009 Secretary of State for Education Ed Balls declared that:

”Many schools already offer a genuinely personalised learning experience for their pupils and succeed both in improving standards and in supporting their children’s development in the round” (Foreword, DCSF 2009).

For the Department the “task” was then to bring all schools up to the level of these “great schools” (DCSF 2009b, Foreword).

Only some three or four years after Miliband’s (2004) North of England Conference speech did the Department begin to publish more specific pedagogical advice (see DCSF 2008a, 2009a; DfES 2007). The pedagogic guidance provided a framework of nine headings (DCSF 2008a, see Appendix 1 p.343).

The pedagogy of personalised learning seemed only to emphasise the role of student voice in relation to learning and the ‘ownership’ of targets in order to improve attainment. However, New Labour (see DCSF 2008d; DfES 2003b, 2004d) increasingly aligned their thinking on personalised learning with existing strategy and advice on children and young people having a say in decisions that affect their lives (a statutory duty under the 2002 Education Act and the 2004 Children’s Act)

and built around the rights discourse of the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (OUNCHR 1989). The concept of more integrated children's services with young peoples' voice as an essential policy element became more acute following the tragic case of the death of the child Victoria Climbié and the subsequent Laming Enquiry¹. The Labour Government published *Every Child Matters* (HM Government 2003, DfES 2004c) with a view to ensuring that all services for children were 'joined up' and advocating a greater role for the voice of young people in these services, publishing guidance that increasingly included the phrasing of personalisation and personalised learning (for example, DfES 2003b, 2004c,d; DCSF 2008d). Personalisation of services and the role of young peoples' voice was then further integrated into New Labour's Children's Plan (DCSF 2007) that promised a system that met the 'needs' of all children, from their education to their wellbeing.

The concept of personalised learning therefore promised to be far-reaching and central to New Labour's drive to push up both education standards and, later in their term, improve children's wellbeing. A number of thinktanks and 'licensed' thinkers were endorsed to support formulation of both strategy and concrete ideas. Academics (see Hargreaves 2004; Rudduck et al 2006; Sebba et al 2007), thinktanks and non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) were involved in conferences, papers and publications researching and airing personalisation. At some of these conferences Ministers such as David Miliband (2004, 2006) and Jim Knight (2007b) made keynote speeches. For New Labour associated thinktanks see: Demos and Innovations Unit (Leadbeater 2004a,b, 2005, 2006); *ippr* (Johnson 2004); Futurelab (Green et al 2005; Rudd 2008; Futurelab 2009); OECD/CERI (2006). The Innovations Unit began life in the education department later becoming an independent thinktank (DfES 2002-2006), and was active in the organisation of

conferences on system change through personalisation. Jim Knight, Minister of State for Schools and Learners at the time of addressing an Innovation Unit conference, suggested that personalised learning raised questions with “radical implications” for the delivery of education (Knight 2007b, unpagged speech). Hargreaves published and chaired discussions with headteachers (Demos 2004a,b), and went onto lead on personalising learning in The Specialist Schools Trust (later Specialist Schools and Academies- SSAT). The SSAT began as an NDPB and later became an independent charity, becoming a locus of headteacher self-management in the formation of debates and guidelines for schools (see Hargreaves 2004, 2006a,b, 2007a,b; Simms 2006; Vacher 2006; Williamson 2006). The NDPBs Becta (British Educational Technology Association) and the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) were active in promoting ideas through conferences and publications. The former focused on ICT and personalisation (Becta 2004, 2008; Horne 2005), and the NCSL on the school leadership implications of personalised learning (see NCSL 2004, 2005, 2008 and West-Burnham 2008).

A year after the Children’s Plan, New Labour summarised what they saw as their achievements in creating a “21st Century” education system and proposed a new White Paper to develop a future schooling “that looks very different to the one we have today” (Ed Balls in DCSF 2008e, Foreword). In this document Secretary of State, Ed Balls suggested that:

“Many schools already offer a genuinely personalised learning experience for their pupils and succeed both in improving standards and in supporting children’s development in the round” (Foreword, DCSF 2008e).

Personalisation is here ostensibly defined by pointing to the ‘many’ schools who practice personalised learning through such features as ‘great teaching’, ‘high aspirations’, ‘good behaviour and discipline’, ‘strong partnerships’ with parents Children’s Services and other schools, ‘involving the local community’, ‘specialist facilities and a wide curriculum offer’. What the document proposes as the next stage is “streamlining the school accountability system” through piloting a “School Report Card”. At the same time as stressing accountability to parents and carers New Labour proposed to build in new flexibilities for headteachers through devolved funding mechanisms and to develop greater cross-school and community partnerships.

Not only were schools made a central feature of community and public service partnerships, New Labour, right into the last months of their government in 2010, sought to expand its concept of personalisation through broadening delivery partnerships and drawing in the third sector (McGuire 2009, 2010). The scope of their ambition was therefore huge and it remained the case that teachers found the notion ambiguous and confusing (Courcier 2007) and that some professionals in school perceived personalisation as a vague, “rather grand and possibly over-reaching” concept (Rudduck et al 2006, p.35).

Despite New Labour’s promotion of personalised learning this sense of confusion seems to have been reflected in a growing lack of enthusiasm for the term. The House of Commons Education and Skills Select Committee (2007) thought that the transformational approach promised by personalising learning had yet to be realised. In a later committee (the Commons Select Committee for Children Schools and Families) one of personalising learning’s early exponents, Professor

Hargreaves, declared the definition of the Gilbert Review to be “well-intentioned waffle” (Hansard 2008, p.22) and that the concept “had outlived its usefulness” (p.24). At the same committee hearing Professor Mick Waters, then Director of Curriculum at the QCA (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority), declared that he “never used the word, because, I think that it has become one of those things that everyone says but hardly everyone does” (Hansard 2008, p.23).

However, the concept of personalised learning did indeed promise to be a “big idea” for school education in England (Pollard and Jones 2004, p.4) and formed a central part of New Labour’s education policy throughout two terms of office. The table below summarises the key moments I researched in this policy narrative, its dynamic and participants, and illustrates why the concept forms a serious topic for research. Further details relating to this table are tabulated in Appendix 2, page 344. (See footnote 1, Chapter One, page 26 for headline biographies of these Ministers).

Table 2.1: An illustration of New Labour’s commitment to personalised learning. Numbers of policy sources by type, date and key ministers.

| Year | Number of: Department policy texts | Number: Associated policy texts | Prime Minister or Ministerial Texts | Prime Minister’s speeches | Ministerial speeches |
|------|--|--|--|---------------------------------|--|
| 1998 | | | Tony Blair | Tony Blair | |
| 2003 | | | David Miliband | Tony Blair | |
| 2004 | 5 | 10 | Charles Clarke | Tony Blair (2) | David Miliband (2); Charles Clarke |
| 2005 | 3 | 4 | Ruth Kelly | | Ruth Kelly |
| 2006 | 2 | 2 | Alan Johnson | Tony Blair | |
| 2007 | 7 | 11 | Jim Knight (3) | | Jim Knight (2); Gordon Brown; Alan Johnson |
| 2008 | 5 | 3 | Gordon Brown (2) Hazel Blears | Gordon Brown | |
| 2009 | 3 | 4 | Gordon Brown (2) Anne McGuire (2) | | |
| 2010 | 1 | | Anne McGuire Tessa Jowell | | |

The pattern that seems to emerge from this table is that the Prime Minister Tony Blair 'sets the scene' at early party conferences for the notion of personalisation in public service reform, including education. He goes on to address public service leaders on the issue. The Ministers David Miliband and Jim Knight appear to be enthusiastic promoters of the ideas and it is notable how associated NDPB and think tank activity proliferated during their terms of office. There is a sense in 2008 of the personalised learning agenda 'petering out' although personalisation is still a theme in the political narrative New Labour are constructing. Towards the end of their term in Government, Prime Minister Gordon Brown attempts to create a political story around localism and personalisation. New Labour Cabinet Office (Jowell 2009) and the Department for Communities and Local Government (Blears 2009) produce papers from their policy units. It is interesting that these papers seem to appear at the same time as, and address the themes that Cameron (Conservative Party 2010) is promoting in the "Big Society" discourse in the run up to the May 2010 General Election.

2.3 Personalised learning and pedagogy, a story of confusion

The Department claimed that personalising learning was an idea that 'excited' the profession (DCSF 2004a). For teachers therefore the critical question was what did this mean for pedagogical and classroom practice? Here the policy narrative becomes one of muddle and confusion.

The DfES initial advice about pedagogy meant, "taking care to nurture the unique talents of every pupil" (DfES 2004a p.4). The Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners placed the relevant pedagogic themes as regular assessment, and using the national curriculum "not as a straightjacket" but as a means to incorporate "a range of learning styles" (chapter 5.10 DfES 2004b). Therefore, the first

personalisation texts rendered only the vaguest sense of 'learning styles' and 'unique talents'.

In schools and around education, personalised learning chimed with the flurry of interest about 'brain based learning' (Fogarty 1997, Smith 2002), the potential of the psychology of learning styles (Riding and Rayner 1998) and Gardner's (1999) concept of multiple intelligences. The latter especially, appealed to the profession through opening up individual potential beyond narrow definitions of intelligence and ability.

However, such matters are complex and contested. For example, a number of cognitive and neuroscientists began to question the way that schools had uncritically adopted and misused research from neurophysiology (Bruer 1997, Blakemore and Frith 2005). Some suggested a more prolonged engagement with the teaching profession in helping them to sort out evidence (Goswami 2004). Critics from education analysed the ways that both 'neuromythologies' had been adopted (Geake 2008) and the manner in which the 'therapeutic turn' in schools to using unexamined notions of multiple intelligence had the potential to undermine the very concept of selfhood they purported to expand (Ecclestone 2007). It is interesting to note at this point that, like the Demos co-coordinated *Learning Working Group* (2004a), the Gilbert Review (2006) cites as a stimulating text on learning, Bransford et al (2000) *Brain, Mind, Experience, and School*. Gilbert (2006) conveys a sense that now more is known and understood about the brain this research needs to be drawn upon, but it is not specific; Bransford et al's (2000) element of "community-centred" learning is not significantly drawn upon either. I can only speculate that

this is because there are potentially some complex implications for the organisational ordering of schooling.

Therefore, clear detail in the policy guidance on the psychology of individual difference or need as advocated by personalised learning was conspicuous by its absence. Critical research findings on the use of learning styles and the lack of evidence for their efficacy (Coffield et al 2004) may well have led to dampening the Department's enthusiasm for being more specific. Indeed, Miliband went on to say that personalisation:

“...is not a crude reductionism to specific learner type. It is recognition that the multiple intelligences of pupils require a repertoire of teaching strategies” (Miliband 2006 p. 24).

Miliband here provides 'approval' for Gardner's (1999) work on multiple intelligences but not for learning styles. In later pedagogical guides (DfES 2007 p.4) teaching and learning models are broken down into three types that can each be expressed as a “highly structured sequence”; namely: “Direct teaching models”, “cognitive teaching and learning models”, “social models”. The reader is told that their consistent application allows a teacher to pick the most appropriate according to the learning objective. Types of learning objective are then listed and linked to families of learning theories: *behaviourist*, *cognitive/information processing*, and *social constructivism* (DfES 2007 pp. 5-7). This list of learning theories has been characterised by Professor David Hartley as a “parsimonious” and reductionist view of all that is known about learning so that “everyone should be able to find an attachment to at least one” of these theories (Hartley 2009, p.429). The effect being that a vague and generalised list of learning theories does little to reinforce a sense of the radical or innovative in pedagogical practice; it would not be surprising if

teachers perceived personalised learning as having nothing new or different to tell them about their practice.

The muddle here is that personalised learning can encompass a range of theories about learning but for New Labour what ultimately 'really counts' is teaching delivered with pace, structure and the rational intervention models as outlined by the National Strategies (see for example DCSF 2008b,c). The offerings on personalisation and pedagogy from the education department run aground on the very dangers of "over-simplified consideration of teaching provision and associated systems" that some commentators feared they would (Pollard and Jones 2004, p.5).

A further illustration of this confusion is the tangle the department got themselves into over the differences between differentiation and personalised learning. Differentiation, in other words, how to accommodate the differing learning needs and 'aptitudes' of pupils became a topic of much concern and research interest following the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988 and its attendant Standard Assessment Tasks (SATs) (Stradling and Saunders 1993). The National Curriculum Council (NCC) was created under the Education Reform Act 1988 to help in implementing the National Curriculum and its assessment arrangements and produced guidance on differentiation that would not seem out of place in the current personalised learning pedagogical debate (for example NCC 1991). The notion of differentiation was further reinforced following *The Special Educational Needs Code of Practice* (DfEE 1994) resulting from the 1993 Education Act. The Code made provision for Individual Education Plans and certainly focused schools on their 'duties' to differentiate the curriculum, as did later obligations about meeting the needs of "Gifted and Talented" pupils. The FAQs on the department website (DFES

2004e), indicate that the difference between differentiation and personalisation caused confusion so that a department official, detailed to head up the personalised learning policy, replied to the question about the differences, thus:

“They are linked, but not the same thing. Personalised learning involves the teaching, curriculum or school organisation being designed to reach as many pupils as possible with diverse needs and experiences for as much of the time as possible. In personalised learning, whole class and group interaction, supported by tailored, focused intervention for pupils who are underachieving at any level, become the keys to accelerate the progress of the individual beyond what she or he can do alone, ensuing best progress for all. It requires class interaction, with good use of questions and fielding of questions, as well as guided group learning and closer support for those pupils who need it.... it does not mean labeling people in terms of learning styles” (Dasey 2004).

A “Practical Guide” to personalised learning (DCSF 2008a, in title) later suggested that in the past, differentiation (“by task or expectation”) “ran the risk of lowering expectations” (DCSF 2008a, p.9). In this guide “**modern teaching**” by contrast is seen as “**quality first teaching**” that is about “**supporting and challenging**” pupils to “**keep up with the pace**” based upon “**effective planning**” and “**skilful design of learning**” (DCSF 2008a, p.9, emphasis added).

“But to be more inclusive **modern** teaching methods have inclined to differentiation by staging the work by level of support, by open-tasking (i.e. setting mixed ability tasks that challenge at every level) and by extension or enhancement activities” (DCSF 2008a, p.9, emphasis added).

Critics of older concepts of differentiation would probably not notice the difference in formulae or the implications for the workload of the teacher between differentiation and personalised learning as articulated here (Everest 2003). There is a real muddle in the guidance: the reader is informed that differentiation by task is outmoded and lowers expectations, yet in personalisation mixed ability tasks are to be set; that personalisation is tailoring to individual need but teachers can “meet most needs by planning appealing lessons aimed at the age group” (DCSF 2008a, p.9). In a further twist, the teacher is advised that need is not the only

consideration; “interests, preferences and priorities” could be taken into account (DCSF 2008a, p.9). Presumably if the teacher panders to interests deemed not to be challenging enough, then that would be differentiation and not the ‘modern’ way of personalisation. What emerged in departmental guidance (DCSF 2008a) is a story of recommendations that would not look out of place in any ‘manual’ of school improvement and therefore a far cry from the radical promise of distinctiveness made by the concept of personalised learning at its inception.

This was partly because, I argue, that the pedagogic story of personalisation arises within a wider political narrative, part of which was creating an ideological force of ‘modernisation’ intended to be sweeping and incontrovertible (Newman 2006). The department were therefore searching for detail to put the rubric of personalisation into concrete pedagogical form, but were at the same time reluctant to specify this detail. As David Miliband stated in a policy steering group meeting I attended, “the days of detail being dictated from the centre are over” (Rogers 2003) and the strong value of school autonomy in their governance strategy (Newman 2006) emerged in this refusal (a theme I return to in Chapter Six). For Miliband the challenge lay in “bringing about a culture change in a way which is not prescriptive” (DfES 2003a, p.1). The potential for confusion at the school level was therefore great. Confusion is to some degree compounded by the debate that surrounded personalised learning not always being in the hands of school leaders but conducted in various knowledge networks, which is where the story now turns.

2.4 Personalising learning: its critical reception

Given the pedagogical confusion and lack of detail provided by personalised learning policy texts, the 'vacuum' was filled by numerous consultants and private companies forming a 'thriving industry' (Guildberg 2004) offering advice and guidance on 'how to do it.' Entrepreneurs in the market, able, and needing to sell staff training were also producing their frameworks and guidance (see for example West-Burnham and Coates 2005; Smith 2005). Given the trajectory of the marketisation of public services begun under Margaret Thatcher, and continued by New Labour since they took office in 1997, personalised learning was a site ripe for market exploitation and the consumer purchase of ready made 'solutions' (Tomlinson, 2005, Hartley 2007a,b). It is out of the scope of this study to evaluate the impact of these consultants on the direction of policy in school in this research and so simply note that personalising learning became a marketable commodity for consultants in education.

Some commentators, who had interests in the welfare of the profession, and research about school effectiveness, expressed a more cautious 'wait and see' attitude along with suggestions as to what the policy ought to address (for example, Jones 2007; Mortimore for the NUT 2006; Millar 2007; Pollard and Jones 2004). Journalist Fiona Millar suggested that: "the political interregnum is still awash with meaningless, "warm words" like "'choice' and 'personalisation', the allure of which masks the reality of the task they face" (Millar 2007, p.4). Professor Peter Mortimore (2006) suggests the government have taken a brave step in proposing policy that is not yet clearly articulated and may carry many hidden costs; he further suggested that:

"Personalised learning might be the new pedagogy that our information-rich society has been seeking or it might prove to be a damp squib. Let us find ways to decide carefully, systematically and without the political rancour that

has so often interfered with the exploration of other innovative ideas in education” (p.49).

Pollard and Jones (2004), expressing the views of the TLRP² research group, while broadly welcoming the focus on teaching and learning, argued that if personalisation is to become a meaningful reality it will have to go beyond general prescriptions for teaching and look at the social practices that have to be altered. The TLRP analysis has in part inspired the empirical aspect of this thesis and the questions they pose about personalisation I have sought to investigate through the experiences of young people. TLRP were concerned that without some rigour and authenticity behind the drive and an understanding of wider system forces, personalisation would slip back into “over-simplified consideration of teaching provision and associated systems” (Pollard and Jones 2004, p.5). This fear is echoed by other commentators who tried to look for the radical possibilities of personalised learning while recognising the pull back to items already found in the ‘best’ schools, and the dynamics in the system that militated against schools collaborating to personalise (Johnson 2004).

The tenor of these commentators is that personalised learning is a political idea that may or may not have merit but the research community and the teaching profession have yet to get to grips with the ‘evidence’. Others suggest that unexamined psychological theories, such as learning styles and learning to learn, are too readily adapted by the government to suit the political mood generated by personalisation (Burton 2007). Far more scepticism is required it is argued. Some commentators are simply more cynical and suggest that talking in generalities wins more popularity than being specific about a policy (White, 2006). Indeed White’s (2007) contention is that policy in general has failed to argue coherently about the purposes and rationale of education and personalisation as an opportunity to discuss richer

notions of education was dissipated in jargon about learning, 'tailoring' and 'individual need' (White 2006).

Some educationalists involved in promoting alternative ideas about learning to those in mainstream policy, adopted personalisation as a campaigning headline for a de-schooling argument (Personalising Education Now, PEN 2004). Co-signatories to the PEN platform advocate a whole variety of "learner managed" scenarios, including home education, and do not believe that mass' schooling has a role in a democratic society (Meighan and Meighan 2005, p.5). This strand of thinking therefore has its roots in the deschooling arguments of learning and individual autonomy combining elements of both Rousseau (2000) – associated with Romanticism - and Dewey (1991) that might be summarised as 'child-centredness'. It is striking that various DFES officials went out of their way to distance the policy of personalisation from 'child-centred' notions (see Hopkins 2004 and Chapter Six later).

However, some commentators are more critical in their analysis of the term personalisation and apply a sociological enquiry in relation to trends within public sector governance and the spread of the market into the welfare state. For example, in social care, where personal budgets have been introduced as a route to personalisation, the tensions between cultures of managerialism and empowerment raise huge questions about the future of universal public services such as the NHS (Beresford 2008). Scholars of education policy have traced the intellectual origins of personalised learning to the business world and argued that this has come to represent a "stronger insinuation of the market" in to education (Hartley 2008, p.377). Against the New Labour view that personalisation represents a more

responsive public service ethos for the individual user, and is hence more democratic, a strand of critical argument suggests that personalisation represents the insinuation of market norms that could undermine the civic ideals that inspired concepts of comprehensive education (Fielding 2006a,b; 2008; Hartley 2008).

In this argument, personalisation far from rendering some rich and democratic concept of the person actually represents a reductionist view of what person-centred education could or should be (Fielding 2006a,b; 2008). Personalisation thus functionalises what Ball (2003) has characterised as the “terrors of performativity” (p.215) inherent in New Labour’s public management. Fielding (2008) goes as far as to say that this is opening up a new form of totalitarianism. In short, Fielding has described the current form of personalisation as tending to be:

“... ahistorical, superficial, insular, technicist, conservative, individualistic, hyperbolic, episodic, calibrated and dishonestly vacant” (Fielding 2008, p.58).

Fielding’s critique is essentially one about policy undercutting any notion of social justice and individual potential. If personalisation captures notions of choice and wellbeing for its appeal as a rubric, and hence draws upon the emotions, one could read across from Fielding’s arguments to a critique of personalisation as being a new phase in the marketisation and consumer culture of schooling through creating a new emotional order (see Hartley 2004, 2007). Hartley (1999) earlier speculated that the appeal to the emotions in school leadership reflects an “internal marketing” (p.316) process that is internally “reculturing” (p.317) schools to be more compliant to the norms of the market and its performative connotations. Hartley (2009) asks, why was a term such as personalisation that appealed to a romantic notion of child-centredness employed in the first place? Hartley (2009) invokes the suspicion that by using child-centred discourses that appeal to the self, two functions are

accomplished. Firstly, personalisation serves to further “adapt” education to consumerism, and secondly it generates a “nostalgic appeal” to some, supposedly better, past that serves to disguise the fact that little about the curriculum or pedagogy has changed (Hartley 2009 p. 432).

The complex relationships between emotions, personal identity and public service reform have also drawn critical analysis from those interested in the use of emotional discourses in cultural trends. If personalisation, as Prime Minister Blair (2004a) thought it did, draws upon contemporary consumerism and cultural mores about identity, it resonates with a growing interest in English public services and schools with concepts such as emotional intelligence and self-esteem and a wider cultural “discourse of emotional engagement” (Ecclestone 2007, p.464). However, this analysis cautions against viewing such psychological concepts as an unalloyed good that necessarily promote human development. In this critique the almost ‘therapeutic turn’ towards concepts such as self-esteem and wellbeing, through promoting deficit models of development, can be limiting of human potential; it is argued that an over-concentration in contemporary schooling on emotions and wellbeing could paradoxically lead to a “diminished” of sense of ‘self’ (Ecclestone 2007, p. 455). A key strand that unites critics of personalisation in the analysis of the state’s use of emotional discourses to ‘engage’ the individual is one of social justice: market norms and concepts such as self-esteem are argued not to be the rational and non-discriminatory goods in education they appear to be at first sight. The theme of social justice is taken up in this research both through the empirical research and also discursively.

The argument in this section is that in the wake of New Labour’s policy of personalisation and its department’s guides to pedagogy one can see a story of

support, caution, confusion, uncertainty, cynicism and critical analysis. The latter critiques raise important issues about consumerism and personal identity in the concept of personalisation that need to be placed within the context of late modernity. This task will be undertaken in Chapter Eight as the thesis works back from the fieldwork data to some critical appraisal of personalisation in the place of contemporary modernities.

What this section has demonstrated is that considerable critical energy was exerted in response to personalised learning policy, that some of the caution expressed about its pedagogy is well merited. While the critical scholarship raises fundamental challenges to the hegemonic positioning of New Labour's public service reform, which need researching and thinking about. The next section briefly links personalised learning to New Labour's use of personalisation in public service reform in order to highlight the key themes of the policy story and thus frames the fieldwork that I undertook in schools.

2.5 Personalised learning in the political narrative

It is important to see personalised learning as part of a much wider political context and within a broad range of strategies advanced by New Labour. Not only does this context explain the emphasis given to the term personalised learning, but it also helps to explain why some of the concepts seemed vague or confusing to teachers. They were part of a *mélange* of public sector modernisation that called upon some "epochal forms of argument" to justify the reform agenda but which only served to heightened the operational confusions (Cutler et al 2007, p.847). In addition, the political context provides three interwoven themes or motifs that frame this research project: firstly, the citizen-consumer, secondly an ideology of modernising and thirdly

a notion of social justice. The ideology of modernisation will be addressed in Chapter Seven; the other two motifs are relevant to the fieldwork of the next two chapters and are therefore discussed below.

2.5.1 Personalisation and the “citizen-consumer”

Across the public sector New Labour proposed various incarnations of personalisation ranging from personal budgets for social welfare, to patient involvement in health care, and service user input (including young people) into a variety of local government services (Demos 2009; Horne and Shirley 2009; Jowell 2010; Moullin 2008). The progressive thinkers of social democracy see in personalisation the opportunity for the citizen to be co-producers and active engagers of services at the local level (Brookes 2007). A recurring theme for New Labour in public sector reform thus became that of the “citizen-consumer” (Clarke et al 2007).

Miliband (2005a,b, 2006) had no doubts about the links between personalised learning, public sector reform and a new understanding of the ‘citizen’. For him, personalisation was an “unashamedly political” concept; part of a political vision about public services at one of “the most important times” for them “since the creation of the Welfare state after 1945” (Miliband 2006, p.21). Miliband was concerned to start a political debate that “frames the values, purpose and shape of public services” (Miliband 2006, p.22), drawing upon the exercise of “Voice” (Hirschman 1970) by the “consumer-citizen” (Hirschman 1982, p.121). In Hirschman’s (1970) proposition, “Exit” was a market mechanism by which a consumer regulates standards through exercising the choice to discontinue their “Loyalty”. “Voice”, added a political equivalent through consumer participation in the

construction of standards (Hirschman 1970). The two strands are woven into the citizen-consumer identity as a mechanism for reform: the citizen as voice participates in shaping, while the consumer holds services to account through the threat of exit.

Personalisation as citizen empowerment is woven into thinking about mutual and co-operative forms of social organisation and communities, as New Labour grappled with strategies about new forms of participatory democracy (Cabinet Office 2008, 2009; Communities and Local Government 2008a,b). Personalisation is a proposition about “empowered citizens” (Cabinet Office 2009, p.9) who are rational actors in both shaping services and in holding them to account by exercising consumer choices and thereby becoming integral to a renewed sense of “community”. Personalisation through the citizen-consumer motif thus became part of a discourse about a revitalising of democracy:

“For New Labour civic renewal meant not just changing the relationships between citizens and the public realm but also their relationship with representative democracy. Communities were seen as both good in themselves but also as a means to an end” (Demos 2009 p9/10).

In the case of personalised learning, such empowerment was especially linked to choice and voice of that exercised by parents (DfES 2004b). Although the voice aspect for children and young people is emphasised in the wider policy story of the Children’s Plan (DCSF 2007), in personalised learning a pedagogical emphasis is placed upon:

“Pupil Voice: establishing the habit of talking about learning and how to improve it” (Gilbert 2006 p. 20).

One of the key recommendations from the Gilbert Review (see 2.2) was about “pupils taking ownership of their learning” and for school self-evaluations to “draw

upon pupils' feedback, specifically on teaching and learning" (Gilbert 2006, p.44). The "prime purpose" of the school in this debate is focused upon teaching and learning, with pastoral systems being re-focused towards learning outcomes (Gilbert 2006 p. 20). Thus personalised learning is simultaneously of a piece with citizen and consumer whilst representing a limited application of the motif to the young person's learning, since the greater part of this domain is to be controlled by parental choice.

2.5.2 Personalisation and social justice

Implicit in the citizen-consumer there is a notion of the 'modern' self- realising individual who, if 'empowered' and addressed, qua individual, is able to drive social justice through forcing up the excellence of public services as they respond to the threat of exit or the creative input of 'voice'. New Labour weaves a social-democratic residue for the 'ordinary' voice into discourses about competition being a driver for greater standards of public service provision, including schools. Witness:

"In secondary education, future reform must have as a core objective a flexible curriculum providing a distinct and personal offer to every child. Through choice and personalisation our aim is ambitious and progressive; 'services fair for all, personal to each'. Public services that harness the drive of competition, and the power of choice to the public sector ethic of altruism and equity" (Blair 2004a, unpagged speech).

Altruism and equity are aligned with "solidarity and justice" as values of the Labour Party argued Blair (2004a) and later, Prime Minister Brown: "We believed – and still do – that enterprise and social justice could go hand in hand" (Gordon Brown 2009a, p.1). The Labour Party were convinced that in education "[I]n terms of practical policy it is the most socially egalitarian vision any Labour government has ever espoused" (Blair 2004b, unpagged speech).

Therefore, New Labour discourses about personalised learning were founded upon it “being a matter of moral purpose and social justice” (Gilbert 2006, p. 7) and enunciated as a part of the modernising discourse of public service reform that provided “opportunity for all”: a “modern social justice” in which the “old” dichotomies of state and market were to be transcended (Blair 2004a unpagated speech). In terms of education policy Miliband (2006) summarised this as:

- “Equity and excellence
- Flexibility and Accountability
- Universality and Personalisation” (p. 21).

One could argue that in defining the social democratic position in terms of providing both equity and excellence, personalisation is used as a rubric: a positioning ‘catch-all’. The rubric of personalisation is thus used to define New Labour as a social democratic party for whom social justice through education means that: “a child’s chances of success are not related to his or her socio-economic background, gender or ethnicity” (Gilbert 2006, p.5).

The languages of modernising that clung to personalisation sought to inspire, cajole and embarrass public servants into their ‘moral purpose’ of delivering greater social justice (see Chapter Seven). If the ‘modern’ motifs of voice and choice are tied together so critically to social justice in the New Labour strategy, then some nine years into the story of their public service reform, it would seem highly pertinent to research whether these policy aspirations had made an impact on the school experiences of young people, and if so, how.

2.6 ‘Whither’ personalisation?

It could be argued that the policy term “personalisation” has run its course, an interesting episode in history, a footnote to New Labour’s extensive programme of education reform and now buried by a Conservative led coalition government anxious to establish its own brand of governing identity. However, as a defining concept for the new government, the Big Society (Cameron 2010, 2011) contains many elements and continuities with New Labour’s programme of public service reform. For example, the rhetorics around mutualism, co-operation and individuals self-organising in society, beyond government, and reforming ‘bureaucratic’ public services through direct accountability to service users. The current government may have dropped the motif of the citizen-consumer, but it is a concept that stalks the Big Society.

The languages of personalising learning have clearly been dropped by the Conservative led Education Department, but the notion of personalising and tailoring services has not. Chris Grayling MP, Minister for Employment, used the very words when interviewed about the Welfare to Work Programme (BBC, Today Programme 2011). In their education white paper the discourses of “harnessing detailed performance data” and “liberating individual potential” (Gove 2010, p.7; see also DfE 2010) quite clearly resonate with New Labour’s texts on personalised learning.

Personalisation is a rubric for the shifting balances between state, public sector, and private sector led market provision and albeit with different nuances and languages being constructed, these trends are still ongoing. Needham (2011) has argued that personalisation is a “unifying theme” and “dominant narrative” (p.54) for New Labour but it contains a number of different story lines. The existence of these different

plots both enables compelling practices but also confuses practitioners (Needham 2011). I argue that personalisation as a rubric certainly summarised a theme, but its principal character, the citizen-consumer, was probably a vague and irrelevant plot for personalised learning. In Chapter Seven, I explore how New Labour used personalisation to set a genre of modernisation but their proposition to leave its detail up to individual schools carried a number of consequences.

2.7 Summary

This chapter has traced the story of personalised learning, describing its main features and placing it within the wider context of New Labour's public service reform. The fact that it was subsumed to this wider political rhetoric and asked to deliver so much partly explains the resulting confusion over the pedagogy of personalised learning. The chapter established that New Labour designed personalised learning as a central element of their policy narrative. The chapter then described the wider discussion ranging from the supportive, to the cautious and the overtly critical. Personalising learning is therefore a policy site worthy of research both in the contextual literatures and within schools. Three interlinked themes emerge from the broader New Labour strategy of personalisation: the citizen-consumer, modernisation and social justice. These themes raise the prospect of interesting research puzzles in terms of investigating the impact they made. In short, a key prompt is asking whether the fears of the TLRP about the possible lack of impact of personalised learning were realised? To research this question I am particularly curious to develop an understanding of how young people experienced a personalised schooling that claimed to be more engaging. A key feature of personalised learning that promises to engage students, is that of providing students with 'voice' in their learning and greater access to the pedagogic practices of schools. In addition, if this student 'voice' is posed within the

modernising discourse of New Labour, how do headteachers come to understand, frame and enact personalised learning within their schools? If social justice is a theme of personalisation through the strategy of raising educational attainment, it prompts a further research question about what are young peoples' experiences at the micro, institutional, level of school's practices? Are practices supposedly more personalised and engaging perceived as 'just'? These are potential empirical questions that may support discussion of issues such as: understanding some of the complexities in the relationship between young peoples' experiences of voice and justice in their classrooms and wider questions of social justice and civic engagement.

Chapter Five will begin the fieldwork element of the thesis by exploring the impact of the motif 'citizen-consumer' and voice, Chapter Six that of social-justice, from the perspectives of young people whose school experiences are supposedly personalised. Chapter Seven will explore how the modernising themes of New Labour strategy impacted upon headteachers' ability to deliver this personalised experience in their schools. Chapter Eight will draw upon the political narratives to critically re-examine the phenomenon of personalised learning in relation to modernity and its moral context about issues such a justice. Prior to these chapters the thesis will next turn to the research design, methodology and methods by which data was generated and analysed.

Chapter Two footnotes:

- 1) The death of Eight-year-old Victoria Climbié through abuse and neglect by her great-Aunt and partner led to Lord Laming's inquiry into child-protection. "Her death has become one of those major modern occasions where there seems to have been a collective sense of empathy for a stranger's fate. She has become an embodiment of the betrayal, vulnerability and public abandonment of children. The inquiry must mark the end of child protection policy built on a hopeless process of childcare tragedy, scandal, inquiry, findings, brief media interest and ad hoc political response. There is now a rare chance to take stock and rebuild" Peter Beresford, Professor of Social Policy, Brunel University, see:
http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_4008654 (accessed 08/03/12)
- 2) TLRP: Teaching and Learning Research Programme working out of the Institute of Education in London. Aims to perform and promote "excellent educational research and ensuring it is used to enhance learning" (<http://www.tlrp.org/aims/index.html> accessed 08/03/12, unpagged web).

CHAPTER THREE

THE RESEARCH DESIGN PART 1: POLICY SCHOLARSHIP AND A VIRTUE ETHICS APPROACH

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter sought to support the aim of understanding more of the political and policy story as it was written at the time, through examining policy documents and speeches, literatures from thinktanks associated with policy making, and writings from a variety of critical voices. To further investigate the story of personalised learning under New Labour, I pose two questions that could be analysed through data obtained from conducting empirical fieldwork:

- 1) What are the experiences of young people as learners within the practices of schools who seek to enact personalised learning?
- 2) How is the enactment of personalised learning in schools framed by the ways that headteachers interpret policies of personalised learning?

In addition, an aim of the thesis is to ask questions about personalisation within the context of late Western modernity. This is particularly important because I argue that schools are critical institutional sites in a liberal democracy for furthering general human goods; I am curious to investigate how far policy and cultural context enables the school spaces to develop practical ethical solutions. In order to support this aim the research design seeks to combine the fieldwork with a discursive scholarship that links to the context of late Western modernity. I propose that a key discursive element of this scholarship is drawn from moral philosophy since New Labour makes arguments about social justice and normative claims about what ought to be done in schools. Therefore this chapter sets out some conceptual underpinning based on the work of MacIntyre (1994) about the nature of social

practices, a characterisation of virtues and what this might reasonably allow one to argue about the links between the micro level of classroom pedagogy, meso translation enactment of policy in the institutional context and macro social and policy contexts. Linkages between these three levels are explored further in Chapter Eight of the thesis. The next chapter (Four) will specifically address those aspects of the research design concerned with the two fieldwork questions proposed above. Taken together, Chapters Three and Four enable the analysis of the data to be credible and link to the more discursive arguments about Western modernity. In addition, this chapter outlines a competing values model of examining governance regimes in the public sector in order to support and contextualise the later analysis of the fieldwork data and to provide linkages between the levels of institutional practice, policy formation and wider cultural trends. This chapter begins by arguing for the need for, and place of, critical policy examination in the overall research design of this thesis.

3.2 The case for critical policy scholarship

Grace (2005) contrasts critical policy scholarship with the ‘purportedly’ scientific policy accounts that suggest an unproblematic chain from text to enactment but which ignore the complex value and ideological issues underlying how policy plays out. A key thread running through critical policy scholarship is an attempt to analyse the:

“...relation of surface social phenomenon to the deep structure of historical, cultural, political, ideological and value issues” (Grace 2005, p.3).

Thus research into policy requires looking ‘behind’ and ‘beyond’ the texts through using both theory and the stories of participants in the study. I argue that personalisation is both a highly problematic policy chain and an expression of

deeper historical and cultural tendencies played out through contesting ideologies and values and therefore its research requires critical policy scholarship.

A critical element of the scholarship is to work between the theoretical tools and the “illuminative” data (Ozga 1987, p.14). In Chapters Five to Seven the data is drawn upon to illustrate and inform the thesis and is then reflected upon using the conceptual tools that will be outlined in this chapter.

One intellectual source for prompting this mode of working is the “sociological imagination”, which seeks to understand the complex relationships between social transformations at a more abstract level and the ‘concrete’ stories of agents. The sociological imagination is:

“...the capacity to range from the most impersonal and remote transformations to the most intimate features of the human self – and to see the relations between the two.”

(Wright Mills, 1980, first published 1959, p.14).

Critical policy scholarship that is “rooted in the social science tradition” is exercising this imagination by being “historically informed and drawing on qualitative and illuminative techniques” (Ozga 1987, p.14). In such scholarship therefore, theoretical research interplays with qualitative fieldwork to illuminate and extend theory (see for example, Grace 2005; Fielding 2004a,b; Gunter and Forrester 2009; Ozga and Jones 2006; Reay 2004, amongst many). Theoretical work on ‘remote’ transformations is therefore important and I use literatures that explore some of the contours of late modernity and personal identity. Thus in Chapters Five to Seven the fieldwork will interplay with arguments in the literatures. Chapter Eight examines some of the more seemingly remote and abstract processes of late modernity.

This approach plays into a critical policy scholarship in education that encompasses, and welcomes, a variety of epistemological and philosophical propositions through the pluralism of contributing scholars (Gunter and Fitzgerald 2008). Therefore, whilst adopting the movements of the 'sociological imagination' between intimate and remote transformations, I add a particular contribution by extending the critical imagination through moral philosophy (see below). My reasoning for this approach stems from critical policy scholarship's interest in power and position in policy enactment. Much critical policy scholarship seeks to understand how voices other than the policy makers come to be either complexly positioned within the policy process; thus 'power' becomes a central theme (Ball 2006b). Two of the key intellectual sources that have been drawn upon to understand the operation of power and exclusion through policy are Foucault (for example, Ball 2006a, 2008) and Bourdieu (for example, Gunter 2006; Gunter and Fitzgerald 2008; Gunter and Forrester 2008, 2009). Some critical policy scholarship has looked to critique how hegemonic forces within neoliberalism are positioned through the economic and intellectual appeals to cultural motifs and emotions such as consumerism, 'emotional' leadership and child-centredness and the languages of marketing (Fielding 2006a, 2008; Hartley 2004, 2007a, b; 2008, 2009). Of particular relevance to this thesis is the question of what spaces are available for the voices of young people in schools (see for example Thomson and Gunter 2006).

Questions of power and the spaces left for voices to exercise political participation in their lives are a matter of understanding how relationships between people are constructed through hidden or overt norms about human goods. These questions are thus also a matter of ethical as well as sociological concern. Indeed it is

MacIntyre's (1994) contention that all philosophy implies a sociology and vice versa. In MacIntyre's (1994) argument there is a distinction to be made between manipulative and non-manipulative moral modes and this strand of reasoning will be explained in order to inform later analysis of the data. Ethical reasoning is committed to producing convincing arguments, or understandings, about why one state of affairs is preferable to another and does so within particular historical moments and social spaces and so contributes critical acumen to the understandings of policy process.

3.3 MacIntyre: social practice and the virtues

The thesis while positioned within critical policy scholarship, uses a neo-Aristotelian ethics taken from MacIntyre (1994, 2001). The model adopted draws upon a moral critique of modernity (MacIntyre 1994) that recognises social structures and contingencies but whose point of entry is in the ethical accounts of the members of social practices. MacIntyre's work has been used to critique 'managerialism' in public services in general (Overeem and Tholen 2011) and in schools in particular (Wilcox 1997). His work has also been used to extensively think about the relationship between teacher's self-development, their professional ethics and the growth of learning in their pupils (Higgins 2011). In Chapters Five and Six I analyse data in reference to MacIntyre's (1994, 2001) account of social practices and virtues. In this chapter the broad case for virtue ethics within social practices is advocated in order to explain the orientation of the research design to ways of generating and analysing the data.

MacIntyre (1994, 1999a, 2001, 2007, 2008) often talks of his work as a journey, one in continual development and so I draw predominantly from a particular stage of his

thinking, one best exemplified in *After Virtue* (1994). In this work a key argument is the notion of the internal goods of a practice and standards of excellence that are definitive of such goods; this concept has been used in education to develop understandings of what might constitute excellence in teaching and for the development of professional practice (an “aretaic” “professional ethics” –Higgins, 2003, p.279). Since personalised learning is advanced as a proposition that encompasses notions of excellent teaching as a right for all pupils, regardless of their circumstances, I argue that “excellence” requires some ethical, and not simply technical, standards of judgement and that MacIntyre (1994) provides a resource for making this argument. The research design therefore proposes to place the experiences of young people in schools within the virtue ethics approach in order to evaluate the impact of personalised learning within their schools.

A starting point to explain this position is the concept of ends or telos. MacIntyre (1994, 1999a, 2001) argues that humans are storied animals, situated in histories that possess a narrative unity from birth to death and therefore also have a *telos* that carries, however well or ill defined, some sense of the future.

“... man is in his actions and practice, as well as his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal. He is not essentially, but becomes through his history, a teller of stories that aspire to truth. But the key question for men is not about their own authorship; I can only answer the question ‘What am I to do?’ if I can answer the prior question ‘of what story or stories do I find myself a part?’” (MacIntyre 1994, p.216).

MacIntyre (1994) casts the telos of human life within a revival of Aristotelian virtue ethics, or those elements that are appropriate to contemporary sensibilities. Aristotle’s (1998) is a functional concept of man: decisions about my future are related to considerations about the ‘best’ or the ‘good’ thing a human can do in these circumstances. For example, if I want to improve my teaching practice I look

not only to standards of guidance but also to practices around me: how do other teachers function? I ask what is it that a 'good' teacher does, how does an excellent teacher work, what kind of character does an excellent teacher embody? These are normative questions because they are stories about how I ought to live my life. MacIntyre's (1994) critique of the Enlightenment tradition is that it has separated, in the realm of human study, ought from is, fact from value.

In addition, stories are by their very nature also unpredictable, can be broken up and re-arranged suddenly. One consequence of this position is to argue that modernity has indeed fragmented and broken up an individual's sense of unity and for MacIntyre (1994) the virtuous life is required for a narrative unity to be restored. This is because contemporary moral discourse is characterised by "emotivism" (MacIntyre 1994, p.11): a doctrine that, "all moral judgments are nothing but expressions of preference" (1994, pp.11-12). For MacIntyre a characteristic of emotivism is that I will choose one position simply because it is one that I like ("hurrah for this", 1994, p.12) or conversely dismiss another ('boo' for this). Emotivism entails a further social consequence: the "obliteration of any genuine distinction between manipulative and non-manipulative social relations" (MacIntyre 1994, p.23).

Therefore in response to emotivism MacIntyre's (1994, 1999a, b) account also entails that I take responsibility for the authorship of my story but that such responsibility is only meaningful if I am accountable to others and can hold others to account. Our stories are deeply contextualised within families, communities, cultures, nations and so forth; an analysis or moral utterance is only ever made from within some tradition. To learn from experience, to move beyond the strictures of

traditions, to improve organisational excellence requires an account of the virtues and MacIntyre's (1994) account will be explained below. However, the confidence in this account for providing rational and reasoned judgements lies in a concept of social practices. Thus the concept of social practices needs to be outlined next.

MacIntyre's (1994) location of ethical reasoning within social practices is a controversial departure for many philosophers (for example, Habermas 1992; Rorty 1994; Carr 2006b). I argue that MacIntyre's concept of social practice is entirely relevant for judging policy in the context of education and can be defended against charges (see Carr 2006b) of some form of cultural relativism. A social practice is defined as:

“...any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and the human conception of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended” (MacIntyre 1994, p.187).

To work in practices is to co-operatively strive towards some standards of excellence that are defined by the purpose or *telos* of the practice, internal goods, and to whose authority I am beholden. Not only that, I am committed to extend the standards of excellence that define the practice, and the means by which to learn and to judge my effectiveness in so doing are my growing and developing the virtues appropriate to my *telos*. As Higgins (2003) has pointed out, *telos* is not the same as aims. Aims may help us organise and understand our purposes but MacIntyre's notion (quoted above) of systematically extending human goods is that there are no end points but a continual process of striving for excellence.

In striving for excellence one is not seeking obedience to single points of view; disputes and argumentation are necessary. MacIntyre (1994) is quite open to the role of conflict in extending standards of practice and in renewing the traditions and commitments from within which I must of necessity begin the rational discussion. Indeed, it could be argued that teaching itself encompasses a variety of ideas and expressions and that “one gets it right only against the background of countless ways of getting it wrong” (Dunne 2003, p.369). To get it wrong and learn from the experience not only requires the virtues of honesty, courage and so forth but also, openness to other traditions that carry a different vantage point. Therefore, a concept of social practice requires a concept of virtue:

“A virtue is an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevent us from achieving any such goods” (MacIntyre 1994, p.191, original emphasis)

In relation to the narrative concept of human life MacIntyre’s argument entails that:

“Someone who genuinely possesses a virtue can be expected to manifest it in very different types of situations” (1994, p.205).

MacIntyre’s (1994) exposition is therefore a very practical philosophy that requires one to exercise character in a variety of different contexts and struggling in one’s practice for something of *eudaimonia*, or flourishing, for young people is also to seek it for oneself and by extension the goods of the wider community.

What then is the relevance of this position and the centrality of social practices and the virtues to understanding and researching the policy enactment of personalised learning? There are three germane points to be made. Firstly, in researching the impact of personalised learning upon the schooling experiences of young people

one would reasonably investigate their stories in relation to the teaching practices in which they live their school experience. Thus, it is relevant to ask: what might constitute 'excellence' in teaching for personalised learning? A concept of the virtues provides a framework from which to investigate and analyse the stories of young people in their classrooms. Secondly, personalised learning in making claims about social justice, through parity of opportunity to excellent teaching and the exercise of choice and voice, implies a normative stance about the goods of education. If the goods of personalised learning are to be realised, MacIntyre's (1994) argument implies that practices need to define and extend concepts of justice as internal goods, in other words they need to be integral to the purposes and modes of being that schools then practice. It is a reasonable research proposition therefore to ask whether personalised learning impacts upon young peoples' experiences of justice in the institutional, micro and meso, settings. A third point, that combines and accretes something of the other two, is that personalised learning is predicated on learner voice and control over the learning process. If schools have used student voice in a continuum from the purely manipulative to the trusting and caring (Fielding 2004a,b, 2006a), then how has personalised learning impacted upon enacting learner voice as an authentic notion? Again, one of the fieldwork questions is to investigate young peoples' experiences in this regard but some prior explanation of what is meant by authenticity is required.

I now explore the three claims made above for the relevance to the research in more detail. The first claim is entitled: "beyond effectiveness, to excellence"; the second claim is entitled: "virtues, capabilities and social justice"; the third: "authenticity and moral modes of practice".

3.3.1 Beyond effectiveness, to excellence

First of all, the relevance of the question of social practices, internal goods and the virtues to issues of personalised learning revolves around the difference between effectiveness and excellence as posited by the concept of a social practice. MacIntyre (MacIntyre and Dunne 2002) has denied that teaching should be considered a practice, as it is only a means, or a set of skills, to an end to other practices and other goods. Rejoinders have used MacIntyre's own definition, as presented above, to argue that teaching is indeed a practice (for example, Dunne, 2003; Noddings, 2003). Noddings (2003) has used MacIntyre's concept of social practice to contrast against the trend to what public policy analysts have described as New Public Management, the technical, routinised and narrow account of public sector management (Pierre 2000; Newman 2006). Hager (2011) has argued for 'refurbishing' the account of practice through extending the value of external goods and viewing them in balance with internal standards of excellence so that education could be conceived as "a collective term for a set of related practices" (p.559). For example, one needs to have qualifications and accreditation in order to enter in the labour market and participate in the economic life of contemporary UK society. This is quite properly a concern of schooling. However, questions are raised as to whether an exam pass of itself is a sufficient good, and if personalised learning was simply to connect young people to higher grades would that be a truly 'rounded' and therefore meaningfully personalised education?

MacIntyre (2001) makes a distinction between effectiveness, where the goods are primarily external to the practice, and excellence, which can only be achieved internally to that practice. Wilcox (1997) has used MacIntyre (1994, 2001) to suggest that school improvement, and thus the judgement of schools improving

solely by exam results, is about effectiveness and this could work to the detriment of internal goods and the acquisition of virtues that both define and extend standards of excellence. What is significant about Nodding's view (1992, 2003) in respect of the difference between effectiveness and excellence is the relational account of the practice: the focus on care and trust on the part of the teacher and the development of an abiding sense of responsibility towards the pupil's future that ought to be an integral and distinct internal good of a school's professional practice. A teacher's intellectual curiosity in maintaining this relationship is also a virtue to be cultivated and extended. There is a notion here that to be excellent does require important technical skills, but there is something fundamentally ethical about the way in which they are developed, deployed, evaluated and come to embody a teacher's character that goes beyond a sense of duty to the job and a duty to the rights of the pupils (Carr 2006a, 2007).

It is important to clarify and exemplify these points in relation to teaching. Some of the goods in teaching will be external and contingent: my own individual financial security in being a teacher, the development of future employment prospects for young people and so on, that depend upon a good education and accredited qualifications. However, I cannot fully trust the security of these external goods if I am not committed to some notion of excellence as an internal goal of teaching, and this is partly defined by the virtues I develop. For example, I cannot pursue excellent teaching without some virtues such as the courage to listen to criticism, some honesty to respond and improve my performance, altruism to work through difficulty in the service of others and a sense of justice in providing equal opportunity for all young people to benefit. The means-end circularity of this practice becomes apparent if I have defined the *telos* of my practice as developing such virtues as human goods in the young people I teach. Thus I will need to embody these virtues

as well as inculcate them as educational aims because they are goods in themselves and not simply a means to some other end such as personal wealth.

If the goods external to the practice of teaching were simply and only the achievement of exam results in order for the students to get a better job, it is conceivable that I could secure this end for a large percentage of young people without consistently embodying some virtues, merely through exercising some effective communication techniques. However, to improve one's technical expertise requires some notion of wider human goods (Carr 2006b) and a commitment cannot be fully realised independently of exercising some virtues such as the courage to improve one's competence in the practice. Therefore motivation and reflection by all parties involved in a practice are required and this in itself requires certain traits of character. Exam passes for individuals do not of themselves guarantee any contribution to wider social goods if there are not opportunities and practices beyond school to which young people can usefully contribute.

Taking the argument back to educational examples: I could pass exams in science or in art and be accredited in those subjects, but standards of excellence within those practices are also about being inducted into the disciplines of the scientist and the artist that define their excellence and also into the disputes and crisis that move them forward as practices. This induction requires the cultivation of certain intellectual and dispositional virtues, for example honesty, truthfulness, reflectiveness, independent thinking and a healthy attitude towards risk and creativity. An exam pass may be a marker of standards as judged by the practice but it is only a temporary snapshot and cannot measure the virtues that the subject requires and encourages for its successful pursuit. To extend standards of

excellence in those practices requires eventually being able to contribute to their internal disputes, conflicts and agreements that extend the goods they strive for. An exam mark denotes how well I have studied for the test and does not indicate anything of the internal goods the subject may offer. It offers an effective benefit, for example furthering my career, but only potentially a virtuous one.

Furthermore, as Wilcox (1997) points out, school practices have a range of internal goods and disciplines that may be in conflict with, or make competing demands upon, other practices that a young person may encounter. As outlined earlier, MacIntyre's (1994) point is that there is a narrative unity in our lives, part of which is to struggle about what is the good life for me, what must I do, but that question can only be answered in practice, not in theory. To bridge competing demands therefore also requires virtues that recognise some wider human purpose than simply satisfying my needs as a 'consumer'. Taylor (2003) argues that as a subject with moral responsibilities I can reason as to which values are trivial and which are not and in my dependence on others I can find significance in certain ways of being that value this dependence. A question for personalisation therefore is whether the consumer voice is liable to undercut that of the citizen? An answer to that might well lie in researching how personalised learning impacts or not upon the development of what can be termed political virtues that transcend one's self-interest.

Two key classes of political virtues in living together that help us bridge the competing demands of choices I might face are what MacIntyre (1999a) has called "effective independent practical" reasoning (p.81) and "just generosity" (ibid, p.121). Both virtues are an acknowledgment of our dependency. For the former, an

individual needs to separate themselves “adequately” from their desires (ibid, p.83) to be able to, for example, evaluate, judge and reason and employ the skills of a practice well rather than badly. Just generosity speaks to more than being dutiful; it encompasses the virtues of giving and receiving, and with “a certain affectionate regard” (MacIntyre 1999a, p.122) that I read as Nodding’s (2003) qualities of creating trust and exercising care and compassion in an authentic, non-manipulative and genuine manner. If following an exam I wish to pursue the practice of an artist or a scientist I will be judged by my peers, to gain their acceptance as someone worthy of contributing, and therefore of being judged, requires the development and habituation of the virtues that make such a relationship possible. To form a personalised relationship to a practice or set of practices is, in this view, to become more than a passive consumer; it is to develop an active relationship to learning as a continuous part of my life’s goods. In forming such a commitment one is not only developing oneself but also contributing to a more just community. A strategic interest for this thesis is how far are the pedagogical practices of schools enabling young people to develop some deeper interest in a course of study or subject area?

3.3.2 Virtues, capabilities and social justice

Rorty (1999) has argued that one of the undeniable tensions in education in general, and by extension in a concept of personalised learning in particular, is that between the development of individual autonomy and the socialisation of a society’s young. In Rorty’s (1999) adoption of Dewey’s pragmatism it is sufficient for education beyond the early years of schooling (which he argues need to be concerned with socialisation) to develop a sense of personal autonomy and intellectual freedom: “if you take care of freedom, truth will take care of itself” (p.118). There is some parallels here with Rawls’s (1988) refinement of his *Theory of Justice* in which the

principle of justice as fairness is complexly and subtly argued for within a conception of political liberalism opposed to (or seeing as unnecessary) “comprehensive” philosophical and moral doctrines (p.269). One of Rawls’s (1988) points is that the way the main political and social institutions of society “hang together as one system of cooperation”¹ should be publically known and recognised as a principle of justice. He goes on to argue that:

“...political institutions satisfying the principles of a liberal conception of justice realize political values and ideals that normally outweigh whatever other values oppose them” (p.275).

On this argument, political liberalism opposes “comprehensive’ doctrines such as the “civic humanism” (Rawls 1988, p.272) that are implicated in the thicker Aristotelian versions of political goods supplied by MacIntyre (1994) and Michael Sandel (1984, 2010). Rawls (1973) can be read as a complex defence, within certain parameters, of the neutrality of liberal institutions in respect to the ends of what might constitute human flourishing. The relevance of these problems is to work out a strategic position to the role of personalised learning in a conception of the consumer-citizen as a rubric for social justice. For example, can the pursuit of personal autonomy as a moral position work towards wider human goods if, qua Rawls (1973, 1988), democratic institutions are well ordered? Is the citizen element of personalisation simply a mode of voice through which to access equal opportunities or does it require something more engaged and committed on the part of the members of a democratic society? The fieldwork element of the research might illustrate the internal stories of how committed and engaged the expressions of voice are within the contemporary institution of schooling.

I suggest that MacIntyre (1994) requires a stronger reading of those human goods as a political form of life that is not simply a means of protecting liberty, but in which

political forms of civic engagement are central to human flourishing. For MacIntyre (1994, 2001), liberal institutions have very little ethical resources from which to make strong civic demands on the 'consumer' if they are arranged to protect neutrality about normative, moral, questions. He goes on to argue that liberalism, as expressed in for example the democratic arrangements of contemporary English society, is not a 'neutral' tradition and has itself a contested history (MacIntyre 2001). Other philosophers in similar fashion argue that a strictly neutral position about human 'goods' is impossible to take because there is always some implicit or explicit theory of ends at work in the institutional arrangements a society makes (Sandel 1984). A thin reading of personalisation as the pursuit of personal autonomy in these kinds of arguments therefore undercuts the kind of civic engagements necessary to decide about normative issues of justice.

However, Rorty (1994) argues that the attempts by philosophers that he labels communitarians, such as Sandel and MacIntyre, to construct a philosophy about human goods are "terminal wistfulness" (p.194) since there is no good argument to suggest that any one particular philosophy is necessary for the survival of liberal democracy, although he grants that some maybe harmful. Rorty's criticism could be aimed also at Fielding (2004b, 2006a,b, 2007a,b, 2008) who has argued for a particular philosophical position on the person both from which to critique the policy implications of personalised learning and to suggest an alternative version of democratic schooling. In Rorty's (1994) view liberal democracies, although not perfect, can enable ideas to be discussed freely and openly and therefore specifying some human goods in advance, as per communitarianism, tends towards authoritarianism, a denial of individual autonomy. Further to this argument is the question of how are the prejudices of communities to maintain abhorrent moral practices to be challenged if individuals cannot reason autonomously (Law 2008). It

was this kind of question, the tyranny of tradition and custom, that nineteenth century English philosopher John Stuart Mill (2008) wrestled with. MacIntyre (1994) rejects both Mill's utilitarian solutions, and the term communitarianism (1999a, 2009). He rejects communitarianism both as label for himself and as a manifestation of simplistic and uncritical yearnings for 'community' within liberal democracies. Similarly, (Bauman 1994, 2000) has warned about the dangers of an unproblematised return to 'community' as a way out of the dilemmas and risks of 'liquid' modernity. So the question for personalisation as a policy aimed at securing social justice remains: how are notions of individual autonomy expressed through personal voice to be correlated to the 'social' if not through some community or collective activity?

The intellectual challenges posed by Rawls and Rorty are not easily shrugged off; but while the argument for virtue ethics does not completely resolve the tensions between autonomy and the nature and strength of our moral commitments to others, it can go some of the way to providing tools by which to make judgements about practices and how they develop both a sense of autonomy within a frame of civic virtues.

The relevance of these tensions to the research and the place of personalisation in the pursuit of social justice is that the concept of practice espoused by MacIntyre (1994) places the virtues in an ongoing relationship between the particular and the universal. So for example, by exhibiting or demonstrating generosity in the concrete milieu of a practice one is also learning something about generosity in general. Therefore, to act in a just way in a social practice is also to develop some understandings about justice beyond it. The reciprocal relationship might also

apply: if there is a widespread sense of injustice perceived by young people about social arrangements beyond the school, is their view of particular practices within school coloured in a negative manner?

Although, virtue ethics has a long tradition with many roots and many points of divergence (Oakley 1996; Stohr 2006) MacIntyre's turn (1994) in such an ethics leads me to argue that social justice in personalisation is not solely a matter of individual rights: it is a move from an argument that I simply have the right to pursue my own course of education, the content and ends of which are my choice alone, to one where the ends of my pursuit could not be considered as separate from some concept of wider human goods. In liberal democracies there are consequences in this argument for the way that policy is framed and enacted within institutional arrangements such as schools. The relevant conundrum here is that personalisation in the consumer pole is designed to protect my rights of access to, and my choice of, public service, whereas the citizen motif suggests that I might have a civic duty or obligation, or simply desire, to engage my voice in the direction of such services. However, the reading of personalisation in the previous chapter suggests that policy emphasis on such an obligation or motivation on my part is a thin one. The major part of the obligation to personalise services rests with the public sector 'system' providers.

My frame of reference in this thesis is that this latter thin reading is not an entirely satisfactory one from which to judge the impact of policy enactment in the practices of teaching. MacIntyre (1999a) is concerned that I do not withdraw into a stance of irony (qua Rorty 1989) without remembering that the judgements the ironist adopts are never mine alone, they are "ours", part of a relational network (p. 153). Perhaps

in complex policy environments such as education and a globalising economy practitioners need some 'wistfulness', some motivating ethical reasoning. In being 'wistful', education practitioners can perhaps be more mindful of their wider commitments that education and learning can make to a vibrant civic democracy in which justice is seen to be more central (see Sandel 2101). In his argument with Rawls, Sandel (1984) ² suggests that substantial moral commitments to each other are part of what makes us human and that individuals are not free moral agents if that characterisation and that connection to substantive moral issues is denied as a motivating factor. Also drawing upon an Aristotelian tradition, Nussbaum (1992) defends a:

“...sketch of an internalist-essentialist proposal, an account of the most important functions of the human being, in terms of which human life is defined” (p.214).

In contrast to Rawl's “thin theory of the good” Martha Nussbaum develops a “thick vague theory of the good” (Nussbaum 1992, p.214/5) and later proposes a first attempt at outlining basic human functioning's whose achievements for individuals would constitute just entitlements (Nussbaum 2003). Even if my moral agency is bound to particular historical and local contexts and I am unable to escape my 'prejudices' (Gadamer 2006), some form of essentialism has to hold if I am to experience a moral argument with others that has an expectation of resolution on the basis of reason rather than emotional preference. Taking Sen's (2010) notion of capabilities further than he would probably vouchsafe, Nussbaum (2003) nevertheless provides a framework of capabilities that are akin to MacIntyre's (1994, 1999a, b) virtues and in reference to which one might judge the actions of schools in enhancing social justice. For example, through examining how the practices schools develop the capabilities of young people in human functioning. Some such political virtues are: MacIntyre's notions of 'independent practical reasoning', 'just generosity' (1999a) and integrity and constancy (1999b), and Noddings (1992,

2003) work on care. These qualities would overlap with Nussbaum's (1992) notion of capabilities and her arguments for compassion and respect in public life and the development of these in human capabilities as a mark of a just society. If one further takes Nancy Fraser's (2003, 2010) marks of social justice as containing the necessity "for parity of participation in social life" (2010, p.145) then it is reasonable to conclude that education should enable and enhance capabilities and virtues that can both accommodate the participation of young people in political life and also equip them with the capacities to extend the scope and reach of civic society.

Thus, the relevance of these arguments for this research design is to ask how the experiences and stories of young people in their schools reflect practices, that are supposedly personalised, in a manner that they perceive as just and in ways that develop their sense of the 'citizen'. Whilst the latter motif maybe ill-defined in policy documentation, a reading of virtue ethics allied to a notion of capabilities leads me to argue that in the social practices of schools, defining their degrees of excellence in promoting personalised learning as social justice would suggest that young people ought to experience many of virtues outlined above in the practices of their teachers.

3.2.3 Authenticity and moral modes of practice

To develop the arguments in sections 3.2.1 and 3.2.2 further requires a reminder that learner voice and engagement through personalised learning is a key policy proposal. Furthermore, as an expression of personal autonomy in personalised learning, learner voice is not a position whose possibility I seek to deny or dismiss. One of the questions I seek to explore is the authenticity of learner voice when viewed from within an ethical perspective.

On the side of developing one's personal identity and capability with policies of personalisation, some view of autonomy and personal fulfillment is always at stake in the social imaginary (Taylor 2003). Practices within schools could be judged within the framework of promoting personal capabilities. However, Taylor (2003) proceeds to argue that personal autonomy ought to be considered against "horizons of significance" (p.35). He adopts a very similar position to MacIntyre (1994, 1999a) and Nussbaum (1992, 2003) in that an individual cannot ignore his or her social ties: I will often act or think in ways that presuppose or recognise some transcendence in individual human desires. To ignore the social and the transcendent is self-defeating argues Taylor (2003). The relevance of Taylor's (2003) 'horizons of significance' argument for analysing policies of personalisation is to retrieve the concept of authenticity and then be able to apply this concept to the exercise of learners' voice with schools that promote personalised learning. Taylor (2003) has argued for the possibility of recovering the concept of authenticity from those who promote the notion as the ultimate realisation of the individual and from those critics of the concept that hold this claim to be symptomatic of "a loss of meaning, the fading of moral horizons" as if all individuals care about is their own self-fulfilment (Taylor 2003, p. 10). For Taylor the argument is not about simple trade-offs between rival positions, as this tends to obscure the moral issues at stake, but about reclaiming the term authenticity in a richer ethical sense. But contemporary Western modernities have constructed for the individual limited political and moral resources against which to judge the significance of such terms since one person's authenticity maybe another's triviality. Providing I do not harm to another am I not morally, in theory at least, free to pursue my happiness in the way that I wish?

However, as Taylor (2003) argues, humans can readily begin to sort trivial from non-trivial horizons. So for example, the weight of moral significance between, say a decision on what shirt to wear today or whether a particular course of study is worth pursuing, is readily available. MacIntyre's (1994) concept of social practices and the exercise of virtues suggests that schools are critical institutional contexts in English democracy through which young people can be provided with the capacities to hone and refine critical judgement.

In terms of this research design therefore, it is theoretically possible to examine, through the stories of young people, how authentically they feel their voice is contributing to defining and extending standards of excellence within the practices of the school. However, authenticity is of itself not a straightforward and easily applicable concept. It requires a further qualification and this is supplied through MacIntyre's (1994) application of "manipulative" or "non-manipulative" to moral modes of being (p.23).

MacIntyre (1994) identified manipulative moral modes in modernity exemplified by the 'characters' of the aesthete, the therapist and the manager, a deliberate use of a dramatic metaphor. Manipulative moral modes take ends as given, as outside of these characters' concern; these characters privilege instead questions of technique. The analysis of the manager and the therapist are particularly relevant to examining school practices. Effectiveness can be pursued through technical expertise by these two characters but as in the earlier discussion about internal goods, justice as a virtue demands, non-manipulative practice: a practice that might be defined by standards of excellence internal to those practices and embodied and extended through the virtues that relate to ends or telos of human flourishing.

Managerialism has been analysed as a manipulative mode of operating in the public sector (Overeem and Tholen 2011) and in schools particularly the rise of a therapeutic dimension (Ecclestone 2007) has seen the character of therapist take on more technical credibility without necessarily lending any more moral or cognitive value to education. Personalisation as a policy suggested the possibility of some intrinsic value to young peoples' learning, a non-manipulative mode of practice, one that drew upon autonomous notions of self-identity. But what if such an identity was reduced to a technical set of data through which the characters of therapist and manager secured the institution despite or instead of the development of an individual's autonomy? In the fieldwork it might well be possible to position a school's use of technical performance data within the meanings attached to it by the young people.

Such doubts strengthen the argument for a criterion of authenticity, for one might object that a particular expression is judged as authentic only if one happens to agree with it. For example, in relation to personalised learning, Fielding and Moss (2011) raise the suspicion that policies of personalisation are an invitation to exercise an atavistic and individualised voice; this they oppose to a person-centred philosophy that encourages civic participation and renewal. But is one stance to be deemed any less authentic because I find it less palatable than another? MacIntyre's argument suggests that a school's practice in relation to learner voice and personalised learning can be investigated from the framework of how far student engagement is used for the external goods of an institution's reputation and financial survival or is an integral part of the learning practices of the school. Of course it is quite possible that there is a continuum or a variety of practices that trend between manipulation and non-manipulation. The moral modes evidenced

thus supports a horizon of significance against which the authenticity of student voice might be judged.

The consequences of these arguments are that an authentic notion of learner voice that carries some significance within teaching is theoretically possible. Possible if teaching is viewed as a relational practice that not only pursues the students' accreditation for external goods, but develops a richer sense of virtue such as care, trust, honesty and courage to reflect deeply and critically about themselves and the world they inhabit. As Smyth (2011) asks: how accountable are schools to the young people in them?

In relation to schools and education one consequence of the preceding statement must surely be that virtues that contribute to human flourishing, for example those making up *phronesis* -practical wisdom- (Aristotle 1998; Carr 2007; Gadamer 2006) need to be encouraged and developed for the young over the course of their educational experiences. For Aristotle (1998) our disposition for moral reasoning has to be cultivated, virtues need to become habits that work also through developing intellectual wisdom. I read MacIntyre's (1994) extension as arguing that social practices in schools and their standards of excellence, definitive of their internal goods, are critical sites for the development of *phronesis* in the young. Habits that contribute to, for example, the practices of justice will never be 'completed' or always practiced every minute of the day, but should be largely manifest in all the stories that make up an individual's life history. In designing the research to investigate the stories of a group of young people in relation to personalised learning, such a concept of virtues forms a background thinking-frame for subsequent analysis.

3.4 The competing values framework

Another discursive element of the research design that can helpfully be explained at this juncture is the adaptation of the work of organisational psychologists and thinkers who are developing the competing values framework (for example Quinn 1991). The underpinning concept in the competing values framework is that organisations have two “fundamental” tensions in play at the same time:

“...the desire for flexibility and autonomy versus the need for control and stability; and the focus on internal concerns and needs versus responsiveness to the external environment” (Talbot 2008, p.10).

These poles of tension (flexibility versus stability; internal versus external) map into four different ways of ‘seeing’ the world present in human organisations: models that represent cultures of creation, collaboration, control and competition. Quinn (1991) argues that:

“The four models are not simply another set of academic abstractions but representations of four competing moralities, four ways of seeing the world that people feel implicitly and about which they feel intensely” (p.42).

Although it maybe possible to dispute this argument empirically, the competing values framework usefully integrates the paradoxes of human organisation, such as schooling, into a single analytical framework through which it is possible to view the cultural and individual tendencies in play (Talbot 2008).

The framework has been used in both a normative and performative fashion to judge the efficacy of public services (see Talbot 2008) suggesting that complex negotiations are required across the four models. The suggestion is that objectives formed from strong pulls to one value or another can lead to clashes, turbulence and undercutting of aims. Balances and trade-offs are always required. The

framework makes these negotiations available for judgement and debate (Talbot 2008).

The competing values framework is employed in this research as a mapping tool to reflect upon the data and its ethical consequences. I argue in Chapter Eight that a feature of modernity is an agonism that enables paradoxical hermeneutics of human identity to be elaborated. In addition I contend that it is possible for agents to hold competing values both within and between themselves, about for example the purposes of education and the values they seek and promote. Therefore, adapting the competing values framework enables a mapping of paradox and tension that could emerge in the data. It will also enable the ethical arguments to be compared and contrasted with values in practice emerging from the fieldwork. Thus chapters Five to Eight will produce a summary figure that has been influenced by, although not directly replicating, the competing values approach. A particular source of adaptation is Janet Newman's (2006) work on the competing models of governance and Chapter Seven explains this in more detail. Chapter Nine looks to contribute a framework of questions under the competing values model to provide alternative evaluative tools through which to judge the ethical spaces of policy enactment.

3.5 Summary

This chapter has sought to outline key intellectual contributions to the research design: its consequence for framing the questions posed and the analysis of subsequent fieldwork and how this is tied back to the framework of social practices and the virtues. This position is elaborated as a moral framework based upon MacIntyre's (1994) concepts of social practices, goods and standards of excellence

internal to them, and the critical role of virtues in both defining and being required to extend excellence.

This framework was posited in relation to developing a critical scholarship that examined the enactment of policy in the messiness of institutional practice as going beyond or behind the policy texts. As Ball (2008) puts it:

“Policies are contested, interpreted and enacted in a variety of arenas of practice and the rhetorics, texts and meanings of policy makers do not always translate directly and obviously into institutional practices” (Ball 2008, p.7).

Therefore the institutional site, in this case the school, becomes a central arena to understand the intersection of structural forces and the stories of young people and it is in this ‘local’ site that MacIntyre (1994, 1999a, 2001) finds more optimistic grounds for establishing reasoned criteria of excellence in social practices. Personalised learning proposed a version of excellence in teaching and the design of schooling with ‘radical implications’ for social justice. This chapter outlines an approach that can test that claim through not only the discursive literatures but also in the stories of those who work and learn in schools. Part of the approach rests on taking a thicker notion of shared moral obligations and “prefiguring” in schooling democratic relationships to civic society (Fielding and Moss 2011, p.149) than some philosophers of liberal democracy would argue is either necessary or defensible. Perhaps their doubts are correct, but what I argue is that personalisation, contrary to exponents of postmodernism (Lyotard 2004), taps into a notion of justice as a ‘grand’ narrative because modernity has created cultural conditions that make some ethical debate and public reasoning about the practise of justice both possible and necessary. To divorce its analysis from an ethical practice containing, however vague, some notion of human capabilities and flourishing is to leave the consumer

motif open to the arbitrary vagaries of the market and to undercut possibilities for the citizen.

Perhaps the turn in the argument from MacIntyre's (1994, 2001) appeal to the *pre-modern* is a response to a postmodern culture that has placed me in some existential need of 're-enchanting' a world seemingly complex and devoid of meaning (Hartley 1999), but I argue that something more substantial about personal reasoning is at stake than being 'wistful'. Hartley's (1999) discursive analysis has been prescient about the ways the turns in marketing and modern management rhetorics are employed in the internal aspects of legitimising current schooling. The dilemmas posed for personalised learning are well captured by some feminist writers who express concern that the emancipatory "trajectories" of their work on critical pedagogies and the personal as political, face a threat from competitive and marketised forms of personalisation (Clegg and David 2003, p.149) but who go on to argue that the possibilities for critical reflection and writing are not necessarily "discursively foreclosed" (*ibid* p.149). By extension, it could be argued that the possibilities for the application of virtue ethics can provide hope for substantial innovations in policy and practice within schools that render the meaning of the personal as something more substantial in a civic and transcendent sense.

Chapter Three footnotes:

- 1) Rawl's (1988) position as a major theorist of political and public life requires a close reading. One that this thesis cannot do justice to, but which I argue that those working in education and concerned with principals of justice need to think and argue about. A key plank of Rawl's work can be found, I argue in the following statement about the "limit of the practical best":

"Now, to say a society is well ordered by a conception of justice means three things: (1) that it is a society in which all citizens accept, and acknowledge before one another that they accept, the same principles of justice; (2) that its basic structure - its main political and social institutions and the way they hang together as one system of cooperation - is publicly known, or with good reason believed, to satisfy those principles; and (3) that citizens have a normally effective sense of justice, that

is, one that enables them to understand and to apply the principles of justice, and for the most part to act from them as their circumstances require. I believe that social unity so understood is the most desirable conception of unity available to us; it is the limit of the practical best" (1988, p.269).

- 2) One of the key philosophical arguments in this debate is the difference between, and the priority of, which is the right thing to do and the good thing to do. Rawls updated his *Theory of Justice* and in 1988 in particular, looks at how justice as fairness also carried five particular goods. I am not convinced that Sandel (1984) has comprehensively or sufficiently understood Rawls's arguments in promoting the notion of good before right, but Sandel's (see 2010) 'wistfulness' is a motivating argument for myself.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH DESIGN PART 2: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter explained the theoretical resources that framed the research design and subsequent methodology for generating and analysing fieldwork data. If the previous chapter serves to orientate the reader to the model (“an overall framework for looking at reality” (Silverman 1998, p.13) this chapter details the consequent empirical methods used to answer the two data generating questions I pose:

- 1) What are the experiences of young people as learners within the practices of schools who seek to enact personalised learning?
- 2) How is the enactment of personalised learning in schools framed by the ways that headteachers interpret policies of personalised learning?

The purposes of Chapter Three and Four are to provide coherence in the design from initial ontological and epistemological puzzles down to details of method (Mason 2011).

The analysis in Chapters Five, Six and Seven will present an interplay between both the data gathered in fieldwork and the literatures in Chapter Three and therefore it was important to establish the model that underpins this research design. 4.2 introduces **methodology**, “a general approach to studying the research topics” (Silverman 1998, p.13) in order to set the scene for describing the methods (4.2.1) employed – “specific research technique(s)” (Silverman 1998, p.13).

Section 4.3 is the section that establishes the detail of the actual fieldwork process. Section 4.3.1 describes the samples and site, why they were chosen, what they represent and then provides a 'cast list' of participants that enables the data extracts in late chapters to be contextualised. Sections 4.3.2 to 4.3.5 detail the methods used with respondents in the order in which they were employed. Data transcription methods and initial approaches to the generated material are also briefly described in the next section (4.3.6). The chapter concludes with section 4.4 discussing issues of trustworthiness, 4.5 the ethics process and 4.6 issues of generalisability.

4.2 Research methodology: the research questions, interpretivism and narrative

On a broad level, qualitative approaches are employed and within this broad spectrum the more specific methodological features of narrative epistemologies are identified that are consistent with the research model. Methodology is essentially the "study of methods" (Wright Mills 1980, p.68) and working from a broad introduction the section will focus on the methodology employed. Firstly, I justify the use of a qualitative approach in relation to what I argue are the valid objects of study for this research.

Chapter Three elucidated an interest in the stories and accounts of those engaged in practices and thus I take them as narratives that aspire to some sense of purpose in the lives of those researched. That means these accounts can be studied in relation to the virtues and standards of excellence espoused by those practices. In this case I am especially interested in the accounts of young people, who are the intended 'beneficiaries' of policies, in relation to the intended moral outcomes of personalisation. In addition the accounts of headteachers who lead schools, and

are charged by government as the critical agents that enact policy, will also be relevant. Furthermore, there are discontinuities and convergences in policy enactments (Ball 2008) and this implies that a practice could espouse one set of standards but its members either embody or experience another set of virtues. These congruencies or discontinuities of perception are valid and informative sites of research. In this case the policy of personalisation is studied from the experiences and perceptions of young people and is contrasted and compared to the intentions of policy makers and headteachers. However, the stories of headteachers are located in contested policy practices, thus the stories and interpretations of headteachers is important in itself in order to gain some understanding of how competing values might play out. In addition, while the direct voice of policy makers is absent in this research other than through documentation, some scoping work has been done to understand the stories of those who could influence the strategic direction of policy through the system.

In light of this preamble, I therefore use qualitative methods in order to investigate the qualities of the meanings people ascribe to their practices in the given context in which they operate (Bryman 1988; Hammersley 1983, 1989; Hammersley and Atkinson 1996; Miles and Huberman 1994; Silverman 2009). Qualitative methods are also appropriate because in the interaction with the people I researched, my reflexivity in the process is important to acknowledge as impacting upon the scope and trustworthiness of the findings (Hammersley 1983; Flick 2009). While such reflexivity can be easily overplayed, adding more rhetoric than substance (Troyna 1994), there is nevertheless a need to be transparent about my positioning within the research process.

However, qualitative methods represent a broad spectrum of models and epistemologies and some further detail is required to ensure the integrity of the research design (Mason 2011). One further level of detail appropriate to this research is that it is “interpretivist” in the sense that the “primary data sources” are “people, and their interpretations, perceptions, meaning and understandings” and unlike a detailed ethnographic case study these data sources do not rely on “total immersion” in a setting (Mason 2011, p.56). The methodological approach is also interpretivist in that I drew in Chapter Three upon the notion of a ‘sociological imagination’. Imagination suggests analogies with human activities such as the arts, creativity, play and stories. Philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (2006, p.570) invitation is to employ hermeneutics, not as a technique but as a “play” on my “prejudices” that does not foreclose the possibility of reaching reasoned agreements about the difficult issues under study. However, Gadamer is not advocating the abandonment of rigour in method for human sciences (he specifically answers his critics on this point in the second edition of *Truth and Method*, 2006). What Gadamer (2006) denies is the impossibility of not bringing to the work, prejudgements and interpretations - or “fore-meanings” (p. 269) and “prejudice” – the latter a hermeneutic term stripped of its pejorative connotations (p.273). In Gadamer’s (2004) view, issues of method cannot exhaustively define how humans understand the complexities of their interactions. What is required from methods is a dialogue that clarifies and confronts the researcher’s prejudices in order to supersede them; a process called the “fusion of horizons” (p.305) in which I seek not to confirm my prejudices but extend my knowledge horizons.

Chapter Three also made a claim for including in the research design the place of narrative in an ethical account of peoples’ interpretations. Thus narrative methodologies are also considered appropriate but the literatures are not consistent

on the detail of methods congruent with narrative approaches (Connelly and Clandinin 1990; Polkinghorne 1995).

Narrative has been defined as:

“...the type of discourse composition that draws together diverse events, happenings, and actions of human lives into thematically unified goal-directed purposes” (Polkinghorne 1995, p.5)

Two key elements in this definition are that “narrative configuration” involves organising “happenings” into a temporal whole with a “thematic thread” called a “plot” (Polkinghorne 1995, p.5). Polkinghorne (1995) goes on to define two sorts of narrative cognition, or ways of knowing through narrative, that lead to two different types of narrative enquiry. One is a “paradigmatic analysis” (p.12) in which the researcher draws on narratives (policy texts and speeches could qualify as a narrative) to draw out key themes and/or taxonomies of for example, characters, settings and genres. Another type is “narrative analysis” (p.12) in which elements are combined to tell as a story; the researcher emplots the data into a narrative.

The thesis research design in respect of generating data is more inclined to the paradigmatic in the first instance but will re-assemble the story of personalisation into a narrative conclusion. Therefore the thesis uses both paradigmatic and narrative analysis (see 4.3.5 below). (Although narrative as a supposed coherent and unified account of a life is not without philosophical issues - see Williams 2007). However, through using the frame of narrative, the research is designed to explore “fissures” and continuities between policy texts and lived experience, requiring respondents to “think aloud”, to provide something of their story in the policy process (Miller and Glassner 1997, p.100). I research both the “stories” people tell

(Connelly and Clandinin 1990, p. 2) and the policy texts and speeches “as instances of general notions” (Polkinghorne 1995, p.13) in relation to policy enactment.

Therefore the data analysis emerges as a “narrative” constructed by the researcher to retell these stories in some coherent fashion (see Connelly and Clandinin 1990, p. 2). Through reconfiguration by the researcher the intention of narrative is to make coherent, potentially “disconnected data elements” in “an interesting and explanatory way” (Polkinghorne 1995, p.20). Therefore while the research design has paradigmatic elements it is also fashioned into a narrative of policy enactment that engages a critical ethical stance.

The use of narrative in this context implies that such terms as metaphor and plot become meaningful for thematically analysing the data. Plot in this research brings together the stories of the state, headteachers and young people in some schools into relationship with the histories of late modernity. In this methodology metaphor will be used to theme data elements and support a coherent link between the meanings of the participants and the meanings of the final narrative. Metaphors can perform this function because, it has been argued, they are a property of human bodies and brain physiology whose use fundamentally structures perceptions and behaviours (Lakoff and Johnson 1999). While the claims of these authors may be over-reaching, metaphor has been considered, philosophically, as integral to language’s capacity to generate new meanings and innovative insights that can be shared by others (Ricoeur 1978). Although Delamont (1981) was referring to ethnography and not to narrative, I use metaphor as a “self-conscious” (p.13) strategy in “making the familiar strange” (p.13) in order to look at stories critically. Metaphor arguably accomplishes the familiar-strange dialectic through involving

imagination and feelings in the cognitive process of invoking one idea as translating into another, but in an enhanced not literal sense (Ricoeur 1978). There is also a one-sidedness to metaphor “that in highlighting certain interpretations it tends to force others into a background role” (Morgan 1986, p.13). Therefore employing a metaphor can thematically deepen the significance of the data through building a bridge of meaning between the reader and the research, but the use of metaphor signifies an active construction by the researcher as a tool of critique. For example, metaphors have been used as a frame of critical analysis of organisations in general (Morgan 1986) and critical policy scholarship has used metaphor with cultural resonances (for example, “Jurassic Management”, Gunter 1995, “Life on Mars”, Gunter and Thomson 2010).

The use of interpretivism and narrative thus suggest some methods as suitable tools for the fieldwork and these are outlined below.

4.2.1 Methods

The methods employed to generate stories in this research are reading documents, interviews and scenarios used in focus groups. The documents that establish the political and pedagogical stories of personalised learning have largely been employed in the exegesis of Chapter Two. The key documents are publically available Departmental White Papers, Legislation, advice and guidance documents, letters to NDPBs and Ministerial speeches. All of which were available through the Department’s website. These sources support the more macro and meso levels of the analysis. In researching these texts I used my own professional experience of the text and also conducted keyword searches using the tags: ‘personalisation’, ‘personalised learning’, ‘personalising learning’. Departmental minutes of a meeting

(DfES 2003a) I drew upon were not embargoed documents but available only to attendees. Other Government documents and the Prime Minister's speeches used were publically available through the relevant departments and are referenced in the thesis. NDPBs and thinktanks publish documents, such as pamphlets, and make materials available through their websites; similar keyword searches were conducted in these documents. In addition, I set up a SCOPUS database alert to journal articles referencing the three keywords above.

In this section I proceed to make a few general points about the interviews and scenario methods used in the thesis and then in the next section, following an explanation of the sample, detail the actual processes of their employment.

In order to investigate the policy push of personalisation and to examine how it was enacted at the local level the core of the fieldwork is conducted in three schools. Interviews with the headteachers and groups of young people in these schools are combined with focus group work in which groups of young people worked on three activities that draw upon scenarios I designed to elicit their perceptions and stories. The exact details are explained below in section 4.3.

Interviews are consistent with generating data for interpretivist and narrative methodologies (Polkinghorne 1995; Mason 2011). However, Silverman (1998) is correct to warn that methods such as interviews can lull researchers into a romantic notion of empathy to the subject's world; interviews cannot simply depict who the respondents are. I conduct interviews in order to allow the respondents to tell their stories, to relay their experiences and give their opinions.

Semi-structured interviews are therefore appropriate: certain themes are to be covered but the conduct of the interview is aimed at a “purposeful conversation” (Mason 2011, p.62). This type of interview is a particular and active form of meaning making conversation (Holstein and Gubrium 1998) suited to the narrative approach because one is not trying to empathise or uncover some ‘reality’ behind the stories, but elicit the cultural resources that respondents draw upon to provide their perceptions and experiences. I am not forced by a desire to ‘prove’ anything, but to enable the serendipitous and the ebb and flow of meaning between participants that can support the research jigsaw (Smith, 1978). The role of the interviewer lies in “virtually *activating narrative production*” (Holstein and Gubrium 1998, p.123, original emphasis). I taped all interviews and then made notes on my impressions of the process of interviews immediately after, as a research diary exercise. During the interviews I tried to keep note taking to a minimum, as this seems, in face-to-face interviews, to act as a kind of prompt or distraction to the respondent.

Given the interpretivist and narrative methodology, additional means of eliciting stories are considered in order to enrich, support, check and cross-reference accounts provided in the interviews. In this case three forms of scenario exercises are conducted with focus groups of young people in three different schools (see 4.3.1 for the sample).

Focus groups have been used in marketing and media research since the 1920’s and have become a popular method in political and social science research (Robson 2002). The main import of focus group work is to produce rich data

insights that arise from the interaction between people in a group when they are asked to focus on a particular problem and produce a more collective view (Robson 2002). The focus group participants were split into four trios. A trio was designed as a group that would encourage and allow all participants to exercise their voice through making it difficult for one person to hide, but also enabling respondents to feel supported and not embarrassed by having to be the sole respondent. As the trios were asked to produce collective responses to a series of questions I also felt that coming to some agreement would be more manageable in a smaller rather than larger group. The trios were given three scenario type activities to work on (see 4.3.3 below for details).

The word “scenario” comes from a performing arts context and is derived from the Latin *scaena*, meaning scene; as a management ‘tool’ scenarios emerged following World War 2 in USA military planning (Ringland 1998). Industry chiefs (the Shell corporation were early adopters) and planners in many public and international contexts have used scenarios in making significant strategic decisions (Lindgren and Bandhold 2009; Ringland 2006; Saussois 2007). In the English education system schooling and curriculum structures have been the subjects employed in leadership training (Miller and Bentley 2003; Miller 2007; Ogilvy 2007). The idea is to reduce complexity while highlighting salient features for future planning (Ringland 2006). Further background details are provided in Appendix 3, page 351. In this research, scenarios are used as statements and stories to frame themes against which young people are asked to voice their preferences and perceptions.

4.3 The fieldwork processes

Section 4.3 describes the fieldwork in order to establish what took place and provide the grounding for subsequent analysis in the thesis. The sequence of the fieldwork is as follows:

- 1) Identify appropriate research sample: strategic actors for orientation to issues; three school sites and young people for in-depth study (section 4.3.1)
- 2) Interview strategic 'players' to orientate myself from their stories to the issues of personalising learning and policy and to support macro and meso levels of analysis. (4.3.2)
- 3) Focus group work with young people based on scenarios, to support the micro-context analysis (4.3.3)
- 4) Group interviews with young people to support the micro-context analysis (4.3.4)
- 5) Interviews with headteachers of their schools to support the micro and meso-levels of analysis (4.3.5)
- 6) Transcribe and first-stage analysis of data (4.3.6).

The exposition of these elements follows the sequence represented above and discusses what actually happened and why. In 4.3.1 below the sample is explained and justified and a 'cast list' is provided for reference to future analytical chapters.

4.3.1 The sample and the sites used for research

In this section a key qualitative methodological device is the use of "typicality" (Schofield 1989, p.99) and how the different types of typicality in a sample may allow a researcher to generalise from one site to others. The samples and sites are explained in the order in which they were approached in the fieldwork process.

1) Policy strategists:

A range of strategic actors in the enactment and understanding of policy were approached in order to provide views of the origins, intentions and ramifications of policy. These were chosen because they had either contributed to the personalisation policy discussion networks, had written about the policy or were responsible for strategic enactment at a local level either as a headteacher or Local Authority Officer. The sample was secured either through personal knowledge or through professional contacts. The Innovations Unit and NCSL Directors were “leading edge” thinkers (Schofield 1993, p.103) in this field and therefore their views ought to be authoritative on what might be expected to transpire in practice. The Local Authority Officer targeted was responsible for wider partnerships, such as extended schools, and had a wider remit than single school improvement and was in the position of taking a broader view of provision; ‘partnerships beyond the classroom’ being one of the five key propositions of the department’s thinking on personalisation (DfES, 2004a). Three headteachers participated in the initial interviews and their testimony is included in Chapter Seven with headteachers from the schools representing the young people’s sample. These headteachers lead schools that are working pro-actively on ideas of personalised learning and along with the Local Authority officer represent a typicality of “what may be” occurring in similar sites elsewhere (Schofield 1993, p. 102). Three headteachers were chosen as a means of triangulating manageable data sources (Flick 2009), as this is an orientation phase.

The final selection of these respondents that is used in the thesis is in the following table:

Table 4.1: Respondents in the orientation phase of research

| Name | Position | Relevance of their story | Where testimony used in thesis |
|------------------------------------|---|--|--------------------------------|
| Wendy Smith (anonymised name) | Director of The Innovations Unit (see Chapter Two) | Instrumental in organising seminars and publications with Local Authorities and school leaders on personalisation. | Chapter Eight |
| Jenny Jones (anonymised name) | Director of Research for the National College of School leadership (see Chapter Two). | Responsible for researching and disseminating personalised learning with school leaders | Chapters Seven and Eight |
| Professor Michael Fielding | Emeritus Professor of Education, Institute of Education, London | Author and researcher with publications critiquing personalisation | Chapter Eight |
| Sara Kumar (anonymised name) | Extended Schools Co-ordinator for an urban Local Authority in the North of England | Interest in and responsibilities for personalised learning in the area's schools. | Chapter Eight |
| Dave Richards (anonymised name) | Headteacher | Representing large secondary predominantly white and middle-class suburban community, who had sat on 2004 DfES working group on personalisation. | Chapter Seven and Eight |
| Julia Osborne (anonymised name) | Headteacher | Representing large urban secondary school, predominantly working-class and multicultural community, known to the University as interested in personalised learning. | Chapter Seven |
| Jim Williams (anonymised name) | Headteacher | Representing large urban secondary school, predominantly working-class and multicultural community, known to me through my professional work as interested in personalised learning. | Chapter Seven |

2) The school sites.

The schools were chosen to represent typicality (Schofield 1989). The features identified as typical are:

- i. At the time of the research the schools were under the spotlight of DCSF intervention strategies (National Challenge¹ and Gaining Ground²; DCSF 2008c); they are striving to raise attainment targets and that includes grappling with personalised learning. This also means they are potentially sites of tension between competing values in policy implementation between central government control and professional autonomy (Newman 2006) and consequently arenas of risks for heads and leaders. In that sense, they could paint a picture of “what may be” (Schofield 1993, p.102), a case of processes that might transpire in other schools.
- ii. From my professional experience I knew that they were keen to think about personalised learning as an improvement strategy and typify other schools in that respect. Whilst the schools were under the DCSF spotlight, their inspection results had commented upon their capacity to improve and the considerable ground they had already covered (OFSTED inspections all carried out in 2009, not referenced to preserve anonymity). They are not dysfunctional settings in danger of being closed down or presenting extreme cases of disaffection by young people. What these schools were trying to practice combined a considerable amount of intellectual and emotional commitment and therefore promised to be very revealing about the operation of personalised learning. There was something then of leading edge typicality about these settings that suggested a rich source of information as well as something ‘average’ about the schools (Schofield 1993).

A final consideration in the selection of this sample is that the schools represent different communities: a largely mono-cultural rural community (Cedar Tree), an urban conurbation (Ash Tree) and a town that has hosted a range of relatively recent migration and multicultural changes as well as losing its manufacturing base (Beech Tree). Given the range of school communities, the research might be able to calibrate respondent views against different cultural contexts and examine the consistency or otherwise of emerging themes and patterns in relation to policy enactment.

Three sites were chosen as it offers the possibility of researching policy enactments in multiple sites, crosschecking descriptions, accessing a range of experiences and viewpoints whilst maintaining some pragmatic control over the volume of data. This is a kind of respondent triangulation (Hammersley and Atkinson 1996) where multiple viewpoints are collected on the same question. However, triangulation should not be taken as some crude endorsement of the validity of the sample and the data obtained (Flick 1991).

The school sites and key characteristics are summarised below and are given pseudonyms.

Table 4.2: School sites, key characteristics, and headteachers

| School site | Key characteristics | Headteacher (pseudonyms) |
|---|---|--------------------------|
| Ash Tree School. 11-18 Comprehensive, Sports and Science Specialisms, | Around 1,500 pupils. Set in a large Midlands conurbation, previously manufacturing area but now high unemployment. Above average Free School Meals (FSM) and those in Public Care. Predominantly White British intake with increasing numbers of Black and Asian (mainly Indian) origin students. "National Challenge" School | Jane Arthur |
| Beech Tree School. 11-16 Comprehensive, Sports specialism | Around 850 pupils. Set in Northern urban town that has lost traditional manufacturing. Above average FSM and special needs intake. Very mixed ethnic population, students with English as an additional language well above national average. "National Challenge" School | Sandra Burt |
| Cedar Tree School. 11-18 Comprehensive, Arts specialism | Around 1,700 pupils. Set in county town of very rural area, serving city and rural population. FSM below average, special needs above average. Mainly White British intake. "Gaining Ground School" | John Collins |

3) Young people in the schools.

The young people were volunteers selected by the school; I asked the headteachers if I could work with a group of twelve students who had engaged in various student leadership or peer tutoring activities the school had run, preferably the eldest who were available to suit exam timetable and subject commitments and split equally in gender if possible. I provided "Participant Information Sheets" and consent forms (as approved by UREC, see Appendix 6, page 363) for the schools to distribute to prospective volunteers. The notion of selecting these particular students carries benefits and risks for the research. In terms of typicality this is a leading edge sample strategy. The aim of the sample was not to recruit young people who could

be considered in anyway representative of particular groups or young people in general, but to engage with those who had experienced some form of student leadership activities. Precisely because they had engaged with the discourses, practices and virtues of the school in an active manner (as opposed to being passive or oppositional members of the school community) I felt that these young people would be able to articulate their stories in ways that showed where practices and policies rubbed up against each other. Another benefit was that these young people had received training from the organisation (the UFA) of which I was a former Director and were therefore used to articulating their views to a non-school adult in an open manner. The risks are that because they are involved in student leadership activities they have some identification with the school that is not typical of many of their peers. If these young people wholeheartedly embrace the discourses of the schools' practices any fissures in policy enactment may not emerge in their stories. However, I considered the 'leading edge' nature of the sample to be more informative of the policy narrative than a risk to the research.

The final selection of the sample was beyond my control. I anticipated that this would always be the case; since I was beholden to the good will of the schools I did not want to make their task too onerous. The students were not selected to be strictly comparable by any quantitative or sampling criteria. The final selections varied between the settings in age and gender composition. In fact, the range of participants contributed to the breadth of the sample. Schools made some pragmatic decisions about who could be pulled from timetables with minimal disruption, but they were also thoughtful about selecting young people who had been involved in a range of student leadership work with the UFA and the school.

Twelve students were targeted in each school order to provide four groups of three. The design was to work in trios as a focus group (see section 4.3.3 below for a full explanation of this design) on three activities, young people remaining in the same trio for each activity. Four of these twelve were asked to volunteer for the group interview. This arrangement was proposed in order to facilitate the provision of four different samples in each school. In all three schools there was one student absent so that there were three, rather than four groups; two groups of four people and one trio. In Cedar Tree School, three students who had not participated in the focus groups joined the group interview, making a total sample for the fieldwork of thirty-six young people. The young people aged in range from the youngest at 14 years old to seventeen years old. There were eleven students in school year 12; eight in year group 11; nine in year group 9; and eight in year group 8. There were twenty-four females and twelve males in the sample; the schools informed me that more girls had participated in young peoples' leadership activities, hence the gender imbalance.

Table 4.3: Young people in the sample, school by school

Ash Tree School, young people participants

| ASH TREE | Focus group number | Group interview (interview approx. 30 minutes) | School year group | Gender |
|----------|--------------------|---|-------------------|--------|
| Ahmed | 1 | | 12 | M |
| Aaron | 1 | yes | 12 | M |
| Abbas | 1 | | 12 | M |
| Adarsh | 1 | | 12 | M |
| Andrew | 2 | | 12 | M |
| Alison | 2 | | 12 | F |
| Abida | 2 | yes | 12 | F |
| Adhita | 3 | | 12 | F |
| Amy | 3 | yes | 12 | F |
| Abigail | 3 | | 12 | F |
| Abir | 3 | | 12 | F |

Beech Tree School, young people participants

| BEECH TREE | Focus group number | Group interview (approx. 45 minutes) | School year group | Gender |
|------------|--------------------|---|-------------------|--------|
| Bashir | 1 | Yes | 11 | M |
| Bobbie | 1 | Yes | 11 | F |
| Beena | 1 | | 8 | F |
| Ben | 1 | | 9 | M |
| Brenda | 2 | | 11 | F |
| Baljinder | 2 | Yes | 8 | F |
| Brandy | 2 | | 8 | F |
| Blossom | 3 | Yes | 11 | F |
| Behira | 3 | | 8 | F |

| | | | | |
|--------|---|--|---|---|
| Brian | 3 | | 9 | M |
| Bryany | 3 | | 8 | F |

Cedar Tree School, young people participants

| CEDAR TREE | Focus group number | Group interview (approx. 35 minutes) | School year group | Gender |
|-------------|--------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------|--------|
| Cate | 1 | | 11 | F |
| Candace | 1 | | 9 | F |
| Cari | 1 | | 9 | F |
| Ciaran | 1 | Yes | 9 | M |
| Chrissie | 2 | | 11 | F |
| Cheryl | 2 | | 9 | F |
| Christopher | 2 | | 8 | M |
| Collin | 2 | | 8 | M |
| Chantelle | 3 | | 9 | F |
| Charmaine | 3 | | 9 | F |
| Christine | 3 | | 8 | F |
| Caitlin | No | Yes | 11 | F |
| Carol | No | Yes | 11 | F |
| Calum | No | Yes | 9 | M |

3) Headteachers.

The headteacher sample includes those in the policy strategists in 1) above and the headteachers of the three schools in which the young people are educated. The headteacher pseudonyms are given in tables 4.1 and 4.2 above. The purpose of the headteacher sample is that as the leadership of the school they represent a critical interface in the political stories being translated into pedagogical ones. Their positioning is a critical influence on the experiences of the young people.

4.3.2 Interviews with policy strategists

The interviews with headteacher Jim Williams and Local Authority Officer Sara Kumar were conducted face-to-face. The remaining interviews were conducted over the telephone. The face-to-face interviews appeared to develop a more wide-ranging conversation but in terms of final data analysis and value I am not certain there was much difference. For example, the longest interview, face-to-face, lasted ninety minutes and produced a large volume of data but little more emerged than from the shortest telephone interview at thirty minutes.

The main purpose of these interviews was to orientate myself to the issues surrounding personalised learning and to understand more about the story of New Labour's policy formations: where it might have come from, who was involved and how it might have been filtered out into schools. Conversations were developed from key questions in the semi-structured interviews and these themes are outlined in table 4.4 below along with the links to the research aims.

Table 4.4: List of interview themes for policy strategists and link to research questions

| Question/theme | Link to the research aims |
|---|--|
| What do you understand by the term, personalised learning? | Understanding more about the story of the policy: its origins, what level of agreement is there about its nature and purposes. |
| What is your role in developing or understanding it? | Understanding more about how the policy is promoted and the key ideas and agents |
| What is the role of your organisation in developing/promoting the policy? | As above and understanding more about how policy messages are filtered out to schools and how headteachers might encounter them. |
| Where do you think the policy comes from? | Understanding how the actors link their views to wider social, cultural and political trends. |
| What do you think are the key challenges and issues with a) the policy itself and/or implementing it? | Understanding more about the policy story and how schools, especially headteachers, might be interpreting and enacting policy. |
| How transformative do you think the policy might be? | As above and also to test out New Labour claims for their policy holding 'radical implications' for schools. |
| What do you see as the role of Local Authorities within the policy? | Understanding more about how policy is promoted, enacted and evaluated. Understanding more about the political and audit contexts within which schools enact policy. |

For the headteacher respondents in this sample, I also included some of the questions asked of the other headteachers, see below 4.3.5, where I felt I needed more information.

4.3.3 The Focus groups and the scenario activities with young people

In all three schools the operation was the same: I was introduced to the eleven young people by a Deputy or Assistant Headteacher, I then introduced myself, thanked the participants and briefly explained why they were here and what was going to happen. I asked the group to introduce themselves to me and say a little bit about themselves (for example year group, leadership or UFA activities they had been involved in, and a particular interest). I asked the group to split themselves into the smaller units, the only criteria being that if it was a mixed age group that each unit had to have a mix of ages in it. Since I had not selected the sample I felt that it was more important that they were comfortable with their fellow group members rather than worry overly about who sat with whom. I introduced the first activity and left them with the written instructions and materials. The small groups were allowed to progress in their own time. As each small group finished an activity I briefed that unit verbally about the next one and again left them with the materials and instructions. The focus groups in each school ran over the course of a school morning for about two and a half hours. In general, young people were highly engaged in the process and commented that they had found the discussions really interesting.

While the groups were engaged in discussion and writing in response to the activity prompts. I went around and asked them to clarify responses if the meaning were not clear to me. These question and answer pieces were recorded, transcribed and added to the response sheets.

I wrote three activities around scenarios that were designed to elicit reactions and counter-stories. The activities are detailed below:

ACTIVITY 1: THE PURPOSES OF SCHOOL

This exercise poses certain purposes of schooling as statements, to elicit some insights into the virtues and telos expressed in school practices as experienced by young people. Details of the statements and why they were posed are contained in Appendix 4 on page 353). This activity had two parts.

Activity 1, Part 1: the young people were given statement cards that began: “The purpose of school is...” followed by a short statement. There were nine of these in total with a tenth asking the young people to write their own. They were asked to discuss each statement, talk about what they think it meant and then record their views against a “Plus” “Minus” and “Interesting” (PMI) frame. This frame is derived directly from the work of de Bono (1995) and whether one agrees with his reasoning or not, it is a simple tool with which many students are familiar. “Plus” asks for points of agreement or positive views about the statement, “Minus” for negative views and points of disagreement and “interesting” is a space for recording things that they were not sure about, or things they found interesting and curious about the statement. I pointed out that obviously schools could be seen to have more than one purpose and that these statements overlapped, but they were asked to think about the merits or otherwise of each of these particular purposes as they read them. I also explained that handwriting and spelling were not being checked and that ideas were the key things required. This activity was the most involved in terms of the time taken up by it, and seemed to generate a large amount of discussion in the groups. The groups self-nominated a scribe to record the final views of the group; if there was strong dissent about a decision then I asked them to record alternative views in brackets. However, this arose only in one discussion. A blank

card was presented for young people to write down what they felt the purposes of schools should be and this data was used to correlate and contrast their views with their experience of policy enactment.

Activity 1, Part 2: the young people were asked to choose what they considered to be their three key purposes of school and rank them in order 1-3. Against each of this list they were asked to circle on a scale of 1-10, where 10 equals “very good or excellent”, and 1 represents “not at all good”, “how good you think your school is in delivering these purposes”. The rating scale was not designed as a standardised quantified method that could provide statistical generalisations about young people’s attitudes as a whole, such as a Lickert summative rating scale (Robson 2002). The scale was designed as a quick snapshot of the respondents’ experiences and beliefs in order to triangulate them with the adult interview and young person group interview data, it was never designed for statistical usage. The purpose of this part of the activity was to focus the thinking of the participants upon their own preferred views and ideas (a forced ranking, Sapsford 2001) and to gather data about how well they thought schools were delivering on their purposes and therefore to what extent they felt school provided an authentic sense of personalisation. They were asked to comment on what they think the school could do to improve delivery against fulfilling this purpose. Again, this was intended to provide further data about current practices and the gaps if any between a headteacher’s perception of personalised learning and the young peoples’ views.

In operation, this part of the activity fulfilled its intended purpose, providing some rich insights to the stories young people could tell about the school’s practice related to the policy of personalised learning. The transcripts of this activity provided data

to refer to and check out against the interview records and supported some of the emerging themes.

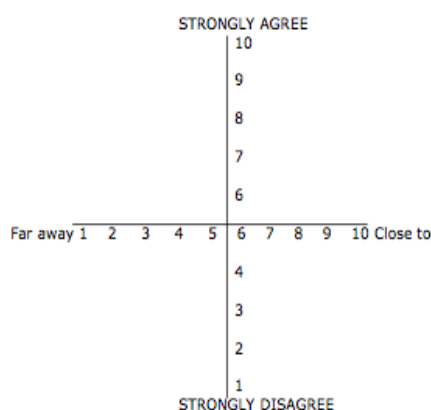
ACTIVITY 2: ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN SCHOOL

Chapter Two argues that personalised learning included a central role for engaging the voice of the learner in school. The virtues ethic approach of this thesis suggests that roles and responsibilities undertaken by young people conveys a story about the extent to which schools' practices embody certain qualities that could be matched to concepts of justice. Given that these young people had been selected from those who are engaged in taking leadership roles in schools the scenarios in this activity are designed to elicit their perceptions of policy in action.

The groups were given a two dimensional grid on an A1 sized sheet of graph paper, against which they had to plot statements about the role of young people in school. One dimension asked them to plot the degree of their agreement or disagreement with the statement, the other dimension asked them to place it on a scale that indicated "how far away" or "how close to" practising this statement they believed the school were.

The grid is like a graph that maps two variables on a scale of 1 – 10, where 10 is "strongly agree" or "very close to" and 0 is "strongly disagree" or "very far away from". The groups had to discuss the statement then mark the letter of that statement against their rating on the grid. The diagram below represents the grid used and the precise wording:

Figure 4.5. Roles and responsibilities: blank agreement and evaluation grid
(Based on a “Priorities Grid”, Caviglioli et al 2002, p.189):



The idea of the grid was for a placement to be made so that I could then question the groups as to their reasoning. These reasons were recorded and entered into the data transcriptions. The contents of the statements were drawn from my professional experience and through observation of many secondary school practices with student voice and leadership activities. Details of the statements and their links to the research questions are to be found in Appendix 4, page 353. The statements provide a cognitive frame and structure against which participants can organise their thinking so that they are not completely floundering in trying to answer an open question, neither are they being completely constrained in what they wish to say.

The use of this grid worked well in the practice by providing some rich discussion opportunities and for seven out of the nine groups in total, I was able to circulate around the tables and ask specific questions to clarify that the participants had understood the question and why they had rated the statement in a particular way.

ACTIVITY 3: FUTURE SCENARIOS FOR SCHOOLING

Activity 3 was designed to build on the previous two by giving young people cognitive and ethical frames from which to approach the same sets of concerns but from a different direction. The purpose here was to get young people to reflect on their current experiences of schools by thinking about future scenarios for providing education. In the context of personalising learning, different future scenarios have been explored to examine the possible impacts upon, and necessary changes to, education systems in post-industrial societies (knowledge economies) (Paludan 2006; see also FutureLab 2009). Paludan (2006) argues that some quite fundamental changes maybe required in the governing, accountability and flexibility of resourcing arrangements of education systems should personalisation respond to both the mood of the times and the increased demand for productive knowledge workers. Whether one accepts this argument or not, it seems entirely reasonable to suppose that personalisation will require changes and adaptations to existing institutional arrangements if it is to have any meaning. My interest therefore was what would young people like to see changed in their current institutions in order to feel more valued and engaged personally?

I designed and wrote three futures scenarios for young people to discuss. The scenarios are drawn from my experience working on the NCSL (2007) FutureSight project with young people but are original pieces of work for this research project. A version of the scripts used for the scenarios is in Appendix 5, page 358. The focus groups were asked to read through and talk about each scenario in turn and then as for Activity 1, complete a “Plus, Minus, Interesting” (de Bono 1995) sheet to record their discussions.

Scenario 1 posits a future of an “increased status quo” in which there is a mixed economy of schools, some run by the state, some Free Schools and some are Academies. Parental choice is a key factor, as is sponsorship from outside agencies such as religious groups, businesses and charities.

Scenario 2 is an ‘extended community schools’ scenario in which schools are run by local communities and contain a variety of facilities such as medical, healthcare, libraries and sport facilities. Local Authorities and local people are heavily involved in governing these facilities.

Scenario 3 is “deschooling”. The term “deschooling” is taken from Illich’s work (1976,1974) and has since its publication been discussed and interpreted in a variety of ways, something that can be seen in the way it has been sequestered to scenario work (see for example, FutureLab 2009; NCSL 2007; Paludan 2006). I attempted to provide the scenario with some concrete context by citing the work of Mitra’s experiments with the “Holes in the Walls” and “Self-organising Learning Environments” (Mitra 2010, web broadcast) as examples of self-organising learning scenarios.

A fourth sheet was presented which asked the young people first of all if they ‘cared’ who governed and was responsible for their schools and secondly to write their own future scenario for how they thought their schools ought to be run and organised.

The scenario activities generated a rich range of discussion and many insights into the perceptions and experiences of young people in their schools. It was striking that young people cared very deeply about who ran their schools and strong senses of justice emerged from this activity (see Chapter Six).

4.3.4 Group interviews with young people

Although it may be sometimes called a focus group interview (Robson 2002) a group interview is different to a focus group in that it is not interactively problem-solving and decision making in a series of exercises and structured prompts. It is simply an interview situation with more than one person in it, who may or may not interact with each other in the course of the interview (Patton 2009).

From those young people who had agreed to participate in the focus groups, four were asked to volunteer to participate in the group interview and they were given information sheets and parental consent forms in line with UREC approval (see Appendix 6, page 363). I recorded the interviews and had a checklist of these topics with me to tick off if I felt that sufficient answers had been given. The interviews provided some rich conversations in which young people consistently ‘sparked’ off different strands and threads that I was able to ask them to elaborate upon. The process is considered a little more in issues of ‘trustworthiness’ in 4.4 below. The interview data became the main source for analysis and reflection in Chapters Five and Six and feeds into the total story that is constructed for the conclusion. The semi-structured group interviews lasted from about thirty-five to forty-five minutes and were conducted to explore research question two: “what is the experience of young people as learners within the practices of the schools as a result of New Labour’s policy story of personalised learning?” The table below outlines the key themes explored and the main reasons for asking those questions and thus the springboards for conversations.

Table 4.6: Key interview questions for young people and the main reasons for asking them

| Key interview questions | Reasons for asking |
|---|--|
| What kinds of curriculum choices did they have in school? | Personalised learning (PL) is advanced as young people having more choice in what they learn to suit needs and interests. How far is this the experience of young people? Is there a notion of a 'consumer' discourse active in schools? |
| How far were they able to put together a 'personal' timetable? | As above. How flexible is the school experience in their view and therefore how 'personalised' do they perceive it to be? |
| Did they have individual targets and if so how helpful or personal did they feel they were? | PL is advanced as learners understanding their targets and having a voice in their learning objectives. To what extent do young people experience this? |
| How helpful and meaningful was the feedback they got about their learning? | PL espouses AfL methods and discourses. To what extent do young people experience this? How do they perceive the quality of lesson feedback. |
| Did they get an opportunity to feedback about lessons and how they were taught? | PL is a proposition about learner voice and engagement in the content and pedagogy of lessons. To what extent and how, if at all, do young people experience the opportunity to engage in learner voice? |
| How 'personally' engaged did they feel they were in their lessons? | As above. Developing an understanding of their perceptions about the extent of 'ownership' of lessons. |
| How 'personally' engaged did they feel in the life of the school? | As above with reference to the wider life of the school. PL is advanced in concert with Every Child Matters and the Childrens' Plan for greater voice in their lives. How do young people experience this in their schools? |

| | |
|--|---|
| What did they think of the voice they had in the life of the school? | Developing the above theme, and exploring what they feel ought to be the case. |
| Had they heard of personalised learning or did it mean anything to them? | An attempt to understand whether the discourse of personalised learning was overtly employed by the schools and whether it was part of a 'meta-language' of learning in a school culture. |

4.3.5 Interviews with headteachers

The interviews with the headteachers were conducted face-to-face in their offices and took place immediately after the work with young people. This meant that I had not always digested the data from the young people in order to check it with the headteachers, but I also wanted the heads to be open and not defensive about responding to points the young people made. The headteachers were generous with their time and seemed more than willing to answer the questions and talk about their stories. The interviews lasted from about forty to fifty-five minutes and large volumes of transcripts resulted. Again, semi structured interviews were recorded. A checklist covered points that I thought relevant to understanding research question two about how young peoples' experiences of personalised learning are "framed by the ways that headteachers interpret and reproduce policies of personalised learning". The following table summarises the key questions and outlines the mains reasons for asking them.

Table 4.7: Key interview questions for headteachers and the main reasons for asking them

| Key interview questions | Reasons for asking |
|--|--|
| What do you understand by the term, personalised learning? | To look at points of convergence/divergence between their views and policy texts. To understand something of why they might be enacting policy in a certain way. To compare their views with the experiences of young people. |
| Is it important for you as a policy? | To develop the above understandings and judge what kind of priorities in policy the school might be pursuing. Also helps to place the headteacher position within the competing values hypothesis. |
| How are you trying to implement it in your school? | To understand how headteachers interpret and then reproduce the policy. Compare to the experiences of young people. Again, to help place the headteacher's position within the competing values framework. |
| How did you get to hear about the policy? | To understand more about the policy story and how it is promoted, received and interpreted. Who are the key agents in this process? How does policy make an impact and which bits of policy do headteachers attend to? Does the competing values framework support an understanding of which policy strategies headteachers feel 'compelled' by? |
| How did you learn more about the policy? | As above |
| What organisations or people support you in developing the policy? | As above. Also to gain more understanding about the pressure on headteachers and how and what they prioritise in policy enactment. |
| What are the key issues for you in developing the policy? | To gain more understanding about the pressure on headteachers and how and what they prioritise in policy enactment. |

| | |
|---|---|
| | Also, to understand how more about the institutional practices and how they might contextualise young peoples' experiences. |
| What do you see as the role of young peoples' voice within school? | To compare and contrast to the experiences of young people. To understand more about the institutional context of practice. |
| Do you feel political pressures or challenges for you in implementing policy? | A sort of check on answers given above and to understand more of the headteacher's placement within the competing values framework. |

4.3.6 Data transcription and stages of analysis

All data from recorded interviews was transcribed and typed out as were responses from the answer sheets from the focus groups, thus providing 140 pages of 'stuff'; a large volume, but not necessarily all relevant. One of the technical questions in interview transcription was the level of detail I thought might be relevant; for example should hesitations such as "er", "um", and particular mannerisms and stresses be annotated? Methodological handbooks provide symbols and notations that can be added to transcripts to key particular emphasis and unspoken conventions (Robson 2002; Silverman 2009). However, I agree with the argument that "little is to be gained" from adding to standard orthography because the transcript is always partial "and can only ever be the best version at that moment" (Coates and Thornborrow, 1999, p.596.) Each reading, or listening, produces new selections and thoughts. As I was interested in the stories the respondents were giving me and the narrative messages rather than the forms and processes of discourse I decided to transcribe as simply and clearly as possible. The only conventions I used were [to indicate people speaking simultaneously, the use of

commas to indicate pauses, semi-colons longer breaks and full stops to indicate a break in flow and meaning.

The first task was an initial data reduction process through categorisation and graphic display (Dey 1993; Miles and Huberman 1994). Working from the transcript texts, including interviews and focus group activities, I extracted key words to put into a mindmap, using a 'mindmapping' programme called MindManager (Mindjet 2007). This programme allows some visual relationship to be established between key words. Given the size of this map I pasted each interview into a separate mind map. Software such as NVIVO may also perform this function, MindManager was a pragmatic choice given its familiarity to me. The aim of mindmapping is to reduce each topic branch to a single word where possible, or as few words as contain the nub of the content.

There were several purposes in this stage: to become much more familiar with the transcripts through summary note-making, look for any promising 'ah ha' moments, produce categories that used the participant's own words - doing the paradigmatic narrative work (Polkinghorne 1995) - and represent the data visually in order to explore relationships within and between the content. In other words I believe there was a complex mix occurring between pragmatic reduction, some preliminary analysis and interpretation, while still trying to let the interviews speak for themselves, to be open and not foreclose the data possibilities. There is something of Strauss and Corbin's (1998, p.223) "open-coding" here as a way of remaining close to the text before taking the process of conceptualisation to another level of abstraction. MindManager supported the process of suggesting the "muted cue and

unobtrusive sign” (Smith, 1978, p.341) because I was forced to reflect on why a particular key word seemed significant to me.

However, this process was not strictly inductive as I also approached the mind maps with “thinking units” (Ely et al 1991, p.143) that are a kind of advanced framing or filing system. In this case the units were formed by the key questions I had asked in the interviews; for example, “what do you understand by the term personalised learning?” Therefore, an obvious place to start categorising the data is to summarise responses to each of the key topics presented above.

As I read through my transcripts, I used a word from the interview that seemed to summarise a new direction (a “topic” in the software’s terminology) and added branches (“sub topics”) of words that built on that key one. I did this chronologically at first, in other words reading through the transcript of each interview from start to finish, but where I felt categories were being revisited in the interview I added branches to earlier key words. When a relationship between category branches seemed obvious, I used the relationship arrow tool to remind myself of the links. An example mindmap is reproduced in Appendix 7, page 376.

In using topic branches on MindManager I could discern patterns that needed a further re-categorisation. This is a process resembling Strauss and Corbin’s (1998, p. 229) “axial coding”, relating the key word topics into more patterning of codes and themes (Flick 2009). Themes start to emerge as carrying broader “statements of meaning” or a singular case that “carries heavy emotional impact” (Ely et al 1991 p.150). In light of the methodology section above I began to formulate metaphors to

summarise the themes. For example, young people talking about how attention was apportioned in schools and their ownership of targets led to employing the “visibility” metaphor. Data was reassigned simply by dragging relevant branches on the software under the main topic branch of “visibility”.

The next stage of the data analysis was to compare the mindmaps and look for continuities and divergences between the datasets. In this process I employed “analytic memos” (Strauss and Corbin 1998, p. 230) where I wrote short notes and questions on the mind maps as reminders and pointers to other pieces of data. The analytic memos were particularly designed to help me tell a story of the policy enactment in terms of two key plots that merged in Chapter Two: learner voice and social justice.

In Chapters Five and Six extracts of the transcript are presented in order to be reflected upon through using the thinking tools outlined earlier, such as the work on virtue ethics. In Chapter Seven, data from the headteacher interviews is combined to illuminate processes explored in the literatures on governance and the competing models of policy government (Newman 2006).

The final selection of data for presenting the argument was based on a complex ‘to and fro’ between the data reduction and:

1. The ethical thinking tools of social practices, virtues and internal standards of excellence
2. The narrative of policy enactment in young peoples’ experience
3. The theoretical work on governance

4. The policy narrative in headteachers' experience
5. The tensions in policy narrative as described in Chapter Two
6. Looking for metaphors that captured themes and conveyed a meaning to another reader.

The results of this process were only possible given the initial data reduction and paradigmatic themes representation in the graphical representation. Having reduced and categorised data into the topics and produced analytic memos, sections of transcript relevant to the selected theme were then colour coded so that they could be imported into the analytical chapters.

4.4 Trustworthiness and validity

Questions of the validity of the research depend in part on the ontological position and epistemic stance argued for. Interpretivism and narrative while conveying something of the agency of those researched may also be open to charges of meaning relativism. Perhaps for pragmatists (see Rorty 1994,1999) this is not so much of a problem providing the case has been well argued. For ontological realists, validity maybe a more pressing issue. The ethical model outlined in Chapter Three implies the possibility of critical realism as an ontological position in that social structures such as class, political economy and family are processes available for study just as much as the attitudes, beliefs, and inner life of subjects can be, even if our study begins from, and ends in, concept laden and historically contingent positions (Bhaskar 1998, 2011; Robson 2002). It could also imply a pragmatist ontology, which while agreeing with critical realists that a correspondence theory of truth is unavailable, ultimately rests on public agreements about truths and what is reasonable to hold in the moment (Rorty 1994). Rorty (1994) is highly convincing when he argues that ontological arguments between

realists and pragmatists are endlessly circular, since neither position is ultimately reconcilable to some non-contingent, 'neutral' and non-circular justification.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed the term trustworthiness to cover a number of concepts such as 'credibility' and 'dependability' that might be used in what they called the paradigm of "postpositivism" (p.14). Leaving aside some possible objections to their understanding of paradigms and their adoption of postmodernist irony, trustworthiness conveys a critical concept that the research needs to be trusted in respect that its claims are well founded. This is particularly important if the claims are to be trusted as conveying meaning beyond the sites in which they were researched. There is no reason to assume that qualitative research should be any less immune about asking questions as to how valid are its findings than quantitative research where statistical procedures are used to validate work and suggest levels of generalisability to the wider population (Mason 2011). In the absence of such statistical procedures for this research the aim of presenting the research design in this chapter has been to provide coherence and some systematic logic to the fieldwork element so that the data extracts are intelligible in relation to the analysis.

However, relying on one's moral integrity as a researcher is not a guarantor of quality (Silverman 2009) and there is still a gap of trust to be filled between presenting transcript extracts and justifying their selection and subsequent theorising. To help bridge that trust gap I outline a mode of argument, some possible dilemmas from my positioning as a researcher, the ethics process and a brief discussion of the generalisability of the research.

The thesis aims at producing “convincing arguments” (Mason 2011, p.173) and in this thesis I work back and forward between the illuminative aspects of the fieldwork and the theory and conceptual construction. This means that I have selected sections of transcripts that maintain ‘fidelity’ to the stories elicited from the methods while exercising some selective judgements based on the model outlined in 4.2 above. “Fidelity” (Blumenfeld-Jones 1995, p.24) is a criterion taken from narrative research and requires being faithful to the stories of the participants in respecting their dignity and reproducing their contributions accurately. In this research I have used transcripts that are the words produced by the young people. Fidelity also conjoins the sense of accuracy with the qualitative and aesthetic aspect of interpreting the material to increase its “believability” (Blumenfeld-Jones 1995, p.31). It is important to remember that I was not trying to empathise with or understand these adolescent’s cultural resources but elicit their stories about the processes of schooling as they perceived them. In the case of this research I employ allusions, metaphors and thematic titles to link my reconfiguration of the data to meanings that work on a reader’s interpretation so that there is some sharing of the arguments.

One aspect of believability is to clarify any possible dilemmas that might have arisen from my positioning as a researcher. I reflected post-fieldwork upon how my position as researcher was “liquid” and not simply defined by the binary of insider/outsider (Thomson and Gunter 2011, p.17). In some instances I was both an outsider but accepted as an insider by young people because of my professional, non-research role. For example, I know two of the young people very well from the work of the UFA and although all the others were strangers all have been involved in some form of training delivered by the UFA. This meant that the young people were responsive informants because they trust the organisation as one that

respects their input, but I was also a stranger who had no apparent special interests in hearing any particular stories. As Bobbie said:

“We can’t really say this to anybody, like, we don’t really know you, but we can explain it to yer, but to, with an headteacher or something we can’t do that, and we should”.

As Bobbie’s statement testifies to, there are clearly advantages in this fluidity of position in eliciting stories but at the moment of research one is never sure how sympathies for the young people might have made me an over-eager recipient of their stories. On listening to the recordings I felt that their accounts were spontaneously and authentically given although one can never guarantee that my interpretation is free from the messiness of the fluid research position.

This dilemma is also apparent in the interviews with some of the headteachers. In the three case study schools I was an ‘insider’ through a professional acquaintance with the headteachers and their support for student leadership work. This enabled access to the sites. However, there is a possible disadvantage in “over-rapport” whereby familiarity blunts the researcher’s questioning power and a respondent, assuming insider knowledge, is less forthcoming (Miller 1952/1969, p.87). One of the interviewees said more than once, “as you know Steve”. However, I was also an ‘outsider’ in not knowing the detailed workings and practices of their schools and therefore approached the interviews hoping to ask some seemingly naïve questions. The dilemma is also how to render a tacit and shared knowledge explicit or how to examine whether the two of us actually did share the same perspective. However, I argue that the fluidity of my research supported the active interviewing process and enabled conversations to develop.

Familiarity can work the other way, in various forms of “reactivity” (Bryman 1988, p.112) one of which is where the interviewee ‘puts up a front’ in order to show themselves in the best light to a colleague (Schwartz and Schwartz 1955/1969; Vidich 1955/1969). I am not sure as an interviewer whether I was ever entitled to judge if a ‘front’ was ‘being put up’ but I used the adults’ stories as an indication of their agency in deciding what ought to take place in their schools. This enabled me to contrast and compare their stories with those of the young people.

I anticipated possible research difficulties in respect of the young peoples’ sample and consciously looked out for ‘group think’ in focus groups and interviews producing a limited range of views expressed. In one group interview one young woman was passive but in all the activities and interviews young people were actively engaged and exchanging views, disagreeing and backing up a point made by another person. The main dilemma is doing justice to the richness of the conversations, which is why it is important to have explained the model that orientates me to select certain aspects.

Ethical dilemmas from establishing a researcher-researched rapport did arise in that one headteacher, and all the young people, talked about members of staff in not always a complimentary manner and I felt that this was material that ought not to be included in specific detail but alluded to in a general manner. For this study I was satisfied that I had provided sufficient opportunity for respondents to present their perceptions within the time and question frames. A key question for me was whether the course of the interview was constrained by different expectations and obligations. In Ozga and Gerwitz’s (1994) experiences of interviewing ‘policy elites’, they recognised differing expectations of the results of the research between

respondent and researcher. That others may not be open to critical perspectives may lead to a temptation for the researcher “to produce work they feel is of some value” (Ozga and Gerwitz p. 124) and I have to ask whether I self-censored the interviewing process in any way. In constructing a convincing argument I feel both that there is enough material to present the story and also that the research could always be improved by more questions. I exercised a certain pragmatism over not gathering an excessive volume of material. In addition I tried to exercise some “self-scepticism” by continually asking: “at what point does closeness to the subject limit the research role?” (Miller, 1952/1969 p.89) and at what point does it help?

4.5 Ethics

UREC granted approval for the research design and methods. All participants were volunteers and had the right to withdraw at any time and informed consent was gained. In the case of the young people, signed consent was also obtained from parents. Copies of the information and consent forms used are included in Appendix 6. No changes were made to the UREC approval in the course of the research. The confidentiality of informants was repeatedly stressed and they were made aware both in writing and in my verbal briefing about their rights in the research process, where the data would be stored and how it would be used. All the young people reaffirmed their willingness to participate before the focus groups began. The activities took place in schoolrooms where others, especially teachers, would not disturb them and during these sessions their physical comfort was ensured through the use of frequent breaks and refreshments.

4.6 Generalisability

The final points to be made in this chapter concern what might be termed generalisability: what is the scope of this study and how far can it be trusted as an account of what is happening in other schools? As Hammersley and Atkinson (1996) argue, much of the validity of qualitative data is post-hoc, dependent on the inferences derived from it; therefore much relies on producing clear theoretical arguments as well as illustrative fieldwork to produce the believable and the convincing. 'Believability is similar to the anthropological criterion of "*verisimilitude*" used by some narrative researchers (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990, p.7, original emphasis) to suggest that stories open up insights into other worlds and not just the contexts that were researched. What I present may not be replicable in literal detail but carries with it some openness to being applied in similar contexts. The concepts of typicality described in the sample are aimed at supporting the application from one setting to another. There is no reason why, as with case study work, the findings of this research cannot be 'projected' from one setting to another, either by analogy or by re-examining in different contexts the theories generated from the first (Elliott 1990).

However, it is important to recognise that this is a small sample of thirty-six young people in only three schools and therefore some tentativeness about the final story is required. What the graphic display of data via MindManager enabled was the aggregation of convergences across the setting to render a powerful testimony in the next two chapters. Had the data themes been disparate then other considerations and factors would needed to have been considered, but the cultural metaphors that I employed to reconfigure the stories of young people in these schools tells of a remarkably consistent narrative. However robust and systematic

the process of fieldwork has been, alternative interpretations are always possible; the purpose of using MacIntyre's (1994) work is to suggest that moral reasons for deciding on the relative merits and virtues of practices in policy enactment within schools can be made with a degree of confidence about their trustworthiness that does not entail a form of meaning relativism.

4.7 Summary

I am mindful of Bryman's (1988) warning against "doctrinaire posturing" (p.173) that qualitative researchers are prone to and Silverman's (2009) scepticism about the obscure philosophical positions often claimed to justify the status of methods. However, while acknowledging the dangers that Bryman and Silverman warn against, in dealing with issues of social stratification, power and questions of the positioning of knowledge, reasons for arguing that certain modes of practice as opposed to others are more 'reasonable' and *ought* to be in place, requires ethical argument. The model in Chapter Three argued that social practices and their account of virtues in institutions, such as schools, are sites of study that enable policy enactments to be evaluated in relation to a virtue ethics as developed by MacIntyre (1994, 2001). Interpretative and narrative methodologies that draw upon notions of plot and metaphor lead to the use of interviews and focus group activities to 'illuminate' the theoretical work. This chapter explained and justified the methodology and methods. In the following chapters (Five to Seven) data from the fieldwork is presented then played against the ethical resources. Policy enactment is considered in relation to the plots of 'voice' and 'social justice' advanced by personalisation and the stories told by young people about their experiences in a political narrative that is at least four years into its development. Chapter Seven

considers the positioning of headteachers in relation to the political narrative and provides a story that in part explains those of the young people.

Chapter Four footnotes:

- 1) **National Challenge** announced by Ed Balls: From Directgov website see Balls (2008): "The Children's Plan sets out that by 2020 at least 90 per cent of children will achieve the equivalent of five higher level GCSEs by age 19. The National Challenge is important step on the way to meet the goal that in every secondary school, at least 30 per cent of its pupils will achieve five good GCSEs including English and Maths by 2011. In 1997 there were 1,610 schools below this 30 per cent minimum standard; today there are 638 - the National Challenge sets out how we will reduce this number to zero. Ed Balls announced that he would double the £200m previously announced in the budget to £400m to help local authorities and schools".
- 2) **Gaining Ground Schools** –extract taken from Foreword to DCSF 2008c: "This strategy will target those schools who are currently coasting and failing to fulfil the potential of their pupils. It will focus greater attention, help and resources to kick start a drive for improvement in these schools". *And further:* "We are putting in place a package of support worth up to £40 million to bring about improvements in coasting schools. We want Local Authorities to identify their coasting schools, taking into account local factors and individual circumstances, and to commission the right support in each case."

CHAPTER FIVE

CROUCHING TARGET HIDDEN CHILD

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I examine the impact of policies of personalising learning upon its intended ‘target’, young people in schools, some six to seven years after its launch. Chapter Two described New Labour’s story of personalising learning and argued that three related themes were inherent in the political narrative: the citizen-consumer, modernisation and social justice. This chapter is a focus on the motif of the ‘citizen-consumer’ with a particular reference to young peoples’ voice in their learning and school experience. The data generated from interviews and activities with young people in relation to the theme of voice is examined. Chapter Six has a focus on social justice in relation to young peoples’ stories and Chapter Seven picks up the theme of modernisation, particularly as contextualized through the stories of headteachers.

The notion of citizen-consumer is located for young people in ‘voice’ and ‘choice’ through their learning and translates as a concept of learner voice –the visible learner (5.2). However, I argue that this voice is problematic. The cultural allusion “crouching target, hidden child” is employed to summarise how the learner voice of young people in this research sample was perceived by them to be mute and their identity as learners rendered invisible by the underlying target and data collecting practices of schools. The allusion is a play on a popular film title: “Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon” (Lee 2000) and is designed to give some resonance to the meaning behind the theme through the play on words. The argument is advanced through

presenting data from the perceptions of young people in three sub-categories: 5.3 **targets and data: reputation**, 5.4 **curriculum organisation**, 5.5 **the mute learner voice**. The titles are derived from the graphical representation and coding of the transcripts as described in Chapter Four and are guided by the critical elements in the pedagogical guidance on personalisation (DCSF 2008a).

'Pedagogic voice' is a term drawing upon a sociological conception of the rules of power and recognition within schools and classroom practice (Arnot and Reay 2004). Although a challenging and critical analysis, in this thesis I use the term learner voice rather than pedagogic voice because different intellectual tools (MacIntyre 1994) are drawn upon to reflect upon the data. The mode of this chapter is therefore both empirical and discursive, drawing upon the stories of young people and also philosophical and critical policy literatures to produce an interplay of theory and fieldwork in developing the argument.

5.2 The Citizen-consumer - learner voice

In Chapter Two it is argued that a key motif in the political narrative of personalisation is the 'citizen-consumer'. It can be argued that the promotion of voice in the citizen-consumer motif became a "trope" for New Labour's "demotic populism in which lay, popular or ordinary voices, experiences and views are increasingly 'authorised' " (Clarke et al 2007, p.36). In the case of education policy the 'authorised voices' are those of parents (see for example DfES 2004b) who, on the basis of publically available data, make choices as to which school to send their children to. This 'data' therefore becomes a critical element in the policy environment, and the implications for governance of New Labour 'populism' are further explored in Chapter Seven. In terms of young peoples' perspectives of

personalised education, the proliferation of this data and its translation into targets aimed at the individual student and then re-aggregated into school based and publically available information is critical.

Policy did not therefore extend consumer choice as a 'market' mechanism to young people, but did propose "pupil voice" – "the habit of talking about learning and how to improve it" (Gilbert 2006 p. 20). Policy also proposed the right to have voice in decisions affecting them, and as a future citizen to contribute to the social order and the economy (see for example DfES 2003b, 2004 c, d). This latter, human capital, aspect of education policy has implications for realisations of social justice (Tikly and Barrett 2011) and will be discussed in the next chapter. In a series on "The Need for Greater Personalisation and Innovation" the Qualification and Curriculum Authority invited Jean Rudduck to summarise her considerable research on the benefits and reasons for student voice in the context of personalised learning (Rudduck 2004).

Therefore the policy strategy of personalised learning suggested that a young person ought to be visible as a learner, actively engaged and represented, almost dialogically, in the practices of learning within a school. Personalised learning also suggested that young people ought to feel some degree of control over their curriculum pathways and the choice available to them. All these aspects could be summarised as learner voice: the extent to which young people are engaged in influencing, negotiating and constructing pedagogic practices within their schools.

If young people were not classed as citizen-consumers in New Labour policy they were at least, however poorly conceptualised, held to have some learner voice. However, the school held data that is collated, monitored and evaluated in relation to the authorisation of parent choice and 'expertise' is precisely that used to monitor and evaluate pupil progress and personalise the education offer of young people. On the face of it a reasonable and rational proposition, but one that had perverse effects on the pedagogic voice of young people as they perceived it, and thus generated the allusion "crouching target, hidden child".

The following sections provide research evidence to elaborate this interpretation.

5.3 Targets and school held data: 'reputation'

Section 2 of the DCSF guidance on personalised learning was largely to do with "clear knowledge of the attainment of each pupil" and their progress with "precise target setting and rigorous and regular tracking of progress" (DCSF 2008a, p.14). The headteachers of the schools all mentioned the importance of data for individuals in personalising their learning (see Chapter Seven).

All the students were aware of targets they had for achieving exam grades, but I gained a contradictory sense of their ownership of them and a number of tensions that appeared to negate this aspect of schooling as a personalised experience. On the one hand, targets were seen as something for the school, and were more about the school image. On the other hand, targets were "theirs" and should be about their learning but were also seen as a limiting factor that could be used to hold them back rather than develop their potential. This latter aspect will be explored in

Chapter Six next. This section develops the tension of 'school reputation versus student learning' through providing examples.

The most striking pieces of data, in that they were fiercely and universally expressed by all the young people in the research, concerned their views that schools were interested in targets only because they got better exam results and the "scores" were good for the school's reputation and not the young peoples' learning. An example from each school:

Ash Tree School:

AARON: But the targets, yeh the targets are just about good grades

I: So you're saying that the main purpose of the targets is to get good grades?

AMY: Yeh, get good grades

AARON: Yeh, they're just, the main objective of the school is just to get good grades for everyone and

ABIDA: to look good

AMY: yeh it looks good on them

AARON: yeh, it's just, I'm not too sure if they're more bothered about the school image and like grade success overall or whether they actually do want to get the best potential out of every kid

ABIDA; no they don't, not every kid

I: right, so you think there's a difference between trying to get the best potential and the grades you think?

ALL: yeh

Beech Tree School:

BASHIR: I think it's just for school's benefit it's not for our benefit; I think schools should think about education at the end of the day

BOBBIE: Not, not reputation,

[BASHIR: Yeh BOBBIE: It should be about our education

BLOSSOM: First, first day back, in assembly, it's just really showing off about their achievements and what they all got and, and then, like our names come on the board and saying what we should get, like, some of us should be right, getting Bs, like "no, we want you to get As, we want you to get A stars so that we can go up again," so the school can keep improving, we're leaving, we're just, really I'm, I'm just on focused my education and not bothered about the school's reputation, not now, I'm in year 11

BASHIR: I think every year it's about the school going up the league board, because every year when you, after like, you know when school finishes and you come back in school after the summer holidays, you always have first assembly by the headteacher, that shows how we've moved up, but now I'm actually wondering why we've moved up. I think it's these shock tactics to us around the school coming better

BLOSSOM: Yeh

I: So it's a kind of, a kind of you've got to do better kind of talk

BASHIR: Yeh it's a shock

I: Right a pep talk a kind of shock talk

BASHIR: A shock yeh

BOBBIE: And it's like, I think we've only gone up in the league board, only because no one sees the full school, they only see the bits that the headteacher wants to see, and really we, we know everything that happens in the school. But like, like when you say, you try to say something then the deputy headteachers look up at you it's just because they don't want their reputation ruined. But really it's about **our** learning as well as what the school wants it for.

I: Right, then do you think your learning is not being fully valued?

BOBBIE: No because it's just, I know she's an headteacher and everything, and it's important to her, but, she should, she should think about us before she thinks about her reputation.

Cedar Tree School:

I: So are those targets useful then, I mean do they engage you personally, are they your targets?

CAITLIN: I think for a person who is very self-driven you can excel in what you want to do but I don't think there's enough push sort of from behind,

CIARAN: yeh if it's not there in front of you, you can do it if you know it's there

CAITLIN: Yeh, there's a lot especially with the learning our school is very, um, sort of you're told what to do and you do it and, rather than "oh we want you to do this go away and think about it", its like "oh what I have to do it?" sort of thing, so I think it's definitely, very, it's a different way that we need to sort of get into and start thinking that maybe it's a good that we need to be pushed into standing on our own two feet

CAROL: It's exam based, very exam based, in year 10, year 10 and year 11 everything is to do with exams and some teachers are really good at asking you what you want to do and how you want to do it but it depends on the teacher

(And later)

CAROL: The school's so busy trying to get the next award and ticking boxes so we can have something else at the bottom of the letter and I say this every single time I get asked about it, but just, all it's about

CIARAN: is ticking the boxes

CAROL: ticking the boxes, the head comes to do one assembly a term and just goes through the school expectations and the school motto, and, like all the things that are stuck all over the walls everywhere and tells us those things and just goes over it and we're just like, "well?"

In a focus group activity Chrissie, Cheryl, Christopher and Collin wrote that "teachers are constantly pushing for good exam results and causing the students to lose interest" suggesting that targets linked to exam results could act as a disincentive for them rather than a means of 'owning' their learning. The disincentive aspect of targets was reflected in the comments about feeling too much pressure in schools. Alison, Andrew and Abida in Ash Tree School wrote that schools "can be too focused on getting grades and that there is too much pressure for exams". Cate, Candace, Cari and Ciaran in Cedar Tree felt "that only a minority of schools help you enjoy learning, sometimes teachers push you too hard, there's always pressure". There was a feeling coming from the interviews that target setting and monitoring for pupils just increased such pressures, although interesting to note that in the extract above, Caitlin felt that some students needed "a push from behind" and were not getting it. Perhaps the targets had become associated with exam pressures rather than a more autonomous and fulfilling view of personal development.

The sense of dialogue, challenge and mutual engagement in target setting that comes from the DCSF (2008a) guidance on personalised learning appears to be missing from the young peoples' experiences of school as a whole. The learner in

these extracts experiences personalisation through individual targets for improvement, which renders her or him invisible through data collection, its management, publication and evaluation. The diminishing effects of such evaluation, by the school, by the wider 'market' of public reputation and by criteria of standards of attainment set by the government, are reflected in the young peoples' perceptions, and its implications are further explored in 5.4 and 5.5 below.

5.4: Curriculum organisation

DCSF issued advice for personalising learning on curriculum organisation building on the Children's Plan (DCSF 2007) aim of "improving the way we tailor the curriculum for individual needs, and increasing choice" (DCSF 2008a p.40). Some of the headteachers in the research thought curriculum organisation and pathways an important component of personalised learning. In the DfES (2004a) "National conversation" this element was titled "Curriculum Entitlement and Choice" (p.10).

Choice in curriculum pathways was seen as a mixed offering across the schools. There was and there was not choice. For the young people there were subject choices available but they could not always put together the combinations they wanted or it was perceived that they were advised against it for some reason. However, the conversations in each school turned more from the choices of curriculum pathways into issues about choice within lessons and aspects of the curriculum that they felt strongly about. In Beech Tree School there was an impassioned discussion about a diploma course that they had been forced to do instead of a GCSE, it was felt that this was limiting their future opportunities because it was perceived to be of lesser value and brought in only because it would guarantee results that boost the school's performance tables.

Examples from the three schools:

Ash Tree School:

I: ok, but you can choose, do you have a choice of subjects you can do?

AARON: yeh, we have a choice yeh

I: is that choice good enough, have you got a wide enough choice for you?

AARON: in this school I think it is

AMY: it is but sometimes they say like if you pick one subject they tell you not to pick another because (ABIDA: they don't go) don't go into, go together, like yeh (AARON: oh yeh) and you're influenced to do something else, just because you want to do a certain subject, they say subjects don't go well together and stuff.

AARON: yeh, because at GCSE I wanted to do business and IT but they said that it was too narrow a path to choose so then I didn't end up picking either of them in the end, I just chose history and French which is nothing to do with what I want to do with my life. So I was influenced by teachers' opinions.

In the Beech Tree extract there is a disagreement amongst the young people about the frustration felt by a teacher over the course option.

Beech Tree School:

BASHIR: they made us do BTEC so, I think no one really appreciates that, they made us do it so, I think everyone would actually pick the proper (*subject*), so I think that would be the best option for us.

I: Right, so, the BTEC wasn't a choice that you..

BASHIR: We didn't get a say in what we wanted, wanted to pick for that, so I think everyone's really annoyed

I: Ok, that's interesting, and why, why do you think the school wanted to do that

BASHIR: erm I think every year it's about the school going up the league board,

(And later)

BLOSSOM: Teachers that want to teach us, like, one of the (*subject*) teachers, when we like started it, the BTEC and he told us that he's not our teacher, he's, he's there to feed us information, he's like, he says that we're thick and stuff like that, we know what you can't say, we know you can't say like they're thick or "you shouldn't have turned up" but he says everything like that, he's, I don't know what's wrong with him! But he says stuff like that and he says that he doesn't want to teach us this, he's spoon-feeding us and we said we didn't choose to do BTEC we want to do a proper GCSE. And he said, "if you're so thick," this is what he said last week "if you're so thick that you can't even do GCSE then I'm teaching this for you". He's, he's really rude

BASHIR: No, it's because he, I think it's because he personally, feels we can do BTEC, not BTEC, but proper GCSE, but he says that would be the best for us,

but like him, himself, he doesn't like BTEC and he doesn't like us doing BTEC, so it's like a headache for him and it's a headache for us

In Cedar Tree School the question about choice went into a discussion about motivation, then into a discussion about how groups were targeted and the “exam driven nature of the school” and extracts of evidence from these strands have been transcribed in the sections above. Caitlin began the thread when in my response to my question about targets she said that if you were “self-driven” you could excel otherwise “with the learning our school is very, um, you're told what to do and you do it”. It is interesting to note that Bashir's GCSE choices were seen by him to have nothing to with his future; personalisation was intended to provide guidance and advice to enable a young person's learning to match their aspirations. Bashir's comments do not appear to evidence a personalised educational offer.

Mr. Collins, one of the case-study headteachers, had said that he could not go as far as he would like with curriculum personalisation because of resourcing and budgeting issues and because the expectation of being judged against the forthcoming E-Bac (English Baccalaureate)¹ was going to be very restrictive. The challenges faced by headteachers and the negotiations they had to undertake in terms of providing a curriculum were not transparent to the young people who perceived curriculum and learning in terms of their personal grades and the options these would provide them later in life.

5.5 The mute learner voice

I researched how young people were personally engaged in lessons, could feedback about them, both within the classroom and the institution more generally, understand the progress they were making and the degree of influence or power

they felt they had over the pedagogy in schools. I argue that these are all aspects of the wider sense of learner voice; a category ties together the two above (5.3/5.4) in indicating the problematic positioning of learners in their supposedly personalised lessons.

There are four aspects of the mute learner voice that emerge from the data that demonstrate the learners' sense of invisibility and muteness within the pedagogic practices of schools. One is that young people did not consistently feel personally engaged with the lessons; secondly, regular and continuous "assessment for learning" (AfL)² and lesson review is also inconsistently experienced. The third aspect is that the very purpose that young people see as core to the school, learning, is the domain in which they feel either most uncomfortable, or the least enabled, to address their voice to the institution as a whole. The fourth aspect flows from this and concerns their perceptions that voice is prioritised in some area but not in what matters to them – their experience of teaching and learning.

These four aspects are critical to personalised learning and the notion of voice or "working together" so that

"Every child knows how they are doing, and understands what they need to do to improve and how to get there. They get the support they need to be motivated, independent learners on an ambitious trajectory of improvement; " (DCSF 2008d, p. 4).

This section takes each of the four aspects in turn and presents evidence that suggests that taken together, young peoples' learner voice is rendered mute.

5.5.1 Lesson engagement

Lesson engagement is fundamental to the New Labour policy of personalised learning. What emerged in this research is that from the perspective of young people the lessons often failed to engage them in learning and lacked variety. Across the schools the young people expressed the view that they experienced a range from really good teachers to very poor teaching. All the young people interviewed expressed the view at some point that people learn in different ways and that lessons needed a variety of approaches. I am not certain whether their views about individual difference were derived from work done by the school on meta-cognitive strategies, for example for revision, or from training that young people might have been engaged in through student leadership and peer tutoring courses, or from other sources such as psychology lessons and general media. However, it appears as a model against which the quality of teaching that personalised the school's practice for them seemed to be judged and that lessons therefore needed to have a variety of approaches.

Three examples illustrate their perceptions, one from each school:

Ash Tree School:

AARON: um well, we have a lot of choice like to do with what lessons we do and what subjects but (AMY *talking over*: but not much) but not much choice in how we learn it, if you know what I mean, I mean like there's a set curriculum and we have no influence on how we're taught. I mean, everyone learns in a different way so it's not really fair, to be honest

I: yeh, so you think that, actually there's just one kind of style of teaching in school?

AARON: yeh it's like, it's just not very good for people who learn in different ways really

I: Ok, can you give me an example of that?

AARON: erm...

ABIDA: I think some people learn like interactively, where others like to learn from a book kind of but then some teachers do try and like, do that type of

learning but it doesn't always work cos half of the class don't really like, understand that way.

I: yeh so, so, would you like to see more variety in the ways that you are taught then?

All: yeh, yeh

AARON: yeh, so for example in our, in a lesson like (*subject*) most lessons are read from a text book

AMY: so copy this down from a text book, answer this question from a text book, where most people aren't taking it in from the book, cos they're not very good at learning from reading or whatever. So, the teachers need to approach it in a different way and do something more interactive, I mean, I'm not sure what you would do in (*subject*)

From Beech Tree School:

BASHIR: Some lessons yeh, like are the same from the beginning to the end like, all the way throughout the year so you don't really get a sense of change. So that, so I don't think it helps learning.

BOBBIE: Especially like, we have a lesson I really hate (*subject*) but, I really just mess around in (*subject*) cos there' nowt to do; we don't learn anything, I don't see the point of coming to school when you're only taught in only like 2 lessons a day something properly; rest of lessons you're just sat there pen and paper in front of you; that's it, you didn't learn really.

BOBBIE: Yeh, so everyone needs something different in the lesson like, but, but like they don't change it.

From Cedar Tree School:

CALUM: I like to be active and some teachers I have, talk far too much and I lose my concentration really easily, I have a teacher and all lesson he talks and talks and

CIARAN: You do one thing wrong and you'll have half an hours lecture

CALUM: Yeh you definitely, I think teachers, because teachers get taught that sort of text book exams are all there, are all there is; no variety about how they teach sort of thing.

The young people in Cedar Tree School developed this notion of variety to meet individual differences further through the theme of "independent learning" (an element in the personalised pedagogy, DCSF 2008a). They felt that some teachers came in and said: "right we're doing independent learning today" (Carol) which meant putting a text book in front of them and telling them

“to get on with it” (Caitlin). Carol argued that independent learning is important but needs structuring and training:

CAROL: So I think, independent learning, I think if we kind of got taught it from year seven and year eight but it was structured then when we got to year eleven it wasn't quite as structured particularly at home it's not structured, you would then be better at it and so you'd probably achieve more because you knew how to do it

I: Right, so what sort of things do you mean by structure what kind of things would help you?

CAROL: so rather than just giving us a textbook and saying “right independent learning” maybe saying something like “Ok here's the textbook, here's all the resources you need then giving you not necessarily a task but um find out something about this or do note cards for this or something like that so that it's kind of almost revision

CAITLIN: Yeh maybe not essay and stuff like that but obviously people learn in different ways, so even if it is just giving four options of giving do flash cards, do a flow chart, you know do a mind map, sort of, then it gives everyone what they prefer and gives everyone a chance.

CIARAN: We had one in (*subject*) about a week or so ago, and most people didn't really do anything because the teacher wasn't involved he didn't really answer any questions, we were just given a worksheet and we had to make a poster

CAROL: I think that's the case when, especially in the younger years you don't sort of get the responsibility of, like, self-learning self-teaching yourself, so that when it comes to GCSEs when it comes to year 10 and you sort of think “oh what do I do I'll just sit here and talk then”, because we don't, don't have that responsibility from a young age so we're not going through school saying ok the teacher might not be here but I can still learn I can learn off my others, off my peers in the classrooms”.

Bobbie's notion of “only” two out of six lessons engaging her in learning would suggest that her experience is personalised in the manner policy intended for only a minority of her school day. The students in Cedar Tree School perceived the concept of ‘independent learning’ as ‘lazy’ pedagogy so that if students are not motivated they will not achieve. Ash Tree School students expressed that pedagogic variety was needed in order to be fair to all, a point that will be raised again in Chapter Six.

5.5.2 Assessment for Learning (AfL) and lesson reviews

Personalised learning included guidance on AfL² as a continuous process of both summative and formative assessment so that for “assessment to be genuinely personalised, all pupils need to understand how they are doing” (DCSF 2008a). Once again, inconsistency of practice seemed to be evident.

Ash Tree School data indicated how they did not get an opportunity to feedback in every lesson and so did not always either review the lesson or evaluate their learning:

ABIDA: In some lessons we do, in some, like in (*subject*)

AMY: they give us this sheet, like and we have to say like, evaluate the lesson, what we understood and what

ABIDA: what she does good and what she does bad”

I: but that doesn’t happen in every lesson then?”

All: No

Aaron: It would be good to have like a feedback session at the end of every lesson to say what was good what was bad, and if it was even useful.

Amy went on to say that in:

“A lot of lessons we, like, write things down in our books and that, but then get a comment later, so like we don’t always know as we do it kind of, how we’ve done”.

Aaron stated that he would like:

“I don’t know, just more variety in how to achieve your top grades, not just a set way you have to learn this, learn this, learn this to pass your final exam. More of like branches to get to the final product”.

Later in this conversation Aaron did add that:

“more teachers had started doing more kind of end of lesson stuff, so maybe they had some training or something, but they need more, they need to be more interactive with the lessons so they know if we understand them.”

In Beech Tree School Blossom made a point about lessons “spoon-feeding” them and contrasted this to what a ‘good’ teacher would do:

“I like Mr. ___ he says “I’m not, not going to like, pretend that you’re doing well”, if you’re failing a test he’ll tell us, then, he’ll help us like so much. He’s, he’s really funny, and he says “I’m not going to spoon-feed yer, because, because I don’t think you need to be spoon-fed”. A lot of teachers do try and spoon-feed us, like they speak to us like, (*puts on a higher pitched voice*) “if you be good, well I’ll give you a sweet”. Like we’re 16! I don’t want a sweet (*everyone laughs*) and some of them are like “c’mon you’re doing really well” and I’m like I know I’ve done it all, I don’t need anymore like baby encouraging, like, it’s like patronising most of the time”.

And later the conversation went:

I: So in a lesson would you get an opportunity to review, so you might have a review session, review what you’ve learnt?

BASHIR: Probably yeh, we’ve not had like individual evaluation of the lessons,

BOBBIE: No (*turns to others*) which teacher used to do that? When we was in ___ in year 10, our ___ teacher used to like, to make us write a personal statement on what we learnt and what we don’t understand

BLOSSOM: oh yeh

BOBBIE: Which was really good,

BLOSSOM: Like they had things on the wall didn’t they

BOBBIE: I found that really good, cos the next lesson she probably looked in our books and she taught it, so it was easy to explain

I: But you don’t do that every lesson?

BOBBIE: No,

BOBBIE: Cos they just tell you if you don’t understand it, come to them but you can’t really go up to a teacher and say “I don’t get this” because you don’t feel comfortable telling them

From Cedar Tree:

CAROL: Some teachers are good at it, it depends. I think it depends on the student and it depends on the teacher. If the student is motivated and if the teacher is, is not necessarily good, the students, they’ll do it, and if the teacher is good it’ll help.

CAITLIN: In the sort of higher years you don’t really have the homework tasks and stuff like that and you don’t really give your book in then they mark it, then you see the feedback. It isn’t really structured like that especially course work based and stuff like that then they can’t mark it so you don’t know so you’ve got to rely on yourself to sort of self-evaluate and also peer evaluate

CIARAN: In most lessons my book, my book doesn't even get marked and once we've done the work we ever really speak about it and then just move on.

CAROL: The way you get feedback really from teachers is either if they have a concern about you and want to speak to you, or in reports. That's the way we find out, reports and parents evenings. So you can go, the silly thing is though, you can go through the year doing something you then go to a parents evening and get your report and they say "oh you weren't very good at that" or "you didn't do very well in this unit"

CIARAN: And you weren't told about it.

Mr. Collins had talked about the use of WALTs ("We are learning to..") and WILFs ("We are looking for") put up at the beginning of lessons in Cedar Tree School. The young people in Cedar Tree mentioned that these were put up in lessons but then reported various experiences of their use:

CAITLIN: Like a lot of teachers start with the WALT and WILF and say this is what you are going to learn today, and this is what we're going, and by the end, but you don't ever sort of, when it gets closer and closer to break or lunch everyone just sort of starts getting their stuff together and just wants to go

CIARAN: It's lazy

CAITLIN: And so you don't have the ok so let's all just have the

CAROL: there's no plenary most times

CAITLIN: Yeh, there's just nothing, nothing to pull it altogether, so you just feel if the lessons sort of just left

From Cedar Tree School Carol felt that some teachers cared about what students thought of lessons and others did not, but here was something about the institutional culture that was not quite right. Witness:

CAROL: I think individual teachers really care, there are some amazing teachers here, who really care about their students and they care how well their students get on, they really, they do care, the school on the whole says it cares, I don't get the feeling it does care, personally, but some teachers will openly say "whether you learn or not, whether you listen or not, I get paid" and I've heard several teachers say that, and it's, its just, there's a negative feel in the school, that's partly because of the teachers, partly because of the structure.

There is a perception in the transcripts that some teachers do engage with the young people in their lessons on how the teacher delivered it, but it is not a practice that is regular and neither do the young people feel confident or comfortable in engaging in this feedback. A point explored further in 5.5.3 below. Neither was reviewing the lesson for their understanding of its content a regular and consistently experienced practice. It seems that contrary to the guidance in personalised learning these young people have to wait for 'key moments' such as book marking or parents' evening to get learning feedback, unless there is a concern with their work.

5.5.3 Mute learner voice

It was precisely on the notion of pedagogic engagement that personalisation attempted to construct a view of learners as being able to exercise 'voice'. But it was on teaching and learning that the students in this research either felt most uncomfortable about giving feedback or that their views were taken lightly. The data evidenced on more than one occasion the issue of 'comfort' and the sense of teachers and students alike treading warily around the issues.

Examples from each school:

I: So do you think students ought to be asked routinely for feedback on lessons?

ABIDA: I think, I wouldn't like, ask them direct because some people find that uncomfortable (AMY: yeh) telling the teacher like they don't like a certain way that they learn, they should do it like, I don't know on paper

AARON; anonymous, so that its sort of...

I: right anonymous so you feel some people might be a bit uncomfortable?
All: yeh

I: the students? And the teachers might be a bit uncomfortable as well? Some of them a bit uncomfortable with that do you think or..?

AARON: er, well, yes

I: you don't think they'd like to hear it? (General laughter)

AARON: I don't think they'd like to hear criticism

And Aaron went on to add:

"If we do ever like say anything to the teachers it's not really taken notice of, it's just passed aside really".

From Beech Tree School in response to the same question above:

BLOSSOM: Yeh, when we have student voice, but, I've done, I've done one Student Voice (*a forum to discuss teaching and learning in the school*) but when I do it I feel like, I'm, I'm not, I can't say what I really think because, it's not like the looks, it's just er, that they ask you the questions, but you feel guilty, because er, they tell you just be honest but if you be honest, they look at you like, you can't say that. So you just have to like make the subjects that you're talking about seem, it's best when it's really not er....

I: Right, can you give me an example of that, I'm interested in hearing more

BLOSSOM: Yeh, like I did (*subject*) and I discussed (*subjects*) and and erm, I wanted to say, one of the teachers, she likes to favouritise pupils, like we get favouritised when I'm there, there's a boy, like, he gets, he gets like singled out, like she'll say stuff like, ... I don't want to get into trouble

I: No, don't worry this is completely confidential

BLOSSOM: (*Blossom recounted what happened in a particular lesson and that she fed this back in a student voice session and how she perceived a member of staff conducting the forum then reacted:*) he looked at me like I shouldn't have said that. (*Member of staff*) was there as well and she kept looking up from her desk every time someone says something, that, that they didn't like. (I: right) So we don't feel like we've got a good voice, like I don't know, we can't be honest and ..

The Beech Tree students then talk about the questionnaires they are given to provide feedback on the teaching in school:

BLOSSOM: Like the questionnaires, we have like 3 questionnaires a year and they don't hand them out on a regular basis, and we have like a suggestion box, but I don't think it ever gets used, cos its not advertised as such

I: So what do they put on the questionnaires? What kind of things are you asked about?

BOBBIE: Just about the teaching, like

BLOSSOM: Are you happy with your learning? And

BOOBIE: And it's not like you can comment

BLOSSOM: It's only yes or no

BOBBIE: You can only, it's like it's only "agree" or "disagree". We should be actually allowed to write comments.

BASHIR: I think the problem is, with that is, they look at all the sheets for example, and if they ask for your name and if they, if they do like pull you out and say what the problem is, and it's like hard to express what's wrong, you know what I mean, you know some thing's wrong but you can't actually tell them, we, we can't make big changes

I: Sure, yes, so, it's difficult to express yourself in that kind of situation?

BASHIR: Yeh

The Beech Tree students said they had felt comfortable expressing views to a total stranger such as myself, or an OFSTED Inspector, but not to senior staff (note above how Blossom was concerned about "getting into trouble" for voicing her opinions):

BOBBIE: I remember when I did a Student Voice with an OFSTED inspector, it, it was like really uncomfortable cos they're the people who mark on your score and that and we'd just got our report, so I didn't want to say anything bad because I was in the headteacher's office and everything, but I had to say every time she walked out what I really thought; but I felt comfortable around him it was just the headteacher, really you know the headteacher so you should feel comfortable around her, but I felt comfortable around someone I didn't actually know

The feeling in Cedar Tree School was that while on the one hand the school genuinely wanted to listen to them, there were issues around dialogue and a sense of trust throughout the school:

CAITLIN: I think our school they are good at listening to us they are, they do want to hear what we say and they do want to know what we think and stuff like that, but I think if they actually stepped back and said right we want you to make up a role for yourself we want to say like if it's a shadowing headteacher or something as in a student, as in stuff like that, then we could do it but then I don't think they, not respect us, but I don't think they trust us **enough** to sort of do that

CAROL: I think some people, I think some, some of the senior management team really listen, but not everybody

Caitlin went onto argue that sometimes young people are stressed, and particularly with teachers they do not know, a sense of discomfort can be exhibited and interpreted in an unintended manner:

“Because this school is so big, your, a teacher will go away sick and you’ll get a new teacher and you’ll be like “what? Who’s this?” and then you panic more and then they don’t know that you’re panicking because they think you’re just showing off and being big and everything in the classroom when actually you are struggling and you need the help but because they don’t know you personally there isn’t a way of, like, like telling them what’s going on”.

In the transcripts it was as if the closer the issues were to the core of teaching and learning, classroom practice, the more discomfort was produced in being able to feedback in an honest manner that did not leave a young person feeling vulnerable.

5.5.4 Mute learner voice: a matter of priorities

Young people in this research expressed the perceptions that they had ‘voice’ on a range of issues but that these were not often “things that matter”, and that confrontation could be experienced between the student body and school on issues such as uniform, which are not matters perceived to affect their education:

From Ash Tree School:

AARON: like the school uniform, there was something going on between the school forum and the teachers and basically they want, say for example they wanted us not to wear colourful scarves and whatever, and the school forum are basically saying, well it’s not effecting our education and the way we learn, so why should we, and, and in the end they ended up just changing it anyway, and we’re only allowed to wear like dark coloured scarves now

I: so how do you feel about that as students?

AARON: Just unfair, like the fact we’re not being listened to

AMY: Yeh, it’s like, like with the scarf and that, it doesn’t effect our education, so, so I don’t see why it got changed

In Beech Tree School some strong feelings were expressed that there were limitations to their voice and that “little petty things” would be prioritised but not long term changes in teaching that they wanted to see. Witness:

I: Ok, so what ways can you make your points, what forum have you got what means have you got to make those points?

BOBBIE: do you mean?

I: Ok sorry, if you've got a point to make, how do you make it, how do you make the point?

BOBBIE: Questionnaires and interviews and everything

I: Right, so you get questionnaires and interviews in school

BOBBIE: yeh

I: Ok so is that a feeling amongst all of you? That things don't really change as a result of what you say?

BASHIR: Not really, but, we get, we get, we all this stuff about, even the teachers say that we'll do something but we don't feel that, we don't feel that, we don't see the results of it, you see, so...

(I ask for examples and they talk about behaviour issues and then):

I: so you feel there's kinds of boundaries, there's things you can say, but there's boundaries you want to go over but you can't go over

ALL: yeh

I: You can't go over, right, ok. So what are the 'safe' things you can feed back on? Like you know, things that they can say, “oh yes we can do something”, things that you feel comfortable about saying?

BOBBIE: Just little petty things, like,

BLOSSOM: Like we need to open the windows

BOBBIE: YEH! (THEY ALL LAUGH)

BLOSSOM: I said that and it's like “yeh we can open the windows”. Everything, everything else they just write down and they say we'll look into that.

BASHIR: Long-term changes we want to see

The perception of the ‘wrong priorities’ was expressed strongly in Cedar Tree School. For instance, Cate, Ciaran, Candace, and Cari in Cedar Tree wrote that “uniform is becoming a massive issue, and people are rebelling, it's becoming silly and too much time is being wasted on it”.

Furthermore:

CAROL: we need to have say, not only in the kind of the things like the uniform and so on, we need to have say in what we do, how the school works and the structure of the lessons, we need to have say in **things that matter**

CIARAN: We also have stupid campaigns, we have one called “just say yes”, where if you say no to a teacher and you don’t want to do something you get an after school detention

CAROL: the school’s priorities are wrong and until they get those priorities right it’s not going to get better

CIARAN: yeh, we’re not allowed to debate with a teacher without having an argument or without having a *(names a detention used by the school)*

Therefore, it seems that ‘opening windows’ is a safe ground for school to meet with student voice while debating with a teacher is seen as an argument. For Carol, “things that matter” were their education, learning processes, the quality of teaching and wider decision making processes on the running of the school.

5.6 Summary of ‘crouching target, hidden child’

The use of targets in supporting personalised learning is constructed on ‘data’ that seeks to render the individual student ‘visible’ as part of the personalised offer. In the school’s view this data is then translatable to the students to give them yardsticks of progress. At an institutional level the young people perceived that the drive to get “better grades” of exam passes resulted in target setting regimes that had more to do with school reputation than enhancing individual potential. This target rationality on the part of the school had perceived impacts upon the way their voices were available for negotiating around classroom pedagogy. One impact is upon the lack of dialogue available to them in discussing the efficacy of lesson pedagogy and a sense of powerlessness when lessons did not engage them. Sitting and reading or copying from textbooks was frequently cited as a lack of variety in their pedagogic diet. Their identity was also bounded by the extent, or

lack of it, in the curriculum choice available in schools and through the inconsistency with which they received continuous feedback on their learning, findings that run contrary to the spirit that personalised learning intended. The cultural allusion “crouching target, hidden child” was employed to summarise how the learner voice of young people in this research sample was perceived by them to be mute and their identity as learners rendered invisible by the underlying target and data collecting practices.

Drawing on Bernstein’s work, Arnot and Reay (2007) challenged researchers to be more analytical and differentiated about the rules of power in play. This data suggests a resonance with the problematic: what is positioned by personalisation as the very centre of young peoples’ school life, their learning, is the voice they find most difficult to articulate and negotiate over within their institutional experiences. The sociological approach suggests that “although student consultation appears democratic, it is a clearly bounded pedagogic event” in which some young people are either excluded, or they self-exclude because they already have access to the “rules of recognition or realisation” in a pedagogic encounter and feel it unnecessary to participate (Arnot and Reay 2004, p. 322). Blossom in Beech Tree School particularly articulated that while school had established a forum to talk about pedagogy, she ‘couldn’t be honest’; the rules of negotiation and the boundaries of dialogue between adults in a position of power were not transparent to her.

In the data evidence in this chapter some young people have self-excluded because they feel “uncomfortable” in engaging in discussion over the pedagogy of the school, they do not have access to the ‘rules’ of engagement, or they self-exclude because they feel the school is not listening to them. However, they are excluded by the school in the “messages” of realisation (Arnot and Reay 2004, p.316) contained with

the possibility of pedagogic voice. For example, experience of 'voice' was possible in the schools but not on issues that mattered to young people; students perceived a lack of trust being shown towards them by the school 'system' through institutions not engaging pupils in the very core purpose of learning.

It is argued in this chapter that 'learner voice' can be employed as the category central to the metaphor of visibility rather than pedagogic voice. The latter suggests particular critical analysis of the rules of power, of recognition and realisation of learner identities as mediated by the social structures of class, race and gender in the pedagogic practices of schools (see Arnot and Reay 2004). Whilst such a sociological perspective is challenging and a useful critical tool, I have adopted an approach to organising and reflecting on the data guided by thinking from ethical traditions that examines learning as a virtuous practice and as such offers criteria for the judgement of its impact upon social justice, a central concern of New Labour policy. Neither have I selected samples or methods that enable an empirical purchase to be gained on the complexities of class, race and gender in the pedagogy of schools. Below I undertake some preliminary reflection on the data using the literatures outlined in Chapter Three

5.7 Preliminary reflections on the data: effectiveness versus excellence

I argued in Chapter Three that the narrative nature of our lives has implications for the struggles to gain recognition and expression, so that how the young people have expressed their experiences also constitutes a 'real' horizon against which the authenticity of their voice is pitted against practices and horizons not in their control. Chapter Three set out a framework from which to argue that authenticity of learner voice could be evaluated in relation to a conception of the social practices that have

a telos of learning as contributing to individual autonomy and capabilities, both located within a thicker concept of human flourishing.

In this study for example, happiness and wellbeing might be a telos of the schools in their public statements but young people experienced other demands imposed by the school as conflicting with this ethos. For instance, in response to a statement about whether they thought schools were about helping people to be happy and develop their ability to develop their potential, whatever that maybe, Chrissie, Cheryl, Christopher and Collin wrote that “good point, wish it happened, but not sure if schools are interested in our potential, just exam results”.

Research data in this project indicated that young people did experience moments in their school lives where they felt their voice was genuinely trusted and respected in the pedagogical exchanges within a classroom. This indicates that despite the systemic pressures, moral agency to operate both a more democratic voice in the school, and a learner voice in the classroom is possible, if difficult. Carol pointed out that, “some teachers really, really care about us”. As one informant Blossom said of her teacher’s feedback in one class, “he tells it like it is”, and does it with a good sense of humour, this teacher does not patronise her and cares about what the pupils think of the subject. Some teachers more routinely it seems were then able to incorporate dialogue about learning, “**things that matter**” (Carol, emphasis added).

What characterised these infrequently experienced exchanges, from the perspective of young people, are the relational virtues of care, honesty, trust and a sense of

passion about the subject. These observations confirm arguments made elsewhere that both good teaching and good learning are not two distinct sides of the relational practice of inclusive schools (Smyth 2006). If one is to read the voices of young people in this chapter as oppositional to the school, in the sense that they advance some strong critiques of their learning experiences, then as Smyth (2006) also argued, identities of resistance are easily created by a lack of care in attending to the fundamental relational practices of teaching. I argue these relational practices embody the virtues that are definitive of excellence in the internal goods of schools. While such practices are not easy to achieve and are undoubtedly subject to any number of social pressures such as the exclusionary and self-exclusionary nature of class determinations (Ball 2010) it is the contention of this chapter that questions about the way power operates in schools can, and should, be asked in order to make schooling “more accountable to young people” (Smyth 2011, p.58).

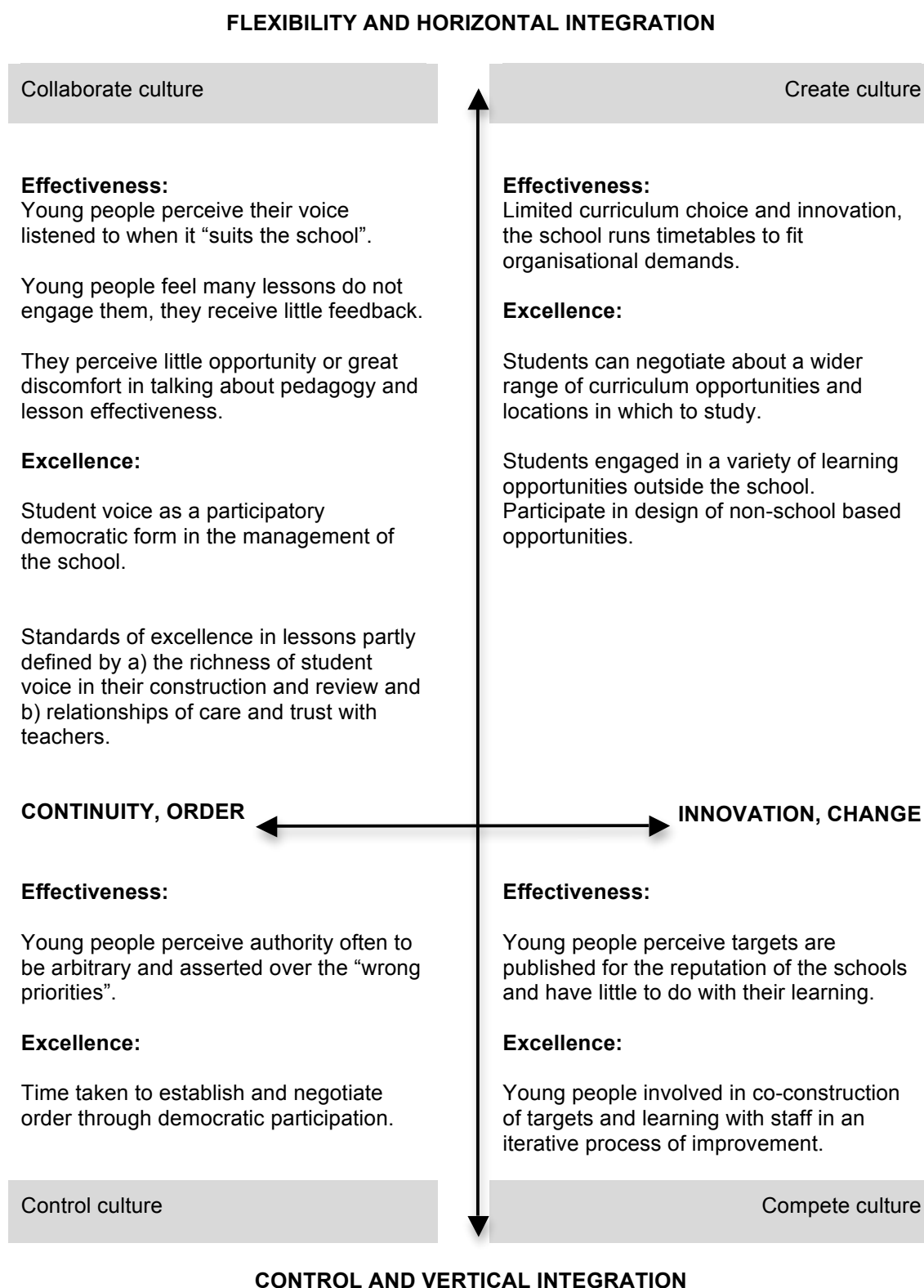
Defining excellence in learning requires a wider notion of virtues that incorporate ‘just generosity’ and the cultivation of effective practical reasoning. The pursuit of ‘better’ exam grades is an external good that in itself is entirely reasonable and to be expected as an outcome of schooling. However, ‘better’ exam grades bear normative implications that are rarely examined and school improvement that judges effectiveness in improving results is not necessarily constructing a rich notion of learning (Wilcox 1997). Using student voice for school effectiveness, for example, is therefore different to that of enabling a variety of rich democratic encounters (Fielding and Moss 2011). Institutional orders in the schools studied seemed to be squeezing ‘voice’ into serving a narrow conception of effectiveness since the young people all believed that the exam passes were driving the targets and the targets were there more to improve a school’s reputation rather than their learning. There was a sense in the data of effectiveness being served by a narrow pedagogical diet

that is driven by 'getting through the curriculum'. I suggest that further ethnographic research with staff in the context of school practices might reveal more about why young people express these feelings and explore what teachers say they are doing and modelling. For this thesis, young people perceive that there are teachers in schools whose moral agency demonstrates the capacity for a much richer and virtuous form of learning dialogue with young people, the students in this research seemed to encounter these teachers inconsistently.

One means of summarising the perceptions of young people in the research with regard to their learner voice and to contrast these with a theoretical account of excellence as defined by virtues, is to employ a competing values framework grid (see Chapter Three). In this grid, Figure 5.1 below, evidence from the data gathering pertaining to learner voice are represented against the cultural models of "effectiveness" that are found in the practices of schooling researched in this thesis. This data is contrasted with what ought to be possible - "excellence": as argued by the young people in this research, as experienced in rare patches by these students and as I argued from the virtue ethics in Chapter Three. In each quadrant an alternative account of what ought to be in practice is posed based on the notion of excellence. The summaries of effectiveness versus excellence are then placed with reference to the competing values framework (Quinn 1991; Talbot 2008). The purpose of the competing values quadrants is that schools, as public service organisations, need to maintain order and stability while striving for innovation and change. Summarising the data and the ethical arguments in this way begins to highlight where and how areas of tension in policy enactment play out. It may well be that within schools, practices of learner voice vary and shift on a continuum between effectiveness and excellence as represented in the figure, and hence young peoples' experience is one of inconsistency. Part of the reason for these

tensions may well lie in paradoxes of governance produced by policy that push the values into too much tension (see explanation below).

Figure 5.1 Effectiveness versus excellence in learner voice, plotted against organisational cultural values



In Figure 5.1 above, it is entirely possible that a “compete culture”, in which the consumer pole of personalisation predominates, leads to the school promoting their reputation through published data. This in turn is perceived by young people as diminishing their ownership of the data and muting their sense of dialogue within the pedagogical process. The “control culture” then becomes important for school leaderships as their ‘reputation’ both with central government and with their neighbouring communities is at risk. In this scenario, risk taking with learner voice through the “collaborate” and “create” values becomes harder for schools to engage in. The strong feeling from the data across all three schools is that young people understand the need for order and stability in their institutions, in fact they often welcome it. The issue becomes that the imposition of rules and discipline is perceived by students as arbitrary, as picking on “the wrong priorities” as “not being negotiated” and “wasting time”. This binary between seemingly arbitrary and misunderstood perceptions of discipline and a negotiated and dialogical one, illustrates perfectly MacIntyre’s (1994, 2001) distinction between standards of effectiveness and virtues of excellence.

5.8 Chapter Summary

‘Crouching target, hidden child’ is an allusion employed to illustrate how the mechanisms in policy strategies, supposedly designed to personalise the educational offer, have in effect rendered young people invisible and mute, especially in respect to a learner voice that can engage with teachers to develop a richer and more virtuous concept of learning and pedagogy. From the testimony of young people it is argued that one of the key mechanisms for producing this sense of invisibility arises from the targets and data held by the school on student

performance, ironically designed to enhance the visibility of young people and render their education more personalised. In the competing values that characterise organisational life, tensions in policy enactment may well serve to push school practices to focus on their external goods through reputational management: “effectiveness”. This is contrasted with a concept of excellence, in this chapter an authentic sense of learner voice, in the telos of schooling that young people reported experiencing only rarely.

The validation of this perspective is advanced following the framework developed in Chapter Three that argued for looking at personalised learning in terms of an account of social practices, the virtues, capabilities and how an authentic learner voice might be possible within schools. Evidence in this chapter suggests that if learner voice is a component of the citizen pole of New Labour’s education policy, then schools’ enactment of policy tends to squeeze out an authentic sense of voice. However, the evidence in the research data suggests that greater moral agency on the part of teachers and learners is available within classroom practise. There is no reason to suggest that young people engaging with schools on “things that matter” (Carol) would detract from the pursuit of external goods, such as higher exam results; on the contrary a virtue ethics account of the goods of schooling might serve to enhance such goods. This kind of question could be open to empirical as well as theoretical work but a critical policy question becomes whether the policy space allows for this. Some speculation about this point is raised in the final chapter. In the next chapter, following further presentation of young peoples’ perceptions, the literatures explored in Chapter Three are used to evaluate evidence from the students in respect of personalisation’s claim to advance social justice.

Chapter Five footnotes:

- 1) "The English Baccalaureate was introduced as a performance measure in the 2010 performance tables. It is not a qualification in itself. The measure recognises where pupils have secured a C grade or better across a core of academic subjects – English, mathematics, history or geography, the sciences and a language". The rationale for the E Bac is: "There has also been a decline in the opportunity to take some core subjects, such as modern foreign languages, history and geography at Key Stage 4. This situation disproportionately affects pupils from the poorest backgrounds or attending schools in disadvantaged areas". Source: <http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/qualifications/englishbac/a0075975/theenglishbaccalaureate> (accessed 15/02/12)
- 2) AfL: Particularly inspired by Black, P.J. and Wiliam, D. (1998) Inside the Black Box: Raising standards through classroom assessment. (King's College, London). Wiliam in evidence to the House of Commons Education and Skills Select Committee (2007) critiqued the way the conception had been distorted by Department policy documents.

CHAPTER SIX

PROCRUSTEAN SCHOOLING? PERSONALISED LEARNING AND SOCIAL JUSTICE.

6.1 Introduction

In Chapter Two evidence from the policy literature described how personalised learning was promoted as a strategy for social justice because it would engage all pupils regardless of class, race, gender and culture in achieving their 'educational potential' and thus deliver equality of opportunity. The link is made in New Labour policy between high standards of attainment for all and therefore enhanced opportunity to access the labour market and the goods such employment could bring. Personalisation is thus of a piece with much global education policy in adopting a human capital approach, a perspective which places "its emphasis on future economic growth" (Tikly and Barrett 2011, p.3). While the proposition of higher educational standards, economic growth and advancing social justice is on the face of it an entirely reasonable one, it is not necessarily unproblematic in all economies across the world (Tikly and Barrett 2011). The question for investigating New Labour and social justice is whether personalisation through the citizen-consumer produces in England a fairer system of education and greater equality of opportunity. A longitudinal study of such a chain is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, if one were to broaden the concept of social justice beyond that of human economic capital then other research possibilities arise. For instance, justice conceived of as not merely redistribution, but also as recognition and parity of participation in society (Fraser 2003, 2010) would enable the research questions about personalised learning and social justice to build upon the work in the previous chapter.

The focus of this chapter is upon the link between the policy of personalisation's claims for advancing social justice and the experiences of young people within schools claiming to enact the policy. The link is advanced because the data from the young people threw up themes of 'fairness' and perceived injustices in the micro-practices and arrangements of schools. The chapter draws upon the testimony of young people and interplays their stories with arguments from literatures about the virtues of justice created in the micro-contexts of schools.

In Greek mythology, Procrustes is described as an inn-keeper who ties travellers to an iron bed; if they were too short for the bed he stretched them, too long and he cut their legs to fit (Bullfinch 1965). The mythical metaphor is used to suggest that personalised learning is the Procrustean story of New Labour's education policy: manipulating schools to 'the one-size fits all' policy under the guise of offering an individual a 'bespoke' service. This chapter presents young peoples' stories from the fieldwork that suggest that practices in their schools are perceived as consistently 'unfair' in ways that are inconsistent with the propositions of personalised learning. Not only do young people experience a lack of recognition, they also express views on the unfair distribution of resources both within and beyond school. In addition they express some sense of transcendence, of seeing unfairness beyond their own self-interest, and articulate a strong desire to know more about and understand the difficult moral and cultural issues that they perceive themselves to be living through.

MacIntyre (2001) argues that moral traditions that advance concepts of justice necessarily entail a practical rationality that seeks to provide good reasons for acting in one way rather than another. Fielding (2004b, 2007a,b) argues for the prefiguring role of student voice and that the practice and habit of democratic participation

should enrich and contribute to the health of civic society beyond school. This chapter also argues that the institutional site of schools and the relationships it establishes with young people at the micro level of adult and young person relationships through the virtues of excellent teaching and democratic exchange are critical. Learner voice, as discussed in the previous chapter, is not only a pedagogical virtue it can also contribute to a sense of parity in the direction of a society and is therefore a question of social justice (Fraser 2010). Using a virtue ethics approach in the specific context of social practices studied in this research poses questions about the moral modes of schools, whether they are manipulative or non-manipulative. Using the testimony of young people as a backdrop, I then repeat the use of the competing values framework to aid an understanding of how the inconsistencies experienced by the students are perhaps related to tensions in policy enactment pushed by competing organisational values.

6.2 “Holding them back”

The testimony presented in the previous chapter can also be read across to this one since invisibility or muteness are signs of exclusion from the learning process and hence from the purposes of schools; using Fraser’s (2003, 2010) categories of justice one asks if this marginalisation is a ‘just’ state of affairs? There are also some additional perceptions provided by young peoples’ sense of what is fair and unfair and that therefore impinge further upon a narrative of justice.

Personalised learning linked developing individual potential to social justice, but young people expressed how they felt their potential was often narrowed or dampened down, with school practices as Aaron put it, “holding them back”. Again the link in this evidence seems to be between issues arising from grades and school

held data, with the resulting labels and sets designed to boost or achieve targets.

Witness examples from all three schools:

Ash Tree School

AARON: and they have like, in the lower years they have like, sets for the classes on ability, it's like set 1-6, and it's like really split up between the kids and the kids that are in like set 6, like the lower ability, (ABIDA: stay there) just stay there, there's not like

ABIDA: they give up, they just think I'm in set 6 so they won't even ...

I: really? They just sort of think

ABIDA: yeh

I: they just switch off?

ABIDA: Yeh like everyone sees, like the set sixes like, like the bad band in the year

AMY: yeh so like they have a reputation

AARON: and like the teachers are restricting the people in the lower sets to only getting a grade C, cos they'll do foundation and whereas there might be a kid that if you really sat down and pushed him, he could be achieving something else but he's kind of restricted

ABIDA: yeh, like you know when everyone did, I think it was IT for like to get your

AARON; oh in year 9?

ABIDA: yeh, it think it was that they could only get, like the teacher would only want them to go up to a pass even though they had more time to go to a merit or, but they were only allowed to do a pass

I: what, so almost held them back?

All: yeh

AARON; even the ones with higher ability it's holding them back as well as the ones with lower ability

Beech Tree School

BOBBIE: Yeh, we're all singled out like, from the people who's got A grade in primary to the low ones, they're all just singled out

I: So are you set then, by ability? Do you have sets, groups?

ALL: Yeh, BOBBIE: Yeh in different....er..

I: Do you think that's a good or bad thing or ..?

BOBBIE: It's good to a certain extent cos you're learning the same thing, but what happens when them people are in set 4 or 5 and they might actually be capable of doing higher work? We should all be given the opportunity.

I: So if you're stuck in a set that's it, you mean?

BASHIR: Yeh, and then besides you end up doing the same work over and over again; and the other thing is, erm, they actually, some of the grades they actually base on you know the CAT scores we done in year 7, so some people they like, they like, improve much but it's still based on the score we done before; so that I think if we done the test again we would have got a higher score, so I think that's a bad point to the school

I: Right, and that effects the teachers' expectations of you does it?

BASHIR: Yeh, basically, what I feel in school is that, I think, I know that I'm capable but the thing is the school they don't think I'm capable, so they always like try to find short cuts around things so like we do better but we, I personally know that I can do better, but like the school they, they won't take that.

I: So they don't have a picture of, so you don't think they have a picture of who you are as a learner or as a person?

ALL: No

I: No you don't think that..

BLOSSOM: Like the school, when they predict our grades it's what other people who have got the same things we did in primary, what they got in school and then what they got again, so they link us with that, so if you got a 6B in primary, you're, you're under-achieving if you don't get a A at GCSEs. So then, so if you, if you like, this girl she's got like a really, really low grade, and so they expect her to get low grades, so they, so everything, so all the work that they give her is a really low standard, like easy work, so she's like "I can do this" and we're all doing, like, the stuff we should be doing but like they enter her for foundation and stuff like that instead of higher that everyone else is doing, they don't ask her

(And later)

BOBBIE: In like, I don't think it's fair like our form should be put into gifted and talented [BASHIR: Yeh] and then the people who need more help because that's just like the people in the like lowest class or form they're probably thinking like

BASHIR: Yeh they don't get valued

BOBBIE: Exactly, we should all be treated equal, fair enough if some are cleverer than others, yeh but, it's not fair, because like the cleverer people in the gifted and talented form, well yeh, they do mix with the other people, but it's like "oh yeh I'm in gifted and talented" and everything so, it's not nice is it?

Cedar Tree School expressed a sense of inconsistency in the level of 'care' they experienced. A striking statement in this regard was made by Carol in the testimony on page 149, recalling how some teachers say "whether you learn or not, whether you listen or not, I get paid" in contrast to those "individual teachers" who "really

care". In response to my questions: "do you think your learning is personalised and do you feel your potential is developed or the teaching is personal to you?" Caitlin added the following observation:

CAITLIN: I think mainly the year, like personally I feel the best teachers are the ones you've grown up with sort of thing, so there are certain teachers that have taught me since year eight and now see me year eleven and coming up to my exams and like, because they've known you for so long they, they don't even need to ask if you're alright, they know you're getting stressed.

Calum expressed the view that because he was on the special needs register, some "teachers are too protective, kind of wrap you up" and sometimes because teachers "talk too much", "I stop concentrating, I just start dozing and I get told off". Inconsistency of relationship seems to be a key theme in the above exchange; perhaps some teachers are perceived as holding the external goods of the curriculum above a deeper personal knowledge of students. It could be argued that from within a consumer discourse young peoples' notions of schools "holding them back" are also about denying their ability to gain greater purchase on consumption through the goods that higher qualifications bring. However, in their often impersonal reflections on the processes of schools the testimony conveys a strong perception from the young people of a sense of justice not only for themselves, but for their peers in that they perceive everyone should have a fair measure of support and attention and be equally valued. Their sense of the socially divisive nature of sets and labels such as "Gifted and Talented" comes through the transcripts. The young people also expressed how once they were sorted schools were more or less fixated on that view of potential. "Holding them back," describes their perceptions that the arrangements in school and the practices of some teachers, perhaps driven by the 'pressure' to get exam results, are failing to satisfy their sense of justice. In light of New Labour's policy aims for personalised learning this would appear to be an ironic finding.

6.3 On “being average”

One might interpret the young peoples’ testimony as a perceived lack of recognition for their identities as learners whether through “holding them back” or the inconsistency with which care for them was modeled. This lack of recognition is also to be found in the way that schools are perceived to allot attention and opportunity to students.

Carol provided a critique that summarises how targeted approaches provide an institutional solution to arranging school life:

CAROL: Yeh I think the school kind of work out who does what, via their target groups, they find target groups of people, they’ll go for G and T or they’ll go for underachievers or they’ll go for people who don’t come to school that much or they’ll go for specific vulnerable groups, so they give opportunities to those people there’s a lot of people in the school who kind of don’t kind of meet the groups, so they don’t get the same opportunities.

There is a sense in Carol’s thinking of exclusion of opportunity if you were not in the right ‘target’ group. This feeling is picked up on by students across the three schools especially in relation to interventions schools made to control behaviour.

Once again examples are provided from all three schools.

In Ash Tree School when I asked what schools could do to help them be more engaged with lessons the following conversation occurred:

AMY: help all pupils not just certain ones

AARON: I think they just need more support of the pupils, so they can, so everyone is, has the equal opportunity to reach their highest potential. People who misbehave and stuff, they get rewarded more than people who are successful, like with treats

AMY: Yeh cos more attention is paid to them as they’re trying to improve their behaviour but most of the time it doesn’t work

ABIDA: we said this before, like I think we said that someone must be brought up that the kids who like behave like better than the ones who don’t, don’t get looked at more and don’t get rewarded. They did something for a bit where like

you got a reward, then they stopped again. So, I don't know, we weren't looked at again

I: mm, so you feel, you feel if you're just getting on with it, trying to do your best, then you kind of forgotten in a way (ALL 3: yeh) right, so if you act out then somebody pays attention to you. So you'd like that to be reversed would you or...?

AARON: Well, not totally reversed because obviously the people who are misbehaving need sorting out in some way, but

AMY: But we need to feel equal amounts 'cos like, if you do something really, really good then, you get like paid attention, the people who're like, like just trying to get through it really don't get looked at that much

ABIDA: I don't know, there's loads of people in the school so that they can't really like, value everyone pay attention to every child, like yeh

AARON: well, in terms of an example of why we're not valued, it's in terms of rewards, people who misbehave and stuff, they get rewarded more than people who are successful, like with treats

AMY: yeh cos more attention is paid to them as they're trying to improve their behaviour but most of the time it doesn't work

Beech Tree School:

I: Ok, so overall then how do you feel valued, supported, in school?

How do you feel as a person in school? How supported?

BASHIR: On a 1-10 scale I would say 3.

I: Really?

BASHIR: yep

BOBBIE: Cos there's like (x) hundred of us in school, and it's like, there's, there's not, there's enough teachers in school so that everyone should be able to get the same but it's only certain groups of people who can have their say innit, you know, like most of the bad behaved students, cos, cos they're confident with the teachers, cos they're naughty so they've got confidence to talk to teachers (*laughing from group*) whereas we haven't

I: Right (*laughing too*) so you just keep your head down and get on with it

Cedar Tree School

CAROL: The problem is, there's like projects for different groups, you're going to have the problem if you have specific projects for specific groups, which is how the school has always worked, to tick boxes, you have to have things for various vulnerable groups or opportunity groups, it's always grouped into sections, and that group of people gets the opportunities, you will still miss the people in the middle so like the average achievers will be missed because they don't fit the groups and they won't be self-motivated enough a lot of them, to go and like apply for an opportunity or do something like that so

CIARAN: yeh, it's not making sure we're happy

CAROL: yeh, it's political stuff, it's so political

CAITLIN: along with, like, behaviour and stuff like that, it's more, teachers have, because teachers have more of a relationship with the naughty people because they know them more because they're always naughty so they're, and it's like the quiet ones, and the good ones, which is true in a lot of places it's the good ones that don't get noticed, so when they have the problems so they don't go up to them and go "are you alright?" or if you say "oh, how's such and such?" "like who?" "They're in my class" "I never knew them" sort of stuff like that, but it's the loud confident, like them, them sort of people that get all the attention and get all the praise when they've done bad so then done good so well like what about all those people who've always been good and never get that

The interviews revealed some strongly held views that if you were 'getting on' with things you were considered to be all right and therefore likely to be ignored. It was not just the 'naughty kids' who were perceived to be receiving more attention.

AMY: Yeh like the cleverer people, like they get more thought of, kind of thing

AARON: yeh, like they tend to favour like, say in the class of 30 kids and there's 5 clever people, the teacher will spend more time 1-1 with them than the other ones who actually need the help.

I: has that been your experience all the way through school more or less?

All: yeh, yeh

A final point to be made here is that young people in the interviews sometimes disagreed amongst themselves about the locus of control for behaviour issues. Some thought it was down to home background and schools have to work against that, while others thought it could be brought much more under the control of teachers and the schools. Blossom noted how a more 'zero tolerance' policy from the head had improved behaviour. She went on to say that she thought "apart from one or two, most people wanna learn" but schools did not always make it easy for them so some people "people put on a front"; Blossom claimed that "the teachers stop us, we don't stop them!" Caitlin argued that people "put up a front" when "they're stressed out" and often that was "down to being pressurised". It seems

evident that wherever the solutions to these challenges lie, schools have difficulty in convincing young people that they care equally about them all in a manner that is personal to them. 'Fairness' is not a consistently perceived quality of school practices in that, from the point of view of these young people, 'getting on' or being 'average' seems to gain little recognition from the institution as a whole.

6.4 Beyond "me"

Given the appeal of consumerism it would not be surprising if young people in the sample demonstrated little inclination to consider others in their educational aspirations. As the data above indicates, this does not appear to be the case. While students advance different explanations, or nuances, for the locus or focus of the problems, the young people across the settings expressed a sense of justice in some of their responses to interviews and activities that transcended a simple "me first" explanation. The next three sub-sections explore the evidence for this point of view.

6.4.1 Young people and distributive justice

The work of Rawls (1973) has been influential in challenging liberal democracies to organise their political institutions so that the goods of a society (economic, cultural and psychological) are 'fairly' distributed. Without discussing the details of Rawl's (1973) principles of fairness here, it is interesting to note that young people expressed concepts of fairness about how resources are distributed on a macro-scale, about who is excluded and possible impact of inequalities with regard to their economic futures. Young people quite clearly have a perception of their future happiness and economic wellbeing and obviously this is important to them. For them personally, ending up with a "satisfying" or a "good" job was part of "success"

in life and therefore a critical role of school was to enable each one of them to achieve this. However, all the young people expressed very similar and nuanced views about qualifications and grades not in themselves being sufficient. Several of the groups wondered along the lines of Ahmed, Aaron, Abbas and Adarsh as to “whether there would be jobs for them to go to anyway”. Such a futures orientation is not surprising, but it did not preclude a wider concern about the macro-scale of social justice issues. It is interesting to note that eleven out of thirty-three young people in the focus groups stated during the course of focus group activities that schools were working in unjust circumstances because people had different access to resources at home and in school and had unequal levels of support from their families. Six of the thirty-three expressed a view that schools cannot and should not do everything for young people and that they either needed to be self-motivated, or that the problem lies with parents and society. This seems to indicate that many young people have thought about the parameters of justice and the limitations of schools as sites that can combat inequality in society. This is further reinforced by larger scale analysis of young peoples’ perceptions of justice in schools (Gorard 2008, 2011).

In the focus group scenarios about school governance and who should govern schools used in this research, all the young people cared very much about who ‘runs’ schools. They all felt that schools should not be run for profit, although two out of the nine groups welcomed outside businesses supporting professionals in schools. In Ash Tree School, Adarsh, Aaron, Abbas and Ahmed recorded in the scenario activity that companies should be able to “sponsor poorer schools, not to make a profit, but to make things more equal because schools like ours can’t afford all the latest equipment like computers.” In Cedar Tree School Cate, Candace, Cari and Ciaran believed that “communities should contribute knowledge not money to

schools because some communities had more to give than others” so “ it is not always fair for young people as some start with better resources than others”.

Chantelle, Charmaine and Christine argued that schools were “unfair for some people because many people have different backgrounds causing them to have restrictions on their contributions”. At the time of the research the proposed ending of the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA)¹ caused some animated discussion from the Sixth Form students present.

Of relevance to the links made in Chapter Five between exams, targets and data are the following observations made by students in Ash Tree School:

ADHITA: We think the government should run schools, and not, not companies because with them a lot of it comes down to profit

AMY: yeh and the amount of money they do actually make

ADHITA: and we said that, that it would turn out that you'd get like separate class like, class differences because schools would

AMY: Like, set up their own academies and you have to take exams to get in

ABIGAIL: exams to get in and

AMY: exams to get in but I don't think it's based on your knowledge, I think it's based on your background, who your mum is and who your dad is. So, like, if you're like, on free school meals, I don't, I think you are less likely than a son of a doctor to get into one because they, they want the best, cos they want the money

ABIGAIL: and the grades as well isn't it

ADHITA: and the grades get like, deceived, because like they can find a way of making the grades look better by getting rid of students before, and making them drop

[ABIGAIL: before they actually go on

[ADHITA: By making them drop subjects before they take exams

ABIGAIL: I don't think that's right

ADHITA: deceives better, deceives people, which is just wrong.

It is interesting to note their perceptions of links between social class and securing educational advantage and the ways schools might manipulate their intakes and results. These respondents use “deceiving” in a normative manner to express disapproval of systemic practices.

Therefore not only were issues of personal recognition and identity construed to be issues of justice but also, young people expressed concerns about the fairness of distribution of resources and opportunities especially in relation to social class. In light of researching the experiences of young people as learners within the practices of schools who seek to enact personalised learning, one has to question whether personalised learning has had any impact upon the micro-practices of schools in relation to what young people perceive as just and fair arrangements. As a vague and incoherent proposition it may well be that personalised learning was never designed to have such an impact (Hartley 2007a, 2008). However, the implication of the Gilbert Report (2006) is that recognition of the individual and their participation in the culture of schooling is central. Personalised learning on the evidence in this research has had little impact on young people feeling any more central to, and at the heart of, the practices in schooling.

As a wider cultural proposition, Chapter Two argued that New Labour’s personalisation sought to harness a supposed contemporary consumer ethos into driving reform. I speculate that this view of personalisation underestimates the motivation of young people to seek a more fulfilling sense of purpose beyond consumerism. A speculation that personalised learning underestimates the desires

of some young people to transcend purely selfish interests is supported by the views of young people in two ways. Firstly, on the curriculum they are offered, which they do not perceive to be answering their 'personal needs' in the 'social' sense, and secondly, in looking for some sense of community, as the next two sub-sections explain.

6.4.2 “Everybody is an outsider to somebody”

Ahmed, Aaron, Abbas and Adarsh provided this theme when they said that “everybody is an outsider to somebody and we should talk about cultural differences rather than just learn about different religions”. They went on to say that school should be about “meeting a variety of people, getting to know more about other cultures and having different experiences”. This was expressed in relation to being questioned on the purposes of school.

In regard to ‘wider needs’ that the personalised pedagogy attempts to address (DCSF 2008a) many of the young people across all three schools felt that citizenship and Personal Social Health Education (PHSE) were under-supported and insufficient as a preparation for “the outside world” (Bashir). Abida thought that “being with different people, different cultures and things” was a vital element of a democratic society and that schools in general did not do enough to help them understand differences, what Abida called “dealing with the really difficult stuff”. They all certainly wanted more difficult issues to be tackled in a concrete way (“things we see and hear”) rather than “textbook stuff” but they did not know whether teachers would be able to do that confidently.

Although sixteen of the research sample believed that among a school's primary purpose was to help young people gain good accreditation and qualifications in order for them to be economically active, and their schools were effective against this purpose (an average rating of 7 out of 10), equally significant numbers (twenty-two out of thirty three) believed schools should be attuned to wider questions such as happiness, interest, aptitude and teaching about citizenship and democracy. They rated their schools as less effective in these aspects (an average rating of 4 out of 10 in this respect).

To begin with all the groups in the research recognised that qualifications and good grades alone were not enough to get a "good job". Ahmed, Aaron and Abbas (Ash Tree School) reported that: "even if young people do well in their exams in the current climate it still might be hard to get a job". A sentiment echoed by all the other groups in different ways. Andrew, Alison and Abida (Ash Tree School) questioned whether all the knowledge they were taught was relevant and "all the stuff we get examined on, is it useful to us anyway? Schools are too focused on getting grades and there is no life teaching".

In all three schools young people reported similar feelings that school "is not just a place just to pass exams" (Chantelle, Charmaine, Christine Cedar Tree School). School should be about developing "life-skills and social skills" (Amy, Abigail and Abir, Ash Tree school) and "we feel that school is not just a place of learning but a social experience" (Chrissie, Cheryl and Christopher, Cedar Tree School).

The “life skills” aspect was interesting in that all the groups commented both in general on the lack of teaching these, and a few groups furnished some details. One detail was that there ought to be more “preparation for the workplace” and that their work experience was insufficient. For example, four groups felt that teamwork was important, two groups that being independent and getting yourself to a workplace was not the same for everyone and some were held back by their home backgrounds. Another detail in relation to this was that five of the groups thought there should be more lessons on financial management skills. Although some young people in Beech Tree School thought this was being done and had got “really boring”. Caitlin summed it up as the need to develop the capacity for bearing the responsibilities that one faces after school:

“I think, obviously like when you leave school you then, get into the big world you can have a vote and you can have a say, and people will listen to you, especially like in the world of work and stuff like that, and I think school doesn’t prepare you for that amount of responsibility and doesn’t prepare you, for like what’s coming, and what opportunities you can have in like, later life.”

Therefore, despite different emphases, a wider need for these students was support to be more socially and economically adept, rather than just pass exams, and to tackle the difficult issues of being an ‘outsider’. This ‘need’ could well arise within current discourses of knowledge economies and flexible workforces and the personalised consumer, but the testimony does suggest a yearning on the part of young people to understand issues that transcend a sense of simply and selfishly needing to be personally prepared for future vagaries. There is a need for belonging in some co-operative community being expressed. Exclusion from such preparation could be read as a case of narrowing the opportunities to model and practice virtues of justice in relation to living with others.

6.4.3 The school as a “community”

Related to the aspect of the outsider is the notion expressed by young people that schools ought to be more of an inclusive community capable of handling differences. There was a perception that sensitive issues are not handled well. For example, bullying was frequently mentioned as an issue that young people perceived was ‘not dealt with’. Ciaran (Cedar Tree School): “like with homophobic bullying, it never gets talked about, it’s been mentioned previously, once or twice because it’s got quite bad, but nobody’s ever done anything about it”. When pushed further about why not, the feeling was that it was “too difficult to keep on top of”. Brenda, Baljinder and Brandy (Beech Tree School) reported that there was racist bullying (name calling) in their school and that if teachers overheard it or saw it then something was done “but it still carries on”. These young people were very forthright about the damaging effects of bullying and the isolation some pupils experienced as a result. When asked further about what more the school should be doing they felt that “lessons about understanding each other more” should be part of school life and that there ought to be more of a sense of “community”.

In the transcripts there is evidence that young people had a perception even in the smallest of these secondary schools that they were “too big” and “lacked a community feel” so that invisibility extended beyond the classroom into the institution as whole. The young people at Cedar tree School were particularly vocal on this point suggesting that communication and consistency through the school was an issue.

CIARAN: well, when I was standing out here, outside waiting to come in there was about five year tens I think and they were just pushing into year sevens and couldn’t care a less about what, about how they felt and there was a teacher standing behind them, watched what they did and didn’t do anything

CAROL: The senior management team are really good and there’s, like the senior management team are good, the heads of year, all the heads of year are

really, really good they work so hard, but the school as whole. It's like, there's not a community feel; it feels like, you walk through the corridor, I walk through the corridor just now and there's like people swearing and it's like, it's like, the culture of the school, is, negative

CAITLIN: I think people overall just want to build more of a relationship especially with the sort of hierarchy of the school, and like, so that people know them on a more sort of personal, because this school is a very, very big school and even being near enough the end of year eleven there are still people in my year that I've never spoken to or never known any of them, and there's just nothing, there's just, I think it is the communication, there's no, like even, there's just no communication between people especially like teachers, teachers are like such and such can I do this because my other teacher said that, "well no because I don't know who that teacher is" there is like, but you work in the same school you should know who you're working with

In this extract, there is a sense of system or culture playing out against the best efforts of individuals (students, teachers and leaders) to care and build relationships. For the Cedar Tree students their perception was that the size of the school worked against establishing good communications. But even in a much smaller school, Beech Tree, the sense of belonging or identity was not any more profoundly perceived. Witness:

I: But you didn't feel that, when they kind of give the school's achievements, you didn't feel part of that, you don't feel proud of that yourselves?

[All: No

I: No, so you don't think there's a sense of community about the school's achievements, you don't feel a sense of community, is there a sense of community pride in the school?

[BOBBIE: No Blossom: They want it to be but there's not

BOBBIE: No they just do what they got to do, we do what we've got to do, well the headteacher just tells us what's happened and we've just got to make it better

Both the Beech Tree and Cedar Tree students made several comparisons to what they thought occurred in neighbouring schools (a 'grass is greener' approach) and were therefore quite critical of the lack of both the community sense of belonging and shared responsibility and personal relationships within the school. None of the Ash Tree young people seemed to make any such externalised comparisons. The Ash Tree students were all sixth form students in a newly established centre and

some of them seemed to place value on school as a place where “good friendships and communication skills were developed” (Andrew, Alison, Abida, and Adhita) and where “supportive friendship groups and team work skills were important”.

It is interesting to note that some of the young people in the sample thought that there was limit to what schools could do anyway and that families and young people themselves were also responsible for making ‘things happen’. Adhita, Amy, Abigail and Abir, thought “opportunities to be happy are not always there in life anyway and you have to make the best of it. Families contribute to optimism and it’s not just the school’s job”. Chantelle, Charmaine and Christine reported that “sometimes there’s too much help, schools can’t do everything people need to make their own mind up and choose to do things”.

Some young people expressed a strong desire to see the school as a community that promoted just practices of inclusion and recognition of differences while other students argued for a stronger sense of individual responsibility. These differences notwithstanding, I argue that there is a sufficient weight of evidence to suggest that these young people are more than ready and capable of expressing virtues that transcend self-interest. The final section of findings from the young people further reinforces this contention.

6.5 ‘Decorative’ and “twisted” voices and “things that matter”

Writers on young peoples’ participation have used the term “decoration” and “tokenism” to describe when an adult organisation uses young people because it looks good and will gain them some material or reputational advantage (Hart 1992,

p.9). In all three schools there were obviously mechanisms and means for young people to have views listened to and to feedback to the school, but there is also a clear sense of boundary against which they feel they are rubbing and a different set of priorities to the ones they perceive the school to be actually acting upon. In Chapter Five examples such as “we can open the windows” (Blossom, page 154) illustrated the sense of boundary as to what were ‘safe’ issues of dialogue. In the general democratic life of the school community young people expressed concerns that their ideas seemed to disappear or were in Aaron’s words “twisted”.

Without any prompting from myself, the decorative aspect to have been picked up on by young people and emerged in the course of conversations. Bobbie in the extract below refers to it being “a bit sly”:

BOBBIE: Like we was told about the *(talks about a funding stream the school had applied for)* and in, in English we had to make a presentation towards our grade but I found it a bit, like, sly, cos we had to make something up about the *(award)*, but really we were just doing it for our English, speaking and listening grade and after all we didn’t even get the *(award)*, but yet we was told “oh yeh we’re going to get it

While Blossom and Bashir defended the school, saying it was not the school’s fault for not receiving the award, they all agree that no feedback or negotiation had taken place as to the status or progress of their presentation and they would have liked more transparency. In Cedar Tree school, and completely unprompted, the young people also developed this theme:

CIARAN: well yeh in quite a recent experience we had to do an interview with a, our, body that would have given us an award for something, me and some other friends had to give a presentation about the world of work, basically, to get the school another award. But () doesn’t really cared what we did it for, and we never heard saying that we got the award, we never heard, thank you or anything cos they just want that award for the school.

Whether the schools had or not, the perception of these young people is that there is a lack of explanation and negotiation in some of the things they are asked to do that appears to them as almost arbitrary. As indicated in Chapter Five in regard to learner voice this arbitrariness seems to extend to unspoken boundaries to what can usefully be discussed in the running of an institution.

Extracts from all three schools provide examples of this. Although, one different comment was that “year sevens shouldn’t be involved in school council because they make silly, unrealistic suggestions” (Adhita, Amy, Abigail, Abir- Ash Tree School) and when questioned further this group thought that some students “were not mature enough”. A consequence being they perceived that if “they (*year sevens*) make silly suggestions then teachers just ignore them so the whole thing gets a bit ignored”. Extracts from the three schools:

Ash Tree School:

AARON: well we have school forums and stuff and school councils where there’s like a group on the forum and all the other kids in the school get to put their views to them, put through them, but I’m not too sure whether they have a large influence on what actually happens

ABIDA: like they say they’re going to something right but I don’t know how slowly, but it just like, it gets broken down, like nothing happens

AARON: our views get put through and they’ll be passed onto teachers or governing bodies or whatever, they’ll twist it to how they want it to be (*murmurs of assent from others*) so, so it’s not actually our views that are being put forward

Beech Tree:

I: yeh, ok, so, you have a school council system or means to get involved in wider decisions in the school?

BLOSSOM: We have like, student council, but I’ve never, I don’t know who our student councilors are for our form, they don’t, they appoint them, I think it’s ___ and ___ but they never leave form to do anything; they get just get the title and get the badge, they don’t have to, they don’t anything, like they, if you’ve got a

problem you complain to your form tutor and he'll, he'll e-mail our head of year but student council don't do anything and we've got Student Voice where you get, you get that look

I: Right, sorry, just to go back there, the Student Voice is that like a meeting?

BLOSSOM: Yeh, they just pick random people

I: Just at random they come into a class and say...?

BLOSSOM: Yeh, different years, just on, just on the same topic though, and I said er, I said something like, (*Blossom explains an issue in detail*) Instead of saying, "yeh, yeh we'll do that" it was like "yeh but can we do that? Can we, we can't do that" and I was like "well you've just asked me for my opinion and I told you" and he looks at me like he just hates me the whole, the whole of the session just cos I said we should have taster days; so..yeh, it kinda, yeh it doesn't seem to work".

Following my same question at Cedar Tree School:

CAROL: well I don't know

CIARAN: Well we sort of do, but it starts off at start of year people get chosen there'll be about a meeting every other week or so and then it would just stop really

CALUM: It starts to fall apart sometimes, because they say you've got to listen to the form and take notes and stuff and you don't really get that from the council and people and they don't like, in year 7 I was a school council

CIARAN: I was too

CALUM: and nothing really happened what we suggested so I went back to the form and like asked for some ideas and some stuff happened like we got some new toilets and they're kept in shape but not a lot else happened really

CIARAN: We did take things like school uniform and being, choosing things in lessons a lot of times and nothing ever really happened about it, we never really heard anymore. And they also think our, all of our form are friends, but it's not really that way, its all quite grouped there are separate people who don't like each other, which happens in every situation but, they don't take in that some people don't get on

I: Right, so, you mean they think that it's, oh just a group of friends getting together

CIARAN: yeh

I: and they think you're just having a moan or something rather than that being representative of the form

CIARAN: yep

I: yeh I'm with you

CAROL: I wasn't even really aware there was a school council, I remember in year 8 we had to like do elections for it and it was all a big deal then. **Nothing** happened, because, I think, I, I don't think the school just think "oh we'll just ignore all the students" I don't think that's how they think about it, I think, it just goes on the backburner, like "ah we will listen when we've not got an award to

win or when we're not doing this when we've not got exams coming up". So they think "oh we will do it but just not right now" and it kinda of, it, it, some of the teachers really value it, student leadership things but most don't really care

CIARAN: yep

Once more, a perceived inconsistency amongst the adult population of the school appears to be emerging alongside a certain sense of powerlessness ("nothing ever happens") in the forums such as School Council that is designed to give them a voice. Bobbie expressed a certain weary cynicism about the notion of free speech in the school:

"Teachers go on about us having freedom of speech, but we actually don't get the right to say anything and if we do we're never understood, our points are never made".

I employ the term cynicism because some young people felt that their voice was valued when it suited the school.

There was an example in the data of a school attempting something radical with the students and it 'backfiring' on the young people. This illustrates the risks that both schools and students take in their practices, but where the possible consequences and parameters are not always transparent to young people. In this example Bobbie and Blossom talk about being giving feedback about staff applicants (a practice the headteacher was proud of).

BOBBIE: When I was in year 9 I did, one teacher, he did get it because he was really good, but when he came in he was so different to what he was, when he, when he, when he was interviewing; he did so much more stuff –don't laugh (*the others laughed at hearing the name*) when he was in interview

I: So he performed for the interview did he?

BLOSSOM: Yeh, when he got it he just got out the whiteboard and when we did it he went this, this and this I went "ok right then" (*laughs*)

BOBBIE: See what I mean they just do anything for a job

Bobbie's cynicism in the last comment reflected for me a general sense 'weariness' about some of the practices of all three schools in relation to an authentic notion of voice or dialogue about issues given that adults exercised the ultimate power over them. The young people expressed that they were happy to accept boundaries and limits but that they would like them explained or negotiated rather than imposed, and that there was this feeling of being 'used' on occasion to further purposes that they felt were the school's but not theirs.

The relevance of this theme to social justice and personalised learning is potentially manifold. Just as learner voice was muted, so to is the notion of a democratic voice that works towards an expansion of social justice through "prefigurative practice" to some wider concept of the common good (Fielding and Moss 2011, p.149). Although the 'common good' is only narrowly conceived within the human and social capital arguments of personalised learning and New Labour's Children's Plan, even a 'thin' reading of social justice would presumably agree that young people should feel valued and connected to their school communities and that decisions affecting them are transparent and 'fair'. The research data in this thesis demonstrates that even the thin experience of justice is inconsistent for the young people. If one accepts the prefiguring argument (Fielding and Moss 2011) as a 'thicker' version of social justice because it models what one might call the democratic virtues, the habits, engagement and responsibilities of democratic exchange, then young people are rendered as mute and invisible here as they are with pedagogic voice.

Democratic voice was certainly an aspect of their school that young people in this research were passionate about engaging with. Caitlin, from Cedar Tree School,

argued above that schools should prepare students better for the opportunities and responsibilities of participating in the democratic life of society. In her view: “the school should provide more, definitely, opportunities to take on the responsibility” that goes with decision making within school, “especially the big, big, decisions”. Carol then added that:

“We need to have say, not only in the kind of the things like the uniform and so on, we need to have say in what we do, how the school works and the structure of the lessons, **we need to have say in things that matter**” (emphasis added).

Carol seems to articulate a developed political consciousness and was quite vociferous about how school and students should meet more often, on a large scale if needed:

“We should have big meetings where we can discuss things with the school, get the whole school together in the hall if necessary and make people do it and then really listen to what we have to say”.

Carol believed some teachers would see this as wasting lesson time but she felt more dialogue throughout the school was essential if it was to be a “positive culture”.

For the young people in this research, “things that matter” could have been a ‘watchword’ of personalisation that pursued social justice within the pedagogical relationships of the classroom. In applying ‘authentic’ models, practices and curriculum content to personalise learning, schools could have drawn upon young peoples’ potential for thinking ‘beyond me’ (“things that matter”) to develop some sense of civic community. However, the drive in contemporary schooling has in Carol’s experience led teachers to consider the wider democratic practices of schools as “wasting time”. If personalised learning as a strategy did not intend to prescribe detail about the micro-practices of school cultures, as a policy proposition

it seems to have done little to impact upon the recognition of young people as individuals with a strong interest in more democratic dialogue within schools.

6.6 Reflecting on the data: Procrustean schooling?

Chapter Three presented an argument about the managerial character in organisational life in modernity (following MacIntyre 1994) and the consequent differences between manipulative and non-manipulative moral modes. By manipulative modes I mean essentially practices whose effect, if not intent, is about proving the effectiveness of schools as an institution to ensure their 'marketable' reputation rather than defining and developing richer and more personally meaningful learning experiences for their students. Young people, in all three research sites, felt alienated from target setting regimes that were supposedly designed to personalise their learning. In this chapter the testimony of young people reinforced a sense of alienation from core practices of the school. This research suggests that Procrustean schooling policy underwrites the predominant mode of practice in schools as experienced by the young people: schools operate in continua of moral modes from non-manipulative to manipulative. The young people express a sense of being manipulated to the one sized bed of Procrustes, in this case exam attainment and school reputation as signified by these standards.

The students perceived unfairness in learning practices that lacked those virtues that would constitute what Taylor (2003) would describe as an authentic experience. In Carol's testimony above about the way schools target certain groups of people and feelings of exclusion, one wonders if this is the direct consequence of New Labour's practice of funding targeted initiatives designed to deliver outcomes, for example targeting groups such as "Gifted and Talented". However, even if this were

the case it does not explain why key relational qualities such as trust and care, which immediately suggest themselves as virtues within a personalised education system, are rarely experienced by young people.

In this research, trust and care came through as key human qualities sought by young people. For example, Cedar Tree students thought that the school is afraid of giving students “too much freedom” but that more mutual trust was required and that consequently the school would “work much better as a community” (Carol).

CIARAN: they're assuming that we're going to behave badly

CAITLIN: they don't give us responsibility

CAROL: we would trust them more if we had more of a say

In earlier extracts Carol had indicated that some teachers and senior management “really, really cared” and “care” came up as a quality that ‘good’ teachers displayed in all the three schools. The young people admired teachers that I would characterise as having a mode of integrity. These teachers laid down what students perceived as fair boundaries and negotiated with them in ways that indicated mutual respect. Integrity is also displayed in the virtues of: teacher constancy- “they’re always there for us”; honesty - “he tells it like it is”; courage to listen – “she asks for feedback but most of them don’t want to hear it” or “they’ll get involved in debates with us”; and care and compassion “some of the staff really, really care about us, they really do”.

In the life of the school beyond the classroom there are again glimpses: “some of the senior management care about what we say” and “we do have some opportunities for a say” BUT “most of the time they don’t listen to us”. The glimpses

of wider moral agency exercised by teachers and senior managers through embodying certain virtues are just that –rare moments in the young peoples’ stories. The experiences of the young people seem to indicate their sense of invisibility to the institutions. Allowing for the possibility that adolescents will find something of the adult moral order and the discipline of schooling naturally repellent, their experiences were highly convergent across the three schools and suggest that if this is how they choose to tell their stories then this is how they also experience them in their school lives.

Gunter et al (2010) - building on Fielding’s (2006b) typology- suggest that schools where trust is negotiated and built as an integral part of a model of personalised pedagogy are in the minority given the instrumental demands of governance upon schools. The data in this thesis bears some witness to this argument. However, it also testifies that the young people in the sample have all experienced respect, trust and care from certain of their teachers and that this indicates a degree of moral agency is available to adults within schools to extend virtues of ‘excellence’ over effectiveness in their teaching practice. Young people experience what they describe as ‘good’ teaching and therefore, ‘good’ here is imbued with normative connotations of relationships that respect some enriched notions of learning.

Therefore with these arguments of agency, virtues and moral modes of manipulation or non-manipulation I draw together the stories of the young people and the work cited from MacIntyre, Nussbaum, and Taylor to construct a figure that summarises the tensions between moral modes of practice experienced by young people and what they could and ought to be. The presentation is not to suggest a ‘solid state’, but modes of possibilities that school practices might be found to adopt. Using the

competing values model of organisational life, this figure follows the rationale of elements being in tension and possibly existing within the same institution. Schools may differ in their balance of positions both between and within themselves. In responses to Bobbie's assertion (Beech Tree School) that "you're only taught in only like 2 (*out of 6*) lessons a day something properly", there is an urgency to suggesting what teaching practices *ought* to be other than as they are currently experienced. But the Figure also illustrates the complexity of teaching practices in schools and is used to highlight the importance of linking moral modes in the practices of schools to possible impacts upon social justice beyond the school gates and for arguing that personalisation served too narrow a dimension of justice.

Figure 6.1 summarises the tensions presented through the stories of the young people in this research in relation to a policy enactment some six to seven years in its life course. The policy of personalised learning was a putative story of change and innovation, promising radical implications for these students. But if there are any innovations delivered, and this is uncertain, they do not seem to be ones that are 'owned' or understood by students. As Chapter Three outlined, a social practice requires the virtues to extend and partly define its standards of excellence, and practices are housed within organisations. The competing values model is once again employed in this Figure because there are certain things an organisation needs to do in order to not only to survive but also to enable standards of excellence. For example, control as a necessary adjunct of stability in a public sector organisation's life does not necessarily mean manipulation and lack of care. Order and continuity as well as innovation are required in schools and a just, non-manipulative practice of order is one that would be transparent and negotiated with students. Young people in such orders would feel that care was an essential virtue of control. Several of the focus groups wrote comments along the lines of that they

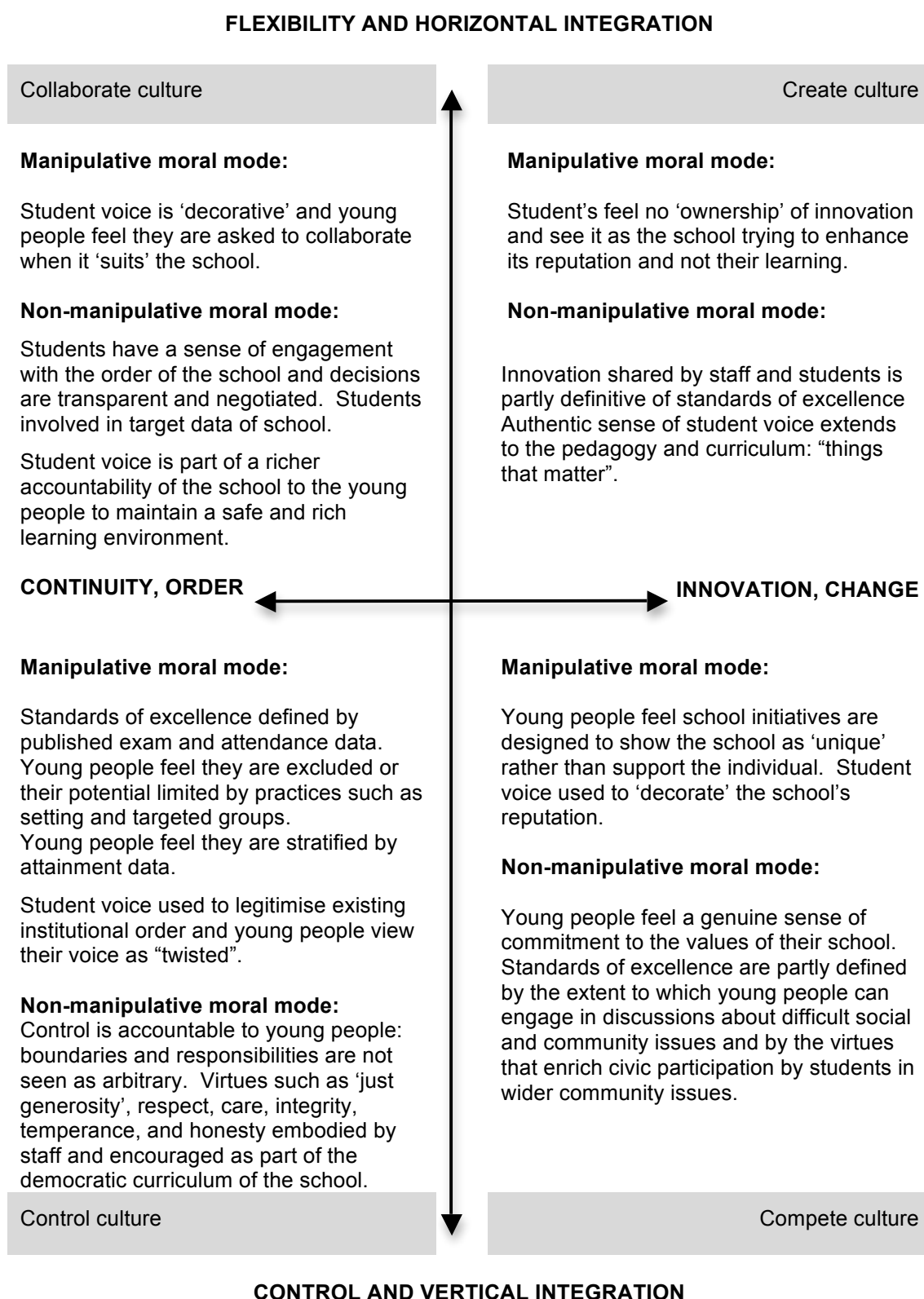
do not mind adults making decisions on their behalf as long as these are “explained” and seem “fair”. They would like far more negotiations, and less of what they perceive as arbitrary impositions. In the testimony presented above, for example, issues such as uniform seem to be points of dispute that young people see as meaningless to what makes a ‘good’ school.

‘Negotiated order’ is, from the fieldwork of this thesis, more likely to be the least manipulative practice experienced by young people as they are invited to collaborate on certain aspects of the running of schools. The young people indicated that they would like this voice to be extended to “all things that matter” but to do so would require schools to enrich the exercise of virtues such as those discussed above into an authentic engagement, especially over issues of pedagogy and learning. So for example, where innovative practices in relation to student voice or leadership may be in evidence, such as in the “create” or “compete” quadrants, they are either perceived by young people as ‘decorative’ and manipulative, or they are about gaining competitive advantage over neighbouring schools and/or enhancing the reputation in the local community (see also Maguire et al 2010 for similar findings). A competitive model within an organisation’s outlook encourages reputation building but it does not by necessity undercut the notion of virtuous practice. After all, an organisation’s reputation for excellence is presumably to be valued in a community and a competitive urge to enhance this may well do so, but the evidence from this data is that young people viewed schools as ‘collecting’ trophies, awards, and letterhead logos in a way that had little connection to either their personal sense of value or their connection to the school community. Bobbie stated above how she found the exercise of their voice in going for an award as “sly”. This latter testimony would indicate a more manipulative mode on the part of the school within the competitive quadrant. A more virtuous approach may have

been if Bobbie had been party to the understanding of the process and its purpose. Again it is important to stress that this summary of the data is more likely to describe a continuum than a binary: there maybe other occasions when the school was far less manipulative in its moral mode and this research did not uncover the evidence.

This figure about the tensions between manipulative and non-manipulative moral modes of practice is relevant to the question of social justice and policy because it locates the institution as a critical local site for engaging individuals in richer debate and practices about human goods, and thus about justice (MacIntyre 2001, 1999a). It would seem ironic if children and young people are not involved in devising a personalised experience of schooling (Gunter et al 2010); an authentic form of voice could contribute to a practice in which connectedness and transcendence are in harmony with developing the autonomous citizen (Starratt, 2003). The goods embodied in these relationships are critical to establishing a young person's sense of efficacy in democratic processes and relationships that are constitutive of just communities and by extension just societies. This contention parallels arguments made elsewhere in relation to prefiguring social justice and democracy (for example, Fielding and Moss 2011; Gorard 2011; Oser et al 2008).

Figure 6.1 Manipulative and non-manipulative moral modes in the practices of schooling in relation to young peoples' participation and the competing values model of organisations



Given the weight of evidence from the testimony of young people in this research, their experiences suggest that Procrustean schooling is an apt metaphor in that their voice is often exercised within manipulative moral modes of school practices designed to maintain the institution (contrary to expectations of personalised learning). More virtuous, non-manipulative modes were available and evident, but inconsistently experienced by the young people. Personalised learning is a proposition to move schools away from 'one size fits all' solutions to learning and education. On the evidence in this research personalisation either made little impact, or it tended to reinforce the pre-existing Procrustean nature of schooling. The next chapter explores the testimony of headteachers, who are uniquely placed between government and young people, in order to understand something more about why a more developed sense of moral agency of both teachers and students is possible within schools but is not largely experienced by young people.

6.7 Summary

In Chapter Five it was argued that there is a difference between effectiveness and excellence and that in pursuit of targets for individual students excellence in the internal goods of education was often sacrificed to the external reputation of the school. The invisibility and muteness of learner voice as perceived by those learners indicated that the purposes of schooling ought to be further extended and that some teaching practices they encountered hinted at this possibility. In further enriching the purposes of education as a means of social justice, the data in Chapter Six suggests that young people desire an expression of the virtues of social justice and democracy in their relationships with teachers and the institution. The data further suggests that their desire for something beyond their self-interest could

be drawn upon to provide a richer content to their school curriculum and democratic participation in key decisions of the school.

While acknowledging that the complexities of social determinations and constructions have not been explored in this thesis, it is suggested that an account of virtues in relation to enriched concepts of excellence in education can develop moral agency within schools to pursue more just practices. The virtues of just generosity, independent practical reasoning, care, trust, and those I summarised under integrity (courage, honesty, constancy, compassion and respect) are examples of relational qualities that if practiced more extensively in the relationships of teaching and learning would serve to prefigure wider civic qualities of justice. Young people more fully engaged in learning through experiencing and developing such virtues are likely to experience non-manipulative moral modes of practice. Social justice in wider society is more likely to be served by non-manipulative modes of moral engagement.

Some of the reasons for young people inconsistently experiencing virtuous practice in this sample may lie within the tensions of governance and New Labour's construction of 'modernisation', for which personalisation is a key rubric. The next chapter therefore explores the dilemmas and negotiations that heads faced within this policy environment.

Chapter Six footnotes:

- 1) EMA: Educational Maintenance Allowance: Piloted in 1999 and introduced nationwide in 2004 as a grant paid to 16-19 year olds from deprived backgrounds to encourage their continued attendance in school. In England, some 650,000 young people received EMA in 2011 - 45% of 16 to 18-year-olds in full-time education. It closed in January 2011 and was replaced by 16-19 Bursaries that are to be administered by schools to those they perceive as most in need.

CHAPTER SEVEN

PERSONALISATION: THE STORY OF MODERNISING SCHOOLS, HEADTEACHERS AND COMPETING VALUES OF GOVERNANCE

7.1 Introduction

This chapter's theme is New Labour's project of modernisation. If personalisation can be seen as a rubric for public policy reform, with one motif being the citizen-consumer, and its purpose as social justice, then it is also a rubric designed to capture a sense of the 'new', of New Labour as a party of innovation with a distinct political position (Newman 2006). The concomitant ideology of modernisation through the rubric of personalisation is now explored in the stories of the headteachers and how they positioned themselves within New Labour's models of governance.

Chapter Two describes how New Labour presents personalised learning as a proposition about 'tailoring' to 'individual needs' and therefore presumes both a process for the tailoring and a conception of needs as the ends of this adaptive movement. The proposition turns out, as critics feared it would, to be empty of new content (White 2006) but the personalised metaphor of 'tailoring' performed a significant role in the textual construction of modernisation that sought to distance itself from the past and look toward the future under New Labour. Constructing an ideology of modernisation was a crucial feature of New Labour policy making constructing a 'with us or against us' discourse that swept public service administrators along in its reforming zeal (Clarke et al 2007; Newman 2006). The relevance of the point for this research is that personalisation is a critical motif in what is argued to be ideologies of modernisation. Modernisation comes to define

the territory within which headteachers are accountable and through which they have to conduct many strategic negotiations. One key expression of personalisation as a modernising rubric is its gravitational pull to rational goal models of governance (Newman 2006); but it is a tendency that competes with other values of public sector management and thus explains some of the confusions reported by headteachers about the policy of personalised learning.

The argument once again draws upon the competing values mapping tool as outlined in Chapter Three but in this chapter takes a specific adaptation from the work of Newman (2006) to illustrate how concepts of governance are informed by competing values. In this thesis I argue that the centre of gravity in the way New Labour structured school policy, undercut its supposed 'radical implications'. A predominant rational pragmatism (Newman 2006) colonised personalised learning and framed school practices that were infused by governance tending towards continuity and a technical rationality that excluded other repertoires of ethical practice.

The fate of the innovation implied by the redesign of pedagogy and organisation through personalised learning, is governed by the mixed outcomes of these tensions. This in turn effects the narrative contexts of young people as they negotiate their civic identities within schools. To construct the argument the chapter firstly (7.2) takes up the theme of 'personalisation and modernisation' by examining the literatures and then linking this to the testimony from interviews with headteachers. The chapter then illustrates how policy relevant to personalised learning can be mapped against the competing governance matrix (7.3). This mapping is explained in more detail and illustrated by the testimony from the headteachers.

7.2 Personalisation and the modernisation of public services

The identities of citizen and consumer were quite boldly aimed at overcoming what New Labour saw as previously inbuilt dichotomies in the 'system', or 'bureaucracy', of public services. The public realm was to be reinvented by New Labour and communities valued as sites of solidarity and tolerance:

"The purpose: to rebuild the public realm, to discover amongst the modern pressures, the virtues of community, of tolerance, of decency of respect. To bring to the self interested consumer age, the values of solidarity. Not to cease to want the best for oneself but to wish it for all" (Blair 2003, unpagged speech).

These sentiments would appear to resonate with the arguments for a conception of virtues in the previous two chapters. However, these statements of values were qualified by the expression "for the modern world" (Blair 2004 a, b, c) and it is New Labour's particular construction of 'the modern world' in which 'consumers' are prominent that represents a critical difference.

New Labour sought to maintain a sense of public service with its values of "altruism", "equity" and "universality" (Blair 2004 a, b unpagged) and defend public services against the free market:

"But the authors of the failed neo-conservative experiment have not given up. It is still their absolute priority to show that public provision is inherently inefficient, unresponsive and second rate" (Blair 2004a, unpagged).

Prime Minister Blair was careful to distance New Labour from the notions of 'markets':

"That is not to create "a market" in the sense that whether they can go elsewhere, depends on their wealth - the private sector market solution" (Blair 2004a, unpagged).

The Blair government stitched onto what they saw as the social-democratic battle against neoliberalism notions of choice that were ‘different’ because they were drivers of equality and were beholden to “public accountability” (Blair 2004a, unpagged).

“Diversity and contestability in public service provision, both between public service providers, and bringing in the private and voluntary sector adds to the choices available and creates strong incentives for more personalized services” (Blair 2004a, unpagged).

The rationale for this proposition is that the world and people have changed so professionals are exhorted to recognise this ‘fact’ since public services must:

“...not only survive but thrive in a world of rapid change, of increasingly complex needs and of ever more demanding people” (Blair 2004a).

Further consequences of these propositions are explored in Chapter Eight, but what New Labour has constructed is a view of the modern world and its inhabitants – “demanding people” that creates an ideological hegemony to suggest to public service professionals that firstly there is no alternative and secondly they were either for the reforms or against them (Newman 2006). Given Miliband’s dilemma of creating culture change without being centrally prescriptive (DfES 2003a) it is understandable that rhetoric and exhortation is used to strategically present a message that prescription or not, the ‘culture’ must change. Personalised learning as ‘tailoring’ to individual need is presented as ‘common sense’, after all who could find anything to argue with, as there is “something inherently redundant about the concept of personalised learning” (Paludan 2006, p.83).

The ‘tailoring’ argument in personalisation performs a dual role for the policy: it attempts to distance itself from the past by giving its educational language the modern vocabulary of technical competence, standards and equity, but the

consumer choice aspect of tailoring is aimed not at the young people but their parents and guardians. As a metaphor 'tailoring' is not new or modern. There are precedents in the 1944 education settlement that talk about social justice and tailoring to individual children in very similar terms, the New Labour policy of personalisation speaks therefore to the failure of this settlement. So for example, we find that the 1945 "Children's Charter" talked about citizens of the future, preparing them for the new scientific age and building upon the new knowledge (Jones 2003) in ways that are redolent of the Every Child Matters agenda (H.M. Government 2003). Ellen Wilkinson, Minister of Education, wrote in 1945 about the new kind of schooling that would be needed, characterised by "laughter in the classroom, self-confidence everyday eager interest instead of bored uniformity" (quoted in Jones 2003, p.24).

Further, in the foreword to the 1947 pamphlet "the New Secondary Education" Ellen Wilkinson suggested that "everyone knows that no two children are alike" and that "the curriculum must be made to fit the child and not the child the curriculum" (Jones 2003, p.26). The 1944 Education Act claimed to shift from the inequality of the nineteenth-century school to being the "birthright" of all children in the twentieth century (Jones 2003). For New Labour read the shift from twentieth to twenty-first century schools.

The preliminary hermeneutic point is that New Labour policy language is obviously aspirational, an electorate would expect no less, but its declamatory vigour seems to mark it out as modernising phenomenon. For example, The Children's Plan is replete with phrases such as the need "to make England the best place in the world in which to grow up" (Balls 2007, p.3). In addition, the personalised learning texts

are full of both reassurances to the profession that this is within their capacity and with injunctions about what is required from schools. For example, “personalisation is not new” it is something the best schools “have always done” (DfES 2004a, p.5; DfES 2005a section 4.2) (read –your school can do it too). Further: “every school will need to realise the vision of a 21st Century school” (DCSF 2007, p.146) (read – not only can you do it, but you must). Therefore, the language of personalisation is redolent with phrasing that denotes certainty, brooks no doubt and invites its reader to enjoin the fact of its existence. For example:

“This debate is THE big idea in education today. If you talk to people in this country about personalisation and get through the jargon, they’re excited by it” (Miliband speech to headteachers 2005b, p.11).

From The Children’s Plan:

“In the best schools in the country, excellent classroom practice has already established a pedagogy and culture of personalised teaching and learning” (DCSF, 2007, 3.54, p.63).

The phrasing of denotation also employs very physical metaphors (“stretching” and “vigorous”) that exhort the reader to join the movement of progression towards the vision. Read for example:

“The distinctive feature of the pedagogy of personalisation is the way it expects all pupils to reach or exceed expectations, fulfil early promise and develop latent potential. Personalised lessons are stretching for everyone. At the heart of personalisation is the expectation of participation, fulfilment and success. The hallmarks are ambitious objectives, challenging personal targets, rapid intervention to keep pupils on trajectory, and vigorous assessment to check and maintain progress. There are clear plans to support those who do not or cannot maintain trajectory” (DCSF, 2007, p.64).

Modern New Labour thus rhetorically distances itself from the failures of past educational reform through its ‘vigour’ and ‘challenge’ using personalisation as a departure point for the new journey.

The supporting actors in this narrative also contributed their versions of the modernising agenda. Hargreaves likened the term to customisation (Demos 2004b). The analogy used here is that the old Ford factory only turned out one model of vehicle in the colour black, but now modern production produces a range of options on the model, suited to customers needs. By analogy, schools should set about customising, or personalising, their offer to young people (Demos 2004b). Some commentators went beyond this formulation to argue for the “co-production” of public sector “scripts” by their users (Leadbeater 2004a, in title). This argument has also been influenced by a new wave of business thinking (interview evidence from the Innovation Unit, Rogers 2008) who drew upon Zuboff and Maxmin (2004). In the supporting texts and policy documents there is declaimed the notion that education in the 21st Century needs to meet the demands of a rapidly shifting, global knowledge economy (see for example DCSF 2007; 2009b; Leadbeater 2005).

This modernising agenda created further points of confusion following the urgency with which policy makers attempted to distance the political concept of personalisation from notions of ‘child centredness’ in personalised learning. Indeed it was often easier for policy makers to say what personalisation ‘was not’. Policy deliverers stressed that personalised learning was not “a move away” from the standards agenda and “neither is it a return to child-centred theories or letting pupils coast along at their own pace or an abandonment of the national curriculum” (David Hopkins then head of the DfES Standards and Effectiveness Unit, 2004, p.8). A point emphasised several times by ministers (for example Miliband 2004, 2005a,b) and expressed by Charles Clarke (Secretary of State for Education October 2002 –

December 2004), as personalised learning “is not a vague liberal notion about letting people have what they want” (Clarke 2004, foreword).

There is good evidence to suggest that ministers, as policy makers, were very sensitive to media perception and were “endlessly briefed” about whether policies would “be seen as leftist” and “seen as lacking in ‘standards’” and in the face of such doubts would often ignore evidence for other policy decisions (Mick Waters, former QCA Director interviewed by Bangs et al 2011 p.77). The Great Debate initiated by Jim Callaghan’s Ruskin College speech in October 1976 on education following the William Tyndale Primary school controversy¹ and subsequent furore in the media seemed to have left an indelible mark on succeeding policy makers (Bangs et al 2010; CCCS 1982). The consequences were that the curriculum was not off-limits to politicians and that ‘child-centredness’ was associated with progressive methods that lacked standards and rigour in the modernising drive of New Labour.

Personalisation as a political concept therefore translated into some confused thinking in the form of personalised learning. The linguistic tenor of policy documentation sought to corral and enthuse the profession through presenting a ‘modern’, contemporary discourse of personalised learning while trying to distance itself from a past series of educational concepts that New Labour viewed as ineffective and inadequate.

Writing about urban schooling in the 1970’s Grace (1978) identified in middle class conceptions of schooling the conflicting ideologies of “liberal pragmatism” (“salvation

through management”) and “liberal romanticism” (overcoming pupil alienation through “the meeting of individual needs” and “creating the conditions for self-expression”) (pp.54-55). To read the policy documentation of personalisation is to be struck by the resonances to these ideological classifications and to argue that despite the discourses of 21st century knowledge economies these ideological tensions still exist.

I suspect that as labels, ‘self-expression’ and ‘liberal romanticism’ would not be recognised by the headteachers in this research, but the notion of meeting ‘individual needs’ and the ‘whole child’ would be and draws upon long historical roots in which liberal romanticism is a precursor as I will argue below. Personalisation certainly appealed to the headteachers’ sense of ‘child-centredness’ (Hartley 2009) in providing a wide set of educational values and New Labour in adopting the metaphor of ‘tailoring to individual need’ certainly played to those values.

For example, headteacher John Collins had “welcomed” the advent of personalised learning; he “liked the umbrella term” since it chimed with his educational philosophy with the focus on the individual within a “broad and balanced curriculum”. The National Curriculum as an entitlement was important to John Collins but it “needs to be individualised, that matches the range of aptitudes and interests of pupils”. He supported the Every Child Matters agenda and saw that as co-existing with ideas on personalisation. Dave Richards expounded a concept of learner ownership with the emphasis less on what schools knew but what learners would know and do in order to both have control of their learning and demonstrate their mastery of it. Four of the other six headteachers had some notion of “knowing the individual”, the “whole

child” at the heart of their explanation of what they thought personalisation should be. Sandra Burt believed “knowing the whole child’ was critical and Jane Arthur talked about an “individualised approach to the school experience” meaning more than what occurred in lessons. Jim Williams and Julia Osborne stated that personalised learning was a focus on the individual’s “needs”; in the case of Willow Tree School the head believed that understanding how students learnt, their “preferred style” was important. Julia Osborne, while mentioning “preferred style”, incorporated “personal ways of looking at things” and “personal circumstances” into an individual’s needs, thereby providing a broader definition of valuing individuals than learning style.

A ‘modern’ conception of teaching in New Labour’s notion of personalised learning was first the incorporation of ‘learning styles’ into pedagogy and then multiple intelligences (DfES 2004b; Miliband 2006). Only one headteacher embraced these psychological notions in detail. Jim Williams of Willow School gave examples of how individual learner differences might be expressed (for example, “some learners prefer diagrams and some lists”) and then accommodated within the classroom. His model of personalised learning was based upon a psychology of individual difference further extended by a meta-cognitive view of young people needing to acquire “critical skills” such as “reflection” “self-knowledge” “problem-solving” that are considered part of a suite of ‘learning to learn’ skills. What flowed from this model in the school is a continual search to improve pedagogy in order to “hook the learner” into the lesson. This focus is of a piece with the school’s “drive to raise standards of attainment” and “raise aspirations in the young people” to go onto higher education. Other heads expressed more caution about psychological models such as learning styles, Julia Osborne was wary “of all the jargon that goes with these things”.

The strong emphasis from the heads was on a notion of individual potential reflecting what I labeled in my data reduction as a 'Romantic' theme; it reminded me of Rousseau (2000) and relates to the characterisation of a cultural approach to the individual as unique and autonomous in their own right and needing a 'holistic' milieu that is somehow opposed to the regulated and technical Enlightenment models of human development. For Jane Arthur, Sandra Burt, and Julia Osborne education in this model is about developing and valuing that sense of individual distinctiveness to its "full potential" and personalisation is about how the school expresses those values. John Collins specifically used the term "holistic education" in relation to a personalised provision. Jane Arthur promoted the ethos of "personal best" to help define the "uniqueness" of the school, and Sandra Burt used "child-centredness" to reflect the school's mission to understand and value the varied cultural and family backgrounds of the student population. However, unlike the associations that might be made with the Eighteenth Century, anti-Enlightenment, Romanticism of *Émile's* upbringing (Rousseau 2000), there is a distinctly contemporary flavour to their models. For example, for Julia Osborne, "releasing individual potential" is part of an "ongoing focus of raising standards of attainment", a view reflected by all the headteachers.

This contemporary flavour is also reflected in strong views about the curriculum and its role in personalised learning. Sandra Burt was insistent that a focus on "needs" was not to be seen as "dumbing down" and that "challenging" young people's aspirations and a challenging curriculum was a vital component. For example, she welcomed the new English Baccalaureate (E-bac) as providing challenge and standards for young people that would enable them to be on "more of a level playing

field". Unlike Sandra Burt, John Collins did not welcome the "E-bac", seeing it as forcing schools to adopt a "content driven" curriculum structure that closed off options for some young people. The emphasis for John Collins in personalising learning is in providing 'breadth' to cater for individual interest and aptitude while maintaining "balance" to reflect both the social values and moral underpinning of a national curriculum and the acquisition of essential life and work skills. Dave Richards also expressed strong views about curriculum choice arguing that young people should be more in charge of their own learning and that it was not schools that should specialise "but kids should". (Referring to his disagreement with the Specialist Schools movement).

For Dave Richards the learning process and learning opportunities were the starting point. Independence was a key feature of his model with learning as a continuous process over which the individual had to have both control and also develop a sense of "mastery". The school had embarked on a number of projects to enhance "student understanding" in each subject area. For this headteacher "mastery" in subject knowledge and skills was almost indefinable, "unquantifiable", but could be recognised in the classroom with skilled observation, questioning and discussion. This model was far more reminiscent of Dewey (1991) than Rousseau (2000). Dave Richards expressed exasperation about the narrowness of assessment and the attempt to "quantify all learning" to the detriment of students' independent learning. John Collins also expressed a regret in relation to personalised learning and government policy. He had an interest in 14 -19 curriculum reform and thought the Tomlinson Report² was a "wonderful opportunity to shake things up a bit" through emphasising skills and processes in learning, and regretted that "the government are really keen on going back to a knowledge base".

Therefore there are some interesting tensions within the strategy of personalised learning that are emerging in the testimonies of headteachers. Personalisation appeals to some identification with the 'whole-child' or the young person in a broad sense of need and value. This identification reflects a variety of heritages: psychological discourses about preferred styles, Romanticism in valuing the whole child, a Dewyan emphasis on independent use of critical thinking skills, learning mastery and meta-cognition. Set amongst this is a modern vocabulary about raising standards of attainment, not 'dumbing down' and differences of opinion between the heads on the shape and emphasis of the curriculum. The headteachers all conveyed a sense that in their desire "not to write off any child" (Jane Arthur) and to "see all children has having potential" (Sandra Burt) schools have moved on and are not prepared, as Dave Richards put it, "to be complacent". However, whether this sense of urgency is due to personalisation is doubtful. Rather, it tends to reinforce Hartley's (2009) argument that in personalisation not only is there an appeal to teachers' child-centred orientation, but also, in the policy of personalisation, there is something for everyone. The consequences of this position for schools in modernity will be explored further in the next chapter.

One consequence for practice in schools is that while the modernising agenda promises much through intuitive appeals to school headteachers, the content has produced muddle rather than reforming strategies. Only Jane Arthur referenced a specific personalised learning policy document (DCSF 2008a) that had been used for their school improvement work as a planning and evaluation tool. There are several examples in the interviews of a sense of "so what" or confusion about the introduction of the policy.

Jane Arthur said that she thought it was “a confused agenda” with “a lot of heads thinking ‘so what?’ Isn’t this what we’re doing already?” This headteacher thought personalisation was something that ought to be taken seriously, partly because it chimed with her educational values, partly because the networks she was involved in were discussing it and partly because they were under serious scrutiny to improve attainment results and therefore needed to “pay attention to policy initiatives”. However, the lack of clarity and confusion around practice meant that as a school they were not sure whether “they were doing personalisation or not”. This lack of clarity was to some degree reflected by Sandra Burt who believed that “a lot of people had jumped on the bandwagon without really being aware of what it meant”. For Sandra Burt personalisation was “knowing your children really, really well; and I think it’s a concept that’s been bandied about for a very long time but to me it’s just common sense really”.

Perhaps these two headteachers are exemplars resulting from what Dave Richards described as a void in policy direction. Dave Richards had taken a far more proactive role in the early days of the personalising learning debate because of an existing interest in looking at student voice and curriculum choices. For this headteacher the difficulties in this policy area was one created by a “political void”: the policy was now “lacking a centre”. Personalisation had become “meaningless”, “unwieldy and bloated” because the government had failed to specify what exactly they meant by it in practice, and in the confusion a number of different elements were tacked onto it. Therefore, schools were “making what they will of it” and while elements like AfL were seen as important for this headteacher, they did not necessarily “belong” in the concept of personalisation. The challenge for Dave

Richards is to define the concept as something “more radical and far-reaching” than currently expressed, but Rowan Tree’s headteacher fears the opportunity has now been lost.

The testimony of the headteachers in this sample certainly reveals no desire on their part to render the young people ‘invisible’ within the school, far from it. These headteachers may also be typical in this of other heads. From one interview, Jenny Jones of the NCSL, there is good evidence to suggest that headteachers were trying to adopt personalisation but found the “most difficult bit, and the bit they struggle with is student voice”. Jenny Jones was relaying this evidence to me from a survey the NCSL had conducted with “around 2,000 heads”. Although Jenny Jones felt that “the majority of headteachers” claimed to have understood personalised learning and felt it to be important:

“...there is a sense across the country that this is not really well conceptualised in schools. Headteachers don’t fully understand and state that they don’t fully understand it”.

In the NCSL survey Jenny Jones thought nearly all headteachers believed student voice to be important but “expressed anxiety about it, about whether ‘they were doing it right’. Whether it was meaningful”. One reason for this anxiety is that “workload is cited as a barrier”. Another Jenny Jones believed is:

“The issue school leaders have about compartmentalising initiatives, and seeing them as separate and competing and not seeing the gestalt of the whole, they just struggle to see it”.

One could argue that New Labour’s policy story employs terms such as personalisation to package simplicity and gravitas, to ‘decompartmentalise’ policy strategies. Personalised learning paralleled personalisation in public service reform

in that it becomes a rubric for the 'modern' and the 'new' and these "linguistic signifiers" are "intended to bring added potency" to the reforming agenda (Newman 2006, p.53). In personalised learning one can see a narrative of New Labour's adoption of the discourses of consumerism, knowledge economy, and globalisation as providing the 'imperative' for schools to change (Newman 2006). However, I argue that the competing values framework enables policy analysis to integrate a view of New Labour modernisation as movements of paradox and tensions that exacerbate compartmentalisation of policy. For example, one value dimension is that of control and stability. In the case of student voice being a challenge to some schools, Jenny Jones was quite clear that power and control is a value issue:

"Because they know, deep down, if they open up student voice. As they really want to or should be doing, what will that do to the dynamic in the school, and I think they worry about where control and power will then lie."

This notion of retaining control is reinforced through the value messages of New Labour who took great pains to stress that personalised learning was not a return to child-centredness. However personalisation's appeal to child-centred values served to highlight the lack of content and radical strategic centre. Thus student voice pulls in the direction of open and creative cultures but does so not in harness with the need for control and stability. 'Voice' becomes compartmentalised as not only one more 'initiative' but also one that is viewed by school leaders as not necessarily going to politically advance the standing of the school in relation to central audit. Therefore, in relation to the positioning of young people as explored in the previous two chapters, the political tensions contextualise the pedagogical muddle. This in turn, doubtless frames the inconsistency experienced by young people in securing a strong voice in learning and their perception of their value as passers of exams for the school reputation.

7.3 Competing values of governance and personalised learning in schools

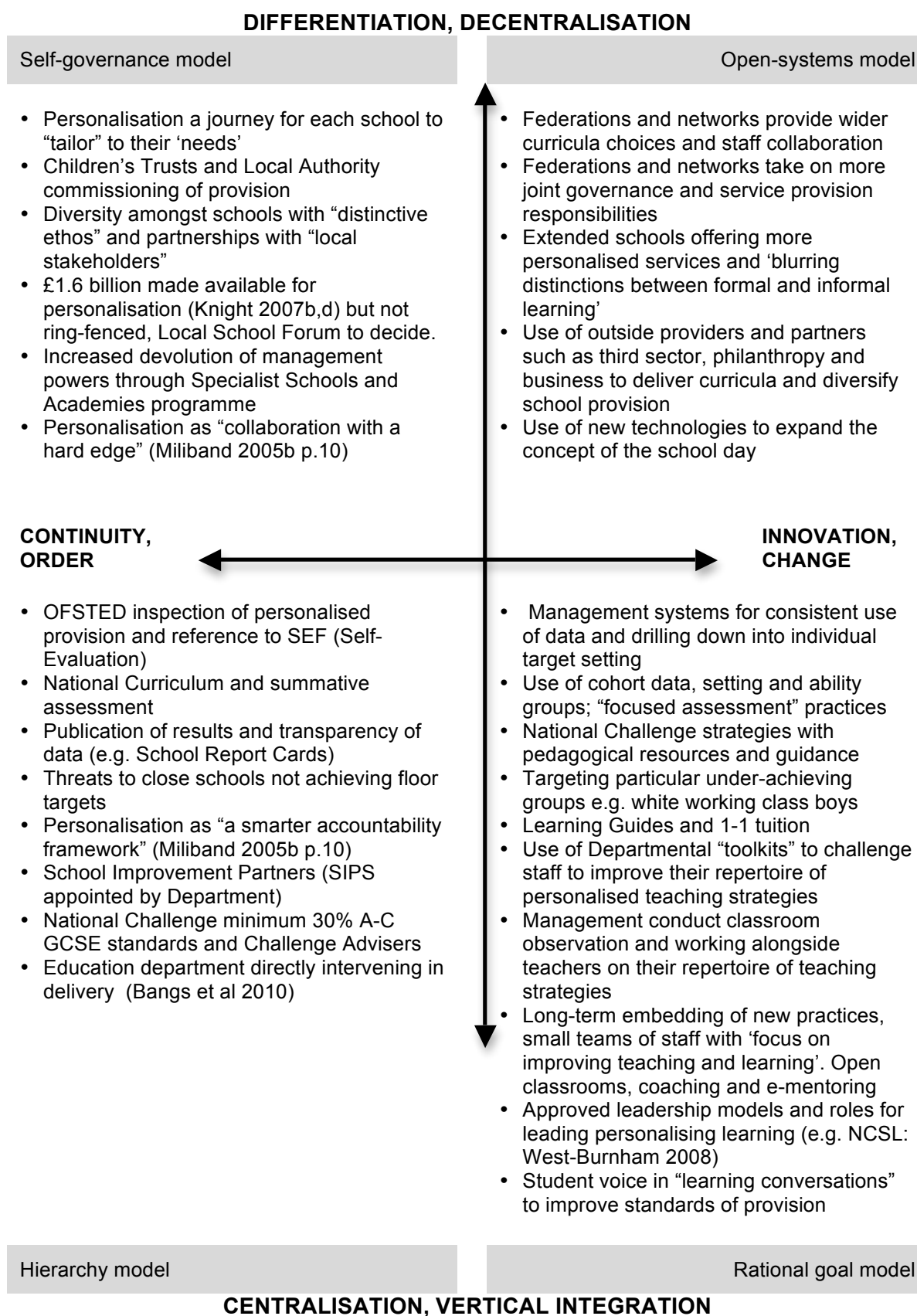
Contradiction in policy enactment is exacerbated by the competing values within governance and the questions of where control for policy enactment ultimately rests. This argument is further explored in the next section, which uses the policy literatures and the reflections of headteachers to present the case. The key argument is that schools need to both innovate and change, and, create stability and continuity; there will always be a tension between these poles. However, accountability regimes and modes of governing schools are also in tension between local self-government and central government direction. Personalised learning represents a case where such tensions might undercut its drive for social justice. For example, Miliband wanted a “viral strategy” (DfES 2003a, p.2) for schools to spread personalised learning on their own, but was driving up schools standards through a centralised pull in policy making with consequences for heads who failed to match up to expectations. Headteachers in this sample acknowledged the freedoms they had to lead their schools and professed to push innovations but alluded to being to be ‘hedged in’ by external forces such as accountability demands of governance, the local community and how far and fast they could “take staff” with them. There is a great sense of pragmatism in this sample of headteachers (for example, “you have to choose your battles carefully” – Jane Arthur) that can be located very strongly within rational goal models of governance.

Governance is a relevant concept because it seeks to describe the processes by which management of public services is being reconfigured in different ways and is therefore critical to the role the headteacher adopts in schools and the negotiations they make in delivering policy. However: “Governance literature is slightly confusing in its conceptualization of governance” but there is a growing sociological interest in

governance as a political strategy for the state to restructure itself in response to changes in its external environment (Pierre 2000 p.3). Essentially, and for several reasons, it is possible to recognise how an increasing variety of actors and institutions are involved in activities that were once the provenance of the centralised state, the analytical arguments arise over the precise roles of the state in co-ordination (Pierre 2000). Hirst (2000) analyses five different usages of the 'governance' and Rhodes (2000) seven definitions; these usages range in application from corporations through to public administration. As this thesis is not about governance *per se* all I wish to say at this point is that the phenomenon of how policy is delivered and translated is not a simple policy chain from education department to young person, thus 'governance' is a relevant notion (Newman 2007).

I am drawing upon the competing values framework (Newman, 2006, see chapter Three for more background) in order to analyse the effects of governance, and ideologies of modernisation, in producing tensions within the work of headteachers as seen through the lens of personalisation. The framework is similar to the competing values model of organisational life in that there is a matrix with "two dimensions of difference" (p.33). In previous chapters the vertical axis represented degrees of control and vertical integration versus flexibility and horizontal integration. In this chapter Figure 7.1 uses the vertical axis to represent "the degree to which power is centralised or decentralised" (p.33). As in previous diagrams, "the horizontal axis represents the orientation towards change" (p.33). Figure 7.1 is constructed to better understand the tensions and paradox of governance that might be related to the inconsistencies of young peoples' experiences and the undercutting of personalised learning as a 'radical' reform agenda. Following Figure 7.1 is an explanation of each quadrant.

Figure 7.1: The competing values model of governance in relation to personalised learning (adapted from Newman, 2006)



Following Figure 7.1 above, the analysis proceeds through an explanation of each quadrant in turn is illustrated with testimony from the headteachers.

The Hierarchy Model as characteristic of top down, centralised models, in this case central government exerting control directly, with a high audit culture made visible through mechanisms that reflect the “audit explosion” (Power 1994, 1999). Writing before the advent of New Labour, Power (1994) is nevertheless prescient about the way that modern audit cultures relegate trust in the purposes of the organisation to the actual activity of providing accountability itself. In this case, schools driven by the “terrors of performativity” (Ball 2003, p.215), expend considerable energies proving themselves to central government through, for example, delivering the National Curriculum and statutory assessments, published results (“league tables”), through direct instruction from the Department via the School Improvement Partner (SIP)³ and the threat of closure under the National Challenge Strategy (DCSF 2008a,b)⁴. All of these factors audited and reported publicly by OFSTED inspections. This investment in accountability produces managerial mechanisms about how staff are employed and performance managed (Power 1999). While this centralised tendency is counteracted by the construction of the “enterprise narrative” in schools, encouraging a more independent and entrepreneurial governance (Ball 2010, p.1), audit regimes exert the most powerful gravitational pull on the practices of schools. Indeed, to become more ‘entrepreneurial’ a school has to be seen as more efficient at meeting the externally imposed audit criteria and therefore conducts a greater amount of effectiveness auditing.

New Labour’s top-down “deliverology” (Barber 2007, p.112) contributed to the fact that schools operated under the “obsessive” and “pathological” pace of New Labour public service restructuring that made no space for evaluation or consideration of

the effects of this “hyperactivity” (Pollitt 2007, p.531). In the case of personalised learning Miliband (2005b) called for “a smarter accountability framework” (p.10) which meant a school had to provide effective self-evaluation that demonstrated to inspectors that pupils were not left “to coast at their own preferred pace of learning” (Miliband 2004, unpagged speech). Hence the requirement for the data gathered by schools. While there has undoubtedly been a drive to become more effective at making sure that young people are not neglected or ‘written off’ because it is easier for teachers to do so, one wonders what the long-term effect on more innovative learning practices has been.

The pressures on these headteachers to conform to central government are very great; not just in terms of audit and accountability but also in the requirements of the curriculum. Dave Richards caviled at the “reductive nature” of the curriculum and what teachers were constrained to do. For example, he lamented that the A- level syllabus was “anti-intellectual” and “so teacher directed” that “perversely some primary kids show greater independence than our A- level students”. This seems a clear instance of a headteacher arguing that hierarchical modes of governance have undercut the scope of personalised learning as a project of student independence and engagement.

However, there are some different ways of interpreting how this centralised pressure may be consistently reproduced through notions of autonomy that seemingly push towards more self-management. The literatures suggest that the headteacher as a professional is offered autonomy but her behaviours and outputs have to be approved by the New Labour discourses of the modern leader (Gunter and Forrester 2008). In addition, headteacher strategies also have to be approved at

the micro-level by staff, governors, parents and the geographical community. The latter is certainly reflected as a 'pull' in this research sample. For example, Sandra Burt stated that the previous school had "a bad reputation in the community that we are constantly having to fight against and market ourselves". Dave Richards added that they worked in "a conservative catchment area, so any curriculum reforms have to be handled very carefully. They like to see the 'traditional'".

Stemming from symbolic interactionism, some work in the sociology of education looked at how actors had to negotiate meanings and develop strategies both to survive and maintain their sense of value and that these strategic orientations impacted upon the practices within schools (Woods 1982). Headteachers have numerous tensions to negotiate in their work, and their testimony in this research sample was replete with pragmatic negotiations they felt had to be made between what they would like to do in regard to personalised learning and the "reality of it really" (Julia Osborne). All the heads remarked about the having to 'filter' and 'sift' the volumes of directives coming from the department. Julia Osborne stated that she "had policies coming out of my ears" and pays attention only to those that she believes will "benefit the kids". In this statement there is a sense of creating the 'insider perspective' as in we know best about "our kids".

While this viewpoint fits with the concept of negotiation, the creation of the insider-outsider "binary" (Thomson 2010, p.8) can be analysed from a different perspective. Thomson (2010) uses Bourdieu's (2010) perspective of field, habitus and practice to argue that the work of headteachers as agents in the schooling field revolves around the reproduction of certain types of privileged cultural capitals and knowledge. In the conditions of contemporary schooling:

“Headteacher agents in new times must therefore be expert at playing according to the codified rules of audit, management and markets, which individualise, through the use of data, the performance of each teacher, each head and each school” (p.15).

In this analysis the desire of headteachers to exert their autonomy, to assert a sense of ‘we know what’s best’, is part of the ‘game’ in which the headteacher is driven to:

“...operate according to the rules of the game as they stand. It works to make agents not only manage the field, but also compete over what is at stake – not to change the rules of the game or the knowledges, dispositions and strategies that constitute its winning formulae and its contribution to the wider mission of the state and the field of power. In other words, headteachers must not simply massify/democratise, but also hierarchise” (p.16).

In this analysis the concept in play is not so much a negotiation between competing tensions but an assertion of self-management that in effect reproduces the hierarchical reproduction of privileged cultural and economic capitals. There are certain echoes in the mode of critical suspicion employed in Thomson’s (2010) analysis to the moral arguments about the manipulative modes of the characters of the ‘manager’ (MacIntyre 1994) discussed in the previous chapter. However, MacIntyre (1999b) suggests that there will always be a moral tension between “socially embodied points of view, between modes of practice” (p.318) but moral agents have an obligation not to be a “co-authors” of a divided individual state of being (this is why the virtues of integrity and constancy are important). MacIntyre (1999b) describes an “indispensable moral maxim’ as:

“Always ask about your own social and cultural order what it needs you and others not to know” (p.319).

As I use the competing values framework as a conceptual tool, what Thomson’s (2010) use of Bourdieu’s work challenges me to ask is how far are headteachers reproducing the hierarchical mode of governance – however unwittingly and counter-intuitively? I will go on to argue below that the degree of autonomy offered

within the rational-goal model of governance can certainly advance the reproduction of the 'game in play', for example, the seemingly rational and modern modes of data gathering and performance management.

MacIntyre (1984) does not deny the existence of powerful social forces but argues that our moral responses to them are fragmented and incomplete because the ethical languages available are fragmented and incomplete. It will take a very strong and collective sense of practice and telos for headteachers to assert modes of governance that do not reflect the contemporary educational cultural climate. I speculate from the small sample in this research that there is something of the "game they are in" (Thomson 2010, p.6) being reproduced through the "rational goal model of governance" (see below) with its emphasis on the technical and the 'pragmatic'.

The Rational Goal Model is typically short-term orientated, pragmatic in needing 'to get things done', managerial in its rationalism, centralised but also expecting some local management of change; crucially here, there is a notion of a delivery chain running from Whitehall. From the early days of New Labour's Standards and Effectiveness Unit (SEU)⁵, they were driven by a need to "scale up" reform speedily and could conceive of this only as driven "unapologetically top down" (from an interview with Sir Michael Barber, conducted by Bangs et al 2010, p.19/20). The DfEE became a delivery agency in a manner that contrasted to the previous role of civil service in advising and framing but not directly intervening (Bangs et al 2010). Although desiring not to be prescriptive in advancing personalised learning the rational goal model of policy making is an extension of New Labour's 'top down' delivery through making local headteachers more accountable to central control via

the audit of targeted ('rational') guidance. 'Toolkits' and guidance are provided to support local management and autonomy but are part of a controlled delivery mechanism that exudes pragmatism in moving quickly to drive up standards of attainment.

For instance, inspection takes account of how far department frameworks and guidelines are evident in practice, especially where standards of attainment are found to be low. For example in personalised learning, central government frameworks such as the National Strategies produced guides and resources for personalised learning (DfES 2007). "Specific teaching and learning models" are advanced (DfES 2007,p.4) along with a "One to One Tuition Toolkit" (DCSF 2009a, title). The Children's Plan (DCSF 2007) exhorted the use of data and targeted intervention for specific, underperforming cohorts of students, for example white working-class boys, ethnic minorities at risk of failing, those with special educational needs and so on. Student voice was proposed as a rational and logical means to secure children and young people's engagement in the school improvement process (Gilbert 2006; DCSF 2008a). NDPBs also contribute guidelines and toolkits to this strategy guidance process. For example, through ministerial direction (Knight 2007c), The TDA⁶ (2007,2009) produced teaching "standards" for personalised learning and guidelines for the professional development of teachers that referenced this; Becta⁷ (2009) produced guides for ICT and personalised learning. Leadership skill-sets and checklists for personalised learning were constructed by the NCSL (West-Burnham 2008; Spencer 2009).

All these standards were indicative of New Labour's belief in a delivery chain that could modernise and reform through giving "toolkits" (e.g. DCSF 2009a, in title) to

local managers (Newman 2006). In this process evidence that might contradict or confuse this rational-goal model was either ignored or shielded from ministers (Bangs et al 2010). For example, among the key components of personalisation was assessment for learning (AfL) (DfES 2004a) but New Labour in their assessment rationales were little interested in the research on AfL and its implications for either school organisation or the status of statutory assessments (Bangs et al 2010) and misused the original principles of AfL (Hargreaves 2008).

So in the case of personalised learning, innovation was to be driven by the rational construction of targets, planning checklists, the systematic use of data and funding mechanisms for 1-1 tuition that was in the control of approved leadership practices at the local level. These practices are also subject to central governance pulls through audit mechanisms of OFSTED and the transparency of this data to the 'public'. The citizen-consumer is also given a toolkit through the purported transparency of data and inspection reports; the threat of parental 'exit' is thus conceived as a rational-goal model for schools to follow central policy rather than take what might be perceived as risky educational decisions.

The rational goal 'measures' designed to enable parental choice and exit impacted upon young peoples' stories about the role of their voice. The young people mentioned pressures of exams and time that negated dialogue on "things that matter" (Carol). The balance of rational goal models in terms of exercising seemingly pragmatic and technical control within the governance of schools comes to the fore now. The practice of headteachers with regard to learner voice is severely weighted by the 'rationality' of data collection, evaluation and publication. This is illustrated by the role of learner voice in the pedagogic process itself. AfL

was seen by five of the six headteachers as an important component of personalised learning and Jane Arthur, Sandra Burt, Julia Osborne, quite specifically linked AfL to data analysis, targets and pupil tracking. In Jane Arthur's words AfL was "wrapped around" target setting and specific interventions. For instance, Ash Tree School used a "red list" system to alert them to students who required "rescue interventions" to "bring them back on track". Beech Tree School worked a lot on the "fine-grain" of their data.

Sandra Burt stated that: "I think good schools personalise the learning as a matter of course; but, but it all depends on the quality of your data and what you do with it." For Sandra Burt then the challenge was "not to dumb down" and to "make sure every child flies high" and using "quality data is an essential part of "getting that level of challenge for each child right". Sandra Burt expressed the fear that personalising through simply responding to needs would lower expectations. For Sandra Burt, a consequence of this for personalisation was that teachers should be "differentiating" lessons in different ways, not just by outcome. Setting was used in some core subjects but the quality of the interpretation was for her about "getting to know the whole child". In this instance data then provides a manageable and condensed means of rendering the child visible, a technical solution to providing information from which to base teaching strategies and to demonstrate to "the outside world that they are improving". The value placed in the whole child is aligned to means rationally manage the process of raising exam pass standards through the 'fine-grain' of data.

Julia Osborne seems to echo this view and talked extensively about "massive amounts of data" and using data to track individual pupils. The data was available

to teachers in lessons, described as “a plethora of information”, and would include students’ personal targets and non-academic information if considered relevant. A great deal of effort is spent on converting this data into targets “that the pupils can own” so that the “you could walk into a classroom and ask the pupils where they were and what they had to do to improve and they should all be able to tell you”. Oak Tree School was not one of the young peoples’ research settings so that this view was not tested out. However, in Ash Tree, Beech Tree and Cedar Tree Schools there seemed to be little evidence of students ‘owning’ their targets.

Two of the headteachers were not so focused on data and targets in a discussion on personalised learning. John Collins mentioned the data in passing, pointing to the wall and saying “we have the usual tracking charts and stuff that all schools do” but was more focused on working “alongside teachers to improve the quality of teaching and learning”. Dave Richards stated that “of course we do the AfL things, target setting and so forth and all the usual things, they’re still important, but they’re not, in my view anyway, not what it’s all about”. Thus tensions emerged from negotiating their legal requirements and their educational models. For example, Jim Williams talked about having “to improve their contextual value added scores while doing what’s right for the kids” reflecting something of Dave Richard’s frustration with “a reductive national curriculum that we have to teach, which isn’t always about learning at all”. John Collins thought there was going to be a “squeeze to negotiate” between learning skills and learning content and between providing more vocational opportunities while being judged by more “academic criteria”. Jane Arthur was working hard on changing their pastoral systems to make the “school experience more personal” for the diverse range of social need they felt their pupils have but was worried about future changes to the qualification structures against which they

might be judged. The headteachers seemed keen to convey a sense of pragmatism: “we try and make it work in our way” (Julia Osborne).

“Pragmatism” is a hallmark in the rational goal mode of governance and notions of ‘reality’ and ‘the possible’ in this sample cohered not only around data but also around notions of order, resourcing and budget. Despite their emphasis on individual value Jim Williams and Julia Osborne felt classrooms with twenty-five to thirty students in were difficult places to manage and teachers could not expect to cater for every individual preference within a lesson. Jim Williams expressed concern that curriculum choice led to timetabling difficulties and that the “order of the school had to be considered when moving large numbers of kids around corridors on a big site”. The school had a big site and he felt “a lot of time and energy was wasted” on managing order. This had led the school to look at ways to arrange the timetable more creatively and they took advantage of freedoms in Key Stage Three reforms⁸ to do more cross-curricular work. For Dave Richards the curriculum choice element is not so much between subjects, for that also in his view is difficult to organise wholesale, but within subjects so that students develop a greater sense of independence and self-directedness in what, when and how they learn.

However, heads who were trying to be more innovative around curriculum arrangements faced pragmatic resource problems. Cedar Tree’s school budget was under severe pressure and maintaining some courses with low number of students was just not viable and some BtEC⁹ options had been cancelled. There were two further issues here, one was timetabling, since not all student requests could be accommodated in a viable timetable. Another was travel, for some students

additional costs would be incurred to attend outside sites and neither the school nor parents were in a position to financially support his.

The order of the school was also rationalised in terms of staff performance. Interestingly, personalisation was seen by heads as an opportunity for innovation, but encouraging staff to change is a process full of paradox and tension that 'managerialism' attempts to render 'scientific' (MacIntyre 1994) or is "hierarchised" (Thomson 2010, p.16). For instance, Jane Arthur cited the slow pace of change in schools and that it is "never where you want it to be" and having to "bring staff with you" in a large staffing complement. Sandra Burt reflected this when she talked about the hard work needed to get consistency of good teaching between and across departments. Jim Williams talked about the difficulties of shifting "traditional subject teachers" into being more "child-centred" and thematic in their approach. Julia Osborne said she had taken over an "underperforming school", there "was a lot of complacency" and her leadership was about moving teachers "from good to even better teaching". Heads also expressed that teachers were working extremely hard to deliver a national curriculum and innovating on the back of it took time. One of the points made by Jim Williams in relation to leading staff through policy change was that "teaching is a high pressure job" and he wanted to maintain a "work-life balance" for his teachers so that they were "not overloaded with constant new initiatives". As a senior management they would look at "an initiative like personalised learning and just take the important bits for us out of it" and then work on those. Here again is the notion of 'sifting' policy but in relation to an order and rationale of 'performance' that is a given by the demands of maintaining order and discipline in classrooms (the 'traditional') and by becoming effective at improving exam results in which the rational goal models of audit cultures pressures time for innovation, risk taking and trust amongst teachers.

This is particularly evidenced in how the rational goal model of central control, exercised more locally and pragmatically, provides a sifting mechanism in the form of auditing processes made available to government scrutiny. Four of the six of the headteachers cited the use of OFSTED criteria to improve staff. The means of doing this seem to be fairly consistent between five of the six headteachers. Ash Tree, Beech Tree and Oak Tree schools specifically mentioned aiming to move the majority of lessons from OFSTED criteria of “satisfactory” to that of “good” and from “good to excellent”. The impression from Julia Osborne’s interview was that Oak Tree School had spent considerable time on this. They began by producing “golden lessons” in their departments – an “all singing all dancing lesson” that was observed by senior management. As teachers “would die of exhaustion” if this was done continuously, only “underperforming ” or newly qualified teachers are now required to produce one. All the schools talked about “learning walks’, coaching methods and how subjects are continuously reviewed on a half-termly cycle per area, so that the whole curriculum is reviewed over two years. John Collins remarked how professional development methods go in cycles and needs “refreshing after a bit because things get tired”. A key for him was “on attention to detail in lessons” and “making teachers more aware of what they have to do”.

The ‘detail of lessons’ and the corralling of targets and data contributed to working towards raising the exam results of their schools. The headteachers subscribe to this drive not simply because they are audited on the results, and face the threat of removal if improvements are not made, but also because they make a moral case for all their pupils being as highly qualified as possible. These motivations are entirely understandable, but given the young peoples’ lack of identity with the focus

of the school on exams, one wonders if the rational goal model of governance undermines the kinds of innovation personalised learning might imply and serves to reproduce the 'business as usual' aspect of institutional life?

While the rational goal model seems to govern a seemingly uniform approach to raising standards, personalisation presents something of a conundrum in the views of the headteachers in the research. As the fieldwork was partly conducted under the coalition government, some headteachers, like Jim Collins and Jane Arthur, were wary of the post-New Labour E-bac (see Chapter Five footnote 1, p.164) and the narrowing of the curriculum choices for their students. For them, personalisation was viewed as a means to widen opportunity. Sandra Burt on the other hand thought the E-Bac provided more equality of opportunity through being a more rigorous and universal entitlement. While not a product of personalised learning and New Labour, the E-Bac represents the conundrums of personal curriculum choice and delivering universal entitlements that seemingly personalised learning did little to resolve. However, the differences of approach to the curriculum did not seem to be reflected in variations between the headteachers in technical attention to data gathering and classroom detail.

The constraints on getting teaching to be more expansive within a "reductive" curriculum model and assessment environment produce pressures on the place of young peoples' voices within schools. Ash Tree School had "experimented" with "student led days' where the lessons were largely led by the students with staff setting the framework. Jane Arthur felt that she wanted "to go much faster and further in student voice work". She felt that student voice is:

“ a great thermometer for staff; it’s a great thermometer that is listened to. But I still have the feeling that we’re at the stage of not fully embracing student voice to its maximum in the school; I still have the feeling that, that there’s a little bit of tokenism attached to it”.

Jane Arthur, Sandra Burt and Julia Osborne wanted to develop more student feedback in lessons and direct engagement with teachers, but felt they had to tread carefully, and “lead people gently along” (Julia Osborne); a sentiment echoed by John Collins. John Collins wanted to encourage more “action research with student leaders” but it “is difficult with the pressures on the curriculum”. John Collins expressed that he “was very excited about the possibilities of student leadership but agreed with one of the problems perceived by Jane Arthur in that “there is a large’ student body and however democratic or representative the school tries to make student fora she believes there are numbers of young people they “haven’t reached”. However, I got the sense of student voice being ‘something to have a go at’ and speculated in my research diary as to how far the implications of a focused and radical approach to ‘voice’ had been thought through.

This reflection was partly initiated by Dave Richard’s strategy that was very much focused on pedagogy. So for example, students and teachers would work together on researching what makes a good lesson. This focus on research skills is viewed not only as a means of “learning for mastery” but also for students in Rowan Tree to have a “genuine engagement” with the teaching and learning in the school. Rowan Tree School is not one of the case study schools so data from their young people is not available. In Chapters Five and Six some of the young people felt that their voice was mute on issues to do with learning, that schools like “to tick boxes” and that student voice was one such tick. Perhaps a focus on how authentic dialogue might be begun in relation to action research on learning is one such point.

The Self-governance Model is more orientated to the longer-term, building partnerships and fostering mutualism and to de-centering the locus of government. It works towards continuity and stability. Miliband's desire to create a culture change without central prescription has already been alluded to (DfES 2003a). The funding devolved by government through its Dedicated Schools Grant for personalised learning was left to schools to decide upon priorities for expenditure through the mechanisms of the Local School Forum (Knight 2007d). New Labour's advancement of the Academies and the Specialist Schools programmes were designed to provide greater local management and autonomy and also, diversity of provision to empower the parent consumer and render such localism more responsive. Although, as argued above, this pressure also exerts more centralised governance pulls. The competitive tendencies in admissions policies and distortions produced through middle class leverage in the system (Ball 2010) have certainly tended towards order, but not the universal equity of provision that Miliband (2004, 2005a,b) argued personalisation would produce (see Kerr and West 2010).

In terms of the content of personalised learning the 'journey' was always to be designed by schools themselves in reference to their local contexts (Miliband 2004). This probably had the effect of adding to the confusion among some heads about personalisation, attracted to the notion of raising individual potential but clear that the GCSE floor targets were how they were going to be judged. In such a lacuna, personalisation became graphic evidence of how policy comes to be constructed and disseminated through the phenomenon of "policy entrepreneurs" who float out of the "primeval policy soup" and become well positioned in the mix of policy makers

(Kingdon 1984, p.123). Chapter Two has already described the policy networks involved in elaborating concepts of personalised learning.

However, at the school level wider policy networks seem much more distant. Three of the headteachers mentioned gaining “some” knowledge about personalised learning from occasional SSAT conferences (one thinking their pamphlets contained “too much jargon”) and two of the headteachers reported using the NCSL for information and “refreshment of ideas” (Sandra Burt). Only Dave Richards had been involved in a national policy group for advising on the future of the personalised learning since he was interested in the area and had been innovating with curriculum reform prior to the announcement. Apart from this instance, the other heads did not feel as though they had been engaged in a “national conversation” (DfES 20004a, title) with central government or the policy debates. One head asked me to keep some of the details confidential, but essentially expressed the view that the department was not really interested in his ideas.

Through the policy entrepreneurs, policy is promoted and reinforced at a more self-governance level through the diffusion of those involved in debating and formulating it. The policy entrepreneurial element of self-governance was essentially aimed at rationalising and stimulating debate in schools about personalised learning and it spoke to marrying the intuitive appeal of personalisation for professionals to the hegemony of modernisation through appearing to be an ‘exciting’ debate exercising ‘innovative minds’. However, it seems from this sample that policy is not necessarily adopted directly from diffuse networks. This perception of the heads about not being part of a wider policy network is partly to do with the fact that many of them feel their time is too pressured to attend to the debates and conferences. But the

perception could also be to do with their view that these fora offer little different than what is already available. As Julia Osborne said: “I’ve got to keep my eye on the ball, here in school, a lot of these things that go on are not really relevant to the kids”. Personalisation certainly emphasises knowledge transfer and exchange but it is the rational goal tendency in governance that narrows the educational debate to short-term and pragmatic discourses: “being realistic” (Julia Osborne). The headteachers in this sample who were in National Challenge Schools seemed much more focused on “getting things right here first” (Sandra Burt) and were very mindful of the pressures to raise their GCSE attainment scores. They saw this as a necessary outcome, “a matter of moral purpose” (as Gilbert 2006, p.7, phrased it) but there is evidence in their testimonies to suggest that school’s practices were being pulled by the centre and by more ordered, rational models, of governance.

In a sense these headteachers seem to have constructed what Thomson (2010) has called a “binary” (p.10) of the outside world and the inside world: the headteachers alluded to the ‘real’ world of school and the more abstract and ‘remote’ world of policy makers. As stated earlier, the “bottom line” for decisions is “the needs of the kids” (Sandra Burt and Julia Osborne). Again tentatively, because more research needs to be done, the professed self-governance models of headteachers constructs a mode of practice that seems to be more conformist to the rational-goal model since the testimony of the young people suggests the practices are less accountable to students than to their school’s public reputation.

The Open-systems Model is more fluid and dynamic tending towards networks and dispersals of power from the centre. Much of the thinktank work described in Chapter Two drew upon network metaphors and complexity theory to locate

personalisation as part of diffuse and self-organising systems that are more innovative and flexible in both providing greater equity of opportunity and higher educational standards (see for example, Demos 2004a,b; Hargreaves 2007b; Leadbeater 2006). In the case of personalising learning, networks offer possibilities for choice and alternative provision, with groups of schools gaining possible advantages through collaborations and cost sharing in order to be more creative with their curriculum choice and pedagogy. Thinking is offered for ICT as a potential personalised tool that could liberate schools from conceptualising their social practice as a series of bounded timetable slots (Paludan 2006; FutureLab 2009). Extended Schools provision that uses a variety of 'enrichment' experiences and draws upon alternative providers wider partnerships, is also offered as a means of personalising the school offer (Gilbert 2006). Radical examples of the use of ICT as a means of personalising learning are being advanced that require little or no input from organised mechanisms of school governance and are more aligned to de-schooling arguments (see for example, Mitra 2010; KhanAcademy 2012).

However, such developments in open-source ICT solutions were not in policy thinking. Miliband (2005b) describes personalisation as offering possibilities for "collaboration with a hard edge" (p.10). In other words schools collaborating can further support pupils' 'needs' but collaborations need to demonstrate that such partnerships are impacting upon improvements in exam attainment. Evidence in the literatures suggests that the 'hard edge' of accountability is not a great incentive for open collaboration towards innovation and tends towards more competition than co-operation and entrenches risk aversion (Kerr and West 2010). There was little evidence in the sample of this research for radical thinking in open-system governance that might presage different learning routes for young people. John Collins talked about collaborating with other schools and colleges to pool facilities to

widen the curricula choices available for young people. Dave Richards saw opportunities to be more innovative within the federated model of governance in both staff development and the personalisation of the curriculum offer. Unlike the other headteachers in this study he proposed a radically different model of development, based on that of action research consciously adopted from “Japanese work study” methods, in which groups of teachers and in some cases young people, study a topic in groups for a year. So in this case they looked at how young people learn and how lessons could be made more meaningful, which for Dave Richard’s was at the heart of personalised learning. This appeared to be a more concentrated holistic approach to their practice, a setting of the agenda rather than a ‘filtering’ of initiatives. This research practice was being extended across schools in their federation. Although one might interpret this as an innovative and open-systems model of governance, it could be an example of ideological modernisation through the reculturing of internal school relationships, the ‘democratisation’ of school development, in order to better ‘sell-on’ governing regimes (Hartley 1999). However, in Dave Richard’s story I interpreted an amount of resistance to being ‘governed’ by the centre and a sense of agency directed towards extending more radical versions of schooling. More longitudinal research would be required to examine the ongoing policy logics and the local capacity of such innovations as those Dave Richards is proposing.

In principle, personalisation, via the citizen identity, should work towards more open and self-managed models of governance, less centrally directed (Miliband 2004), more community and young person orientated and co-constructed (Leadbeater 2004a). Also via the consumer identity, similar tendencies should in theory be at work, with choice pressurising schools to be more immediately sensitive to the market and therefore more self-managing, open and collaborative, involving local

communities and 'consumers'. However, while networks and collaboratives may show signs of delivering more equitable outcomes through widening choice and resource, the evidence is as yet inconclusive (Kerr and West 2010). The heads in this sample talked about collaborations and partnerships but only Dave Richards had begun more extensive explorations of a federated arrangement. He saw huge advantages for young people in being able to have access to more diffuse range of provision than a single school could provide. However, it has been argued that the contemporary discourse in education about networks, by reducing them to simple metaphors of knowledge exchange and transfer, both impoverishes conceptions of human relationships and ignores questions of how power and privilege are maintained (Frankham 2006).

While headteachers talked about the partnerships and collaborations they were in, most of them, apart from Dave Richards, seemed more orientated to either their neighbouring primary or enriching the curriculum provision of their own schools. These conversations about more federated models of governance were not exhaustive so only tentative conclusions may be drawn. I speculate from the testimony of the headteachers that the public position of the school was the key factor, for example ensuring feeder primaries 'bought' into their school as a choice for their pupils. This perhaps aligns with institutional tendencies to reproduce hierarchies (Thomson 2010) rather than innovate through alternative modes of governance.

7.4 Summary

Of the heads interviewed, Dave Richards was under the least pressure to raise floor targets in response to government challenge. I speculate as to whether this

accounts for some of the more long-term views of innovation and open-systems modeling that he expressed. In his view, personalised learning had now become “indistinguishable” from the “school effectiveness stuff that was in the public arena previously”. In light of the data from my research, a credible and defensible statement; apart from the mention of Every Child Matters, it is hard to see how the personalised policy agenda has shaken up or disturbed the courses the headteachers have set or routinely negotiate for their schools. For John Collins it has given legitimacy for his values and strategies. Dave Richards believes personalised learning should have given even greater weight to changing learning practices within schools, while the other headteachers have adopted a more “what’s to argue about?” response in line with what they felt were existing priorities.

I have argued that these priorities are sifted and weighed in the complex negotiations that headteachers have to conduct between government, staff, students, parents and their surrounding communities. But the headteachers in their expressions of pragmatism might well create the insider role that while pushing against hierarchical modes of governance does tend to reinforce continuity through the rational-goal model of governance. In New Labour’s governing project one can discern competing values of governance at work from the dispersal of more autonomy in the system through to central control over governance, from long-term shifts in the system to short-term improvements. The rational goal model of governance maintains central control over policy while allowing some local innovation and change. This model of governance it could be argued is very much the home of school improvement and school effectiveness but it has a key driver in the production of data for government and public consumption in order to facilitate the supposed market. This market mechanism was one designed as a lever of change, which with New Labour, nuances of social justice its purpose. As such

personalised learning in the view of at least one government minister (Jim Knight), and one headteacher in this sample, was said to hold radical implications but it seems to be 'business as usual' in the schools.

I argue that personalisation was a rubric for modernisation in New Labour's schools policy and in appealing to headteachers' values about the 'whole child' it promised something new and offered to trust headteachers to define their own learning journeys. Personalisation supported the securing of New Labour's of 'rigorous standards' that as a moral purpose that would be difficult to defy. As a policy built on tension and lack of trust perhaps it was far simpler for headteachers to align their professional beliefs to the pragmatic and technically rational orientations of governance that demands data outputs and audit trails. If tension, dissonance, frustration and lack of trust are thus incorporated into the governance of schools then one can see why for young people some more extended, richer and teleological identity as young learners is only inconsistently experienced.

The motifs of the citizen-consumer with services tailored to individual need are incorporated through personalisation into the modernising language of social justice. However, the 'tailoring' is aimed at the young person while the consuming discourse is aimed at their parents with market choice as a lever of control. Another part of the modernising language is built around 'standards' and not 'child—centredness' while at the same time professing professional autonomy and local accountability, but these professionals also have residues of child-centredness in their value set. The targets, attainment data and personalised learning pedagogy supposedly designed to render young peoples' school experience more engaging, were a rational and technical solution at the local level, but New Labour needed central

prescription and hierarchically organised governance mechanisms to ensure the 'standards' agenda was delivered. Therefore, personalisation is more a story of rational goal models of governance than open-systems in which headteachers have autonomy to construct other models of learning to that contained within New Labour's proposition of personalisation. What emerges from the fieldwork of the previous three chapters is the notion of schools as spaces of policy enactment where the ethical debate and possibilities for extending the pedagogical engagement of young people are being 'squeezed' and pressured. In the next chapter I wish to explore the relationship of personalisation and modernity in order to understand more of why its linguistic register has become so prominent, or persuasive, and whether there are cultural and political tendencies that might support the argument that, what I shall call the ethical spaces of schooling, are being pressured or squeezed into narrower goods of effectiveness than such institutions could be developing.

Chapter Seven footnotes:

- 1) "For some 18 months, between the spring of 1974 and the autumn of 1975, the William Tyndale Junior School, off Upper Street in Islington, north London, became the focus of probably the most embittered educational controversy in post-war Britain" (Davis 2002, p.275). The head and deputy headteacher's attempts to run an open and democratic school, led to internal divisions in the school, public debates and eventually an enquiry (The Auld Report). This controversy became something of a 'cause célèbre' about educational standards, 'discovery' learning and progressive methods. The affair prompted Callaghan's speech and led to a new era of accountability in schools that still carries contemporary resonance (see Bangs et al 2010).
- 2) The Tomlinson Report: The *Final Report of the Working Group on 14–19 Reform* chaired by former OFSTED chief, Mike Tomlinson, was published by New Labour in October 2004, but the proposals were clearly much diluted in the subsequent 2005 *14–19 Education and Skills White Paper*. A Key proposal was a new diploma course to replace GCSEs, A-levels and vocational qualifications with a new single diploma over 10-year period of reform.

- 3) School Improvement Partner (SIP): "In 2004, the Government set out its vision for a new relationship with schools, designed to give schools greater autonomy and to help them raise standards. The school improvement partner (SIP) programme was introduced as part of this new relationship". Source: <http://www.teachingexpertise.com/articles/school-improvement-partners-2260> (accessed 20/03/12).
- 4) The 2009 White Paper (Building a 21st Century Schools System- DCSF 2009b) clarified their role as: support schools to improve all Every Child Matters (ECM) outcomes for children; broker school improvement support; make decisions about schools' specialist status; increase their leverage over weaker performers, by making receipt of part of these schools' funding contingent upon the SIP signing off their school improvement plans; clarify their position as the primary intermediary between schools and their LA. SIPs were recruited from existing or ex-headteachers and trained by the NCSL under the remit of the Department.
- 5) National Challenge Strategy, see footnote 1, Chapter Four, page 132.
- 6) Standards and Effectiveness Unit (SEU): Established by New Labour Education Secretary David Blunkett in 1997 and headed up by Michael Barber until he moved to Tony Blair's office in 2001, then by David Hopkins until it was closed in 2004. The SEU was responsible for a number of strategies such as key Stage targets and tests, Education Action Zones and Excellence in Cities. Blunkett and Barber viewed the SEU as a direct way of speedily delivering government policy and it was viewed with some suspicion by Department officials (Bangs et al 2010).
- 7) TDA: The Training and Development Agency, an 'arms-length' body or NDPB established to oversee the development of the school workforce. It was established as the Teacher training Agency in 1994 and re-launched as the TDA in 2005.
- 9) BECTA: the British Educational Communications and Technology Agency, established as an NDPB in 1998 by New Labour to oversee the government's ICT strategy in schools. Abolished by the Conservative led coalition government and liquidated in April 2011.
- 10) The Key Stage Three Strategy began its roll out in 2001 designed to improve teaching and learning for 11-14 year olds. The strategy constantly evolved under New Labour, guided by the QCA, and attempted to draw more cross-curricular work and thinking skills into the KS3 curriculum. Schemes of work and teacher training were developed.
- 11) BtEC: The Business and Education Technology Council is an awarding body for vocational qualifications (BtECs) that can be awarded at different levels. The aim of the original Tomlinson Report (see footnote 2) was to streamline diplomas and A levels into more transferable qualification routes.

CHAPTER EIGHT

MODERNITY, THE CONSUMER AND THE ETHICAL SPACES OF SCHOOLING

8.1 Introduction, recapping the argument

Before introducing the shape of this chapter I first review some of the argumentation to date in order to set the direction for the final phase of the thesis.

In Chapters Two and Seven I examined how New Labour's modernising agenda, pursued with "ministerial machismo" (Alexander 2004), and employing metaphors of vigour and strength had declared personalised learning present in, and impacting upon standards, in the majority of schools. A key task as laid out in the Children's Plan (DCSF 2007a) was to spread the impact of personalisation to those schools that had yet to 'improve'. What is interesting in this history is not that the Labour government pursued reform with great energy, an electorate would expect no less and this was their political platform, but that the conception underlying personalised learning is a partial response to challenges in modernity that covers up a number of paradoxes. In the post-Children's Plan documentation, the political landscape seemed to be painted as simple: schools were either getting on with personalised learning or they were not. Again perhaps not surprising, in a liberal democracy a political proposition has to be succinct, easily communicated and look for levers of reform that are available within the term of a government. However, the testimony gathered in Chapters Five to Seven suggests that some of the tenets of personalised learning, such as learner voice and engagement with the pedagogy and assessment, is not a universal feature of the young peoples' school experience. Admittedly the sample is small and not conclusive, but the convergence of testimony

led me to argue that the English school system under New Labour was defined by rather narrow features of effectiveness, and in the experience of young people, this is at the expense of richer and more authentic engagement in learning. For example, exam results and school reputation became the defining values within the practices as experienced by young people.

Newman (2006) lays out an extensive and well evidenced argument to suggest that New Labour constructed mantras such as “standards” in an attempt to politically “reconcile the traditional with the modern” (p.173) and in so doing covered over a number of fault lines and paradoxes. I tentatively suggest two areas of tension and paradox are relevant to this thesis. One was to produce a seemingly rational and engaging proposition (personalisation) that would not only be hard to disagree with but would serve to capture political territory – one is either for or against us, disagreements are either naïve or demeaning to children. A focus on standards and the generation and evaluation of fine-grained data about the individual’s learning is a rational and technical response to managing large numbers of pupils within a school in a ‘personalised’ manner. A second stems from the suggestion that power is being dispersed from the centre, for example through networks and federations with central government declaring themselves to be strategic shapers rather than detailed prescribers. In the case of personalisation, a range of NDPBs and thinktanks became involved in elaborating policy. However, the evidence in this thesis suggests that much power is still exerted from the centre and that the room to innovate beyond a narrow range of measures is heavily controlled. Headteacher testimony suggests they were little involved in the formulation of policy.

What is further interesting about their testimony is how the technical capacity to gather a wealth of fine-grained data is embraced by headteachers as a means of enacting personalised learning. In using the competing values model of institutional life I suggested that what is largely evident is a rational goal model of governance, characterised by pragmatism and 'realism', and underscored with elements of hierarchical control. The theory suggests that some elements of these values are required in an organisation but only in balance and in harmony with the other quadrants of creation and collaboration. In Chapter Three I argued that social practices could extend and define standards of excellence richer and more extensive of human goods than narrower measures of effectiveness. If this argument is to hold then institutions such as schools are essential sites for housing practices that can enrich the virtues constitutive of human goods. I suggested that for a policy to impact upon social justice then the institutional space needed to allow practices to model and develop in the micro-context such virtues as just generosity, independent practical reasoning, care and trust. A critical question therefore becomes what sort of policy spaces did New Labour's proposition of personalisation provide for schools? It seems that the pulls in New Labour governance, have skewed schools to respond primarily to centralised, integrated and uniform responses and that personalisation as a vague and conceptually muddled proposition is best seen as a rubric that does little to shift the tendencies of governance.

It could be argued that such control is a necessary feature of a reform programme that is instituted with some urgency and is more likely to impact upon social justice than developing other modes of governance. While this is possibly the case, there are other potential explanations that are credible given the strong evidence that after three terms in office the pull towards the centre seems to have been as strong as ever and that equity in outcomes for young people is little better (for example, see

Ball 2010). In this chapter I propose that there are paradoxes within the social imaginaries (Charles Taylor's term, 2007) of contemporary Western modernity, some of which are incapable of some final reconciliation: an agonism of modernity. Personalisation becomes a compelling narrative because it resonates with, or precipitates out from, some of the moral orders of the social imaginary. It also speaks to existential features of modernity that produce new contours and risks for the individual (Beck 2010). In drawing upon compelling aspects of contemporary social horizons New Labour however presented a partial response to modernity and one that might have excluded other cultural tendencies and viewpoints (Newman 2006). David Miliband's (2006) thinking is critical to the story of personalisation and his reform proposition draws its rationale from concepts of a globalised world, a rapidly shifting knowledge economy and changing consumer expectations. The welfare state he argued had to respond to these changes and part of that process was changing government and changing systems to work to individuals rather than the other way around. Once more, a seemingly reasonable proposition, but the concept was partly drawn from a uniform characterisation of the modern consumer, an identity that could be conceived of from very contradictory positions (an agonism of modernity).

In this chapter I wish to examine some of the fault lines and paradoxes that both make personalisation a compelling narrative but also undercut its potential to create radically new spaces for school practices to innovate in terms of an authentic learner voice that is engaged in more just forms of participation. A key paradox is consumerism and the motif of consumer-citizen that suggested a concept of social justice achieved through redistribution, voice and participation but which is laid open to another key fault line: that of neoliberalism. While outside the scope of the study to empirically investigate the contours of neoliberalism within schools, this tendency

within modernity has an impact upon social justice and therefore needs to be explored as part of the story in order to understand better the relations between pressures on institutional sites and the narrative of personalisation. Another fault line is the place of local tiers of government within the narrative. While local authorities are not necessarily paradigms of virtue or efficiency they need to be considered as part of a narrative that is proposing new modes of governance because of the role they have traditionally held in holding schools to account, or to supporting schools to innovate.

The chapter works in a more abstract discursive style, a necessary adjunct to understanding the context of institutional space for a practical and ethical philosophy. However, where relevant, fieldwork testimony is drawn upon, especially that of strategic players in the policy story of personalisation. The chapter proceeds to outline the compelling case for personalisation when viewed from the contemporary social imaginaries of western modernity (8.2) and their posing of malaise and existential crisis (8.2.1). I do so in order to delineate some of the moral horizons in which New Labour policy operated. The chapter then examines the paradoxes of the consumer identity through outlining how it may be celebrated or critiqued in different ways (8.3). The case being that if there is an essential agonism about the moral status of the consumer then this identity is available for numerous discourses to draw upon. In the social imaginary the moral order of the self-realising individual is a compelling theme for neoliberalism to draw upon. Neoliberalism is thus placed into the story and the questions of social justice and personalisation are raised (8.4). The next fault line to be explored is the role of local government, especially in the light of social imaginaries about progress and self-determination (8.5). These arguments are then drawn together with particular reference to the competing values model of governance and the possibility of

spaces for enriching the notion of learner voice that was said to be a component of personalised learning (8.6).

8.2 The compelling case for personalisation in the social imaginaries of modernity

In this chapter I take a definition of modernity from Taylor's (2007) concept of "multiple modernities" (p.1). They are multiple because their manifestation in different societies is varied and uneven throughout recent history. In addition, modernities in Taylor's argument represent an amalgam of practices (cultural, social, political, and economic). This amalgam comes to constitute the background against which individual and collective self-definitions work. Modernities are also modes of narration, of ways of defining the story in which I must locate myself:

"From the beginning, the number one problem of modern social science has been modernity itself: that historically unprecedented amalgam of new practices and institutional forms (science, technology, industrial production, urbanization), of new ways of living (individualism, secularization, instrumental rationality); and of new forms of malaise (alienation, meaninglessness, a sense of impending social dissolution)" (Taylor 2007, p.1).

Taylor's (2007) work is about new forms of living, their concomitant malaise and a moral relation to order and economic activity that provides a context for personalisation.

Taylor (2007) argues that modernity cannot be viewed as the history of stripping away of pre-modern social identities and ties, until some essential individual was arrived at, but as processes that constructed an entirely new sense of what it is to be a person. There was instead a "revolution in our understanding of moral-social order", a "Great Disembedding" and a re-embedding in new moral orders (Taylor 2007, p.65). Moral orders legitimate the social imaginaries that frame our horizons

and repertoires of acting. Social imaginaries are not developed theories or singular ideas but sets of social expectations, ideas, stories and so forth for people about “how things are between them and their fellows” and “is that common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy” (Taylor 2007, p.23). The background imaginary makes the practice possible but it is the practice that carries the imaginary. Taylor put it this way:

“Not only troubling aspects, like some forms of nationalism or purifying violence, but other, virtually unchallenged benchmarks of legitimacy in our contemporary world – liberty, equality, human rights, democracy – can demonstrate how strong a hold this modern order exercises in our social imaginary. It constitutes a horizon we are virtually incapable of thinking beyond” (2007, p.185).

An example would be that a referendum on changing the voting system in England (5th May 2011) would take for granted that whatever the merits of one mode of voting over another, a local or general election in which each citizen enters the ballot box as a private individual is part of the United Kingdom’s social imaginary that legitimates the political process. Whatever an individual thought about the politics, there would be a great deal of social angst should the democratic processes of voting in the United kingdom be threatened. Thus a social imaginary does not necessarily frame what I believe in detail, but would clearly signal when some moral orders were in danger of being violated.

Another point of the social imaginary is that the metaphorical import of the word ‘imaginary’ is not necessarily determining of the ‘truth’ of contemporary society. Taylor goes on to point out that:

“Like all forms of human imagination, the social imaginary can be full of self-serving fiction and suppression, but it is also an essential constituent of the real” (Taylor 2007, p.183).

While the social imaginaries do not necessarily determine a political proposition, such as personalisation, its significance as a compelling narrative for New Labour is that it tapped into contemporary mores, especially that of a disembedded individual with the potential to be self-determining and self-realising. This potential becomes a 'constituent of the real' against which the citizen-consumer is rendered an entirely rational and believable proposition as a reforming motif. The imaginaries of contemporary education policy are thus both subject to, and reflexively engaged in, hegemonic cultural and social forces of what counts as 'legitimate' discussion (CCCS 1982).

The thesis does not have space to explore the history of social imaginaries in more detail but a key point to make is the relationship of the self-realising individual to economic activity. In the eighteenth and nineteenth century a cultural milieu grows in which "the private world of production now has a new dignity and importance" (Taylor 2007, p.103)¹. While various intellectual ideas about the condition and potential of the disembedded individual may seem to be radically opposed, what is at stake in the social imaginary is not: the argument is at heart about individual autonomy, and economic activity. For instance, in nineteenth century England one may point out that a decade before Mill (2008) published *On Liberty*, and at a time of European revolutionary uprisings, Marx and Engels (1848/2002) produced *The Communist Manifesto* expressing a programme for individual freedom fundamentally different in its social implications than Mill's (2008) utilitarianism. It can be argued that what is at stake in both is the concept of freedom and human capacity for happiness.

The moral horizon of this imaginary is I suggest at work in the policy story of personalisation. For instance when Wendy Smith from the Innovations Unit, a key shaper on the edge of government, expressed the view that:

“It (*personalisation*) doesn’t actually derive from the political, there’s nothing ideological about it. I mean there’s a sense it’s more of an economic phenomenon, because everybody’s experience now in their everyday life is increasingly one of personalised services. I mean this is what the manufacturers of more or less any commodity you buy or think about are striving to get because that is peoples’ expectation and it’s as much an expectation for young people now”.

In this view personalisation retains ideological neutrality because it is an expression of economic expectation on the part of a self-determining individual and such a perspective is entirely consistent with the moral order of the social imaginary. It was present in Blair’s (2004a) speech when he talked about the ever-more demanding consumer. This is not to argue that policy is necessarily determined and pre-empted by the social imaginary just that there are compelling resonances from which a political story can be forged and against which such a story takes on a projection of the possible and the necessary.

Another feature of the imaginary is that a sense of the dignity of the self-realising individual being freed by economic activity is also couched within the narrative of progress (“one of the most important modes of narration in modernity” Taylor 2007, p.176). As argued in Chapter Seven the thread of personalisation in New Labour’s modernisation programme was explored, and in this context progress as a narrative is associated with two key features. One was the need to reform, given the pace of communication technology and globalised changes (which for New Labour meant an emphasis on the knowledge economy, see Clarke et al 2007, Newman 2006).

Another was the equation of progress with scientific advance and a technical emphasis on the capacity to solve human problems.

For instance, in the first case New Labour expressed this in the rhetoric of schools 'fit' for the 21st Century (DCSF 2008e). Strategic players such as Wendy Smith (Innovations Unit) and Jenny Jones (NCSL) also elaborated the sentiment that the 'system' was clearly in need of reform in the light of global changes and new technologies. There was a feeling that whether personalisation happened along or not, schools would have to change. Jenny Jones thought that:

"Personalisation raised the status of the debate, the need for the system to continuously improve, but that these things were needed or were going to happen anyway, whether we called it personalisation or not".

Personalisation for them was a matter of developing schooling around a 'world' in which individuals possessed a more powerful sense of agency.

"I am talking about a fundamental pedagogic role for schools, but a balance there between what you call an instructional or transmissive form of pedagogy and a much more constructivist form which build upon what a young person already knows, builds upon their kinds of experiences but enables them to move out from there" (Wendy Smith).

A feature of progress in this story is the growth of computing technologies and the world-wide-web (network technologies is used as short-hand here). Network technologies certainly featured in the work of the Innovations Unit and the NCSL as a driver of change that needed to be better understood and utilised. In their view the way young people were accessing network technologies meant that schools were almost 'running to catch up' with the learning possibilities. Jenny Jones of the NCSL put it this way:

"I think its (*personalisation*) allied to the fact that new technologies now mean that there are greater opportunities than ever before for children to learn at any

time any place, anywhere, and as an education sector we just haven't got to grips with the potential of that and therefore I think personalised learning has given us a framework with which to harness the potential of all that new technology".

At stake here is a feature of multiple modernities that amplify a moral sense of the agency that makes the paradoxes of new technologies difficult to think through and beyond. The web has become a powerful driver of the notion of personalised services. An on-line retailer or web-browser advises me that I can personalise my landing pages, or has some personalised offers all ready for me when I 'arrive', and a train operator offers me the opportunity to construct a personalised timetable. But it is not only material goods that are so offered. I was 'personally' invited to "invest in my happiness" ("Via Institute On Character" 2011) and use the virtual world to produce a 'personalised' psychological profile.

Unlike other private goods in the high street the personalised site does not appear to exclude others from doing the same should they have the means to do so; personalisation via the web possesses a seemingly democratic and universal appeal. However, that very functionality also renders it exponentially more standardised across a greater number of people. While the portal is private to myself, to be fully functional as a personal tool, the web compiles my personalised page recycles my 'private' pieces of data against potentially endless other pieces of other people's private data as comparative algorithms. For example, in the case of the "Via Profile" cited above, it is offered as a tool for organisational effectiveness so that I find an appropriate niche within the company. To make it more effective requires the public redistribution of my private thoughts in forms of comparative data, and the more who contribute their private data the more effective and the more marketable such tools will be to the 'public'. Any scale that is used to 'measure' some human capacity such as intelligence has obviously always been a

comparative exercise. Virtual technologies have exponentially increased a human capacity to make such comparisons and under the spell of this powerful 'magic' I am less likely to question its moral implications or how unique the results are to myself.

The commodification of my needs renders, for example my 'character profile, as the private property of a private company, owned by experts, compiled from persons similar to myself in their interest to complete the profile. The personalised train timetable is simply a variation of a standardised timetable that can only contain a certain limited range of standardised options. In the case of my being able to consume and co-create newsfeeds, the formats and algorithms employed are by necessity held by a few experts and one can speculate that their users are also self-referring groups whose capture of news items will tend to reflect certain ways of seeing the world. Thus the potential for a society to reflect a diversity of views through their virtual expression is matched by the increasing power for consumption of material and psychological goods to become more standardised and privately owned. Morozov points to the phenomenon of "digital captives" and warns against "cyber utopianism" (Morozov 2009, unpagged). Giddens, writing before the explosion in use of network technologies, categorises a dilemma for self-identity in modernity as that of "personalised versus commodified experience" (Giddens 1991, p.196). Individuals are offered mediated possibilities for self-realisation in which:

"The narrative of the self must be constructed in circumstances in which personal appropriation is influenced by standardised influences on consumption" (Giddens 1991, p.201).

Perhaps the paradox of network technologies is that they can easily enable a personal narrative to be constructed, and reconstructed, but the standardised

mediation is hidden in the translation of the increasing capacity to control my narrative to the increased desire to construct it.

Another paradox of the virtual worlds of personalisation arises from the concepts of time they construct. Personalisation cements the here and now, that feature of profane time enabling me to block out, should I so wish, the demands of the future and create stories that, to be legitimate accounts of my life, require no transcendence in them. Personalised access does so not just because of technological means to instant access of private goods, but because access in the future is another 'now', simply a postponement of the instant access to satisfying a private desire. I can 'switch on' and 'tune in' at any time. Therefore, new technologies have seemingly personalised time itself and connected my private needs and private profiles to public flows of information that offer possibilities for public and democratic exchange. This is an important feature of virtual personalisation since a public sphere in which I might engage with political discourse is increasingly converging with the media sphere of communication networks (Castells 2007). With network technologies power takes on new dimensions. Castells (2010) has characterized the attempt by the powerful to disrupt and annihilate the orderly sequence of time through global networks as "*timeless time*" (p.xl original italics). In the contemporary network society, capitalism is global and the control of information is paramount: "The power of flows takes precedence over the flows of power" (Castells 2010, p. 500).

Castell's (2010) analysis points to how our understandings of space and time are transformed in contemporary modernity so that individuals and cultures are separated from the material relations of their existence. This is the alienation

through commodification foretold by Marx (1973) exponentially accelerated via the web technologies. In addition, it can be argued that political debate becomes flattened so as it revolves around the personalities, rather than their ideas, that new media converge upon (Castells 2007). Personalising time in digital environments can therefore potentially disrupt political debate.

However, network society offers the possibility of other concepts of time being created, for example, “glacial time” and the possibility of new democratic and environmental movements using technology to forge counter-hegemonies (Castells 2010, p.xlii). New horizontal alliances, both for the good and the bad, can be forged through networks of information, thus the moral horizon in the imaginary is often seen to be the right to participate in a self-determining manner in the web. With some exceptions defined within the law, moral violation is felt if the state or any other authority tries to block one’s access to the virtual world.

Personalisation is a compelling aspect of the virtual world in which private need is both valourised through its public reinvention but also potentially transcended in networked societies. Modernity places certain minimum thresholds on public discussions of the moral paradoxes in the story of “ I can, so, I ought to”. Young people in this research felt that the web, and attendant learning and social media, were forces for good that enhanced their sense of agency. Their concern was that all young people shared the opportunities to participate; if personalisation is to be a positive story in an ethical sense then it can be evaluated by its claim to have impacted upon equal access for students to potential learning opportunities in networked societies. From the testimony of some students here there is still much work to be done.

In the second feature of progress, that of technical rationality, examples can be found in the way languages of personalisation cross over into scientific discourses.

For instance:

“Scientists have developed a **personalised** blood test that monitors cancer in the body, offering the potential of tailoring treatments to individual patients by monitoring how well a tumour has responded to surgery or therapy and picking up early signs of recurrence” (Sample 2010, p.13, emphasis added).

Cancer is a medical condition that presumably any rational person would seek a cure for and would wish others to be free from. The tumour can be directly targeted and its scientific elimination is a good that can be grasped in a concrete manner. The medical metaphor of tailoring treatment provides a compelling resonance for the tailoring provision in schooling. An individual pupil can be set targets, data collected, interventions planned and outcome data evaluated: a rational model of managing large amounts of information. Similarly, a rationality is created through the private portal of one's computer: targeting the individual through personalised offers of learning platforms is both technically possible and therefore desirable. In contemporary Western modernity the claims of the 'rational' are a feature of expertise that comes to dominate certain aspects of public life, and in this case schools, through the 'characters' of modernity (MacIntyre 1994).

The social imaginary helps to grasp how complex ideas with long histories come to be horizons of moral thinking and make compelling cases as to why an idea such as personalised learning was claimed to be exciting the profession (DfES 2004a) because beyond resonating with notions of care for the individual child, it was 'out there' in wider cultural tendencies. In the rational goal model of governance,

modern institutions take upon themselves the need to make pragmatic decisions to 'deal with' the 'reality' of young peoples' lives.

I cannot do justice to all the complexities but the argument is important enough to be summarised. I tentatively suggest that in the proposition of personalisation as expressed by Wendy Smith (Innovations Unit) below, one can see a precipitation of some of the moral horizons that lie with contemporary social imaginaries:

"Personalisation is about three points: choice, voice and co-creation. In schools co-creation is where young people, or indeed learners of any sort, are deeply involved and own the arrangement of their curriculum and to some extent form the pedagogy that best suits them".

In this exposition all three ideas are 'self-apparent', to be taken as incontrovertible. The ideas that flow within the social imaginary of contemporary Western democracy and their consequent relation to personalisation as a political reform in England are summarised in Table 8.1 below. The key sources for the content of contemporary imaginaries presented in the table, beyond the policy documentation and fieldwork studies, are MacIntyre (1994) and Taylor (1995, 2007). In addition, Rawls (1973) provides key intellectual arguments that frame understandings of institutional arrangements to be found in the social imaginary of liberal democracies.

Table 8.1: Horizons in the social imaginary linked to the narrative of personalisation

| The horizon in the social imaginary | Links to the narrative of personalisation |
|--|--|
| The self-realising individual and the order of market-economies are an imaginary of the mutual manifestation of some natural moral order. Markets are rational and dignify human activity ¹ . | The individual can be a rational agent in defining his or her own needs and hence seeking to realise them. Markets are a rational solution in leveraging higher standards of public service through consumers exercising choice. |
| The self-determining individual has the right to pursue the ends of his or her own choice and, within certain thresholds, his or her private life is not a matter for public scrutiny. | The consumer can exercise both 'exit' and 'voice' with a minimum of interference from the state. Public services should thus be organised to facilitate voice and exit. |
| The equality before the law of the self-determining individual in liberal democracies to pursue his or her own ends. | Personalisation is a social-democratic narrative that aims to redress imbalances in this equality of opportunity. |
| The self-determining individual is part of the imaginary of the self-governing people. | The exercise of voice and the opportunity to participate in the public sphere is a natural extension of the social imaginary and hence the citizen pole of personalisation is a rational concept ² . |
| An extension of the imaginary of popular voice is that it is opposed to over-bearing state structures and government | Bureaucracy is positioned by New Labour as antithetical to personalised voice and hence local government is positioned in paradoxical ways within personalisation (see section 8.5 below) |
| Personal autonomy can be a paradox between one's individual freedoms and one's social obligations. Government should aim to promote the former without detriment to the latter. | The citizen-consumer motif of personalisation aims to bridge the paradox. |
| Belief in progress in a society to produce 'better' outcomes for its members is a modern narrative of the social imaginary. | Schools need to innovate in order to keep pace with a complex and changing world. Personalisation is a signifier of New Labour as a reforming and progressive party. |

The moral horizon of the imaginary makes it difficult to argue beyond choice, voice and co-creation as other than rational and makes for compelling narrative themes from which New Labour can adopt personalisation as a political rubric. The social imaginaries that bound the narratives are not settled and determined but they form the moral orders about what is at stake. Thus I might argue about consumerism and individualism and the role of the state but whatever conclusions I might reach certain elements, such as my right to self-determination are always at stake. This is the 'long march' of the dis-embedding of the individual from pre-modern orders followed by a re-embedding into new horizons (Taylor 2007).

8.2.1 The compelling case for personalisation and the 'risks' of modernity

If the social imaginary of the self-realising individual in modernity disembedded individuals from hierarchical and more solid orders of society, then freedoms are won at the expense of people experiencing certain losses or declines (Bauman 2000; Taylor 2003) that might be described as "malaises of modernity" (Taylor 2003, p.3). In Bauman's (2000) metaphor contemporary modernity is experienced as "liquid" (in title) in which the individual is exposed to the vicissitudes of life for which earlier solidarities, such as class, produced more collective solutions to.

Whether Bauman's thesis is sustainable, the metaphor certainly accords with a feeling that Western modernity gives rise to a sense of fragmentation in the narratives individuals try to construct for themselves with a concomitant sense in of moral fragmentation (MacIntyre 1994, 1999b). So as Sennett puts it:

“‘Who needs me?’ is a question of character which suffers a radical challenge in modern capitalism. The system radiates indifference” (Sennett 1998, p.116).

Character for Sennett (1998) is that sense of narrative unity an individual tries to construct for herself to negotiate the vicissitudes of life but it is a story that becomes increasingly hard to manage in modern capitalism. Taylor has described one of the malaises of modernity redolent in the social imaginary as the phenomenon of the “the disenchantment of the world” (Taylor 2003, p.4). Following the displacement of the mystical and the religious in secularised society to the private world of the individual, the self-determining person seeks some mode of expression that confers significance (Taylor 2003). One such mode is choice, the notion that I can choose.

Freedoms expressed through the capacity to choose bear dilemmas and paradox. In education Hartley (1999) explores how, through a mode of re-enchantment, the business and marketing literatures are being drawn into education for performative purposes. Thus one paradox is the question of whether choice is aligned to legitimising existing social relations. Dilemmas of choice for the individual are to increase personal doubt and anxiety and another is to take on risks as individuals that in some cultural forms might once have been shared collectively (Bauman 2000; Beck 2010; Giddens 1991). The embedded, social determination of identity of earlier historical periods is now replaced with “*compulsive and obligatory self-determination*” (Bauman 2000, p.32, original italics). Where Bauman (2000) argues from a broad sweep of history, the ‘liquidity’ of modernity, Rose arrives at not dissimilar conclusions from investigating how the particular expertise of psychologies have discursively constructed our lives so that:

“The self is not merely enabled to choose, but obliged to construe a life in terms of its choices, its powers, and its values. Individuals are expected to construe the course of their life as the outcome of such choices, and to account for their lives in terms of reasons for those choices” (Rose 1991,

Thus, for some sociologists and philosophers, the ‘obligation’ for self-determination, amongst the dilemmas of modernity, threatens what Giddens (1991) has termed our “ontological security” (p.36) so that the modern identity bears the ‘malaise’ of anxiety that accompanies an ideal of progress and order (Taylor 2003). Personalisation becomes a compelling political narrative because it speaks to the obligation of the self to construct one’s own narrative and offers the promise of some existential security. The paradox at play here is that the collective moral languages or traditions that might have supported one to ‘do the right thing at the right time’ are not readily available to the individual (see MacIntyre 1994).

A further potential consequence is that social inequalities become “redefined in terms of *individualization of risks*” so that social problems are taken on board as “personal inadequacies, guilt feelings, anxieties, conflicts, and neuroses” (Beck 2010, p.100, original emphasis). This phenomenon may well explain the rise of interest in psychology (Beck 2010) and in education, psychology links to the pedagogy of personalised learning. For Rose (1999) the insertions of psychology in our lives as an authoritative discipline has constructed an entrepreneurial subject whose sense of autonomy becomes a feature of self-control and self-discipline. Although Beck and Rose approach the notion of self-realisation from different intellectual traditions, their analysis points to the sense of personal obligation that explains why personalisation is a compelling political narrative of its time. The question is raised as to whether the citizen-consumer motif adequately bridges for **all** citizens, the tasks of self-realisation with the social obligations of exercising voice within public service reform.

The answer I suspect is not, for neither pole of the motif is fully conceptualised beyond the trope of a self-interested consumer. Personalisation as a process that draws upon imaginaries of self-realisation finds a place for psychologies that support the individual search for significance. A reform that promised to put 'me', and my needs at the centre of its programme undoubtedly has a resonance for individuals seeking affirmation and significance. Personalisation speaks to desire, need and absence in one's life and the possibility of fulfilment. In that sense personalising an experience is an existential statement about what is or is not possible in my life; but desire, need and fulfilment are motifs that take on a particular existentialist resonance for living, only in modernist societies with a social imaginary of the self-governing individual. Bauman (2000) adapts Beck's thesis to argue that as a consumer the risks are not only individualised but that the capitalist mode of consumption places the blame for being poor, dysfunctional in, and disengaged from, society squarely on the shoulders of the individual. Failure to 're-enchant' one's life is thus the fault of the individual, the failure to make the best use of one's opportunity in the market economy. If New Labour's motif of the citizen-consumer adapts too readily only one easily sequestered couplet in the imaginary –individual choice and voice- then perhaps the spaces for more collective solutions to existential crises are squeezed out. In one sense personalisation is thus compelling because it is 'easy' to conceive and the consumer identity becomes a one-dimensional birth. In this scenario it is easier to be a 'citizen' if one already has the social and economic resources to do so.

The point about the individuation of risk is not only to locate the compelling nature in personalisation but also to ask questions about whether the power to impact on issues of social justice through this political narrative will bridge some other major contemporary fault lines. The question of this chapter is to try and understand the

ethical and policy spaces in which schools might impact upon social goods, such as justice, and how the consumer who individually adopts the rewards and the risks of contemporary life is part of this story. An agonism of modernity is perhaps that the moral status of the consumer identity cannot be easily resolved, but consumerism becomes a key trope in the narrative of personalisation; the following discussion is to help clarify the concept of ethical spaces that might or might not be available within the practices of schooling. Although the arguments around the consumer sharply diverge, they cohere over the response to modernity as one of crises in which, as outlined above, individuals are posed existential dilemmas and consumption is either a mode of social and individual renewal or one of continued social control and individual repression.

8.3 Personalisation and consumerism: celebration or suspicion?

Proponents and critics of personalisation as represented in policy seem sharply divided about the identity and role of the consumer, but as the social imaginary suggests, the position of the consumer is a key ground of moral debate. Wendy Smith (Innovations Unit) directed me to the work of Zuboff and Maxmin (2004) and stated that the ideas coming out of new entrepreneurial business writings about consumerism were “certainly very influential”. The Innovations Unit felt personalisation had its origins within social changes in society towards more individualism and organisations’ subsequent responses to these trends. By way of contrast, Professor Michael Fielding (in conversation, Rogers 2008) expressed the view that personalisation was a “vacuous and intellectually vacant” attempt to use a “poor” notion of individual identity in “the marketisation of public services” and has reflected this position in his writings (latterly Fielding and Moss 2011). Other critiques are to be found directed against the use of works from the business world

(for example, Zuboff and Maxmin, 2004) by Professor David Hartley (2009). Perhaps both sides of the argument are so to speak peculiarly modernist in that the moral status of the individual in society is at stake in both of them.

For some proponents of personalisation in public service reform the inspiration for its promise as a lever of advancement comes from the success of modernity to create a 'new' individual. I have called these arguments a hermeneutics of celebration in order to contrast them with those of suspicion (Ricoeur 1970), but to distinguish them from propositions to be trusted, for they provide insufficient grounds to do so. These analysts 'celebrate' the 'new individual' and argue that capitalism needs to renew itself because its success has bred a 'new individual' no longer satisfied with the old order:

"In the second half of the twentieth century a new society of individuals emerged – a breed of people unlike any the world has ever seen. Educated, informed, traveled, they work with their brains, not their bodies. They do not assume that their lives can be patterned after their parents' or grandparents'" (and further) their sense of self is more intricate, acute, detailed, vast and rich than at any other time in human history" (Zuboff and Maxmin 2004, p.3).

Capitalism, it is argued, can renew itself through the re-enchantment of the need to seek expression and new technologies can provide the means. For example, The Massachusetts Institute of technology (MIT) designed a virtual newspaper, "The Daily Me", that filtered and customised content for its readers depending on their preferences- personalised news feeds (Bender 2002). The paper grew to incorporate readers in to the production:

"Over twenty years, the Daily Me has evolved from the means to enhance an individual's access to news to a mechanism for active engagement in critique and reflection. We are seeing the emergence of a grassroots level of expression that will enhance processes that are democratic and will challenge those that are not. Average citizens today have tools that were never before at their disposal" (Bender 2002, p.29).

In response to criticisms that personalised learning is individualistic and “myopic”

Bender responds:

“Rather, it is unleashing in each of us our basic desire to share, which sometimes translates into a sharing of information, social and political ideas, or goods and services. We are more deeply engaged in learning, more in tune with our priorities, and ever expanding our scope. The process has begun, and it is indeed a paradigm shift: the consumer is becoming a creator” (Bender 2002, p.29)

This statement presages the consumer as a creator. Thus some business schools of thought argue that personalisation goes beyond customisation by “co-opting customer competence” (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2000, p.79), drawing them into a dialogue. In contrast to customization:

“...personalization, on the other hand, is about the customer becoming a co-creator of the content of their experiences” (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2000, p.84).

This strand of co-creation is more radical than personalised learning as customisation (DEMOS 2004b) and has influenced, or is aligned with, Leadbeater’s (2004a,b) work for the thinktanks DEMOS and the Innovations Unit.

‘Co-creation’ as a theme has also been reflected in concepts of public service administration that suggest governments should become more entrepreneurial mixing market flexibilities with a sense of connection and caring such as found in families and communities (Osborne and Gaebler 1992). This is an optimistic account claiming that the globalising of economies will be paralleled by a global convergence of forms of government in which the satisfaction of citizen or consumer is enabled to lead the direction of provision. The global convergence claimed by authors such as Osborne and Gaebler (1992) bears little empirical scrutiny (Hood 1995) and given the contestations and nuances of governance in England this kind

of account, like that of Zuboff and Maxmin above, seems to rely more on rhetorical declaration than empirical analysis.

However this does not stop public service managers and businesses being castigated for not changing as fast as the individuals they depend upon so that:

“It is not just that the time for a new enterprise logic and a new episode of capitalism has finally come. It is in fact long overdue” (Zuboff and Maxmin 2004, p.286).

Contrary to critics of modernity who express pessimism about the narcissism of contemporary culture in these trends (Lasch 1991), exponents of the new personalisation see almost a spiritual revolution taking place: “the new postmaterialists demand true voice” (Zuboff and Maxmin 2004, p.108). The reader is informed that these individuals have “a deep and abiding yearning for psychological self-determination” and that:

“Psychological individuality is also typically associated with powerful drives toward interdependence, affiliation, and community-building, but in ways that no longer depend upon a priori criteria such as kinship or geography. A heightened sense of individuality is not a sign of narcissism or self-indulgence” (Zuboff and Maxmin 2004, p.107).

The affiliations that ‘postmaterialists’ supposedly seek can be found within new business regimes, the “support economy” (*ibid* in title), that satisfy both community belonging and personal needs. The modes of expression of “new needs” are based on the:

“Claim of sanctuary

Demand for voice

Quest for connection” (Zuboff and Maxmin 2004, p.143).

Personalisation is therefore argued to be not only about choices in consuming customised goods, it is providing the 'quest for connection', the re-enchantment of life through 'sanctuary' and 'voice' in the enterprise culture. But notice that Zuboff and Maxmin's (2004) 'new individuals' are 'brain workers', 'well-educated', 'well traveled', they are therefore an already existing elite. If the consumer-citizen of New Labour's personalisation is this 'new individual' then the claims for social justice through parity of participation in the economic goods of society are already undercut by the exclusion of the disadvantaged. Zuboff and Maxmin's case would seem to be an instance of what Fraser (2010) describes as misrecognition in access to the political sphere of justice.

A further irony is that existential needs are posited by the business thinking as grounds for renewing capitalism, whereas Marx's (1973) optimism for the ultimate expression of these human capacities was based on capitalism's very inability to nurture those claims. So against the hermeneutics that see individual potential emancipated in new business arrangements of consumption and voice there is posed a strand of suspicion that modernity's modes of the consumer identity represent a repression and alienation of human capacities.

It is to the hermeneutics of suspicion (Ricoeur 1970; 1989) that the argument now turns for if modernity creates discourses of liberation through consumption, it has other discourses in which this freedom of choice is also a denial, or perversion, of emancipation. Philosopher Paul Ricoeur aptly named the "masters of suspicion" as Nietzsche, Marx and Freud (Ricoeur 1970, p.70). For some philosophers there is a lineage from Nietzsche to Foucault (Ricoeur 1989, Taylor 2007), relevant given the Foucauldian inheritance of contemporary cultural analysts (for example Rose 1999).

The hermeneutics of suspicion suggests that not all is what it at first seems, that symbols bear multiple meanings, that a phenomenology stops short at the point that it needs to go beyond the immediately apparent:

“What all three attempted, in different ways, was to make their “conscious” methods of deciphering coincide with the “unconscious” *work* of ciphering which they attributed to the will to power, to social being, to the unconscious psychism. *Guile will be met by double guile*” (Ricoeur 1970, p.34 original italics).

Critical theory derived from Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche all have something to say about the notion of personalising and consuming. I examine briefly the most relevant to the concept of personalisation. Personalisation perhaps first appears in critical literature as a ‘shorthand’ to describe a mask for power and subjugation that operates through the logic of capitalism and the unconscious, Freudian, mechanisms of the psyche (Baudrillard, 1968/1988). The spectre offered up by this strand of suspicion is that contemporary consumption is a mechanism of social control that ultimately flattens, disguises, fragments or subverts the potential of the individual to seek emancipation.

Baudrillard specifically coined the term personalisation as a critique of contemporary consumer society. Personalisation releases the consumer within us in a drive to seek some personal fulfillment:

“In a more integrated society individuals no longer compete for possession of goods, they actualize themselves in consumption, each on his own. The leitmotiv is no longer one of selective competition, it is *personalization for all*” (Baudrillard 1988, p.13, emphasis added)

Humans have always consumed in some form, but in this phase of capitalism, consumption, he argued, no longer had limits, no longer satisfied psychological or physiological needs; the object becomes a sign that signifies difference between other signs and therefore subsequently codifies social relations.

Baudrillard postulates a code that acts as a kind of grid against which individuals are plotted and classified (unlike Foucault's, 1974, discursive formations, this is not so much a structuring of subjectivity as a language of mapping out social positions). The code represents an active logic that integrates complex social relationships into seemingly flattened classifications of power and social standing and its signification is exercised through the brand. The code renders such power opaque, seemingly deep and liberating, but:

"But let us not be fooled: objects are *categories of objects* which quite categorically induce *categories of persons*. They undertake the policing of social meanings, and the significations they engender are controlled" (Baudrillard 1998, p.16/17 original italics).

For a product to be integrated into the code "it must be "personalized"" (Baudrillard 1988, p.22). So, the mechanisms of flattening, the controlling aspect of this relationship, depends for Baudrillard on the conflictual nature of our psychic drives, Freudian mechanisms. I both desire and feel guilt about that desire, feel simultaneously gratified and frustrated. Consumption both "liberates" and "alienates" deep personal drives (p.18). Personalisation through the attachment to the object is the moment at which the play of signs is transferred to the consumer, the point at which our internal "censor" is mobilised to both fulfil and "annul" desire (p.25):

"The ideology of personal fulfillment, the triumphant illogicality of drives cleansed of guilt (*deculpabilisées*), is nothing more than a tremendous effort to materialize the superego. *It is a censor, first of all that is "personalized" in the object*" (Baudrillard 1988, p.18, original italics).

I read Baudrillard as suggesting that if I choose a brand of sports shoe, the label is its most important signification, not its function, and I will never be satisfied with one

item from the brand or with one brand name. Personalisation is not the 'shoeness' of it but its signification of difference and status. My desire is integrated into personal identification with the brand and its signifiers and what it says about 'me' while suppressing any questioning of the social order of production. At the heart of this analysis seems to be absence and alienation so that:

"The very project of life, segmented, dissatisfied, and signified, is reclaimed and annulled in successive objects" (Baudrillard 1988, p.25).

On this analysis it would be naïve to imagine that an advanced capitalist society could ever moderate consumption. The specifics of classification by the code are not very clear in Baudrillard's work. In addition, the power of the brand could be presumably open to empirical investigation and the legacy of the brands could prove to be as equally ephemeral as they are pervasive. However, it is an interesting piece of work that forces the reader to consider what the act of consumption entails, and it also contributes to the motif of personalisation as pointing to the absence of some human goods in peoples' lives; it is a critical theory that hopes to re-engage or re-enchant by pointing to the futility of endless consumption.

The critique of suspicion centres around modernity's mechanisms of choice as commodified need; in other words, everything from food to a self-help course is packaged and represented as something that I can purchase to satisfy a desire that I might 'need' because it is advertised and marketed as an object of desire (Giddens 1991). The commodification of need was anticipated by Marx (1873/1857-8) who wrote about how in yoking the use value of production to its exchange value, capital objectified labour: human needs, emotion and culture are objectified through production whose objects are subsequently available for sale. For Marx this represents "the most complete suspension of all individual freedom" (Marx 1973,

p.652). In his notebooks (*The Grundrisse*) Marx anticipated the ever-increasing circularity with which capital has to chase more capital and in so doing has to squeeze out more surplus value from objectified “labour capacities” (Marx 1973, p.676).

The logic of contemporary capitalism, it has been argued, is that in order to maintain capital flows that are interrupted in the national context by the tensions of global competition, industrial societies have switched the emphasis from production to consumption (Bauman 2000). Consumption is fuelled and sustained by the drive to lend and to borrow that late capitalism has instituted as some social norm (Bauman 2000). This is life “organized around consumption” and “guided by seduction” and “ever rising desires” (Bauman 2000, p.76) into the “task” (p.31) of being. If for Marx (1973) human labour was alienated by commodification through processes of production, for the analysts of late modernity it is now consumption that performs this task.

Thus consumption is implicated in a different way by the later inheritors of Marxism such as critical theorists of the Frankfurt School (for example, Adorno and Horkheimer 1979) who wondered why societies keep reproducing themselves in such a stable fashion, when so much misery and inequality arises from their capacity to produce so much wealth in the hands of so few. To paraphrase: why they asked, are the oppressed, party to their oppression? Herbert Marcuse put it this way:

“We are again confronted by one of the most vexing aspects of advanced industrial capitalism: the rational character of its irrationality (*and further*)

The people recognise themselves in their commodities; they find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi set, split-level home, kitchen equipment. The very

mechanism which ties the individual to his society has changed, and social control is anchored in the new needs which it has produced" (Marcuse 1972 p21/22).

For critical theorists such as Marcuse (1972) and Adorno and Horkheimer (1979) the Enlightenment, the age of reason, had been turned through technical rationality and its supporting ideology into the selling of the system to members of society, falsely conscious and alienated from recognising the 'true' relations of their exploitation. Baudrillard (1988) attempts through Freudian psychology to identify in personalised consumerism the moments of the objective subjugation through desire, the reification of individuals, whereas in personalised consumption, Marcuse (1972) attempts to identify the subjugation through moments of false consciousness that disguise the 'real' consequences of class rule in capitalist societies.

Saleci (2010) combining the Marxism of Althusser (an emphasis on ideological formations) with psychoanalysis, suggests that consumer choice is a paradox: not only does too much choice induce anxiety and indecision but it can leave us less satisfied and more susceptible to social control. Whereas Baudrillard (1988) has a general, and vague, thesis about the code, Saleci (2010) offers more specifics about the structures of the psyche and the models provided by contemporary celebrity culture for example.

Rose (1999), drawing on Foucault, would presumably disagree with the determination of social control by more abstract, systemic, logics of political economy but would agree that the fate of individuals is to realise themselves as skilled, autonomous performers and that such an obligation patterns and controls our lives in ways not transparent to the self. Unlike Baudrillard (1988) and Marcuse

(1972) Rose (1999) seems more coy about the normative dimensions of his work, seeking to present the analysis as simply that, but admits to some unease about the ethical dimensions of power maintained through the discursive formations he describes.

Rose's (1999) suspicion is relevant to the argument on two counts: at an abstract level the account examines how power works through language and therefore challenges a researcher to consider how constructions such as consumer-citizen might discursively constitute forms of social control. Secondly, and more concretely, Rose (1999) examines the role of psychology in contemporary life and personalisation draws upon many levels of psychological reasoning. "Psy" represents for Rose the forms of psychological expertise and authority that come to constitute how humans come to "conduct themselves in new ways" (p. vii):

"Talk about the self actually makes up the types of self-awareness and self-understanding that human beings acquire and display in their own lives, and makes up social practices themselves, to the extent that such practices cannot be carried out without certain self-understandings" (Rose 1991, p.xviii).

I read Rose's (1999) argument as installing in the modern identity a psychologically shaped existence, not through a one-way process of social construction but through complex interactions of ever more self-aware subjects and assemblages of authority. A "passional economy" is thus "fabricated" in which desires said to lie within the self-governing individual are connected to life-styles and promises of fulfillment that also frame routines of self-government (Rose 1999, p.271). The moments of suspicion in this analysis is that liberal democracies are supported in the maintenance of social control by a new kind of political contract built around the self as a consumer. Being indebted to Foucault, Rose is concerned to highlight governmentality, how there is a social order imposed independent of a systemic

state or global class interest and how truth is related to knowledge formation; in this way he represents a more contextual and perspectival ontology compared to the realist inheritance of Baudrillard and Marcuse.

Therefore while the above hermeneutics of suspicion suggest that in consuming there are mechanisms of social control and commodification of identity (either through capitalism as a mode of production or late capitalism as a mode of consumption) they disagree on the determining mechanisms of such control. Disagreements exemplified for example by codification, discursive formation or false-consciousness, and perhaps the ontological status of power in this process.

Thus, the apprentices of suspicion cannot agree among themselves on the conditions and nature of consumption within modernity, and they are all diametrically opposed in some form to the business schools and thinktanks who promote the consumer identity as the new creative individual through which social renewal is possible. In both poles of the argument a social order is reproduced and legitimated through the position of the consumer; the question becomes one of the norms of legitimacy. I contend that an agonism of modernity is that each variant of the argument has good reason to believe in the veracity of their position, even if their empirical evidence is lacking, and that they are ultimately irreconcilable to some universal standard of adjudication.

One purpose of the section is to demonstrate that New Labour has but one variant, the celebration, in the argument about the moral status of the consumer. In Chapter Three I outlined a case for adopting Nussbaum's (1992) proposals for a "thick vague

theory of the good” (p.214/5) and a “sketch of an internalist-essentialist proposal, an account of the most important functions of the human being, in terms of which human life is defined” (p.214). Therefore in order to evaluate the narrative of personalisation I ask whether the social practices of schooling through the propositions of personalisation impact upon developing such capabilities as Nussbaum proposes. The limited evidence of the fieldwork is that personalisation as a political proposition did not seem to have a significant impact. This does not mean to say that schools are not already engaged in developing these capacities but nevertheless, other hermeneutics, those of suspicion, will always be possible.

Thus, another purpose of the section is to suggest that if the discourses of the consumer are morally open-ended in some way then perhaps what determines how one variant of the argument gets positioned are questions of power. In hegemonic terms, tendencies in society struggle over the dominance of ideas that legitimate relationships of power (Gramsci 2007). One could well argue that certain tendencies in society have the power to present their picture of the consumer identity as the dominant one. Any critique of consumer discourses has to also lay down some argument that however convincing, will always be subject to an irreconcilable agonism and is thus struggling for space to be ‘heard’. In the next section I explore the idea of the power of neoliberalism that runs as a fault line through the narrative of personalisation and which therefore may have considerably lessened the spaces for differing ethical practices.

8.4 Neoliberalism and the narrative of personalisation

Critics of contemporary capitalism such as Harvey (2007, 2011) have gone much further in their analysis of globalisation as a ruling class project than the readings of

modernity drawn from Beck (2010) and Giddens (1991) would suggest.

Neoliberalism is a critical concept in this analysis, defined as:

“...a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human wellbeing can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade” (Harvey 2007, e-book location –(L)-101).

Harvey (2007) argues that neoliberalism is essentially a project to restore class power threatened by social-democratic settlements and a crisis of capital accumulation. Although there are problems with using neoliberalism as a blanket term (because it does not necessarily represent a unified project) critical theorists argue that: “there are enough common features to warrant giving it a *provisional* conceptual identity” (Hall 2012, p.9, original emphasis).

Historically the post-1945 UK state can be viewed as a form of “embedded liberalism” in which market and entrepreneurial processes were embedded within various social and political constraints (Harvey 2007, L - 248). In the UK the welfare state, in functional terms can be seen as a settlement between capital and labour securing internally “domestic peace and tranquility” and externally preventing inter-state rivalry leading to further wars (Harvey 2007, L-228). By the 1970s a crisis of capital accumulation and threat to the power of political and economic elites necessitated a new political and economic strategy to maintain capital flows and class dominance (Harvey 2007, 2011).

Harvey (2007) is careful to explain that neoliberalism is not the inevitable result of the crisis but after some “chaotic experiments” - for example Chile post the 1973 coup –and “gyrations” (L- 289) capitalist societies “stumbled” (L- 289) into an

orthodoxy. New Labour's "Third Way" (Blair 1998; Giddens 1998, titles) can be seen as an attempt to bridge the polarisation between market freedoms and the social-democratic inheritance of state planning and welfare reform. Other neoliberal solutions emerge argues Harvey (2007) such as China, but certain universal features are recognisable. For instance, the features of greater market freedoms but with tight control of labour power, a net increase in the power and wealth of ruling elites with concomitant increases in social inequalities. In addition, another complicating factor is that old notions of class are being replaced in the neoliberal project. Harvey (2007) argues that a part of the Conservative Party were dismayed by Thatcher's promotion of a new breed of entrepreneur, business man and financier that replaced certain traditional orders. Whatever the identity of the ruling elite however, the logics remain: a ruling elite gathers more powers and wealth and an increasingly stratified society in which inequalities of wealth and opportunity grow wider (Harvey 2007).

There is some dispute in the literatures as to the alignment of New Labour with the neoliberal project, some arguing for a more detailed and nuanced approach to the differences between Thatcher and Reagan's political programme and that of Blair (Clarke et al 2007; Newman 2006). Miliband (2004) was insistent that personalisation represented the "social democratic settlement" (unpaged speech) in the face of unfettered market forces. Cultural critic Stuart Hall (2003) on the other hand argues that New Labour's "double-shuffle" draws upon their social-democratic heritage to, in effect, accommodate neoliberalism. Hall (2003) argues that New Labour was not entirely reactive to historical contingencies and their 'shuffle' represents a significant conjuncture in the progress of neoliberalism. The New Labour project in relation to personalisation and the citizen-consumer is certainly active and denotative but it cannot be seen as all of a piece, as a unified entity;

social justice within the Labour tradition and the use of market mechanisms often sit uneasily side by side (Clarke 2012; Clarke et al 2007; Newman 2006, 2007). Chapter Two outlined the tensions and paradoxes within the detail of policies of personalisation.

Given the argument I advanced about the history of the link between social imaginaries and their compelling resonances for personalisation, then perhaps it is correct to take a nuanced and more detailed approach to the relationship between New Labour and neoliberalism. But the self-realising individual, the creative consumer, is also a “compelling and “seductive” component of neoliberal ideas (Harvey 2007, L-148):

“The founding figures of neoliberal thought took political ideas of human dignity and individual freedom as fundamental, ‘as the central values of civilization” (Harvey 2007 L-148).

If critics of personalisation condemn it for its cultivation of individualism (Fielding 2006a, 2008) in a sense, modernity has already completed that task. It could be argued that the business and marketing literatures of personalised services that become part of the grammar of schooling that legitimise existing inequalities (see Hartley 2007a, 2008, 2009) are already available in the moral horizons of the imaginary. So perhaps it is less a question of New Labour strategically aligning with neoliberal discourses and more one of complex historical conjunctions colliding and from which policy reacts to the fall out. Certainly New Labour is an example of how contemporary governments create “synapses” between social movements and:

“...popular sensibilities, drawing upon, amplifying, transforming and institutionalising the challenges presented by such movements and orientations” (Clarke et al 2007, p.29).

However, there is strong evidence to argue that potential sites of “popular realignment” around moral values other than unfettered consumerism were consistently ignored (Clarke 2012, p.49). If Hartley (2009) is correct in arguing that hegemony requires “finesse”, “not force” (p. 432) then propositions that appeal to the profession such as child-centredness and emotional intelligence also enable a finesse of market forces to be insinuated into education (Hartley 2009).

If the position of New Labour to neoliberal projects remains ambiguous it is still a strong argument to make that neoliberalism wields a considerable amount of power on the direction of public services through the financial markets and the threat of exit. The minimal state in advanced capitalism performs a function to release flows of capital and regulate potential opposition from the labour market (Harvey 2011). In the current crisis depressed labour power and spending ability in the economy was offset by credit and the inflated power of consumption based on borrowing (Harvey 2011). But the state still functions to ease these flows by not only enabling borrowing on a vast scale but by ensuring skills and knowledge are held by a populace who can participate in an orderly fashion in the global economy (Bauman 2000). A debt crisis may require capitalism to re-rationalise itself both in terms of ideas and structure but it will attempt to do so in order to maintain elite powers (Harvey 2011).

If personalisation was a story about the pursuit of social justice through the redistribution of wealth via higher standards of educational achievement for those disadvantaged in the economy, then it was always going to be a challenge for New Labour to confront structural inequalities. From the conversations with David Miliband (Rogers 2003, DfES 2003a) and their speeches (for example Miliband

2006) New Labour were clearly sincere and determined to rise to the challenge and yoked personalisation to their cause. The young people in this study used the term 'class' in telling their stories. They were very well aware that unfairness in society is reflected in the differential resources that schools have and argued that governments should be able to correct these inequalities. For instance:

"We think government should run school and not private companies because with them a lot of it comes down to profit, and it would increase class differences. Already some middle class schools have more resources so it's not a fair system. If schools have exams to get in then it's not based on your knowledge and potential, it's based on your background, who your mum and dad is" (Extract of a written response by Adhita, Amy, Abigail and Abir to a focus group activity).

They were also orientated in their future to gaining as many skills as they could in order to compete in the labour market. This is an example of external goods that are properly the concern of schools. However: the question remains if personalisation draws upon moral norms of consumerism that are also compelling to sustaining neoliberalism as a hegemonic and structural project, can social justice through the realignment of wealth and influence become a reality?

The argument here is that the market is not a morally neutral mechanism but interjects norms that undercut the telos of public institutions as service orientated and sites of civic participation and mutual commitment (Sandel 2010). The efficacy of personalisation to impact upon social justice in the face of neoliberal consolidation becomes even more acute if one widens the scope of justice from economic and resource distribution to questions of recognition and parity in the political process (Fraser 2003, 2010). Fraser (1997) argues that histories of the public sphere have consistently marginalised or ignored multiple voices such as those of women and ethnic minorities and that contemporary democratic societies have witnessed a shift to the politics of recognising different voices as much as

social status. In terms of cultural presentations about social justice contemporary societies are therefore “veritable cauldrons of cultural struggle” (Fraser 2003, p. 56) in which solid class boundaries may no longer be the only, or indeed predominate factor. But, “thanks to unjust economic arrangements” the contestants do not have equal access to resources with which to exert their identities (Fraser 2003, p.57). It is interesting to recall from the testimony of the young people that they expressed a strong desire to engage in deep and rich conversations about identity and cultural differences. They felt that this ought to be a purpose of schooling but was an element their schools “found hard to do’ (Aaron).

So I return here to the notion of ethical spaces in which practices can deepen the sense of enquiry that these young people deemed to be necessary. I suggest that the neoliberal fault line is that the privileged norm of the consumer requires ‘standards’ of public services to be simply and easily translated into measures that allow a market of choice and exit to ‘weed’ out those institutions deemed to be performing poorly. While public accountability and high standards of attainment are again, a proper concern of the external goods of schools, the discourses of neoliberalism are in effect not those of universal justice either in economic or recognition terms. The internal standards of excellence that personalised learning promised to enhance, such as an authentic learner voice, are not necessary to the technical translation of schooling into auditable measures. The norms of the markets thus squeezes the spaces for schools to innovate in the areas of learner voice and accountability to students and neoliberalism is a project that thus closes down the avenues of moral debate over the direction of public services. The irony remains that while schools seek to market their ‘unique’ qualities in order to gain local advantage in the market (Maguire et al 2011) the evidence in this fieldwork

suggests that their effectiveness depends on rendering their data in ever more standardised forms for public consumption.

The theme of accountabilities and ethical space thus becomes key to the discussion of the other major fault line that New Labour struggled to bridge: the changing conceptions of governance in the narrative of personalisation.

8.5 Governance and personalisation

In Chapter Seven the slippery nature of governance and even its conflicting use as an analytical term was raised. Nevertheless, there is an understanding that even prior to New Labour government, differing models of governance begin to enter the public administration arena (Rhodes 1996). Under New Labour governance included the promotion of networks in public services. In relation to the personalisation debate Miliband talked about the 'viral' strategy in which the centre became the strategic shaper (DfES 2003a) and schools provided the detail relevant to their context.

One tier of governance in schools has traditionally been the local authorities who have a number of legal roles in regard to the curriculum, admissions, special needs and so forth. Headteachers in this study responded to my question about the role of local authority advisors with perceptions such as they were a source of challenge, of support, of inspecting standards, advice and of securing financing. They were quite clear that the role of these officers is changing and that with funding mainly directed into school budgets headteachers now had much more power to select the terms of the relationship than was previously the case. This provokes some interesting

questions about the accountability of schools in governance as Sara Kumar, the local authority officer I interviewed, indicated. Sara Kumar was quite clear about how her role in regard to schools had changed and describes how she feels like:

“...a glorified consultant, brought in when schools feel like it or have a need. Where I have a good relationship to schools, they still see, see that as valuable. But they don’t have to.”

She went on to describe how money was now more directly delegated to schools by central government:

“...for things like personalised learning, extended services and so on under what used to be standards fund. Part of this was for personalised learning, but we used to have some power to retain money and delegate it to schools in return for, for outcomes that we’d want to, that we’d expect to see. It all, all the money in my budget apart from my, my salary, and the team’s, it all goes out now. But as consultants we are given absolutely no rights either in terms of monitoring, of monitoring of activity or monitoring of the use of the money, which is also really, really important. Along the way the local authorities are running shy, scared of asking the questions and indeed haven’t been given the authority to ask the questions about the expenditure of the money.”

In this extract Sara Kumar articulates a position of powerlessness for local authorities in exerting leverage on what happens in schools. Her prognosis was that she would be increasingly involved in “commissioning services that schools can buy into or that other people run”. Other people in this instance are likely to be self-employed consultants or private companies. The testimony of this local authority officer indicates that not only will local government be less involved in the delivery and monitoring of key policy strategies but also there will be a proliferation of business interest in servicing the needs of schools for infrastructure, advice and resources.

When asked about the role of local authorities, Wendy Smith thought they were still absolutely crucial for brokering the partnerships that schools needed to enact

personalised learning. Jenny Jones of the NCSL thought so too but was more ambivalent about their future:

“Local authorities have been caught up in the last two years in quite a lot of their own restructuring which I think meant many of them have been focusing inward. I think that in the past the department’s view of local authorities has been pretty low and I think the government has had a love-hate relationship with them. So, I think the local authorities are still grappling for a role in the new landscape, I really do”

If personalisation is a story central to increasing partnerships and local collaborations in order to provide more integrated services, especially to the socially disadvantaged as the Children’s Plan (DCSF 2007a) envisioned, then it is quite reasonable to suggest that local authorities would play key coordinating roles within this strategy. Yet the testimony from headteachers and Sara Kumar, and the indications from the competing governance model indicate that more control is emanating from central government, even where it is dispersed to local heads via the rational goal values.

I speculate as to why this might be and how this intersects with the narrative of personalisation before thinking about the potential impact on the question of ethical spaces for practices posed by local governance.

In modernity’s narrative of progress there is a tendency for the self-realising individual to be contrasted to the restrictive nature of state power and the ‘stifling’ effect of bureaucracy upon innovation. The narrative of progress, following Mill (2008), wants to suggest that individuals are mature enough in contemporary societies not to need the strong “nanny state” (de Botton 2011, unpagged web article) and this ideal joins that other story of modernity: the global extension of European

civilisational superiority (Taylor 2007). In the long history of contemporary English capitalism one can discern a strain in the imaginary that runs from Dickens's satire of the "Circumlocution Office" in *Little Dorrit* (1857/2003, p.119)³ to a nadir in Prime Ministers Blair and Cameron⁴. The imaginary is already familiar to the listener when Prime Minister Blair complained:

"That the old monopolistic, paternalist model of public services failed to address inequalities, indeed in some cases worsened them" (2004a unpagged speech)

The sense of transcendence implicit in the moral order of a 'free' and private economic agent (Taylor 2007) is positioned in the social imaginary against the 'organs of state' and this theme resonates in New Labour's exposition of personalisation. The 'paternalistic' model of public services that Blair alludes to may indeed have failed to deliver more just outcomes but what is interesting to note is the way that this discourse becomes associated with local government's failure to meet the aspirations of the 'modern consumer'⁴. The Conservative party Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, quoted a Blair memoir explaining the 'success' of the Academies programme by the fact that they were:

"...freed from the extraordinarily debilitating and often, in the worst sense, politically correct interference from state or municipality" (Gove 2012, unpagged speech).

Local authorities become associated with the 'system' and in the narrative of personalisation it is systems that should meet the needs of individuals and not the other way around. Thus a consistent fault line in New Labour policy is their need for local tiers of government in their dispersal of power and coordination of services that reflect local needs and priorities, with a paradoxical pull to marginalise them for more direct control from the centre (Newman 2006).

Undoubtedly this is an uneven and complex process and an energetic reform programme can be easily frustrated by what politicians see as intransigent local officers. But there are other paradoxical factors in play within the discourses of bureaucracy and the imaginary. New Labour endorses a view of technical rationality, the tailoring argument, the gathering of data and technical tracking of pupil progress. The character of the manager in modernity represents an endorsement of technical rationality in applying scientific principles to human organisation (MacIntyre 1994). But as MacIntyre (1994) has argued, despite elements of regularities and predictability in our social structures the human world is essentially unpredictable and in the context of human organisations (for example schools):

“The concept of managerial effectiveness is after all one more contemporary moral fiction and perhaps the most important of them all. The dominance of the manipulative mode in our culture is not and cannot be accompanied by very much actual success in manipulation” (MacIntyre 1994, p.107).

The practice of effectiveness is orientated to technical solutions based upon faith in a law-like chain of reasoning that supposes that: “if I do x then y will follow” when the essential unpredictability of humans in asserting their independence makes this calculus tantalisingly beyond us:

“The fetishism of commodities has been supplemented by another just as important fetishism, that of bureaucratic skills” (MacIntyre 1994, p.107).

But such fetishism comes at a price and that is disillusion with the powers of bureaucracy to get it ‘right’. Perhaps personalisation as co-creation spoke to this sense of alienation and chimed with the placing of the risks of self-realisation upon

the individual since the organisations that had once represented solidity no longer do so.

From the interviews comes a strong sense that schools can no longer ‘stand alone’ to raise standards of education:

“There needs to be reconfiguration of the system. Schools can’t do this alone, the notion of schools just standing alone with, you know, the odd helper is just absurd, there’s a myriad of agencies out there that ought to be part of the learning pattern” (Wendy Smith).

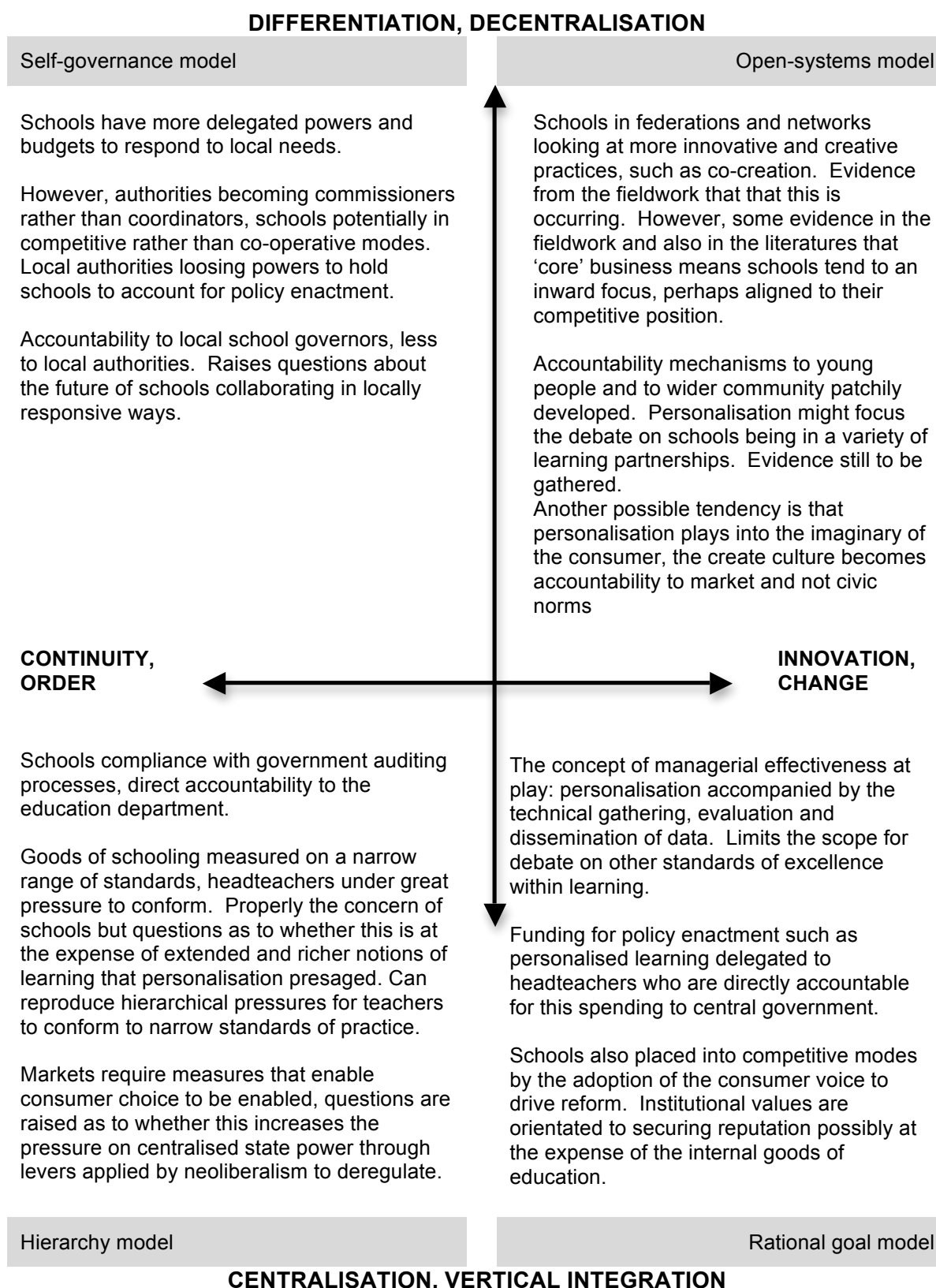
Jenny Jones and Wendy Smith both talked about the need for schools to be in networks of different public services and third sector organisations and networked into their geographical communities. Their use of the metaphor of networking and the concept of innovation going ‘viral’ that Miliband (DfES 2003a) had raised, suggested an association with complexity theory. The complexity metaphor promises to re-energise ‘stale’ bureaucracies by putting new rationality into the concept of networks of governance that innovate schooling towards more just outcomes.

However, the evidence that networks of schooling can relocate power into producing more just outcomes is mixed. Jenny Jones argued that the NCSL certainly has examples of creative innovations being undertaken that enhance concepts of personalised learning, but Frankham (2006) suggests that there is a danger of networks being used to secure competitive advantage for schools and thus entrench inequities in the system. As the empirical evidence is unclear I offer an ethical argument to suggest that some form of democratic accountability at the local level is essential. Perhaps the discourses of complexity theory by dispersing moral debate through institutional realignment plays into what Sandel (2010) describes as the

worries a pluralist society has about confronting difficult moral issues and disagreements. If local authorities become simply organisers and commissioners of privately owned services does this not undermine the norms of public service and democracy? For if the state should, *qua* Rawls (1973) provide the procedural capacity to simply live together, rather than represent for us some deeper moral consensus (even if that consensus is how to live with irreconcilable disagreements) then “the nature of political obligation becomes systematically unclear” to its citizens (MacIntyre, 1994, p.254). I am not arguing that public services were ever a paradigm for some utopian society, ‘better days’, or that they consistently deliver equitable access or outcomes for their users, but could not public services responsive to local governance carry symbolic recognition of shared goods and trust between members of a society? As Marquand (2004) argues, beyond services there are numerous other means (for example parks and shared civic facilities) that are public connections that constitute a public sphere. A vibrant civic domain helps to honour the virtues of mutual trust and generosity (Sandel 2010). Marquand (2004) highlights how, in British society, “public trust in some of the key institutions of the public domain is dribbling away” (p.128); trust in professionals running services remains high while the public trust in the “marketizers” (p.128) seems to be increasingly lost.

In Figure 8.2 below I summarise some of the tendencies that are at play in circumscribing the ethical spaces for schools to engage in a wider debate about their telos and goods. (Such spaces are squeezed but could possibly be liberated, since in places evidence is yet to be gathered). The summary utilises the competing values model of governance adapted from Newman (2006) in order to provide consistency to the research.

Figure 8.2: ethical spaces in the governance and accountability structures of schooling under New Labour



In the Figure above I have attempted to distil the analysis of this chapter in the light of proceeding ones. It is highly likely that this figure and contents could have been constructed as a description of New Labour education policy without the lens of personalisation. Personalised learning as a proposition has provided a focus for an examination of the cultural and political tendencies at play and examining the room for schools to manoeuvre. So I suggest that while personalisation seems to promise a more responsive and engaging sense for civic voice in the construction of public services, there are very mixed messages about the local democratic mechanisms through which this engagement might be realised. This is a fault line that personalisation does not adequately seem to bridge, and I speculate that such a failure seriously undercut the scope for innovation in schools because the centralised models of governance resulted in narrow and conforming lines of accountability to notions of effectiveness. Teachers are under pressures to conform in ways that are not always productive to innovation because the pull to integration in the system that measures effectiveness rather than excellence seems to be out of kilter with the values of collaboration and creation that might enrich the internal goods of education. Creative possibilities in the open-systems (create) model are beginning to be evidenced in terms of expanding young peoples' ownership of pedagogy and the curriculum (see Jenny Jones and Dave Richards) but these might have happened in any case (see Dave Richard's testimony). The question still remains to be answered as to whether this "create" quadrant opens up other forms of consumerism to the market or offers possibilities for authentic student and community voice in schools; an agonism of modernity that can perhaps only be argued to a conclusion by drawing upon some ethical philosophy, which is why I elaborated the virtue ethics approach in Chapter Three.

8.6 Summary

One of the strategic aims of this chapter was to set about trying to understand more of why personalisation is a compelling contemporary political narrative, and how intersections of cultural and political tendencies might have squeezed the available spaces (what I have called ethical spaces) for schools to extend the ethical practices beyond narrow measures of effectiveness. There are many resonances in what Taylor (2007) has termed the long march of modern social imaginaries. These form moral horizons against which argument and debate are set but what is often at stake is the nature and status of the self-realising individual. In modernity this particular individual is dignified through private economic activity within the market place. Allied to which is a narrative of progress that increasingly sees the state as a brake on the individual in a complex and rapidly changing world. However, late Western modernity also encapsulates a sense of unease in the face of one's continued obligation to become self-determining and self-justifying and own the risks of doing so. Through consumption, especially that amplified by the increasing power of network technologies, one is offered a way to personalise and own these obligations but the question is raised as to whether personalisation also means more commodification of need, more standardisation of the consumer.

A central motif in personalisation is the consumer, an individual who can drive reform through exercising choice and voice and, in many discourses, becoming a co-creator in both the renewal of business and of public service. However, an agonism of modernity I argued is that the moral status of the consumer is open to many irreconcilable interpretations: personalisation can be a moment of celebrating individual agency as a creative force or subject to the suspicion that it is a symbol of social control and the reproduction of unjust economic arrangements.

The consumer identity is thus open to differing normative interpretations, but the markets, over which neoliberalism exerts a powerful influence, set out a very narrow case for individual autonomy. Neoliberalism undercuts the pursuit of social justice because it is a project that is about maintaining elite power.

It would be unfair to characterise New Labour as simply accommodating to neoliberalism, their position is more complex and nuanced. New Labour set about reforming education and public services with great energy in pursuit of more socially just provision. They present a compelling case in its resonance with the social imaginaries. But New Labour's proposition about personalisation is only a partial narrative of the citizen and its rational, technical tenor, brooked no debate. In their narrative they cited the complexity of the modern, globalised, world and the ever-more demanding consumer, but drawing on Nancy Fraser, the question remains as to whether a deeper and richer conceptualisation of justice that examined mechanisms for cultural recognition and parity of participation, would have enabled greater ethical spaces within the practices of schooling.

I tentatively suggest in this chapter, because there is still much theoretical and empirical work to be done, that serious questions are raised as to whether their models of governance supported ethical spaces for schools to be far more reaching in adapting and developing the radical implications that personalised learning suggested. The fault line of local tiers of democratic accountability remained unresolved in New Labour's project.

Chapter Eight footnotes:

- 1) While this is a brief summary that does not do justice to the history I suggest the argument still stands. Among the many historical tendencies that are important in the imaginaries described in Table 8.1, is the linkage between a secular society, individual realisation and economic activity expressed through the market. The secularising tendencies that fermented in eighteenth century Europe did not signify a growing absence of religion but rather a displacement of the transcendent into the private lives of individuals and the family.

As the private world of the family became disembedded from an order hierarchically established around the rule of the sovereign embodying the will of God, the market increasingly became a public sphere in which private interests could be pursued without political interference. The economic sphere became imbued with a sense of order and discipline paralleled, or even stemming from, the 'inner' faith of the reforming Puritan class (Tawney 1969). For example, The English historian R. H. Tawney (first published in 1922) argued:

"Puritanism, not the Tudor secession from Rome, was the true English reformation, and it is from its struggle against the old order that an England which is unmistakably modern emerges. But immense as its accomplishments on the high stage of public affairs, its achievements in the inner world, of which politics are but the squalid scaffolding, were mightier still" (Tawney 1969, p.199).

This 'inner dimension' is reflected in the growth of a public sphere; as the family increasingly becomes a site of education and cultural exchange, so a wealthy industrial class begins to read about and take an interest in political matters and converse publically about them (Tawney 1969; Taylor 2007).

- 2) It is interesting to note that New Labour, like most contemporary Western governments were in the paradoxical position of having to reform public services as a matter of necessary moral purpose while also trying not to become a moralising state about private matters. Some critical policy scholarship takes New Labour to task for its 'middle class' imaginary and hence class conception of morality. For example, Gerwitz (2001) critiques in New Labour policy for reflecting what a middle class families 'ought' be like in the moralising tone of education and social policy directed at working class families. However, the point being that moral debate about private and public matters, while it may have a class history, is in the social imaginary a 'difficult' concept for both critics and proponents alike and hence a source of disputation without necessarily a rational resolution. This is partly why MacIntyre (1994, 2001) turns to social practices and moral traditions to seek some reasoned basis for ethical practice.
- 3) In Charles Dickens's famous satire set in Victorian England, the men of invention, the entrepreneurs, struggle against the bureaucracy of the old aristocratic stranglehold on the state. Run by the Barnacle Family, metaphorically clinging to the ship of state, the Circumlocution Office continually blocked the entrepreneurial efforts of Daniel Doyce in "Little Dorrit":

"No Public business of any kind could possibly be done at any time, without the acquiescence of the Circumlocution Office (*and further*)
Whatever was required to be done, the Circumlocution Office was beforehand with all public departments in the art of perceiving – HOW NOT TO DO IT".
(Dickens 1857/2003, p. 119).

- 4) Prime Minister Cameron also elaborates this theme within the “Big Society” discourse when he expresses the need for entrepreneurs and public service professionals to be free to innovate (Cameron 2011). This discourse represents public service delivery through government, central and local, as “centralised bureaucracy that wastes time and money” (Cameron 2011, unpaginated speech).

Gove endorsed New Labour’s approach to school autonomy: “Andrew Adonis knew it was headteachers, not councillors, not ombudsmen, not advisers or consultants, who made schools succeed. So he cut through the red tape” (Gove 2012, unpaginated speech).

CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSION

9.1 Introduction

This final chapter summarises the analysis in response to the strategic aim of the thesis and to the two fieldwork questions in particular. The chapter concludes by describing the contribution of this thesis and directions for further research.

A strategic aim of the thesis was to ask questions about personalisation within the context of late Western modernity in order to understand more about its place and prominence in New Labour's policy making and how this might then contextualise the practices of schools and the experiences of young people within them. I argued the necessity of this aim because education entails a series of ethical questions about what ought to be done within schooling and personalisation in particular advocated a proposition about moral purpose in the pursuit of social justice. I needed to understand in terms of a sociological and philosophical imagination (following MacIntyre 1994, Wright-Mills 1980) the relationship between more abstract cultural transformations and the micro-practices of schools. I argued that schools are critical sites for ethical practices that contribute to notions of human goods, even if the structuring of liberal democracies declines to engage in a thicker consensus of what such moral and political obligations might be (MacIntyre 1994).

The contribution of the thesis is to seek to combine the research from fieldwork with the discursive literatures into a coherent and convincing argument, acknowledging the partial nature of the account and the need for further theoretical and empirical work.

The particular research questions that guided the fieldwork were:

- 1) What are the experiences of young people as learners within the practices of schools who seek to enact personalised learning?
- 2) How is the enactment of personalised learning in schools framed by the ways that headteachers interpret policies of personalised learning?

In this conclusion I provide a preamble (9.2), turn to the specific questions (9.3, 9.4), then summarise the analysis through the question of the ethical spaces for personalised learning and implications for social justice (9.5). The final section (9.6) concludes by describing the contribution of this thesis and directions for further research.

9.2 Conclusion: preamble

New Labour outlined personalised learning as a series of policy statements to promote social justice by raising the standards of education in English schools through the notion of the curriculum being 'tailored' to the individual student (see Chapter Two). This was a policy designed to reinforce the social-democratic view that "excellence" should be available to all and not to those who could afford to pay for it (Miliband 2004). However, Needham (2011) argues that as a narrative theme, personalisation should not be seen as a coherent policy strategy with a "stable set of policy goals" (p.56). As a series of stories, personalisation has been both compelling and confusing (Needham 2011). I find in this thesis levels of ambiguity, tension, confusion and paradox in how personalised learning was both portrayed and understood as a pedagogical project for school reform (Chapters Two and Seven).

However, there are some underlying themes worthy of exploration one of which turned out to be the fault lines that policy attempted to bridge. A coherence is found

in reading personalisation as a rubric, a headline, for the political story that New Labour advanced to bridge its social-democratic origins and ideals, to an accommodation with the growing hegemonic forces of neoliberalism. With my starting position about the centrality of schooling in contemporary societies, what increasingly emerged from reading the data and the literatures is that schools are spaces under extreme pressures from cultural and political forces. Headteachers, as critical agents, had to make complex negotiations between the competing modes of governance promoted under New Labour and found themselves in the binary of having delegated powers and being, increasingly, directly accountable to central government. How far headteachers are complicit in constructing such binaries (the outsider/insider) is an open question (Thomson 2010).

I argue that progress and modernisation through technical rationality are modern modes of narrative (Taylor 2007) and New Labour embraced these modalities with enthusiasm. Despite the 1944 education settlement advancing arguments about the curriculum meeting the needs of children rather than pupils having to fit the system, New Labour policy sequestered this proposition of 'tailoring' as personalised learning to their version of the contemporary context. A context subsumed under the plot of the 21st century 'knowledge economy'. Their policy making was redolent with metaphors of 'vigour', 'robustness' and 'standards' and while attempting to mollify professionals by stating that this was what good teachers always did, an underlying presumption in personalisation is that 'failing' schools did not engage young people in their learning. One cannot criticise a political party for searching for reform and for more equitable outcomes in public services, nor for seeking succinct and easily communicable measures of the success of their political programme. But a further ethical question, that of practical policy enactment, is how extensive and far-reaching are concepts of justice elaborated by New Labour and to what extent

did their modes of governance enable school to develop a range of practices whose standards of excellence would be open to a wider civic debate?

In the fieldwork and policy documentation a key mode of engagement in personalised learning is found to be 'measured' through the fine-grain of data and targets that drive a school to 'improve'. In this thesis I argued that effectiveness in improving schools employs different ethical standards to that of excellence in education (see also Wilcox 1997). These standards, following MacIntyre (1994), would include an account of the virtues that could contribute to criteria of social justice. While personalised learning may have contributed to effectiveness in raising educational attainment, the latter had more to do with hierarchical and rational goal models of governance and their demands for 'public' data and reliance on performance targets. While personalisation professed a story of trust in schools and professionals its underlying narrative is an ideological regulation of the education workforce and what counts as professional knowledge. Ironically it might even have managed this 'finesse' by being vague and even contradictory about the pedagogical principles of personalised learning (Hartley 2009). There was 'something for everyone' in the pedagogical story and the appeal of placing the individual child at the centre of education rendered personalisation a sheen that stood in some paradox to the strenuous denials by Ministers and policy strategists that this was not a 'return' to child-centredness, despite a lack of investigation as to whether these notions had a) either been widespread or b) had contributed to lack of progress and poor standards in education. The compelling case for personalisation was that it tapped into the imaginary of progress and New Labour were at considerable pains to distance themselves from the past.

Personalisation promised ‘radical implications’ (Knight 2007b) for the education system and ignited a flurry of interest and debate within policy networks, especially in the years 2004 and 2007 when Ministers such as David Miliband and Jim Knight (2007a, 2007b) seemed to take a particular interest. However, by the time of the House of Commons Education and Select Committee report (2007) personalised learning appeared to have ‘run out of steam’ although the narrative of personalisation is still being run through to the end of their term in government in public service policy thinking (Chapter Two). The conclusions of this thesis are that personalised learning policy enactment did not result in radical reform either in classroom pedagogy or curriculum organisation and content. Indeed, from the testimony of headteachers and policy strategists in the fieldwork it maybe that personalisation focused certain aspects of the debate, but it was ‘business as usual’ in the attempts to move the system forwards.

I placed three key themes as emerging through personalisation in New Labour’s policy story of public sector reform: the motif of the citizen-consumer whose exercise of choice, voice and exit was considered to be driver of reform; personalisation as social justice through providing equity of excellence throughout the public sector; and modernisation which in schools was translated into such motifs of the 21st century school, the knowledge economy and personalisation as not child-centredness but a “hard-edge” of accountability (Miliband 2006). The citizen-consumer, social justice and the narrative of modernisation became key lenses through which to analyse the data in the fieldwork. In addition, I employed the competing values model of organisational cultures (adapted from Quinn 1991) that was in turn adapted by Newman (1996) as the competing values model of governance. This framework has also been adapted in the thesis. One of the key reasons for doing so lies in the argument for the importance of the institutional site

as a location for housing social practices. Institutions work around value models that can be competing to the point of rendering them dysfunctional, or, the tensions are creative when working in harmony: the need both to provide stability and to innovate. Where those values become highly pressured by external forces or internal contradictions, the spaces for practices to define their telos by internal goods of excellence become more directed to external goods that define effectiveness on a narrower range of standards. An account of the virtues is required in order to align practices in an ethical direction, but the policy drive may make such qualities extremely difficult to define and defend (Chapter Three). A competing values framework has been used in Chapters Five to Eight in order to summarise and illustrate the argument based upon the fieldwork testimony.

9.3 What are the experiences of young people as learners within the practices of schools who seek to enact personalised learning?

Personalised learning was a proposition about actively engaging the learner in their learning and whilst the citizen-consumer motif was not applied to young people, their voice was certainly meant to be an active feature of personalised schooling (Chapter Five). The testimony in this thesis from young people suggested that they experienced an active and meaningful engagement in only a minority of their lessons. The allusion “crouching target, hidden child” was employed to summarise young peoples’ problematic positioning within the practice of their schools. I found their voice to be largely rendered mute and, contrary to the visibility suggested by personalisation, young people perceived themselves to be largely invisible to the practices of the school. In their view, if you were not ‘acting out’ or were not ‘clever’, but just ‘getting on with things’ then a student would receive little attention. In this regard they did not view their lessons as personalised. This sense of invisibility

often extended to the wider life of the school. A certain cynicism was expressed that 'voice' counted when it suited the school.

One explanation I advanced to account for their story is the context of rational models of governance dedicated to securing higher exam passes and undercutting more innovative and risk taking practices. For example, young people felt that teachers perceived the time taken to engage more in a language of learning and continuous feedback, or wider democratic negotiations, was time that ought to be spent on covering an exam syllabus. Young people felt some teachers were uncomfortable about critiquing or discussing their lessons with them. Personalised learning was meant to promote a culture of improving learning through dialogue with young people about how and what they were learning. But to do so requires dialogue about the efficacy and practice of a teachers' pedagogy; ironically this is the very dialogue that both young people and staff felt the least comfortable about engaging in. Young people certainly felt they did not have access to means or codes of communicating pedagogical critiques within schools.

One might argue that this is an overly critical view of school practices. Managing large numbers of young people so that they all feel connected, engaged and noticed in school is obviously a challenge, especially if from adolescents there could be a certain amount of resistance to the adult ordering of their world through regimes of discipline and imposed structure. It could be argued that the data has simply presented the young person's perspective and then only from a small sample without acknowledging this complexity. Epistemologically some critical theorists have argued that voice discourses, through privileging subordinated voices, such as those in of these students in their classroom pedagogy, has led to a conflation of

knowledge to knower's experiences, a relativist enterprise that cannot ultimately decide truth claims between different groups of subjects (Moore and Muller 1999). There is a danger therefore that merely describing the 'standpoint' of young people somehow validates the interpretation that flows from the research data. Further layers of complexity are added by acknowledging that young people speak from within a range of dominant discourses, such as consuming children, so that the heterogeneity of their voices have to be understood (Thomson and Gunter 2006). Given the caveats above that might be applied to the research data, I argue that it still holds as a picture of some typicality in English secondary schools struggling to raise their exam attainment scores.

One reason for justifying the evidence is drawn from MacIntyre's (1994) moral philosophy that argues for the place of virtues in social practices. If teaching and learning is a social practice then the virtues that personalised learning ought to embody as standards of excellence (Chapter Three), ought also to be experienced in the testimony of young people. The fact that they were not, suggests convincing moral reasons for critiquing their absence in policy enactment.

Young people in Chapters Five and Six cited cases of teachers who did engage them more richly in lessons and "cared about" them in ways other staff did not. Young people were prepared to accept what I called a negotiated order and adult authority, but too often the practices they experienced seemed to be arbitrarily imposed and pedagogically disengaging. In light of this, I conclude that personalised learning, some six to seven years after its introduction as a proposition through the "National Conversation" (DfES 2003a title), failed to impact systemically on altering learning practices in these case study schools, and by implication in

settings beyond. The mythical metaphor of Procrustean schooling (Chapter Six) was employed to suggest that despite the promise of personalised learning, the main experience of schooling for young people was a 'one size fits all' system that did not consistently engage them in learning practices but sought to 'manipulate' their participation.

In addition, even though one might expect young people to be positioned within a consumer discourse that leads them to privilege their own needs over others, testimony in this research suggested they are developing a sense of justice and fairness that often transcends their own selfish interests. Young people expressed concern for their peers who they felt had been marginalised or 'held back' (Chapter Six). In addition they want to grapple with difficult and sensitive cultural issues and feel that their school curriculum is doing little to equip them to live in a multi-cultural society. This finding about a sense of justice and wider interest in the social world has resonance with other literatures (Gorard 2008) and suggests that other young people across English schools will express similar sentiments.

A competing values framework (Figure 5.1) was used to illustrate the differences between goods of effectiveness and goods of excellence in the engagement of young peoples' voice in their pedagogy. In Figure 6.1 this framework was used to extend the notion of voice into the wider practices of the school and draw a distinction between manipulative non-manipulative moral modes. This was partly enabled through drawing upon a notion of authenticity (Taylor 2003) in which one is able to argue that some horizons possess significance and others do not. Thus for young people it was clear when their voice was used to 'decorate' or enhance the school's reputation but made little impact on the accountability of their school

towards them. The competing values framework does not suggest that schools operate only in one mode or quadrant, but that a variety or continuum of practice is likely to be experienced by young people. It is suggested in the thesis that one reason for the inconsistency of their experience is that headteachers and their agency to innovate are placed through modes of governance into positions where a headteacher's desire for innovation is squeezed through both the narratives of progress and the culture of audit.

9.4 How is the enactment of personalised learning in schools framed by the ways that headteachers interpret policies of personalised learning?

The conclusion that personalised learning failed to have a 'radical impact' upon school practices seems to be born out by Dave Richard's remark, that for the headteachers personalised learning was "indistinguishable" from the "school effectiveness stuff that was in the public arena previously". If headteacher Sandra Burt believes that personalised learning is "just common sense" really, then critical policy scholarship has to ask how this common sense is constructed and what it signifies. There was evidence to suggest (Chapter Seven) that the headteachers in this sample created binaries in the manner suggested by Thomson (2010): for example, policy "jargon" versus "the needs of the kids". Whether the theoretical framework of field and habitus can adequately explain the role of these binaries would need further research. In this thesis I certainly argue that the headteachers in this sample were pulled towards reproducing New Labour's modernising ideology of the 'good' school through rational modes of governance. The fieldwork in this thesis suggests that the experiences of the young people inconsistently match up to the ethos that the strap-lines of the schools are trying to capture because the targets and data they gather are seen by students as more to do with the school's reputation (Chapter Five). A reputation that is subject to the scrutiny of an audit

culture and to the threat of parental 'exit'. Carol from Cedar Tree School articulated this tension in the following way:

I don't think the school just think "oh we'll just ignore all the students" I don't think that's how they think about it, I think, it just goes on the backburner, like "ah we will listen when we've not got an award to win or when we're not doing this when we've not got exams coming up". So they think "oh we will do it but just not right now".

Therefore, part of the modernising ideological pull is for a school to position itself in both a survival and a competitive mode. Schools have to become market orientated to 'compete' for parents' attention (Tomlinson 2005) and create 'strap-lines' that mark them out as a "best buy" option (Maguire et al 201, p.14).

Even though this is a model that did not necessarily accord with headteachers' education values and principles, personalisation enabled them to absorb the pressure to produce narrowly evaluated standards of effectiveness by aligning the technical demands for data to their moral purposes of social justice and fulfilling individual potential. Rational goal models of governance that stress the pragmatic, the technical and work towards order and control seem to predominate (Chapter Seven). This despite Miliband's (DfES 2003a) use of the viral strategy metaphor suggesting that personalisation might have supported more open-networks of innovation and collaboration. The use of the competing models of governance framework (Newman 2006) in this thesis was to suggest that personalised learning could contribute to different modes of governance, but that the 'common sense' within which headteachers operated rational models of governance largely framed their selection of strategies. The pragmatism of headteachers about choosing their grounds for innovation and having to work hard with staff to change practices is saturated by the technical languages that New Labour adopted around standards and their audit.

This finding may seem to contradict the argument that underwrites this thesis that although moral agency is socially embodied, a moral agent is responsible for transcending social structures (MacIntyre 1999b). However, the Aristotelian legacy adopted by MacIntyre (1994, 2001) is to suggest that it is in practices, not in abstract rules and theory, that moral possibilities are sought and argued about. Headteachers can exert moral agency but it is a process of struggle, of choosing grounds on which to 'fight' and exercising that practical wisdom Aristotle (1998) called *phronesis*. The question then becomes what is the value slope of balances (Taylor, 2003) in one's practices? In this sample headteachers professed wider and richer educational values than those their young people experienced and at the abstract level their value slope was certainly towards being more accountable to, and engaged with, the voices of their learners. The models of governance in policy enactment either make this slope uphill work for headteachers or render their values co-opted to hegemonic forces that redirect their energies. More research is required to test out these ideas. But the evidence in this sample tentatively suggests that a headteacher who can carve out space from external audit has more room to innovate and change towards his or her educational values. Several of the headteachers in this sample expressed the view that they were not as far along the road of student voice and participation in pedagogy as they would like to be. Apart from the pressures of being accountable to government audit, some cited the difficulty of taking "staff with them". A further line of research is suggested here: what constitutes or goes into making the character of a teacher who is open to the risks of a more authentic student voice? MacIntyre's (1994) account of social practices and virtue ethics would certainly make a starting point to such an investigation.

9.5 The ethical spaces for personalised learning and the implications for social justice

A theme that emerged from analysing the fieldwork and reading the literatures was the notion of space. That if institutions had spaces within the policy narrative could they engage in richer forms of accountability to their young people and their communities? Could they engage in richer forms of learning that personalisation certainly seemed to promise if not deliver? The thesis cannot answer these questions in the positive but can suggest that spaces are certainly being squeezed in contemporary English schooling and thus from a negative sense it could be argued that innovations in learning could be enabled if spaces were created. After all a reason for becoming curious about the notion of personalised learning is a deep belief in the human goods to be cultivated through learning; goods not just for oneself but for a richer sense of democratic engagement. A space would be time and the wherewithal to engage in ethical debate about the telos or purposes of schooling and to seek standards of excellence that define the internal goods of their practices as well as answer to those external goods such as improving the qualification standards of their students. I call this space an ethical space to clarify its philosophical nature. Figures 7.1 and 8.1 summarised through the competing values of governance how different accountability structures might squeeze and pressurise such spaces.

The fault lines of neoliberalism and the emasculation of local tiers of government that run complexly under New Labour's proposition for personalisation serve to pressure the system in certain directions and I suggested that more, not less, central government control is being exerted. There are a number of implications for social justice in the paradoxes of policy. But some of these paradoxes are not of the government's making but reflect the imaginaries present in Western modernity. The

moral status of the consumer is subject to an agonism of modernity: I could engage in interminably circular arguments about it. The consumer identity is available for any number of discourses. New Labour has chosen a partial view and one it is argued that does not reflect the heterogeneity of contemporary English society (Newman 2006).

Another paradox is that New Labour correctly pushed the notion of universal entitlement - one of the reasons for Charles Clarke arguing that personalisation “is not a vague liberal notion about letting people have what they want” (Clarke 2004, foreword). But they did not wish to prescribe the content from the centre. In addition, personalisation as a policy to broaden personal choice of curriculum pathways in order to engage students could be interpreted as a contradiction of universal entitlement. Personalisation could be seen as a site of tension between a) justice as acquiring individual rights to pursue economic and social goods through one’s own educational achievement and b) justice as a virtue given meaning within some social, collective and co-operative activity. Again one of the features of modernity is that there are no easy answers to these paradoxes. But I suggest that there is an oscillation between the poles of ensuring universal entitlements and liberating schools to innovate that meant that any ethical space in school was never still enough before the next ‘initiative’ came along. A factor alluded to in the testimony of headteachers who complained of “initiative overload”.

It might seem that an argument to create and value the ethical spaces for schools is prone to the same paradoxes. How can a universal and equitable provision be ensured if schools are given such room? One way of addressing this objection is to examine the purpose of ethical space in relation to the virtues of social justice and

how this might be argued in the context of social practices; contexts that might well be tuned to different melodies in diverse communities.

At the macro-level there are problems in studying and researching the link proposed by personalised learning between attainment and social justice partly because the grounds for debating issues of social justice are narrowly captured by the economic arguments (see Ball 2008) and partly because the methodologies, and hence findings, are disputed (Gorard 2010, 2011). Governments look for readily available levers to effect change, and school structures and performance data are examples of these (Levin 2010). So, at the macro-level it would seem reasonable that some longitudinal analysis could examine the links between social mobility (the increasing numbers of people gaining access to goods such as 'better' life-styles through higher paid employment) and the increase in educational standards of attainment as designated by exam pass grades. However, this analytical enterprise is not without dispute, and challenges have been made to the methodologies employed by researchers and subsequent findings (see for example, Gorard 2010). The impact upon social justice at the macro-scale is thus very difficult to judge.

There are ethical arguments to suggest that elements of personalised learning as witnessed in this research lead to some pessimism over the hopes for social justice on a macro-scale. This is not to deny the undoubted significance of macro-institutional arrangements of schools and the way in which they are governed and structured. However, broadening the scope of justice as a concept beyond the right to equal shares in economic activity begins to open up possibilities for re-examining the micro-context of institutions. In the case of this research I argue that the capabilities to open up other possible discourses of authentic learning are linked to

virtues through qualities such as care, respect, trust, honesty, and the political virtues of just generosity and independent practical reasoning that enable young people to grow as human beings. I make this judgement based largely on the intellectual heritage of MacIntyre. Despite revisions and alterations to his account (MacIntyre 1999a, 2001) *After Virtue* still holds a key on five counts:

- 1) Excellence is first located, or best understood, in the milieu of practice and the goods internal to that practice;
- 2) These goods point to standards of excellence but need virtues to both achieve and define them;
- 3) The virtues are necessary “to contribute to the good of a whole life” (MacIntyre 1994, p.273);
- 4) This good is also commensurate with the good of human life in general but,
- 5) I cannot elaborate this from some neutral standpoint, free of tradition and social context.

To qualify as a virtue, a quality will have to be thought of in terms of the wider human good, and on this point I believe MacIntyre (1984) has furnished a sound basis for reason that negotiates the difficulties of abstract moral principles and a counter to accusations of cultural relativism.

Just practices need to struggle to incorporate the virtues in order to develop characteristics in individuals who are capable in turn of acting justly towards others. Schools provided ethical space to collectively debate and share a conception of the virtues would then be stimulated to correct the tendencies of 1) institutions to compete with each other and 2) to manipulate outcomes towards ‘proving’ effectiveness as opposed to enriching notions of human excellence through learning. Such a sharing as a democratic community would be difficult but ought to

be possible (see Fielding and Moss 2011; Oser et al 2008). Especially given the findings that capacities towards justice are nascent in, or expressed by, the young people in this research and that what the young people experienced in some instances of teaching are 'authentic' and meaningful instances of just and virtuous practice.

Policy that renders itself in terms of effectiveness and modernisation has made a moral displacement in the vocabulary of personalisation by shifting the languages of ethical discourse from collective obligations to personal risk assumed by the consumer. If the citizen motif is there to balance the pole of the consumer, it is not clear how this manifested itself in policy that seemed to privilege choice over citizen voice. In these reflections I argue that there are sufficient grounds in related philosophies of capabilities and human functioning to reconstitute a richer experience of learning and that emergent practices to realise other conceptions of educational excellence do exist.

The manipulative modes in contemporary schooling (Chapter Six) are likely to undercut the development of prefigurative capacities of young people for developing the virtues of justice and civic engagement because neither full recognition nor representation is available to them "in things that matter" (Carol, Cedar Tree School). As a young person, why trust a civic society or display "just generosity" in civil participation (MacIntyre 1999a, p.120) when its institutions cannot replicate those virtues towards their young participants? This argument is one that is no doubt open to some form of longer term empirical investigation, but the young people in this research indicated that trust is a reciprocal quality, that they had a wide sense of justice for themselves and others and wanted a wider engagement in

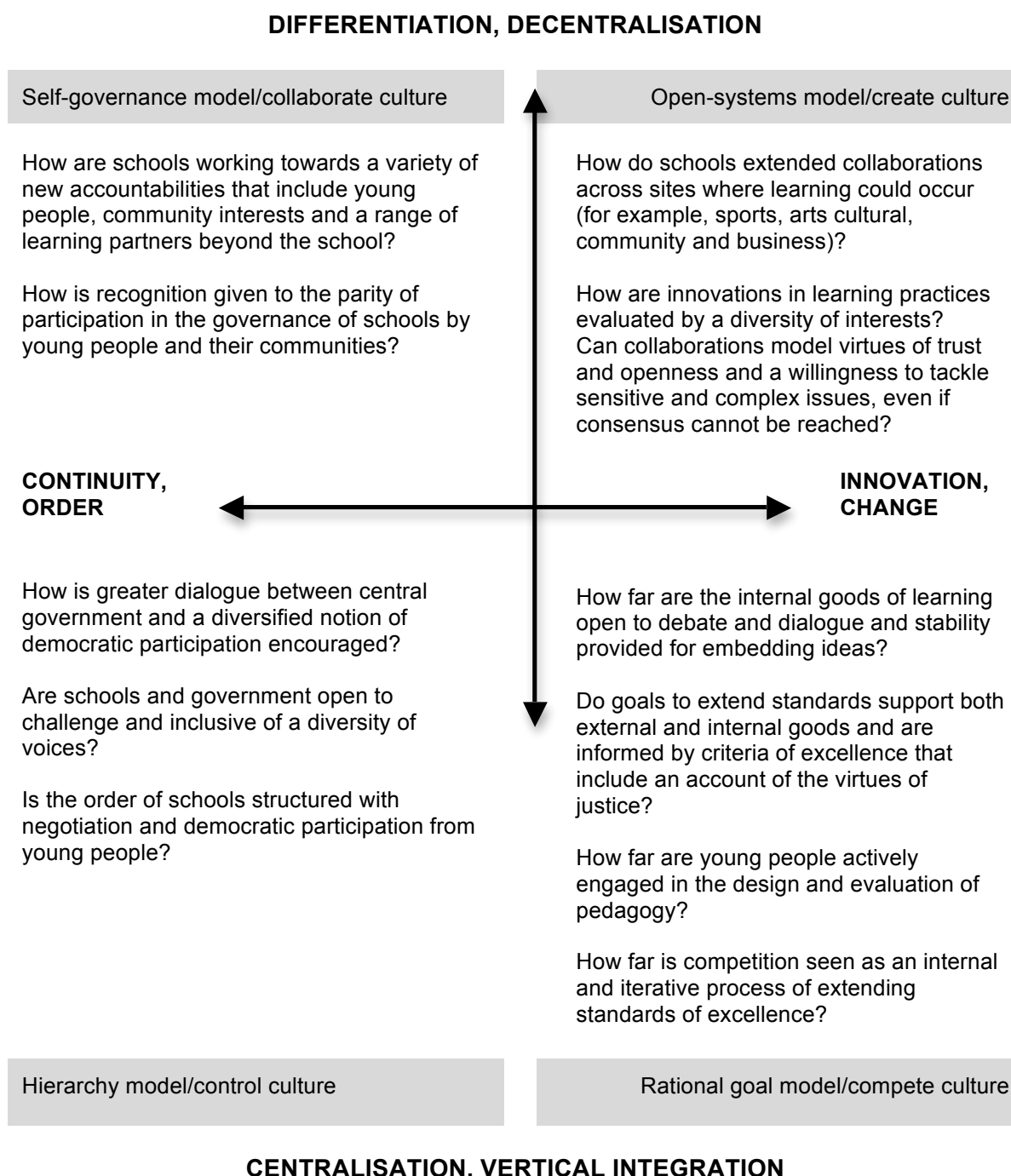
difficult moral issues. The economic and human capital arguments of policy makers serves to narrow the grounds of conceptions of justice to the attainment of skills for an economy that only a few have either the opportunity to participate in or receive benefit from. As Martha Nussbaum argues:

“..to give up on all evaluation and, in particular, on a normative account of the human being and human functioning was to turn things over to the free play of forces in a world situation in which the social forces affecting the lives of women, minorities, and the poor are rarely benign” (Nussbaum 1992, p.212).

Therefore, as a contribution to critical policy scholarship I offer a final Figure that draws upon the competing values framework of organisations to ask how one might judge the efficacy of both school and different tiers government in producing models of justice through a richer and more authentic account of (personalised) learning.

Figure 9.1 poses the kinds of questions that social practices, in public institutions, engaged in developing learning of any kind might ask themselves about the standards of excellence that are partly definitive of, and ought to be extended by, their practice.

Figure 9.1: questions to evaluate the ethical practices of schools and governments in developing excellence in learning



The questions are not exhaustive and doubtless many others are available from within the framework, but then the critical policy scholarship stance taken in this thesis has required evaluative work of the sort that introduces complexity and mess.

Perhaps policy makers feel on safer ground arguing about economic merits and skills as these appear to be easier to measure and leverage, and one cannot deny that gaining new skills and knowledge are a means of both self and social improvement. However, some conception of human ends and human flourishing suggests that the both the content and form of human life is worthy of richer moral debate (Nussbaum 2003). It is a debate that government in liberal democracies is unlikely to get into too deeply.

Judging by testimony in this research political obligations for young people in schools are determined by rules, codes of conducts and orders of timetables. While such codes may be absolutely necessary to the smooth functioning of the institution, they are not the only elements in which young people desire to share dialogue. Schools in this research tried to find means of political engagement through various voice 'initiatives' and leadership training, yet there was a remarkable consistency to the stories of young people that describe how schools took account of this voice when it suited them, or that their voice was 'twisted'. Obviously the sample researched is small in number but choosing young people who were engaged in student voice activity (a 'leading edge' sample) ought to indicate that if these young people feel this way then a great many more in their schools do so too. If young people feel that their institutions care more about the order of schooling than authentic engagement, then one can speculate that their sense of obligation to participate in wider public fora is then diminished. The young people in this sample certainly expressed the desire to be part of a community that was more politically engaged with its members.

I argue this guardedly, and offer speculations, because nothing is clear-cut, and the word 'perhaps' is intended to suggest the argument without laying claim to definitive reasoning. Perhaps, in being unclear about the detail of personalised learning and in combining a multitude of discourses into the citizen-consumer motif (Clarke et al 2007) New Labour absorbed the cultural sensibilities of modernity into a paradoxical story. Perhaps there is something in Hirschman's (1982) speculation that:

"It is the poverty of our imagination that paradoxically produces images of "total" change in lieu of more modest expectations" (1982, p.95).

Perhaps, New Labour's personalisation as a story of attempting so much through a 'big idea' represents a lack of imagination about the possibilities of practices in schools, because as a government they did not fully engage in dialogue with the profession about what the place of learning in society could be. While some, with a little justification, may accuse MacIntyre of pessimism over the possibility of re-enchanting a sense of public good (Feinberg 2012), MacIntyre's analysis (1994, 1999a, 2001) suggests that institutions are local forms of community where a reasoned argument about the goods of human flourishing may be held and standards of excellence elaborated that contribute to a richer democratic engagement.

If young people are going to be supported in developing the virtues that could contribute to a more just and democratic public life then the evidence of this research suggests that personalised learning was not a policy that contributed to any such standards of excellence. School policy and its modes of governance need to create stability but they also require innovation. It is argued that an account of the virtues could stimulate innovation in learning if it was given policy space to do so.

9.6 The contribution of the thesis and suggested further lines of research

Personalised learning was heralded, not least by New Labour themselves (DfES 2004a) as the 'big idea' in education, 'exciting' the profession, and is therefore a policy site worthy of, and important for, research. There is very little research into the experiences of young people in the schools that claimed to have adopted personalising learning. This research seeks to provide some further understandings of young peoples' experiences of purportedly personalised learning and to theorise about these stories in the broader social and cultural contexts. As argued below, there is still much research to be done and there are acknowledged limits to its generalisability. However, the fieldwork is striking in that a consensus in the stories of young people from three different schools is to be found. The contribution of the thesis lies in using the neo-Aristotelian ethical analysis of social practices and the virtues they embody as a reasoned ground for appraising and evaluating policy enactment of personalised learning as testified to by young people. In addition the thesis contributes through providing a broader historical context in which to understand the policy narrative and create links between the more abstract and 'remote' cultural plots and the stories of young people. The thesis has contributed an understanding of the dynamics and contours of New Labour's narrative of personalisation as it applied to education and presented an argument as to why it failed to have the radical impact some of its proponents promised. One of the modes of presentation has been the use of the competing values framework of organisational life and of models of governance. As a contribution I adapted the framework to examine the paradoxes at play in organisations and to suggest ways in which alternative frames of evaluation might be constructed that ensure the integrity of schools as site that are meaningful to all young people and not just the few.

The research sample is small and not necessarily representative of all young people and all schools. However, a sufficient convergence in the young peoples' stories, and the reasoning behind the employment of the chosen theoretical tools, suggests there is a strong case to characterise personalisation as a narrative mode of manipulation that offers only glimpses of alternative practices and possibilities. These 'glimpses' are there not because of personalised learning as a policy enactment but because they are already in the agency, or character, of 'good' of teachers who embody virtuous practices. In addition the sample of schools presents some typicality of the pressures faced by English secondary school headteachers who are under the direct gaze of government and operate within the tensions of competing values of educational governance. Although New Labour no longer governs education policy, I argue that the framework of ethical analysis is as important to apply now as it ever was. Virtue ethics provide intellectual tools for researching and evaluating the state of practice and policy enactment that can make a rich, interdisciplinary contribution to the sociology and history already to be found within critical policy scholarship.

The argument could be accused of "naïve possibilitarianism" (Whitty 2001, p. 288) but I contend that it contributes to complex hope (Grace 2011) and that to continue to do so a number of research lines could be opened up. For instance, the question of whether prefiguring democratic virtues in the practices of schools contributes to the wider goods of society should be open to some form of empirical research design. Also, it is interesting to note that some of the young people in this research argued that: "schools should be run by government because they should be for everyone". This suggests immediately that a productive line of research would be an account of a 'public' and what public education is for. Questions of public trust

in teachers and how a teacher replicates that trust within her pedagogical practices would be fruitful research interests.

Time and circumstances of examination timetables prevent me from fulfilling an intention to discuss the findings of the research with the young people themselves. However, that would certainly be a necessary step to a richer research project. In addition the research in this thesis needs to be complemented by ethnographic studies that incorporate the stories of teachers and the routines that schools establish around order, discipline and democratic engagement. The notion of negotiated order and virtuous practice as possible non-manipulative moral modes of school practice could therefore be empirically challenged or extended.

Further to the empirical work this research needs to consider alternative theoretical models that could be used to re-analyse the data and look for other research questions on the issues of public education, pedagogic practice, learning, student voice and social justice. In terms of examining the role of publics in relation to social justice, the work of Habermas (1992, 1995) and Fraser (1993, 2003, 2010) suggest themselves as possible sources of theoretical resources. In terms of student voice Bernstein's work on codes and the framing of voice has been cited through the research of Arnot and Reay (2007) and could be used to further analyse the differentiated mechanisms of exclusion and invisibility of students in pedagogic practices. Bourdieu's (2010) work on practice, field, doxa and habitus could be used to examine how the daily life of classroom practice interplayed with social structures and their reproduction. Critical policy scholarship has already drawn upon Bourdieu's work (for example, Gunter 2006; Thomson 2010) and the research begun in this thesis would perhaps be extended by asking questions about the

habitus of young people in relation to those of teachers and headteachers. Themes of invisibility could then be explored in relation to structural issues of power. There would be a worthwhile theoretical task to accomplish in engaging the sociology of Bernstein and Bourdieu with the virtue ethics of MacIntyre. Some tentative linkages were suggested in this research through trying to locate contemporary moral modes in the history of modernity but there is much more to be explored.

The challenge of the sociological imagination proposed by Wright-Mills (1980) still remains and it needs to be complemented by interdisciplinary contributions such as those from philosophy, history and even perhaps the arts.

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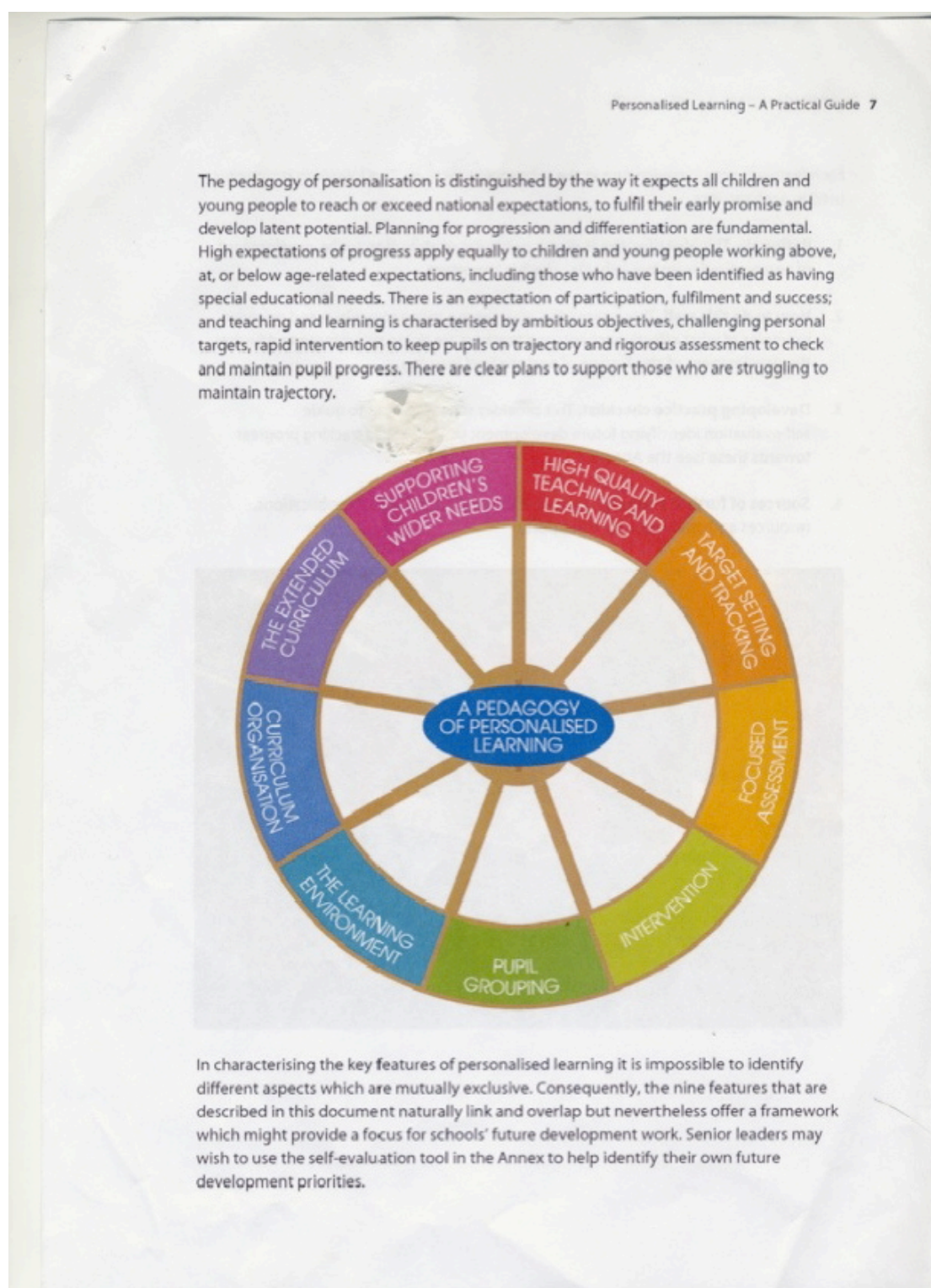
APPENDICES

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APPENDIX 1 (refers to page 32):

Extract from: DCSF (2008a, p.7), illustrating the summary of DCSF guidance to schools on the “nine features” of “A Pedagogy of Personalised Learning”.



APPENDIX 2 (refers to page 36):

New Labour's personalised learning: a 'timeline'

Timeline moments and publications relevant to promoting, investigating or explaining personalised learning as policy (table does not include critiques and is not exhaustive of every publication). Full references in reference section beginning page 320.

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| 1998: Prime Minister Blair's ippr pamphlet: <i>Leading the Way: New Vision for Local Government</i> Sets the scene for the notion of the citizen-consumer and the 'modernisation' of public services (http://www.ippr.org/publication/55/1119/leading-the-way-a-new-vision-for-local-government , accessed 12/08/12) |
| 2003: David Miliband, Minister of State for School Standards, <i>Every Schoolchild is Special</i> , The Observer 1 st June 2003, introduces a first notion of personalised learning |
| 2003: Prime Minister Blair's Speech to the Labour Party Conference, Bournemouth Tuesday September 30 th 2003, emphasises importance of education and personalised offer for every school child |
| 2004: Speech by David Miliband, <i>Minister of State for School Standards, Personalised Learning: Building a New Relationship with Schools</i> "North of England Education Conference" Belfast, 8 th January 2004, 'launches' personalised learning |
| 2004: Prime Minister Blair's speech to Guardian summit <i>The Future of Public Services</i> , 26 th February 2004, reiterates personalisation as a key reform theme in public services |
| 2004: <i>Every Child Matters: Change for Children in Schools</i> , explains how Children's Act 2004 works with Every Child Matters vision, (ECM) (Green Paper published September 2003) to "strongly support the principle of personalisation and the work schools are already doing to raise educational standards" linking to wider wellbeing outcomes |
| 2004: DfES statutory guidance published, <i>Working Together: Giving Children and Young People a Say</i> April, 2004 builds on DfES (2003a) <i>Your Voice (consultation document)</i> and links to Every Child Matters Outcomes |
| 2004: Speech by David Miliband, Minister of State for School Standards, <i>Speech Choice and Voice in Personalised Learning</i> to DfES/Innovation Unit/Demos/OECD conference, 15 th May 2004 later published in OECD (2006) |
| 2004: DfES (2004) launch pamphlet and programme of briefings on: <i>A National Conversation about Personalised Learning</i> |

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| <p>2004: NCSL June 2004 publish a special supplement: <i>"Personalised Learning: Tailoring Learning Solutions for every pupil"</i></p> |
| <p>2004: DfES, Innovations Unit in partnership with Demos and NCSL promote:</p> <p>Charles Leadbeater (2004) <i>Learning about personalisation: how can we put the learner at the heart of the education system?</i></p> |
| <p>2004: Leadbeater, C. (2004b) <i>Personalisation through Participation: A new script for public services</i> (London, Demos) part of a series of pamphlets extending the personalisation discussion</p> |
| <p>2004: Becta (2004) <i>Personalising Learning: developing Becta's position</i>; position statement on the role of ICT and how BECTA as an NDPB should participate</p> |
| <p>2004: Prime Minister Blair's speech Institute of Education 24th July 2004 reiterating themes of personalised learning</p> |
| <p>2004: Department for Education and Skills: <i>Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners: Putting People at the Heart of Public Services</i> July 2004, personalisation a "central characteristic"</p> |
| <p>2004: On-line advice "Five Components of Personalised Learning" appears on the DfES "Standards" website. Includes, "Sue Dasey DfES head of personalised learning, answers your questions" September 2004</p> <p>Teachers magazine issue 34</p> |
| <p>2004: Miliband commissioned report: The Learning Working Group (2004) <i>About Learning. Report of the Learning Working group</i> involved headteachers and Demos understanding implications of personalised learning</p> |
| <p>2004: Hargreaves, October 2004 <i>Personalising Learning Next Steps in Working Laterally</i> Specialist Schools Trust contribute to the debate.</p> <p>Builds on speech he made at "Transformation Through Global Networking" conference in Melbourne (July 2004). Work also evident in DEMOS (2004b) <i>Leading the Education Agenda: Report following five workshops with David Hargreaves</i></p> |
| <p>2004: Johnson, M. (2004) <i>Personalised Learning: an emperor's outfit?</i> (London, The Institute for Public Policy Research (ippr). Ippr Labour supporting thinktanks, their contribution to the debate</p> |

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| 2004: TLRP commentary from the Institute of Education, Pollard, A. and Jones, M (Eds.) (2004) <i>Personalised Learning: A Commentary by the Teaching and Learning Research Programme</i> . |
| 2005: Ruth Kelly, Secretary of State for Education, Speech to “North of England Conference”, University of Manchester, 6 th January 2005 mentions personalisation and particularly role of parental choice |
| 2004/05: Futurelab run a series of seminars, December 04 to February 05 and publish findings in Green H., Facer, K. and Rudd, T. (2005) <i>Personalisation and Digital Technologies</i> |
| 2005: Charles Leadbeater (2005) <i>The Shape of Things to Come: personalised learning through collaboration</i> DfES publication in Partnership with NCSL |
| 2005: White Paper: <i>Higher Standards. Better Schools for All</i> More Choice for Parents and Pupils October 2005 –personalised learning “a central characteristic”, reiterated in DfES (2006) <i>The Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners; Maintaining the excellent progress</i> |
| 2005: DfES (2005) <i>Key Stage 3 National Strategy Leading in Learning: Developing thinking skills at Key Stage 3: Guide For School Leaders</i> ; personalised learning linked into national strategy on KS3 |
| 2005: NCSL (2005) <i>Leading Personalised Learning in Schools: helping individuals grow</i> |
| 2005: DfES/Innovation Unit/NCSL joint publication, Charles Leadbeater (2005) <i>The Shape of Things to come: Personalised learning through collaboration</i> |
| 2005: Matthew Horne representing DfES presents at Becta conference (2005) <i>Personalised Learning (Becta conference presentation)</i> |
| 2006: DfES and Innovation Unit research publication, Ruddock, J, Brown, N and Hendy, L. (2006) <i>Personalised Learning and Pupil Voice: The East Sussex Project</i> |
| 2006: June 2006, DfES publish National Strategy Guidance <i>Pedagogy and personalisation</i> |
| 2006: Rudd, T., Colligan, F., and Naik, R. (2006) <i>Learner Voice: a handbook from Futurelab</i> (Bristol, Futurelab). Building notion of voice into personalised learning debate |
| 2006: December 2006 DfES publish review on personalised learning, chaired by Christine Gilbert (Chief Executive of Tower Hamlets and Chief Inspector Ofsted from October 2006) <i>A Vision for Teaching and Learning 2020 Report of the Teaching and Learning in 2020 Review Group</i> |
| 2006: Hargreaves, D. H. (2006a) <i>Personalising Learning 1-6</i> (London, Specialist Schools and Academies Trust). Hargreaves, D. H. (2007a) <i>Deep Leadership 2: A culture of personalisation</i> (London, Specialist Schools and Academies trust). Hargreaves, D. H. (2007b) <i>System Redesign-1. The road to transformation in education</i> (London, Specialist Schools and Academies Trust). |

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| <p>2007: Jim Knight (Minister for Schools and Learning) 2007a “North of England Conference” Speech theme: <i>Personalisation, progression and technology</i> Preston, 04/01/07 again reiterates centrality of personalised learning</p> |
| <p>2007: NCSL Leadership Network Conference Report on personalised learning Carter, K and Sharpe, T. (2007) <i>Stepping up, stepping out: Learning about Leadership</i></p> |
| <p>2007: Jim Knight (Minister for Schools and Learners) speech launching the Innovation Units Next Practice Project: <i>Resourcing Personalised Learning</i></p> <p>26/02/07 – ‘radical implications’ speech. Later announces funding for personalised learning available</p> <p>Knight, J. (2007c) <i>School Funding Settlement for 2008-9 to 2010-11</i> and Children’s Plan advertises £1.2 billion over the next three years to support personalisation</p> |
| <p>2007: Jim Knight 23rd March 2007-Letter to Graham Holley, Chief Executive, TDA mentions Gilbert Review and role for teachers in personalising learning</p> |
| <p>2007: 2007 Qualifications and Curriculum Authority strategy contextualised in publication <i>QCA Features: Meeting the Challenge</i> “Personalisation has been described as a dynamic combination of public services and a greater voice in the design of those services”.</p> |
| <p>2007: March 27th, Public Services Reform Conference, personalisation presented a s central theme: Brown, G. (2007) <i>Presentation by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rt. Hon Gordon Brown MP; Public Service Reform: 21st Century Public Services</i></p> |
| <p>2007: DFES June 2007 <i>Pedagogy and Personalisation</i>, Primary and Secondary National Strategies Guidance published</p> |
| <p>2007: TDA (2007) <i>Professional Standards for Teachers</i>. Available online at: www.tda.gov.uk/professionalstandards/downloads.aspx (accessed 08/04/09).</p> <p>Provides ‘standards’ about personalised learning</p> |
| <p>2007: QCA (2007) <i>The New Secondary Curriculum: What has changed and why?</i></p> <p>Features personalising the curriculum offer</p> |
| <p>2007: September 2007 DCSF and DCMS memorandum to Select Committee on Education and Skills on advantages of the new secondary curriculum changes to</p> |

support personalised learning

2007: Vacher, K. (2007) Personalising Learning (Head of Innovation and Personalising Learning at the SSAT), in: K. Carter, and Sharpe, T. (Ed) *Stepping Up, Stepping Out: Learning About Leadership, NCSL Leadership Network*

2007: Sebba, J., Brown, N., Steward, S., Galton, M. (2007) *An Investigation of Personalised Learning Approaches used by Schools: Research Report 843*

2007: 6 June 2007, the then Secretary of State for Education and Skills, Alan Johnson, announced a major two-year pilot from September 2007 The Making Good Progress Pilots includes provisions for AfL, one-to-one tuition and progression targets that form part of personalised learning. Introduces “single level tests” and pupil premium

2007: August 2007 House of Commons Education and Skills Committee Seventh Report of Session 2006–07 Sustainable Schools: Are we building schools for the future? Challenges the department on lack of definition, links to ECM and Building Schools for the Future: “Personalisation is a key element in the Government’s plans to improve levels of attainment. It does not appear, however, to be a radical or transforming policy”.

2007: DCSF (2007) The Children’s Plan: Building Brighter Futures, Announced 11/12/07, incorporates personalised learning as part of an emphasis on ‘joined up’ personalised services and wellbeing

2007: DCSF (2007b) Working together: listening to the voices of children and young people

2007: Ippr pamphlet, Brooks, R. (Ed) (2007) Public Services at the Crossroads
Thinktank work on how personalisation can be realised

2008: Rudd, T. (February 2008) Learning Spaces and Personalisation workshop outcomes.
Report of workshops with educators on practices for personalised learning

2008: Consultation for new White Paper DCSF (2008e) 21st Century Schools: A world-class Education for Every Child (Nottingham, DCSF) in which personalising learning is a feature

2008: June 2008 Prime Minister Brown writes foreword to Excellence and Fairness:

| |
|--|
| <p>Achieving world class public services, Cabinet Office</p> <p>July 2008 Prime Minister Brown writes foreword to White Paper "Communities in Control: Real people, real power"</p> <p>July 2008 Rt. Hon Hazel Blears, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities, Statutory Guidance engaging and empowering local people –the 'citizen-consumer' theme is reiterated</p> |
| <p>2008: DCSF (2008a) Personalised Learning- A Practical Guide</p> |
| <p>2008: DCSF (2008d) The Assessment For Learning Strategy</p> <p>Guidance to work alongside personalised learning publications</p> |
| <p>2008: Moullin, S. (2008) Getting Up Close and Personal, further work from ippr on personalisation of public services</p> |
| <p>2008: NCSL (2008) Personalised learning comes of age?</p> <p>West-Burnham, J. (2008) leadership for personalising learning.</p> <p>Outlines role of school leadership to personalised learning</p> |
| <p>2008: 17th November 2008, Professor David Hargreaves describes personalised learning as "well-intentioned waffle" in evidence to Commons's committee Uncorrected Transcript of Oral Evidence; Children Schools and Families Committee House of Commons</p> <p>At the same hearing Mick Walters, Director of Curriculum at the QCA declares that personalised learning is a term he does not use</p> |
| <p>2009: DCSF (2009a) One to One Tuition Toolkit part of the suite of personalised learning advice</p> |
| <p>2009: June 2009, DCSF (2009b) Your child, your schools, our future: building a 21st century schools system Features role of personalised learning within global knowledge economy and future wellbeing of individuals and society</p> |
| <p>2009: Becta (2009) Make Learning Personal: How are you making Next Generation Learning personal? Looking at role of ICT and personalised learning</p> |
| <p>2009: Spencer, A. (2009) This time it's personal, Ldr National College for School Leadership), 25 -27. Report on research with school leaders about personalised</p> |

learning (finds 'student voice' an area schools keen on but have least developed)

2009: Facer, K., (ed) (2009) educational, social and technological futures: a report from the Beyond Current Horizons Programme. A 'future scoping' report that features personalisation

2009: Harris, M., and, Albury, D. (2009) Innovation Unit pamphlet on public service reform building on notions of personalisation through a 'radical' support economy

2009: Prime Minister Brown, G., (Foreword) (2009a) Working together: public services on your side

Brown, G., (Foreword) (2009b) Putting the Front Line First: Smarter government
Places personalisation as part of the public service reform programme

2009: Blears, H. (2009) Foreword: Guidance on building a local sense of belonging (London, Department for Communities and Local Government).

Cabinet Office (2009) *Power in People's Hands*

Personalised services mentioned as part of the localism agenda

2009: December 2009, Rt. Hon. Anne McGuire MP Cabinet Office Advisor on Third Sector innovation leads a consultation of personalisation and the third sector, includes education:

McGuire, A. (2009) The Role of Third Sector Innovation: Personalisation of Education and Learning: Call for Evidence).

March McGuire, A. (2010) The Role of Third Sector Innovation: Personalisation of Education and Learning Services: Recommendations

2010: Jowell, T., (Foreword) (2010) *Mutual Benefit: giving people power over public services*. Cabinet Office 'think piece' paper, re-iterates the concepts behind the citizen-consumer

APPENDIX 3 (refers to page 96): Scenarios, more background.

Scenarios have been used by those seeking innovation (a new approach to existing organisations and the possible challenges that could be faced) by those in pursuit of some public service reform, or for environmental planning or competitive advantage. Various definitions have been offered about scenarios (see Lindgren and Bandhold 2009), but a definition that seems to summarise these offerings reads as:

“Scenarios are consistent and coherent descriptions of alternative hypothetical futures that reflect different perspectives on past, present and future developments, which can serve as a basis for action” (van Notten 2007, p.70).

In order to achieve this internal consistency, the literatures suggest the need to thoroughly research and identify key drivers and extrapolate logically consistent trends on the basis of these drives. Then, offer a framework that hypothesis some few alternative outcomes from these trends playing through in some future time span; for example, twenty years is quite common (Ringland 1998, 2006; van Notten 2007; Lindgren and Bandhold, 2009). Many users agree that scenarios are not necessarily predictors of the future in the way that a forecast tries to be (van Notten 2007). However, rather than just working forward to the future from past trends, scenarios should offer the opportunity to explore “possibility spaces” (Miller 2007, p.93) and be used for strong action orientations (Ogilvy 2007). There are some tensions in the literatures cited above between scenarios carrying normative assumptions and simply being analytic extrapolations from events, i.e. the difference between could be and ought to be; the descriptive being favoured over the normative (Lindgren and Bandhold 2009; Ringland 2006). In my experience of using scenarios it is impossible to frame some scenarios them exercising normative assumptions about what ought to be.

The National College for School Leadership published work on scenarios for schooling (Miller and Bentley 2003) and they emerged in a NCSL programme for school leaders called the FutureSight Toolkit (2004 but see now NCSL 2007 for details) that was then available in a set of boxed resources for use with school leadership teams. The programme was designed to build capacity in school leadership, move away from ‘one size fits all’ solutions and enable schools to work

out values and strategies that would “redesign learning so that the needs of the entire population can be met” (Creasy and Harris 2007, p.124). In this aim, it echoes some of the motivations behind conceptions of personalising learning.

The scenarios were gathered as part of the OECD’S Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) “schooling for tomorrow” programme begun in 1999 (OECD/CERI 2007). NCSL, OECD, Demos and Innovations Unit brought together various leaders from English schools and authorities at a seminar held in December 2002. Apart from England, studies from the Netherlands, New Zealand and Ontario, Canada, were included with a range of methodological discussions in the OECD/CERI (2007) publication. This collection remains as one of the few comprehensive analysis of scenario building within education. Other futures work of possible relevance to this study that have emerged within England recently have included scenarios about the future of civil society (Mulgan, CarnegieUK, 2007), *VisionMapper* from a series of workshops conducted by FutureLab (2009) *Beyond Current Horizons* (Facer 2009), and from BECTA (British Educational Technology Association – Sandford 2009).

APPENDIX 4 (refers to pages 110,113):

Focus group activities 1 and 2, statements and research purposes.

The tables below detail the statements used in the first two scenario activities in the order they were presented, and the link to investigating the research questions. The link to the research questions represents my thinking in the design phase about some of the possible relevant avenues that might be opened up by posing the scenario statements.

Activity 1 “The purposes of schools” statements are as follows:

| List of purposes provided to the groups | Link to research questions |
|--|---|
| 1. The purpose of schools is to help young people get a good job by gaining qualifications and accreditation through getting good exam passes. | For New Labour personalised learning was about raising standards of attainment and skills in the knowledge economy (see chapter 2). Is this a key motivation or purpose for young people? How do young people view their schools efficacy in achieving this? Does a school focus on exams create a personalised experience for young people and if so in what ways? If personalisation is about social justice do young people have views on the fairness of exams? |
| 2. The purpose of schools is to help young people contribute to the economy by preparing them for the world of work and making sure that they have the right skills. | As above, New Labour links personalised learning to increased productivity through skills in the knowledge economy. As above, do young people see this as important and how does this effect their experiences of personalised learning? |
| 3. The purpose of schools is to help young people contribute to society by teaching them how to become responsible citizens. | New Labour policy, e.g. The Children's Plan (DCSF 2007a) QCDA (2010) also outlines a notion of the future citizen. Do schools encourage or develop the citizen identity and is this important to young people? Where does this purpose fit or cut across with personalised learning? |
| 4. The purpose of schools is to help young people fulfil their potential through developing their interests, personal skills and finding something they are good at. | New Labour policy draws upon notions of personalised learning developing potential and talents (e.g. DCSF 2008a; Gilbert 2006). How far do young people think this is an important purpose and to what extent do schools succeed in personalising learning through doing this? |

| | |
|--|--|
| 5. The purpose of schools is to help people be happy in their future through giving them skills to cope with whatever happens to them in their life. | Wellbeing is introduced into personalised learning policy (DCSF 2007a). How far do young people think schools should or do contribute to their wellbeing? |
| 6. The purpose of schools is to help people enjoy learning and want to learn more in the future. | If personalised learning is about a richer sense of learning and not just about attainment scores, then do schools succeed in doing this? Do young people have a feeling that learning is valuable for its own sake and will continue to want to learn after they leave school? |
| 7. The purpose of schools is to help young people understand the wider world around them in all its aspects (e.g. physical, geographical, social, cultural). | As above, if learning should encompass a number of virtues and aims that are wider than a narrow curriculum content (see White 2007) then does personalised learning, in the experience of young people, contribute to these aims or not? Do they believe this is an important purpose of school and therefore should be reflected in personalised learning? |
| 8. The purpose of schools is to help people accept their place in society. | Critical theories about schools suggest that there is something more suspicious to their purposes (e.g. Bowles and Gintis 1976; Holt 1976). For instance, if a realist theory of schools argues they are about maintaining relations of power and/or sorting young people to fill slots in the economic system, then personalised learning without radical re-organisation of the school system would be about maintaining this status quo. Young people might express some moral distrust of this statement but do they feel that schools try to do more than treat them instrumentally? How valued do they feel (how personalised is their schooling) in their experiences of the purposes of schools? |
| 9. The purpose of school is to teach people to behave morally, to take care of each other and the environment. | This relates to 7 above in that there are arguments for wider tasks, moral tasks that a school ought to be engaged in (see Starratt 2003). Do young people agree and what do they experience of this telos? This is related to the virtues that could be embodied in a social practice that was claiming to personalise learning. |

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>10. The purposes of school are to...? (please discuss, agree and then write your own statements down below):</p> | <p>This question was designed to provide some normative orientation about what young people felt the telos of schools ought to be. From this information I hoped to explore the kinds of virtues that schools currently exercise that might contribute to the identities of young people as school students through personalised learning. This is used to cross check with data from the interviews.</p> |
|---|---|

Activity 2 “Roles of Responsibilities in Schools” statements are as follows:

| Statements provided to the groups | Link to research questions |
|---|--|
| <p>CARD A</p> <p>Young people are not mature enough to participate in deciding what goes on in school; we should leave the running of the school to adults and professionals.</p> | <p>My professional experience indicated that this is an implicit institutional model of school practice, that young people on leadership activity often express frustration that they are not trusted as mature enough to be involved more in school policy. Personalised learning draws on notions of student voice; how do young people experience their schools model of trust in such voice?</p> |
| <p>CARD B</p> <p>Young people have the right to be heard and have a say over how their schools should be run.</p> | <p>This is another way of exploring the issue above and triangulating views on it. It provides a useful check to statement A to examine the consistency of responses.</p> |
| <p>CARD C</p> <p>Schools should teach young people about democracy and the way the school is run should practice democratic principles. For example, issues should be discussed and voted on by the students.</p> | <p>This statement draws upon one of Fielding’s philosophical arguments (2007c, 2008) for personalisation and work done on democratic practices in schools (2010). The statement was designed to test young people’s views on this possibility and how far schools had moved down this route.</p> |

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| <p>CARD D</p> <p>Young people should be able to give feedback to teachers about their lessons.</p> | <p>One of the researchable issues discussed in Chapter Four was assessment for learning and how far personalised learning practices in schools engaged young people in the processes of learning. This statement was designed to see if the virtues of honesty and courage to adapt to critique in extending excellent practice in teaching were combined with the virtue of integrity in valuing what young people said about lessons. It was also designed to see if some young people would welcome an opportunity to provide feedback and inform learning practices.</p> |
| <p>CARD E</p> <p>Teachers are the experts, we should leave the curriculum and how it is taught to them.</p> | <p>This builds on the above statement and my professional knowledge of schools that have started to form curriculum committees that bring adults and students together to discuss learning. Was there evidence in these schools of this process and if so was it contributing to personalised learning? Would young people see this statement a positive or negative feature of school life?</p> |
| <p>CARD F</p> <p>Young people should have the opportunity to work with teachers on the content of the curriculum and how it is delivered.</p> | <p>Again, checking on the consistency or reliability of the witnesses in relation to the above. Also checking the extent of assessment for learning practices within the school.</p> |
| <p>CARD G</p> <p>Young people should have some input into the appointment of staff.</p> | <p>An increasingly common feature of student voice, not in my experience always welcomed by some staff. Do young people feel it is necessary or valuable? If used, how authentic did the young people feel its use to be? This was designed to feed into questions about the virtues that schools embody in their practices and how such qualities impact upon personalised learning.</p> |
| <p>CARD H</p> <p>Young people should have a say in how the school is governed and be represented on the governing body.</p> | <p>As above in relation to the democratic management of the school and its sense of authenticity in personalised virtues.</p> |

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>CARD I</p> <p>Young people should be given more opportunity to have a say about rules, behaviour management and what is fair in the school.</p> | <p>Again in my experience, rules and behaviour are invariably a big source of rub between students and school management. How far was this the case in these schools? Is it an issue and what do the ways that schools deal with behaviour management model to young people? For example, do young people feel personally valued and involved in creating the ethos of the school?</p> |
| <p>CARD J</p> <p>Young people should have the opportunity to act as mentors and guides to other students.</p> | <p>An increasingly common practice in schools is the use of peer tutors and peer mentors for a variety of activities. As this sample of young people was drawn from peer tutors and student leaders, did they feel valued by the school in their roles? What do the practices of the school in these activities say to their personal identity? For example, if trained did they get to be used and if so, how and why? How did this correspond to the headteacher's views of personalizing learning?</p> |

APPENDIX 5 (refers to page 114):

ACTIVITY 3 Future scenarios

These are copies of the scripts that were published on cards and in different colours for the young people to read in the scenario activity. They were asked to respond on a “plus, minus, interesting” sheet on the three scenarios and write a statement as a response to card 4, their own version..

Each member of the focus groups was given a card for each scenario. All three of the scenarios were introduced and read through by myself and some explanation as to their meaning was provided. I asked the groups if they had any questions and were clear about the task. One member of the group was asked to be scribe to record their answers. They then set about discussing and responding in their own time.

Scenario 1: Status Quo, mixed state economy

Schools carry on more or less, as they are. The government develops new academy schools (semi-independent, sponsored by business and charities) and Free Schools (these schools are free from local government control and anyone can set one up).

There is a mixture of state sponsored schools and new academies and Free Schools. All schools will have increasing freedoms over their own affairs but the academies and Free Schools will have greater independence.

Small sized schools may become more uneconomic to run as less public finances are given to broader education and the government focus is on a 'core curriculum'.

The policy aim is to make every school an attractive choice; but those schools that do not succeed in getting the government's exam pass quota are closed. The government encourages private sector companies, charities and faith groups who sponsor the academies to take over failing state schools.

Governing:

All schools have to answer to their governing bodies, however, day to day running and future strategy are largely left to educational professionals with a principal or headteacher in charge.

Governing bodies typically have representatives from the local community, parents, local authority and interested parties such as local businesses.

Academies and Free Schools have more freedoms to set terms and conditions for staffing and to make curriculum arrangements; other state schools are more answerable to the central government and local authority for standards and curriculum.

All schools are required to have core national curriculum arrangements.

National policies on admissions and places should apply to all schools but in practice are very hard to enforce, especially in academies and Free Schools that could operate a hidden selection policy.

Scenario 2: Community and social learning centres

Schools are based in the heart of their geographical communities.

These schools become centres not just for educating young people but provide social and welfare facilities for the whole community.

They house crèches and nurseries, all age schooling facilities, a library and ICT centre, welfare facilities such as doctors and advice centres.

There is a range of arts and sports facilities open to the whole community, and adult-learning classes will take place there as well.

The centre is open for long hours and all year round. The school day for students may well change and include the possibility of starting and finishing school later, or doing evening classes with adults.

Local businesses and public sector providers could be involved in providing vocational and work experience training.

There could be one such centre for a community, meaning some schools may close down to make way for them.

Governing:

The emphasis in this scenario is much more on the local users and the neighbouring community participating in the running of the centre rather than just education professionals or private sponsorship interests.

Local people have a stake in what takes place there and how it is run and are able to sit on a Board of Trustees alongside the centre principal.

Local government would also have a part to play, helping to ensure the quality of education, social services and health in particular.

Scenario 3: Radical deschooling

ICT enables education to take place anywhere. There are models such as the 'hole in the wall', that were launched in India, where a computer screen and terminal was placed in the wall of a building and just left. These have developed into SOLE (self-organising learning environments) spaces where small groups of young people cluster around computers and teach themselves.

This scenario could work for secondary education and be based in a variety of community premises, homes and businesses – anywhere clusters of ICT facilities might be located. ICT could be used to pipe lessons in, interact with tutors or conduct independent research.

Young people would have a personal tutor, or work with community elders, to meet occasionally face to face and virtually guide and prompt learners to ask the right questions and support their research.

There might well still be a national curriculum and public exams but the emphasis is on long term project work, self-directed and relevant to a young person's interests and ambitions. ICT could provide some standardised feedback on their work.

Community facilities such as theatres, concert halls, libraries, sports clubs and centres would support a broader educational experience. Young people could work part-time in public services or business and learn whilst working for future careers.

Governing:

Either the state or the private and voluntary sector would have to provide community facilities and invest in building and maintaining them. The state could take on all this work itself, but given trends in public financing, is unlikely to. The state may well encourage private investors through start-up funds or tax breaks, the return being that providers have some say in the structure of the provision. There would be a much larger voluntary element in self-directing these learning environments.

New forms of qualifications and apprenticeships might emerge. There would have to be far more involvement from parents and the communities in maintaining the effective use of alternative facilities and how they were employed.

Businesses and public services could play a greater role in setting guidelines for the training of the future skills and knowledge that they require. Universities and

colleges would offer open short-courses and take a greater role in setting project questions for young people to research.

Young people would be far more responsible for governing themselves and participating in decisions about the kind of communities they want to learn in.

The responsibility for learning could cross national boundaries as ICT enables global communications between interest groups.

Your future scenario: How would you like schools to be governed and run in the future?

“Governing”:

means who, in the end, is responsible for what goes on; who the staff, by law, have to report and answer to. This is important to think about when governments invest large amounts of public money (your taxes in the future) in education. In the future some of this money may not come from the tax payer. Does that change how you as a member of the public have a say in how schools are run?

Do you care who runs, or has a say in, your school?

How would you like society to provide your education?

Who would you like to govern and run your schools?
(E.g. local council, parents, business, community, a mixture?)

How would you like your ideal school to run?

APPENDIX 6 (refers to pages 102, 116, 129):

UREC approved participation information and consent forms

1) Young people and parents/carers information and consent form –focus group activity



School of Education
Humanities Building
Oxford Road
Manchester
M13 9PL

An invitation to take part in university research

Participant Information Sheet

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study that is part of a PhD project at the University of Manchester. The research is interested in young people's views about schools and how you would like schools to be run in the future.

Your name or school identity will not be published at any time and will remain confidential. Before you decide if you would like to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear, or if you would like more information. Thank you for reading this.

Who will conduct the research?

Stephen Rogers, School of Education, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL.

Title of the Research: *Personalising learning*

What is the aim of the research?

To understand more about young people's voice and participation in school and how young people would like schools to run in the future

Why have I been chosen?

Either, you may have taken part in a leadership project that was run in partnership with my organisation, the UFA, or you are taking part in general studies, citizenship, politics or sociology lessons.

What would I be asked to do if I took part?

I would like you to take part in a group discussion about the purposes of education, different scenarios concerning how education might be organised in the future and the role of young people in how schools are run. I will ask you for your ideas and views. The group will be twelve people from your year. The discussion will last for no longer than half a day and will be an interactive session, with an opportunity for you to contribute your valuable ideas.

I will be asking you to work in small groups and presenting you with different activities to discuss. There will be a framework for the groups to discuss each one and record the decisions of the group. I will also ask you to make a new one up if you feel there are views that have not been represented clearly.

What happens to the data collected?

The data will be recorded, analysed, compared and added to the views of other young people who are taking part in this research in other schools across the country. I will take away and store any posters or presentations you might make and these could appear in the final report, however no names or identities will be attached to them. The analysis will be used to inform my ideas in the final report.

The discussions will be recorded on MP3 files and stored on a hard drive to which only I will have access. No names will be used in the transcripts or in any reports that quote the interviews and discussions. The names of the schools will be disguised so that no one should know who you are or where you go to school.

What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time.

I will also need your parent or guardian's permission for you to take part in this research and they are entitled to withdraw you from the research at any time. Please let them see this information sheet.

Where will the research be conducted?

It will be conducted in a room on your school premises over the course of a school morning (probably about two periods). You will be able to take refreshment and comfort breaks during that time if required.

Will the outcomes of the research be published?

The research will be published in a thesis and stored in the University of Manchester library. Some of the findings might be used in articles published in a future

academic journal or book and conference papers. Your names will not appear in any publications.

Criminal Records Check :I have a full CRB check and can provide copies of this document.

Contact for further information You can contact me on: stephenrogers@mac.com

If you wish to make a formal complaint about the conduct of this research, please contact:

Head of the Research Office, Christie Building, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL.



Personalising learning, research project

If you are happy to participate in this research, please complete and sign the consent form below

CONSENT FORM

Please Initial Box

1. I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet on the above project and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions and had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

3. I understand that the presentations and interviews will be audio recorded

4. I agree to the use of quotes without my name being used.

I agree to take part in the above project

| | | |
|--|---------------|--------------------|
| _____ Name of participant | _____ Date | _____ Signature |
| _____ Name of person taking consent Stephen Rogers | _____ Date | _____ Signature |
| _____ | _____ | _____ |

To be signed by parent/guardian

I agree to _____

Participating in this research project and understand that I may be able to withdraw this permission at any time.

Signed _____

date:

(Parent/guardian)

2) Young people, information and consent forms – group interview



School of Education
Humanities Building
Oxford Road
Manchester
M13 9PL

An invitation to take part in university research

Participant Information Sheet

Dear

You very kindly agreed to participate in an earlier part of this research project, working in the larger group. I would now like to invite you to take part in a group interview with three other young people.

Before you decide if you would like to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear, or if you would like more information. Your name or school identity will not be published at any time and will remain confidential. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

Who will conduct the research?

Stephen Rogers, School of Education, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL.

Title of the Research

Personalising learning

What is the aim of the research?

To understand more about young people's voice and participation in school and how young people would like schools to run in the future

Why have I been chosen?

Either, you may have taken part in a leadership project that was run in partnership with my organisation, the UFA, or you are taking part in general studies, citizenship, politics or sociology lessons.

What would I be asked to do if I took part?

I would like to conduct a group interview with you to ask you questions about your experiences of school, the kinds of choices you can make and the roles you can play within schools. The interview will be recorded, and should last about half an hour to forty minutes at most. We are interested in what you really think, there are no right or wrong answers!

Afterwards the interview will be typed up and you can read and comment on it. I may like to do another interview at a later date with some more questions to clarify points you make.

The topics I would like a conversation about are:

What kind of choices do you have in school over what you learn?

Do you feel you have opportunities to influence what, and how, you are taught in the classroom? (If so what would they be?)

Do you feel you have opportunities to influence what goes on in the school in general? If so what kinds opportunities and how do they work?

Do you have individual targets in school and how do they work for you?

How personally engaged do you feel in your lessons?

Are you able to lead on anything in the school so that you feel you have some control over things? Would you want to have control over life in school? If so, what kinds of things and how do you think it should be organised?

What do you believe the values, or ethos, of the school are? Do you think the school lives up to its values in the way it treats you? (How do you know that, how is it communicated to you?)

How do you feel the school values you personally? (What kinds of things or evidence lead you to believe that?)

Are you able to make choices in school that you feel are really personal to yourself, in other words you have some control over them or they are real choices?

Have you heard about the term personalised learning does it mean anything to you?

If you were to make changes to your school, or schools in general, what would be the most important things you would like to see? (and why?)

Do you think schools prepare young people well to be part of a democratic society?

What happens to the data collected?

The data will be recorded, analysed, compared and added to the views of other young people who are taking part in this research in other schools across the country. The analysis will be used to inform my ideas in the final report.

The interviews will be recorded on MP3 files and stored on a hard drive to which only I will have access. No names will be used in the transcripts or in any reports that quote the interviews and discussions. The names of the schools will be disguised so that no one should know who you are or where you go to school.

What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time.

I will also need your parent or guardian's permission for you to take part in this research and they are entitled to withdraw you from the research at any time. Please let them see this information sheet.

Where will the research be conducted?

It will be conducted in a room on your school premises.

Will the outcomes of the research be published?

The research will be published in a thesis and stored in the University of Manchester library. Some of the findings might be used in articles published in a future academic journal or book and conference papers. Your names will not appear in any publications.

Criminal Records Check :

I have a full CRB check and can provide copies of this document.

Contact for further information

You can contact me on stephenrogers@mac.com

The University
of Manchester

MANCHESTER
1824

Personalising learning research project

CONSENT FORM

If you are happy to participate please complete and sign the consent form below

**Please Initial
Box**

1 I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet on the above project and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions and had these answered satisfactorily.

2 I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

3 I understand that the interviews will be audio recorded

4 I agree to the use of quotes without my name being used.

I agree to take part in the above project

| | | |
|---|---------------|--------------------|
| _____ Name of participant | _____ Date | _____ Signature |
| _____ Name of person taking consent | _____ Date | _____ Signature |
| _____ | _____ | _____ |

To be signed by parent/guardian

I agree to _____

Participating in this research project and understand that I may be able to withdraw this permission at any time.

Signed _____ date: _____

(Parent/guardian)

If you wish to make a formal complaint about the conduct of this research, please contact:

Head of the Research Office, Christie Building, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL.

3) Headteacher information and consent form



School of Education
Humanities Building
Oxford Road
Manchester
M13 9PL

Dear

An invitation to take part in university research

I am writing to ask for your support in PhD research that I am conducting at the University of Manchester. The research is investigating the policy of personalising learning and in particular looking at young people's experiences in school and how young people would like schools to be run in the future.

As part of this research, I would also like to conduct some interviews with school leaders. I would be very interested in your views on personalisation as a policy and how you believe the policy might have impacted in your school. Overleaf, I detail some of the questions I would like to explore.

I appreciate how busy you are, but these interviews should take only about thirty to forty minutes and will form an extremely valuable part of the research. The interviews can take place at a time and place that is convenient to you, or over the phone.

Afterwards the interview will be typed up and you can read and comment on the transcripts. The transcripts will be analysed as part of the data that makes up the PhD thesis. No schools or settings will be identified by name or obvious identifiers, and quotes from the transcripts will remain anonymous. The final research findings are to be used in a PhD thesis and as possible sources for journal articles, book chapters and conference proceedings. Professor Helen Gunter at the School of Education, University of Manchester, is supervising the research and The British Educational Research Association code of ethics will be adhered to throughout; you have the right to withdraw from the research at any time.

If you agree to take part in these interviews, I would like to ask for your signed consent on the attached form. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

Thank you for reading this and I look forward to hearing from.

Yours sincerely,

Stephen Rogers

Contact for further information You can contact me on stephenrogers@mac.com or on 07871 300 653

The topics for the conversation will include:

What in your view is personalised learning or personalisation?

Do you think it is an important policy for your school? If so why, and if not, why not?

What, if any, are the ways you are trying to implement personalised learning?

What do you perceive the difficulties or challenges to be in implementing the policy?

Where do you think the policy has come from?

How did you get to hear about the policy? E.g. strategy adviser, conference, local authority, national college, reading, DCSF 'conversation' and policy documents

Did you feel consulted/involved/sceptical when the policy emerged and the DfES started a "national conversation"?

Do you perceive changes in your school since the policy was announced and if so what/how/why?

What are the most important values for you in your leadership of the school?
How do you think the school ethos or culture embodies those values?

How do you think young people in your school become more personally engaged with the life of the school? What are your views on young people's leadership/voice and so forth?

What are your views on parent and student choice as part of government education policy, and what kind of impact does it have on your school?

Personalising learning research:

CONSENT FORM

If you are happy to participate please complete and sign the consent form below

**Please Initial
Box**

1. I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet on the above project and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions and had these answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.
3. I understand that the interviews will be audio recorded.
4. I agree to the anonymous use of quotes.

I agree to take part in the above project

Name of participant

Date

Signature

Name of person taking consent

Date

Signature

If you wish to make a formal complaint about the conduct of this research, please contact:

Head of the Research Office, Christie Building, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL.

APPENDIX 7(refers to page 122):

An example of a mindmap using MindManager (Mindjet 2007) for first stage data reduction and display.

