Young researchers in schools: A participative action research study into the efficacy of a whole school mental health strategy

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by

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Signature

Abstract

In England between April and June of 2021, 190,271 young people were referred to mental health services, an increase of 134% since June 2020 (Local Government Association, 2022). Since 2014, schools have been expected to support young people's mental health needs (Department for Education, 2014).

This qualitative work critically explores the efficacy of a whole school mental health strategy, in a comprehensive academy in England. As participative action research (PAR), this approach involved self-selecting young people aged 16-18 years old to collaborate with me as a young research team (YRT). They worked closely with the study participants, aged 12-15 years, who volunteered from the pupil premium cohort (The Department for Education, 2022). A weekly cycle of meetings between myself, the YRT and participants took place, providing qualitative data. This research focuses on a school mental health strategy and new approaches to young people's participation in school decision-making.

My findings and contributions to knowledge are divided into two sections. Firstly, I present findings that indicate a school mental health strategy requires trusting staff / young people relationships to be successful. As a further contribution, I suggest relationships are viewed through a nanosystems lens (Rudasill et al., 2018), so schools can start to address this issue. My second area contributing to new knowledge is how this unique methodology has enabled the development of youth participative dialogic action research (YPDAR). I have discovered how using YPDAR can positively impact young people and school character. YPDAR benefits young people as attachment-like relationships may develop between young researchers and participants. In addition to improving young people's socio-emotional skills, this research can boost their confidence, empowerment, agency and trust in the school. School character also benefits, as YPDAR requires a power shift from school to young people, strengthening relationships and the development of trust between them.

Table of Contents

Table of Figures

Table of tables

Acknowledgments

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A big thank you to Marcus Byron who created most of my illustrations and whose cartoons helped illuminate my ideas and theories.

Finally, let this thesis inspire all those young people who like me when at school, were told they were 'no good' and would not succeed.

> *"They will always tell you that you can't do what you want to do, but you can do what you want to do. You just have to believe in yourself. The system is to bring you down, but you can rise up."*

> Bob Marley

Declaration of Authorship

I, David Simon McPartlan declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere.

Glossary:

- **Academy:** a state school funded directly by the government and run by an academy trust.

- **Academy trust:** a not-for-profit company which runs and is responsible for the performance of a single or group of academies.

- **Adolescence**: a developmental stage starting with puberty and ending when an individual maintains a stable, independent position in society.

- **Emotional wellbeing:** a positive mental state where an individual's basic needs are met to the point where they have a sense of purpose and are able to achieve personal goals and participate within the school community.

- **Epistemic agency:** the ability and motivation to refine and alter one's belief-forming methods and practices.

- **Mental health:** an individual's psychological condition which, like physical health, is something that all young people experience and can impact upon how they feel and behave.

- **Mental illness /Mental health disorder:** mental illnesses are medically-classified signs and symptoms that are often complex and multi-faceted. They require medical diagnosis and treatment to enable young people to live productively both in school and in the wider community.

- **Participants**: volunteer young people, aged 12-15 years old from the school's free school meal cohort who met with the young research team to explore the research themes.

- **Pupil premium cohort:** a group of young people, designated as disadvantaged and qualifying for extra school-funding to improve their educational outcomes.

- **School character:** the interaction between cultural, physical, emotional, relational and social aspects of school environment: how the school feels.

- **School mental health:** an aspirational concept with a focus on ensuring that all young people are in a position to achieve to their potential. It encompasses education, and support for young people and their families, as well as signposting to external services where appropriate.

- **Social constructivism:** the view knowledge is created through social interactions.

- **Teachersism:** the dysconscious act that enables adults to have power over young people in schools.

-   **Young research team**: co-researcher volunteers taken from the school's 16–18-year-olds.

Abbreviations:

-   Action research (AR)
-   Child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS)
-   Chief executive officer (CEO)
-   Collaborative self-reflection tool (CSRT)
-   Critical communicative methodology (CCM)
-   Coronavirus (COVID)
-   Ecological systems theory (EST)
-   Grant maintained schools (GMS)
-   Local education authority (LEA)
-   Local management of schools (LMS)
-   Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI)
-   National Health Service (NHS)
-   Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED)
-   Participative action research (PAR)
-   Public and patient initiative (PPI)
-   Social and emotional attitudes to learning (SEAL)
-   Stage-environment fit theory (ESFT)
-   Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)
-   Special interest group (SIG)
-   Systems view of school climate (SVSC)
-   Teaching and learning (T&L)
-   Transformative student voice (TSV)
-   United Kingdom (UK)
-   United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)
-   United States of America (USA)
-   University of Chicago Consortium of School Research (CCSR)
-   World Health Organisation (WHO)
-   Youth participative action research (YPAR)
-   Youth participative dialogic action research (YPDAR)
-   Young research team (YRT)

Prologue

As an individual who had a 'chequered' academic career, this PhD has been an illuminating journey of self-discovery. From a very early age, school for me was a social space where academia was somewhat of an inconvenience. My earliest school experiences were notable for the fact that teachers were keen to tell me that I was 'lazy' and 'not academic'. This linked to the fact that corporal punishment was the preferred way of control in schools and this resulted in my negative mindset around education. However, I always enjoyed the social side of school and, despite the physical punishments I received, little deterred me from my ambition to become a teacher. Scraping through O-levels, A-levels and a Bachelor of Education degree to gain entry to the next step on this road, resulted in me starting a long career as a teacher. My initial path as a geography teacher soon gave way to responsibility posts in the pastoral and welfare side of teaching; a Deputy head of year, a Head of year, a Director of learning and finally the Pastoral assistant headteacher of a large secondary comprehensive school. On reflection, this should be no surprise to me as my values have always been about caring for others and looking after those who may find life a challenge. My values are directly linked to inclusivity, integrity, honesty and trust; building relationships is key to who I am and how I behave. My responsibilities in my final years as a teacher reflected this, as I led a large pastoral team in school as we built systems that linked with outside agencies such as social care, police and youth offending, to do our best to support young people and their families.

A meeting in school in 2017 between myself, a student who was returning from a short-term school exclusion, and a parent is where this PhD journey started. As I explored the behaviour of the young person with the parent (an ex-student who had also been excluded) and we discussed how the young person was experiencing mental health issues, I realised that the behaviours of the parent, when at school, and the child were of a similar nature. Whilst as a pastoral team we were acutely aware of the increase in mental health-related school issues, it was not until I was sitting in this meeting that I realised that we were possibly dealing with intergenerational mental health issues and an alternative approach, by the school, was required. My final major contribution to the school thereafter was the design and implementation of a whole school mental health strategy. The strategy aimed to enable young people to take responsibility for their mental health within a supportive school structure. This PhD is the next step in this journey, as the main focus of this research is to explore how effective the mental health strategy has been. As I will go on to explain below, the research has been less than straightforward as it has developed beyond its initial focus. My desire to include the thoughts of young people in this research has seen it develop beyond just investigating the school's mental health strategy, to exploring how adults can best effectively consult with young people in schools. I believe that if we want to encourage young people to improve

their own lives, we need to partner with them so that they can explore the issues that impact them, and so support them to find solutions.

Another fundamental consideration related to who would be the participants in the study. My research aims were clear but I also wanted to ensure that whichever young people were involved in the research also had an opportunity to benefit from it. I chose to focus on the group of young people who are designated by the Department for Education as 'pupil premium' (The Department for Education, 2022). Schools receive funding for young people who are placed in this category for a number of reasons, but mostly because their parents qualify for financial support. My thought process was that, as many of these young people are from an economically-disadvantaged background, they may benefit from access to the project. Forthwith, I will refer to them as participants in this thesis.

The school in which this research took place is a secondary academy situated in the small market town of Brampton in the north east of Cumbria. It is a larger-than-average comprehensive school with approximately 1400 students from the age of 11 to 18 years. The school has a largely rural catchment that extends north to the Scottish border, east into Northumberland, and takes from the Eden valley and the city of Carlisle. William Howard [1] was formed in 1980 with the amalgamation of the town's grammar school and the secondary modern. It became an academy in 2012 and is now the academy lead for the Cumbria Education Trust.

The school is predominantly made up of white British heritage students with a minority coming from another ethnic background. Whilst the proportion of students who are designated as disadvantaged (pupil premium) is below average, the number of students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) is above average. The reason for this is that the school has a special needs resource base that caters for up to nine young people. I would describe the school as a true comprehensive as it takes from some of the poorest wards in the country, as well as extremely affluent parts.

During the most recent Office in Standards for Education (OFSTED) inspection, in May 2019, the school was judged to be 'Good'. It was described as having a "positive, welcoming culture" and as being "highly inclusive", where "Pupils from a wide geographic area and different backgrounds come together well". The inspection report also explained that "Pupils feel safe and well looked after", and

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[1] Ethics approval allows for the school to be named, as principles of confidentiality rather than anonymity were accepted by the school.

that they are "well-mannered and behave well". Behaviour in the school was described as "good", as "exclusions are decreasing for most pupils as behaviour improves". Curriculum design was identified as meeting "the needs of pupils and the local labour market" and was "enhanced by a wide range of extra-curricular activities and leadership opportunities" (Ofsted, 2019). Whilst never perfect documents, this, in my experience, would suggest it was a fair summary of the nature of a school; one which has worked hard to become an inclusive environment for the local young people in its catchment area. Whilst school context is important, wider historical concerns in relation to mental health also need to be highlighted.

This research started in October 2019 as I embarked on my PhD. The empirical research was due to commence in the autumn of 2020, however the onset of the Coronavirus (COVID) pandemic held this work up as schools were initially closed and then re-opened with restrictions. After a failed attempt at starting the research online (young people were reluctant to engage with this approach), we started meetings and data collection in March of 2021, and this continued until the end of the school year. The findings of the research were presented to the school in the autumn of 2021.

The thesis is divided into 3 parts, each of which is further split into chapters. Each part of the thesis is proceeded by a brief synopsis outlining its purpose and how the chapters contribute towards it.

Part 1 Setting the scene

The first part of this thesis comprises five chapters and grounds the research by giving a context to it. Part one starts with a short introductory chapter developing the research rationale and is followed by chapter two which frames the research context in relation to a history of education, school purpose, and school character. Chapter three takes a detailed look at adolescence and mental health. This leads to chapter four which explores the role power plays in young people's school life and how this has the potential to impact their agency, identity and accumulation of capital. I conclude part one with chapter five, a methodology chapter detailing the philosophy of the research.

Chapter 1: Introduction and research rationale

1.1 Young people their mental health and schools

Child and adolescent mental health is one of the most significant issues of the 21st century, so much so that the government have appointed a Mental Health Ambassador to champion this cause (Prime Ministers Office, 2021). Between 2004 and 2017 there have been increasing numbers of children being referred by schools to mental health specialists, prescribed anti-depressants, presented in accidents and emergency due to mental health concerns, and reporting lower general wellbeing (NHS Digital, 2018). In 2017, it was estimated that 850,000 young people had diagnosable mental health disorders (DfE/DoH, 2017), with a further rise since. Between April and June of 2021, there were 190,271 referrals to young people's mental health services, an increase of 134% on the same period the previous year (Local Government Association, 2022). With the country emerging from the pandemic, concerns are growing, and latest figures show increases in probable mental health issues for children and young people between 2017 and 2020 from 10.8% to 16% (Newlove-Delgado et al., 2021). There is now an expectation that schools become involved in supporting young people's mental health needs (DfE/DoH, 2017).

The mental health schools' agenda is gaining traction due to the recognition of the increasing numbers of young people who are experiencing mental health issues, such as those demonstrated above. The government have initiated mental health support for young people in schools through the introduction of a named staff member with responsibility for mental health in schools, and the introduction of the NHS Mental Health Support Team Pilot in schools (Department of Health and Social Care & Department for Education, 2017). After a successful pilot, this has since been developed further (NHS England, 2021). Unfortunately, the government are advocating a deficit clinical mental health model (Glazzard and Stones, 2021) identifying young people with mental health needs as the problem; the solution is the use of mental health support teams providing interventions for them. Whilst this is a major push by government, they also advocate other school initiatives. These include support for young people and their families; monitoring of young people's mental health; taking measures to reduce stigma around mental health; and a curriculum promoting the understanding of mental health. The focus of this work needs coordination and is most

effectively achieved through whole school strategies (Bostwick and Glazzard, 2018). Schools' roles within the mental health structure are still ill-defined. However, it is accepted that school staff are not trained mental health practitioners and, as such, cannot treat mental illness or mental health disorders. However, with leadership, guidance and support they can educate, monitor, signpost, and support both young people and their families, so young people have every opportunity to fulfil their potential both in school and beyond (Bostwick and Glazzard, 2018).

In the prologue, I described how the foundation of the whole school mental health strategy grew from my experiences as a teacher where I saw the impact of the school on young people. I have listened to young people complain about schools piling on the pressure, using aspirational targets to improve performance. However, there is evidence that by using performance rather than mastery goal structure, schools are more likely to increase behaviour issues as well as raise levels of depression (Wang, 2009; Olivier et al., 2022). During my career as a teacher, there were many times when I came across young people who felt that they did not belong; whilst the school tried to develop an inclusive and welcoming environment, there were a number who found it difficult to fit in. They were often the ones in trouble, the ones who did not want to come to school or those who had ill-defined health and wellbeing issues. The research into belonging and emotional health supports this view as those with lower feelings of belonging report lower emotional health (Freeman et al., 2009). To compound the issue further, this problem is accentuated for those who come from a more disadvantaged background. In her book *Miseducation*, Reay (2017) makes powerful arguments that the present education structures are based on wealth that reinforces rather than addresses a hierarchical class structure. As set out in section 2.2.4 the values at play are neoliberal ones and related to the market and all the problems that this creates; ultimately, as we have seen, those who are most in need are likely to be left behind. Reay tells us that the system works against those from the working classes; they are at a disadvantage from day one at school and it becomes increasingly more difficult to catch up as their education journey continues. The reoccurring theme is that some young people do not fit into our school environments, and often poor staff relationships are at the core. Positive interpersonal relationships between groups of young people, as well as between young people and teachers, correlate with higher life satisfaction (Suldo et al., 2013). They are often more able to cope in school as well as having greater optimism about school as a whole (Ruus et al., 2007).

There are clear links between what happens in schools and how young people feel about themselves (Ruus et al., 2007). The connections between these are complex and sometimes confusing. My values are closely linked to my work in schools leading pastoral teams. This is one of the reasons I believe the research should have young people at the centre and why I designed it in a way that enabled them to be young researchers.

1.2   The development of a whole school mental health strategy

Having spent over 35 years teaching, and most of that in the area of pastoral work, my last substantial piece of work in schools was to design and implement a whole school strategy for mental health. This strategy was based upon educating both young people and staff about mental health: what it was, how one could look after it and where to go for support. The basis of the strategy was to not only provide support but to encourage young people to self-refer to staff in school. Leaving teaching two years into the strategy implementation, I started my PhD intent on working with young people in school to research how effective this strategy was.

1.3   Young people as researchers

My aim from the beginning of the research was to ensure it was a participatory project. I was aware there were differing levels of young people's participation (Mercer, 2002; Cook-Sather, 2020) in educational research. This was something that also gave me the opportunity to explore how my teaching career may impact my work as a researcher (see section 5.8.1). As I allude to throughout this thesis, my past school role would often impact how I framed and reflected upon the research. My values were often challenged, compromises were called for and I was, on occasion, required to make uncomfortable decisions. This is one of the reasons I was drawn towards participatory action research (PAR) as I wanted to help young people by improving their access to school support. The partnerships I developed with them during this research led me to the conclusion that, with guidance, they could become change agents in the school. There was also a part of me that felt as if I was making amends for my past in schools by involving them as co-researchers in this research.

Being aware that young people are often used as objects of research within a school setting (Erickson & Christman, 1996; Wöhrer & Höcher, 2012), my intention was to ensure that this

research was conducted from the young person's perspective; something gaining credence although not commonly adopted (Noffke & Somekh, 2008; Brady, 2017). Accordingly, prior to initiating the data collection phase for my thesis, I visited the school and conducted a patient and public initiative (PPI) exercise, something I explore in greater detail in section 7.7. The purpose of the PPI meetings was to gather the thoughts of young people so that they could help shape the research. One of their recommendations, which I adopted, was for the data collection to be completed by sixth-formers, whom they believed the younger participants would talk to more readily. In this respect, I agree with Moules & Kirwan (2005) when they say young people are more likely to open up to their peers than they are to adults. I intended to get a critical view of the whole school mental health strategy from a young person's perspective. If they were more comfortable talking to someone closer to their own age, they were more likely to give insightful and authentic answers.

1.3.1   Pupil premium cohort as the participants

Another fundamental decision taken at this point was my invitation to young people from the pupil premium cohort to collaborate as participants in the research. Coming from the most economically disadvantaged section of society, my aim was to give volunteers an opportunity to contribute to and benefit from this unique school research. This decision was founded on the basis that research tells us poverty results in poorer outcomes both in health (Marmot et al., 2020) and education (Hirsch, 2007; Mowat, 2015). Hirsch suggests young people in a similar demographic to the participants in my study feel a lack of control over their learning, and therefore become reluctant learners. Whilst this is complex, deep-set and often linked to factors outside of school, education still plays a key role in this area. Furthermore, young people from poorer backgrounds are more likely to lack confidence in school. Mowat (2015) suggests they can feel anxious, sad, frustrated, and angry about the school experience, something often compounded by discriminatory behaviour by teachers. What both Mowat and Hirsch's research also suggests is that work with these young people is more effective when they feel more involved in the decision-making process about their own futures.

Hirsch (2007) believes that young people's engagement in school is linked to confidence and school relationships. Mowat (2015), however, suggests that schools need to value young people for who they are and treat them with unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1957). In my teaching career, I would observe young people from this demographic arrive in school

keen and eager to impress, but gradually over time withdraw into their shells. Their performance nose-dived and many became either invisible or disaffected. Whilst many different approaches were attempted, solutions were rarely identified and we were often left scratching our heads. I, therefore, felt I had an opportunity to support young people from this cohort and explore whether they could benefit from being involved in a research project such as this.

1.3.2 6th formers as a Young Research Team

After the PPI exercise, which suggested 6th formers work with me as co-researchers, the decision to ask for 6th-form volunteers to make up a young research team (YRT) was also founded on a number of other principles. Firstly, as the oldest students in the school they are often looked up to by other year groups, and the school promotes them as being aspirational role models for the younger years. Secondly, they have a small number of free periods allowing them to withdraw participants from lessons and not encroach on their lesson or social time. My experience as a teacher told me in order to engage young people as fully as possible it was important not to impinge on social time, whilst I was also aware school staff were less likely to complain if the YRT were not missing lessons. An added bonus was participants would have the opportunity to miss the occasional lesson. As a rural school, the majority of young people are bused to and from school, therefore after-school meetings are difficult for many to attend. My final, and possibly most important, reason for identifying this cohort as young researchers was their age. Many of them have been at the school for either five or six years and it is this experience of the institution (its workings, its systems, and idiosyncrasies) I wanted to tap into; the research needed to be viewed through the eyes of these experts and social actors (Cowie & Khoo, 2017).

1.4 Research aims

I therefore decided upon the following research aims:

- To explore the efficacy of the whole school mental health strategy.
- To ensure the research is informed by young people in the school.
- To develop ways of collaborating with young people, which ensures findings are not influenced by the researcher's previous position in the school.

1.5 Research, knowledges and voice

This was a participative action research project intent on involving young people as fully as possible, being practice-based research. It was designed with sixth-form volunteers as co-researchers, and a YRT working alongside the researcher and collecting qualitative data from a younger cohort of students (participants). This was therefore a youth participative action research (YPAR) project.

The outcomes of the research were twofold. The findings about the school's mental health strategy focussed on three major areas; relationships with staff, the impact of working alongside the YRT and the school curriculum. The second major outcome was related to the methodology that I used. Learning from critical communicative methodology, I synthesised this with YPAR to develop a process with dialogue at its core: something I call youth participative dialogic action research (YPDAR).

The "knowledges" (Martinez-Vargas, 2022) that I draw upon within this thesis are many. I differentiate between the singular term knowledge and instead use the plural term knowledges as they are relational, cultural and specific to individuals from different backgrounds. My experience as a teacher and school leader has given me an educational perspective on the work. In addition to this I became a researcher, a process enabling me to think and reflect differently, giving me a complimentary view to that of a teacher. The combination of these two perspectives enables a noteworthy, alternative and unique view of the research area. The YRT have used their lived experience, as have the younger participants, to contribute to the generation of knowledges. In addition to this, the YRT had numerous conversations with school staff whose indirect input cannot be discounted. My writing, therefore, takes on many forms, as it is generally split between the first and third person. There are also occasions where I will highlight the voices by using different texts as follows:

- **My reflective voice is used when extracting from my reflective diary**

- *Young people's voice is used when I draw from their verbal or written reflections to me*

Chapter 2: Research context

2.1 Introduction

This chapter explores how education policy since the end of World War Two has seen distinct shifts impacting the mental health of young people in schools. The policy direction, in particular over the past 40 years, has resulted in the marketisation of schools that, in turn, has seen a transformation in both school values and subsequently how they are run. This leads me to briefly touch upon school purpose, as I use this as a lens to explore how this has impacted young people's experience of school. I draw on school climate and culture literature to develop my understanding of what I call school character. The final section investigates how ecological systems theory (EST) relates to this work. Of particular interest is how their application can help understanding of the relationship between young people, the school environment and mental health.

2.2 A history of education policy and how it has impacted young people's mental health

In this section, I provide the context for developing a whole school mental health strategy within education in the United Kingdom (UK). I will explore the macro-scale historical educational policy perspective in the UK since 1944.

As is common in the study of history, we use the past to understand what is happening now; this is undoubtedly true in UK education. I, therefore, begin with a brief history of education policy, before concentrating on a more detailed look at recent influences. From the 1960s onwards, the alternating Labour/Conservative/Labour/coalition and Conservative governments set a path that has framed mental health within education settings. The following section will demonstrate why I believe the rise in the challenges of young people's mental health is at least partially a result of the new capitalist age of education. This is characterised by a situation whereby schools are encouraged to compete against each other and are judged objectively using exam results as the overriding criteria. Thus, success in schools is about how well someone achieves and not how well they feel.

2.2.1 Post-war welfare state

The 1944 Education Act was conceived during the war by the then President of the Board of Education (to be Secretary of State for Education), R.A. Butler. There was a feeling amongst the country's population that Britain needed to be a better post-war place, and secondary education for all was required (Barber, 2014). The new Act did not disappoint as the main thrust was the delivery of free maintained education for all, with a tripartite secondary system that saw grammar schools alongside technical and secondary schools. The 11 plus attainment test, with elements of intelligence testing incorporated, was introduced to allocate young people grammar and other schools (Ball, 2021). Whilst the intention was to have technical schools for the cohort below those selected for grammar, many local authorities chose not to open them. With some areas seeing a pass rate of as little as 12%, the majority of young people went to secondary modern schools. This new system aimed for universal and free education, not based on class or wealth but on merit. However, what transpired were different types of schools for different kinds of students, and the idea of parity of esteem was never actually achieved (Ball, 2021). The following 20 years saw the growth of the new free and universal maintained sector of schools. This saw a rise in pupil numbers from 5.5 million in 1947 to 9.1 million in 1967; the number of teachers doubled during the same period. Whilst the school leaving age did rise to 15 years of age in 1948, it took until 1972 for this to go up to 16 years old, the age at which it stands today. This meant that of those pupils who did not pass their 11 plus exam and gain entry to grammar schools, 80% went to secondary modern schools (Barber, 2014), often leaving school with little or no certification (Ball, 2021). Even as late as the 1960s, only one in eight young people in secondary modern schools recorded O-level passes. This, and the introduction of the Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE), designed for less academic young people, reinforced the two-tier system of schooling in the UK (Ball, 2021). However, for the first time in the country's history young people were guaranteed a secondary education, eventually up to 16 years of age, something previously reserved only for the wealthy in society. It thus represented an attempt by a Labour government to bring about class equality through universal education.

Whilst the 1944 Education Act was introduced by Churchill's coalition government, the 1945 Labour government implemented the post-war agenda following Keynesian social welfare principles (Ellison, 1996). The Labour manifesto was about welfare reform and gained support from a population who had endured years of austerity during World War Two (Tomlinson, 1998). Instead, there was a promise of employment for all on the back of the 'social democratisation of the political system' (Jessop, 1980), including the nationalisation

of coal (the National Coal Board) and iron and steel (The Iron and Steel Corporation of Great Britain). 1948 also saw the formation of the NHS, providing free healthcare for all; education was, therefore part of this welfare revolution (Stoye, 2018). These welfare reforms were designed to ensure all society had jobs and access to free healthcare. The aim was to raise everyone's living standards and break away from the class-driven society of the past. This was possibly something that, as I discuss below, was not quite as straightforward as assumed.

2.2.2   From a post-war vision of welfare to the beginnings of competition

The Wilson Labour governments of the 1960s continued the socialist agenda within the education sector with the introduction of Circular 10/65 (DES, 1965), which declared the government's objective to end selective education and introduce comprehensive schools. This was non-statutory guidance and, as such, local education authorities were only asked to submit plans for comprehensive schooling in their area; it was not made a matter of law (Ball, 2021). However, whilst there was an intention to get rid of grammar schools, there was no clear vision of what comprehensive education should look like. This, therefore, resulted in reproducing a version of grammar school education within comprehensive schools (Ball, 1981; Riseborough, 1981; Reynolds & Sullivan, 1987).

Other issues were also at play, as the Black Papers (Ball, 2021) became influential within educational policy from 1969 to 1977. They were a series of publications written by right-wing commentators criticising comprehensive and progressive education, calling for a return to traditional educational values. The Black Papers attacked on three fronts. Firstly, they believed what was going on in schools was responsible for both the decline in academic standards and a decline in Britain itself; many commentators blamed the education system for the recession at the time (Ball, 2006). Not only was there no clear evidence for the academic decline (HMSO, 1975), but more and more youngsters were leaving school with qualifications than ever before (Wright, 1977). Secondly, teachers themselves were blamed for being politically motivated, as captured by Thornbury (1978, pp. 136-7) when describing English teachers who "indoctrinated themselves and their classes in attitudes critical to the police, local government bureaucracy… and employers". The final accusation suggested behaviour in classrooms and on the streets was declining, and this was also the responsibility of schools; juvenile and, in particular street crime was on the rise. A symbolic crusade or moral enterprise, championed by the Right in the form of the Black Papers, to prevent

disaster by returning to traditional values was undertaken. This was supported by teacher bashing newspapers such as the *Daily Mail, The Sun* and *The Star* and television programmes such as the BBC Horizon's Lesson for the Teacher. The message was clear that schools were out of control and that teachers could not be trusted; parents were encouraged to believe that they were now in a position to wrestle control for themselves (Ball, 2006).

There was also another agenda during this time. Margaret Thatcher, the leader of the Conservative government, was determined to fight socialism. Her championing traditional family values were set against a view of declining morality within UK society. Not only did we have teachers who were revolutionaries (Cox, 1981), but we also had unions perceived as the enemy within. The racial politics surrounding issues of immigration was set against the jingoism and rediscovery of Nation that found voice, and some would say was exploited, by the Falklands War (Ball, 2006). In a newspaper article (*The Times,* 21 October 1974), Keith Joseph, who was thought to be the architect of Thatcherism, highlighted further the ills of society including the rise in delinquency, hooliganism and teenage pregnancy, as well as gang culture in schools. Society's decline was further promoted daily in the newspapers and on television as schools were portrayed negatively as progressive institutions under the control of left-wing teachers. Through education policy, however, concerned parents were soon to have a voice and choose which school was best for their children (Ball, 2021). This was part of the rising conservative neoliberal ideology that promoted freedom of choice, market forces and quality through competition. These ideals would be seen to drive education policy for at least the following 40 years (Ball, 2021).

The changes in policy between a welfare-oriented education system and a neoliberal one can be seen as a broader reflection of societal change. This was not the first time this had taken place, and was not the last. It has been summarised in table form as follows:

Table 1: Shifts, ruptures and state (adapted from Bell 2021)

Shift	Rupture	State	Key dates
1870-1944			
Industrial revolution	Break with resistance to state education and welfare	Modern (or interventionist) state	1902 Education Act Established a Board of Education
1944-76			
Post war growth of economy and middle classes	Move to welfare state education	Welfare state	1944 Education Act Established the principles of universal and free education
1976-97			
Economic crises including mass unemployment	Break from emerging national comprehensive systems and end of professional autonomy for teachers	Neoliberal state	1980 & 1988 Education Act Included giving and extending choice to parents 1988 Education Reform Act Included the devolution of school budget control from LEAs to schools. 1992 Creation of OFSTED
1997-2022			
Knowledge economy, basic and hi-skills	End of national systems locally administered	Competition state	2000 Learning and Skills Act Introduced the City Academies Programme 2010 Academies Act Rapid expansion in academy numbers

So far, I have briefly explored the post-war period that incorporated a welfare approach to education policy and looked at how a neoliberal enterprise gradually replaced this during the Thatcher years. Whilst this policy history gives a context of how societal events influenced educational structures, there has been a seismic shift in what is expected from schools since the late 1990s. This has dramatically impacted how young people's mental health in schools is now perceived, something I discuss later in this chapter. The following section explores the development of the competition state and how this has impacted our educational institutions' value base. I intend to then show how this, in turn, had a negative knock-on effect to how schools respond to the wellbeing of young people.

2.2.3   Competition and marketisation of education

Whilst the ideology of the competition state was set during Thatcher's early years in government, the irony is it was the Wilson-Callaghan government of 1974-1979 who largely prepared for the educational direction until the end of the century and possibly beyond (Lowe, 2004). The Labour government were beset with social, political, and economic problems that saw the beginning of the end for the socialist ideologies dominating education post 1945 (Ball, 2021). By the late 1970s and early 1980s, a Conservative government came into power and there was a clear change in direction as Keith Joseph (Secretary of State for Education) was talking about 'market solutions' and 'a paternalistic inspectorate' (Knight, 1990); around the same time performance based appraisal for teachers was also under discussion (Simon, 1991).

In the first years of the Conservative government the work started with the aim of weakening the power of the local education authority (LEA) and strengthening the voice of the parent. This was done by giving parents freedom to choose their child's school, as well as providing guaranteed parent places on governing bodies (Ball, 2021). City technology colleges, the first independent state schools free from LEA control, were introduced in 1986. The 1988 Education Reform Act introduced local management of schools and grant-maintained schools. Schools no longer needed their LEAs but could commission their own services. If these both hastened the journey towards school autonomy then the introduction of OFSTED certainly raised both teacher and school accountability (Gillard, 2018). National and school performance targets were introduced in 1992, and were then used by OFSTED to judge, and sometimes praise but often condemn schools (Leckie & Goldstein, 2016). Schools were

entering an era of performativity which, as I will go on to discuss, had an inevitable impact on young people as exam results became the measure of a school's performance.

Competition was very real, both nationally and locally, as league tables were produced that pitted local schools against each other (Ball, 2021). Schools used their budgets to advertise and market their institution as pupil numbers were all important; school funding largely being reliant upon the numbers enrolled. A school struggling with exam results was likely to suffer on a number of fronts. A poor OFSTED rating would mean that other local schools could attract 'their' pupils; as competitor school's numbers went up and they became richer, then a 'failing' school's numbers would fall. A fall in numbers meant a reduction in revenue and, in turn, would impact the quality a school could offer; I witnessed local schools finding themselves in freefall. The Conservative government first introduced performance tables in 1992, and encouraged a public discourse around good or bad schools based on performativity. Labour built on this with their agenda around failing schools, subjecting them to a greater number of inspections, interventions and sometimes closure (Ball, 2017). This pattern continued through successive governments as a way of forcing schools to move from local authority control, and has led to the introduction and growth of Academies and Academy chains, now multi-million pound businesses in their own right (Ball, 2017).

2.2.4 The changing school system and its impact on values

My experience in education has demonstrated that the very purpose of schools is at the heart of the changes that have taken place over the past 40 years or so. When, in the early 1980s, I entered the teaching profession I did so to help young people. It was a vocation and, as I progressed through my career, I helped young people prosper through improving their life chances. Assessments are the most obvious example of this, and I took great pride in the results that students achieved. As time moved on, I followed a pastoral route as a Head of Year and then Assistant Headteacher with responsibility for all welfare issues. This involved working with families and young people who often found school challenging. It also meant partnership working with outside agencies including children's services, the police and youth offending services. My priorities had changed and the focus of my vocation became those who were identified as being vulnerable. My values have always been at the heart of my work, be it my past teaching career or now my research.

In contrast, and during this same time span, an enterprise culture in education became pervasive as governments built upon the work of previous administrations. The culture of competition had seeped into, and subsumed, the fundamental meaning of what I see schools as being about. As single schools have been subsumed into multi-million-pound academy trusts, then so their values have changed as a matter of necessity. As corporate culture has taken over, schools are now economic institutions needing to compete with market forces in order to survive; their employees are required to tow the party line. From personal experience and discussion with colleagues working across the sector, I have seen good and honest professionals push at both legal and moral boundaries when it comes to assessments.

In some instances there was evidence of professionals turning a blind eye to illegal exam practice because they knew there was potential for an unravelling that risked the success, status and standing of the school. I have met curriculum leaders who were advised by LEA advisors to raise their students' moderated marks and so improve grades; the headteacher agreed with the advice and his expectation was that the advice should be followed! In my experience the pressure of accountability through the market has certainly eroded the value base within the profession. Schools need students to perform and achieve prescribed levels of exam results. If results are not at a required standard, schools and their staff come under great pressure and, on occasions, staff may lose their job. As such I agree with Ball (2006, p.11) when he says: "Value replaces values, except where it can be shown that values add value".

As policy pushed schools from the timeworn bureaucratic post-war ways into a proposed exciting entrepreneurial future, a new type of school leader was required. Gone were the traditional academics who managed the schools, and they were soon to be replaced with quality-driven professionals who would market the school, attract greater pupil numbers, improve results, and hold their staff to account. Thatcher (1995) talked about 'dependency culture' and the problems created by the welfare state. Her stated aim was to replace this culture with the value of self; this is reflected in what was happening in schools. Thatcher attacked this dependency culture in favour of her enterprise culture (Adkins, 2017). Young people in schools who may fall into this dependency category are those who, through no fault of their own, may not be able to help themselves. The young person with mental health problems I mention in the prologue, whose parents and possibly grandparents had mental health problems, is typical of the ones who are left behind in our system. In far too many

schools, they are not the priority, as the focus is on exam results, and thus their problems are too great to be overcome without substantial financial support.

The values once centring around young people now focussed on the market. It was all about image, exam results and competition for market share; schools now focussed on self-interest in order to thrive or, on occasions, just survive. The values underpinning a school were now set by individual headteachers, many of whom were under increasing pressure in this new competitive world where the very survival of schools was at stake (Grace, 1996). Many headteachers chased the promise of money by becoming independent of LEAs. All schools had to improve exam results as this was the new currency of success; a bright student who could add value in this respect was one that was therefore valued by schools.

What I witnessed at times was however a tragedy. Many young people who needed the greatest support often missed out on potentially beneficial school places as their background or demographic was not seen as something that would enhance the school.

The reform of education in the 1980s took the power away from the local authority. Headteacher appointments were made by them, they had a school advisory team and they also had representation on a school's governing body. Whilst schools were allowed to get on with things in their own way, the local authority had a window into what they could see and what they were doing. With reform, autonomy slowly became real as school leaders set the agenda for schools. No longer was there a local representative able to observe what was going on in the school, and instead monitoring from the national government started creeping in. Lipsky (1980) introduced the idea of 'street-level bureaucrats', who are public sector workers often with high ideals and strong ambitions; a description that fits many of the headteachers that I have worked for. He argued that these public servants, although governed from above, were in fact policy makers in their own right as they need to make daily decisions about how they worked in their own specific environment. As the focus in schools was shifted from a traditional education to an exam and goal-based performance structure, so school leaders needed to move with the times. As street-level bureaucrats, they were now able to set their own agendas and, as such, the traditional value base in schools changed forever. So, whilst schools are monitored more rigorously than ever, it is also true to say that staff within them continue to have agency to do things in their own way. The values, set by a chief executive officer (CEO) of an academy trust or by the headteacher of a school, sets the

ethos of the institution. I argue that values are also crucial to school character (see section 2.4) as they can often dictate how staff and young people interact, and how both groups may feel about the school. I suggest that schools with a zero-tolerance approach towards behaviour will have a very different feel to a school espousing restorative values. Amongst the other areas that contribute to a school's makeup are the physical environment and government policy; the character of a school is about how all these separate areas interact to influence the thoughts and feelings of the individual students that attend.

Within this new world, values took centre stage. Whilst the policy drive, from above, is about economics, market share and self-interest, I believe an individual school's first priority should be the young people they serve. The balance between what is best for the school and what is best for the wider community of young people it may attract is a delicate one. Whilst this new breed of headteacher was focussing on school survival, there were some young people who would not be seen as enhancing the aims of such schools. During my teaching career, I came across several schools where young people with social emotional and mental health difficulties (Department for Education, 2015) were seen as disadvantageous to their image and exam results. Why then would these schools want to spend time and money attracting them? Once the school finance would be required to provide services to look after them, which budget would that money come from? The underlying messages from the government and OFSTED were the only currency that counted was exam results. The introduction of targets and school league tables filtered down to create a culture of performativity. This was taken to extremes by teachers who were in fear of failure; not of their students but of reaching the ever-increasing and continuously stretched targets. This had little to do with child-centred education (O'Neill & Adams, 2012).

Parents then, as now, were in a position where they have to choose a school. Whilst some would send their children to the local school, others look for the best one. They have a limited pool of information on which to base their decision; this includes OFSTED reports largely based on exam results; criteria that many within the teaching profession saw as erroneous. Evidence suggests that parental choice increased the inequality gap in education (Ball, 2021). Simply put, the more affluent parents could afford to bus their children to a better school and the less affluent could not (Ball, 2021). As mentioned above, the result was often that some schools started to contract in size, and as their budget started to decrease the quality of services they could offer would be reduced. The lack of funding meant that often

20

the first things to be impacted were support services; the thing that many of these young people needed most was welfare support. A colleague of mine, when faced with the prospect of some of her support staff being made redundant, once reported that the headteacher had said to her "You are therefore asking me to get rid of teachers so you can keep your support staff"? The implication was that it was either teachers or support staff who would lose their jobs. The choices were stark but, ultimately, the result was often a poorer education for the most vulnerable in the most deprived areas.

Within the context of results and quality-driven headteachers, schools under threat from OFSTED, and classroom teachers threatened by targets, what space is there for individual students and the potential problems that they bring? In my experience finances are spent to enhance measurable outcomes such as school image, and also to improve exam results. However, the soft outcomes, such as wellbeing and mental health, are rarely measured and are therefore likely to be low down on any priority spending list. One of the criteria parents look for in a school for their child is high academic standards (Reyes & Due, 2015), and schools know this and will do what they need in order to achieve their goals.

For the majority of my career, I was lucky enough to work in a school that did prioritise pastoral care and the welfare of young people. Whilst I always sought increased funding for my team, money was spent on support staff and services so that we were able to look after young people and support their families. However, I was also acutely aware that we were the lucky ones, as the majority of my colleagues in other schools did not have the same priorities. Far too many schools developed into inward-looking institutions that had been swept along by the drive to grow what they had at the expense of others. The child-centred welfare agenda had been overtaken by the neoliberal agenda of the market and self. This is something that started its journey during the 1970s, and is still now having a significant impact on schools and, more importantly, on the life of some of our most vulnerable young people. Not only has the support for young people been removed, but there has also been increasing pressure on them to perform; this has resulted in a downturn in young people's mental health and also, ironically, on their exam results (Smith, et al., 2021).

The implications of the policy shift in education resulted in other subtle changes in our schools. With the focus on examinations, I experienced schools discouraging young people's participation in out-of-the-class trips and visits. This narrowed young people's experiences

along with their opportunities to develop social and cultural capital. In addition to this, the drive for improved examination results has seen a push for greater teacher control in schools that has led to the increasing implementation of zero-tolerance behaviour policies; something I have seen at first hand. This strengthens the power imbalance that favours teachers in schools and undermines some young people's school experience. This is a complex area overlapping with what the purpose of school is. As I discuss in the following section, school purpose is itself complex and ill-defined, but is an area I need to address as it adds context for my thesis.

2.3   School purpose

On a simple level, as someone who has been involved in education for nearly 60 years, I have always seen its purpose as being to educate the country's children. Young people often get but one chance at school; if the school gets it wrong, it has let them down or failed them. This could include underachievement relating to qualifications or, more broadly, be in relation to preparedness for life in society. With increasing experience of education, I have developed more nuanced views and believe that education has a moral purpose to make a difference and bring improvements to people's lives (Elliott, 2012). This, in turn, links to the changing value base I have addressed in the section above, as it raises ethical questions about school leaders responding to policy change. As such, I agree with Ball (2006, p.11) when he says "Ethical reflection is rendered obsolete in the process for goal attainment, performance improvement and budget maximisations".

Looking more widely, the purpose of education and schools is something that has been debated for many years, from ancient times when figures such as Plato and Aristotle wrote about it to our more recent history when Dewey wrote that it was about teaching children how to live "pragmatically and immediately" (Dewey & Cohen, n.d.). In a critique of Dewey's work, Counts (1932) moved away from education and schools being about preparing individuals to live independently and towards them being prepared to live within society. These debates have continued into more recent times. Adler (1982) suggested that there were three main purposes for schools, and they were the acquisition of knowledge, development of skills and understanding of concepts and values. A pragmatic view was posited in the 1990s by De Marrais (1995), who believed there were four major purposes of schools that were: economic, social, intellectual and political.

The debate continues into the 21st century where over a decade of accountability measures, imposed through the government and enacted by OFSTED, have seen many schools shift towards a predominantly academic focus. However, some believe that they are places where young people learn how to form healthy relationships, and develop emotionally, behaviourally and cognitively, as well as gain their independence (Wilson, 2004; Cohen et al., 2009). An area worthy of further consideration, and which I will develop in chapter 4, is how power in school influences young people and their ability to take responsibility. It has long been argued that schools are responsible for socialising (Henslin, 1999) and promoting conformity of young people (Saldana, 2013). However, conformity should also be recognised as a power-laden tool which could be seen as an insidious practice and as a way in which society and school values are enforced (Saldana, 2013).

Over the past 40 years schools have changed. They have become businesses in their own right, leading to competition between institutions for the budgets that follow young people. As capitalism has taken hold, so the values in schools have changed. There is a greater emphasis on exam results, which has a twofold effect. It can put undue pressure on young people, some of whom develop mental health issues, whilst the support for them is often reduced with budget restrictions resulting in pastoral staff reductions. A perfect storm for increasing mental health issues.

Education in 2023 is at the centre of an ideological struggle between traditionalists who favour a purely academic focus and progressives who approve of more rounded and holistic approaches. This has partially been addressed by the latest OFSTED framework introduced in September 2019, which has a more socially-balanced focus. Inspectors are now asked to look at a school holistically when making their judgements. They have removed expected exam progress as the limiting measures (OFSTED, 2019). The way in which a school approaches key policy areas such as curriculum, behaviour, inclusion etc., will therefore directly impact upon school character. And so, this takes us full circle to the values of the school and how it is led. As educational policy changes and schools are put under increasing pressure, are the decisions they make ethical, and for the benefit of the school or young people? What a school leader believes and how they implement this belief will impact directly upon the staff, young people, the environment, and the relationships between all involved. This is the character of the school, something I will now go on to explore.

2.4   School character and how it may influence outcomes for young people

2.4.1   Overview

It is essential for schools to understand how the character of the school may impact students, their emotions and, therefore, their willingness to connect with the school and any available school support. This section explores the concept of school character and how it may impact upon the mental health of young people, including the measures put in place to support this. First, I consider what is meant by the term school character before investigating the theories that may influence it. The impact that school character has on students is likely to impact their outcomes. In order to enhance the theory around school character and draw it into the specific context of my research, I will supplement this section by reviewing appropriate literature and exploring exemplars from my teaching career. I will conclude by summarising the potential impact of school character on the mental health of young people.

2.4.2   What do I mean by the term 'school character'?

In section 2.2.4, I explore how changing education policy has impacted upon school values. The changes made in the last 40 years have meant that schools are in a competitive marketplace where performativity is the key measure through which they succeed or fail. This has resulted in changes to the ways in which schools operate that, in turn, have shifted their value base. Where there was once a focus on success for the sake of young people, the focus has now shifted to being about school success. I suggest that this subtle change has impacted the school experience for young people. School character is exactly how young people experience their education. It is linked to the feel of the school, what the climate or culture of the school is and how this impacts on young people. The importance of school character cannot be understated as how young people feel about their time in school is likely to impact upon wellbeing and performance (Lester & Cross, 2015). An exploration of the key components of school character will be the focus of the following section.

2.4.3   Values and climate as subsets of school character

The first acknowledgement of the concept of school climate was early in the 20th Century (Perry, 1908). The first research was in the 1960s (Halpin & Croft, 1963) and is deemed to be

somewhat oversimplistic as school climate is now accepted as being complex and multi-dimensional (Wang & Degol, 2016). There has been little consensus on a definition as to what school climate is (Rudasill et al., 2018); some, such as Freiberg & Stein, (1999) choose abstract definitions that use terminology suggesting school climate is the heart and soul, and the essence, of the school. Others have more concrete definitions. Aldridge & McChesney (2018) explain school climate as being about how the expectations and beliefs of a school create environments where young people feel emotionally, physically and socially safe. Terminology is also a problem as the term school climate is often interchanged synonymously with terms such as classroom climate, school belongingness, school connectedness and school culture (Rudasill et al., 2018). There are those who differentiate between school climate and culture, defining climate as "the character and quality of life within a school" and culture as "a set of beliefs and values" (Lester & Cross, 2015, p. 2). Furthermore, school climate could be described as a facilitator for school culture (Lester & Cross, 2015). There are clear links between the two descriptors and, although they are conceptually close, it is however important to differentiate between them. Culture is related to shared norms, whilst climate is about shared perceptions (MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009).

Whilst it is tempting to adopt a definition of either school culture or school climate, I have adopted the term school character as a more inclusive term that includes all aspects of a school environment. In addition, school culture can be viewed from an anthropological perspective and, as such, there are ethnographic features that need to be drawn upon in this thesis (MacNeil et al., 2009). I, therefore, want to ensure that any cultural aspects are not overlooked. The definition of school character that I will therefore adopt for this thesis is:

School character is the interaction between cultural, physical, emotional, relational, and social aspects of school environment. The interplay between these individual facets of school character is set by school leaders and includes their values and behaviours. School character relates to how these varying aspects impact staff, young people, and their relationships, as well as the wider outcomes of the schools.

Wang & Degol (2016) introduced the Conceptualisation and categorization of school climate framework (Figure 1) which divides school climate into four broad categories: academic, community, safety, and institutional environment. This can be further broken down into sub-

categories that encompass the areas of school life that impact the lives of young people who attend them. By drawing on personal experience and focussing on each of the categories I can contextualise how this framework can contribute to my research.

The **safety** category in relation to school climate, and therefore character, refers to physical and emotional safety as well as order and discipline (Wang & Degol, 2016). Emotional safety is also defined by whether staff are caring and supportive, and whether the school provides services to support those who may be experiencing mental ill health (Kuperminc et al., 1997; Kuperminc et al., 2001; Swearer et al., 2010). Again, my reflective diary extract exemplifies the point:

> "My experience as the school leader responsible for student health and safety allowed me great insight into this area. Young people who were bullied either physically or emotionally were unhappy, frightened and neither enjoyed school nor performed well there. On the occasions that classes were disorderly and discipline was lacking the emotional health of young people suffered."

As I explore all categories within the model, the importance of the **community** category will become self-evident. Positive relationships are key to respect, trust, support and caring, and as such are vital within the context of school character (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Pianta, 1999; Wang et al., 2012) and mental health. Equally important is the approach of staff to equality and diversity by valuing young people's opinions as well as their autonomy and interest (Weinstein et al., 2003). This is exemplified by another extract from my reflective diary:

> "In my previous career as a teacher in an inclusive school, I can attest to the fact that character of the school was all the better for the educative approach to correction when young people made the mistake of not respecting minorities or diversity. When young people made the mistake of abusing others because of differences such as race, gender, or sexuality, they were required to attend one-to-one education sessions, in their own time, where the pertinent issues raised were discussed and explored."

The **academic** category focuses on leadership, teaching and learning (T&L) and the professional development of staff. Whilst each are key, a good leader will set the vision for all other areas of school life, including T&L and professional development. As such, a good

leader will be a good communicator, offering guidance to the staff (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). The best school leaders ensure that there are open lines of communication between school staff and students (Waters et al., 2004; Kelley et al., 2005). T&L is about how teachers communicate understanding to young people. It encompasses areas such as instruction, academic challenge and feedback to young people, and is thus important in relation to school climate (Stefanou et al., 2004). The final aspect of this area is professional development for staff. From my own experience this area is crucial as a school develops its vision and ethos, as illustrated by my reflective diary extract below:

> "For example, when leading on whole school behaviour, in my school career, I implemented a restorative approach to discipline. At this time my focus was to ensure that I educated staff in relation to both the restorative theory and school policy and so ensure that there was consistent implementation. Without this professional development, which was ongoing and took place over several years, the vision would not have been realised and school ethos would not be as I had wished it to be."

As will become clear in the findings section of this thesis, interpersonal relationships are pertinent to this.

The final category of **institutional environment** is related to the impact that the "sensory quality" of the school environment has on young people who inhabit it on a daily basis (Wang & Degol, 2016). The particular focus is on the condition of the buildings and whether it is a pleasant place in which to learn. Dawson and Parker (1998) found that the quality of instruction and teacher effectiveness improved with the quality of the environment. This in turn improved students' academic performance. Carpets, decoration, lighting etc. were regularly maintained to ensure that the environment was clean, welcoming, and a pleasant place in which to study. I reflected:

> "Early in my career one of my first headteachers had an annual percentage of the ever-decreasing school budget designated to modernise the school buildings and keep them in good decorative order. In this era of school marketisation, I have also seen the push to increase school numbers as a way of improving the school budget so that money could be spent on resources and the upkeep of the school. The whole purpose of such approaches was to ensure

that the environment was pleasant and welcoming for the school community but young people in particular".

The conceptualisation and categorisation of the school climate model is a comprehensive framework that complements my own definition of school character. I, therefore, intend to adopt the term school character as a reference tool throughout my thesis. Although the model is comprehensive as regards the breadth of topic areas, it cannot encompass all areas for all schools. I will therefore, where appropriate, contextualise, innovate, and adapt it to work for the school in which I am conducting the research.

Figure 1: Conceptualisation and categorization of school climate (Wang & Degol, 2016)

Sections 2.2 to 2.4 have given context from a historical educational standpoint that introduced the idea of a value shift in schools and how this has filtered through to impact the character of the school. It is also important to explore theoretical concepts related to young people and their development within both societal and educational structures. This will be the focus of the next section.

2.5   Theoretical influences

Research into child development, environmental impacts and the links between them demonstrate they may well influence school character. The area that can offer this work the greatest insight is Bronfenbrenner's work on ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) and bio-ecological framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

2.5.1   Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (EST)

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) EST and bio-ecological framework suggest that development is the result of reciprocal interaction between a human (bio-psychological organism) and others within the environment. The EST focuses on the nested model that places the child at the centre of five interconnected ecological systems (see **Error! Reference source not found.**). The first level of this system, known as the "microsystem" is about the child's immediate environment, including the people around them both in and outside of the home. These are very often personal and intimate relationships that are bi-directional. Young people spend much of their childhood in schools, interacting with peers, school staff and the environment, and as such schools are therefore instrumental in a child's development. The levels of cooperation, conflict and collaboration between all parties, as well as academic expectations, all go to make up school climate and character (Haynes, Emmons, & Ben-Avie, 1997; Juvonen, 2007). It has therefore been proposed that the school is seen as the microsystem, as character is directly influenced by the combined perceptions of the school community (Rudasill et al., 2018). The implication for schools is profound. As demonstrated in the writing earlier in this chapter, school character is about the interplay between the human, physical, emotional, and social aspects of schools, as set by the values of its leadership. As with the EST, the young person sits at the centre and should be the focus of any improvement work. In section 2.2.3 I discussed the marketisation of education and how this has skewed many schools' aims. Instead of centring on young people, schools have been distracted and

now focus on satisfying external bodies such as OFSTED. The young person needs to return to the centre of everything that school is about and the focus of schools should be on ensuring their "microsystem" is the priority.

The "mesosystem" is the interaction between a child's microsystems. It is about the impact that the relationship between teacher and parent may have on them to influence effort and engagement in academic work (Galindo & Sheldon, 2012). However, there are also times when parents and schools have different values and give conflicting messages. This can often leave the young person trying to negotiate a path between the two (Spencer, 1999).

Bronfenbrenner also identified both formal and informal social structures not necessarily containing the child, but possibly impacting upon them. These "exosystems" have a distal influence on young people as it has an indirect impact on school character. It may be a government policy implementation, a fund-raising campaign by the parent association or an effective charity drive such as Red Nose Day. These experiences have a bearing on the life of the young person in the school (Marino, 2011).

The cultural elements that impact upon a child's development, such as poverty, ethnicity, religion etc., are known as "macrosystems". These are the effects that, through immersion, influence a child's beliefs and perceptions. As mentioned previously, a school's values and ethos are part of its character and, more specifically, its macrosystem, and something that, from my experience, will impact upon a child's beliefs and perceptions.

Finally, "chronosystems" are the major events over time that impact a child's development. Be it starting school, transitioning to secondary school, or a high-school shooting (Hong & Eamon, 2012), all such events may leave young people feeling insecure within their school environment.

It will often be difficult to identify exactly which aspect of school character influences an individual within the school setting. It could be the physical structures, systems, curriculum or young people/staff relationships, but the bio-ecological theory asserts any of these can influence student development (Way et al., 2007). Furthermore, the EST has been designed to include all influences upon the young person at the centre; they are the focus and, as such, the model suggests that school character should be responsive to factors beyond their control,

such as community dynamic or government policy. What happens in practice is still however subject to the values of school leaders. As we saw earlier in this chapter, ethics and ideology play a big part in this; one leader may respond to their school being in a deprived part of the country by enforcing a zero-tolerance behaviour policy, whilst another may respond by introducing a relationship-rich restorative one. Another aspect that should also be considered is how much of an influence a school can have on a young person, bearing in mind they are subject to numerous influences outside of school. Conflict may often arise when there is a lack of congruence between the school and these other areas. The most obvious example being a parent with a very different value base to the school refusing to support the school and coming into conflict with it.
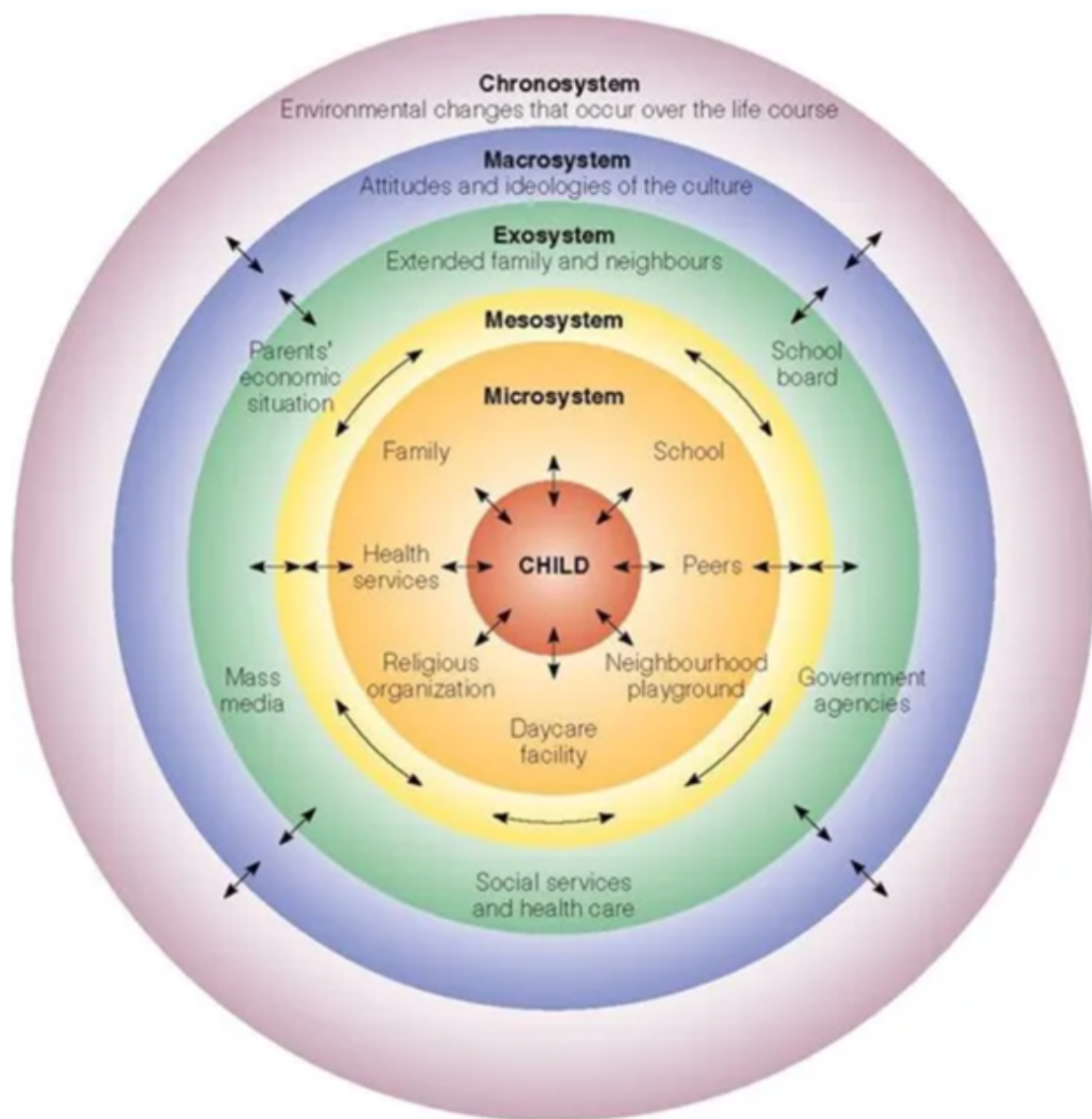
Figure 2: Bronfenbrenner nested model of ecological systems (Guy-Evans, 2020)

Returning to exemplars from my teaching career, an extract from my reflective diary gives clarity to how there can be conflict around the school external factors influencing young people in school:

> "From my own experience in schools, I can recollect numerous occasions where young people who I knew to be responsible outside school ended up in serious trouble within the school environment; the young farmer who took massive 'adult' responsibility at home running aspects of the farm, the young carer looking after the alcoholic mother being but two examples. The environment in which they lived enabled, allowed, or possibly forced them into positions of responsibility however when they were in school, they were required to follow rules which they often saw as irrelevant and rebelled against. Both in and out of school I would argue that the bio-ecological framework, with its multidimensional nature could possibly explain the differing behaviours of young people from different environments."

Rudasill et al. (2018) have developed a systems view of school climate (SVSC) (see Figure 3) that is broadly based on Bronfenbrenner's nested model. It develops the nested concept and, whilst it is based around the school, it also links with family and peers that interact with the school microsystem. The SVSC chose a new term, "nanosystem", to describe adaptations specific to schools that allow for the interaction of sub-groups within school microsystems. This places the student as separate from the school microsystem and impacted through more remote 'nanosystems' such as classrooms, peer groups and extra-curricular activities, including involvement in research such as this.
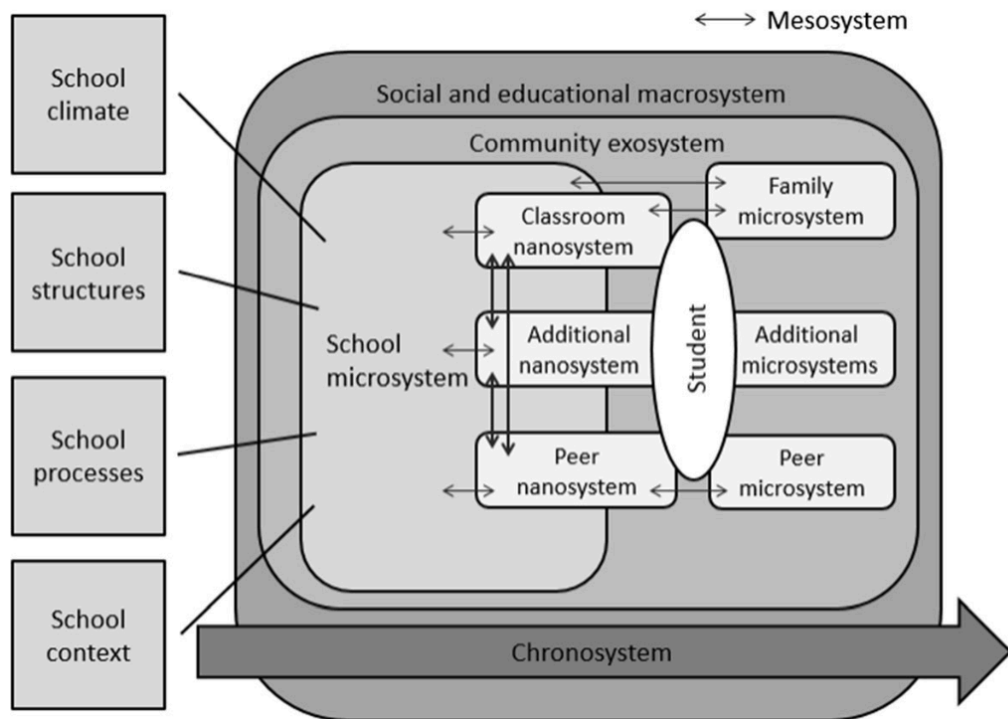
Figure 3: Systems view of school climate

The extract from my diary below shows how the introduction of nanosystems, as a sub-category of microsystems, presents opportunities to explore the potential influences on young people's experiences in school:

> "From past involvement in schools, I have seen the impact, both negative and positive, of staff. The support staff with specific student welfare responsibility who over a period of years builds relationships with young people and their families. They build trust and improve student experience in school; the role allowing the development of relationships, has a direct impact on school character for young people. Similarly, there are staff with attitudes of 'zero tolerance' around behaviour as they have little understanding or interest in child welfare. They expect all young people to behave impeccably and have inflexible behaviour systems often resulting in serious conflict with students. This again impacts on the school character for young people who attend those classes. These differing adult behaviours have the potential to impact young people's mental health, something not to be underestimated."

2.6   Chapter summary

In this chapter I have laid out the context for my research starting with how historic education policy has played out in the past 40 years, and how there has been a shift in values due to the

marketisation of schools. I have explored how this shift in values has impacted the school experience for young people as the school character has also undergone a period of change. I have concluded the chapter by considering the research context through the theoretical lens of EST. EST holds a mirror to the changes seen in education in the past 40 years. It prioritises the young person, and appreciates everything in their lives that can impact upon them. The following chapter concentrates on aspects of mental health in relation to adolescence and schools so I can apply recent learning to this research.

Chapter 3: Young people, education and mental health

3.1 Chapter introduction

This chapter explores mental health in general terms, and more specifically in relation to this research. I begin by looking at how mental health has been viewed historically before focussing on education and mental health. The impact that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on young people's mental health is explored alongside a critical exploration of educational responses. I investigate adolescence through the lens of attachment theory before reviewing literature related to mental health research developments. This includes how magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) has transformed brain function research. I complete the chapter by investigating how MRI discoveries have contributed to understanding adolescent mental health. In particular, I focus on adolescent social cognition and self-concept, including social media's role in this.

3.2 What is mental health?

There is great ambiguity around the term *mental health* (American Psychological Association, 1959; Manwell et al., 2015). This includes the fact that it is sometimes used as a euphemism for mental illness (Cattan & Tilford 2006). Mental health has been defined as an absence of disease, as well as being associated with biopsychosocial factors that may contribute to an individual's ability to function within society (Manwell et al., 2015). There are other definitions that go further, including intellectual, emotional and spiritual development (Herrman et al., 2016), together with physical health and feelings around self-perception and self-worth (Bhugra, Till, & Sartorius, 2013; Caswell, 2021)

As highlighted by Manwell et al. (2015) discussions around mental health have been further informed by a debate exploring a redefinition of the term health (Huber et al., 2011)*.* This debate has challenged the World Health Organisation's (WHO) definition of health as achieving "a state of complete well-being" (WHO, 1946/2022). The WHO definition was lauded as inventive and progressive when enacted in 1948, as it attempted to move away from a traditional and problematic view of health, towards a positive and holistic definition. Huber et al. (2011) argue it is a static definition that, due to its longevity and changing world

demography, is outdated. Furthermore, the term 'complete' is unachievable, and I contest most of the world's population would fail to reach the goal of 'complete health'!

However, in the 70 years since the original WHO definition, the understanding of mental health and mental illness has moved on. It is now seen as a desirable asset that enhances life experience for individuals and society (WHO, 2019a). The WHO were building upon the work of figures such as Huber et al. (2011), who looked at health definitions that included concepts of capacity for an individual to adjust and develop over time. As an inclusive statement, this gives power back to individuals; it is optimistic and positions health within a person's control as it "restores one's integrity, equilibrium and sense of wellbeing" (Huber et al., 2011, p.3). The balance between passing responsibility on to individuals and supporting them to take responsibility is very fine; related changes need to be supportive. The WHO revisited the concept of health in 1984, reframing its thinking towards a vision of health as a resource, and not an objective measure or goal. Within this definition the term 'change or cope' is used in a similar way to adjust as used by Huber et al. (2011). This is reinforced further as the definition goes on to state "Health is a resource for everyday life, not the objective of living; it is a positive concept, emphasising social and personal resources, as well as physical capacities" (WHO, 2019b). This realignment from a judgement (either subjective or objective) to an asset is a discrete and definite move away from a deficit model towards a positive and inclusive framework.

Manwell et al. (2015) build on the work of the WHO (Boxer, 2005) and Huber et al. (2011) in adopting the three domains of health: physical health, mental health and social health for their transdomain model of health. By integrating them they have been able to identify key and interlinked components for each domain, whilst also highlighting areas of common ground (see Figure 4 below).
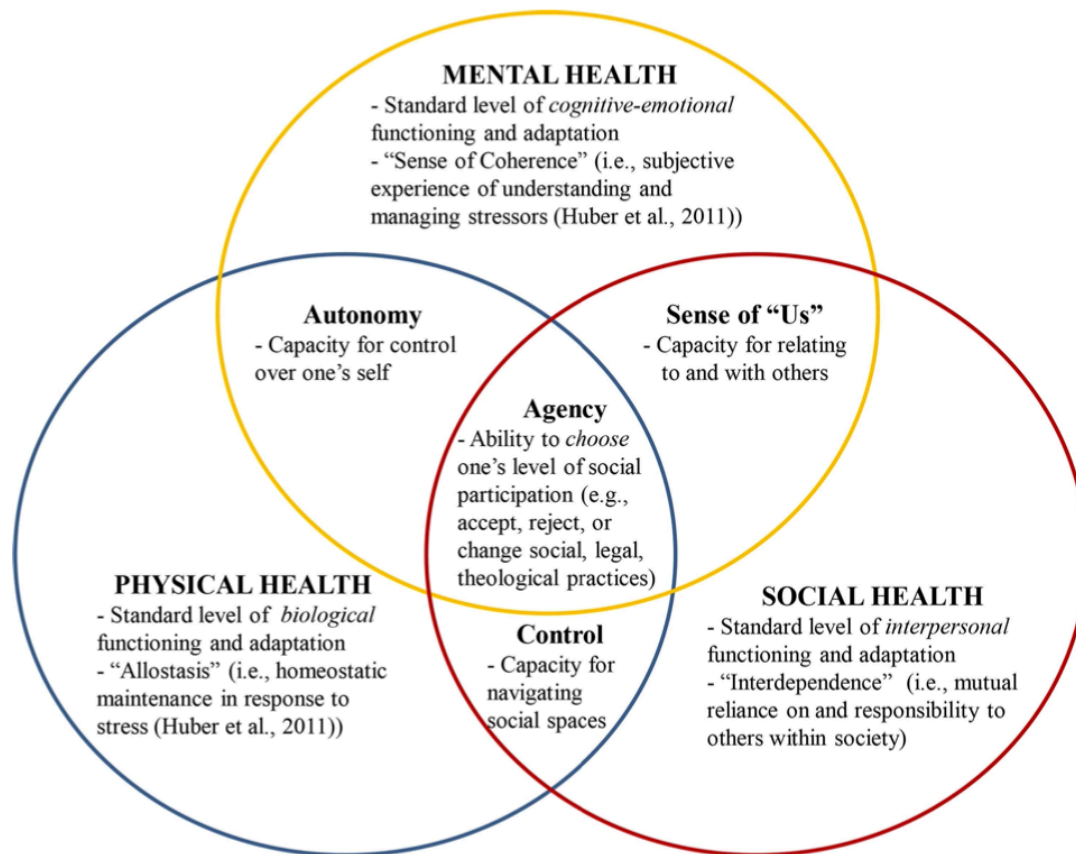
Figure 4: Transdomain Model of Health (Manwell et al., 2015, Figure 4.)

As I have already discussed above, this is about individuals being able to draw upon their holistic resource base in order to thrive. Mental health can be affected by genes, brain chemistry and neurons, but it also has to do with an individual's interactions with the wider environment. A person's relationship with self and others, society, environment, and political and economic systems are among the components that all have an effect on mental health (Manwell et al., 2015).

3.3 Mental health in the context of this research

I embarked on my own professional mental health journey as I followed a pastoral career path in schools. My job was about building relationships with young people and their families while supporting them, linking them with external services and ensuring they were able to benefit from education and progress in life. In my early days of teaching, mental health was a term reserved for medical settings and rarely used in schools (RothÌ & Leavey, 2006). In my

experience, it has only been in the past ten years or so that the term mental health has received widespread use in the education sector. It was initially mentioned in relation to certain behaviour problems, anxiety and bullying issues, and one of the issues was these types of problems seemed to be on the increase and schools were not in a position to deal with them. The issues related to the term mental health and its meaning in a school context continue to this day. This is something I will return to later in this section. My experience of the last 30 years has seen schools move from being places of education that were primarily run by teachers to quasi-welfare institutions with a wide range of multi-disciplinary staff within them (Simkins, Maxwell, & Aspinwall, 2009). The changes in the needs of young people have been gradual, and thus the profile and skills of staff in schools have needed to adapt. There were no rule books and changes were organic, and developing at a time of decreasing school resources. With the introduction of devolved school budgets, individual institutions prioritised their spending (Ball, 2021). Some schools, such as mine, ensured the pastoral dimension was well served, while others neglected it. Working with schools from across the country, I saw a patchwork of pastoral approaches, meaning an inconsistent provision in the care for young people.

Furthermore, school change has been accompanied by reductions in support services across many sectors of society. In 2018, the Sutton Trust estimated that up to 1000 Sure Start centres had been shut (Butler, 2018) since 2010. The YMCA reported that between 2010/11 and 2018/19 the reduction in funding for youth services saw the loss of over 750 youth clubs and over 4000 youth workers (Weale, 2020). In addition, austerity, the coalition government's stated aim, resulted in a stripped-back welfare system, as well as an NHS that is being funded at a far lower rate than previously (Stoye, 2018). The result of these changes, together with the changes to the experiences of adolescents outlined earlier, was an increasing problem with fewer resources. In schools and society, there are increasing adolescent mental health problems, alongside a reduction in vital support and medical services (Local Government Association, 2022).

There is an acceptance that the period of adolescence finds many vulnerable to mental health issues, due to several conflicting factors impacted by this sensitive period of brain development (Fuhrmann, Knoll, & Blakemore, 2015). Whilst most young people navigate this period without major mental health issues, the growth in such problems is truly worrying. In 2017 it was estimated that, in England, one in nine, equivalent to 850,000 children and

young people, had a diagnosable mental health disorder (DfE/DoH, 2017). Figures for anxiety in children (3.3%), depression (0.9%) and mental health disorders (10.8%) (DfE/DoH, 2017; NHS Lifestyles Team, 2020) are all concerning. However, one of the issues is there seems to be an upward trend in mental health disorders statistics. They show a steep increase between 2017 and 2020 to one in six, with an estimated increase of 425,000 to 1,275,000 (NHS Lifestyles Team, 2020). One of the contributions to this rising trend may be increasing acceptance of the self-reporting of mental health concerns, resulting from efforts to destigmatise it. Furthermore, some believe the recent focus on mental health may in itself be increasing mental health problems for some (Foulkes & Andrews, 2022). The rise increases in reporting is further reinforced by figures that show that CAMHS receives 183 referrals every school day, with 56% of these coming from primary schools, an increase of one-third since 2015 (The Lancet, 2018). This has been further compounded by the COVID pandemic (NHS Lifestyles Team, 2020).

The reality is that young people who experience mental health issues are more likely to have problems in later life. Thus, as well as impacting the quality of an individual's life during this most impactful period, it can cause problems as young people mature. Young people with mental health issues are more likely to have a disrupted education, with apparent consequences (DfE/DoH, 2017):

- There are links between mental ill-health in childhood and poorer employment-related outcomes, including regularity of employment and earning power (DfE/DoH, 2017).
- Links between mental health issues and crime are well documented, with young offenders more likely to experience mental health difficulties (DfE/DoH, 2017).
- The cost to society cannot be ignored either, with over 11.4 million working days lost due to work-related stress, anxiety and depression (DfE/DoH, 2017).

My experience in schools was that there were generational mental health problems. Having taught across two, (and possibly 3) generations in the same school, I came across young people and their parents whose patterns of mental health followed a similar trajectory. The concerns above suggest it is of the utmost importance that society does everything it can to address the rise in adolescent mental ill-health. Whilst many of the challenges mentioned in this paragraph are societal problems, they are often positioned as issues that schools can address through policy (Ball, 2021). Whilst the Mental health support teams pilot

(Department of Health and Department of Education, 2017) and its subsequent fuller implementation (NHS England, 2021) is a recent initiative that aims to address some of the issues of mental health in schools, the reality is that schools have limited options to draw upon. In section 2.2 I raise issues around the marketisation of schools that have drawn on both economic resources and school values; both can be barriers to improving young people's mental health. An area that schools can use to support emotional difficulties is the SEND process, which includes an application for an Education and health care plan under the category of Social, emotional and mental health difficulties (Department for Education, 2015). Where the problems go beyond being just educational and impacting life outside school, there are options to apply for an Early help review from local authority partners (OFSTED, 2015). However, in my experience, rarely did individuals with mental health issues benefit from these measures.

3.4 Mental health and school approaches in 2021

3.4.1 Overview

The term *strange times* could not be more apt for this thesis. In the following short section, I present the mental health dichotomy society, as schools find themselves embroiled in this at the beginning of the 21st Century. A recurring theme throughout this thesis is growing calls by many for a focus on supporting children and young people's mental health needs. This has been exaggerated further by the COVID pandemic we have been experiencing. This has magnified societal inequalities, as health and financial concerns have created trauma for many, with young people being the hardest hit (Meredith, 2020). Issues around bereavement, anxiety and loneliness are among the key factors impacting young people (Cava, Buelga, & Tomás, 2021). It is also important to recognise that there is evidence that some young people experienced "improved mental wellbeing" (Soneson et al., 2022, p. 1) during the lockdown. Whilst this thesis is not bound by the pandemic, the research occurs at a unique historical point for young people and school mental health.

Research at this time has also linked young people's mental health and attainment in secondary education (Smith et al., 2021). Smith's report also found that young people with similar characteristics to the participant cohort were likely to be at the most significant risk of underachievement. However, another point of view needs to be considered, which is the rise

of what has been called 'therapeutic education', which is seen by some as doing more harm than good (Didau, 2016). As I will set out, the arguments against therapeutic education are further confused by the ideological debate in schools, which pits the knowledge curriculum against the skills curriculum (Gibb, 2021). At its simplest, this is about traditional versus progressive education, and is where emotional or therapeutic education comes under pressure. The UK government follows a traditional path (Gibb, 2021) and favours a knowledge curriculum. This combines with the pressures of assessment, discussed above, to create an environment where increasing numbers of young people struggle emotionally.

3.4.2 Therapeutic education and how it is viewed

The ideology mentioned in the section related to educational history and mental health goes deeper than just an education debate. After the 1997 election victory, New Labour championed a more progressive and child-centred approach, including the introduction of social and emotional attitudes to learning (SEAL). Ecclestone & Hayes (2008) suggest that New Labour's approach was about appealing to the public via a popular therapy culture. Since the re-election of a Conservative government in 2010, the focus has been on implementing a knowledge curriculum, as referenced by Gibb, (2021). These political decisions then divide opinion and add to the broader education debate that follows an ideological script. What seems to get lost is what the right thing to do for young people in our schools is.

Although some are demanding a greater focus on emotional health in schools (Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families, 2022; Lioncare, 2022), there are also those who believe that, by its very nature, such an approach disempowers and undermines young people's self-esteem. An example is the work of Didau (2016), who supports the view that therapeutic interventions aimed at suppressing negative feelings can do more harm than good (Borton & Casey, 2006). Emotional curricula, such as SEAL, promote a belief that young people struggle emotionally, are vulnerable or are challenged by low self-esteem (Ecclestone & Hayes, 2008). The argument is that however well-intentioned this approach is, it lowers expectations and aspirations and replaces the goals of an academic curriculum (Didau, 2016). Whilst this may be true, I suggest most modern interventions are not about the suppression of feelings, but about understanding and coming to terms with them. During my school career, I saw examples where interventions enabled a deficit approach whereby young people, and

sometimes their families, were labelled as being in need and therefore invited intrusion into their lives.

Much of the argument against school interventions seems to be based on the polarisation between a therapeutic or knowledge-based curriculum. My time working in schools with young people and families tells me that it is not a black-and-white decision. Just as there should be a balance between skills and knowledge, there is a place for an emotional curriculum. The research evidence around the impact of COVID on young people demonstrates that many need support and help to deal with the trauma of what they have been through (Carpenter & Carpenter, 2020; Meredith, 2020; Waite, 2020). Furthermore, Smith et al. (2021) are clear that increasing mental health issues are impacting attainment, particularly for the cohorts of disadvantaged young people. If we ignore the problem, then it certainly will not get any better.

3.5 Understanding adolescence and links to mental health

The natural processes that ensure humans change biologically from childhood through puberty into adolescence, and then to adults, have been misunderstood and often demonised for centuries. Rather than seeing adolescence for what it is, it seems that through history a deficit model has been developed that still exists today.

In ancient Greece, both Socrates and Aristotle (469-322 BC), when talking about the youth of the day, wrote about young people having bad manners, showing disrespect and being fickle, things that would not be out of place in today's tabloid newspapers. (R. W. Hill, 2017; Hohnen, Gilmour & Murphy, 2019). In the 17th century, Shakespeare exemplified the worst of adolescent behaviour in The Winter's Tale (1623) when he wrote "…stealing, fighting—Hark you now! Would any but these boiled brains of nineteen and two-and-twenty…" (Shakespeare, 1978).

In the first decade of the 20th century, the first definition of adolescence was committed to academic text when Hall (1904) wrote about it as a time of 'storm and stress'. Again, the implications were that this was a difficult time for young people, where their behaviour was scrutinised and often below the standards that society expected. This pattern continues today, as young people are often labelled as abnormal because of the adolescent traits that, it could

be argued, result from the biological changes happening to them. A newspaper headline that exemplifies this, "Tories five-point plan to tackle yob culture" (Daily Mail, 2005), explains 'yob' behaviour on a mix of young people and cheap alcohol. The article discusses how the leader of the then opposition would 'fix' the problem by 'frightening' these 'yobs' with the police, whilst simultaneously adjusting licencing laws. The language used in the article assumes that the readers understand terms like 'yob' and 'thuggish', and plays into a societal fear of young people (Arnett & Hughes, 2012).

Adolescence is seen as a developmental stage that starts with puberty and ends when an individual maintains a stable, independent position in society (Mann & Blakemore, 2021). A generally accepted age range was from 10-19 years (WHO, 2014), however more recently an argument has been made that the age definition needs to be expanded to 10-24 years (Sawyer et al., 2018). Earlier onset of puberty and neuroscience developments, as well as societal changes, suggest that adolescence is now lasting longer, and adulthood is often starting later, particularly in many Western societies.

Typical behaviours highlighted above and associated with adolescence, such as conflict with parents, mood swings and risk-taking behaviours, are seen as negative and disruptive. However, these views are slowly being replaced by a transformative (Sawyer et al., 2018) point of view suggesting they are a necessity, enabling the growth from a child, (a being in their own right) to a becoming a responsible adult (Arnett, 1999; Corsaro, 2018). It is a unique period in a person's life where they exercise their agency to challenge, grow and develop. In so doing they go through a period of mastering enabling experiences that should be viewed as a normative process (Bandura, 2006). Western society still has a deficit approach to adolescence, but this developmental period should be seen through an adaptive and rational lens (Blakemore, 2018). It is now accepted that peer pressure plays a large part in the life of some adolescents; they engage in risk-taking behaviours rather than jeopardise their social standing within a group. Furthermore, what is far less accepted in Western society is that during this period in their lives many pro-social behaviours are contributing to their development (Blakemore, 2018).

My personal experience in schools certainly supports the opposing views of adolescence. As a teacher for many years, the overriding consensus from those with power in schools is that there are young people who choose to misbehave. Therefore, there are others who do not know how to behave and, whilst mitigating factors are sometimes considered, the consensus

is one of negativity towards certain sections of the student population. Having responsibility for the behaviour system for over 12 years put me at the centre of this dichotomy. Whilst we tried to develop a system based on relationships rather than behaviour, there were occasions when the intensity of the work, the drive by outside forces and pressure from targets became overwhelming, resulting in a deficit mindset around this group of young people. Over the years, there were many occasions where I would have to take stock and remind myself that the number of behaviour issues in school created pressure due to the interaction of a tiny proportion of the population. Whilst on occasions I might have to remind myself that I was in danger of lapsing into a deficit mindset, some other staff were squarely in the deficit camp. As with society, there were those who took on the view that we had a yob culture, and would treat young people accordingly.

Society's view of adolescence continues to be informed by research, and there is a growing body of evidence suggesting the attachment between a child in the early years of their life and a primary carer can contribute to the impact upon their behaviour during adolescence. I explore attachment theory below.

3.5.1   Attachment and how it can impact adolescence

Attachment theory is one of the critical foundations of school climate work as it emphasises the importance of secure child-adult attachment, as well as warm and consistent environments (Bowlby, 1988). At its most basic, attachment is about the bond between a child and a unique and particular adult (or adults) in their life. Bowlby (1988) initially investigated the role of the primary carer in providing a safe and secure base from which the child will be able to thrive and flourish. Adults, through attunement, ensure the emotions and the psychological state of the child are the centre of attention and the motivation to their work (Trevarthen, 2011). Attunement helps develop a child's emotional security and enhances their feelings in relation to themselves and others. Furthermore, it influences their thoughts, feelings and behaviours, helping them cope with stressful situations (Sroufe, 1995).

The relevance of attachment theory for secondary schools and adolescents comes as it has been discovered that interventions in later life can positively impact attachment issues (Smith et al., 2017). Furthermore, it has also been suggested that events in later life can affect relationships and cause attachment issues (Cummings & Davies, 1996). Whilst attachment was initially used as a therapeutic model in counselling and psychotherapy, it has more

recently been linked to educational settings. The development of positive sustained relationships that promote attachment in schools is one of several requirements needed to ensure that a young person's developmental needs are fulfilled (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). It has been established that attachment influences young people's relationships with their friends and peers, as well as school staff, something referred to as a microsystem by Bronfenbrenner (1979). It therefore stands to reason that, in schools prioritising exam success ahead of pastoral care, these types of relationships will be more difficult to develop.

Furthermore, it has been recognised that schools that develop environments with opportunities for stronger adult/young people relationships provide a more productive context for learning. Young people in such environments are more likely to have a better attachment, greater motivation, higher attendance, better behaviour and improved achievement (Hammond & Harvey, 2018). As a teacher, whilst I saw many young people develop attachment with staff through their time in school, others could not build these independent relationships through a lack of confidence. Schools can and should do more. In secondary schools with robust transition arrangements with their feeder schools, young people who find relationship building difficult will be known to the school. Schools then have a unique opportunity to create systems whereby these young people can build a meaningful relationship with a key adult before transfer. By employing a staff member whose role is to support and advocate for the young person, a start can be made to ensure healthy relationships develop; this then creates the greater possibility for attachment to be made.

Trusting and positive relationships between young people and school are one of the key areas when investigating the success of young people in school (Smyth, 2007; Martin & Dowson, 2009). Research has also demonstrated that young people can form bonds with adults outside the home, such as school staff (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004; Riley, 2009). Once again, I draw upon my reflective diary to illustrate this point:

> "In my school experience, I have witnessed how some staff have built trusting relationships with young people. In particular the staff member responsible for overseeing the school's pupil premium cohort produced remarkable results through building relationships with her charges. She built the trusting, parent-like relationship with the heroin addict's daughter or the young man who lived with grandma because mum and dad were alcoholics and could not

care for him. She helped, supported and advocated for them but also held them accountable for their behaviour. She had a parent-like bond allowing them to succeed at school."

Bergin & Bergin (2009) suggested that at least one-third of young people have insecure attachment issues that could impact their school performance. Unfortunately, the behaviours exhibited by such young people are often misinterpreted by school staff, whose reactions can make the situation worse. Attachment behaviours may include aggression, lack of concentration, demanding behaviours etc. My reflective diary extract once again illuminates how my school experience supports this theory:

"The problems that I experienced in school was the need to balance the good of the individual against the good of the rest of the school population. School budgets were never enough to support those with the greatest needs. Often fallback positions were punishments and sanctions rather than the support or specialist help these young people required. Whilst the school used restorative approaches to foster relationships, on occasions, young people were excluded from school. I also saw some schools focussing solely on student achievement, often with zero-tolerance behaviour policies. I would suggest that such policies have the potential to do more harm than good for young people with attachment issues."

I now explore more closely how the relationship between mothers and new-borns can also impact young people. During adolescence, young people are more likely to self-report lower life satisfaction than at any other period of their lives (Patalay & Fitzsimons, 2018). In section 3.7, I discuss the development of the social brain during adolescence. This supports the thinking that young people are likely to experience emotional instability and stress in a way they have never experienced before (Mónaco et al., 2019). This period also offers opportunities; as the social brain is developing, it has been discovered there may be flexibility within the brain, allowing the possibility for adolescents to learn how to manage their emotions (Mónaco et al., 2019).

Secure attachment, traditionally seen as being built on warm and caring parent-infant relationships, is developed through relationships exhibiting trust, communication and a lack of disaffection (Koehn & Kerns, 2018). The early connections between the primary caregiver and child are likely to impact the development of how an adolescent may view themselves and others as they grow up in their social environment (Bowlby, 1982). For a child who is

nurtured with trust and love by attentive parent(s), a secure attachment is something likely to endure into their later adolescent life; as a consequence, it is probable the child will develop a fundamental attitude of trust towards others (O'Connor et al., 2019). Furthermore, it is thought those who have benefited in this way will have more effective emotional and interpersonal skills, enabling them to develop positive relationships in adult life (Allen et al., 2018). The significance of this cannot be understated for my work, as my thesis specifically explores what support young people need to take responsibility for their own mental health. It is therefore pertinent to highlight that society needs to ensure that those who exhibit symptoms of insecure attachment, and have difficulties with their fluctuating emotions, should be supported to develop their emotional competencies. My research is designed in such a way that it promotes relationship building between participants and sixth formers. The intention is for these relationships to be beneficial to both parties. I believe that the potential bonds (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004; Riley, 2009) that develop between the two groups of young people may help develop the emotional competencies that are so important to young people. I will explore this in more detail in the discussion chapter.

3.5.2   Neuroperson model

Emotional competencies are related to how an individual manages their emotions to function adequately in a given social setting (Petrides et al., 2016). This is about how one perceives, names, expresses and regulates their emotions (Mónaco et al., 2019). Also, these now being recognised as traits that may function as mediators between attachment and wellbeing (Sabri et al., 2015). Research suggests emotional competencies are seen as having a buffering effect against the negative influence of an individual having to maintain insecure attachment relationships. It is recognised that good emotional competency indicates subjective wellbeing (Di Fabio, 2016) and physical wellbeing, such as less somatic issues and lower levels of perceived stress (Matthews et al., 2017). Furthermore, it was found that those with secure attachments, based on trust and communication, were more able to talk about their emotions, meaning they understood how they felt and therefore had a better chance of being able to cope with this (Keaten et al., 2008). Balluerka et al. (2016) also suggest that introducing emotional competency training for adolescents may be a way of preventing the onset of wellbeing issues. It is interesting to note that there are also sociodemographic differences, as females seem able to perceive and express emotions more than males. In contrast, males can develop more effective strategies to regulate negative emotions than females (Martínez et al.,

2020). There is also a need for additional research about those identifying as non-binary or gender-fluid. The intention suggests, therefore, that we want young people to take responsibility for their mental health. If this is the case, we need to understand the existing knowledge available and use it to ensure that any targeted help is well-informed.

The Neuroperson approach is underpinned by the Three part socio-emotional mental skills as seen below (McNeil & Stuart, 2022).
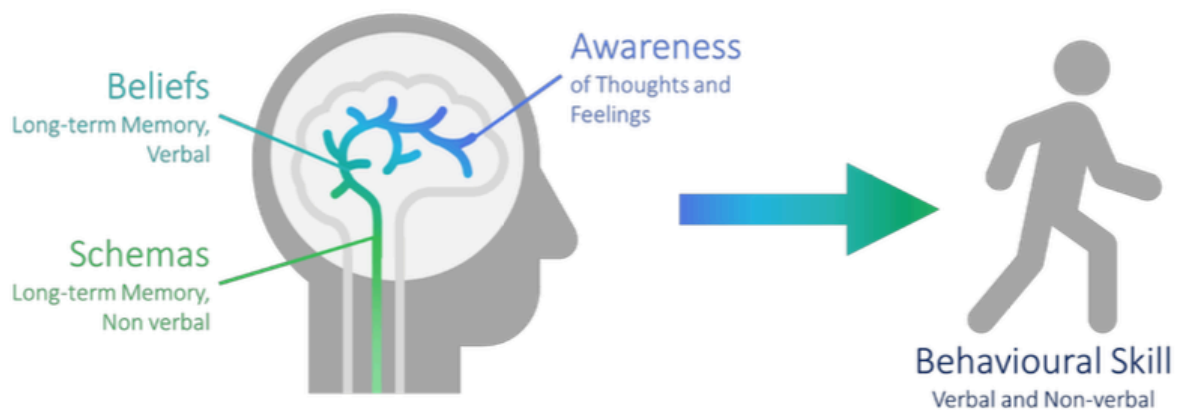
Figure 5: Three Part socio-emotional mental skills

Error! Reference source not found. suggests behaviours are influenced by young people's mental skills and their neurobiological support systems. Schemas have a powerful influence on how young people feel and behave. They consist of non-verbal memories that, when triggered, can result in emotional responses. Schemas are deep-set and long-term memories which take time and perseverance to change (McNeil & Stuart, 2022). In contrast, beliefs can change relatively quickly and are therefore easier to impact upon. The power a person has to be aware of their thoughts and feelings, and consequently the ability to focus awareness at a specific moment whilst purposefully changing focus, is a crucial management skill (McNeil & Stuart, 2022). Schemas are directly related to attachment patterns; therefore, it is important to understand their influence on emotions and behaviours. In turn, as adults look to support young people, relationships between supporting adults and young people are essential. The emphasis in the Neuroperson model is on practices that engage young people's schema-developing awareness of feelings and challenge-seeking behaviour. These are known as broaden and build schemas, and they contrast narrow and constrain schemas.

McNeil & Stuart (2022) have developed an outcomes framework 2.1, which focuses on six domains of socio-emotional skills, described by them as life skills; once learnt, they are applied across the life course (Figure 6). The outcomes framework 2.1 is designed to inform informal youth provision; there may also be a place for it in schools that are seen as formal provision for young people. The aim is to assist practitioners as they, in turn, support young people in developing socio-emotional skills.

Emotion Management is the ability to be aware of and constructively handle both positive and challenging emotions;

Empathy is the ability to relate to others with acceptance, understanding, and sensitivity to their diverse perspectives and experiences;

Initiative is the ability to take action, sustain motivation, and persevere through challenge toward an identified goal;

Problem solving is the ability to plan, strategise, and implement complex tasks;

Teamwork is the ability to collaborate and coordinate action with others; and

Responsibility is the ability to reliably meet commitments and fulfil obligations of challenging roles.

Figure 6: Domains of socio-emotional skills and their contexts

The implications of the neuroperson model and the domains of socio-economic skills are therefore relevant to my research. Schools need to understand the neuroperson model so they can fully recognise how young people's emotional competencies can influence their behaviour. This is however a challenge on a number of levels. When SEAL was first introduced to schools, it was short-lived as other priorities squeezed emotional education out of the curriculum. As discussed in section 2.2.4, the neoliberal agenda prioritised exams, something that altered the school value structure. This also links to section 2.3 and the arguments about school purpose; what are schools for and who is responsible for young people's neurobiological functioning? I suggest that, like mental health, schools are not responsible for it but do have a part to play in it. It is also essential to recognise that dynamics between adults and young people in provision such as schools are key drivers in the socio-emotional learning (Peck, & Smith, 2020). Secondly the domains in Figure 6 need to be understood by adults in schools so they can be systematically incorporated into activities and, at times, the curriculum. Furthermore, the skills and competencies my research have exposed

the two groups of young people to align with the above-mentioned domains. The YRT quote supports this in section 5.10 as it is explained how, through the research process, uncertainty was replaced by confidence both in actions and feelings. This is something that I explore more fully in the discussion chapter.

3.6 Adolescence and brain development

3.6.1 Societal approaches to mental health: From biomedical to biopsychosocial

The introduction of the biopsychosocial model (Engel, 1977) as an alternative to the biomedical approach changed how mental health was understood. Engel argued that mental health should be looked at through three separate lenses: biological, psychological, and social, with each of the three different disciplines being examined collectively as the others impact each. This approach is seen as being inclusive of the patient as opposed to them being the passive victims of the biomedical approach. Again, this deficit approach considers the problem as the patient who will be put right by the medical profession.

The biopsychosocial approach is a good fit for diagnosing and addressing mental health (Babalola et al., 2018). Much research has linked how a person lives with the state of their mind. Marmot et al. (2020), in their review of health in the UK, discovered that health equity is a significant problem as deprivation is one of the greatest indicators relating to health; they bluntly stated, "The poorer the area, the worse the health" (Marmot et al., 2020 p.13). The report is clear in highlighting that throughout a child and young person's life they are at three times the risk of mental health issues if they live in poverty than if they are relatively well off. Inequalities at school are linked to poorer life-long outcomes, including income level, future employment quality and physical and mental health. Children excluded from school are ten times more likely to have mental health problems and four times more likely to live in poverty than their peers. Absence from work due to a young person's poor mental health is increasing; between 2009 and 2017 it grew from 7.2% to 9.6%. Marmot addresses other issues such as debt, food security, housing, heating poverty and poor community cohesion as contributors to an increase in young people suffering from anxiety and depression. The social part of biopsychosocial needs to be addressed by society if we are to support young people towards improved mental health outcomes. Unfortunately, we seem to be moving in the opposite direction in many ways. Since the universal credit introduction in 2010, 92% of

NHS trusts cited the new benefit arrangements as responsible for increased referrals for mental health issues (Marmot et al., 2020). By electing to work with the pupil premium cohort, I have attempted to address social aspects impacting them. In my experience, this group is disadvantaged by its circumstances and, as such, deserves every opportunity that can be given to help them improve their own lives and future.

3.6.2 Medical advances and their contribution to an understanding of mental health

The introduction of MRI has enabled the medical profession to get inside the brain (literally). It has allowed scientists to study how the different parts of the brain react under certain conditions; studies have also been carried out with other animals that supplement emerging evidence (Orben et al., 2020). Some argue that the brain undergoes continuous change throughout an individual's lifetime (Weedall, Wilson, & Wayte, 2019). However, it has also been recognised that there are specific life periods during which the brain undergoes substantial development, making it vulnerable to environmental impacts (Romer, Reyna, & Satterthwaite, 2017). The brain starts developing around the third gestational week and will continue to grow throughout the foetal period and beyond. Another important period for brain development is the post-natal pre-school period from birth to six (Weedall et al., 2019). This is a significant period in child development and a particularly sensitive time. It is now accepted that adolescence is also a period of brain maturation. Whilst this brings development opportunities, it is also a period of vulnerability for young people as their brains can be susceptible to mixed messages leading to erratic decision-making (Steinberg, 2014). From my school experience, I observed some young people who found it challenging to fit in. This is something that I explore in more detail in section 3.7.1.

The earlier quotes from Socrates and Aristotle are words which would not be out of place in schools today. As highlighted earlier, these negative attributes are accepted as part of the maturation cycle. However, what is different today is that, due to the advances in neuroscience and technology, we are more able to understand what is happening in this phase of life and, more importantly, how this can impact an individual's behaviour. Through this lens, I will explore what is happening and how this is relevant to my research.

Adolescence results from the onset of two major biological events; the release of pubertal hormones and the consequent change in both the structure and function of the brain

(Fuhrmann et al., 2015). As recognised above, this time of sensitivity within the brain can lead to some individuals behaving in a risky or challenging way. This can result in adults developing negative belief systems related to young people in general, or to specific individuals. Adolescence provides opportunities to enhance life experiences; therefore, we need an understanding of what influences this.

One of the striking differences between adolescence and childhood is the switch in focus away from family and towards friends (Larson & Richards, 1991; Blakemore, 2018). This push for independence is part of the transformative process, and enables a child to grow into an adult. This draw towards spending more time with friends is part of the transformation in adolescence; most young people will start to assert their authority about whom they want to be with and where they want to go. In turn, young people are often more likely to make choices influenced by their peers that may make them more vulnerable to risk. Furthermore, MRI has discovered that different parts of the brain control distinctive functions. There is a pleasure part of the brain sensitive to rewards (the nucleus accumbens) as well as a regulatory section of the brain (frontal cortex) (Crone, 2017); as we mature these parts of the brain also develop. However, the frontal cortex takes longer to develop, and many adolescents will behave in an unregulated manner. Their desire to please their peers and fit into the group means they may, on occasion, behave in a risky way even though they know the dangers; their need to fit in overrides the regulation from their immature frontal cortex(Steinberg et al., 2008).

3.7 Applying brain development research to this thesis

3.7.1 Adolescence and social cognition

Social cognition is the ability to make sense of the world through processing signals from others (Blakemore & Mills, 2014), and was previously thought to have developed and matured during childhood. However, more recent studies have shown that this continues through adolescence, with activity in the brain concentrated in a network that is sometimes known as the social brain (Blakemore, 2018). This is significant because peer relationships are now thought to influence social decision-making. Increasing self-awareness during adolescence is considered to have implications for integrating self-judgement and peer

evaluations (Blakemore & Mills, 2014). This links directly to a primary need of humans to be part of a social group.

As we have already seen, adolescence is a time for separation from family with a move towards peers. This is when adolescents spend most of their time with peers and learn the rules of the group; by trial and error, they go through a social process of learning how to interact with others and fit in (Crone, 2017). Rejection from one's peers around this period of brain sensitivity can be particularly painful and can result in depressive symptoms (Rigby, 2000). Rejection can also result in poor school attendance and all the associated issues. Furthermore, the use of MRI has found that the reaction to social rejection is most significant for those who are anxiously attached (DeWall et al., 2012), have low self-esteem (Onoda et al., 2010) or have a history of abusive behaviour (van Harmelen et al., 2014). Some adolescents are so sensitive to rejection that they encounter social anxiety to the extent of experiencing depressive feelings and psychosomatic issues, such as stomach aches and headaches. The result can be that they remove themselves from the equation by not attending school. In this way, it could be viewed that they are no longer able to function normally in society (Crone, 2017) by saving themselves from the hurt they feel when rejected. The implication of this research for schools looking to support young people and to developing meaningful mental health strategies is self-evident:

- Be aware of who these young people are.
- Schools need to consider developing targeted intervention strategies.
- Train staff to recognise the warning signs.

Just as rejection causes pain, acceptance can result in feelings of pleasure or reward. In experiments, it was found that the sense of fairness also caused feelings of pleasure (Tabibnia et al., 2008). Furthermore, it is suggested that cooperation is rewarding and results in positive emotions. Therefore, through this research, I must develop a process that encourages a team-building approach on multiple levels. This is something that I explore further in the findings/discussion chapter.

3.7.2   Adolescence and self-concept

The development of self is about the awareness of becoming an individual with an identity, and starts around 12 months (Crone, 2017). However, the real advancement in an individual's concept of self occurs during adolescence, as an ability to integrate the views of others into one's perspective of self starts to develop (Selman, 1980; Garber, Frankel, & Herrington, 2016). Self-concept comprises several components, such as the distinction between self-knowledge and self-esteem (Harter, 2012). Self-knowledge is about an individual's personality traits, how one judges one's ability to do something and how one sees others judge that ability. Self-esteem, however, is about how individuals value themselves in relation to self-knowledge. Chapter 4 focuses on how agency, identity, power and capital all impact upon the ability, or lack of ability, young people have to take responsibility for their mental health. How self-concept develops during adolescence is also crucial to this area, as it is linked directly to identity. As I discuss in section 4.10, the social position an individual finds themself in can impact self-esteem. In turn, numerous studies are showing low self-esteem is linked to anxiety (Beck et al., 2001; Muris et al., 2003), depression (Mann et al., 2004) and, in some cases, externalising behaviours such as aggression (Donnellan et al., 2005). This is pertinent as my research is designed to address some potential negative school influences on the young people involved, whilst simultaneously using the research to address issues associated with capital, power, identity, and agency.

Pubertal hormones are released during adolescence, which can lead to mood fluctuations in the same period of development in self-concept. Mood swings coincide with changes in self-esteem that peak during early adolescence. This is when young people worry about how others perceive them and are more likely to experience anxiety and tension, something they can remain sensitive to throughout their lives (Steinberg, 2008; Blakemore, 2018). Conversely, those young people who have developed a more complex self-concept take a rational perspective on aspects of their life beneficial to their wellbeing (Crone, 2017). Furthermore, it has been found that having a more developed self-concept enables adolescents to differentiate between their true self and the self they fear; studies have often found that youngsters in the criminal justice system are abundantly clear about whom they do not want to become (criminals) but have no clear sense of whom they wish to be (Oyserman & Markus, 1995; Brewer, 2017). More recent research has linked self-concept with other constructs such as mastery, defined as how well an individual is under control of their life chances (Turner et al., 2017). Mastery has been associated with concepts such as; locus of control, personal control, self-efficacy and fatalism, as these all incorporate the idea of

individual agency (Turner et al., 2017). Whilst there is a possibility that poor self-concept may be linked to a lack of aspiration for some young people, there is also evidence that the discourse of aspiration is contextual rather than individual (Harrison & Waller, 2018).

3.7.3 Social media and the adolescent mental health debate

As discussed above, a crucial area for adolescents lies around whether they feel they are an accepted part of a group. Acceptance or rejection can make all the difference to them. It could be the difference between them withdrawing from society, potentially developing mental health problems, and leading a relatively normal life (Guyer et al., 2014). Whilst beyond the scope of my thesis, social media has a strong influence on young people and I have, therefore, decided to explore this further. We all live in a media-saturated world; however, it is the most recent generations who have grown up knowing little else (Crone & Konijn, 2018). As any parent or teacher can attest, young people communicate via social media platforms. It also allows young people to share ideas and opinions (Crone & Konijn, 2018). This is where young people stay connected and check out their status with their peers; they monitor the feedback they receive from their friends. Our understanding to date suggests it is likely this plays a role in adolescent development (Wartella et al., 2016; Donelle et al., 2021). Society's approach to social media is complex; on the one hand, it is used as an advertising and marketing tool (Siddiqui, & Singh, 2016) that targets individuals and encourages use. On the other, society is also quick to criticise young people for being obsessed with their phones as they are seen to be addictive (Ignat & Galatiu, 2022). To add to the complications, they are also seen as a valuable asset in targeting support issues such as mental health (Ridout & Campbell, 2018). This debate is carried over into schools where the use of phones divides opinion (Gajdics & Jagodics, 2021).

Earlier in this chapter, I highlighted how MRI has transformed neuroscience development and how the social brain undergoes significant change during the sensitive brain period of adolescence (Crone & Konijn, 2018). How young people use social media is therefore significant in this regard as it amplifies social influence. The evidence suggests a similarity between online and offline social experience and the adolescent brain development (Crone & Konijn, 2018). What is concerning is that the habits of young people, who have between 6-9 hrs per day of screen time (excluding school work) (Rideout & Robb, 2019), are developing to the extent that their online social experience is a more intense experience than ever it was;

their exposure to rejection and the negative consequences associated with this is also increased (Crone & Konijn, 2018). Social acceptance online also produces very similar results as face-to-face acceptance, with activity seen in the pleasure or reward centres of the brain (Crone & Konijn, 2018); research also suggests this type of social acceptance may be responsible for the mitigation of depressive symptoms (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015).

The influence of peers online is also seen to be significant, and it is found that both adults and young people will adjust their input to fit in with their friends. However, this is more significant for adolescents, due to their brains going through a sensitive developmental period (Crone & Konijn, 2018). Interestingly, young people were also found to be susceptible to peer influence regarding body image, suggesting social media can influence how adolescents view themselves and others (Crone & Konijn, 2018).

Social media is part of the day-to-day lives of most adolescents in Western society and beyond. It impacts how they live, and the negatives of this are often highlighted at the expense of any positives. As with many topics, the position on adolescent use of social media and mobile devices is one that divides opinion as to whether it is a benefit to them or not (Donelle et al., 2021). For example, numerous schools throughout the country have taken a deficit approach to mobile phones, and banned their use on the premises as they are seen as a distraction and encouraging of cyberbullying and sexting. However, I take an asset approach and believe using social media and mobile devices in schools present opportunities. This modern technology is here to stay, and its use will only increase. I suggest that we seize the opportunity to educate young people about how we get the best from this union with mobile technology. Schools have cohorts of young people with a powerful computer in their pockets that could support their education and learning. Beyond this, I suspect there are opportunities to harness their power positively, and enable a contribution to young people's well-being. I suggest engaging with and educating young people about social media, which should be seen as an imperative for school.

3.8   Chapter summary

This chapter has explored the key areas of mental health, adolescence and the relevant theory that links to these topic areas. I have framed them in this research's context and viewed them from both societal and educational perspectives. The pandemic, which included periods of

lockdown, anxiety and uncertainty, brought a greater focus on mental health for young people. This has come at a time when young people's mental health services are under increasing pressure, and schools are encouraged to take a more significant role in supporting students. Medical advances in brain research mean that society's understanding of mental health is developing at a greater rate now than ever before. This thesis intends to learn from the latest research and apply it within the context of mental health support in schools.

Chapter 4: The impact of agency, power, identity and capital for young people taking responsibility

4.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at young people's challenges as we explore how power is central to them and their ability to take responsibility. The mental health strategy I designed at William Howard School was about how young people could take responsibility for their mental health. It recognised a need to provide a supportive school environment where young people would feel safe exploring mental health issues (McPartlan, 2019a). I believe that many of the problems around agency (Houlders, Bortolotti, & Broome, 2021), power (Durkheim, 1982), identity (Cooley, 1902; Onu et al., 2016), and capital (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986, 2011) that exist in wider society are replicated in UK schools. Therefore, there is a need to try and understand how these issues may impact young people and their ability to take responsibility. By understanding the potential problems young people may be experiencing, it should be easier to address them. Presuming we can know what young people need to take responsibility for their mental health, it is unrealistic to expect all of them to engage with these concepts. It is, therefore, incumbent upon me as an educator to explore and understand the causes of such issues; only then will I stand a chance of reducing or mediating the impact.

Whilst society and schools may want young people to have agency in personal mental health, the concept is hindered by other factors. Identity plays an ever-increasing role in young people's lives today. It is entwined with the adult's perceptions of young people, which may, in turn, impact the competencies of these young people. The inequalities in society today highlight that, socio-economically, young people cannot be categorised as a single homogenous group; there are rich and poor, advantaged and disadvantaged. Power is also an area worthy of exploration. However, we live in an adult world, which influences how young people are treated, and this impacts their behaviour. How these disparities affect different groups of young people is an important area to investigate and, in this chapter, I explore how some young people are less likely to be able to engage than others. This is a complex area and is wrapped up in the debate around the structures and agency (Alderson & Yoshida, 2016), something that I touch on below. Finally, I take a closer look at class and education through the eyes of Bourdieu (1973, 1974,1977, 1986, 1988, 1990, 2011) and his fundamental concepts of habitus and capital. These seminal ideas contribute to understanding

how marginalised young people behave in schools, and also help provide solutions as we endeavour to improve their school experience.

Having experienced schools, either as a student or teacher, for the vast majority of my life, I can attest that they are institutions dominated by power. As a young person in school, I experienced power through violence via corporal punishment. As a teacher, I saw hierarchical power influence staff and young people in various ways. Foucault claims power is an essential element in the development of individuals as they are constituted through social interactions, all of which are power-laden (Saldana, 2013). Their interactions in school, therefore, shape a young person's identity. Foucault explores the role power plays in forming an individual's agency that develops through interactions within the family and school (Saldana, 2013). Furthermore, young people are subject to dangerous strategic power relations within social institutions, including schools, such as sexism, class oppression, and adultism. Power is at the core of much of Bourdieu's work (Power, 1999), which has valuable contributions to make as I explore power in schools and how it impacts young people.

This chapter will centre on the role of power in schools, how it has impacted identity, agency and capital, and how it has contributed to my research.
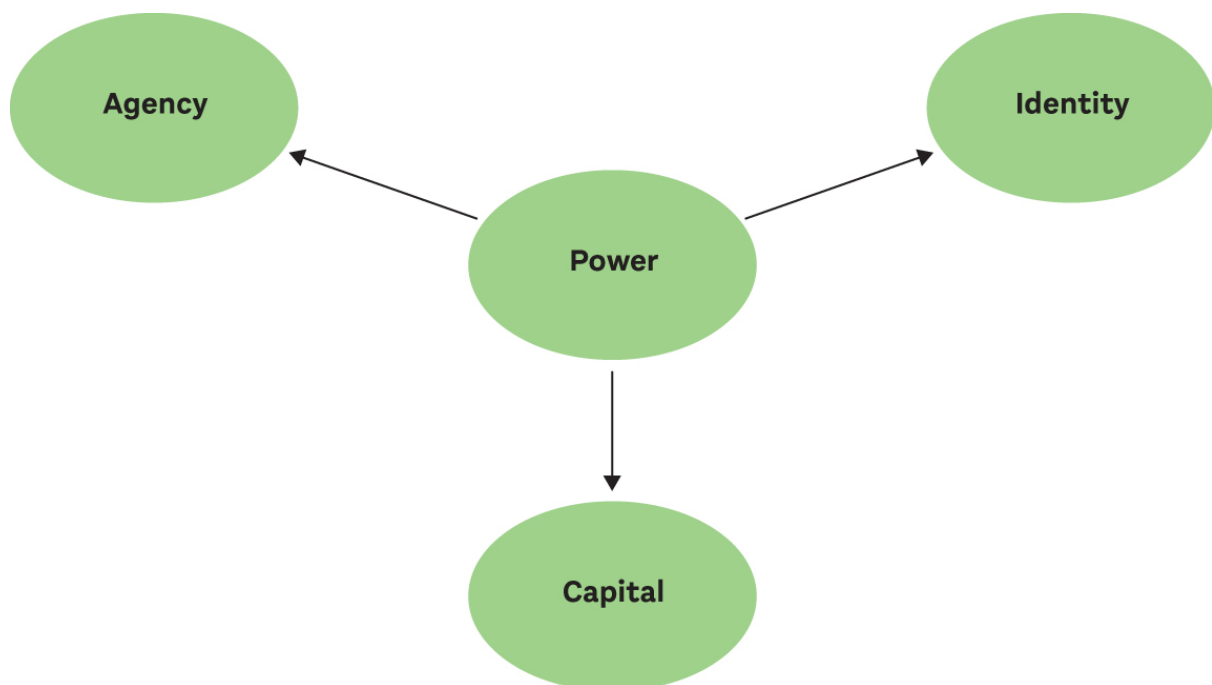
Figure 7: How power influences young people's agency, identity and capital

4.2   Power, young people and schools

Power relationships between adults and young people shape many lives within schools and wider society. This section explores the power relationship both from a school and societal perspective. In writing below, I address the power issues between myself and young people involved in school research. This writing explores more general relationships between young people and adults (including staff working in schools), and how this impacts young people to take responsibility.

In the 19th Century, sociologists were altering perspectives of society by suggesting individuals were created by their environment and society (Durkheim, 1982). Described as functionalism or structural functionalism, Durkheim highlighted power as being critical to how society functions within its unique structures. Positioning power centrally in society enabled systematic thinking about how power and society interact. However, these views had limitations, as the state was overemphasised at the cost of the population, who were seen as objects. Durkheim argued from a functionalist perspective that society creates roles for individuals, and the interplay of these roles enables a society to function, with the noncompliance seen on the part of deviants. An opposing view was developed by Parsons (1937). Whilst he agreed with Durkheim that structures were central to societal processes, he also argued that the status quo within society was maintained by individuals accepting their prescribed roles. He believed that as actors we choose our societal roles, and the role of the elite was to uphold society, as the lower classes were not intelligent enough to do this. Whilst only seven per cent of the British population attend private schools, the vast majority of top jobs come from this seven per cent: 71% of barristers, 71% of British army officers, 61% of senior doctors and 64% of the government cabinet are all privately educated (Mohamed, 2020). As demonstrated, the class problems that fuelled our past are still with us today. This is exemplified in what we have seen from two of our last five prime ministers, David Cameron and Boris Johnson. They are products of a privileged upbringing that included a private education at Eton, somewhere that has provided this country with 20 of our prime ministers (Overton, 2021). I reflect in an extract from my diary below:

> "There is also an uncomfortable reality for me, a privileged, well-educated, middle-class white man in a position of power in the school. Having left teaching, I am now researching school mental health, particularly about young people from poorer sections of society. This

area is linked to relational ethics, something I explore in detail in chapter 7. Within this context, it could be argued that whilst my intentions may be laudable, I am as guilty as those I castigate above as I am from a privileged section of society trying to further myself by 'using' others. My response is that I understand and accept my failings, which is why I have ensured my research is conducted from a young person's point of view and is founded upon values and respect (Vervliet et al., 2015). As discussed in my methodology chapter (5), I have developed this as YPAR to ensure that it is seen through the eyes of young people and not from the perspective of a privileged, white, middle-class man."

Parsons's (1937) view that people accept or choose their roles and ensure the smooth running of society is somewhat idealistic. For many young people, the choices they can exercise may be narrowed by life circumstances. The example of Steph (a pseudonym) from my school pastoral work illustrates why Parson's assumption that all in society are in a position to make a choice does not stand up to scrutiny.

"Steph was a student of mine who ended up permanently excluded from school. Since then, she has become addicted to heroin, been the victim of domestic abuse and hospitalised on several occasions. Her daughter is on the child protection register is now at school. She has witnessed fighting at home and the death of her mum's friend from an overdose. She has been arrested for shoplifting and has started experimenting with drugs."

Steph's daughter has seriously restricted choice regarding her future direction. As it is, her life is structured around disadvantage and chaos. These are, Durkheim might say, the social facts of this young person's life. In a larger sense, structures both develop a society's culture and are created by society; they are factors controlling individuals, including norms, rules, laws, and discourses; they are what is accepted as the way things are (Maynard & Stuart, 2017).

As I demonstrate later in the chapter, Bourdieu's (1977) theories of habitus and capital are about social inequalities and how power can help reproduce inequality. All staff in school can be described as power-laden. Compared with the study participants, most staff are from a relatively privileged background gaining valuable social, cultural and economic capital from their advanced education. It is, therefore, more likely that young people will perceive them as the ones who dominate; consequently, some young people may also take on the role as the

ones who are dominated. Some see power as a negative force and controlling factor, while Foucault (1991) regards it also as enabling within society (Gaventa, 2003). Foucault (1991), believing that language around power needed to change and arguing this should not always be expressed as 'excludes', 'represses', 'censors', 'masks', or 'conceals'. He also believed power transcends politics and is embedded within society. This has been my experience in schools where power is also embedded. Whilst some young people see only a school's negative power dynamic, others choose to become empowered within such structures. I observed the following when I was on the school's leadership team:

> "As a member of the school's leadership team, one of my roles included running the student council. Every year we asked for new volunteers to stand, and we had elections for young people who wanted to stand. However, it was predominantly the same young people every year. They were motivated young people from privileged backgrounds. We tried expanding the pool of young people to include a more representative and diverse collection of young people but with little success."

Gramsci (1971), and Bourdieu (2000) had similar views about the ruling classes and their manipulation of the masses. Gramsci introduced cultural hegemony to explain how the powerful ruling classes imposed on society to protect the status quo and thus retain power. He believed a struggle is created when revolutionaries advance alternatives under the banner of social justice. My intention with the research is to develop an alternative to the cultural hegemony created in the school. Young people involved in the research, both the YRT and the participants, have been enabled to contribute to how the school is run. The aim is, therefore, to shift the power base in favour of young people, empower them, improve their sense of self, and cultural and social capital, and help develop their agency to act.

This research is an exercise that supports an inclusive approach for some of the most vulnerable young people, many of whom do not fit in to the middle-class hegemony of the school. Teacher-student relationships are often seen as interpersonal (Frymier & Houser, 2000), and research has shown teachers use social influence to persuade young people to be obedient, comply (Richmond & McCroskey, 1984) and learn (Richmond, 1990). However, there is evidence that young people also apply social influence, thus developing the power to sway teachers (French, & Raven, 1959; Golish, 1999; Golish & Olson, 2000). The somewhat complex boundaries between social influence and power can get blurred; teachers may use

both, but young people generally lack legitimate power and rely on social influence to get their way. The question then arises as to how this impacts the power dynamics between young people and teachers that influence relationships.

4.3   How power impacts relationships

There is a broader question about relationships between young people and adults across different settings. This is exemplified by the relationships that visiting youth workers developed with young people, compared with those between teachers and young people. The power relationships available from youth workers and school staff differ significantly; as such, the response from young people reflected this. Young people are required by law to attend school; it is compulsory and, in my experience, some young people resent this. Also, school staff are the ones who often have to enforce this law. In contrast, the relationship between a young person and a youth worker is voluntary. Young people cannot choose whether they have a relationship with school staff because of the compulsory nature of school. By engaging with a youth worker, young people are making a positive choice that will likely benefit the relationship. This further supports my rationale for ensuring this work was directly influenced by young people and completed as YPAR. In this way, I ensured the research was robust and from a young person's perspective. French and Raven (1959) suggested five relational bases how teachers (and I would imagine other adults in society) may exert influence through power that can then be used for pro-social and anti-social effects. Pro-social power includes reward, and expert and referent power, and anti-social power includes coercive and legitimate authority. Relating this theory to my research is important as the dynamic it created contradicts much of the above. In relation to pro-social power, the rewards young people get are both intrinsic and extrinsic. However, in discussion with the YRT, their motivation for volunteering was primarily based on their interest in mental health and helping other young people. They were, therefore, likely to benefit through their own experience rather than purely extrinsic factors. The research was designed as a collaborative exercise. I deliberately broke down barriers by positioning young people as experts in their own lives (McPartlan, 2021). Referent power was virtually inconsequential as young people's actions were primarily motivated by a belief in what they were doing, rather than what an outsider told them to do. I believe that French and Raven's (1959) anti-social power was largely irrelevant as my research was designed in a way that disempowered me

and empowered young people; I have continually encouraged young people to do what they believe to be the right thing (McPartlan et al., 2021).

I have seen shifts in society's attitudes to power that mirror the discipline structures in schools. This ranges from being a pupil who received corporal punishment (possibly the ultimate exertion of school power) to being a senior leader in a progressive, pro-social leaning school. As attitudes have changed, anti-social use of power has been discouraged, as alternatives to corporal punishment have been suggested (Maurer,1984). Schools moved towards supporting young people, as opposed to punishing them. Initiatives such as social and emotional learning (Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF, 2007)) focussing on child wellbeing were introduced as an alternative to, or alongside, sanction-led approaches. The introduction of restorative approaches also helped young people to understand how their behaviour impacts others (Hopkins, 2002). William Howard School adopted this approach to shift the school's power relationship dynamics. It introduced an element of fairness to disciplinary procedures by ensuring incidents and their impact were understood by all. Crucially, it also gave young people a voice and shifted the teacher-dominated power dynamic. This approach was also about both parties taking responsibility for their part in the incident, something that individual young people and staff found difficult to do on occasion. It would be naive to imagine these changes were appreciated by all young people, as some still rejected the rules and sanctions imposed.

The restorative approaches also acknowledged that teachers and young people share power and cooperate (Devine, 2003). Whilst a teacher's power over young people is often implicit and invisible (Bernstein, 1977), it can often shift and change; power-sharing and conflict are not mutually exclusive as teachers and young people continually create and modify their relationships (Woods, 1980; 2012).

So far in this writing, I have deliberately focused on negative young people/teacher power relationships in order to highlight the largely negative connotations of power in school. However, it is also important to acknowledge that students expect to have rules (Kim, 1998; Thornberg, 2008) and they have confidence both in the rules and in the teachers (Cullingford, 1988; Thornberg, 2008). Furthermore, research suggests young people judge staff in terms of honesty and are mainly only critical of unfair treatment (Gorard, 2012); in my experience, the majority of young people/teacher relationships in schools are positive and supportive.

4.4 Agency and how it is impacted by power relationships

Broadly speaking, agency concerns the ability of an individual to shape his/her own life by making meaningful interventions to bring about change (Houlders et al., 2021). Being an agent relates to intentionally making things happen so that, over time, an individual can adapt, develop and renew (Bandura, 2001; 2012). The core elements of agency include intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness and self-reflectiveness (Bandura, 2001; 2012). My concern arose as I tried to apply the principles of agency to this research as I was less than confident that all young people had the required agentic competencies to be aware of their mental health, let alone seek support for it. The concept of agency, and particularly that of young people's agency, is a complex one as there are those who believe that it is not something that individuals possess (Oswell, 2013; Horgan et al., 2017). Oswell (2013) suggests that a young person's agency only exists in the context of their relationships with others. Earlier in this chapter, I focused on power and relationships relating to adults and young people in schools. In the context of agency as a relational concept, the link between the two is clear, young people in schools who are subject to non-pro-social power by adults are likely to have a diminished sense of agency. Agency is something that is created through a number of different factors, including family circumstances and upbringing, as well as interactions within social institutions such as schools. Young people do not choose their family (Archer, 1995), moreover "they are context-dependant relational beings" (Horgan et al., 2017 p.276) who are impacted by the environments in which they live. As I will demonstrate, the circumstances in which children and young people live differ and, in turn, so too will their agency to act. The importance of supporting children and young people to develop their sense of agency cannot be underestimated (Maynard & Stuart, 2017).

Before looking specifically at agency and young people, it is prudent to take a step back and explore a number of theoretical aspects relevant to my work. The role that social structures take in a young person's life is impactful. The family unit, the schools, the local community, and involvement with local sports clubs or local churches all have a bearing on how an individual develops. For many years academics, including Parsons (1937), Weber (1978), Durkheim (1982), Bourdieu (1990), King (2010) and Lamsal (2012), have debated social structure, and more latterly the relationship that social structure has with how individuals act, thus informing their sense of agency.

Giddens (1979) developed his theory of structuration describing agency and structures as two sides of the same coin (Marsh, 2010). Simply put this posits a duality whereby individuals within a group act and, in so doing, create the rules and structures for that group. However, the other side of the coin is how the rules and structures of the group also impact individuals, empowering and/or limiting their actions (Lamsal, 2012). Archer (1995) proposed morphogenesis as an alternative view to such relationships. She suggests individuals and social structures are a dualism rather than a duality, and are independent of each other; meaning they are intertwined but distinct. Whilst critiques have highlighted disagreements regarding the detail in their work, there is a fundamental agreement that human agency is interlinked with societal structures (King, 2010). Whilst the debate around the similarities and differences between the two approaches is interesting philosophically, the pertinent issues for my work suggest agency and structure are linked. Schools, as social structures, are power-laden institutions and the staff/young person relationship is at the centre of this. It is therefore important to recognise the impact school values may have on school character and the agency that young people display. I, therefore, suggest where schools adopt a non-pro-social power-based approach, some young people are less likely to be able to develop their sense of agency as the staff/young person relationships will be based on coercive or legitimate power. This is an area beyond the scope of this thesis which requires further investigation.

Schools, as social structures, play a major part in a young person's life, impact the agency they have and, ultimately, how they live their lives. Morphogenesis also helps explain how differing school value sets can impact upon an individual's sense of agency, as Archer (1995) takes a sociocultural view where context is all important. This can be seen within society and schools. As an example, schools with a zero-tolerance policy on behaviour will elicit a different response than schools with restorative-based behaviour policies (Nassem, 2019). Young people's agency will be impacted by the different structures. However, it is not just young people. Staff, parents, and governors will all also respond in different ways depending on the school's value base. Young people not only have to navigate a more or less harsh set of rules, but those rules/structures send a subliminal message to the school community which in turn impacts upon agency and behaviour. This subsequently, be it acceptable or not, will then exert influence on the structures.

4.5   Sense of self

Agency, and particularly epistemic agency, is linked with a sense of self (Houlders et al., 2021). Epistemic agency is the ability and motivation to refine and alter one's belief-forming methods and practices. To fully explore the complexity of this phenomenon is well beyond the bounds of this thesis. However, an overview will help situate young people's ability to control their own behaviours. The following elements are some of those that make up a sense of self and include: memory; relationships; bodily awareness and affect (Houlders et al., 2021). As someone who has spent his life working with young people, I have seen first-hand how a sense of self can be enhanced or diminished due to circumstances that have been thrust upon them. Relationships with primary caregivers or friends, personal events and traumatic life events are just a few of the examples of how young people's sense of self can be influenced by outside agents (Houlders et al., 2021). In relation to this research, school experiences may also be included within this list of events for some young people. In addition, there is also consensus in research that autobiographical narratives are linked to feelings of selfhood (Bruner, 1991; Dennett, 1992; Huttunen & Kakkori, 2002; Stenberg, 2011). Throughout my teaching career, I saw how individuals from different backgrounds experienced life differently, impacting their sense of self. This was often communicated through a personal narrative that was also affected by sociological structures, such as schools and interpersonal relationships, and these events and interactions often framed their lives (Houlders et al., 2021). Those young people who live in stable family units, who have enough money coming in for food, clothes, heating, and leisure activities, are likely to have a more stable sense of self than less advantaged young people. What is more, there are those that believe experiences in these formative teenage years are likely to shape individual identity (Addis & Tippett, 2010).

The equalities literacy framework developed by Stuart et al. (2019) exemplifies this. It draws together five elements: pre-existing context, lived experience, positioning of others, technologies of oppression and positioning of self. It also suggests these all contribute to the sixth element, impact and trajectory. Using this as a lens through which to observe young people's lives allows us to see their lives in context. An individual's self-narration can be seen in a general sense; it can be via oral or written communication, and does not need to be part of a formal process (Gallagher, 2007). The feelings attached to some of our self-narration are significant in relation to one's sense of self as they can directly shape how we see

ourselves (Houlders et al., 2021). Furthermore, it is also important to recognise the potentially significant role others play in our sense of self (Gallagher, 2007). Parents, siblings, and teachers are among the people who can often influence and shape how young people see themselves.

As a school leader, I often witnessed reactive policies that took little of a young person's history into account. The boy from the chaotic home, whose first responsibility was to feed his little sister before taking her to school, but was given a detention for not bringing the correct equipment, is one of many examples I could cite. Once again, schools could benefit from using the equalities literacy framework to support all young people. The tension between the greater good of the school and the individual is enduring. This could not be exemplified in my career better than my experience with different headteachers. At one extreme, there were the headteachers who were determined to reduce the number of young people excluded from school; they invested in support services and would see exclusion as a last resort as they wanted to avoid the potential harm to an individual. The other extreme was a new headteacher who insisted that we exclude someone as soon as possible in the new year to send a message to the other young people. As such, it was the same school run by headteachers with differing values. The equalities literacy framework aims to position an individual and contextualise their life so that there is awareness of the limiters in their lives. Stuart et al. (2019) suggest schools need to be aware of young people's backgrounds, and professionals needs to be cognisant of how young people's lives have been shaped and how this may impact behaviours. This allows staff to use this information to benefit young people. However, as discussed earlier, in section 2.2.3, issues remain around the marketisation of schools, with very few resources to spend on this sort of work; schools are increasingly challenged as they attempt to support all young people. Hattie (2015) argues that this is an overly pessimistic view, and that there will always be issues beyond our control.

There is an ongoing struggle between traditionalists who advocate hard-line zero-tolerance behaviour policies and progressives who favour more educative ones that include restorative approaches. This is down to how society sees young people. If we recognise young people as complete human beings with the facility to participate fully within society, then we need to treat them in this way (Freeman, 1996; Spyrou, 2020). The danger is that if punitive sanctions are solely relied upon, lessons will not be learnt, and further damage may be done (Ttofi & Farrington, 2008). A young person's sense of self will impact their behaviours, so any policy

should consider this. The link between power, relationships and sense of self is played out in schools throughout the country. This requires consideration if we have expectations of young people being able to take responsibility.

4.6 The influence of power on epistemic agency in schools

The methods and practices that result from epistemic agency can be understood as doxastic disposition or belief-forming abilities that can be seen as one's proclivity to form true or false beliefs (Olson, 2015). The context of how a young person matures within society plays a significant part in the growth of their epistemic agency. However, schools also have a role to play in this epistemic development. School structures communicate different expectations regarding staff and young people's role in deciding which or whose knowledge is valuable, and how that knowledge should be constructed (Ko & Krist, 2019). A school's power structures characteristically ascribe epistemic agency and authority to staff, rather than young people, with little opportunity for young people to co-construct knowledge (Ko & Krist, 2019). A young person may therefore have the dual impacts of a less advantageous upbringing alongside attendance at a school where their epistemic agency development is at best discouraged, and at worst ignored. Epistemic agency should not be seen as a binary concept that one either has or does not have. It is a complex, ever-changing and relational construct that occurs through interaction with others (Ko & Krist, 2019). If there is an expectation that young people should take responsibility for their behaviour (including their mental health), schools need to understand their role in developing young people's epistemic agency.

It has also been suggested that one's autobiographical narrative can directly impact one's sense of agency (Ratcliffe & Broome, 2012; Ratcliffe, 2016; Tate, 2019). One's agency to act is directly linked to what an individual thinks or feels is possible (Houlders et al., 2021), and includes Bandura's (2001) core elements of agency. As a teacher, I observed young people having had their lives shattered by years of neglect at home, and withdrawing into themselves. Their autobiographical narrative possibly cast them as quiet and unassuming, thus meaning they find it challenging to fit in. These responses then impact the individual's ability to exercise epistemic agency or controlling actions, ultimately impacting events in their wider world (Haggard & Chambon, 2012).

To have a sense of agency is to believe that you are in control of your faculties; you initiate your actions and influence the direction in which your life goes (Tapal et al., 2017; Christensen et al., 2019). My experience of young people similar to Steph (pg. 62) is that they rarely feel they are in control, and often feel helpless. I suggest some young people in schools are in survival mode, as their lives are in turmoil due to circumstances beyond their control. It is doubtful they will have a complete sense of epistemic agency as they lack one or more of the areas of competency, authority, or credibility to comprehend their own experiences (Houlders et al., 2021). Therefore, this has profound implications for my research; I am asking how young people can take responsibility for their mental health in school or, more generally, within society. If, as Houlders et al. (2021) suggest, some need to gain the skills to comprehend their own experiences, then there is little chance they will be able to take responsibility for their mental health. If this is the case, schools must be aware of these assumptions to mitigate them. This reinforces the Stuart et al. (2019) equalities literacy framework for use in schools to get a clearer picture of those young people who would benefit from extra support.

Furthermore, and linked to this, we can learn from Maslow (1943) and his hierarchy of needs. A significant number of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are surviving. Schools must be aware of these assumptions to mitigate them if this is the case at the lowest level of this hierarchy. In the cost-of-living crisis of 2022/23, many struggle for adequate diet, warmth, and even reasonable housing. Many young people do not have their psychological needs fulfilled, yet the set expectations and targets from many schools are based on self-actualisation; all young people are expected to achieve their full potential, whatever their circumstances (Maslow, 1943; McLeod, 2018).

Society and schools need to recognise that many young people are not in a position to take direct control of their lives because they lack epistemic agency; their life circumstances prevent this. It is, therefore, unlikely they will be able to take responsibility for their mental health. As such, they are subject to epistemic injustice, something I will explore in more detail in the following section.

4.7   Epistemic injustice

As I contextualise the theory for the benefit of my thesis, I am drawn towards the notion of epistemic injustice being the harm done to young people as epistemic subjects (who know, reason or question). Young people are harmed as their capacity to make sense of their own experiences or give knowledge to others is undermined (Fricker, 2007; Crichton et al., 2017); I see this happening in society and schools as they facilitate the building of structures that enable and limit this epistemic injustice.

Epistemic injustice can be divided into two substantive parts; distributive and discriminatory. Distributive injustice is about inequalities in the distribution of epistemic goods, such as information and education (Crichton et al., 2017). Reay (2017) argues that inequalities throughout our society are mirrored and reinforced by the UK's education system. The economically advantaged generally benefit from high-quality primary and secondary education, enabling their progression to the best-funded universities. The financially disadvantaged often struggle either in inadequate schools or in the lower sets of better schools. Their eventual educational outcomes are often defined early in their schooling when testing occurs as they start primary school. Those from economically advantaged groups start school at an advantage over those from economically-disadvantaged groups; the education gap is visible when children start school (Hattie, 2015). This often condemns these children to lower sets and a second-class education, often for the entirety of their school lives (Reay, 2017). Discriminatory injustice can be further divided into the more commonly recognised testimonial and hermeneutical injustice (Crichton et al., 2017). Testimonial injustice is the wronging of someone in their capacity as a speaker or knower (Byskov, 2021). It occurs when a person from a marginalised group suffers prejudice, diminishing their credibility.

In schools and broader society there are numerous examples of young people being on the end of such treatment. The term snowflake generation, now widely used in Western societies, is associated with an attitude that sees young people as emotionally weak. This attitude is further subsumed into society through the introduction of popular television characters who legitimise and possibly encourage the vilification of minorities. Vikki Pollard from *Little Britain* (Lipsey, Lowney, Posner, & Lucas, n.d.) and Lauren Cooper from *The Catherine Tate Show* (Anderson, & Gernon, n.d.) permit us to laugh at young people from poorer backgrounds, as described by Tyler (2013) in her work on social abjection theory. In schools, I saw numerous occasions where adult staff would dismiss information from students because they believed them to be untrustworthy, incompetent, or irrational; young people were

stereotyped by adults. I think most, if not all, young people could claim to be the victims of testimonial injustice. This is also linked to epistemic agency and power, as the adults in school were only in a position to discriminate because of their ability-laden status. It is reasonable, therefore, to assume that a young person subject to epistemic injustice through discrimination is unlikely to have trust in those who discriminate against them. I suggest that, where there is a lack of trust, young people are unlikely to take responsibility whether they can or not.

Hermeneutical injustice is a structural phenomenon that again happens to hermeneutically marginalised groups such as young people (Dieleman, 2012). As the term hermeneutical suggests, it is related to interpretation. In this case, the opportunities people have to interpret the social world and, in particular, their social experience (Dieleman, 2012). However, as explored above, some young people's life experiences do not allow them to develop these self-interpretative skills. There will therefore be social experiences where individuals do not have the interpretive skill that enables them to explain to others or even comprehend it themselves (Dieleman, 2012). Some young people will find this challenging when schools are tasked with supporting young people to take responsibility for their mental health. Considering poverty is a significant factor in young people's mental health (Wickham et al., 2017), we must acknowledge this as an issue to find solutions.

4.8   Overcoming epistemic injustice

Distributive epistemic injustice is a result of the epistemic structure of society and, as such, is a societal problem (Bai, 2020). Thus, is it necessary to tackle it at an international and national level. This research will play a role in raising awareness of such issues. However, the problems are far broader than what happens in one school. Distributive inequalities are a societal issue and something that is at the heart of this country's education system. It is, therefore, beyond the scope of this thesis. We can address discriminatory injustice through a mixture of education and professional training. Society as a whole, but schools in particular, need to be made aware that young people, as a sociological group, are discriminated against both hermeneutically and in terms of testimonial hearing. Fricker (in Dieleman 2012) writes about virtuous hearing. She describes how, in relation to testimonial injustice, individuals need to be made aware of any potential prejudice so they can neutralise its influence. This is

about neutralising the influence of possible prejudice that one may have about a marginalised group (Dieleman, 2012).

Stuart et al. (2019) suggest working with young people in need to improve their own equalities literacy and, therefore, start to break the cycle of social justice inequalities. This is something schools are in a position to be able to do by developing awareness training for staff related to hermeneutical injustice. Staff need to be aware of the characteristics of someone suffering hermeneutical injustice. Individuals may struggle to communicate their feelings as they may not understand what is happening to them. Fricker suggests sensitivity and care are required, which may include gentle open-ended questioning to help the young person explore their feelings so they can understand what is happening (Dieleman, 2012). I suggest a restorative questioning framework could be used to frame virtuous hearing. A person's ability to communicate with others is essential to an individual's social life and agential action (Crichton et al., 2017). It is, therefore, paramount that, as educators, we are not only aware of this, but are also fully trained to respond to it.

4.9   Identity, what it is and how it impacts upon young people and their ability to take responsibility

As someone investigating how young people can take responsibility for their own mental health, I needed to critically evaluate what was enabling or preventing this. The school participants in this research are volunteers from the cohort who qualify for pupil premium funding. In my experience, many from this cohort found school a challenge; this was often seen as either rebellious behaviours or in how they physically present, something that Bourdieu (2000) described as "bodily emotion". As a professional who spent many years supporting many from this cohort, I suggest their difficulties were a complex mixture of issues related to power and trust, sense of self, identity, and agency. By drawing from several ideas and theories related to identity, I explored what enables some, but not others, to engage. Within this, I also acknowledge that schools are the most important public institution in developing young people's identities (Reay, 2009).

In an attempt to understand selfhood and identity, numerous academic disciplines have conducted studies in this area. Psychoanalysis, through Freud (1856-1939), Erikson (1902-

1994) and Marcia (1864-2014), have explored adolescent development, each building on the former's work. Similarly, in sociology, Cooley (1864-1929), Parsons (1902-1979), Durkheim (1858-1917) and Mead (1863-1931) have all made contributions to theories related to self and identity (Adams & Marshall, 1996; Geldard, Geldard, & Yin Foo, 2020). Socialisation relates to how an individual successfully integrates within society and is also seen as essential to both an individual and society as a whole, (Damon, 1983; Blos, 1985; Hauser et al., 1991; Grotevant & Cooper 2009). The processes of development and socialisation are based on the conflicting association between the opposing elements of agency (related to uniqueness, individuation and separateness) and communion (being about connectedness and belonging) (Adams & Marshall, 1996; Geldard, Geldard, & Yin Foo, 2020). Both are required to create a positive self-image of someone who is significant and makes a difference (Rosenberg, 1985). Individuals require both belonging and distinctiveness, and must be able to develop positive relationships with others (Damon, 1983; Geldard, K, Geldard, D. & Yin Foo, 2020). Young people struggling to develop an affirmative self are more likely to be in danger of harm as they feel less secure about their place in society and are, therefore, more likely to engage in risk-taking behaviours (Silverberg, 2020). Furthermore, where self-identity is a problem, the development of meaningful relationships is likely to be hampered. These factors are directly linked, as young people who have life challenges and who may not fit in may also be the ones to find it difficult to seek help. Identity, therefore, requires further investigation.

Adams & Marshall (1996) propose identity as an ongoing process punctuated by sensitive points, often seen as life stages (adolescence, mid-life etc). In addition, they also suggest that in most Western societies, an individual selects a set of psychological and interpersonal goals. These are based upon feelings of uniqueness, agency, approval from others, belonging, equity, social responsibility and caring for others. This is articulated within society in different ways, depending upon one's circumstances. When young people are exposed to consistent adult values and expectations, they develop a positive sense of self with a purpose, direction, commitment, and identity, with perceptions of power and mastery giving them feelings of independence and control (Silverberg, 2020). In addition, they develop values consistent with individual and social responsibility for themselves and others.

In contrast, the outcomes are very different when young people find themselves in poverty, where conflict may be rife, and there are conflicting goals or expectations. What results is confusion, cynicism, a lack of direction and a poor sense of self (Ianni, 1989). Taken within

the context of my research, it is no surprise that the participants may find taking responsibility a challenge, as many of them live in poverty. If these young people have a weak sense of self and are challenged by identity issues, it is little wonder they lack confidence in a formal school setting. I believe this is a significant reason why many of them do not have the awareness or self-confidence to be cognisant of their own mental health, let alone take responsibility for it.

4.10 Social and learner identity in education

Social identity is another aspect to consider if we want to fully understand how some young people can engage whilst others cannot. Social identification is a cerebral process where social categorisation is internalised to become part of an individual's self-concept (Turner, 1982; Reynolds, 2009). Much of the work around social identity looks at how individuals define their identities in relation to their place within social groups (Islam, 2014). Social identity theory builds on these concepts to explore social categorisation and social comparison, and the impact that these may have on self-esteem, stereotypes, and discrimination.

Theories related to social groups can be used as a lens through which to filter the research. Of the eight social identifiers (race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, faith traditions, social class, ability and age), because of the demographic of the participants, the most significant for this research are age and social class (Onu et al., 2016). Whilst social categorisation will usually commence in the home, there is also a belief that children begin to form self-concept and build their social identity through interactions with other groups in more formal settings, such as schools (Albarello, Crocetti, & Rubini, 2018). Jenkins (2004) suggests that as young people reach adolescence, their identity develops further as they are drawn towards their peers.

Schools are where young people mix, meet others from various backgrounds, and engage with differences. This makes schools important places in identity development (Reay, 2009). It is further complicated in schools by the intersection of social and learner identity, as young people construct themselves and others as a learner in relation to their peers and school staff (Reay, 2009). If I return to chapter 2, where I explore how school values have been developed, other lessons can also be learnt from this work. The overemphasis on school

assessment has resulted in the valorisation of ability as measured by tests and exams. This leads to young people internalising the messages given to them by the school system (Reay, 2009). Bernstein (2000) develops this further, claiming that there is also deliberate policy by the state to develop young people's identity through education. In section 2.2.4, I discuss how Thatcher (1995) intentionally replaced what she called the 'dependency culture' with the value of 'self'. This education policy direction was about changing a mindset. Society was seeing a reduction in state welfare, and education became about preparing young people for a culture of the market (Bernstein, 2000). This was an identity founded upon self-support, self-reliance and individualism, and is something that governments have continued to promote for the past 30 years or more (Reay, 2009). The education system was now at the centre of identity formation (Reay, 2009).

Cooley's (1902) looking glass theory helps explain how young people from these lower socioeconomic groups may self-identify. Cooley proposed that individuals imagine how they appear to others, what judgements others make, and how others feel about them. However, individuals are active within this role, and our self-image is shaped by others but only through the filter of our minds (Squirrell, 2017). Our perceptions can often be inaccurate as we cannot know what someone feels about us or how they might judge us. We are also selective in what we process; we care more about some things (people and their judgements) than others, and we use our looking-glass self to regulate and inform our response to others. Being constantly aware that others are observing us alters our behaviours and projects what we think others may want to see (Squirrell, 2017).

Many participants' identity and self-concept are a complex mix of these theories. Social identity highlights categorisation, comparison, and self-esteem, which are issues for many young people engaged in this study. As a teacher, I saw examples of their low self-esteem as they categorised themselves in extremely negative ways; academically weak, troublemakers or generally unworthy. I now understand what I saw as a lack of aspiration is a far more complex construct. These young people are only partially in control of their destinies. Yes, they can make choices, but these are often limited. I therefore suggest some young people have less capacity to take responsibility than others.

4.10.1 Viewing young people in schools through a lens of habitus and culture capital

Within the following section, I draw heavily on Bourdieu and Reay using their language of social class for clarity. However, I know that some believe this to be contested. One of the problems with education in the UK in 2022/23 is that it is a relic from the past, producing an antiquated hierarchical system that still benefits the most privileged in society (Reay, 2017). The existing inequalities are a constituent part of the processes within the system. As I exemplify in this section, all aspects of society contribute to the continuation and success of this grossly unfair status quo. The mostly upper-class young people privileged to go to private schools have generational support with an unwavering belief in their right to be at the top of the academic tree (Reay, 2017).

Bourdieu's work allows us to frame the agenda in terms of transformation rather than reproduction. By understanding what habitus means for the poorer in society, and by aiming to create school opportunities for them to develop cultural and possibly social capital, my work creates openings to alter the field in which they live (Mills, 2008b).

4.10.2 Habitus

Habitus develops within an individual from childhood as they grow into their family and surroundings. The repetitive nature of everyday life ensures these young people take on the beliefs, values and behaviours that impact their speech, dress and manners as a subconscious social class compass that directs them towards the acceptable norms within their group (Mills, 2008a). Therefore, the dispositions they exhibit reflect their upbringing. It is expected that someone from a working-class background may behave differently to someone from the middle or upper classes (Bourdieu, 1990; Thompson, 1991). Furthermore, some young people will attune to the school's values by the virtue of their upbringing. This is related to how someone may think and, more generally, to their cultural disposition (Grenfell, & James, 1998; Purdy et al., 2021). In relation to my own experience, whilst teaching, many individuals did not understand how to behave in and around the school when they first arrived. Some young people found the school experience extremely challenging; if they did not rebel and get excluded, they would often merge into the background, keep their heads down and get by with the minimum effort, often underachieving. Bourdieu & Passeron (1964; translated by and cited in Grenfell & James, 1998) also posited that those who fit their environments were more likely to succeed in school. This has implications for my research, as those young people, mainly from the lower socioeconomic groups and who find schools a

problematic place to be, are less likely to engage and trust adults, accept assistance, or go looking for help, as they are not comfortable in the school environment.

Within critiques of Bourdieu's work there is a discussion about whether his theory of habitus is about reproduction or transformation. Kenway & McLeod (2004) ask whether there is room within his theory for agentic improvisation or whether it is simply deterministic. Whilst some, such as Jenkins (2002) and Nash (1990), argue that his work is too deterministic. Whilst his work shows little evidence of transformation, there are others, such as (Reay, 2004), who argue that in his works such as The Weight of the World (1999)*,* Bourdieu and his co-authors are searching for ways of transforming the lives of the vulnerable. Reay, David, & Ball (2005) suggest habitus can be both reproductive and transformative. This area cannot be divorced from agency and identity and, as such, habitus can shape but does not have to determine choices young people make in their lives (Mills, 2008b). Being responsible for behaviour and welfare in schools resulted in me observing many adverse, deterministic outcomes. Sometimes, I needed to remind myself that these negatives were a hazard of the job that temporarily blinded me to the many positive stories happening in school. I, therefore, also had to be conscious of another group of young people who could have followed similar negative routes. However, by being in a position to accept support, they employed their agency to make positive life choices. The habitus of one individual may be more transformative than that of another, and this may well enable one to take an opportunity whilst another cannot.

Furthermore, young people may see possibilities for action in one situation, and simultaneously prevent themselves from recognising other situations, as habitus merely sets boundaries in which agents are free to act (Codd, 1990; Mills, 2008b). This research exemplifies this, as both the participants and the YRT were volunteers. Two separate, and seemingly homogenous groups of young people, were given opportunities to become involved with this research. Whilst some came forward and volunteered, others decided they did not want to be involved; both groups were agents free to act and they all did, in either one way or another.

Another question is whether we, as professionals, should strive to transform or change young people. This is beyond our remit as, by doing so, we will be interfering with cultural issues beyond our understanding, something that could do more harm than good (Mills, 2008b).

Some would suggest that attempting to impact the working classes in this way is to risk pathologising them (Lawler, 1999; Friedman, 2014). Whilst it is difficult to argue against offering young people transformative opportunities, schools should be more concerned with providing educational experiences that create life-changing possibilities. This is particularly true for the marginalised, excluded or disadvantaged (Lingard et al., 2003). By offering the participants a position within this research I offered them an educational experience that would create possibilities for them to change their lives, even if only in a small way.

4.10.3 Culture capital

My experiences working in state schools leads me to agree with Bourdieu's premise that schools are places that reproduce both social and cultural capital (Mills, 2008b; Burger & Walk, 2016). Bourdieu's (1973, 1974) assertions were that it was the culture of the dominant classes that was embodied in schools. This is something that would also give those young people who could identify with this accepted culture an educational advantage (Mills, 2008b). Others, however, would need to adjust their behaviours to fit into the academic structure or stand up and fight against the system (hooks, 2017). The problem, however, is somewhat more entrenched than even this implies, as performance at school is now misrecognised as being about an individual's talent (measured by test scores), whilst social class is ignored. As demonstrated earlier in this chapter, there is a gap in the educational starting point for those from different backgrounds. This profoundly impacts both educational provision and outcomes (Mills, 2008b; Croizet et al., 2017). Bourdieu, and Passeron's (1990) cultural capital describes the codes, rules and ways of behaving that individuals take on from the lives they lead. However, Reay's (1998) work identified substantial differences between the cultural capital middle-class mothers generated for their children and the difficulties immigrant parents had in helping their children within our education system. The difficulties were down to the lack of cultural capital the incomers had, or, to be more accurate, how the cultural capital these immigrants did have was no longer valid within this their new environment (Fresnoza-Flot & Shinozaki, 2017). As such, educational consequences exist for those who possess cultural capital in the wrong currency (Gewirtz, Ball, & Bowe, 1995; Raffo et al., 2009). Our system, often including the schools, teachers and parents, unwittingly supports this social segregation that sees unfair educational advantage given to the privileged in society (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Reay, 2017).

We are left with a system that enables young people to succeed based on class privilege rather than merit. Using my research as a tool to broaden the cultural capital we use in school, this work can be transformational (Mills, 2008b). By working and co-producing with young people as researchers in school, I am taking a more critical perspective and using the benefits of contemporary society to give them access to both cultural and social capital (Comber & Hill, 2000; Raffo et al., 2009). Those young people who have yet to accumulate the various forms of capital are likely to be the ones whose habitus does not enable them to fit in at school as well as others might. This suggests that capital plays a significant part in a young person's development. Therefore, I argue this adds to the complex factors influencing why some young people find it difficult to take responsibility for their mental health.

4.11 Chapter summary

This chapter situates the position of power in schools and highlights its importance within this research. The literature has demonstrated how it can impact young people's agency, identity, and capital. This is particularly true for those from the lower socio-economic groups, which includes the participants in this study. The links between power, agency, identity and capital are complex and, at times, being able to separate the impact of each one is a problematic process beyond the bounds of this thesis.

Chapter 5: Research methodology

5.1   Introduction

This chapter presents my philosophical position and rationale for the study. I investigate the social constructivist foundations for the research and how this has influenced my decision to adopt an approach synthesising action research (AR) and critical communicative methodologies (CCM). I explore how the context of the research, particularly collaborating with young people as co-researchers, has also been influenced by my social constructivist beliefs. I delve into the reasons behind my decision to incorporate young people in the research, and how I recruited both the YRT and the participants, before looking at how my partnership with the YRT influenced the research cycles and the methods used in the study. My positionality is briefly examined before I consider using both reflectivity and reflexivity in this research. The chapter is concluded with a section on how the analysis developed through the process of crystallisation as we collected data.

This research collaborated with young people in a school setting and explored the efficacy of the whole school mental health strategy to find improvements. I intended for this research to directly benefit the two groups of young people involved, the YRT and the participants. It was also about re-balancing social inequalities in school. My qualitative research is about understanding young people's subjective experiences in a school setting and investigating their unique perspectives (Stringer & Ortiz Aragon, 2021). Therefore, this research was not about the objective measurement of a school process for universal implementation, but about constructing a critical pedagogical approach to achieve knowledge democracy (Stuart, 2020).

Later in this chapter (section 5.2), I argue that this research is taken from a social constructivist standpoint; it is important to contextualise this within the broader social constructionism family. Confusion arises as the terms 'constructivism' and 'constructionism' are sometimes interchanged (Burr, 2015). However, constructivism has also been theorised as a branch of constructionism, where individuals see the world differently through their perspective, creating meaning from events (Burr, 2015). From this perspective, I approached the research by choosing an AR methodology as I sought to collaborate with young people. The collaboration was through a combination of CCM and YPAR, which I discuss later in this chapter.

As an ex-teacher, my researcher position felt vulnerable. I was returning to a school where I held power and was concerned this could influence both the young people and the authenticity of the findings. I, therefore, adapted learning from CCM that put us on an equal epistemological level and re-balanced the power dynamics, further enhancing knowledge democracy. The final part of my methodological philosophy, which I conceptualise in Figure 8 below, is the approach I took to data collection. The mixed-method data were from a variety of sources, but at its core were information collected by the YRT in their meetings with the participants. The YRT was given the freedom to develop their data collection strategies and were equal partners in the analysis of the research. I made a deliberate decision to further enhance knowledge democracy within the process; this area is explained in more detail in section 5.7 and the data collection philosophy is summarised in Figure 9.
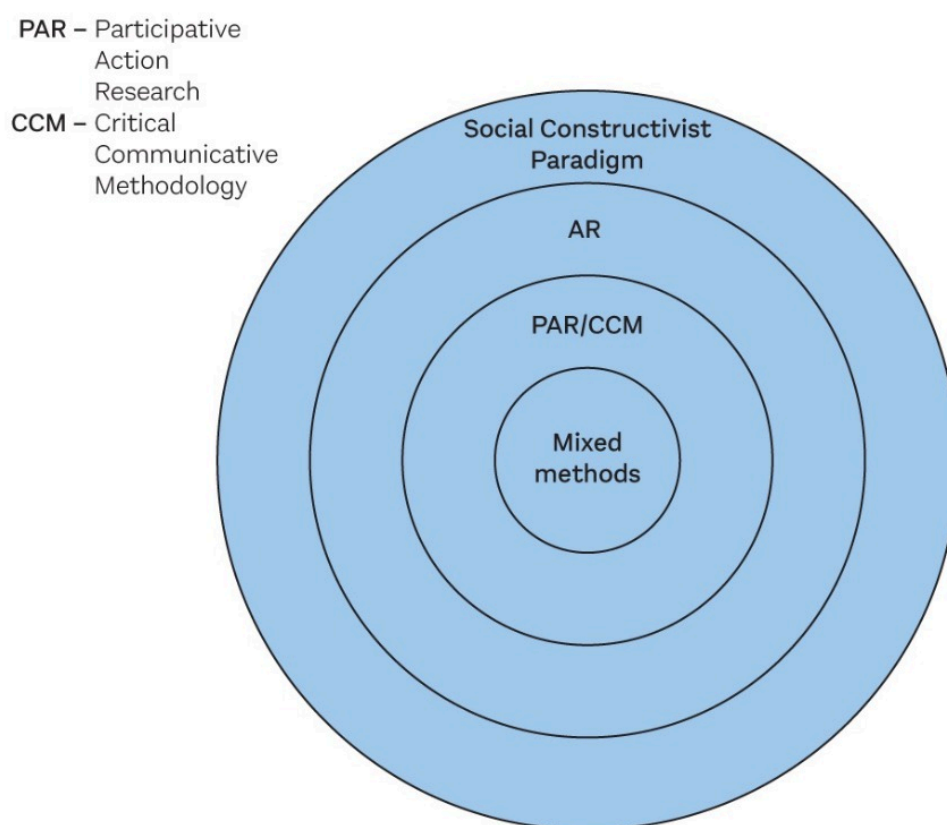
Figure 8: Concentric methodology model

5.2   Social constructivism

My ontological position as a social constructivist aligns with my decision to conduct youth participative action research (YPAR) (to become youth participative dialogic action research (YPDAR)). By committing to empower and enable young people to work with me as co-researchers, I was morally invested in their wellbeing and welfare, something I saw as being enhanced by the research process (Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2022).

Social Constructivism owes its foundations to the work of many including, Piaget (1970, 1971), Dewey (n.d., 1938, 2007 [1916]) and Gergen (1985). It focuses on social interactions' role in developing reality, knowledge and learning. Some believe that for social constructivism to be active, only one pre-requisite is required: a social action must occur between two individuals (Teague, 2000; Safari, 2020). A transaction (sharing of prior knowledge) occurs between them, resulting in both participants leaving with knowledge gained. Culture is seen as important within social constructivism as individuals can influence transactions with their values and beliefs formed from the social background or environment they inhabit (Whiting, 2007).

Social constructivism is a value-laden philosophy as the knowledge that each individual creates is, by its very nature, influenced by the learning process through which it has travelled. An individual's life experience will therefore impact how they go through the learning process. Thus, my own life experience influenced the philosophy of this research. As a teacher for over 35 years, I was concerned with helping young people improve their lives. Through this research, I came to see that from a social constructivist standpoint, young people in school had different starting points due to the circumstances in which they were born. It was, therefore, important to me that I treated this as an exercise in social justice. I created a participatory learning environment that helped young people develop their agency, and thus improve their life chances (Brubaker et al., 2010).

Crethar et al. (2008) identified *equity, participation, harmony*, and *access* as four essential components or aspirations that they believed underpin socially-just qualitative research. My research was inclusive as it encompassed *equity* via the participants coming from the pupil premium cohort. This was also achieved as a *participative* project, as it included young people as co-researchers. The focus of the project was to ensure *access*, as it was about working with young people to identify the correct questions to make a difference and come

up with pertinent resolutions. *Harmony* was achieved by ensuring that the community benefited from the project as a whole (Lyons et al., 2013).

From my perspective, returning to my previous school, a social constructivist framework was the best fit to explore mental health strategy and the impact this was having on young people within the institution. My history within the school and my relationship with staff and students meant that the constructs that informed the development were central to my role in the research. As I set out in the prologue, the school where the research was conducted was a comprehensive academy with a mixed rural/urban catchment. All young people come with unique perspectives and, as such, have different social constructs, which schools need to address to provide equal opportunities for all. Taking a social constructivist approach enables an understanding of how the individuals within such organisations function because schools are fundamentally social structures; they are living communities and, as such, they are socially constructed.

Reality is developed through human activity; individuals within society fashion the properties of the world (Kim, 2000; 2006) and, from this perspective, the same can be said for schools. Individuals and groups from different backgrounds, cultures, and communities inhabit them. The basis of interactions of the individuals (both within and between the groups) is based upon a shared understanding of their environment, which influences their assumptions and should also lead to cooperative learning within the school (Lee, 2020). This intersubjectivity is fundamental to the processes that take place in the development of knowledge, which is constructed socially and culturally by the interactions between individuals and their environment.

Therefore, it was essential to design my research using these principles as a guide to ensure the findings were authentic, as my collaboration with young people creates them. We worked together to design the research; they worked with participants to collect data and took a leading role in analysing and disseminating the findings and recommendations. Young people involved in the research were engaged in social activities, ensuring the learning process they were involved in was meaningful (Kim, 2000; Hein, 2000).

The knowledge created was through a democratic process that placed young people, the school environment, society, and culture at the centre of the work and was thus indeed socially constructed.

Young people in school were a source of knowledge housed within their community (Wood, 2016); I was determined to ensure the creation of new knowledge came from this foundation. The term authentic is crucial to my research. Throughout this thesis, I use it to signal to the reader that any findings are from the insight of young people rather than seen through the researcher's lens. In section 5.8 I explore my position within the research and, as such, accept it is impossible to remove my lens from this research. However, I took on a reflexive responsibility where I continuously scrutinised my assumptions and conclusions, as well as checked them with the YRT (Dávila, 2014).

The formation of reality, knowledge and learning will alter within and between the specific groups that are part of this complex school community. Within schools, it is accepted that young people face numerous risk factors that may result in mental health difficulties (Bostwick & Glazzard, 2018). The risk factors vary; they include influences from within schools, such as high-risk testing, and wider society, such as socio-economic disadvantage (Bostwick & Glazzard, 2018). Any school mental health strategy needs to consider this; just as young people experience mental health in different ways, they will have different experiences of school strategies. The school's role in mental health is also pertinent at this point. It is accepted that pressure from assessments can create mental health issues for young people (Păduraru, 2019). Other problems, such as approaches to behaviour and the general approach to inclusivity, may all have a bearing on young people's mental health. Therefore, schools must have a good understanding of how they may be influencing mental health as they prepare a strategy to combat it. My methodological approach to the research was influenced by social constructivist thinking, and it is important to present my research principles based on this theory. They are not a tick list but served to guide me and the YRT as we developed the process together.

- Ensure that the processes of the research are founded upon a sharing of experience.
- All parties involved in the research are to be viewed as co-creators of knowledge.
- The researcher/YRT relationship is to be based upon support and assistance rather than direction and instruction.

- Tasks within the process to be collaborative and ensure inclusivity.
- The research outcomes and processes are to be viewed as equally important (Adams, 2006).

With the above principles laid out, I now intend to explore the place of CCM, AR, and YPAR within my research.

5.3   Critical communicative methodology (CCM)

After Jurgen Habermas gave a lecture addressing *'The intercultural discourse on human rights'* during a 2001 conference in Barcelona, he was challenged by a lay non-academic about women's labour rights. Whilst some in the audience were contemptuous of the questioner, Habermas addressed the issue, calling it a brilliant and critical question. He applied his proposal of universal dialogue that states that all can offer arguments in whatever way they wish (Gómez et al., 2011). This dialogic approach is the basis of CCM, that at its core believes everyone has the critical competence to analyse their own lived world; this analysis is achieved through dialogue between people from differing backgrounds to ourselves (Gómez et al., 2011). This dialogic turn in society is directly relevant to the critical communicative approach I intended to take (Puigverta, Christoub, & Holfordc, 2012). Habermas' thinking influenced CCM, and the key to his thinking were his seven postulates, three of which are fundamental to my work. He believed that everyone could interact and communicate; he called this the 'universality of language and action'. The second postulate of relevance was the 'absence of interpretative hierarchy' that stated all interpretations coming from the research process are equally valid, regardless of the position of the person putting them forward. The final postulate is where the researcher and researched work on an 'equal epistemological level', each an expert in their area, be that academic or lived experience (Puigverta et al., 2012). These are areas I will return to in the discussion chapter.

Habermas (1987) suggests that we have moved into an age of dialogue as there has been a shift from instrumental rationality to communicative rationality, where people use their knowledge gained from lived experience, which is something that, by its very nature, is socially constructed. Such an approach aims to achieve accord rather than allowing power to be the leading force for change. As with the rest of society, which has seen this dialogic transformation, qualitative research has shifted away from traditional hierarchical research

relationships. A redressing of power imbalances within some research areas has been achieved (Råheim et al., 2016). As a result, scientific knowledge about our social world has increasingly come about through egalitarian dialogue (Gómez et al., 2011) and has produced a more democratic, socially useful and politically responsible knowledge (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; 2000; 2017) that also has the potential to be transformative (Gómez et al., 2011; Tracy et al., 2015). Importantly, CCM states that social interactions build social situations and, as such, reality does not exist autonomously from the subject; only where researchers have intersubjective relationships with social actors, can objectivity be reached (Gómez et al., 2011). The premise within CCM is that everyone can contribute to knowledge construction, which is further enhanced where there is dialogue between people with differing cultural intelligence. The relationship between the researched and the researcher is vital, and the dialogue between the two enables a path to empirical truth (Gómez et al., 2011). This process, therefore, gives the researchers a deep insight into the lived experience of those they are collaborating with, and offers opportunities to transform people's lives. By developing a dialogic methodology, I followed the principles of CCM and this was instrumental in fostering a process with the potential to enable young people to be part of transformative research and, thus, change their own and others' lives. By accessing the participants' social constructions of reality, the YRT will then be able to construct their realities in school. The participants came from a cohort of young people who were some of the most economically disadvantaged; the YRT were a self-selecting group in a comprehensive school. Both groups shared their lived experience with a researcher through various forms of dialogue. I believed that by giving these young people the opportunity for rich learning experiences, I would enable them to improve their capabilities for life-long learning by facilitating their agency to choose and develop the things they value (Hi Kim, 2017).

The CCM dialogic approach aligns with my arguments in section 4.10.2. I agree with Reay, David, & Ball (2005), who suggest that whilst habitus can be reproductive, it can also be transformative. Freire (1970) distinguished between those who engage in dialogue and those who are anti-dialogic and want to impose their will on others. Habermas (1984) positioned the fight as between those with validity and power claims. Young people who live in poverty have been set as individuals who are deficient in an ability to choose and achieve (Bok, 2010).

Furthermore, young people might adapt to their challenging circumstances through self-restriction, limiting their ability to open up opportunities for them (Teschl & Comim, 2005). This can lead to young people lacking inspiration and aspirations for enriching life experiences (Hi Kim, 2017). By placing young people at the centre of my CCM research methodology, I have attempted to counter the deterministic hegemony I have highlighted previously. Social constructivism is about how human interactions enable knowledge creation, which I aimed to achieve by developing this research synthesising CCM with YPAR.

Following a CCM is about demonopolising the knowledge of experts (Beck, 1992) and is also attempting to ensure that the knowledge creation, whilst necessarily more complex, is more inclusive; it is likely to impact the lived reality of the social actors as they have had a dialogic collaboration with academics (Schütz & Luckmann, 1974). Young people have been described as "social actors and experts in their own lives" with perspectives that are important in their own right (Cowie & Khoo 2017 p. 234). Working in this way, with egalitarian dialogue between myself, the researcher, and these social actors, we aimed to better understand the complex nature of the inequalities that have impacted them.

5.4   Action research

5.4.1   Introduction

The action research method is congruent with the socially constructivist paradigm in that it is value-laden; it has social intent and a social or "sound moral purpose" (McNiff, & Whitehead, 2012; Groundwater-Smith et al., 2015, p. 142). My values were integral to this study's purpose and outcome, particularly as it was subjective in exploring people's everyday life experiences. Crotty (1998) suggests we need to view the research from the participant's point of view, and minimise the risk of imposing my assumptions on it. Furthermore, Crotty suggests that to protect against researcher biases, the participants needed to be involved in the research process to ensure interpretations are made from their social construction and not from that of the researcher. In the context of this research, there was the opportunity, therefore, to develop an action research project that was both participative and potentially transformative by its nature. The issue of shared ownership within the research was addressed through widening participation between myself, the researcher, and the researched; as the

process developed and control was devolved through the team, my role evolved from designer to facilitator (Ennew & Plateau, 2004). As PAR has the potential to be emancipatory and is most closely aligned with social constructivism (Langhout & Thomas, 2010), I decided to apply it to this school study. There was the exciting prospect of developing a research team that would include me as the researcher/facilitator, volunteer sixth formers as members of a YRT, and a cohort of young people as participants.

5.4.2 What is action research, participative action research, and youth participative action research?

Action research assumes that those closest to a given issue are experts in understanding the root of the problem, and are in the best position to help find solutions to such issues (Stringer & Ortiz Aragon, 2021). It addresses real-life issues that impact people's lives through a systematic cyclical investigation that incorporates observation, reflection and action (Stringer & Ortiz Aragon, 2021). PAR is a collaborative approach to AR where the research team includes community members with lived experience of the research topic. The aim is the reconstruction of knowledge through understanding and empowerment. PAR is often carried out with marginalised groups who rarely have their voices heard (Bergold & Thomas, 2012) and is seen as a way of ensuring social change is informed by the voice of such groups. YPAR is where youth are the participants. There is evidence that collaborative projects enabling young people to contribute towards research design can be challenging, but have also been found to be productive (Bowen et al., 2013). I cite examples from my 35-year teaching career to counter this. Young people rarely get the opportunity to have a say in the running of their school. Some schools run student councils, but my experience suggests they often have a staff-led agenda with little real impact on young people or the institution. I, therefore, suggest young people should be viewed as a marginalised group within a school setting.

There have been a variety of action research cycles developed in recent years. Some, like Hendricks (2017), conceptualise the cycle as a two-dimensional iterative process of reflection, action and evaluation. Others such as Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon (2014) suggest a three-dimensional spiral process of plan, act, observe and reflect. I agree with Stringer & Ortiz Aragon (2021), who highlight that the key functions within any action research cycle are linked to looking and thinking. The model they suggest includes mini-

cycles of looking, thinking, and acting within a broader cyclical process of planning, implementing and evaluating. The model that I developed was based on the group's preferred way of working, which I will explain below.

5.4.3   The development of iterative action research

My research created two separate action research cycle processes. The first was a mini cycle between me, the YRT, and the participants, and the second was a less frequent process of me stepping back from the day-to-day work to reflect upon, consider and further plan the research cycle.

Over the data collection period, weekly mini-cycles were taking place, and these can be simplified into four stages:

Stage 1. I met with the YRT team, where we identified a research issue, discussed how we would investigate it and then planned the YRT/participant meetings.

Stage 2. The YRT members held separate meetings with their participants.

Stage 3. I held meetings with the YRT members immediately after their participant meetings. These meetings fulfilled several purposes as they allowed me to capture and transcribe the information, but also enabled us to discuss the research meetings and explore how they worked. This was a time for reflection that considered the process and the research material.

Stage 4. I then met with the YRT to discuss how the meetings and data collection had progressed. I developed a process that ensured that we learnt from each other to improve our practice. This was also the time that we planned the following week's meetings.

As a social constructivist, and as mentioned at the beginning of section 5.2, I was morally invested in young people's wellbeing and welfare. It was incumbent upon me to support and look after them (Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2022). I, therefore, decided to prioritise three specific areas relating to both the development of the YRT and the good of the research. These were:

- Active support and care for young people.
- Empower and give them as much autonomy as possible.
- Ensure research integrity and authenticity through an open and honest approach.
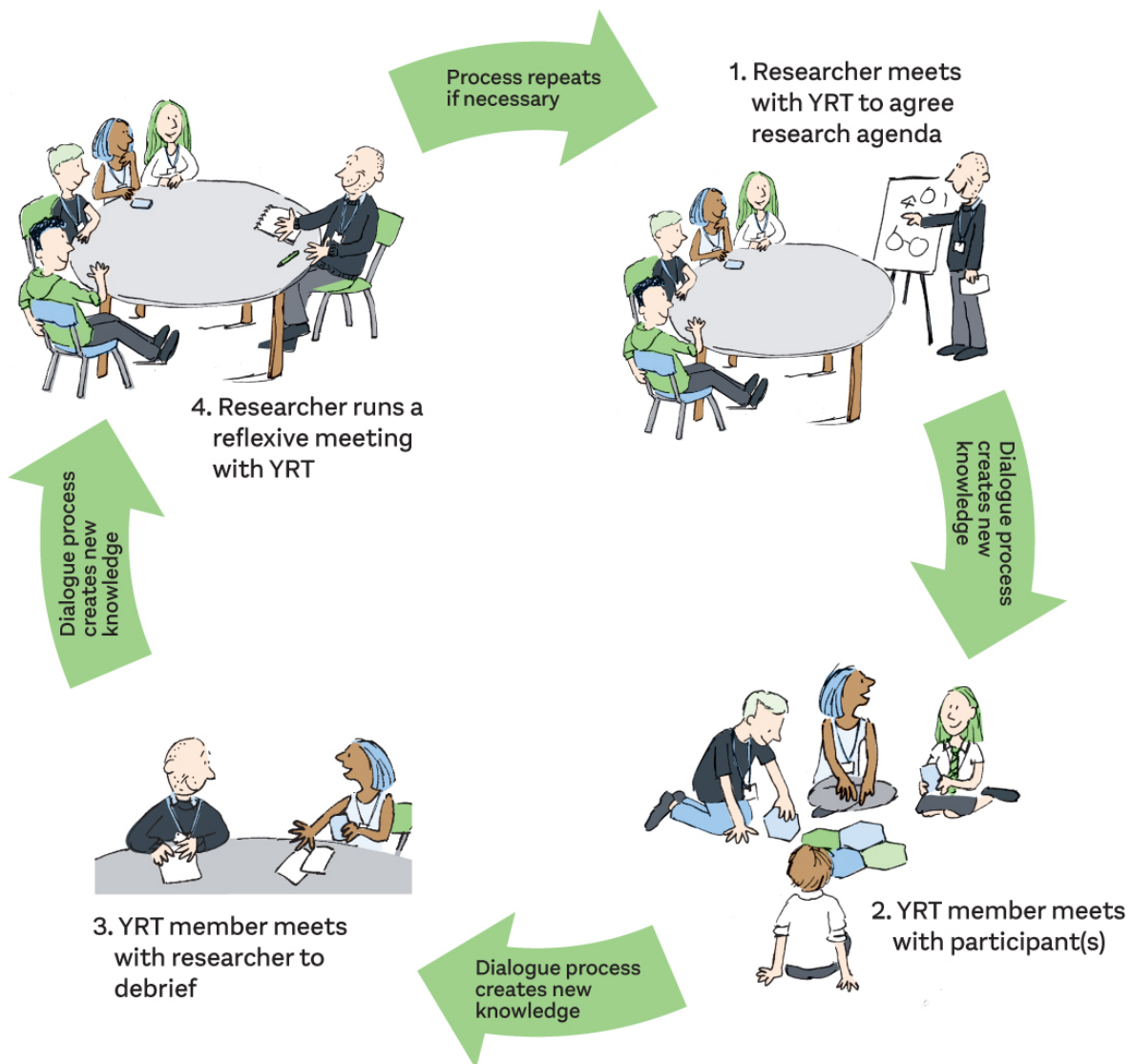
Figure 9: Action Research Cycle

In order to understand fully how the above process worked, it is important to exemplify how stage two of the research cycle, above, worked. As discussed in section 6.3, I encouraged the YRT to creatively develop their own research sessions with the participants. While many of the sessions differed, they all had the same aim. This was to create a process that enabled the young researchers and the participants to develop an understanding of the given area under discussion. As the data collection commenced, I deliberately chose to give the YRT the freedom to discover the most appropriate method with which to engage the participants. All YRT members went into their initial meetings with a question-and-answer approach, which was unsuccessful. The participants were difficult to engage in conversation, they gave very simplistic answers, and little meaningful data was gathered in the first few meetings. We gradually evaluated this approach, and many of the YRT team decided to employ more active, creative and fun approaches to engage the participants. In order to get a flavour of

how this worked, I will use one such session, run by Charlotte, a YRT member, to exemplify the typicality of these sessions.

Charlotte worked with two participants, both of whom were in year seven. In one of her sessions with the participants, the topic of 'stress' was discussed, and Charlotte decided to explore this further. She researched this topic and found a resource she describes as a 'stress wheel' that divides into eight areas of life that can impact an individual's stress levels. Each area is scaled from one to ten, indicating the differing stress impact for each area (**Error! Reference source not found.**).
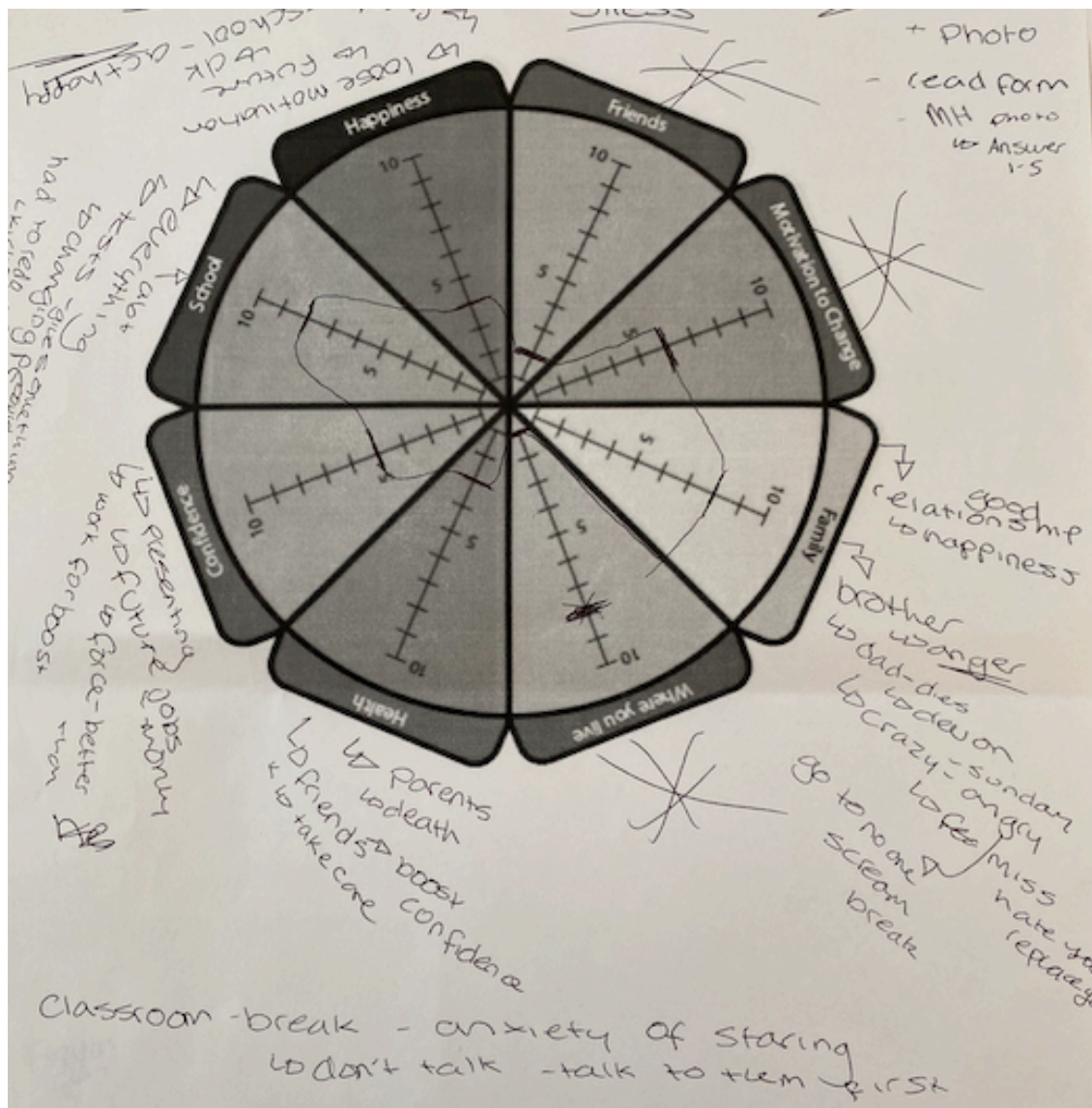
Figure 10: Stress wheel data collection tool

Charlotte then describes her approach:

"I briefly talked about what potentially does stress them in school. I introduced this stress wheel that categorises different aspects of life and allows them to scale their stress in different areas. After explaining how it works, and the scale of 1 to 10 for each category they worked on their own wheel."

The two participants were then given their own stress wheel and asked to fill in each category to develop their personal 'stress profile'. This then acted as a discussion point for the three of them. Here are some of Charlotte's thoughts relating to one of the participant's wheel.

"Happiness and family had high stress scores, and this surprised me, so I tried to dig into those. Participant 1 explained that she was worried about her parents because her dad wasn't very healthy so she was scared he was gonna die.
She also worried about her friends liking her and she worried that if she doesn't do well in school she won't get a job and she explained how she couldn't help but look forward, and worry all the time.
She said that her dad gave her 150 pounds worth of Amazon voucher as a present and she's already got all of her friends presents from it. And I was like oh you should get something for yourself. It seems to me that she uses presents to her friends as a safeguard against losing them"

Charlotte used this simple tool in a number of ways. It provided her with a simple mechanism to engage the participants and enable them to open up about their experiences in and out of school. It allowed her to record what they were saying on a third 'wheel', which she completed during their discussions (**Error! Reference source not found.**). This activity also enabled a relationship-building process to develop week upon week.

This activity took two weeks to complete; in that time, I met with Charlotte at a debriefing between the two of us, where we discussed the approach, what worked and what she needed to do next. Our debrief meeting also gave her time to reflect on her data collection, and the stress wheel exercise as well as plan her next steps. Charlotte also shared this approach with the other YRT members at the weekly team meeting. This created a lively discussion where others helped evaluate the process and findings. Again, reflection on an individual and group level enhanced this process. This approach to the research helped the team as we supported

and learnt from each other. The collaboration within the team also enabled creativity as other members were inspired by the ideas brought forward and demonstrated by individuals.

This activity serves to demonstrate the approach we took at stage two in the research cycle see Figure 9.

5.4.4   Why I chose youth participative action research

As this research was being carried out within a social constructivist framework, the aim was to work with young people as part of a research team and involve them in all processes. This was about valuing them as individuals in their own right, and not just using them as a data collection tool. By working in this way, young people were at the centre of the resulting transformational changes, and this meant that such changes were something that they will be able to take credit for (Cook-Sather, 2020). I saw that we all made sense of our worlds in our ways, and everyone's experience was valid and worthy of respect (Crotty, 1998). However, I also saw that we were shaped by our background, the space we lived in and the people we lived around. Social constructivism played a part in how we saw the world and in our knowledge production (Nyandarai & Egbuonu, 2018; Crotty, 1998). This framed the importance of having young people from the school working alongside me as co-researchers. They were the social actors with lived experience and, as such, the real experts in our field of investigation (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005; Cowie & Khoo, 2017). Therefore, I needed to work with them to integrate their thoughts, feelings and reflections as part of the process. Somekh (2002) goes one step further when she suggests that knowledge produced independent of active practitioner participation is only partial knowledge. Therefore any knowledge created about young people without the involvement of young people lacks integrity as it has not been grounded in their worlds (Jones, 2004). I was duty-bound to ensure the YRT were fully involved in the research. Having recognised that young people can be the co-producers of new knowledge, I needed to explore their roles and responsibilities within the research.

As discussed in Chapter 2, education has been impacted by the neoliberal agenda, with young people being used as commodities so schools can improve themselves. It is important to distinguish between economic theories of human capital and theories of human capital (Sen, 1999). Capital accumulation should move towards being seen as a process in which humans

are intrinsically involved in the production of their own futures; as a society, we need to build on individuals' capabilities (Sen, 1999; Patton et al., 2016). YPAR would therefore promote the growth of students, as participants and co-researchers, into becoming part of their reality so that they would be integrated within a process creating new theory, new knowledge and new practice.

Working in a social constructivist framework informed my decision to adopt a PPI as a pre-research approach. This is something that I touch on again in section 7.7 when I discuss the involvement of young people in more detail. PPI is a process embraced within the health service that aims to improve patient outcomes by involving them in the design of the research questions, and methods of collection and analysis, as well as decisions to do with the dissemination of findings (Hoddinott et al., 2018). This is why the approach is philosophically aligned with YPAR and CCM and, as such, fits well with this research.

The processes involved in my action research are inherently related to interactions between people. My relationship with the YRT and the relationship between the YRT and participants were part of AR cycles that created new knowledge and altered our individual realities. Furthermore, this research explored the support required to enable young people's agency about their ability to take responsibility for their mental health. Therefore, the intention was to ensure that, through this research, we developed theories that were first tested and then applied to help others. In this way, I agree with McNiff and Whitehead (2012 p.34) when they say, "The idea of agency is that people can, and should, take an active part in decisions about how they and others should live". By taking a participatory approach, I intended to be dialogic, which meant more than just listening to the voices of young people. This approach was based on relationships oriented towards young people's self-understanding and agency. It is suggested that engaging in this way ensures change grounded in respect (Graham & Fitzgerald, 2010). This leads to questions about what my influence as a researcher may bring to the project. Unlike in traditional research, where the researcher should not influence or be influenced by the research, in AR the researcher takes on the responsibility for influencing the process as a primary instrument (Stringer & Ortiz Aragon, 2021). Within this AR, I took control by using my agency to identify a need for change and investigated social situations that benefitted from improvement. At the same time, my learning process was also necessary; as the researcher, I needed to ask questions about my independence and decision-making ability. This is something that Etherington (2004, pp. 31-32) describes researchers as having

the capacity to "acknowledge how their own experiences and contexts … inform the process and outcomes of inquiry". Therefore, I saw AR as being about honesty, integrity, and authenticity, and whether I could be critical of the process and myself. Consequently, the process was heavily value-laden.

Running concurrently with this is the concept that AR is about social improvement and the development of new theories explained through one's own and others' learning. This is why I have developed theories that I have subjected to critique and am publishing for further scrutiny (McNiff & Whitehead, 2012). Having been the person who created the whole school strategy, I believe that I was ideally positioned to influence this work. However, I was also mindful that in having this initial investment in the strategy, I needed to take a reflexive approach to ensure that my bias did not interfere with research findings, one of the reasons the YRT were engaged. When Ofsted (Ofsted, 2019) inspected the school, they made favourable judgements about the mental health provision within the school. However, the brevity of the visit (two days) meant that their judgments were generic; I argue that the Ofsted findings were based on anecdotal evidence that did not meet research standards. Therefore, a robust, in-depth investigation was required to explore whether young people in the school benefited from the strategy. As a social enterprise project, I intended to introduce new practices that came about through theory and knowledge development from dialogic action research with young people.

The business of action researchers is to develop innovative practices that improve aspects of society, academia and the intellectual world; it is about being a theorist and a practitioner (McNiff & Whitehead, 2012). Whilst only a few choose this path, all humans have a story to tell. Some feel that action research needs to be heard; what is the purpose of it if it is not being used to improve society at whatever scale? Steele (2010) explores Foucault's understanding of parrhesia and free speech. Learning from this, I deduced there was a responsibility on those involved to tell their truths from their perspective, something my research was intent upon doing. Some believe researchers in social science could and often should go further. Stuart (2020) argues that the scholar activist contributes to society by using their research as a vehicle for change. Within the context of this research, the scholar-activist approach is somewhat appropriate as I aimed to discover new theories to influence social change and, through dialogue, "become jointly responsible for a process in which we all grow" (Freire, 1970, p. 53). In relation to the YRT, it is through this that, as scholar-activists,

they can help "transform that structure so that they become beings for themselves" (Freire, 1970, p. 47).

5.5   The barriers to young people's participation

The narrative around how young people are seen by society has been changing for a number of years. Since the 1990s, the UK government have been officially promoting the voice of young people as an important asset in service review and delivery (Davidson, 2000). This agenda was further enhanced with legislation such as Every child matters (Thornton, 2007), which centred young people in service delivery. Young people are now seen as social actors with the right to participate in decisions that impact their own lives (Hill et al., 2004; Kalliala, 2014; Lawrence 2022).

Unfortunately, for many years, the role of young people in research was limited to them being used as a data source. They were often seen as incompetent and unable to understand research processes (Christensen & Prout, 2002). Kitzinger (1997) argues that images contrived through the word incompetent disempower young people by denying them access to knowledge, which leads them to become more vulnerable. More recently, research has made a conscious effort to include young people in research and, importantly, to ensure that they are involved in shaping it. This then ensures the research is focused through young people's worldview, rather than the worldview of the adult researcher (O'Brien & Moules, 2007). It has also been suggested that working with young people to investigate the services provided for them has the potential to develop new knowledge and more democratic communities (Aubrey & Dahl, 2006).

Furthermore, Laws (1998) concluded that it was important to recognise the capacity of young people to evaluate service provision and give reasoned opinions. More recently, it has been recognised that young people can participate in critical inquiry in schools and make a difference to themselves, their peers and their school environment (Mitra & Serriere, 2015). Without young people's perceptions, it is difficult to know what they need for systems to be improved (Hart & Chesson, 1998).

The level of participation within a given project is important as it is inevitably linked to power relationships and control. Arnstein (1969) developed his ladder model, one of the first

widely used participation models. More recently, it has been developed by scholars such as Hart (1992) with reference to children and young people (Figure 11).

The Ladder of Participation

8. Chld-initiated, shared decisions with adults

7. Chld-initiated and directed

6. Adult- Initiated, shared decisions with children

5. Consulted and informed

4. Assigned but informed

3. Tokenism

2. Decoration

1. Manipulation

Degrees of Participation
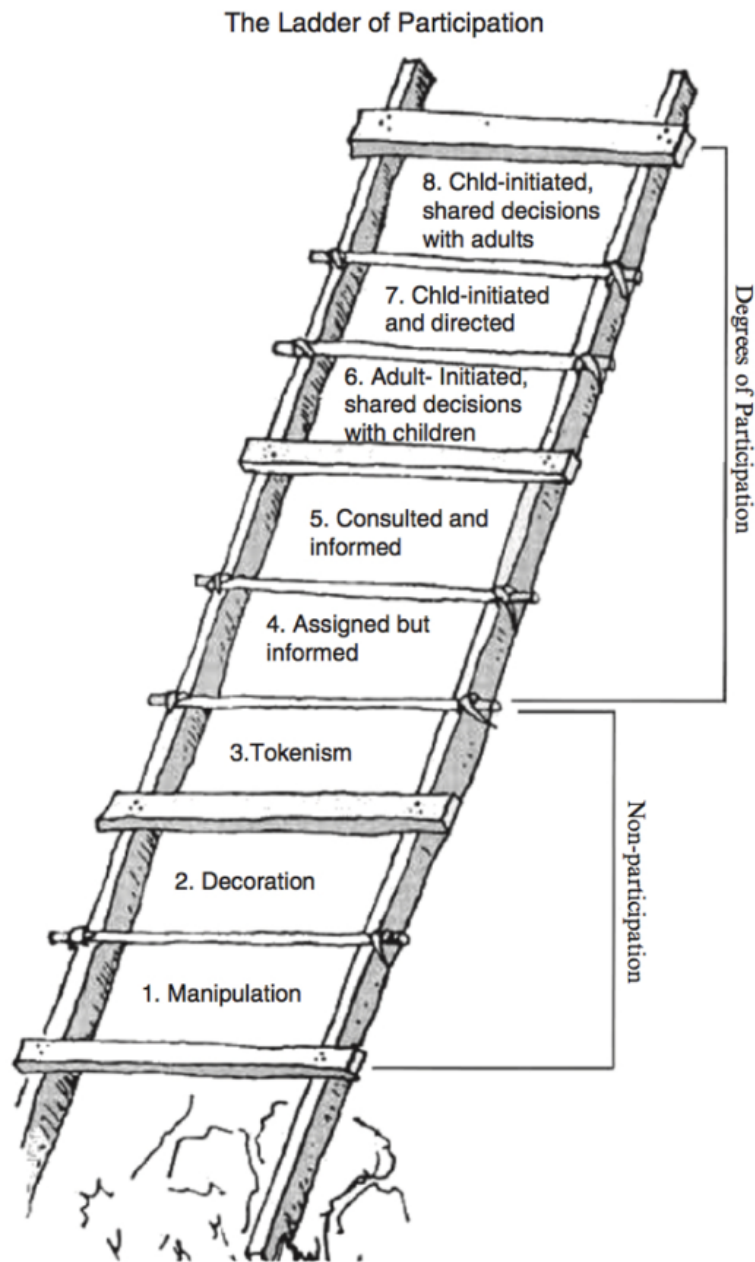
Non-participation

Figure 11: Ladder of children's participation (Hart, 1992)

Whilst these attempts to categorise participation levels of citizens, particularly children, were initially welcomed, they also have limitations in that levels of participation are rarely found to be sequential in the manner depicted as a ladder. Although Hart clearly states that the model is not intended to be used in this way, using the metaphor of a ladder gives the impression that participation at level eight has greater validity than at level five. There are

instances when it is more appropriate to consult with young people than to have a child-initiated decision-making process developed. Further development came from (Treseder, 1997; Driskell, 2002), who reconceptualised the ladder away from a sequential image towards more bespoke units that depicted the roles of both children and adults within the process (Figure 12)

Assigned but informed
Adults decide on the project and children volunteer for it. The Children understand the project, they know who decided to involve them, and why. Adults respect young peoples views.

Consulted and informed
The project is designed and run by adults, but children are consulted. They have a full understanding of the process and their opinions are taken seriously.

Adult-initiated, shared decisions with children
Adults have the initial idea, but young people are involved in every step of the planning and implementation. Not only are their views considered, but children are also involved in taking decisions.

Degrees of separation

Child-initiated, shared decisions with adults
Children have the ideas, set up projects and come to adults for advice, discussion and support. The adults do not direct, but offer their expertise for young people to consider.

Child-initiated and directed
Young people have the initial idea and decide how the project is to be carried out. Adults are available but do not take charge.

Figure 12: In Empowering Children and Young People: Promoting Involvement in Decision-Making (Treseder, 1997)

As we have seen, participation is so much more than demonstrating that children or young people are involved in a decision-making process: it is about ensuring that when decisions are to be made, we listen to what they have to say, so their views can be taken into account. The debate then moves from one about what could happen to one about children's rights and what should or must happen.

5.6 Young people's rights

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) was written in the 1980s, adopted in 1990 and came into force in the UK in 1992. It is a legally-binding human rights treaty that focuses on the rights of the child. Whilst the document is designed to be read and enacted as a whole, Article 12 is clear that children have the right to:

- Express their views in all matters relating to them
- Their views being given due weight, taking account of age and maturity
- Be heard in administrative proceedings (UNCRC, 2019).

The significance of this is that, for the first time, children were recognised as full human beings with the facility to participate within society fully (Freeman, 1996). Moreover, by signing up for this, the UK government is legally bound to apply it without compromise. The Committee on the Rights of the Child oversees compliance with the treaty and has, on a number of occasions, criticised the government for failing to apply aspects of it fully. In particular, in 2002, it recommended they needed to do more in society as a whole, but specifically in schools, to ensure there was effective and meaningful participation of children (Lundy et al., 2020).

Arguments about the participation of young people in the school decision-making process go beyond legalistic ones. There is evidence that, at the most basic level, young people want to be heard; they want a voice and want adults to value it (Kilkelly et al., 2004). This is also about dignity and respect (Morrow, 1999) and some argue their rights should be written into public decision making (Byrne & Lundy, 2019). Furthermore, from experience, young people in schools are more content when they feel listened to and happier when they feel respected by staff. This view is supported by the recognition that where children are consulted in schools, there have been improvements in the teaching and learning (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004). The experience of many school staff is that they do not believe young people have the capacity to contribute towards decisions or the rights to do so; such arguments are deeply flawed. Ironically the ignorance of some staff towards this legislation strengthens the case for framing it as a rights issue. This is not a gift for adults to give or take away (Lundy et al., 2020).

One of the difficulties in schools is perceptions of what constitutes participation. Again, my experience suggests many schools have a student council as a decorative participative feature

to satisfy OFSTED. However, this is a dangerous approach as there is evidence that having a tokenistic school council is illegal and, more importantly, counterproductive (Pleasance, 2016). It has been found this sort of council has a greater negative effect than having no school council at all (Alderson, 2000; Lafferty-Jenkins, 2017). Kilkelly et al. (2004) reported students complaining their school council meetings were heavily staff-led with trivial agendas that usually include topics such as canteens. Students are unhappy with school forums where nothing ever changes (Alderson, 2000); they see them as a waste of time. It is, therefore, no surprise that the existence of school councils, parliament or senate is no guarantee of children's rights (Wyse, 2001).

The work that Lundy (2020) has done in developing the Lundy model of participation is primarily about simplifying how young people can be given an active role in the decision-making process regarding aspects of their lives. Lundy's space, voice, audience and influence principles align perfectly with my thesis' research design. I aimed to give young people voice and space as co-researchers and participants, as well as an audience through the school's leadership team. The influence was to come with the commitment the school has made in promising to listen and give due regard to the findings and proposals from the research. They intend to implement change to develop the school's mental health strategy.

5.7 Knowledge – accessing it, creating it or co-producing it?

Plato wrote "Those who know and do not act and those who act and do not know" (n.d). From the perspective of a researcher working on a participative action research study with young people in a school setting, this statement challenges me. I reflect on my years of teaching, and it encourages me to question whether I was someone who knew but did not act. The answer to this question may well be for others to provide, but will depend upon the subjective views of those involved with me during that time. From a personal perspective, I know that I worked incredibly hard to improve the lives of thousands of young people. However, this sits counter to what I am learning now as I return as a researcher. My role as a teacher was constricted by a complex mixture of social, political, and institutional factors that limited what I could do. Although I often made a conscious effort to give young people a right to reply or a say in the running of the school, my position often limited rather than enhanced the voice of young people.

I was at the centre of what I would call a traditional school model where the teacher holds the knowledge and transmits this to the student. In this respect, I would be seen by Plato as one of those who "know and do not act". As a researcher, I see potential in young people, that I rarely saw when I was a teacher. From the outset of the study, I have worked hard to switch the emphasis, both in terms of power and knowledge, from **ME**, the adult and ex-teacher who has the knowledge, to **US**, the researcher and the YRT, who will co-produce the knowledge. Over time, as our relationship developed and their confidence grew, they have shown themselves to be perceptive, thoughtful, and knowledgeable individuals with the capacity to contribute much more than previously allowed. I have realised that young people such as these can develop into independent researchers with limited input from adults. I was therefore duty-bound to ensure participants and the YRT were as fully involved in the research as possible. Having recognised that young people can be the co-producers of new knowledge, I needed to explore their roles and responsibilities within the research.

5.8   School context

My aim from the beginning of the research was to involve young people within the school setting as fully as possible; I had concerns about the extent to which this research would be participatory. Being aware that there are different levels of young people's participation (Mercer, 2002; Cook-Sather, 2020) in educational research allowed me to explore how my time as a teacher may impact my work as a researcher. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, my school role would often impact my behaviour; personal values were occasionally compromised as I was required to make uncomfortable decisions. This is one of the reasons that I was drawn towards participatory action research. I wanted to help young people by improving their access to support in schools. The partnerships I developed with them during this research led me to conclude that they can become change agents in schools with guidance.

Being aware that young people are often **used** as objects of research within a school setting (Erickson & Christman, 1996; Wöhrer & Höcher, 2012), I intended to ensure this research was conducted from the young person's perspective, something not commonly adopted (Noffke & Somekh, 2008). As I discuss in section 7.7, I visited the school and conducted a PPI exercise. The findings from this exercise concurred with Moules & Kirwan (2005), who found young people were more likely to open up to their peers than they were to adults. If I

intended getting a critical view of the whole school mental health strategy from a young person's perspective, and they were more comfortable talking to someone closer to their own age, they were then more likely to give insightful and authentic answers in this setting.

5.8.1 My positionality within the research

Whilst the methods used will be explored in detail later in the following chapter, my position within the work was an important aspect to consider. Before looking at the theory underpinning this, it is important to understand the context of my history in the research school. I was the Assistant Headteacher with a pastoral responsibility, and my potential influence cannot be underestimated. I was responsible for attendance, behaviour and welfare issues, and found myself in conflict with young people, often every week. One of my tasks was administering all exclusions from school, a contentious area that again proved to be a challenge regarding my relationships with some young people and sometimes parents. By its nature, my position was seen by young people as powerful, as overseeing behaviour, I often had to make decisions regarding young people's sanctions. As a researcher returning to my previous school, it was clear that my lived history with the institution and its population could not be ignored. Having explored the literature concerning power in detail in chapter 4, it is pertinent to reinforce the idea that adults are seen to have more power than children (Cooke & Kothari, 2001). In accepting this, it is important to ensure this is not replicated in my research. Therefore, I needed to ensure power issues were addressed ethically (Edwards & Mauther, 2002), something that I explore in detail in Chapter 9.

Bearing in mind my history outlined above and returning to the school as a researcher, I was in a somewhat unique position as an outsider who was an insider, and now probably sit somewhere between the two. As I went into the research, I was aware of the insider/outsider debate, and I followed learning from Corbin, Dwyer & Buckle (2018) to surmise that the space in-between was the place I was going to occupy. However, my position was complex and did not fit neatly into the insider/outsider debate. The research structure saw me as an ex-teacher returning to the school with which I had an intimate relationship. I understood how it functioned, I had worked with many of the staff and, as such, felt like an insider. Within the research, there was also an indirect triangular relationship between me, the YRT and the participants. After the recruitment of the participants, I had no contact with them, leaving the YRT to work with them. However, although this neutralised my influence on them, they

would still see me as an outsider. I constantly deliberated over my relationship with the YRT and quickly recognised that as an ex-teacher, I would be seen as an outsider. However, I wanted to work collaboratively with them, make joint decisions and empower them to act; something needing trust. This would require my position to shift from an outsider towards being an insider.

The consideration of my positionality was about how "tuned-in" (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994) I was to the experiences of all the groups involved, the school and staff, the YRT and the participants. I was cognisant of the fact that, having worked at the school, I had subconscious biases at play and did not want these to influence the research process with any of the groups above. Furthermore, I was also aware that as a qualitative researcher, "*There is no neutrality. There is only greater or less awareness of one's biases*" (Rose, 1985, p.77). I worked hard with the YRT to reinforce my neutrality through conversations with them individually, as a group, and on occasions when we were involved in meetings with school staff. At times I deliberately needed the YRT to see me as part of their team rather than as an ex-teacher. This ongoing process made me aware that my position was constantly shifting.

This process enabled me to embrace my positionality. I became aware that I was not separate from the research but a central cog, part of all aspects and essential to it (Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2018). Further to this was my need to separate out the bias my past life may bring to the research. As I discuss in section 5.8.3 this was achieved through a constant reflective process, which enabled me to recognise that the most important aspect was an awareness of both my own feelings and the feelings of others. One cannot have true self-understanding without other-understanding (Fay, 1996). From this research perspective, it is impossible for me to position myself in one camp or another; the complexity of schools and their populations makes the task too difficult. Rather than attempting to position myself within the project, exploring how to remain true to myself and ensure honesty and integrity was more important. This thinking process is an area I will explore in the following section. The tensions that my positioning created throughout the research are something I will return to in the discussion chapter.

5.8.2 How is robust thinking ensured within the process of action research?

In section 5.4.3 I highlight the AR cycle and how it has been conceptualised in different ways; at its core are the twin processes of looking and thinking. Hendricks (2017) and Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon (2014) use the terms 'reflection' and 'reflect' as the thinking part of the AR cycle. Reflection in AR is an explicit and active role that needs to be directly linked to further action. It is not about a passive reflective approach (McNiff, & Whitehead, 2012). The data produced within this research had a complex foundation coming from the three-way dialogues between me, the YRT and the participants. This research was about giving voice to young people, who often go unheard (Rothman, 2007). I agree with Francis & Hester (2012), who propose that the daily lives of the researchers should be part of the society explored, and their experiences and action used as data. The methodology I designed for this research required a process through which I and the YRT could turn our own experiences, actions and emotions into data for analysis (Roy & Uekusa, 2020). Furthermore, as researchers, we were part of the school's social world. Therefore a starting point of this social inquiry could be our own experiences and activities, and our reflections upon them (Francis & Hester, 2012).

The data collection period saw me adapt rigorous engagement with reflectivity as a tool through which I could enhance the research process. My daily meetings with individual YRT members and my weekly YRT team meetings were functioning reflective sessions. My task after that, having decided to develop a reflective methodological thread through the research, was to engage the YRT to take a more active reflective role. Enabling the YRT to develop reflective approaches also enhanced the study's validity by giving them deeper insight and a more rigorous understanding of their sociocultural experiences (Roy & Uekusa, 2020).

5.8.3 A process of collaborative reflection to enhance the research process

The reflective process I developed was an incremental one. In the early days of the data collection, as the YRT attended weekly meetings with their participants, I ensured that I met them after each meeting to discuss the process, record the conversation as data, and build the YRT's self-confidence. This allowed close one-to-one conversations where we discussed what was working and what was not, enabling us to develop creative solutions to obstacles arising. As the process moved forward, I became aware of the need to draw the young researchers together more closely so they could share their experiences and contribute to group problem-solving. The needs of the YRT varied. Some were confident, enjoyed working

individually and chose to continue this way; this was particularly true of young people in Year 13. The other YRT members decided to work in pairs or small groups; they experimented to find the best option for themselves and the participants. However, I also initiated weekly meetings so we could explore the details of what we were doing and how we were doing it. This work was not merely about data collection but about developing relationships to improve people's lives. The younger Year 12s had a different dynamic; whilst one or two of the group worked similarly to Year 13, the majority preferred group work; four of them paired up and met with two groups of younger people. As with Year 13, we also had weekly group meetings to ensure we could focus on our all-important goals and values.

As our confidence grew and we started to understand each other and develop a deeper trust-based relationship, the group meetings began taking on a greater reflective significance. I recognised that I had an opportunity to establish this process more formally by using the discussions as prompts which would spark reflection via a written process. As we embarked on a joint paper, the writing that came back from the YRT was not only high quality but gave me an insight into the challenges and successes of the process from their viewpoint. Reflection is about facilitating mental processes to enable a better understanding of confused or unstructured ideas based on reprocessing our thoughts and emotions (Moon, 2005). In exploring the theory around reflection, numerous models offer frameworks to structure this type of process, such as those by Kolb and Moon. Whilst these seem to concentrate upon individual reflection, I was searching for something which could support us as a research team to explore our individual and collaborative experiences. To this end, I developed the collaborative self-reflection tool (CSRT) (Figure 13) to support each YRT member to reflect and learn. The group then met to collaborate through a discussion of individual learning, enabling collective synthesis and planning as the research moved forward. This tool came from a collaborative process between the YRT and me. We worked individually, contemplating an aspect of the research, before meeting as a group to collect our thoughts and plan for the following work.
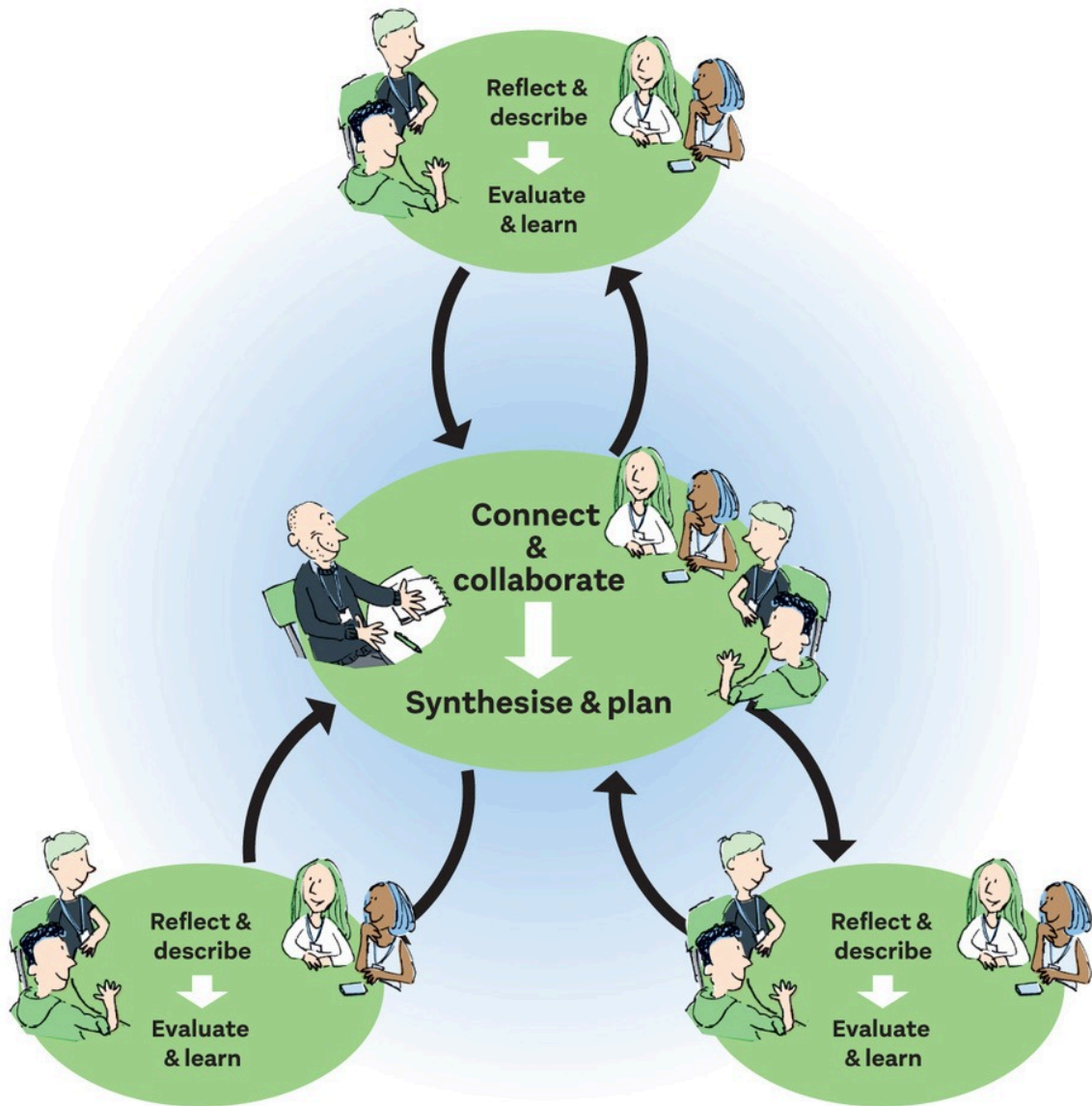
Figure 13: Collaborative self-reflection tool

Collaborative self-reflection tool descriptors:

Step 1. Individuals reflect and describe

Each team member explores their thoughts and feelings during specific aspects of the research. What did that aspect tell them about the research, the young people they were doing the research with or the research process?

Step 2. Individuals evaluate and learn

Each team member identified what worked and what did not. What has been learnt from the process, and what needs to change going forward?

Step 3. Collectively connect and collaborate

The group of researchers come together to connect and share their learning. The team develops an empathetic appreciation of the work through this collaborative process.

Step 4. Synthesise and plan

Learning is synthesised from an appreciative position of common understanding to revisit the previous work or move on to the next aspect of the research.

Since completing this section of the research process, I realised that there was a further step in this reflection. This saw me, in the researcher role, sit outside the whole collaborative process and view it from an autonomous perspective. I realise that the word autonomous could be challenged, but I think it is important for me to distinguish the part I play in the research process. In Figure 13, I actively work with the YRT as we collectively reflect on what is happening to learn and plan for the next cycle. However, I am suggesting that as the researcher responsible for this work, I have an autonomous role, which means I need to take responsibility for the outcomes. I have therefore included an updated model, Figure 14, titled Researcher summative reflection. For this, I have included a fifth step:

Step 5. Researcher's summative reflections

In addition to being within the research process, the researcher also takes on an outsider role. This research is his responsibility, and he needs to be prepared to make decisions after viewing the process from an autonomous perspective.

Again, this could be challenged, as anyone involved in steps one to four would find it very difficult to divorce themselves from what has taken place and make independent decisions. However, once the researcher accepts this premise, there is a valuable role to be played by them as they conduct an overview of this part of the research.

Figure 14: Researcher summative reflections

I intended that the benefits of pursuing a reflective process with the YRT would bring substantial gains. From academic writing to using SWOT analysis charts, or one-to-one and group discussions through to the use of the CSRT, a steady process of repetitive reflective engagement has supported the development of individuals, the team and the research process.

Developing this further thinking links my research with that from the University of Chicago Consortium of School Research (CCSR) (Figure 15) and their model to show how various factors interact and contribute towards young people's development, including how they interact with the world around them (McNeil et al., 2019). The model highlights how young people can grow through an action and reflection cycle. This process builds their skills and increases their experiences of agency. It is enhanced by a method of learning by doing, assisting young people in developing their sense of self and perspectives on others. This feeds into the growth process and enriches their journey towards intentional life choices (McNeil et al., 2019).
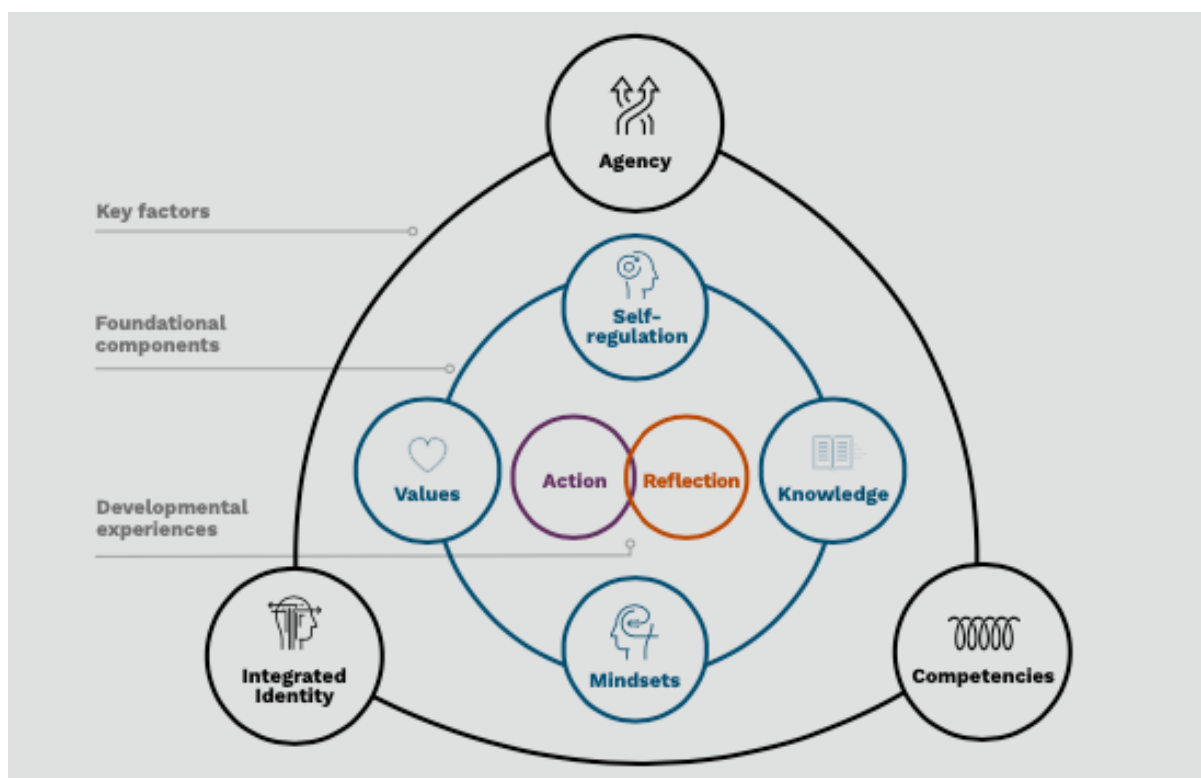
Figure 15: The UChicago framework. Taken from 'A Framework of Outcomes 2.0' (McNeil, et al., 2019)[2]

5.9   Reflexive approaches

The approaches described explain how the work was constructed between myself and the YRT through a reflective approach. However, this only partially covers how I worked as the person leading the research. I found the answer in the term 'reflexivity', which is defined in the Cambridge Dictionary in the following way: "the fact of someone being able to examine his or her own feelings, reactions, and motives and how these influence what he or she does or thinks in a situation". Cunliffe (2003 p.985) meanwhile stated: "…that we are constantly constructing meaning and social realities as we interact with others and talk about our experience."

I used reflexivity to examine my feelings, reactions, and motives within the research process. In particular, attention was focused on the knowledge and reality constructed through the social interactions between myself and the YRT in the research. This was an opportunity-

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[2] The original source from the University of Chicago could not be found

laden yet critical process that contributed original knowledge about procedures, relationships, and personal learning of the YRT, the participants and myself, the researcher.

Through dialogue (Reason, 2006), this approach focussed on ensuring all participants had the opportunity to contribute and communicate in a way that was accessible to the individual regardless of age, ability or status. It has been suggested that dialogue is about the processes, suppositions and reality that make up everyday life (Issacs, 1993; Chiva et al., 2014); this is the approach I took by tapping into the lived experience of young people in the school.

Throughout the research, I 'stood back' and enabled young people; they were experts in their own lives (Cowie & Khoo, 2017). My aim was for the ones with lived experience to be reflexive about my role to ensure that I did not dilute the findings of the young people. Through dialogue, I encouraged the YRT to think for themselves and decide what was important to them, what they should include and what they should reject; they needed to be the decision-makers. By being reflexive, I challenged myself to ensure the findings were from their perspective, not that of an older white male. The iterative work that I did with the YRT, in examining the data in conjunction with my reflexive diary, and continual reading of literature, helped us make new decisions about the next steps, but also ensured that I was aware of both myself and the research processes (Robertson, 2000). My recognition that I could not stand outside this research was evidence that my values would permeate the inquiry, something the YRT needed to be aware of. In this context, reflexivity required my commitment to the value of this awareness (Robertson, 2000). Equally important was my academic input. Making decisions to introduce ideas, concepts and thoughts from other projects needed to enhance the decision-making process for young people. There was a continual balancing act between allowing the YRT to get on with the work and recognising that there may be a need for abstract thought, ideas and input from my academic work. By working this way, I aimed to safeguard the research and align with CCM.

My position within this research, the space in-between, has been highlighted above, as has my need to be critically reflexive. This thesis is based upon a philosophy of social constructivism; using autobiographical techniques has enabled me to develop a reflective process to derive meaning from experience (Saldana, 2020). This is not conducted in isolation but takes account of context and social interaction, and therefore supports my social constructivist philosophy (Saldana, 2020). I have taken the opportunity to use critical

reflexivity by drawing on my autobiographical writing to develop and explore my learning and understanding. I agree with Roberts (2019), who suggests that using an autobiographical tool improves critical thinking. This, in turn, assisted me in addressing potential imbalances with the YRT. It was important that, as an ethical researcher, I paid attention to and addressed, rather than ignored, power positions (Edwards & Mauther, 2002).

5.10 How the reflective and reflexive approaches helped me navigate the mess

My wish to enable the YRT as co-researchers required me to relinquish a certain level of control to them. My loss of control, particularly around processes, has been like learning to ski again, travelling downhill with little ability to control the descent, having frequent crashes and showing little, if any, style. I arrive at my destination, but how is somewhat of a mystery! The likeness to skiing continues beyond this, as the process as a novice skier and novice researcher can lead to a scrambled brain, confusion about the direction, and a lack of confidence about any tangible outcomes. In relation to research, Cook (2009) describes this as mess, something she sees as essential for progress in action research. Furthermore, she argues that it should be acknowledged within any research process. Firstly, because it is there, secondly because denying its existence would undermine other researchers and thirdly, and in my opinion most importantly, because there is a reason for its existence.

Barthes (1982) writes about 'punctum', the concept of knowledge that we have that is just beneath the surface but difficult for us to articulate. We are aware of it, but it is hidden from us and, as researchers, we will often shy away from it because of the difficulties we have engaging with it and making sense of it. This is the mess I found myself working in. As I worked with the YRT, wrestling to make sense of our collective thoughts and deliberations, we were engaged in a collaborative process of co-labouring that involved hard work, often leaving me feeling distinctly uncomfortable (Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 1993). This uncomfortable place was the space for creativity and the development of new thought (Cook, 2009). It should be a reason for celebrating that, on occasions, we did not know what we were doing (Atkinson & Claxton, 2000). This punctum, or mess, is where there was an innovative collaboration between those who know and those who act to develop the new knowledge required to advance the research; it is where the work with the YRT was situated. As one YRT member reflects:

"At the beginning of the project, I found it difficult to communicate and express my ideas and thoughts on the different topics we discussed as I was unsure if what I was saying was applicable. Though as the project grew more into a collaborative process, I felt it was easier to share how I felt about matters – especially during our weekly meetings between the young research team and Dave. We started to analyse our findings as a group during these meetings, meaning there were varying perspectives on how our plans came together and what could be improved, leaving us plenty of opportunities to get the most out of the project we possibly could. We concluded that the more creative the meetings were, the more open, engaged, and expressive the participants were. I have noticed the confidence of everyone in the group has significantly improved – not only by creating a rapport with the participants, but also with creative thinking/generating ideas, problem-solving, and working together as a team."

Taking a constructivist approach opened up the opportunity to reap the benefits of working with people, guided by their perspectives and developing new knowledge on their grounds. This was about developing the research from the viewpoint of the young people I was working with, and not about introducing theoretical frameworks imposed upon them. This leads to authentic research based on appropriate, well-informed choices by the co-research process (Manning, 1997). Validity and authenticity was secured further by returning to those who act, the YRT, to check that what had been discovered made sense to them (Lather, 1986). Engaging with the mess was, therefore, part of the collaborative process and about exploring what we did not know and what we nearly knew, thus resulting in a more rigorous research process (Cook, 2009). A crucial aspect of getting to grips with the mess was the ability to stand back, find some space, and reflect upon observations and the process. As I have explained, this needed to be done individually and as a group to make sense of it.

5.11 Research analysis

One of the central themes of this research was to collaborate with the YRT to ensure the findings were authentic, having been created from our three-way dialogue. I had to ensure the analysis came from the subjective experiences of everyday life, and this was about how young people's world was understood rather than an objective reality of it (Boyland, 2019). Social constructivism enables a relational reality to be constructed by individuals working together. Biosocial interpretation develops through biological cognition evolving via social interaction as consensus is reached (Cottone, 2001). In this research analysis, the biosocial interpretation came from the dialogue between the three parties, people from differing backgrounds collaborating on an equal epistemological level (Gómez et al., 2011). This research was about enabling young people to bring their reconstructions together around the consensus (Boyland, 2019).

As I have highlighted in the introduction, this was practitioner-based research. As such, the research process was not straightforward; the challenge came about as we aimed to conduct data collection followed by a process of data analysis. As I explain below, this was an assumption on my part. At the outset, I intended to apply an inductive thematic analysis approach; the YRT would meet with participants, and through transcripts of my debrief meetings with them, we would codify the data. I expected to conduct a text-book thematic analysis to systematically identify, organise, and gain insight into patterns of meaning within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Whilst I used the six-phase approach to the thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) as a guide, what transpired, due to the nature of the research design and the make-up of the research team, was a hybrid dialogic version. My adaptation saw codes and themes develop through discussion and experimentation, as well as scrutiny of our texts, made from the transcripts of YRT/participant meetings.

The importance of the ongoing dialogue between all research parties at each step of the process cannot be underestimated, as it enabled the team to scrutinise, adjust, re-test and confirm threads in the data. Whilst ongoing dialogue was about the data, it was also coupled with the sharing and reinforcing of my values. This was achieved by being fully attentive to the team by listening, discussing, and collaborating with group members as we navigated a complex and circuitous route through the research and the analysis.

This was true for my meetings with individual YRT members, our YRT meetings and the YRT/participant meetings. The weekly AR cycles became more than a data collection exercise as they involved an ongoing analysis process. This process is explained in detail in the following chapter.

5.12 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I have detailed the underpinning philosophy of this research and how this has informed the research processes. As a qualitative study that has followed a social constructivist path, I have adapted an AR cyclical approach alongside CCM, enabling me to collaborate closely with the YRT. This approach was initially conducted as YPAR, which has since evolved into YPDAR. To ensure the integrity and authenticity of the research, I have adopted both reflexive and reflective ways of working. These approaches, including the CSRT, helped me support the YRT and helped us think through the issues individually and as a group with a biosocial approach. In addition, this has enabled me also to distance myself from the collaborative reflection and view it as the author of this research. This chapter has also contextualised the data collection and analysis approaches, which I will develop further in the next part of this thesis.

Part 2. From theory to action

Part two of this thesis is concerned with the practicalities of the research. There are 2 chapters designed to take readers from the philosophical and theoretical context of the research to what I did and how I did it. I start with a chapter highlighting the research methods, from data collection to analysis. The following chapter then explores my ethical approach to the research as it reflects my journey from procedural ethics at the commencement of the research to the practicalities of the relational ethics I developed.

Chapter 6: Research methods

6.1 Chapter introduction

This chapter explores the participative principles of the research, and how these principles of equality, inclusion and dialogue impacted the methods used to collect data. This is also reflected in how young people were recruited for the research. The cycle was also influenced by my understanding of the terms vivencia, praxis and conscientisation, and I have developed my thoughts on these concepts in relation to this research. I then look in detail at how the relationship between myself, the YRT and the participants influenced the action research cycle we created. This includes explaining how the data collection and analysis became part of the same process. I share examples of how this came about and how the YRT, in particular, was instrumental in this. The developing relationships between myself and the YRT were also fundamental to the success of the research.

As discussed earlier in the methodology, introducing a YRT as collaborative partners is one of the ways I intended to tackle the concerns around my previous role in a school. Whilst I hoped this approach would start to redress the balance, I needed to take care not to imagine that all issues around power would be resolved (Groundwater-Smith, Dockett & Bottrell, 2015). It was, therefore, important in delivering authentic work; I needed to reflect on these developing relationships and the processes involved in this PAR.

6.2 The recruitment of young people for the research

An important aspect of this research was how young people would be selected to participate in the study. In the introduction, I explained my rationale for working with the pupil premium cohort as participants and the 6th form as a YRT. I worked with staff members who supported both cohorts of young people to develop strategies to recruit volunteers. I will explain the process for each below.

6.2.1 Participant young research team and recruitment

I arranged with the staff member responsible for the pupil premium cohort to meet with small groups in order to explain the research and their potential role in it should they choose to volunteer. For those interested, I prepared letters and consent forms for them to take to their

parents. These were then returned to the staff member by those interested. During the recruitment process, I met approximately 100 young people, 40 of whom took letters, of which 38 were returned. During the same period, I attended assemblies for the 6th form and promoted the research as something in which they could contribute to positive change in the school, and something that would enhance their own skill set; this resulted in 20 young people volunteering.

The initial plan involved pairing YRT members and participants for meetings. However, the pandemic interrupted the process, as the case study school was shut just as the meetings were due to start. After consultation with school staff, we attempted to complete meetings via an online video platform. Of the initial groups, six participants agreed to participate, and only three of the YRT wanted to do it this way. Despite numerous attempts to run these meetings, only two were held before this approach was abandoned. When we returned to school, the two groups were approached to start the meetings. We experienced dropout from both groups; ten participants and seven of the YRT decided to withdraw from the research.

6.3   Young people as collaborators in research design

To develop a research project that is a sustained collective inquiry, the collaborative process must include its design (Eynon, Torok, & Gambino, 2013). I had already identified the project's scope; however, the YRT needed input into the most appropriate methods. There was an expectation that in an attempt to collect data from a wide range of participants, multiple methods would be required. At the beginning of the research, I had thoughts about how the YRT would collect data, but it was clear that the YRT themselves should lead this area. I, therefore, developed a methodological tool (Figure 16) that I introduced to the YRT. This aim was twofold. It was an educative instrument as it helped me explain to them the broader purpose of the research in relation to knowledge creation. It also enabled me to introduce a variety of potential methods the YRT could use with participants.
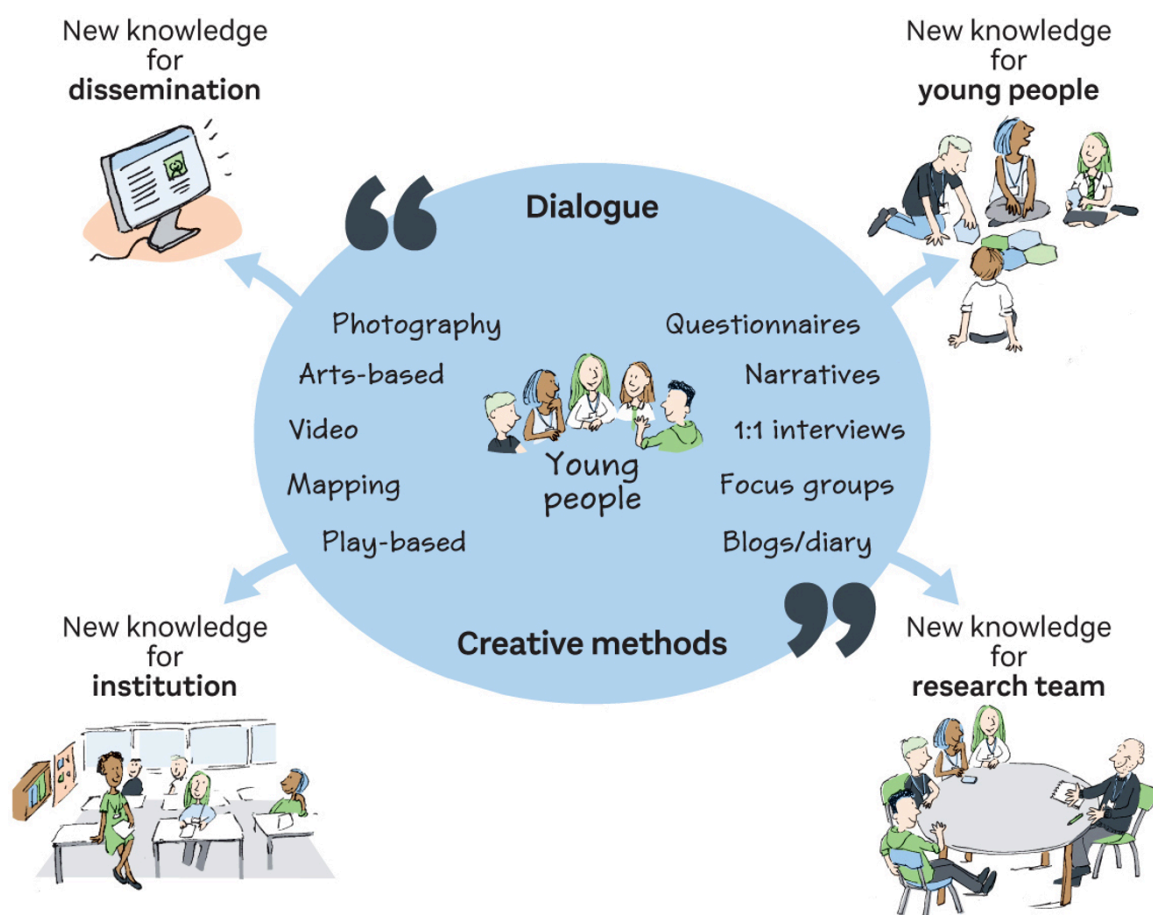
Figure 16: Methodological tool

Initial conversations based on the tool centred around more traditional data collection methods such as questionnaires, one-to-one interviews, focus groups, blogs, and diaries. We also discussed the possibility of using more creative methods, such as drawing, story-telling through narratives, visual sociology and semiotics, and mapping or play-based activities. However, I was also conscious that the YRT may need to experience conversations with the participants to make decisions about how they collected data. The scope of this thesis does not allow a detailed analysis of each method mentioned. However, research has shown (Groundwater-Smith, Dockett & Bottrell, 2015) each has its advantages and challenges. Table 2 below summarises the advantages and disadvantages that the YRT expressed about the methods they chose to engage with the participants.

Table 2: Advantages and disadvantages of YRT selected methods

Methods chosen by YRT to collect data	Advantages	Disadvantages
One-to-one conversations	Opportunity to get an individual's thoughts	Sometimes difficult to motivate a response, particularly at beginning of research
Group conversations	The collective can motivate others to speak and engage.	Without careful management one individual can dominate. An individual's comments can sometimes lead others to follow.
Photo elicitation	Engaging and active way of collecting data. Helped develop relationship between participants and YRT.	Didn't lend itself to the specific task that.
Art based activities	Engaging way in which to develop dialogue. Active and fun. Helped develop relationship between participants and YRT.	Some participants lacked in confidence and were self-conscious about drawing etc.
Concept maps	Engaging way in which to develop dialogue. Active and fun. Helped develop relationship between participants and YRT. A good visual tool for connecting ideas.	None identified
Interactive tasks based on YRT developed activities	Engaging way in which to develop dialogue. Active and fun. Helped develop relationship between participants and YRT.	None identified

I was also acutely aware that the key to the data collection would be the three-way relationship between myself, the YRT and the participants. The initial focus for the YRT/participant meetings focused on getting to know the participants. On reflection, my meetings with the YRT also followed a similar pattern: the more we met, the more open we became and the better we worked together. What very quickly became apparent was that, to engage the participants and to develop the trust required, the YRT needed to introduce a variety of different activities with a common thread. Meetings were required to be both fun and active. The YRT started experimenting with potential data collection methods by adapting a sorting exercise I had used with them. Once they saw how successful this was in engaging the participants, they used their imagination to design their own activities. These included using outline figures, hexagons, photo-elicitation and poster making. These methods helped the participants find their voice as it enhanced their engagement and, ultimately, the relationships between themselves and the YRT, which is critical to this research (Broussine,

2008). I regularly reminded the YRT that these qualitative methods aimed to draw out a dialogue between themselves and participants in a search for rich data. I was becoming aware that dialogue was a central tenant to this research, being much more than a method. As I will explore later in this chapter, it also became crucial to the analysis process.

6.4   The influence of vivencia, praxis and conscientisation on the methods

The concepts behind this work were straightforward; they were about participation, action, reflection and research. However, the processes that enabled the realisation of these concepts were more complex (Glassman & Erdem, 2014). In section 6.5, I will explain how the data collection process, through numerous action research cycles, merged with the analysis. However, it is important to understand the theory underpinning the process before exploring it. By choosing to follow a participative route with a CCM influence, one of the most critical aspects of the research was the collaboration between myself and young people. The lived experience of the YRT was vital to the success of the research. This is an example of vivencia, defined as the full experience of events lived through their participation (Glassman & Erdem, 2014). The power of vivencia is that it cannot be observed; it can only be experienced, felt and lived (Glassman & Erdem, 2014). As someone who has not experienced the mental health strategy from a young person's perspective, this is not something I can draw on unless I can partner with young people. Thus, this is something I did and which I outline in section 7.5.

The transformation of vivencia in this research, bringing about change in school, is achieved through praxis (Glassman & Erdem, 2014). The process I expand upon below is an example of praxis, as it was an ongoing form of authentic action and reflection to bring about change (Crotty, 1998). Freire (1970) insisted the elements of praxis could not be divided; they were one and the same, and as such were a creative force (Crotty, 1998). By working in this way, I ensured the YRT's critical self-insertion into their reality, enabling them as re-creators and not just spectators (Freire, 1970). The process required a constant cycle of dialogue, reflection and action between myself and the YRT, the YRT and participants, and amongst the YRT when we met as a group; this was something other than what could be planned (Glassman & Erdem, 2014). Crotty (1998, p.153) describes it as "Action/reflection in fellowship and solidarity". This was what Freire (1970) called critical reflection and links to the process of conscientisation or critical consciousness, which is the awakening of people to

their capacity to change their own lives (Glassman & Erdem, 2014). Only dialogue can create critical thinking, but it cannot exist without it, meaning that dialogue is central to conscientisation (Crotty, 1998).

Conscientisation is therefore closely linked to vivencia, and praxis, as those marginalised within communities become aware of new perspectives, empowerment and a possibility of change. Through the research methods described below, the YRT took the opportunity to think and reflect critically, before taking action as part of a praxial process (Glassman & Erdem, 2014). Our research was not based on an abstract hypothesis but on observation of human relationships within a complex social structure. We aimed to gain insight into the working of the whole school mental health strategy to improve it, and so improve the lives of young people. The research process was a cycle of ongoing exploration and understanding, "action as praxis, research as conscientization and reflection leading to transformation of praxis" (Glassman & Erdem, 2014, p. 214). As young people are marginalised in schools, this research was also about rebalancing power in this setting; young people were given an opportunity to contribute to running an aspect of the school. It was also important that the research methodology and methods respected young people as partners in the research and not as subjects of it; hence our adaptation of CCM and its equal epistemological philosophy. This was a collective problem-solving process in a shared world which was challenging and problematic (Borda, 2006). This was about benefiting the community by creating a setting for young people to share their vivencia with adults in their world through processes of reflection and change (Cammarota & Fine, 2008). Section 6.5 details how the research unfolded into a five-step process incorporating data collection and analysis.

6.5   From data collection to analysis

6.5.1   Detailed research analysis

In the section below, I build a step-by-step picture of how my analytical method developed. As I worked through the AR cycles and the steps below, what struck me was the overlap between methodological processes and the methods of analysis. The steps below are an indication of the sequential and iterative nature of the work. What is significant is that whilst all steps were integral to the process, Step 3 was the one where time was spent discussing, deliberating and reflecting within an intense dialogic process. This is where we came together

for collaborative reflection after individual reflection from individual meetings. This was the time we made decisions, and the critical step within this dialogic process.

Step 1. YRT/participant meetings

The YRT met with their participants every week for four months. These took on various different forms depending upon the YRT members. Some worked on a one-to-one basis, and others chose to work in pairs. On other occasions, the YRT decided that all the participants should meet together, so large whole group sessions were also held at times. My desire to give autonomy to the YRT meant that when challenges arose and solutions came through a process of dialogue within the research team, my default position was to encourage the YRT to take control and make the final decision themselves. This process' success was based on the relationships that developed between the YRT and their own participants; I learnt to trust the YRT members' judgements as they were more than capable of making the right call on the working of the YRT/participant groups.

Step 2. Debrief between the researcher and individual YRT members following YRT/participant meeting

After each YRT/participant meeting, debrief meetings were held between myself and the YRT member(s) where we would explore what had taken place; this was recorded, and a transcription was made that both myself and the YRT members reflected upon and scrutinised. During the meetings, we would look at what had been successful and what had been less so. These transcripts were used for the thematic analysis process as we developed an inductive, bottom-up data-driven approach (Braun & Clarke, 2012)[3]. This is where we started to discover the codes and themes as our process of insightful invention supported us in discovering new knowledge (van Manen, 1990).

Step 3. Weekly research team meetings

The research team meetings process was built upon the foundation of collaborative dialogue based on epistemological equity. Reflective conversations drew initial observations from individual meetings and allowed us to compare and contrast the participants' thoughts. It also facilitated in-depth dialogue within the group that enabled individual and group

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[3] Whilst I am aware of Braun and Clarke's 2021 edition of 'Thematic Analysis' I still refer to their 2012 edition in this thesis.

interpretations. As a research team, we discussed the findings from the previous week, and our deliberations then led us to a focus for the following week. To divorce these discussions from the analytical process is an almost impossible task, as the research process enabled us to develop threads that the YRT would then go and explore with the participants; it was part of the research and analysis methods. The acts of dialogue between myself, the YRT and the participants were part of communicative action as they were based upon validity, rather than power claims (Flecha, 2009). This stage of the work was crucial if I was to develop findings based on the voice of the YRT. I prioritised my own individual reflexive process, where I regularly challenged myself about whether findings were from the YRT or if I had filtered and distorted them.

Throughout this process, the YRT were given opportunities to summarise the work and draw conclusions. There were challenges to this work around the YRT's time availability and their varying personal commitments. I supported and led them; I suggested tasks for them to complete and could not (and did not want to) force work on them. The process through which the analysis grew and developed was based on the meeting patterns described above. On one occasion, to help us reflect on our progress, I conducted a hexagon exercise with the YRT. We explored the causes of mental health problems related to school character and grouped and linked them to help us create codes and themes. The results can be seen below in Figure 17.
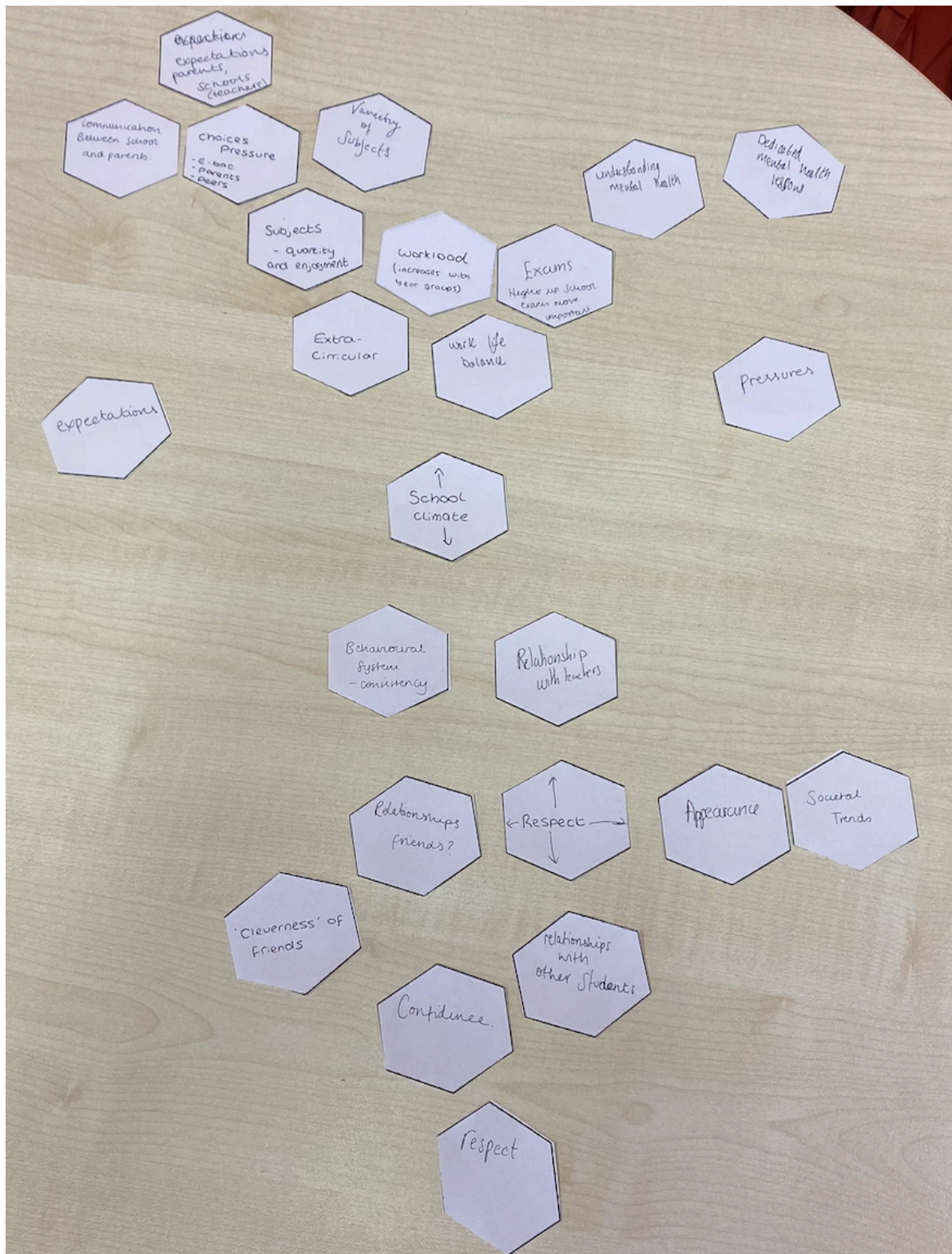
Figure 17: School Climate Hexagon Summary Exercise

To develop this exercise further, and after reviewing school character literature (chapter 2) concerning mental health, I developed a tool to use as a discussion starter with the YRT,

Figure 18 below. Whilst YRT voice was my ultimate aim, I was responsible for guiding and prompting them by introducing academic theory to the process. The objective was to link theory on school character to young people's lived experience to support us all in developing new knowledge.

Leadership and structures:
- Values of respect and fairness are clear and understood by all
- Staff motivate learners by being supportive and rewarding effort
- All students have a trusted adult they can talk to
- The behaviour systems are fair
- Staff and young people are proud of their school

School Climate and Mental Health

Environment:
- The school feels a safe place to be
- Staff set high expectations but offer support to students
- Young people are helped to understand and deal with exam stress
- Staff encourage young people to offer their thoughts and opinions
- Young people feel they have a part to play in the running of the school
- Young people are helped to put things right when they get something wrong
- Young people have a sense of belonging in the school

Relationships:
- Staff and young people get on well and have respect for each other
- Young people mostly get on with each other
- The school values all groups of young people
- The school celebrates diversity
- Young people feel as if they are respected by staff

Figure 18: School climate and mental health tool[4]

From this, we discussed their findings, and they then completed the hexagon exercise (Figure 17). In discussion, we decided that a productive way forward would be for them to develop the hexagons into a framework model linked to the influences that impact young people's mental health in schools; unfortunately, they had little time to do this because of their academic commitments and so we all agreed I would produce a version. This, however, would be my interpretation of our joint hexagon exercise. The result was Figure 19 (below).

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[4] At this point in the research process, I had not formulated my views on school character. The tool therefore uses the term School Climate.
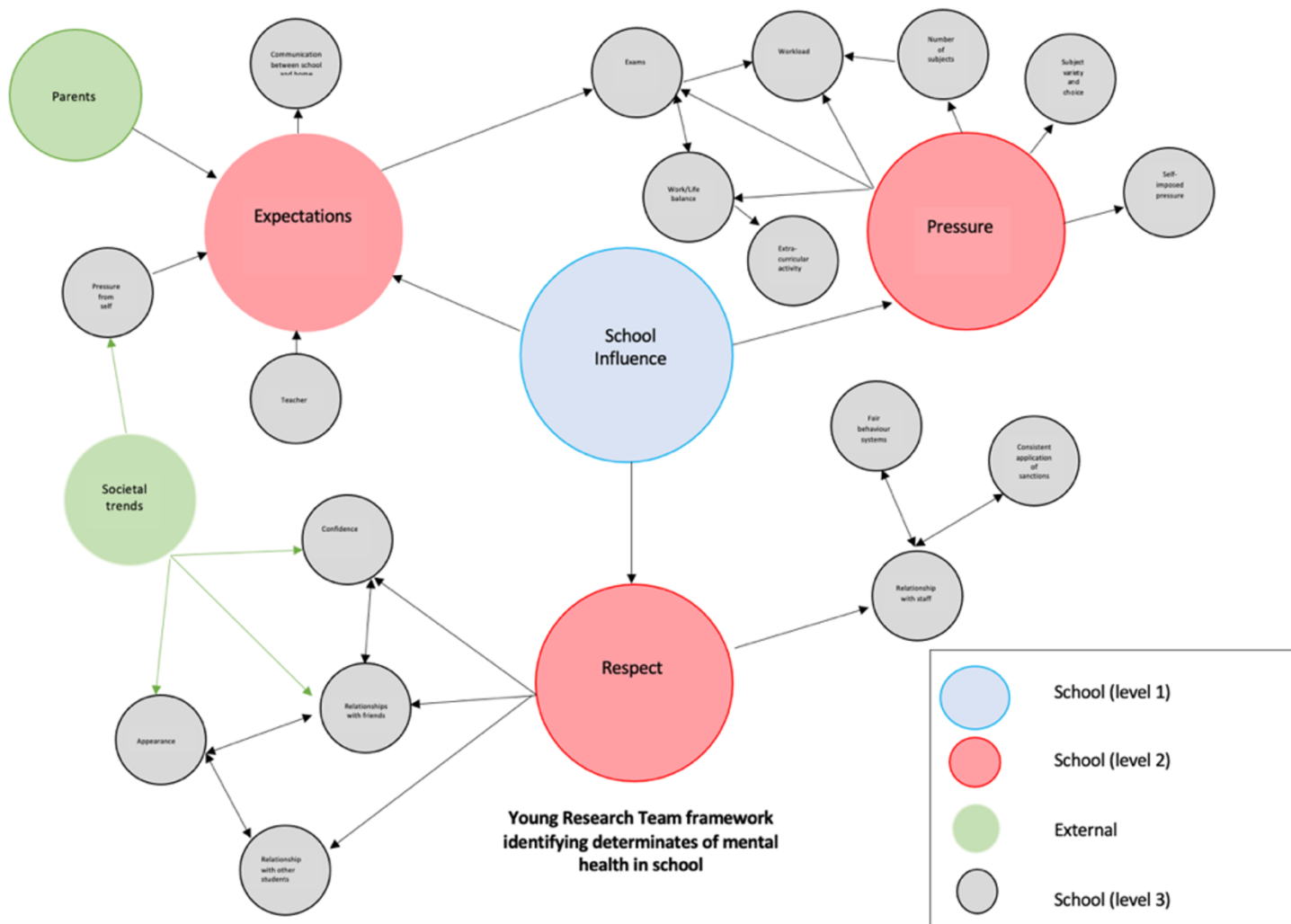
Figure 19: Framework developed by the researcher taken from YRT hexagon exercise

I circulated this to the YRT for feedback, asking for their thoughts. What I got back surprised me initially, as two of them went away and changed what I had presented. I had produced something from their own work, but as my diary entry from the time recognised, the results should not have shocked me.

> "...my diagram was their information filtered through my eyes, the eyes of a 60-year-old white man! It isn't, therefore, a great surprise that they wanted to change it so that it is their work seen through their eyes."
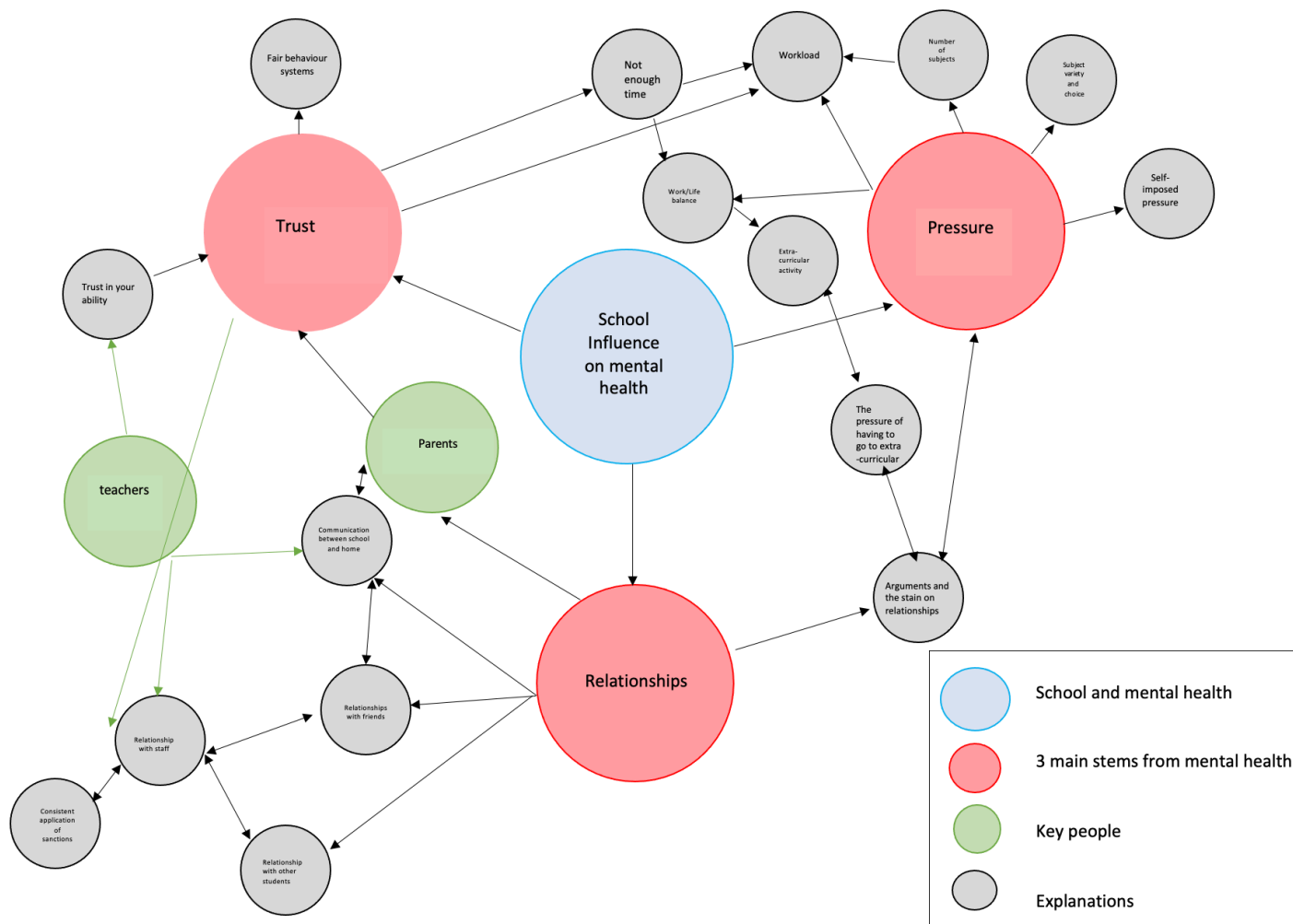
Figure 20: YRT framework model 1 adapted from researcher model fig. 19

Content within the figure:

- Fair behaviour systems
- Not enough time
- Workload
- Number of subjects
- Subject variety and choice
- Trust
- Trust in your ability
- Work/Life balance
- Pressure
- Self-imposed pressure
- Extra-curricular activity
- School Influence on mental health
- teachers
- Parents
- The pressure of having to go to extra-curricular
- Communication between school and home
- Arguments and the stain on relationships
- Relationship with staff
- Relationships with friends
- Relationships
- Consistent application of sanctions
- Relationship with other students

Legend:
- School and mental health
- 3 main stems from mental health
- Key people
- Explanations

"... it is interesting to reflect on the differences between Aimee's model and my own. She has kept the basic components the same as mine however she has reflected teachers as key people whereas I neglected them. She has also developed her explanations more than I did. Therefore, I suggest that by getting the YRT members to develop these ideas gives a greater subjective element from the YRT point of view. Something I could not do".
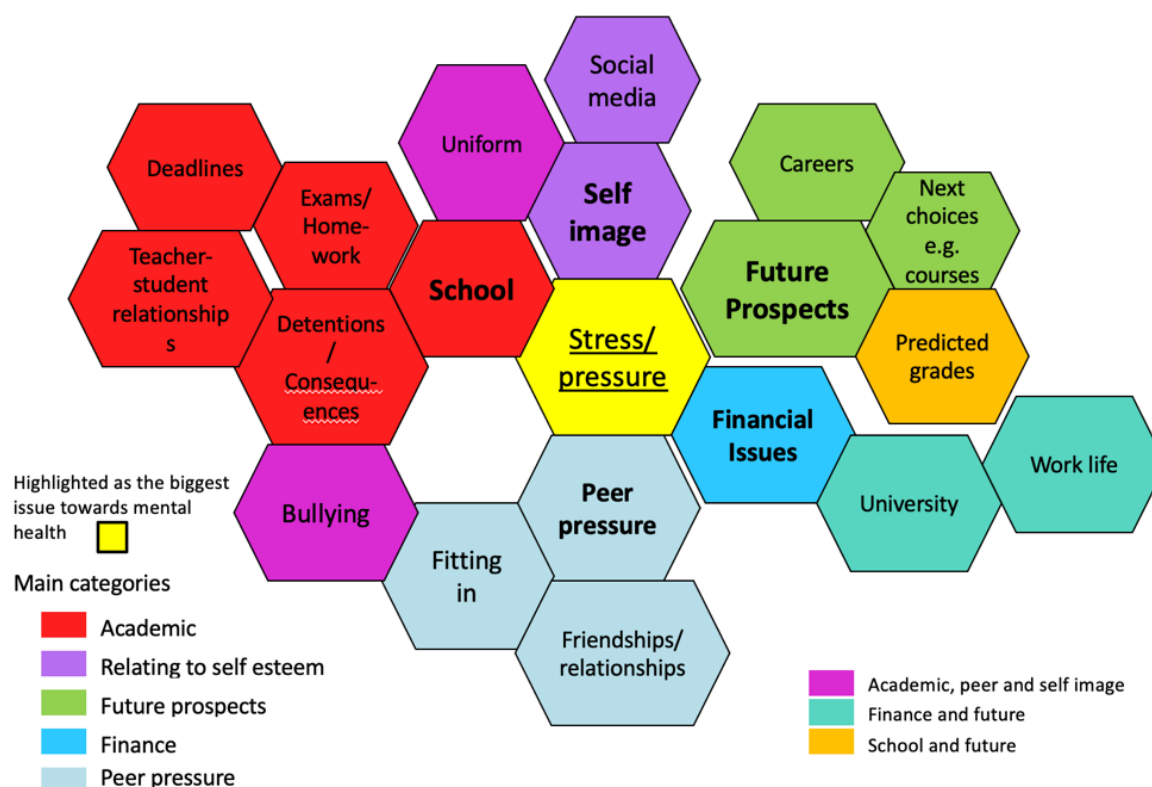
Figure 21: YRT framework model 2 adapted from researcher model fig 19

".... Susannah focused on stress and pressure categorising it into a number of different areas. School was the biggest direct impact but followed by future prospects which links to 'expectations' in my first model. As with Aimee's model, this again showed the importance of enabling the YRT to develop their own ideas independently".

Whilst the two models, Figures 20 and 21, they developed were different I was encouraged for several reasons. Two of them had taken the time to challenge me, which was significant in terms of the research process and my relationship with young people. This also heartened me as it exemplified that I had enabled the voice of the YRT to come to the fore. This was a collaborative project; working together, we developed a process enabling young people to

present their findings. An important aspect of this phase of the work was that out of the 13 YRT members, only two had committed to creating their own model. This is something I return to in the discussion chapter. The two models also demonstrated to me the importance of the YRT developing their own work as their contributions were different to mine.

Step 4. Supporting the YRT to contribute to the analysis

Enabling the individual members of the YRT to develop their own narrative relating to the findings was important as this reinforced their autonomy within the research and built their confidence towards the analysis of the data. It was a continuation of my journey to ensure that the voice of the YRT was at the core of the process. To support the YRT's involvement in the analysis, I took four significant steps.

1) Introducing them to Quirkos, the tool I had identified to help with the data analysis
2) Running tutorials on qualitative analysis that included a help sheet (Figure 23)
3) Supporting reflection through the use of my Collaborative self-reflection tool (CSRT)
4) Inspiring them to develop reflective writing

6.5.1.1 Quirkos

Together we used the transcripts from our meetings to develop the analysis within this programme. It allowed us to develop codes and themes that indicated areas that the participants saw as being significant to them taking responsibility in school. The final one we developed is seen below (Figure 22) and shows how it visually simplifies the text into the themes and codes as an intuitive model. I imported all the transcripts into the programme, and together we codified it and developed the themes. In order to create this pattern, we referred to the framework models, Figures 20 and 21 above, and two previous Quirkos exercises (causes of mental health and school support for mental health), as well as notes from our meetings.
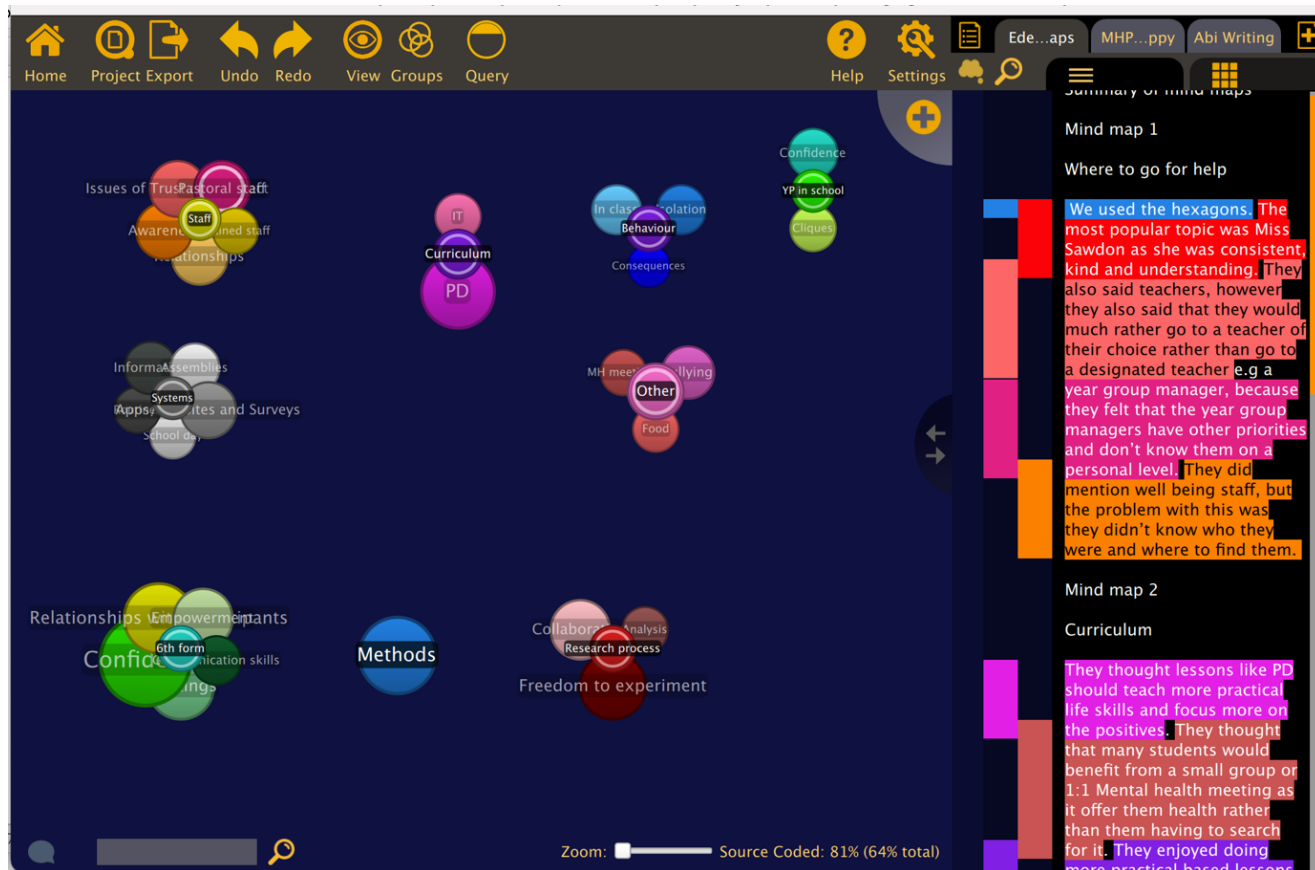
Figure 22: Final Quirkos analysis diagram

6.5.1.2 Qualitative research support

I produced a help sheet, Figure 23, for the YRT to support them in their analysis. I then ran tutorials discussing how we might go about developing our findings and recommendations. Again, the aim was to enable the YRT to develop their own thoughts, analyse their data and draw their conclusions from the research.

Qualitative Data Analysis and how to get started!

Analysis of qualitative data is about looking for patterns in the writing. Trying to identify themes see how those themes are broken down (or made up) and identify links between them.

"Think of this in the same way that you think about doing a jigsaw."

Step 1
Identify the key questions and try to break them down; write down what you think the question(s) is about. This can be done individually, in pairs or in a group. This will help you to focus on exactly what you need to be looking for.

Time to do your jigsaw!

Step 2
Just as when you do a jigsaw you will need to organise a strategy. Where do you start? Which bits come next? And so on!

- Start with the 4 corners of the jigsaw. In the analysis see this as looking for the main themes. When you read through the different data what stands out? At WHS we have developed a frame work so it may be that everything we read will be assigned in to one of these categories. Be careful, it may be that we have missed some things out and they may need adding
- Separate out all the edge pieces. Within each theme can you subdivide in to further categories? Look for themes within themes
- Are there pictures on the jigsaw that help you link bits together? How do we link themes or sub-themes together? Are there areas that overlap and need to be included in more than one theme?
- Are there bits of the jigsaw that don't fit? In the same way as a jigsaw there may be evidence in the data that sits by itself or is even contradictory. Make a note of it, put it to one side but keep trying to find a solution; you may get it to fit or you may come across a reason why it doesn't fit.
- Are there bits of the jigsaw missing? Is there anything that is obviously missing from the data? Keep asking yourself the question, "am I missing anything here?"
- Always do the sky last! I always keep the hard, uniform bits until the end. In the same way in the analysis, you might come across something that you find difficult. Put it to one side and move on, go back to it at the end or with someone else and try and work it out.

Step 3
- The above process may take you 3 or 4 attempts reading through the data. Once you are happy with it try and pull it all together.
- Write a paragraph about each theme. Within each theme write about each sub-theme. When you are writing try to quote examples from the text to back up what you are putting forward.
- Write about what doesn't fit and why you think that is.
- What do you see as the links or threads that run through the analysis?

Have a Happy Jigsaw!

Figure 23: Qualitative analysis help sheet

Step 5 Reflective dialogue to develop findings and recommendations

The final step in the analysis process was to draw all of our information together and conduct a dialogic review process between myself and the YRT, where we revisited our thematic analysis via Quirkos, our reflexive writing and our discussion notes as captured in my

reflective diary. My invitation to the YRT to write up their own findings resulted in three reports written by five of the team. Through a lengthy process of collaborative deliberation, discussion, and creativity, we crafted an understanding of the key findings. Due to the work commitment of the YRT, I drafted these before a concluding discussion with the team to finalise the findings and recommendations for the school.

The process I described above was about how dialogue became central to the research and how the principles of CCM enabled a collaborative process that encouraged egalitarian relationships. This, in turn, countered hegemonic school power relationships. The dialogic process between the three parties involved ensured robust data collection and analysis. It then enabled us to produce findings and recommendations which were presented to the headteacher, with whom we had further dialogue before agreeing to implement. This is summarised below in Figure 24.
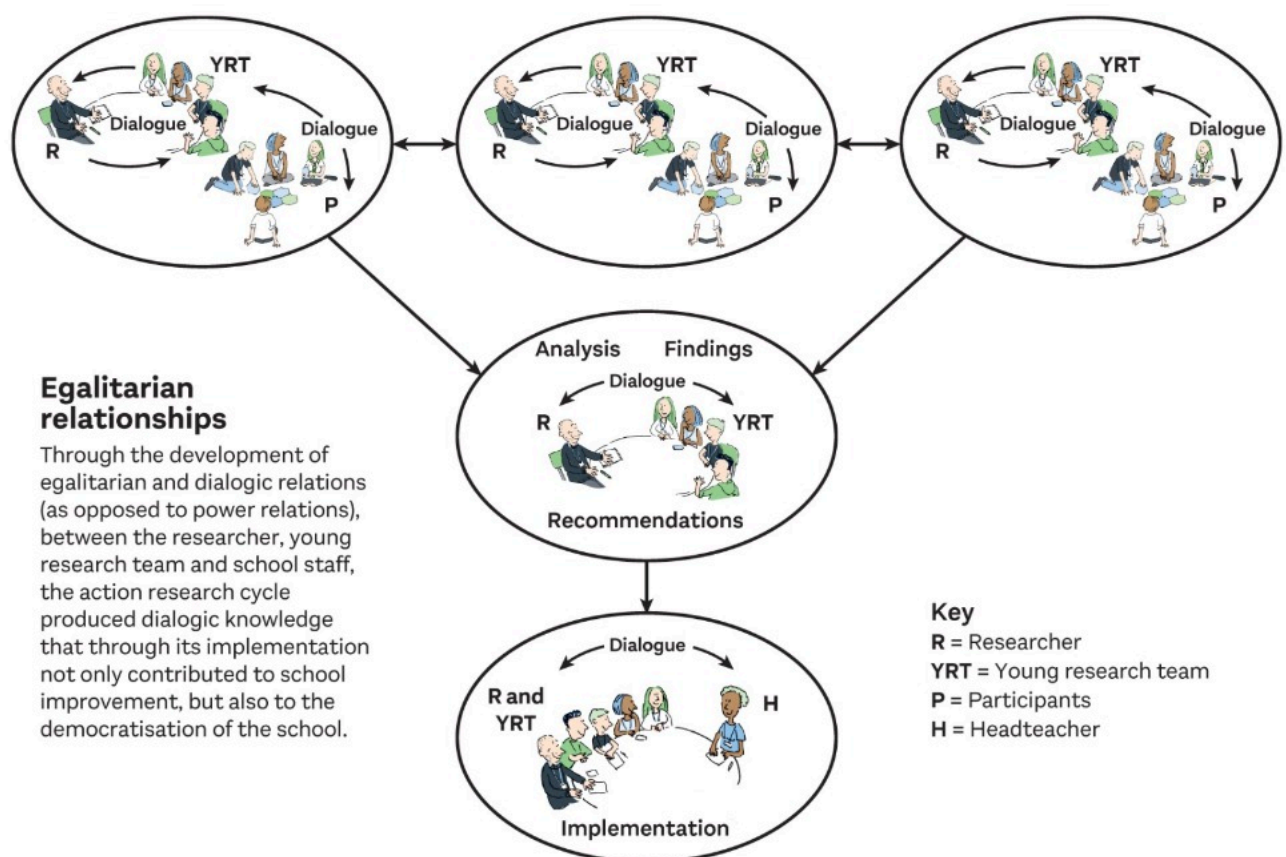
Figure 24: Young research team participative action research cycle

135

One of the difficulties throughout the data collection phase was the logistics of working with the YRT. My ideal was to have weekly group meetings with all YRT members attending so that we could agree on plans together. Because of school commitments and a lack of free time together, this was not possible; instead, I was left acting as a go-between, trying to negotiate an agreement between the two groups. Whilst, on the surface, not a difficult task, I always had tensions. Throughout the process, I questioned whether my negotiator position meant that I influenced decisions too much. I continuously reflected and evaluated the decision-making process, asking myself whether I was really allowing the YRT to decide on the direction of the research. In reality, there were many joint decisions as the YRT constantly impacted my thinking.

6.6   Triangulation or crystallisation?

As described above, the project's design enabled both groups of young people to make meaningful contributions to this research through their own lived experiences and interactions with each other. It was about them developing their relationships to build an interpretative position as social constructivists (Charmaz, 2000), and was not about taking an objectivist standpoint (Ellingson, 2008). My dilemma, however, was that when I first engaged in this research, I aimed to use conventional forms of qualitative analysis so that findings could be presented to improve practice in the school (Charmaz, 2000). What transpired was a thematic analysis approach that was informed by the dialogic processes between the three parties within the research. My search for authenticity was less about triangulation and its objective overtones, and more about the intuitive flexibility of crystallisation, which enhances and deepens my thoroughly partial understanding of this given area. This approach brought a greater depth of understanding whilst also highlighting that there is so much more for us to discover (Richardson, 2000).

My decision to use crystallisation as a guiding philosophy for the analysis was reinforced by my commitment to understanding the social world through subjective interpretation within the research team (van Lieshoult & Cardiff, 2011). As the research developed over time, the relationships matured. As I will demonstrate in the discussion chapter, trust and understanding built between myself and the YRT, as it did between them and the participants. This enhanced our interpretive mechanisms as we started to believe in one another's capabilities and intentions. Through the repetitive reading and discussion of the transcripts,

the collective development of new ideas became cyclical and generative as the group and research developed. By ensuring the perspectives of the research parties were interwoven, I was evaluating the quality of the work based on criteria of convergence rather than criteria of objectivity (Ricoeur, 1976); although this was more about being comprehensive in approach rather than about convergence as a goal (Varpio et al., 2017). This, I believe, is crucial for the analysis of the research as, by fusing multiple interpretations of reality, I am guarding against and, as far as possible, removing "authorial intent" (Ricoeur, 1976). The clarification process through repetitive speaking and listening tests boundaries and redefines understanding, enhancing trustworthiness (van Lieshoult & Cardiff, 2011). It is this that can then give us a fully involved understanding of this topic (Varpio et al., 2017).

6.7   Who is the analyst?

Whilst I have ownership of this research and the thesis is written in my voice, I am also acutely aware of the tensions existing within the process of analysis around the critical question of 'who should analyse the work?'. This is a question I will now seek to explore and answer. From the outset, this research has been founded upon my deeply-set values of honesty, integrity, authenticity, and inclusion. By developing this research with young people and for young people, I aim to help improve their lives both now and in the future. To be involved in this work is their right and, as I quote in section 5.6, this right is not one for "adults to give or take away" (Lundy et al., 2020). My intention was that involving young people in the design and data collection would result in data from their perspective, and would therefore be authentic. This also holds for the analysis. Were I to collect the data from young people and analyse it myself, I would be undermining my values, and I also believe I would be letting the young people down. This is research from their perspective, and the analysis also needs to be done this way.

I worked with the YRT team to design the research, and they then worked with participants to collect the data. Collaborating with them to conduct the analysis proved to be challenging in a number of ways. Firstly, as intimated above, this was my research and my qualification which I needed to own; I had opinions about the research, dialogue, and findings, and I wanted to be able to voice them. Initially, I considered two choices; do I present my opinions to the group, impose my power to force these on the YRT (researcher analysis), or do I step back and allow the group to decide (participatory analysis)? There was a compromise

whereby I offered my opinion and suggested it as just one voice within the group, and we analysed the work together. I found this a challenging time and this is reflected in an extract from my reflexive diary.

> "The tension I have is that I do not want to impose myself or my opinion, I also question the validity of what the YRT may decide. The echoes of adultism and teacherism are reverberating in my head as I ponder the correct decision for myself, the YRT and the research outcomes. If I am to be true to my values, then the YRT needed autonomy to make their own findings within a supportive structure, something I need to develop. Just because the YRT are made up of young people does not give me the right to disempower them and impose my will. I believe that by taking the 'middle road', I will offer opinions without imposing my will."

The development of our relationship was crucial for this as trust had been developed between us. At every meeting, I would actively encourage them to challenge me; at times, I would challenge myself by putting counterarguments to points I made. I would also take time to reflect on conversations and return to the group and revisit discussions where appropriate.

I was aiming for intersubjective consensus (van Lieshoult & Cardiff, 2011) or mutual adequacy (Boog, 2007), a critical validity check in PAR. Reciprocal trust was developed through our relationship, which also helped deepen truthfulness, morality and authenticity (van Lieshoult & Cardiff, 2011). This was multi-voiced research and required multi-voice analysis. Ultimately, I am responsible for telling a story and reporting the findings as I see them. I worked extremely hard to give young people the support, direction, and autonomy to enable them to develop new knowledge using their experience and research. I had impact, but how much cannot be quantified. I have set myself a high standard of self-scrutiny throughout the research. I have questioned, discussed, and deliberated on decisions to ensure my primary goal of inclusion for young people was met.

6.8   Summary

This chapter has outlined how this research developed between the three parties as we searched for new knowledge through dialogue. I have explored how the methods of data collection were chosen. I clarified the five-step part of this process, highlighting how it

enabled me to ensure the YRT were central to decision-making. I also gave examples of how the collaboration developed between the YRT, the participants and me. Section 6.6 has explored how the analysis and data collection merged into a crystallisation process. The following chapter examines how ethical procedures became fundamental to this way of working.

Chapter 7: Ethical considerations

7.1 Chapter introduction

At the conception of my research, ethics was an area which had not been fully considered. However, what transpired was a journey from the necessity of protectionist ethics via the university board to an in-depth analysis of ethics in the context of youth participative action research in schools. I did not intend to commit to a lengthy exploration of ethics until I realised its centrality in my thesis. Chapter 4 explores how young people are impacted by power and how this then impacts their agency, identity and capital, areas which are at the heart of what ethics is. A detailed exploration of ethical issues related to young researchers and schools follows. I decided to concentrate my ethics writing here in one chapter, presenting the challenge of what to include and omit. I refer to this in section 5.10 as mess; the reason why the reader may interpret parts of this chapter as findings.

Therefore, this chapter charts my ethical progression through this research journey. I start by reflecting on the procedures demanded of me to gain approval. I then explain my approach before the research, involving a consultation, PPI process; this informed two critical elements of this research. The importance of relationships to my research cannot be underestimated. Therefore, I explore how my relational research processes aligned with my social constructivist standpoint, which led me to ensure the YRT were involved in ethical decision-making. This, in turn, steered me towards relational ethics as a way of working and ensuring young people were at the centre of the research as equal partners. I investigate the key elements of relation ethics and how they influenced my research, before I conclude by exploring the importance of dialogue to my relational ethics approach.

7.2 Seeking ethical approval

My introduction to research ethics was via the university ethics review panel, as a requirement to receive ethical approval was a prerequisite for conducting research with young people. Whilst I was aware of how important the relationship-building process would be in the research, I did not deliberate on the relevance of relationships as I conducted the university's ethics procedures. Although aware that the relationship status between all parties would be important, I did not know then that I would be working on an equal epistemological

level with the YRT. As my research developed, I came to understand how, together with the YRT, we would be co-producing dialogic knowledge. As part of this, we would need to be critically reflective and grounded within what we were doing (Banks & Brydon-Miller, 2019).

Similarly, my understanding of critical reflection developed, and I became cognisant that it would allow us to interact with the research, the researcher/co-researchers and the results, enabling us to interpret our lives through the experience (Martin et al., 2003). Were I to complete the process again, I would want to involve young people in a discussion about ethics and explore the potential advantages and disadvantages of their involvement in this type of research. Whilst the focus of such discussions would be on the relational aspects of the research, I would also find a space for a discussion around research ethics as protection, something I discuss in detail below.

7.2.1   Research ethics as protection

One of the challenges within ethics for qualitative researchers is that the origin of ethical guidelines comes from a scientific and bio-medical background (Artal & Rubenfeld, 2017). The initial impetus came after the atrocities of the unethical research practices by the Nazi regime during the second World War that led to the Nuremberg Code in 1947. The Declaration of Helsinki updated this in 1964 and has done so regularly since, with the latest version published in 2013 (World Medical Association, 2013). The Declaration of Taipei (World Medical Association, 2016) continued this ethical modernisation process. However, whilst ethics guidance has taken great strides forward, disturbing cases have continued, and as recently as the 1970s dehumanising research was still taking place that resulted in yet further legislation. In the United States of America, the Belmont Report (The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979) was implemented in response to the Tuskegee syphilis study. Since the basis of ethics development has come from a natural science or biomedical standpoint, issues of significance to qualitative research, such as the importance of relationship development, are largely overlooked. There is a belief that there has been too little focus on ethics within the behavioural and social sciences (Schrag, 2010). Applying ethics within a qualitative research setting still requires consideration and development.

The background I have given to the development of research ethics suggests that it was seen as a purely protective measure for many years. Whilst some academics started to address ethical dilemmas, such as research relationships and ownership of findings (Burgess, 1989), there was (and is) still an overemphasis on protection from harm (Banks & Brydon-Miller, 2019). There is a debate across society about the benefit of this approach as it can be seen as a deficit one searching for what an individual needs (McCashen, 2014). Instead, society should take an alternative and asset-based approach (Stuart & Perris, 2017) and concentrate on promoting good to support people's strengths, helping them take responsibility in their lives. This area is explored more fully in section 9.4.2, where I look at relational ethics as an approach within YPDAR. This asset-based approach builds on the positive relationship between the parties involved as they are created through equal epistemological power relations. However, I feel compelled to state that guidelines designed to protect young people from harm must be understood and followed, although they should not be used solely to exclude other ethical considerations.

7.2.2   The process of completing ethical procedures

I completed the university ethics documents systematically, but with reservations due to the procedural nature of what was required. This was the most straightforward aspect of the ethical procedure as it dealt with tasks such as the safety of individuals, data collection and storage. A set of robust procedures were developed following the university's guidance. It was a relatively uncomplicated process whereby I had to document how I would keep young people and researchers safe, as well as collect, store and then safely dispose of all data. As I mentioned above, what I now realise was missing was any input from young people. I am uncomfortable with this approach as, on reflection, it feels as if young people were being treated as research objects. My belief is counter to this, as they are thinking beings who are socially constructed. There is a danger that this approach could undermine young people's agency (Hilppö, Chimirri, & Rajala, 2019).

Cutting & Peacock (2021, p. 2) describe "navigating our institution's ill-fitting ethical procedures alongside the realities of conducting participatory research". The principles applied by review panels may be necessary to ensure that guidelines are being followed, but they are also about power and control (Banks & Brydon-Miller, 2019). Cutting & Peacock (2021, p. 2) also describe the gap between ethical procedures and ethics in practice as

"dilemmas" or "moments", sometimes described as "ethical slippage". This is when the reality of everyday life is ignored and comes about when working with other human beings, as the unexpected will often happen. New ethical dilemmas continuously present themselves and need to be considered, understood, and acted upon. At this point in time, the signing of the forms will ultimately be irrelevant and could also be seen to absolve a researcher of the responsibility to reconsider issues (Hoonaard, 2011). My concerns about the university's ethical procedures were many. They included the suspicion of a top-down approach which was as much about the university abdicating responsibility as young people's safety. In addition, it disempowered young people I was collaborating with, as they had no say in the same rules being applied to them.

The ethics approval process began before I engaged with the co-researchers or participants. I thought through the process and discussed potential issues with my supervisors and school staff. This was about following a rules-based traditional approach and was located around my deliberations with other adults. Crucially, other than the PPI activity (section 7.7), I did not engage with young people themselves (Hilppö, Chimirri, & Rajala, 2019). The ethical guidelines I was working towards in preparation for my research should be seen as rules of thumb rather than absolute, and used as part of a suite of measures in any ethical decision-making process (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005). Once ethics was granted, I moved on to the data collection process. However, this was about accepting and embracing a generalised other rather than a concrete other in relation to ethics (Pollard, 2015). Whilst the process I had put in place protected all parties, I now question how I did it. The approach I took was functional and, as I will explore in the following section, dissonant with my preferred relational way of working.

During the research, I recognised that an interpersonal bond was being developed within the research team through our cyclical conversations and dialogue; actions were from the heart and mind (Slattery & Rapp, 2003). The positioning of the term relationship was important as it was about all parties understanding each other and each other's lives to ensure that everyone bought into the concept; these relationships were a primary consideration (Hilppö, Chimirri, & Rajala, 2019). As humans, we have a constitutive relation with others, which implies one already has an ethical responsibility to the world and others in it. This was not required as part of my ethics application for this research, but it was an essential part of the research process.

7.3   The significance of ethical considerations to this study

Ethics are closely linked to morals and related to how we embrace such issues when working with others (Gregory, 2003). In a research context, ethics is about values and responsibilities; complexity arises, however, as it needs to be seen from various standpoints, including harm prevention (Fry, Treloar, & Maher, 2005), democracy (Marrero Castro & García, 2021), and human rights (Reis Monteiro, 2014). More recently, its meaning has been broadened to include animal welfare and environmental issues (Chatfield & Morton, 2020).

As described in the context chapter, this research is about working with young people within a school setting. Two groups of young people were involved in the research, with each group requiring both conjoined and separate ethical considerations. The two groups included the YRT, a group of 16–18-year-olds who acted as co-researchers with myself and undertook regular meetings with participants, and the participant group, which included groups of young people aged between 11 and 15 years old from the pupil premium cohort of the school. From the outset, there were a multitude of interconnected issues that required care and consideration regarding ethical concerns that will be explored throughout this chapter.

Working as a social constructivist is about discovering meaning and understanding through my active involvement in constructing that meaning (Kim, 2014). Within this paradigm, it is therefore important to consider the social interactions with young people involved (Kim, 2014). At the outset, I was aware that the relationship development between myself and the YRT would be vital to successful outcomes. I had yet to consider the implications of these relationships on the ethics within this work. However, I am subscribed to a way of working that, from my perspective, demands a research partnership with young people on an equal epistemological level. During the data collection period, there was a gradual transformation in my own ethical development as I realised the intricacies involved when conducting research of this type. Having failed to involve young people in the procedural ethics at the outset, I was wakening up to the realisation that the ethical integrity of this research was at stake. To be true to my values, I needed to develop a way of working that had relationships at its core. This research is about working with young people as partners, using a process of collaborative dialogue. It is, therefore, vital that the relationships between parties in the research are also true to the values and intent of the research, including care, fairness,

openness, and inclusion. The foundation of this research is based on social constructivist principles (see section 5.2), and it is important to explore how this has influenced my ethical approach (Cottone, 2004).

7.4   Ethical consideration of working in a social constructivist paradigm

Following a social constructivist paradigm, my research was built upon the pre-requisite that social acts occur between individuals (Teague, 2000); any transaction results in knowledge gained for all parties. The processes that guide the research design heavily rely upon the values held by those within the research relationships, something significant within my research. The research I have undertaken has ensured that the knowledge created has come through the engagement of individuals in social activity (Kim, 2000). This section will explore how working in a social constructivist paradigm has implications for the ethical approach I need to take to remain faithful to my values.

We all inhabit the same relational world, and important questions need to be explored to do research and live in this world together (Hilppö et al., 2019). Furthermore, research ethics is under constant revision, and much has been written about how we ensure it can be adjusted and redefined as research situations change and develop (e.g., Baumrind, 1964; Etzel & Watson, 2006; Harlow & Oswald, 2016; Campbell & Morris, 2017). One of the central themes of this writing is the claim that human ways of being and becoming are essentially relational, and who we are and whom we become is through our interaction with others (Hilppö, Chimirri, & Rajala, 2019). In research where one aims to understand the lives of others, essential consideration is given to the interactions between the researched and the researcher, and how these impact how both parties live their lives. In other words, we have a moral responsibility and ethical commitment to ensure that we look after each other (Hilppö, Chimirri, & Rajala, 2019). Collaborating with the YRT and working on an equal epistemological level meant I brought my academic knowledge while they brought their lived experience and life knowledge. This did not necessarily bring equity of power to the relationship. Still, it enabled both young people and me to bring our unique and different power to the partnership (Pollard, 2015). In addition, there was a need for a deep and trusting relationship, particularly between the YRT and me, as well as between the YRT and the participants. In my view, it would be difficult for work to be conducted on an equal epistemological level without a strong element of trust between all the parties. Within a

145

school setting, this empowered the YRT to be part of the ethical decision-making process. In conjunction with me, they were actively involved in ethical discussions and decisions they would otherwise not be allowed to contribute towards. These decisions were constructed within the context of the research but, more importantly, the context of the relationships (Pollard, 2015). This interdependency between young people and me was crucial to the research's success and depended upon the quality of our relationships. I agree with Cottone (2004) who argues ethical decision-making as a social constructivist is a joint decision, as decisions are made in a context of social interaction. This is described as consensualising, which is "acting according to what is 'known' through social interactions" (Cottone, 2004 p. 8). These were the social interactions taking place between us.

As I suggest in this writing, young people in schools are often subjected to teacherism, which is systemic across UK education; but it is important to set out precisely what I mean by this term. Building upon Shier's (2015) definition of adultism, teacherism can be understood as a subset of the orientation of cultural norms that reinforce the superior position of adults in relation to young people (Corney et al., 2021). This position is further exaggerated within a school setting as the historical power structures in schools reinforce the position of both adults and young people. The definition I put forward is as follows:

> Teacherism is a dysconscious act carried out by adult teachers over young people in a school setting. Schools, as institutions, are adult dominant power structures that reinforces societal belief systems that adults are superior to young people. Schools place teachers in positions of power reinforcing young people as 'becoming' adults, something that in turn disempowers them as beings in their own right. Teachers are described as educated and professionals, terms which are loaded positively and that engender respect. In contrast young people are often described as pupils, students, or adolescents, terms defining young people as 'becoming' and which can also have negative association connected to them.

Figure 25: Teacherism definition

Working on a YPAR project in school enables young people to rebalance and shift the accepted school power hegemony legitimately, as well as contribute to school improvement (Cook-Sather, 2020). This research enables young researchers to contribute to ethical decisions and benefit from moral and social development. There needs to be a move away from an ethics of intention to an ethics of responsibility (Searle, 2004) and, in doing this, we

commit to the consequences of interaction (Gomez et al. 2011). YPAR is a way of working from a values base recognising the rights of young people to contribute to research directly impacting them, and ensuring they play a central role in this research. In particular, the methodological innovation around the fusion of YPAR and CCM requires reframing the traditional protectionist ethical approach to a relational ethics approach. It, therefore, follows that relationships within the research context require further scrutiny.

7.5 The importance of the research relationships

As discussed throughout this chapter, the caring, respectful, and trusting relationships between the three parties were crucial to the project's success. Below I will explore each element in turn.

7.5.1 Participant/researcher relationship

I had a fundamental decision regarding my relationships with the two groups of young people, the participants and the YRT. My relationship with the YRT was central to the research outcomes; the YRT were the link between the participants and me. If we did not trust and respect each other, the process of data collection and analysis (explored in chapter 6.5) would have been close to impossible. However, my relationship with the participants was somewhat different; it did not need to be as close as they met regularly with the YRT. From my perspective, the participants were in the background as it was the YRT, and not me, who would have weekly contact with them. I had concerns regarding how my historical relationship with the research participants may influence their approach to the research. This is best illustrated by a diary extract reflecting on an incident during the recruitment of the participants:

> "As I sat waiting in a room for a small number of potential participants to arrive, a young girl came in, I reassured her she was in the correct location, but her nervousness was obvious. I explained what the meeting was about, and she breathed a big sigh of relief and said, "Oh, thank goodness for that. I thought I was in trouble with you". I was extremely surprised; I had never spoken to the girl before and had left the school 12 months previously. However, she remembered me from my past role as a powerful member of staff who would often deal with discipline issues. The power issues I discussed in chapter 3 immediately struck a chord, and the PPI consultation explained in section 7.7 proved

pertinent; I was definitely not the most suitable person for the participants to be talking to. At this point in time, I also made the conscious decision that I needed to leave the contact to the YRT, trust them to build relationships with the younger participants and deliberately remove myself from the day-to-day contact with them."

The following comments from members of the YRT indicate that this process was successful, as they all highlighted trust in the research development. Josh commented:

> "In my opinion I've moved away from being a strange year 12 that talks to them about topics which are difficult to speak with friends about, never mind complete strangers. I am someone who my participants can talk to about the school's mental health support system, with enough trust and confidence between us that they know they can critique the system without being reprimanded by staff due to what they've said in our meetings. This confidence and trust have also helped me develop more as a person"

Susannah commented:

> "Though as the project grew more into a collaborative process, I felt it was easier to share how I felt about matters especially during our weekly meetings between the young research team and the researcher."

Poppy and Katie commented:

> "As well as my confidence growing, the participant's confidence also started to grow as he began to open up more and became more trusting of me."

7.5.2 Young research team/participant relationships

Whilst I had overall responsibility to ensure the safety of all young people within the research, the YRT were the ones building relationships with the participants meant I needed to ensure systems and lines of communication between all parties were clear. The YRT were in a position to recognise distress or have a concern about one of their participants. However, their responsibility was to pass any concerns on to either myself or a school staff member, ensuring the participants were safeguarded; to my mind, it would be totally unfair and ethically wrong to place the burden of care at the door of the YRT. Therefore, I worked with

the school and developed a safeguarding system to allow the YRT to pass any concerns on to a staff member if I was unavailable. I also conducted safeguarding, child protection and confidentiality training with the YRT.

Furthermore, I reinforced this whenever appropriate to ensure they were reminded of their responsibilities and to ensure they were comfortable bringing things to my or the school's attention. This all took place before the research started, and whilst I took feedback from the YRT it was not planned in collaboration with them. I was applying my procedural ethics as advised by the university. On reflection, working as a partner, I should have built in a consultation phase with YRT rather than imposing something on them.

Whilst guided by procedures, there were no specifics from the university to guide me on what I have just described. It was down to me to work through all the issues, and this was something I did through conversations with my supervision team and staff in school. Whilst completing the university's ethics application process, an area I did not highlight but that came to light was the pupil premium status of the participants. I decided to discuss the issue with the YRT. This was an ethical dilemma as I was giving the YRT access to confidential information about the status of the participants, something students would not usually have. However, I was also cognisant that without this information, the YRT were unlikely to be able to conduct their work either effectively or empathetically.

By entrusting the participant conversations to the YRT, I knew that the relationships between these two groups would become an important aspect of the research. The safeguards I put in place aimed to ensure the safety of the participants and YRT. However, I discovered that one of the most critical aspects of this area of the research was the direct and indirect support I gave to the YRT to ensure they developed caring and productive relationships with the participants. In the section below, I explore the development of my relationship with the YRT. However, it is important to highlight that as part of the action research cycle (Figure 9), I intended to model, to the YRT, the way in which you develop a trusting and productive relationship. Through discussion at individual and group YRT weekly meetings, I could draw on the research's values; why we were doing it, how the participants may benefit, and what we were learning about ourselves. This demonstrated to the YRT what a caring/trusting relationship required so they could get to know and support their participants both in the research and in the broader school community. In the following section I quote examples

from the YRT's writing to demonstrate that confidence and trust between the two parties grew as their relationships matured as we moved through the research. In addition, members of the YRT developed positive relationships with participants they had worked with over this period of time.

7.5.3   Young research team/researcher relationship

In chapter 4, I explored power issues between young people and adults in schools. As such, I was aware my past position in school would impact in some way upon the relationships between myself and the YRT. I, therefore, undertook a continuous weekly process of discussing with them how they could shape the research by taking control of aspects of it. It was also important that this was not just a discussion; I demonstrated to them that I was also allowing them to take control. This was a delicate path to tread as this was my research, but as part of it I wanted to empower the YRT to be architects of their self-improvement. However, I was surprised by the extent of this impact on members of the YRT; it was not just about empowering them to take control, but also about developing their confidence and new skills and recognising this development in themselves. As YRT members reflected:

Katie:

> *"Empowerment has become a big part of this project for me especially as I have learned many skills which have allowed me to provide better support to the participants, also seeing the young person's confidence and knowledge around the subject of mental health in school develop and increase has ultimately improved my confidence and trust in myself."*

Poppy:

> *"As well as my confidence growing, the young person's confidence also started to grow as he began to open up more and became more trusting of me, this was very empowering for me."*

> *"Over my time doing the mental health project I feel my confidence has grown and developed in a variety of ways."*

Joanne:

> *"The success of this meeting was mostly down to my increased confidence in what I was*
>
> *doing and also helped by the relationship we'd built"*

The action research cycle (Figure 9) enabled me to build relationships with individual YRT members at our weekly debrief meetings and develop a relationship with the group at our weekly group meetings. The intensive process that developed through the mini-action research cycles enabled the relationship-building process to mature. As I discuss in section 5.8.3, I deliberately introduced a collaborative self-reflection process involving individual, followed by group, reflection. This, along with the process of the writing our academic paper (McPartlan et al., 2021) together, helped cement trusting relationships between the team and me. I would also suggest our relationships were further enhanced as I prioritised my relationship with them over my relationship with the school staff and the school itself. Again, this was often a delicate balancing act, but it was essential that the YRT could trust me. They knew I was an ex-teacher, still in touch and friends with the staff at the school. Therefore, it was essential that I actively showed the YRT I would put both the research and the YRT above these other historical relationships, something I had to do on several occasions.

This section has highlighted the role and importance of relationships within this research. The part that relationships played in ensuring young people's ethical voice was heard is an area that I will now explore further.

7.6 Ethical voice in this research

7.6.1 What do I mean by voice and ethical voice?

As an ex-teacher, I was aware that within the school system it was adults who made decisions and had the overwhelming voice within the institution. I wanted this research to be different; I wanted young people to have a voice where they could participate, be listened to and contribute to change in their school. I tried to enable them to express their beliefs and preferences (Sharma, 2009). This research was about empowering young people to influence

critical decisions. It was, however, also about who should have a voice about the ethics, something I describe as ethical voice.

7.6.2 Who has an ethical voice in this research?

The concern for me was around the questions who within this research has or should have an ethical voice, who is listened to and whose voice is heard? As the leader of this research, it is clear I have an ethical voice, and through knowledge of school systems, and including school staff, I have enabled the institution of the school to have a voice. The YRT also need to be heard when it comes to ethical issues. However, in terms of ethics, in my experience, young people's views in schools are rarely considered. I sought for them to be involved and ensured we had conversations to discuss the ongoing research; I listened to them and took on board suggestions, altering some of the procedures as we implemented them (Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2022). Young people had a stronger ethical voice through the research cycle, as issues arose requiring us to make decisions to develop a strategy. Over the months, our relationship developed, so our discussions had greater significance and depth. In one of our weekly group meetings, discussing how to get more effective mental health teaching into the school, I proposed a non-confrontational strategy for an obstructive staff member with a traditional outlook when it came to young people and their place in school. I was taken aback, slightly shocked, but also delighted when a reticent member of the YRT basically called me out. She said:

> *"We have done the research; this is what we have found out and we have Mr X who is not happy. Will we allow a member of staff to continue working in the same way and disadvantage hundreds of young people? That is not fair on young people".*

She made a valid point. We then spent considerable time discussing the issue and trying to resolve it. This incident reminded me of the importance of active listening within this dialogic process, and being particularly attentive to less forthright partners.

Developing a YPDAR project in schools is challenging as young people have to cope with adultism (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002; Delgado, 2008; Shier, 2015; Corney et al.,2021) and, more acutely, teacherism (see 5.4.4 introduction to YPAR). Again, there is an ethical

aspect to this that was not covered through the traditional university process. My strong values-based approach to the research means that, as the researcher, I have a responsibility to ensure the YRT are not let down by the school or the process within the school. There were a number of occasions, as demonstrated above and also discussed as part of my relationship-building process with the YRT (section 7.5.3), when individual staff took exception to what was happening or being suggested. On one such occasion, a member of staff argued with members of the YRT that the more creative, activity-based classroom approaches they were suggesting were unrealistic as "none of the children wants to be in the lesson" and because "they did not know how to behave when sitting behind a desk let alone doing activities". As an ex-teacher, I was shocked as these were issues that were professional and not to do with the research. I had to decide my ethical position. As a teacher, it would be very unusual to take the side of a young person (in my teaching career, this did occasionally happen but was rare). However, as a researcher, I had an ethical responsibility to the YRT. The headteacher and I had promised them that these findings would be implemented. However, it seemed there were staff who were not aligned with the school's wishes. I then spent time discussing the teacher's approach with the YRT, particularly how unprofessional it was and how we could move the project forward. My past teacher persona needed to be suppressed as I felt distinctly uncomfortable talking about a staff member, particularly with a negative opinion. This experience enabled me to reflect on my position as someone occupying the space in-between, something I explore in section 5.8.1 (Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2018). Whilst I ensured that the YRT were clear that this was a confidential conversation and I trusted them not to gossip about what I was saying, I still felt uncomfortable. This was an example of my working with the YRT and using embodied knowledge (Craig, Jeong Ae, & Zou, 2016). We used our judgement based on perceptions, which I discuss in more detail in section 7.8.1.3. (Nussbaum, 1990). Reflecting on this has allowed me to clarify exactly my position within this work. I am a researcher with a responsibility to my co-research team and participants. This is captured in a short extract from my reflective diary:

> "What a weird experience that was! First the feedback to staff where one of them was unprofessional and the YRT were the professional ones; a role reversal. Then debriefing with the YRT, I was unnerved by the fact that I had to carefully negotiate my way between an ex-colleague (someone I like and got on with) and my 'new' colleagues the YRT. As the first meeting was taking place, I could feel myself being torn and very quickly had to clarify in my head which side I was on. By the time we got to the debrief my head was clear and I

knew that my responsibility was to the YRT. Whilst I know I did not let the YRT down; I also know that I was having to process my feelings of discomfort at criticising my ex-colleague......wow."

This research and the approaches I have taken have enabled the YRT to have their ethical voice heard. As co-researcher, they have bought into the value base of fairness and justice; they expect that the research to be implemented where possible to ensure it creates better systems. Furthermore, and equally important, they have also found themselves in a unique position as this work, possibly for the first time, has given them a legitimate and transformative voice in the school (Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2022).

I will summarise by addressing the less-than-straightforward question of whether the participants had an ethical voice in this research. My experience of working with young people has helped me form an opinion that young people are often ignored, patronised and silenced within a school setting. Being true to my values, I wanted to use my research to change this status quo, and if I were to do that the participants needed a voice and to be heard. The youth participation in schools model (see Figure 35) that I introduce in the discussion chapter is designed to ensure there is a process whereby this happens. I disengaged myself from the participants by enabling the YRT to take responsibility for the data collection. This had the negative effect of reducing their access to me. We had a remote relationship, so the chances of them directly impacting ethical decisions were reduced. We set up systems enabling them to speak to the specialist pastoral worker, and they also met their YRT members every week. Whilst the YRT developed close and mutually beneficial relationships with the participants, there was no systematic provision for the discussion of ethical issues. The YRT made me aware that they occasionally had conversations that could be placed within this category. However, the concern of how participants may be able to have a greater ethical voice is an area that requires further exploration. Whilst the significance of whose ethical voice can be heard is important, it was also critical that young people influenced the shape of the research. This is something that I discuss in the following section.

7.7 Using a patient and public involvement (PPI) approach to enable young people to shape the research

Throughout the first few months of my PhD, I was challenged about my position within the research. In chapter 5, I explored my use of the term authentic research and how this related to my position as an ex-teacher and my desire for this not to compromise my findings. As my research shape started to develop, my first ethical deliberations began. A fundamental question I needed to address was whether young people who had known me as assistant headteacher of the school a year earlier would accept and trust me in my new role as a researcher. I intended that this research needed to reflect the thoughts and understanding of young people in the school; my knowledge of the school and its systems was different to young people who experienced it. To put it bluntly I made the rules, and they were expected to follow them. I wanted to ensure that any findings were not my interpretation of what young people said, but their own interpretation. To be able to do this would require the development of trusting relationships (see section 7.5), and the experiences of my previous school life could potentially hinder that.

I needed to start as I meant to go on and talk to young people to determine their views and preferences about how they would like me to approach the research. Mindful of the power imbalance due to my previous role, I aimed to attempt to deconstruct any existing issues. To do this, I arranged a series of meetings with groups of young people in school using a PPI process often used in health settings to improve the relevance and quality of the research (Hoddinott et al., 2018). PPI is defined as research being conducted either with or by patients and members of the public (Hoddinott et al., 2018). It is a flexible approach with the general aim of improving patient outcomes by involving them in the design of the research questions, methods of collection and analysis, and also decisions to do with the dissemination of findings (Hoddinott et al., 2018). Fundamentally, this is a research process ensuring outcomes matter to patients as they are relevant to those who will benefit from the work. Here was an opportunity for young people to contribute with knowledge gained from their own lived experience, making the research more equitable and ethical. Using this process, it became clear that their feelings of worth would be boosted through being included from the outset (Hoddinott et al., 2018).

Through this PPI process, the most important questions I asked were about communication. All young people involved in this research needed to be comfortable with the arrangements we made for the data collection, including whom they were expected to talk to. I had four

one-hour meetings, two with young people aged 13 and 14, and two with sixth-formers aged 16 and 17. Over the four hours, we focussed on two key questions:

- How would those involved in the research want to be addressed?
- Who would young people in the research feel most comfortable talking to?

When I was teaching, I often felt uncomfortable when young people addressed me as 'sir'; I was far happier when young people used my name, 'Mr McPartlan' and, on rare occasions, 'Dave'. I would always address young people by their first names as a mark of respect for them. However, within the context of this research, I thought it important that the young people involved had the opportunity to define themselves. Were they students, pupils, teenagers, or adolescents? The 16- and 17-year-olds did not want to be referred to as 'teenagers or adolescents' as, in their minds, these terms had negative connotations. Many young people were uncomfortable with the terms 'student and pupil' as this defined them through their education status. They, therefore, suggested the term 'young person', something up until that point I had not considered. In my session with the 13- and 14-year-olds, I added this to the activities, and they agreed with the sixth formers that the term 'young person' should be adopted. This is noteworthy as one of the aims when initiating this research was to ensure young people were at the centre, with a significant voice within it. There was a substantial jeopardy to my integrity as a researcher if I did not talk to young people about such issues. It would have been unethical of me to assume how young people wanted to be addressed; I would have chosen one of the other terms, leading to resentment among some young people. In turn, this was likely to have impacted the relationship between young people and me, and possibly could have impacted the authenticity of the research findings.

The second question was more straightforward. I was open with the young people in the PPI meetings and explained my trust and power issues concerns. I asked them, "Who should conduct the research interviews?" Again, starting with the 16- and 17-year-olds, we worked together to develop three options. I could do the empirical data collection myself; I could get an outside researcher to collect data for me, or I could work with older young people from the school to collect the data. The younger cohort was clear that they would not be keen to talk to an ex-teacher like me, as there may be trust issues, and they would not be comfortable talking to an adult researcher who was new to them. There was unanimous agreement from all young people involved in the PPI work that the best model would be for sixth-formers to work with

me; they would be the ones to collect the primary data from the participants. The younger group believed their peers would be more likely to be open and honest talking to young people closer to their own age.

Reflecting on the PPI, an extra round of discussions with young people may have benefitted the process. As I suggested above, an exploration of ethical issues, including relationships, prior to the research's instigation would benefit the research's start. It would allow the researcher to set the tone with young people and commence the crucial relationship development between the parties. Whilst this consultation with young people helped shape the research, it was completed from a position outside the research. As the working relationships developed through the research process, I realised that an alternative ethical approach needed to be considered. In the following section, I will explore the applicability of relational ethics as an approach for this research.

7.8 Relational ethics

The premise of relational ethics is that ethical decisions and actions are made within a context of a relationship (Pollard, 2015). Much of the work around relational ethics has come from healthcare (Cook, 2012), although there are lessons that education can learn from this. Studies have explored how some relationships are better than others for providing healthcare (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005), in particular ones that follow the principle of a concrete other as opposed to a generalised other. That is where relationships are developed, and decisions are informed by learning from the relationship rather than by often oversimplified and universal knowledge. Bergum and Dossetor (2005) also identified a number of key interdependent principles (discussed below) underpinning relational ethics in healthcare, which YPDAR in a school setting can build upon. There has been a shift in healthcare from traditional thinking, positioning the nurse and patient as independent agents, towards a more integrated approach (Pollard, 2015). It is now accepted that ethical commitment, agency and responsibility for oneself and others develop through interactions involving relations between individuals (Pollard, 2015).

Similarly, as I discuss in section 5.4.4, YPAR sees occasions where young people are used in a tokenistic way (Alderson, 2000; Charteris & Smardon, 2019), or are seen as objects of research; procedural ethics are likely to dominate in such instances. YPDAR ensures that the

researcher and young people are interdependent and connected, so that ethical decisions are constructed through a collaborative partnership. This ethical commitment develops from relationships built on social situations and involving individuals with agency. They take responsibility for themselves and others within the research relationship (Pollard, 2015).

7.8.1 Fundamental principles of relational ethics

7.8.1.1 *Mutual respect*

Mutual respect is generated through responsibility for one another and has a role in rebalancing power dynamics (Pollard, 2015). Within this research, the YRT and I had different power; I had the power associated with being an ex-teacher and researcher, whilst they had the power gained from their lived experience as young people who, amongst other things, had attended the school for six years. The YRT also had the power to disengage from the process and pay lip service to the study, or even subvert it. The different power we had was what complimented, rather than excluded, within the relationship (Behabib, 1987). As the premise of these relationships was from a value base of equity and complimentary reciprocity (Pollard, 2015), we needed mutual respect. This developed through a common and non-opposition standpoint that acknowledged our phenomenological experiences.

7.8.1.2 *Engagement*

Building a relationship, a central pillar of YPDAR and relational ethics, was how I engaged with the YRT. This was about me being able to move my position towards the YRT (and the YRT towards the participants) (Bergum, 2012) so that we were alongside each other and engaged with the other (Olthuis, 2001). The engagement resulted from this real 'researcher-self' being present only as a result of our relationship (Pollard, 2015). A significant aspect was gaining an understanding of others' perspectives, complexities and vulnerabilities. As the researcher, if I had tried to imagine myself in their place, I would have risked discounting their phenomenological experience. Instead, by working alongside them, I identified their unique needs, limitations, talents and capacities (Pollard, 2015), which enabled me to develop positive relationships and work on an equal epistemological level with them to support them to improve their own and others' lives.

7.8.1.3   Embodied knowledge

Embodied knowledge concerns the distinction between an intellectual decision-making exercise and decisions made through cognitive, affective and emotional experiences gained through our lived experiences (Pollard, 2015). This was the desired way of working for the YRT and me. It was about making judgements based on perception, as it was impossible to apply systematic universal rules to each and every situation within the research (Nussbaum, 1990). As the research developed and our relationships matured, how we interacted and made ethical decisions changed. Earlier in this chapter, I discussed how, on occasions, I had to decide how to respond to inappropriate comments by staff. As a teacher, I would not have commented to the YRT about it, as this would have been seen as unprofessional. However, from a relational ethics approach, I referred to embodied knowledge and opened a conversation with my research partners about these inappropriate comments (Tomaselli et al., 2020).

7.8.1.4   Environment

As social beings, and in relation to our environment, we are connected to others and to wider society; who we are, our perceptions, values and concepts are, therefore, a product of our environment (Sherwin, 1998). However, within relational ethics, there is a subtle difference in that we are the environment (Bergum, 2012); we cannot be separated from others, and this mutuality defines this as the key aspect of the environment. This mutuality was how the power differentials were redistributed. This aspect of relational ethics was further complicated by three constituents within its relationships: the YRT, the research participants and me, the researcher. Mutuality existed between me and the YRT, as well as between the participants and the YRT. Further research will be required to look at whether mutuality was in any way transferred between the participants and me via the YRT.

7.8.1.5   Uncertainty

As discussed throughout this chapter, values are at the centre of this research. However, these values often brought dilemmas, difficult decisions and uncertainty (McPherson et al., 2004). With uncertainty came the realisation that there may well be no perfect answer to a given problem; instead, a best fit was sought within the context of unique situations (McPherson et

al., 2004). Rather than power, information and ideology, what was required was humility, understanding and relationships (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). The knowledge constructed through context when we worked as a team in this way was often incomplete. We found the process challenging as we worked to draw our findings together and make recommendations to the school. Therefore, we used a self-reflective process including various methods such as discussion, writing, my collaborative self-reflection tool (Figure 13), and negotiation to address the tension regarding what needed to be done (Pollard, 2015). Whilst the key principles above are fundamental to relational ethics, I believe within the research context time and the nature of the dialogue are also highly significant.

7.8.2 Time and contextual experience

In addition to the fundamental principles Bergum and Dossetor (2005) identified, a further element yet to be discussed is time and contextual experience. As discussed in chapter 4, power is important when considering school research. Young people are subject to teacherism and may be regarded as oppressed (Cammarota, 2002; Delgado, 2008; Ginwright & Shier, 2015; Corney et al., 2021). It is unrealistic to imagine a teacher/researcher from within the school, or a researcher from outside, can turn up and expect young people to engage and trust them immediately. The complexity compounds the problem in relation to the power differential between the adult researcher and young people in the school (Schäfer & Yarwood, 2013). Relationships take time and effort to develop. Whilst relationships are never static, and constantly change in one way or another, this nascent relationship could and probably should take many months to develop. My experience was working for many months with the same group of young people. Some of the conversations we had and decisions we made in the latter part of our research would not have been possible earlier. Whilst the time, in relation to the number of interactions, discussions, arguments, and decisions, cannot be quantified, the contextual experience of the relationship is all important. The researcher held the key to this by living out the values in everything done within the research. In this way, young people were in no doubt of my intentions and, crucially, their own place within the research.

7.8.3 The nature of dialogue within relational ethics

Whilst dialogue is part of YPAR, as I synthesised it with CMM, I realised it was a fundamental and essential constituent of our way of working. It was the element that ensured young people were taken seriously as collaborative partners, rather than as tokenistic objects, as sometimes can happen in YPAR (Alderson, 2000; Charteris & Smardon, 2019); dialogue is also fundamental to the success of relational ethics. Relational ethics are not about following rules or guidelines, nor are they solely about solving problems on the ground (Hilppö, Chimirri, & Rajala, 2019). They are about being attentive and responsive to others within the relationship (Austin, 2007). To do this, the researcher must commit to being self-reflexive in relation to the assumptions and predispositions of others within the relationship. They also require self-awareness on behalf of the researcher so there is an appreciation of the relationship as defined by those whose lives are being studied; this, in turn, defines the researcher (Hilppö, Chimirri, & Rajala, 2019). This means relational ethics are about being open and available to others. They are about responsivity and preparedness to listen to others and take their concerns seriously. There is a need for sensitivity and inclusivity through open dialogue, but this does not mean that anything goes; it is about being in this together (Austin, 2007), as the research builds through honest dialogue, enabling all involved to bring their reflections to the table. Openness is established through the development of the research relationship building during and beyond the research project; it impacts the life of the researcher and the researched (Ellis, 2007).

Relational ethics within research involves walking alongside your research partners as their supporter and their advocate; it engages them, as a participant, *with them* rather than as a spectator *of them*; it is about the research, but it is also about the everyday life of those partnering in the research (Maffesoli, 1989). As researchers are not only *in* the world of their research partners but also *of* the world (Barad, 2007), and as social relationships have implications relating to contextualised power balances (Erickson, 2006), relational ethics move beyond preventing harm. Instead, the focus should be developing a partnership that will improve the lives of those being researched and possibly that of the researcher. It is thus a symbiotic relationship.

7.9   Chapter summary

In this chapter, I have set out the ethical journey this research has taken me on, from my introduction via the university's ethical procedures ensuring the safety of all involved to my realisation of the central role relationships has played within the research. My position as a social constructivist has enabled me to view ethics through a collaborative mindset, supporting my decision to promote the position of the YRT. I have explored how the principles of relational ethics have influenced my research and have positioned dialogue within my ethical approach.

Part 3. What did we find out and what does it mean?

In parts one and two, I have laid out the context of the research and have both described and explained how and why the research was carried out. Part three of this thesis will show what I learned in my research, and what I hope this means for future practice. It also looks at the limitations of this study and how further research is required to develop ideas raised in this thesis.

Chapter 8: Findings

8.1 Chapter introduction

This chapter introduces the findings and is divided into three sections. Firstly, I present my findings concerning the whole school mental health strategy. I then present two sets of findings on my new methodology, YPDAR; its impact on young people and on school character. This is then followed by a chapter containing detailed discussion as well as limitations to the study.

8.1.1 Development of my discoveries in relation to the whole school mental health strategy

My findings about the whole school mental health strategy resulted from the five-part collaborative process between myself, the YRT and the participants, which are highlighted in chapter 6. Our work was conducted within the context of praxis; learning from action, reflecting and building forward. In addition to this process, I also conducted more formal reflective exercises, including developing frameworks to categorise and help apply the findings. This was carried out with the YRT, who mirrored our reflective meetings with the participants to sense-check our findings. After completing frameworks built through praxis, this ongoing cycle of action and reflection enabled us to develop our findings, which I have summarised below.

8.2 Findings

I will write the following section in a neutral voice, and will not use any of the texts outlined on page 10 of my introduction. The findings related to the school mental health strategy were created collaboratively between myself and the YRT, whilst the methodological findings were created by myself.

Throughout this research, and as I highlight in 5.8.1, I wrestled with my positionality within it. I was always conscious that I had developed a methodology, YPDAR, which empowered young people and subsequently took some of the control away from me, the researcher. In exploring the ethical considerations in Chapter 7, I look at the importance of the relationships within the research process. Section 7.5.3 explores what was involved in handing power to

the YRT and how this, in turn, reinforced the development of trust and confidence in the methodological process. I was developing what I call the methodological voice of the YRT, see section 7.6.2. This entailed taking on responsibility to ensure they were not let down in the research process. I set them up as partners in the research working on an equal epistemological level, and I had to ensure this principle was adhered to. We worked on the analysis of the research together and collaborated to develop the findings. When we settled on the findings, I asked the team to write them up and present them to me. They presented them in bullet point format, which created a problem for me. I was aware that traditionally findings chapters were often substantial works rarely presented in bullet point format. I, therefore, had to choose to either abandon the work of the YRT and re-write the findings in my own way or accept their work as it was. To be true to my inclusive values and the YPDAR methodology, I had little choice but to use the findings as they had been presented; I had to have the courage of my convictions. This research was built around a collaborative process where we worked as co-researchers. I, therefore, adopted the YRT recommendations and used their bullet point format. Having made this decision, it then made sense to use this same bullet point format for my own methodological findings also.

Whole school mental health strategy findings

The focus of the findings related to the whole school strategy concentrated on three areas, two of which were interlinked. Firstly, young people reported that whilst the school had set up referral systems for them, this entailed approaching staff for help. This was problematic for some young people due to trust issues. This links with the second issue around trust. The school strategy relied upon school surveys as a self-awareness tool for young people and a gauge for the school. However, young people did not trust the survey process. Finally, young people also reported dissatisfaction with how they were educated about mental health in school.

Oppressive school structures encourage teacherism, which has a detrimental effect on staff/young person's relationships.

    i)   Good trusting staff/student relationships are of the utmost importance because:
- Young people requiring support will only go to those staff they trust.
- Young people requiring support prefer to go to staff they know and trust.

- Young people requiring support will not trust staff they feel are judgemental and display teacherism.

ii) Pastoral staff are often the preferred choice of staff they will choose to go to because:
- For many young people, these staff have dealt with personal/family issues previously, and many pastoral staff have followed cohorts of young people through the school and are likely to have a more trusting relationship with an individual.
- Young people do not have a perception that pastoral staff have the same conflict of roles that class teachers may have.
- These staff give more opportunity for confidentiality than teaching staff do.

iii) The member of staff responsible for the pupil premium young people has built one-to-one relationships with many from this cohort and was the most popular choice for someone to confide in because:
- Young people trust her.
- She does not judge young people.
- Young people are comfortable talking to her as they have built a relationship with her.
- She is consistent, kind and understanding.

Trust

School surveys are not trusted by young people because:
- They don't know who will see the information and what those people will do with it.
- When completed in classrooms on computers, they feel others can see what they are entering.

Curriculum

i) Personal development lessons should be used more effectively to educate young people about mental health and reduce the stigma around mental health by:

- Focussing on the recognition of the signs of poor mental health, self-help strategies and whom to go to for help if needed.
- Making mental health a frequent and regular topic in lessons.
- Making lessons positive, fun and, where possible, personal to the individual.

ii)   Other subjects don't contribute enough to the education around mental health and reducing stigma because:

- They don't explain the part they have to play in supporting mental health (e.g., PE, drama and art).
- They don't reference mental health during routine lesson time.

By synthesising YPAR and CCM, I developed my new methodology, YPDAR. There were two primary beneficiaries of YPDAR, young people with whom I collaborated and the school within which the research was carried out. My methodological findings are presented below.

Methodology development and its impact on young people

The development of a new methodology, YPDAR, has enabled young researchers to develop their agency and build their confidence, trust, and empowerment.

i)   Developing a school-based research team empowers young people and improves their agency to act by:

- Giving them support to develop and lead research projects across the school.
- Mentoring them as they choose appropriate research methods.
- Demonstrating the use of reflexive practice within the research process.
- Supporting their development as critical thinkers.
- Developing their confidence and trust in school staff and structures.
- Creating a mutually-constitutive duality as the agency young people develop impacts upon the school structure that, in turn, puts their trust in what young people suggest. This further develops the trust, agency and empowerment of young people.
- Redistributing power dynamics.

ii)   Developing a school-based research team builds researcher confidence by giving them the opportunity to:

- Connect and engage other young people.
- Collaborate with school staff, working on an equal footing with them.
- Prepare resources and run research sessions.
- Develop their communication skills.
- Realise their own potential and further develop their sense of self.
- Develop knowledge in key areas (school mental health).
- Participate in academic forums through paper writing, conference presentations and wider research group membership, thus developing new forms of social and cultural capital.

iii)   Developing a school-based research process builds researcher trust with the school by:

- Putting a system in place that enables young people to bring forward their own ideas for school improvement.
- Giving young people the time, support, and resources to build meaningful relationships with school staff and structures.
- Engaging in conversations regarding their ideas about school improvement.
- Implementing findings from their research.

iv)   YPDAR can assist the development of young people's social and emotional skills and capabilities by:

- Creating opportunities for young people to rehearse emotional management, empathy, initiative, problem-solving, teamwork and responsibility in real-life situations.
- Supporting young people to develop a broaden-and-build schema through exposure to situations that require the domains of socio-emotional skills.

v)   Working collaboratively with a young research team to develop research furnishes researchers with the skills to understand and develop appropriate research methods by:

- Demonstrating different methods and supporting them to experiment with their own ideas.

- Encouraging them to use creative techniques.
- Demonstrating, supporting, and encouraging them to be reflexive in their approach to the research work.

vi) Through research projects, 6th formers have a key role as mentors to younger students in school because:

- Researching issues that are important to young people develops real-world situations that enable meaningful dialogue between groups of young people.
- They are looked up to by younger students and can inspire confidence in their mentees.
- Working with the younger participants on meaningful school research can shift the narrative around them and contribute to improvements in their sense of self and self-identity.
- They can develop attachment-like relationships that make a positive contribution to how younger students feel about themselves and the school. This, in turn, improves their experience of and engagement with the school in addition to improving their general confidence.
- They can provide a trusting outlet for younger students.

Methodology development and its impact upon school character

The implementation of my new research methodology, YPDAR, can enable schools to improve school character.

i) By adopting YRTs in school to collaborate with staff and other groups of young people, the school benefits from:

- The opportunity for young people to be involved in counter-cultural research.
- A more balanced power dynamic between staff and young people with the potential to improve staff/young people relationships and improve young people's agency.
- Greater trust between young people and school structures.
- A potential reduction in young people's perception of teacherism.
- The opportunity to support young people as critical thinkers and so engage in policy with the potential to transform the school from one supporting banking education to one with a problem-posing focus.

169

The development of YPDAR frameworks safeguards the integrity of both the research as well as the parties within it.

i)   The YPDAR framework sets the parameters for this research in schools by:

- Making the principles and values explicit.

- Centring dialogue and equity of relationships within the research.

- Ensuring multi-voice analysis through a process of crystallisation.

- Positioning relational ethics at the heart of the process.

Chapter 9: Discussion, limitations and challenges

9.1 Introduction

My research has chartered the dichotomy that is our schools. Schools are for young people; however, they do not necessarily cater for all of them. This discussion chapter will therefore concentrate on how my research can contribute to developing ways schools can further support young people's mental health. My emotional mental health framework and school mental health model are specific contributions to knowledge in this area.

To do this, this chapter will explore what my research means for future practice and how it has contributed to new knowledge. This will include several interconnected areas, all of which are linked by one common denominator, young people. My initial discussion will investigate the process through which the research was created, developed and completed. This is divided into two parts which I set as aenigmas. The first focuses on the literature around power issues and their impact on young people's agency, identity and social and cultural capital. The second part, linked to the first, is about the English education system, how it has developed through time and how socio-political influences have shaped it. I then reflect upon how this impacts young people. My research confirmed my view that schools' expectations of young people are as passive (Freire, 1970) recipients of education. The system in which young people are forced to fit in ensures they have little active voice, and therefore have little chance of real growth and development.

Following discussion related to the two aenigmas, I explore how the synthesis of CCM and YPAR created YPDAR, a methodology for use in schools, which I position as a solution to the two aenigmas above. YPDAR centres young people as transformative activists and change agents as they contribute to improving their school community and lives. I present YPDAR as an alternative to Freire's (1970) banking educational system. Rather than seeing young people as objects used within an oppressive system, this research positions them as capable young people who can use their subjective knowledge to overhaul a broken system. I will therefore explore how young people's participation and rights need to be included when considering consultation, collaboration and research with young people in schools. I conclude the chapter by applying this learning to my youth participation in schools model, a further contribution to knowledge.

9.2 The process

Each of my aenigmas is explored through a revisiting of the findings in light of the literature reviewed, something I describe as a praxis. The literature review in chapter 4 focuses on the role power plays in the lives of young people in school. As I discuss below, power structures dominate education, but power's negative impact on some young people is often unseen in this area. In particular, it reduces their epistemic agency as well as their agency to act in school. In addition to this, the participants, coming from the PP cohort, are more likely to have a poor sense of self and may be challenged by concerns around their identity. The final piece in this complex jigsaw, is how this same cohort may find school challenging as they may not have access to the social and cultural capital required to succeed. I, therefore, developed Figure 26 as a lens through which to view these young people in school today. This suggests a deficit perspective to young people and schools. However, having completed the empirical data collection, and having seen the benefits of YPDAR on the young people, I then returned to explore these relationships through an asset-based lens, which resulted in Figure 27, something I discuss later in this chapter. These common threads run through the above elements of the aenigmas. Within the context of the state school system, this research (section 4.9) has reflected on how some young people lack meaningful power and agency, and their identity is often being set by others. When this happens in a deficit way, their sense of self can be challenged, and a negative script can be set. Their capacity to generate meaningful social and cultural capital is hindered, and they are challenged both in life and school.

Similarly, our education system is a legacy of this country's class-driven past, which is reflected in how it imposes upon our young people. From my teaching experience, I suggest schools are largely anti-dialogic organisations that take a tokenistic approach to listening to young people's views. This can result in aspects of some young people's personal development being curbed. However, this research has also demonstrated how schools can empower young people and help develop their sense of agency which, in turn, helps improve young people's sense of self. It also plays a part in challenging the often-negative script ascribed to them. Chapter 2 touches on how neoliberal policy and other external influences have resulted in schools being fixated on assessments at the expense of broader cultural and social experiences. As the school curriculum is often narrowed and constricted by the focus

on assessment, young people are less able to benefit from the social and cultural capital that could help them. The asset approach that this research takes can be a counter to this.

9.2.1 A deficit approach

In section 7.4 I highlighted that young people are oppressed through adultism in society and teacherism in schools. This literature is supported in my research by the example I cite in chapter 7, when a teacher acts to undermine the legitimacy of the YRT when they report their findings to her. Chapter 4 highlighted some young people's difficulties in engaging with and taking responsibility for their mental health. This exemplifies how imbalances of power, between adults and young people in schools, can lead to young people being overlooked, dismissed, or even dominated by adults, something I review in the literature in chapter 4. Therefore, I suggest Figure 26 as a lens to explore how this can impact my research.

Connected to this are two further areas for consideration relating to adultism and structures of oppression. As discussed in section 4.4, whether structuration or morphogenesis, agency is interlinked with societal structures such as schools. My original assertion was that these two theories agreed that structure and agency were linked. However, reflecting on my findings, it is now clear that this research was an example of structuration as they are a "mutually constitutive duality" (Jones & Karsten, 2008, p. 129). In the findings chapter, I posit that this research developed an approach whereby the school started to trust the YRT, and they, in return, began to develop trust in the school.

I had created a situation whereby the research process empowered the YRT and developed their agency. The trust young people had previously not had in the school started developing as they completed the research and put recommendations forward. Trust development was a symbiotic relationship from a school's perspective as they were engaging with and acting upon suggestions made by young people about an area of school improvement. In this instance, it is hard to see how trust between the school and young people could have come about in isolation as each side required the other. Furthermore, I suggest that research of this nature, if taken on systematically by the school, can positively impact the school's character. When developed further, I posit that a school with an emerging culture of dialogue with young people is likely to afford these young people greater agency in their school lives. In

this way, a mutually constitutive duality has been created as agency and structure rely on each other to survive.

As I exemplify in chapter 2, the marketisation of schools since the 1980s has seen a shift in school values that, in turn, has impacted how teachers operate. Examples of such teacher behaviour surfaced during the research in two ways. Some teachers refused participants permission to miss a part of a lesson, citing work pressure as the reason; the participants were at least a year away from any exam classes. This was despite explicit instructions from the headteacher to the contrary. Similarly, early in the research, a number of the YRT withdrew from the project as they were being pressured by teachers who suggested they consider whether they had time for the research.

Young people were pressured into following the teacher's advice, which was given without due care relating to young people's wellbeing. It is how the school controls young people by imposing its will on them. These are the behaviours of schools striving to ensure their exam results meet expectations. In my experience, schools and staff who work in this way undermine many young people they are aimed at helping. While the focus of Figure 26 is the four key areas discussed in chapter 4, it is important to note how societal and school structures frame the theoretical principles. The power structures at play in society and schools are about how adults perceive and treat young people, something linked to hermeneutical injustice. I argued in chapter 2 that England's education system is an unfair and antiquated hierarchical structure that benefits the more affluent. It employs a deficit approach to working with young people. As demonstrated in Figure 26 below, both examples are related to power and its related structures, including teacherism. They were denying young people an opportunity to develop many skills, but also to develop their agency and their sense of self.

My findings identified what was being gained by young people was a trust and connection with the school, the development of potential and a sense of self, opportunities to develop skills, and social and cultural capital. I support my findings further with observations I made over the research period. In the first few meetings, the YRT wanted to be spoon-fed; they kept asking, "*how do we do that?*" or "*what do we do next?*" By the end of the research, they were challenging me, making critical reflections about our practice and presenting their findings at conferences. The participants and their YRT members were both critical and

resentful towards the teachers who limited their involvement in the project. I suggest that they would be unlikely to trust these staff moving forward, and thus reflecting the findings in this chapter related to young people/staff relationships. There are lessons for schools (and researchers) to learn about communication with staff. All staff knew of the research and the expectations on them; however, I am less sure that they had a clear understanding of its aims and the potential benefits it could bring both young people and the school.

As I reflect on my journey of becoming a researcher, I have recognised how the processes of learning take time. The findings of this study have demonstrated that when young people are given time to complete research, such as the YRT and participants, they can flourish and problem-posing education results (Freire, 1970). Unfortunately, teachers are being forced into fixing young people by cramming them with tests and extra classes, and trying to force their development. In contrast, I see a banking system in education (Freire, 1970). I suggest that my research has lessons for policymakers, teacher trainers and educators alike.

Determined by a lack of
confidence and trust
leading to a deficit in self-
competence, self-authority
and self-credibility

Agency

Antiquated hierarchical educational
structures disadvantage the
poorest in society

Prohibitive structures that deny
young people hermeneutical justice

Class inequalities in
society lead to a
corrupt and unfair
system that
disadvantages the
less well off

Capital

Inability to take
responsibility

Power

An imbalance of
power leading to
young people
being dominated
by adults

The perpetuation of unfair economic
structures reinforce the status quo
for the poorest in society

Power structures that impose
inequality on young people

Identity

Poverty, disadvantage and
marginalisation results in
confusion, cynicism and a
lack of direction that in turn
leads to poor self-
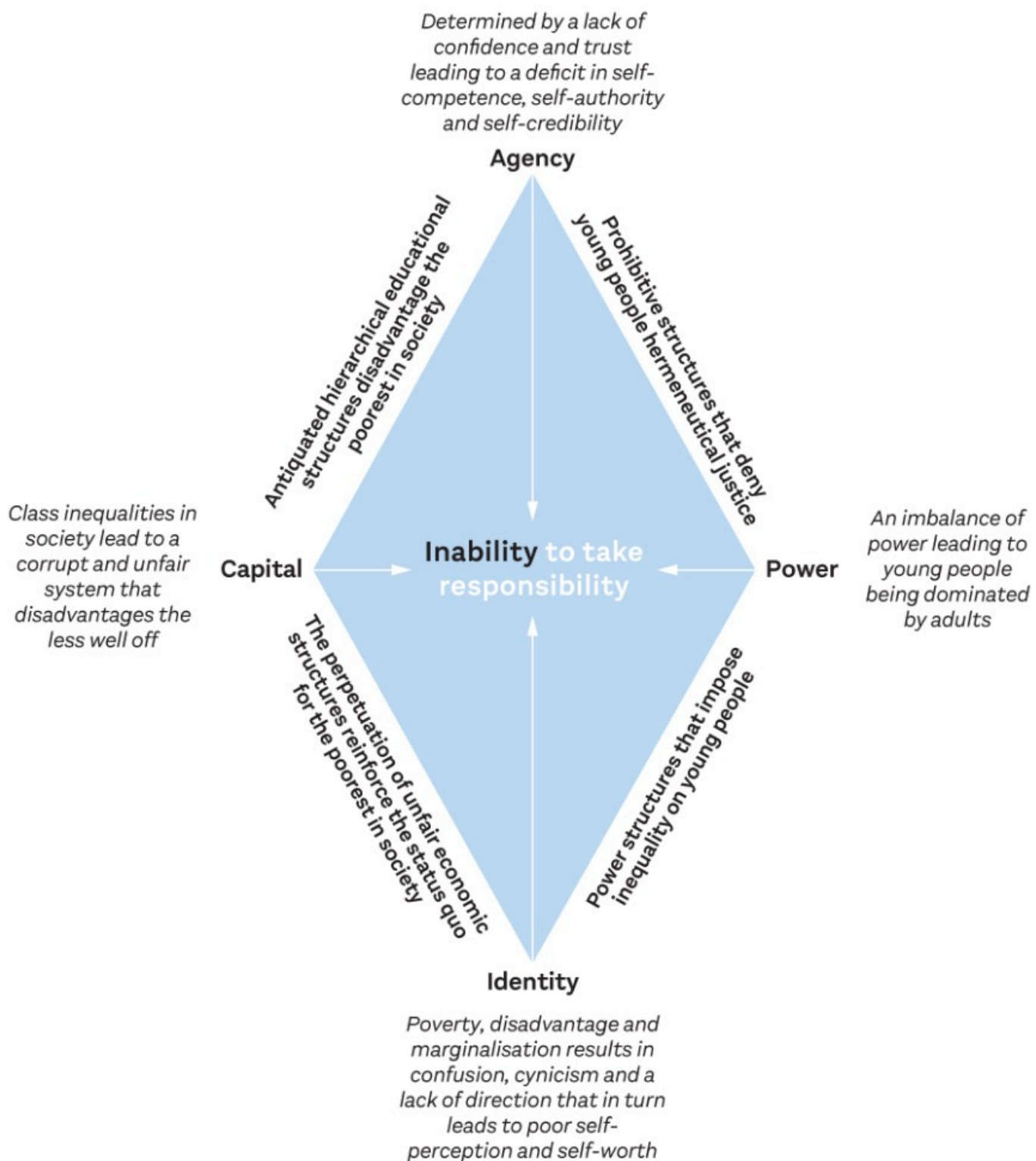perception and self-worth

Figure 26: Inability to take responsibility: a deficit-based tool

9.2.2 Barriers to research success in schools

As discussed previously, the English education system is a legacy of the class-based society that has evolved in this country. As I progressed on this research journey, I became aware of potential barriers to its success. One of the most significant barriers to effective and progressive research with young people was adultism. Which promoted the deficit-focused view of children and young people (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002; Delgado, 2008). Adultism, which includes a lack of positive social norms related to young people and laws delegitimising young people, is further compounded by adult values that are internalised as negative beliefs by young people themselves (Flasher, 1979; Kennedy, 2018). In the ethics chapter, I suggest that it is possible to sub-categorise adultism further in relation to a school setting. As evidenced in the findings, I argue that a specific type of adultism in school should be described as teacherism, where teachers use their position and power to subjugate young people. I explore this in more detail and define it in section 7.4. Many young people feel totally disempowered and delegitimised within a school setting as there is a compulsion for them to attend an institution in which they often feel distinctly uncomfortable. Experiences of adultism are magnified through teachers shaping and supporting oppressive school structures. Teacherism has developed historically alongside adultism and is now a dysconscious act for many teachers; they behave towards young people as society, and the school's management structures, expect them to. The term dysconscious refers to an uncritical habit of the mind that includes perceptions, attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs, and justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as a given (King, 1991).

I should have prepared the teachers to be involved in the meetings; in hindsight, that was a mistake. In chapter 7, when I explore ethics within the research, I refer to an incident when a teacher became extremely defensive as the findings were explained. As I now explore with the Academy Trust how the next stage of this research will work, I need to be cognisant of this as a potential issue. One of the challenges moving forward will be how schools and their staff can be prepared for such situations. As I discuss in the limitations, all in the school community need to be aware of such research projects and their wider aims. The attitude of the member of staff suggested that the contributions of young people were incompetent and untrustworthy, and therefore the adult/teacher would impose what they thought was right; and young people were ignored (Schelbe et al., 2015). On reflection, my understanding of the importance of trust has developed since the end of the project. I was determined to encourage

the development of relationships between the YRT and participants, as well as between myself and the YRT. I also aimed for all young people involved to develop confidence and trust that the school would take their work seriously. However, as I alluded to above, I should have acknowledged the importance of the school trusting the YRT. The incident above, where I believe the teacher was unprofessional, was partially down to the fact that I neglected to prioritise trust development, from the school and staff in the young people. I have therefore concluded that, for this research to be successful, trust must be a two-way process; schools also need to play their part.

Schools must be committed to the research and cognisant of the potential for such studies to be culture-changing. To ensure research of this nature is more than tokenistic, schools must commit to prioritising the work as a valued school improvement project. This will need to include continued professional development for all staff and the regular celebration of what has been achieved by the young researchers to their peers. To facilitate this, and as the potential research facilitator and the teacher-researchers supervisor, I have offered to share the theory and background philosophy with all school staff. I have suggested regular updates be made available to staff from the teacher-researchers and myself. This is about slowly changing the school's character through a process that drip-feeds information, celebrates success and demonstrates the strengths and abilities of young people. I hope that ensuring staff are well-informed, interest and conversations between staff, young people and researchers will hasten cultural changes within the institutions. Educators, educator trainers and researchers working in schools need to be aware that unless schools are fully committed to working in this way, and all staff adequately prepared, trust is liable to break down (from either direction), meaning the likelihood of success will also be limited.

Teacherism is a more extreme example of adultism because the structures of the school support teachers. In particular, a school's policy will reinforce how the teachers can impose their will on young people. One such policy implemented in English schools after perceived successes within the criminal justice system is zero tolerance for what schools deem inappropriate behaviour. Despite the fact that research from the United States of America (USA) (Skiba, 2008) found that the suggested successes of zero tolerance in schools were, in fact, ill-founded, it seems that many secondary schools in England have gone down a similar road of zero tolerance behaviour policies. However, research has shown that young people in schools who use these policies feel victimised, and believe that once identified by teachers as

someone who does not follow the rules, they will be subject to a vicious cycle of sanctions (Nassem, 2019). These policies further alienate already-disillusioned young people who often find it a challenge to fit into schools. This is important in the context of this research as my findings show that some young people already lack trust in the staff. They find the school systems that create or further promote teacherism work counter to the positive school character that promotes openness. Nassem's (2019) research goes further. It suggests that the policy, and the attitude it creates in the school, allow staff to ostracise and humiliate young people, particularly those with disabilities and learning difficulties. To compound things further, the research findings also highlighted that disadvantaged young people, often from working-class backgrounds, were disproportionately impacted by such policies.

The example above strengthens my argument that teacherism is a consequence of adults having their power base strengthened by the policies and structure in which they work. These are the very young people who, from my experience, can lack the cultural capital to fit in, enjoy and fully benefit from attending school. As discussed in chapter 3, neuroscience has shown that adolescence is a period whereby the brain develops and that risk-taking is more likely. The needs of young people at this time are more likely to benefit from adult support, identity negotiations and academic self-efficacy (Skiba, 2008). I have been involved as a teacher in numerous schools throughout my career and have observed elements of teacherism in them all. My research highlights the importance of creating other ways of knowing. I suggest that a zero-tolerance behaviour policy is a "structure of oppression" and supports a banking concept of education (Freire, 1970, p. 47). In contrast, the type of research that I have been conducting gives young people problem-posing education that has the potential to transform these structures of oppression and, in the process, enable the development of new knowledge (Freire, 1970).

I used Gramsci (1971) to demonstrate how power plays out across society, alongside his ideas of cultural hegemony. The same could be said for struggles in schools. As I demonstrate below, the findings support this view in that I set this research as counter-cultural. What has emerged during this investigation is a form of research that has also been able to counter the oppressive structure young people find themselves in today. Young people have little power in society or school, and their role in this research has empowered them and given them the opportunity to create change within the organisation. By offering young people this chance to get involved in the research, I played a part in repositioning them as

epistemic agents by a soft redistribution of the hegemonic school power (Ko & Krist, 2019). This was done by intentionally opening up dialogic spaces, and thus allowing young people to become co-collaborators in knowledge (Ko & Krist, 2019). I deliberately use the term soft in relation to the redistribution of school power, and suggest that any power shift needed to be through evolution rather than revolution. In my experience, schools are not revolutionary places, and whilst I have observed numerous school leaders promoting concepts linked to critical pedagogy, few seem to support their implementation actively. This may be due to critical pedagogy being seen as a revolutionary concept.

Shifting power can create uncomfortable positions in schools built around implicitly designed systems (Ko & Krist, 2019). To change systems directly would have required an enormous values shift. However, collaborative research, such as this, gives opportunities for a soft shift in power that redistributes epistemic agency (Ko & Krist, 2019). My findings support the approach encouraged by the literature. The participants and YRT reported increased confidence, empowerment, and a sense of agency as they developed their trust in the school. I suggest this was the beginning of a redistribution of the hegemonic school power. This is reflected in comments made by a YRT member in section 7.5.3. I see the soft power shift, through student-led school improvement research, as a contribution to new knowledge. There have previously been young researchers in schools, but my research has positioned it as research that, if done systematically, can change the hegemonic character of the school.

The findings in chapter 8 also highlight the success of the research in this respect. By collaborating with the YRT and supporting them, they have become more able to use a reflective approach and develop their critical thinking. The ability to be a self-reflective critical thinker is a skill that helps prepare researchers to recognise and help transform oppressive structures (Clark, 2010). The YRT, through this research, were at the beginning of a transformative process of changing school structures. Maybe, more importantly, it was also about transforming themselves. This has resulted in young people who have grown in confidence as researchers. We jointly published research findings as an academic paper and have co-presented these at a conference.

I ensured the YRT had the space and voice to contribute, and the audience and influence to make a difference (Lundy et al., 2020). This was about developing a new authority or hegemony with young people at the core, with the intention of contributing to dismantling the

adult-dominated hegemony that has limited the powers of these young people (Cheney, 2019). The YRT recognised their development and acknowledged the role the research has played in their self-confidence, as reflected in their comments in section 7.5.3. I recognise that the YRT were presenting at an adult-led conference, and I realise the limitations of this. As a YPAR special interest group (SIG) member in the Action research network of the Americas (ARNA), I am engaged with academics from the USA, South Africa, France, Italy, Portugal and Greece. We are developing forums for young researchers from all over the world to meet (initially online) and learn from each other by sharing knowledge from their own participative research. The ultimate aim is to bring these groups together for their own conference. In this way, our ultimate aim is to establish a mechanism enabling young people to collaborate with minimum interference/influence from adults.

To summarise, I return to the inequalities of our class-based system and reflect on how it deprives some young people of the social and cultural capital often required to succeed in society today. The status quo is protected by societal and school structures that privilege the middle and upper classes and deny many young people the opportunity to thrive in society. As I discussed in chapter 4, these may well include schools that I have described as technologies of oppression (Stuart et al., 2019). I believe that the school and societal approaches to some marginalised young people hinder young people's ability to take responsibility. This deficit approach tool is summarised in Figure 26, that is based upon this discussion. In chapter 4, I discuss in detail the impact power differentials and the opportunities young people have for social and cultural capital can have on their identity and their agency to act. This research has given both the participants and, more particularly, the members of the YRT an opportunity to develop different forms of social and cultural capital. The writing of an academic paper gives these young people an opportunity they are unlikely to have had. It broadens their educational and cultural scope and maybe the extra ingredient that helps prise open a door of opportunity for them later in life. Likewise, presenting at a conference gave them a new experience; they rubbed shoulders with academics and professionals from different worlds. It gave them new experiences away from their home and school environment; opportunities to develop social and cultural capital away from the norm.

9.2.3 Power, structures and agency

In section 4.4 I explore how agency intersects with power relationships. Oswell (2013) suggests that the concept of agency should be viewed through a relational lens; it exists not within an individual but in the context of relationships with others. Horgan et al. (2017) go one step further, suggesting that young people are relational beings impacted by their environment. The views of Oswell (2013) and Horgan et al. (2017) are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, my findings show that young people involved in this research improved their trust and confidence in the school, and through this their agency to act. This came about as the power dynamics shifted from school and staff towards young people.

Below I highlight the key findings in relation to the importance of young people/staff relations and, as such, I agree with Oswell that young people will have an increased agency to act if they trust a member of staff. Horgan et al's. (2017) view that choosing to participate (agency to act) is supported by my suggestions in the previous section that schools that develop an environment of open dialogue with young people are more likely to support young people's agency to act. In particular, the relevance of societal structures and schools takes on great significance in this respect. In the previous section, I discussed schools as structures of oppression and how teacherism reinforces this concept. It, therefore, follows that some young people in schools are impacted by the oppression of both the structure and the school staff, many of whom will display characteristics of teacherism. This is about the imposition of power by teachers on young people and, as discussed in section 4.4, some young people are less likely to be able develop their sense of agency within this school context when challenged by a non-pro-social power-based approach. This links to my findings in Chapter 8: Findings suggesting the importance of young person/staff relationships in relation to young people being prepared to confide in staff should they need support for mental health issues. Young people's agency is paramount if we want them to come forward and ask for help. If they do not have a trusting relationship with a school staff member, it is unlikely that they will seek help. This new insight gives educators an alternative lens through which to view a school mental health strategy, as I found that young people were unwilling or unable to engage with the staff they did not trust. If some young people do not trust adults in schools and therefore will not come forward, we need to find an alternative to support them. We need to focus more on relationship development in schools and ask young people about

their preferred option before then supporting them to get it. This area requires further research.

As I emphasise in the deficit tool, Figure 26 above, antiquated social structures reinforce the disparities between sections of society. Also, as I have highlighted, this is seen in English schools. They combine to undermine young people as their self-identity is weakened, and they need more power, agency, and capital assets to take responsibility in areas of their life both in and out of school. However, this research has demonstrated that it does not need to be this way. As I will demonstrate below, my research took an asset-based approach to collaborate with young people.

9.2.4 An asset approach

One of the challenges to ensuring young people's development, is society's (and school's) deficit approach. We live in a culture that wants to identify those in need, what is needed and what provision is required (McCashen, 2014). This approach is risky as it has the danger of developing a deficit discourse that further marginalises, oppresses and disadvantages those it is trying to support, and often blames them for problems in society (Pitzer, 2013). This discourse is ably reinforced by the media, who take great delight in reporting young people as the problem (Tyler, 2014). The media messages are starkly portraying young people as delinquent and criminals with the need to be controlled (Stuart & Perris, 2017). This, in turn, then supports the deficit agenda that young people need fixing. What is required instead is an asset-driven approach.

YPDAR was designed to ensure that the YRTs' involvement enabled them to participate fully in this research as co-researchers and thus ensure their rights as contributors to their own futures. As the research process developed and the findings emerged, I became increasingly aware of the research's positive impact on the young people involved. I, therefore, returned to my original deficit-based tool (**Error! Reference source not found.**) to develop an asset-based one (Figure 27). The findings, (see figure 8.2), were clear that developing a school-based research team empowered them and therefore started to rebalance power in school. This, in turn, enabled young people to develop their agency to act. The findings showed that the research process boosted young people's confidence through the development of their socio-emotional skills. It also improved young people's trust in the school. These processes

combined in a way that enhanced their sense of self and grew their self-identity. The following sections will further explain and explore the evidence and theory underpinning the asset-based tool (Figure 27).

An asset or strength-based approach focuses on what people can do, rather than what they cannot do (Stuart & Perris, 2017). As discussed in chapter 4, the theory of capital and its unequal distribution (Bourdieu, 1977) is closely linked to privilege and disadvantage. Furthermore, capital has also been connected to one's possession of assets (Mathie & Cunningham, 2005). Therefore, developing an asset-based approach to supporting young people can be seen as a way of championing the cause of the marginalised and, as such, is socially-just work (Stuart & Perris, 2017). I returned to the literature in chapter 4 to develop an asset-based tool to explore the potential of this research, Figure 27 below. My findings focus on the potential for an asset-based approach to the school. I have reached this conclusion because I found during my years as a teacher, and subsequently as a researcher, that much activity in school sees young people as being a glass half empty rather than a glass half full. This builds upon the work of (Foot & Hopkins, 2010) and demonstrates how my research, with young people as co-researchers, can address some of the highlighted issues.

The evidence from my YPDAR research has demonstrated how the young research team have grown and developed throughout the process. My aim at the beginning of the research was to ensure the YRT had as much input and control as possible. Whilst my research topic was set, they all volunteered, and thus bought into the subject area; we worked as a team to set the research agenda and methodology, continually discussing and evaluating what we did. My philosophy and methodology focused on developing the team as capable individuals who would contribute with their lived experience as their guiding light; this was an asset-based approach. What I learnt from this research was that the process was not a simple or linear one. As we approached each section of the research, new challenges were met, and these needed to be addressed. This took time, as we gently assessed the YRT strengths and weaknesses, so we could identify the skills gaps and address them as a team. Also, we needed to give whatever time was required to build relationships between myself and the YRT, as well as between the YRT and participants.

In section 7.5 I discuss how this research helped develop young people in various ways. These young people were demonstrating aspects of a problem-posing education system rather

than a banking education system (Freire, 1970). They very quickly started to realise that they had the potential to contribute and make a difference in their community.
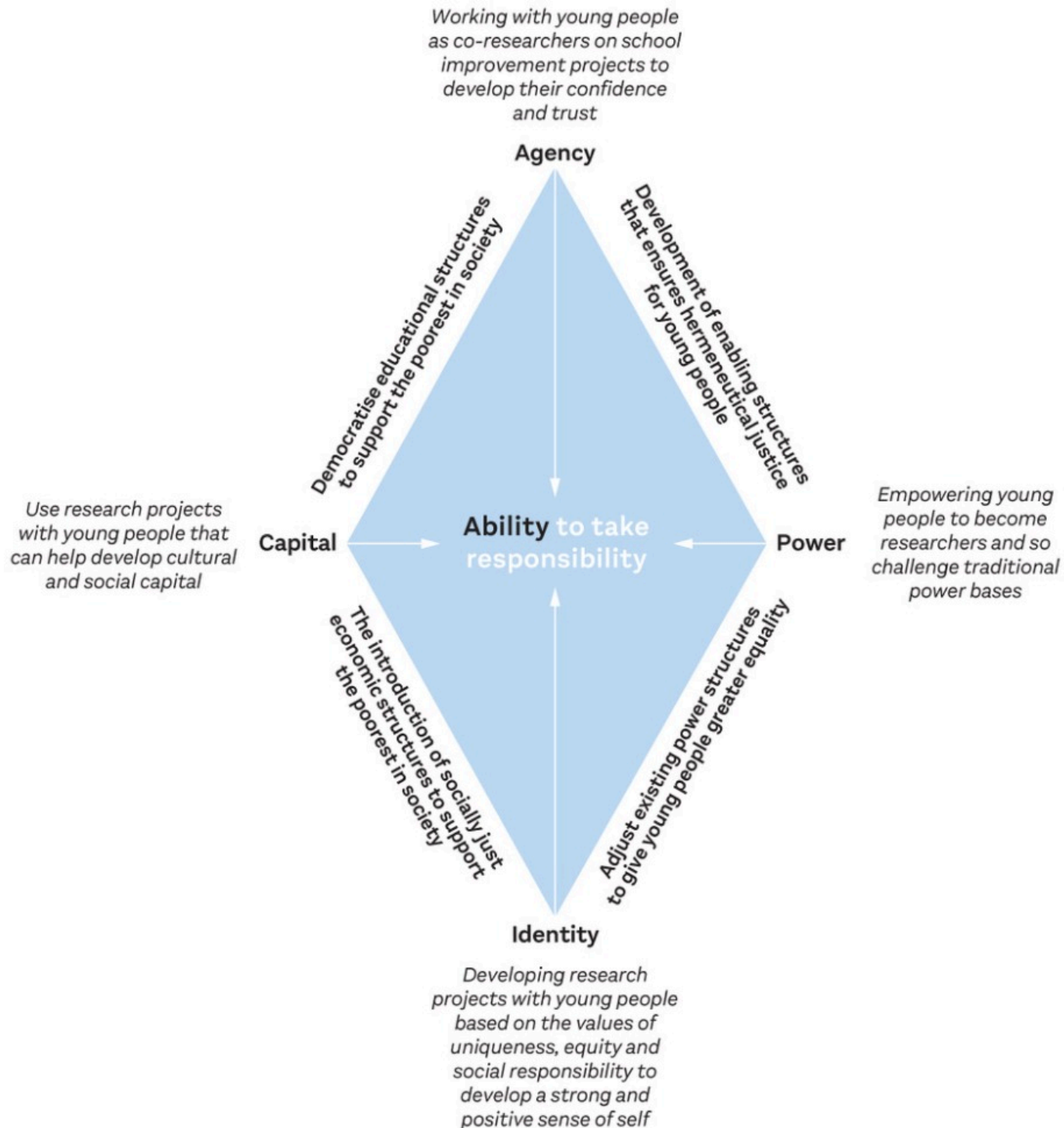

Figure 27: Taking responsibility: an asset-based tool

Freire, (1970, pp.46-48) wrote, "The more students work at storing deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of the world." This research was, in effect, about being able to "…transform that structure [school] so that they can become "beings for themselves."" This transformation required trust, which this research identified as lacking within this school's systems. As demonstrated in the findings, the participants were clear that there were elements of these systems that they would not engage in because they lacked trust in both the school structures and the adult staff. Earlier in this chapter, I give an example of how the YRT were subject to teachers during this research. As the project became established, trust developed, primarily between the young researchers and myself. They also started to trust the process, meaning they trusted that the school took the research seriously. A subtle switch in the power base became apparent. This aligns with what Freire (1970, p. 47) calls becoming "fully human" as the research acknowledged the role of both participants but more notably the YRT. By working as a research team, we engaged in critical thinking and were on a quest for "mutual humanisation". I had worked extremely hard to develop this critical ethic within the team by being a "partner(s) of the students"; I had "profound trust in people and their creative powers" *(*Freire, 1970, pp.46-48)*.

The school was committed to the research and, despite resistance from one teacher, most of the findings have been implemented. The school have made it clear that they want to listen to young people and allow them, where possible, to contribute to school improvement. The YRT, therefore, became empowered and transferred this to the participants, who also saw themselves as change agents.

Therefore, the processes we have developed in this research have positively impacted the school, young people and the structures that influence them. Whilst the impact so far has been small scale, there is potential for this to grow. The school has shown that they are prepared to engage with young people and listen. The message that the school is sending is vitally important. As long as the school follows through on its promises and commits to further such work, I am confident it can be transformative for all involved. The improvements

in confidence, trust, and relationships have helped develop young people's sense of agency; they have discovered a way to voice both their opinion and the opinion of their peers. Whilst small, there has been a shift in the power base. Previous to the research, the school had no real student voice relating to school improvement and the subsequent changes represent, a process of evolution rather than revolution. The research has empowered the YRT and participants, which has challenged the school's traditional power base. The research process, to date, has seen young people involved in the research, develop new skills, work with new people, and contribute in different ways. They have presented at meetings and conferences; some have contributed to an academic paper, and they have developed research skills. They have experienced something different from their peers, and mixed with professionals from various backgrounds new to them. Their experiences have been broadened and thus improved. Their social and cultural capital has been enhanced and will help them as they move forward. Overall, this work has impacted the identity of young people who now see themselves as confident and capable individuals with an important role to play in improving their own lives and those of their community.

In this way, an asset-based approach to working with young people has been developed and aligns with other research in this area. This includes Positive youth development (PYD), which focuses on evolving young people's competencies in the context of healthy relationships and communities (Teixeira et al., 2021). My research is also similar to Transformative student voice (TSV). TSV is about working with "adult allies" (Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2022, p. 2) in schools and developing marginalised young people's critical reflection skills through open dialogue. It aims for young people to become change agents (Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2022). This research has given a new perspective linked to young people researching in schools and is a significant contribution to knowledge.

By enabling young people to achieve through this research, I also believe that we are addressing epistemic injustice, something I discuss in detail in chapter 4. Houlders et al.'s (2021) arguments associated with this and how it links to self-identity and an individual's feelings of trust and confidence are also explored in detail in this chapter. I suggest that this is further compounded by schools displaying teacherism. As educational structures, I believe they may undermine young people's competency, authority, and credibility to comprehend their own experiences. Both distributive and testimonial injustice can, however, be addressed by schools.

In contrast to my reflections in chapter 4, where I discuss how some teachers denigrate and belittle young people, this research has the potential to promote young people's strengths as equal research partners. The literature I reviewed in chapter 4 related to hermeneutical injustice suggests that this is about individuals developing self-interpretive skills through social experience. It is also about the problems some young people from poorer backgrounds have in developing it (Dieleman, 2012). As demonstrated in the findings, we discovered that by involving young people from the pupil premium cohort in this research, they have been able to develop relationships with older young people which were reported as extremely positive in a number of ways. They have had the opportunity to speak their mind about school experience, debate and argue openly about the school, and develop their interpersonal skills through this. They are contributing to school improvement and developing their sense of worth. Possibly in a small way, this research provided a social base that enabled the development of hermeneutical agency.

After presenting the initial findings of the research to the school, the headteacher recognised the benefits and agreed to work further to develop a student-led, research-based school improvement model; a follow-up project investigating young people/staff relationships and how they impact the willingness of young people to ask for help in school has been completed. I am in discussion with the Academy Trust's CEO, looking at developing this model across a number of the Trust schools. The YRT have been given the guarantee of space, voice, audience and influence. In the introduction to this section, I referenced how schools as structures are part of the oppression of young people. Introducing young people from the pupil premium cohort to this research enables some of the poorest in society to develop self-confidence and feel valued as contributors to school improvement.

As I evidence in the findings above, this contributes to their sense of self and self-identity by changing the narrative around them. This research and the commitment of the school/Trust to enable its development is a step towards addressing structural issues in English schools. The asset tool above exemplifies the structural changes it has started to shift. The power structures have shifted, so young people's hermeneutical injustice is being addressed. This has come about as the research, based on young people's assets, is an enabling rather than disabling structure. In section 4.2, whilst exploring the literature related to power, young people and schools, I discuss how structures both develop society's culture and are created by society.

This is how I view my research, as it has started to develop the school's culture but is also being created in collaboration with the school. Maynard & Stuart (2017) write about the factors controlling individuals, including norms, rules, laws, and discourses, as being what is accepted as the way things are. This is the direction in which my research is moving as it aims to develop practice in schools that become an accepted way of working. This work also takes strides towards developing schools as truly democratic structures. This research has given a new perspective on how research collaboratives between young people and adults can positively impact young people and aspects of school character. Whilst, this work is unlikely to affect government economic policy, it has started to impact this school, which is a significant social structure in the lives of the young people in its community. Whilst I do not think this is enough to solve all related problems, I believe that it contributes to small changes that, with careful management, can be grown further within the institution, initially other schools in its Academy Trust and eventually throughout other schools in the country.

I have reviewed some of the literature regarding power in relation to society and schools in chapter 4. However, my focus on power throughout this thesis is also deliberate, and as expressed above I believe that it is an essential factor in the negative way in which some of our young people experience school; from a functionalist perspective (Durkheim, 1982) many young people fit into the role that they believe to be theirs. However, following Foucault's (1991) thinking around power as an enabling force, I believe the research has demonstrated precisely this. The participants from the pupil premium cohort and the YRT have blossomed through this research period. I have observed both groups of young people develop and grow. Many were shy young people lacking in confidence, but some have gone on to present their own experiences to academics, teachers and headteachers, whilst others have presented at conferences. As I have demonstrated, they have reported feeling empowered by the process as they contribute to school improvement and the mental health strategy.

9.2.5 School strategies to support young people's mental health

My initial inspiration for this research was around young people's mental health, particularly how schools could support it and how young people could contribute towards developing this support. The original school strategy was introduced as part of an external programme that produced a framework for developing an individualised school strategy. On reflection, whilst developing and implementing a strategy for the school, I was unaware of the implications of

research linked to young people's development and the impact different environments may have on them. Furthermore, as I report in section 9.2.3, some young people in schools are reluctant to come forward and seek support from staff due to a lack of trust. By returning to literature in chapter 2, I draw upon Rudasill et al. (2018) and their system view of school climate (SVSC), in which they introduce the term nanosystem. They suggested nanosystems include peers, sports teams and academic school settings. To this, I would add a school mental health strategy. Nanosystems are seen as a bridge between the school and individuals. If schools view the strategy this way, recognising that some young people find relationships with adults difficult, they are then cognisant that this issue needs resolving if the strategy is to be successful. Schools must prioritise staff/young people relationships if they want young people to come forward for support. Applying my research to this literature, I offer new insight by suggesting that a school mental health strategy should be viewed as a nanosystem; this new perspective is a further contribution to knowledge.

A school implementing a mental health strategy will implicitly signify that, as an institution, they care about young people's mental health and want to support them in improving their mental health. However, my findings suggest that this is more complex. One of the strategy's aims was to encourage young people to self-refer to school staff if they felt they needed support. However, as stated earlier in this section, young people were reluctant to self-refer to school staff they did not trust, who were judgemental or who displayed aspects of teacherism. Also, school surveys, implemented as part of the strategy, were disliked by young people for two reasons. Firstly, they did not know who would see the information (and therefore whether they were someone who could be trusted) and also what would happen to the information. Secondly, young people perceived the environment where the surveys took place as lacking confidentiality, as surveys were completed on a computer screen in a classroom.

The school strategy, designed to help young people, was therefore also seen in a negative light. The issues of trust were once again at the forefront, and acted as a barrier to the strategy which was therefore not always observed as being a positive and supportive school act. Whilst some in the school community saw the concept of the strategy as being positive, others would not fully engage in it because it required the ability to trust the adults in school. Therefore, teacherism has resulted in young people feeling that they are not able to engage. This also supports the view in section 4.4, expressed by Horgan et al. (2017), that agency is a

relational concept. If young people were able to trust the staff in school, they would be more likely to come forward and ask for support, and also more likely to complete the school surveys. This reinforces the need for young people to be involved in the design of school policies, especially those that have the potential to impact their wellbeing. This also supports my desire to ensure young people's rights are recognised in schools, and this links directly to the Lundy model of youth participation, which I discuss in more detail later in this chapter.

My research has built upon Rudasill et al.'s (2018) work and contributed original thinking in relation to my interpretation of the school mental health strategy as a nanosystem, something that facilitates relationships between young people and the school. However, to ensure that this contribution is meaningful, I need to apply what I have learnt and explore how this can shape the thinking of educators and educator trainers in relation to school mental health strategies. Therefore, I intend to draw together learning from this research and address the issues challenging schools in this area. What follows is my suggested framework to support schools in helping young people to look after their wellbeing and mental health.

9.2.6 A framework for schools

Whilst completing the literature reviews and in preparation for the empirical data collection, I became aware of the potential this background work could have in relation to young people's wellbeing and mental health. As I discovered the work of Bronfenbrenner, I reflected on my school experiences and the context reading from chapter 2. The historical changes I highlight and the impact these have had on school values led me to develop a conceptual framework for emotional wellbeing in school. As an ex-teacher, it occurred to me that schools would benefit from a deeper understanding of how young people and their wellbeing outcomes fit into the broader education picture. The framework I consequently developed (Figure 28) also drills down to give a perspective of young people, mental health and schools including all internal and external influencing factors. Young people's outcomes are influenced by their own world and the world around them, including the world at large (UNICEF, 2020). Any model or framework for school mental health needs to place young people at the centre and demonstrate how factors in their lives impact them. This can be achieved by adapting Bronfenbrenner's (1994) bio-ecological model as a framework through which schools can explore young people's emotional wellbeing. It will benefit staff to understand the determinants of those factors that directly and indirectly influence young people. In turn, the

outcomes they display will depend on the circumstance in which they live and learn. This is not about a pretence that schools are bubbles separate from society, but it is about recognising that they have a unique place in the lives of young people, and that they can have an enormous impact on them. This is about a school context.

Like Bronfenbrenner's model (Figure 2) the school's framework (Figure 28) puts young people and their outcomes at the centre. Learning from Bronfenbrenner, I believe that young people are impacted by their biological makeup and immediate environment, both in and out of school. Following the concept of concentric circles, I have chosen to focus on elements impacting young people. However, unlike Bronfenbrenner, I only explore how young people impact their school environment. This is deliberate, as my thesis investigates young people's mental health in relation to schools. Whilst there is evidence that young people impact their wider environments (Silvestri et al., 2009), this is beyond the scope of my study as I concentrate on influences that impact young people's wellbeing outcomes.
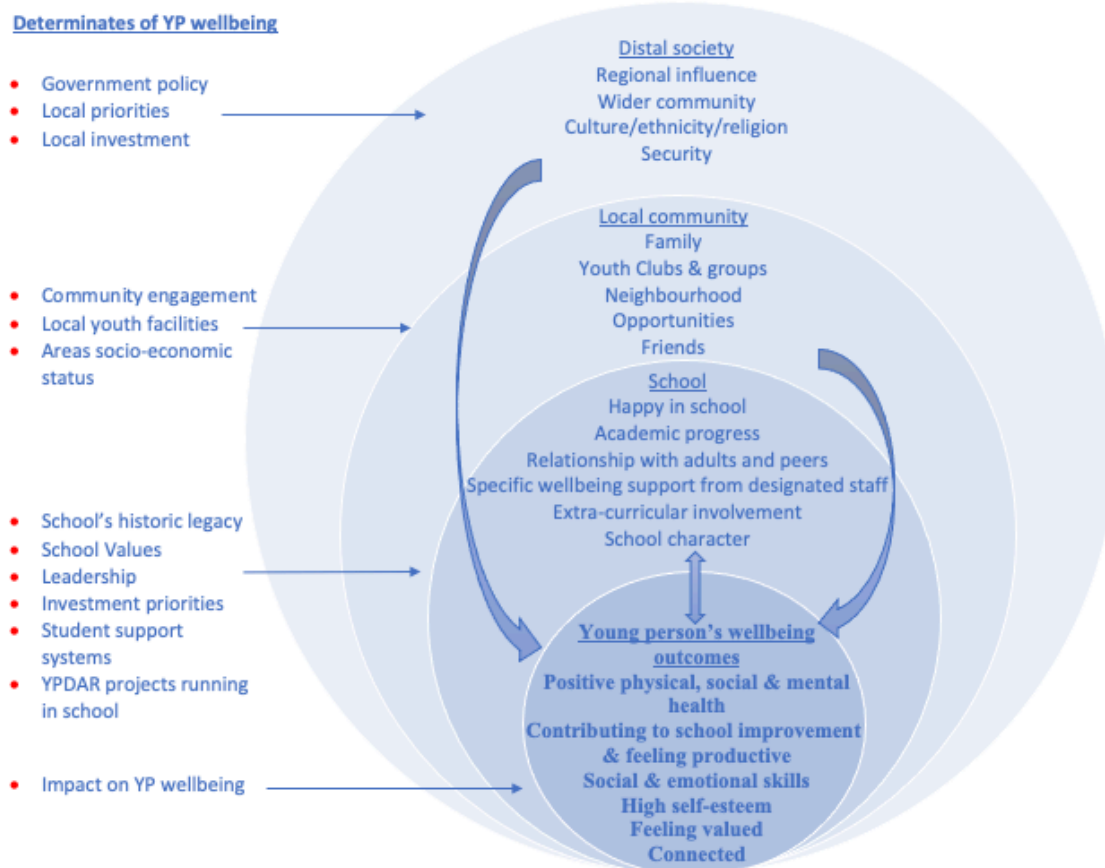

Figure 28: A conceptual framework for emotional wellbeing in schools

The outer circle and distal influences on young people's wellbeing are linked to the wider community and society. The broader determinates are related to past and present political choices. At the community layer, I chose to concentrate on local influence; the community supporting the young people, including family, youth centres, and their neighbourhood. The final influence on young people's wellbeing is the school itself. The determinates are associated with the nature of the school, from its history to its character, and how the leadership interprets their responsibilities to young people. As I have already highlighted, my findings suggest that well-being outcomes are likely to improve where school values focus on young people, rather than school success. The lack of trust that we discovered in this research suggests that a new approach is required if schools are to develop as institutions to be trusted by young people. Within the determinates for schools, I have therefore included the YPDAR approach used in this research, as I believe it can impact upon school character and also improve outcomes for young people's wellbeing. This is something that I explore in greater detail later in this section. This also enables me to take a fresh view of Bronfenbrenner's model, as I suggest that in the 1980s and 1990s, whilst his focus was on the development of young people, their position was set in society as becoming adults who had little say in matters relating to them. Whilst the UNCRC (2019) was written in the 1980s, it only became law in 1992. As I discuss in section 5.6, the fact that the law changed to give young people a right to a say in their own lives does not mean it will happen. Children's rights to a voice are now more widely accepted than in the 1980s and 1990s. My research findings demonstrate the benefits to young people of research I carried out. I, therefore, suggest that adding youth/child participation as part of the microsystem would add value to Bronfenbrenner's model and contribute extra knowledge and new insight from within the perspective of his EST.

In the following section, I set out how schools can benefit from adopting the framework and using it as a lens through which to critique their approach to young people within a broader context of national and local issues and policies. It is a tool for school leaders and pastoral staff, and may be used as a reference and discussion framework to improve understanding of young people in their care. Schools must appreciate the framework's purpose; therefore, I have developed considerations they need to explore before adopting it.

A conceptual framework for wellbeing in school's considerations:

- School leaders could use this conceptual framework to explore how the specific circumstances relating to young people impact wellbeing of young people within the school.
- There is scope for schools to adapt this framework to their local situation.
- The framework (Figure 28) raises the awareness of school staff regarding the issues of young people's mental health within the context of wellbeing outcomes.
- The term wellbeing is used in multiple ways depending on the context, and it must be seen from an education-specific perspective; that is, in how it impacts the education a young person receives.
- The framework is designed to be used independently or alongside subjective self-assessment criteria for young people, such as those developed by Burton et al. (2014), below.
- This is not intended for school staff to use as an objective assessment tool, but could be implemented as part of a professional development package. There is also an opportunity for initial teacher training programmes to adopt the framework as a reflective tool for graduates working in schools.
- This is a reference point and guide for school staff working with young people.

Subjective self-assessment (Burton et al., 2014) criteria may include:

- A capacity to develop and sustain mutually satisfying personal relationships.
- Age and ability-appropriate psychological development.
- Age and ability-appropriate development to play and learn.
- Developing a moral sense of right and wrong.
- Psychological distress and maladaptive behaviour fall within normal age and context limits for the young person.

As presented in chapter 3, there is great ambiguity around the term mental health, and it can be used in multiple ways to convey varying conceptions. Some believe mental health covers such broad areas that it is almost impossible to develop a useful definition (Manwell et al., 2015). I find this argument difficult to counter, as the term is used in various ways depending on professional setting, be it education, health, or social care etc. However, it is my experience that most young people today are aware of the term mental health; they are encouraged to think and talk about it and, as such, it is incumbent upon us as educators, to

ensure that they have a clear understanding of the different definitions. Young people need to know what mental health, mental illness and emotional well-being are, and the difference between them. The imprecise terminology may well lead to a lack of clarity in an area where we are trying to upskill young people. If we do not support them in understanding the difference between these terms, how can we expect them to appreciate how they may vary in the impact on themselves and their families?

A multi-faceted approach is required to develop an appropriate school mental health definition encompassing the three areas of mental health, mental illness, and emotional wellbeing. As the model, Figure 29 below, demonstrates, there is a relationship between all three, and schools have a crucial role to play in facilitating the support for young people in each of them.

Whilst in my role as assistant headteacher and introducing the whole school mental health strategy, I discussed terminology with mental health professionals from various backgrounds. There was a strong feeling that if society was to reduce the stigma associated with mental health, the issue needed to be tackled head-on. The advice was to use the term mental health, and explain that it was different from mental illness and that the school was integral to ensuring that individuals in need were supported either in-house or signposted externally. For this work, I am clear with the distinction between a mental illness that is medically diagnosable and mental health that is an emotional state all young people experience. With education and support, young people can learn to understand their feelings, adapt, adjust and modify their behaviours to experience a fruitful education and prepare for a fulfilling life beyond school. Glazzard & Stones (2021) write about conceptualising mental health as a state along a continuum from being mentally healthy to being mentally ill. I advance this further by suggesting the School mental health model (Figure 29) be used by schools in conjunction with the mental health definitions to simplify the issue. Both educators and educator trainers can use the model to support staff and young people in this complex area.
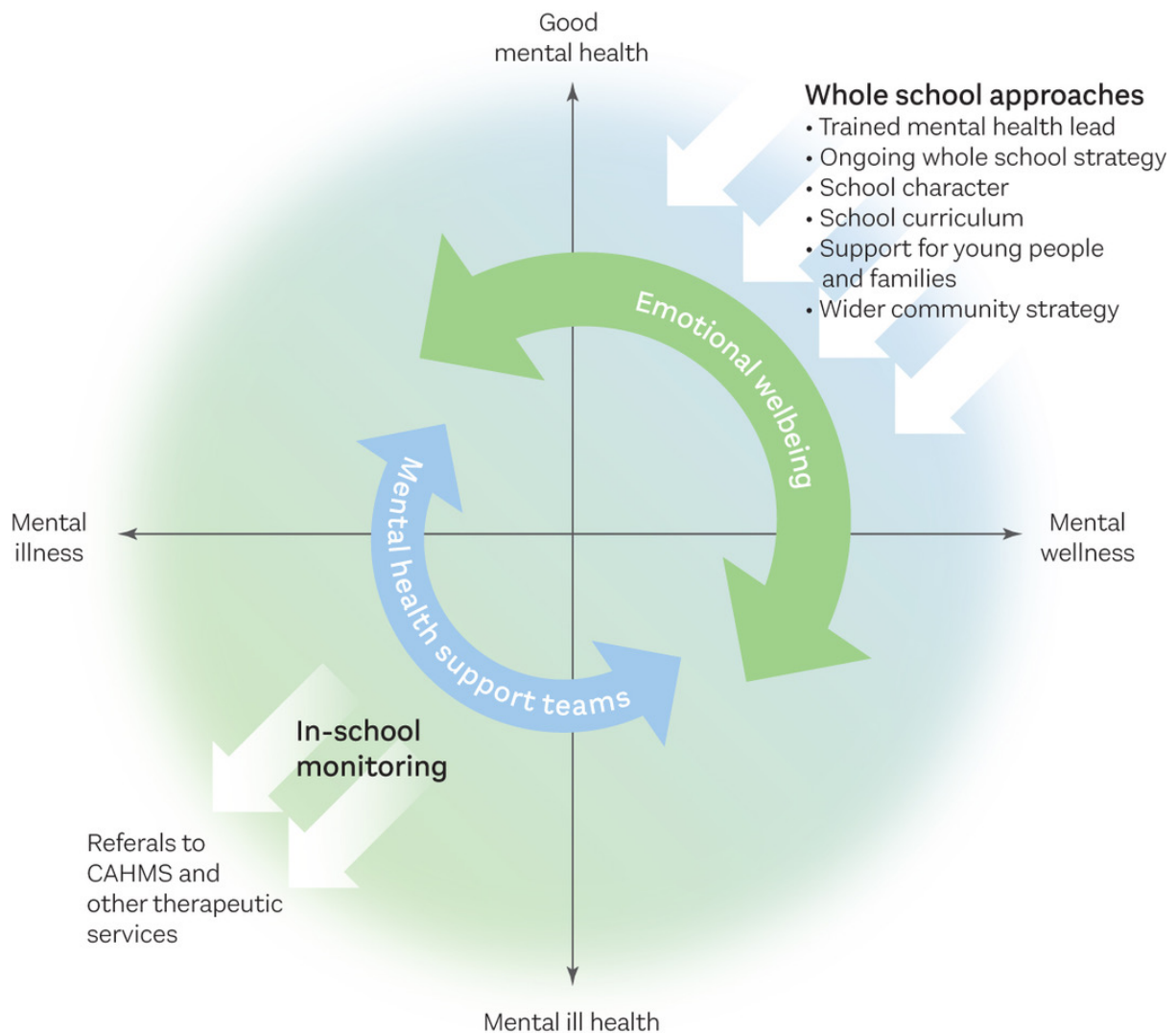
Figure 29: School mental health model

For this research, I intend have adopted the following definitions:

Mental health

Mental health is an individual's psychological condition and, like physical health, is something that all young people experience and which can impact upon how they feel and behave. It can be influenced by what is going on in their day-to-day lives and it affects them in different ways and to differing degrees. Good personal mental health is important as it enables young people to be the best version of themselves. (Bronfenbrenner's 1994; Manwell et al., 2015; WHO Mental Health and Substance Use Team, 2022).

Mental illness/Mental health disorder

Mental illnesses are medically classified signs and symptoms that are often complex and multi-faceted. They require medical diagnosis and treatment to enable young people to live productively both in school and in the wider community. (Bentall, 2003; WHO Mental Health and Substance Use Team, 2022)

Emotional wellbeing

Emotional wellbeing is a positive mental state where an individual's basic needs are met to the point where they have a sense of purpose and can achieve personal goals and participate within the school community. Emotional wellbeing is further enhanced by an inclusive school climate where schools prioritise healthy relationships and support for young people experiencing difficulties. (Huber et al., 2011)

School mental health

This is an aspirational concept focusing on ensuring that all young people are in a position to achieve their potential. It encompasses education, support for young people and their families, and signposting to external services where appropriate (Bronfenbrenner's 1994; Huber et al., 2011; Manwell et al., 2015).

I give a new perspective by defining the term school mental health. It is an alternative that schools can use to frame mental health within their specific context, and give clarity to their role in supporting mental health for young people and their families.

Figure 29 above demonstrates how all four concepts interact within a school context. Furthermore, it shows how schools can work to ensure that young people are supported to achieve good emotional wellbeing, and therefore enjoy a productive education in preparation for life in the future. My previous teaching experience suggests that schools have a role to play in both mental illness and mental health. Dedicated pastoral staff can address some of these issues through in-school monitoring. These staff require training that will give them the skills to recognise the warning signs for potential mental ill health. This will then enable schools to signpost young people and their families to appropriate services that will be able to diagnose and treat them. I favour this educative approach that, if implemented alongside monitoring, can enable schools to signpost young people and families to diagnostic services when and where appropriate. The introduction of the Mental health support teams (NHS

England, 2021) will support this process; however, as a deficit model, more is needed to address the ever-increasing emotional needs of young people.

Mental health can be supported through whole-school strategies that require a multi-faceted approach (McPartlan, 2019b, 2019c). The aims of an effective strategy are:

- To educate young people about all aspects of their emotional wellbeing.
- To support young people to be able to take responsibility for their mental health.
- To develop school character that is inclusive and supportive.
- To develop a school curriculum that supports rather than harms young people's mental health.
- To develop a school curriculum that strategically normalises mental health through an approach that requires all curriculum areas to include the topic in subject syllabi.
- A broader community strategy that supports mental health education in the school.

By taking this approach, the mental health and emotional well-being of young people will be prioritised by schools, which will be central to their values and will ensure that they are in the business of developing well-rounded and well-adjusted young people.

9.3   Methodological innovation

9.3.1   Introduction

In chapters 5, 6 and 7, I develop the premise of YPDAR and how it is built around the notions of equity, inclusion and authenticity when researching with young people in school. To fully understand the development and creation of this synthesised methodology, I return to Freire's classic Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Freire, 1970). I have learned from Freire's concepts of banking and problem-posing education and agree that reality can only occur through communication rather than isolation (Freire, 1970, p.50). I draw on French and Raven's (1959) work, which influenced my thinking on relationship dynamics, hegemonic power (Arnot & Reay, 2007) and teacherism in school. I discovered that relationships in schools are lived out through a power dynamic, which is an inequitable dynamic in seeing young people as lesser beings who benefit (or do not) from teachers' knowledge, wisdom,

and experience. This was an area that required consideration within the sphere of the research as well as the development of YPDAR. In an attempt to dismantle the power dynamic in the research, I took learning from CCM, which celebrated a dialogic approach (see section 5.3). By developing the definition below, and with dialogue at the centre of my work, I empowered the young people I was collaborating with. I built on the work of Habermas (1984) by ensuring the findings of this research came from the YRT and were validity claims rather than power claims. I adapted learning from Freire (1970), who suggests research such as this is dialogic; I developed YPDAR to influence an anti-dialogic school which I saw as wanting to impose their will on young people.

9.3.2 Dialogue and critical communicative methodology

Dialogue and my understanding of this term is central to all aspects of my research. Therefore, it is crucial to understand what I mean by the term and why it is important. Freire's problem-posing concept suggests dialogue enables reciprocity between teacher and student in their symbiotic pedagogic relationship. This was central to my development of YPDAR. As I explained above, the research was designed so that both parties took responsibility for their contributions to the process; myself offering academic knowledge and the YRT offering knowledge from their lived experience. New knowledge was created from our dialogic interactions. Just as the students in Freire's problem-posing model are no longer passive learners but analytical co-investigators, so were the YRT. Both the younger participants and YRT were invested in a process through dialogue with their researcher. This is the dialogue that creates the impetus for the unveiling of reality and the emergence of critical intervention. This dialogic process is what enabled the YRT and me, the researcher, to collaborate and understand our reality, and grow our critical thinking. In this way, we developed the power to critically explore our relationships, not only with each other but also with the school and the world in which we live (Freire, 1970).

Freire argues that "something which is the essence of dialogue itself: the word" (p.60) is instrumental in our approach to life. Our understanding of the word praxis, and its dual dimensions of reflection and action, are vital to this work, as without either of them, a word becomes empty. Where reflection takes place without action, one is left with verbalism; similarly, where action takes place without reflection, what remains is activism (Freire, 1970). As the research team worked through the weekly mini-action research cycle (Figure 9)

this understanding of praxis and its links to the term dialogue became our way of working. As explained in section 5.4, we discussed and reflected on previous actions, how these actions connected or not, and how our collective learning would inform our next step forward. Throughout this process, the values of honesty and integrity became fundamental to its success, reinforcing the development of relationships between all involved, which was a particularly essential element. Freire posits that unless we are prepared to collaborate in this collective spirit, we cannot be truly transformational, and the key to this way of working is dialogue. Our research design was what Freire described as the "encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world" (Freire, 1970, p.61).

I believe that the meaning of the word dialogue is fundamental to this work and, as such, I therefore suggest the following description to be used within YPDAR:

The dialogic approach in YPDAR is communicative activity that emanates from life reflections between two or more individuals. Creative activities are encouraged to stimulate inquiry that empowers individuals to self-critique their own life-circumstances as a transformative endeavour. In this context dialogue is egalitarian. Positive relationship development is essential to the process and is enhanced by equitable but different power interactions between the researcher and the researched.

Figure 30: Dialogue description

Whilst the position of dialogue within YPDAR is fundamental to its success, so is the alignment between the researchers and the participants. Therefore, I return to look at how Habermas and CCM have impacted my work.

9.3.3   Habermas' theory of communicative action

Habermas' thinking was influential in developing CCM and, therefore, also in my research. I have realised the importance of his theory of communicative action, which I explore in more detail below. The key to this theory was his seven postulates, three of which are fundamental to this research. These are 'universality of language and action', 'absence of interpretative hierarchy', and working on an 'equal epistemological level'. I will briefly investigate the relevance of each to my approach. I will then explore how they influenced my methods and analysis in greater detail.

200

9.3.3.1 The universality of language and action relates to Habermas' thinking that everyone can interact and communicate

This is one of the reasons we developed the research process as we did; layers of research between three parties focussing on dialogue to encourage consensus and mutual understanding. I believed that young people in the school were the only ones who had the answers to questions relating to their experiences of the mental health strategy. In section 6.5, I write in detail about the development of the analysis and how the YRT contributed to it. Within the process, I gave them as much autonomy as possible to conduct the research with the participants; I encouraged them to take chances and be creative. To do this, I had to develop checks to my power-laden position by engaging in reflexive activities and developing reflexivity in our group meetings. I explore this in more detail below.

9.3.3.2 Absence of interpretative hierarchy links to Habermas' belief that all within the research process had an equal part to play when interpreting the data

Throughout this thesis, I have discussed how my life as a teacher impacted this research. As the researcher, I had to contribute to the process but ensure my position did not enable me to overrule or impose my will on young people. It was elemental to the research. The findings came directly from young people and not via the interpretation of an ex-teacher. This is supported by the thoughts of Susannah, a YRT member, in her reflections in section 7.5.1, where she demonstrated how, as the research developed, her trust in me grew, and she could contribute how she 'felt about matters'. The importance of these meetings as vessels through which we created the findings together is also exemplified. I always intended to ensure an absence of interpretative hierarchy. This did not necessarily come easily; it took time for trust and relationships to develop between the parties involved. This leads me to believe the time-limited nature of my research was likely to hinder its outcomes. It also reinforces the importance of allowing time for relationship development in qualitative research such as this.

9.3.3.3 *Equal epistemological level. Habermas believed all parties bring their unique expertise to the research*

My positioning of the research did just that; I set my academic experience on the same level as young people's lived experience, and whilst our experience was different, it was of equal importance. This research would only work with young people's input alongside mine; one without the other would not provide the results we were aiming for. Whilst this is discussed in greater depth in chapter 5, I also believe that the implications of this philosophical approach have the potential to have a positive impact on schools. This is something I explore in more detail later in this chapter.

These postulates were about equity between the researcher and the YRT. However, to ensure their adoption was not tokenistic, they needed to be built into the research's foundation. To do this, I needed to support the YRT to enable them to interact, communicate, and collaborate if they were to contribute fully to the process. Therefore, I decided to develop strategies to improve their reflexive and reflective skills.

9.3.4 Impact of a reflexive and reflective approach with the YRT

The research was an action-orientated approach to inquiry, using small-scale theorising to investigate specific problems and situations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). As discussed in chapter 6, I aimed to work with young people in school as the knowledge was housed within their community (Wood, 2016). This was to ensure the research came from the YRT and from the school community. I saw the YRT develop skills and acquire knowledge, enabling them to sustain and build on the research (Schratz & Walker, 1995). The processes involved were about social change (Schratz & Walker, 1995) and democracy at its most basic level. Young people were being supported to develop a reflexive and reflective process that grew their critical thinking skills and brought about positive change in their school.

As I have already highlighted, the YRT were not in a position to deliver on the academic aspects of the research. Therefore, I was responsible for introducing academic principles to the group. I built in a reflexive process to ensure the YRT fully knew they were the vessels through which the research would flow (Borg et al., 2012). As part of a constructivist approach, critical reflexivity helped situate our experiences as data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). In addition, the reflexive process that we developed brought us closer together as a

team; it enabled us to build cohesion, trust (Simmons et al., 2021) and a collaborative mentality. Much of this can be exemplified through quotations from the YRT members in sections 5.10 and 6.5, as they talk about growth in their confidence and trust, and the collaborative process. In section 5.10 the comments also suggest that our emphasis on reflexivity improved creative thinking, problem-solving and generating ideas.

The reflexive approach was crucial, but the research also benefitted from my development of a systematic collaborative self-reflection tool in Figure 13 and **Error! Reference source not found.** 14. As I suggested in chapter 5, the tool enabled me to investigate the daily challenges of the research process with the YRT team. It was about collaborating with them and stimulating them to explore what they were doing, and how they were doing it. I took on two roles, firstly as a team member within the research and supporting the YRT. Secondly, I removed myself from the process and became the researcher overseeing the process. The collaborative self-reflection tool I developed is a valuable contribution to knowledge as it creates a framework that researchers and young people in schools can use. In addition to enabling a systematic reflective process, the tool also helps develop young people's critical thinking skills.

It was important that, as part of both the reflexive and reflective processes, the YRT could challenge both myself and my position; this is something I encouraged. The combination of the work we carried out in the mini-action cycles and this reflexive work enabled us to develop the findings in relation to the mental health strategy and the emergent YPDAR. The dialogic interactions within the research team suggested there was a more effective way of having an inclusive approach to involving young people in school research, that being YPDAR. This created a model for impactful involvement and resulted in authentic findings from a mixture of young people's lived experiences and my academic input.

My role, however, went further than just developing the YRT skills and facilitating the research. The relationships within the process were more than merely functional. Freire (1970) suggests that love is an essential ingredient of dialogue, and that true dialogue cannot exist without it. It is both the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself. Dialogue cannot be about oppression or domination, but needs to have liberation as a focus. Therefore, I sat alongside the YRT and they sat alongside the participants. On occasions, we acted as advocates for our respective partners. We supported them and took an interest in them. I offered myself to the YRT in whatever way they wanted.

I wrote references, helped them with applications, lent them reading books and generally took an interest in their lives, both in and out of school. Similarly, the YRT learnt from my example in that they would stop and talk to their participants in school, offer advice when approached and, on one occasion, support a shy young person to access an out of school young farmers club. Freire (1970, p.143) calls this "communion" when describing how Che Guevara interacted with peasants. Investing in people in this way, be they Brazilian peasants or young people from a school in Cumbria, demonstrates a commitment and love for them and enables a genuine dialogic process. As I reflect, by the culmination of the research, the YRT and I were in communion. We were comfortable in the other's company, had mutual respect and trust for each other and went out of our way to support and help where appropriate. However, as the findings show, some young people in this research told us they did not trust school surveys (or staff) and would not take them seriously. As something designed to engage young people, it was obviously failing. This type of student consultation is tokenistic and not about communion with them, but instead supports Freire's (1974) view that schools are anti-dialogic. The benefits this research has created are many. However, they can be divided into two major categories. Firstly, I explore those benefits that impact the school as a social structure, and I then look at the benefit of young people as researchers working with their school peers.

9.3.5   Research impact on school

As a researcher in a school, working closely with sixth formers, I have adjusted my approach so that the work is non-hierarchical. The school saw the success of this research and employed me to develop it further. I returned to the school to work with another sixth-form YRT on similar research. After the success of this second project, I am in discussion with the Academy Trust to lead a team of teachers as researchers who will use YPDAR. My role within this will be to supervise the teacher/researchers and oversee the research project in several schools. I will also be interested in observing how the teacher/researcher relationship with young people changes from when I was the researcher. Whilst I was an ex-teacher and concerned about how this may inhibit the research relationships, I was, nevertheless, able to distance myself from the direct influence of school structures. This is something the teacher/researchers may find more challenging as they are part of the school structure, and integral in its direction of growth. As this further research progresses, work will need to be

done to explore how a teacher/researcher's position will impact both research relationships and outcomes.

Another challenge for the school staff will be whether they can cultivate trusting and enduring relationships that build young people's confidence so that power relations between them can be redistributed. This will enable them to work on an equal epistemological level with young people. I agree with Darder (1997) when she describes this as democratic education which is only possible when educators see it as an act of social justice that enables young people to discover their own transformative power and potential. This is an important step away from Freire's banking model and towards his problem-posing one. I discuss school values, climate and school character in section 2.4, and this is where the challenge lies. Unless the school is committed to working with young people in this way, I suspect individual teachers may struggle to deliver. The findings of this research have already highlighted the benefits of increased confidence, trust and empowerment for young people. However, as I reflect below, the advantages gained from young researchers collaborating with younger participants also have the potential to impact the lives of those young people positively.

9.3.6 Young people researching with young people

In chapter 3, I review the literature on attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988). This requires further exploration as it is pertinent to this discussion. As discussed in section 3.5.1, Hammond & Harvey (2018) suggest that schools developing environments with opportunities for stronger adult/young relationships have a more productive context for learning, resulting in better attachment, motivation and behaviours, and higher attendance and achievement. Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggests that the microsystem of such schools has been enhanced, as productive relationships with staff may be more easily achieved. One of the outcomes of this research is the realisation regarding the lack of trust some young people have in school staff. This leads to a reluctance to seek support for any mental health issues. The design of this research has seen a group of young people, the YRT, collaborating with other young people, the participants. I touch on a new perspective in chapter 6: the potential transformational relationships between these two groups during the data collection period. On one level, the YRT worked with the participants to investigate issues around the school's mental health strategy. However, their work was more significant than just collecting empirical data. The YRT also developed a bond and team ethos with either individuals or small groups of young

people from the cohort of participants. As I suggest in the findings above, the participants also reported feeling empowered, more confident, and more trusting of the school. It is important to remember that, other than during the recruitment process, I had no interaction with the participants. Therefore, all the reported feelings resulted from the participant's interactions with the YRT. This suggests that the relationships developed were more than just researchers working objectively to collect data. Furthermore, at its conclusion and when asked to assess the project, the overwhelming majority of participants cited relationships with the sixth form YRT as the most important factor regarding their enjoyment. The social interactions between the two groups have resulted in reward feelings as they have been included and accepted, to the extent that they felt part of a meaningful and purposeful project.

My research has demonstrated that attachment-type bonds can be built between young people and adults outside the home (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004; Riley, 2009). The growing relationships I observed between the two sets of young people fit with how Koehn & Kerns (2018) see secure attachment development. It was based on trust, communication and lack of disaffection. Allen et al. (2018) suggest this further enables young people to benefit from more effective emotional and interpersonal skills, enabling positive relationship development in later life.

The work between the YRT and participants developed relationships that were beneficial to both groups. The findings draw together evidence from my teaching experience and this research to suggest that the relationship could also be mentor-like. I have concluded that participants admired and looked up to the YRT; they inspired them. Trust developed between the two groups, enabling positive and productive discussions between them. During the PPI exercise I conducted, I was told participants were unlikely to trust me during the research process.

What I did not know was the potential for developing transformational relationships between the YRT and younger participants. Over many years as a teacher, I observed numerous failed attempts to foster mentoring relationships between groups of young people. Most, if not all, had failed. On reflection, I believe this was due to a lack of purpose within the projects. Whilst schemes were put in place, neither group of young people ever had a choice in the topic area for this relationship. The mentor schemes I came across were prescribed and delivered via a help sheet or guidebook. The relationships that developed within this research

were founded upon shared common goals. Both groups were interested in young people's mental health and how schools could support it. These young people wanted to be involved in improving the school and were prepared to engage with young people from a slightly different age group. In section 4.4, I explored how a sense of epistemic agency was boosted when young people felt they have the competency, authority and credibility to understand their own experiences and master concepts relating to their situation (Houlders et al., 2021). Therefore, I suggest this process has benefited the YRT in this way. Whilst not a specific focus of this research, my observations of the benefits of these relationships suggest this type of research has identified additional knowledge to the area of young people as researchers in schools. It is, however, an area requiring further investigation.

To take this learning further, I return to Chapter 3 and the exploration of the neuroperson model and the domains of socio-emotional skills. This section explained the theory underpinning how an individual perceives, regulates, manages, expresses and names their emotions (Mónaco et al., 2019). Also, it is important to understand the impact of emotional competencies on wellbeing, and an individual's ability to understand their feelings and come forward to talk about them. This is linked to secure attachment and the capacity to trust and communicate. My research, focusing on the school mental health strategy, suggests that some young people are less likely to be able to come forward due to their lack of agency. The neuroperson model indicates that some young people have narrow and constrain schemas that do not support the development of awareness of feelings or challenge-seeking behaviour. The domains of socio-emotional skills have been suggested to help these young people to develop a broaden-and-build schema.

My research has demonstrated that both sets of young people have benefited from their involvement in this research. They now have improved confidence and trust, and are more empowered by what they have done. Above, I suggest that the relationship between the YRT and the participants is attachment-like, as a bond was built during a mentoring-type relationship. The evidence would also suggest that this research could be viewed as developing young people's socio-emotional skills and competencies. I will take the domains and explain how each resonates with the development of young people, particularly the YRT, through this research (McNeil & Stuart, 2022).

- **Emotional management** – YRT members demonstrated how they could be constructive in challenging situations at various points in the research process. In chapter 7, I recount the difficult meeting with a staff member. As I reflect, the YRT were able to stand back and see the bigger picture; they recognised it was only one staff member under pressure and being irrational.

- **Empathy** – I draw upon the same incident of the member of staff's interaction with the YRT to illustrate that they displayed empathy. There were also occasions during the action research cycle meetings when I was impressed with the levels of understanding and sensitivity of the YRT to the participants. YRT members took time to help participants who were finding situations difficult.

- **Initiative** – The empirical research process took over a year to complete, and throughout the YRT and participants remained steadfast in their commitment to the research. They persevered to complete the work despite setbacks, including three months of COVID disruption.

- **Problem-solving** – This was at the fore throughout the research. However, the longer the process went on, the better the YRT became at it. The YRT quote in section 5.10 sums this up perfectly.

- **Teamwork** – Once again, I refer to quotes in sections 5.10 and 6.5, where the YRT talk about the collaborative process developing over time, and how it helped them share their feelings and grow.

- **Responsibility** – As I have mentioned previously, the YRT were volunteers within this research; they were fitting work in alongside their studies. However, they remained tenacious and determined throughout. They were loyal to the research, me and the participants, whilst also being understanding and taking their responsibilities seriously. They also committed to extra work by taking on and completing the academic paper we published together.

Another lens through which to understand the impact this research had upon the YRT is the Uchicago model Figure 15 that I briefly explore in chapter 5. My experiences of working closely with the YRT were mirrored by what the CCSR suggested. As I have explored above, this research process has helped them grow as individuals as they engage in various experiences. Importantly, I allowed them to reflect on the purpose and processes at play with this work. This action and reflection cycle has been vital to both what we have achieved and how we have achieved it. The YRT have been learning by doing, and have thus been able to

cultivate their own sense of self. This has been in addition to getting a perspective on other young people and school staff they have been forced to work with. Just as with the CCSR, YPDAR has built the YRT's skills and increased their experiences of agency, which I suggest will feed into the growth process and enrich their journey towards intentional life choices (McNeil et al., 2019).

The YRT relationship with the participants can benefit both parties, and I suggest YPDAR has also benefitted them. The processes within YPDAR bring new understanding to collaborative research with and between young people in schools. YPDAR can be used not only for school improvement research, but also to develop the socio-emotional capabilities and skills of young people.

I have highlighted how the theory from Habermas and Freire has contributed to my understanding of dialogue and its influence on the research. I have also explored how this research impacted the school and young people involved. I now analyse my new methodology to consider the development of YPDAR frameworks for use in schools.

9.4   A YPDAR framework for schools

To fully consider and engage with YPDAR, it needs to be dismantled into its primary constituent parts. The YPDAR framework (Figure 31) does just that by conceptualising it but also enabling an exploration of the ethics and analysis required for its success. The principles of YPDAR are based on the assumption that the researcher and YRT are working on an equal epistemological level (Gómez et al., 2011). The collaborative and dialogic act between the two parties (three if we include the relationship between the YRT and the participants) ensures that any claims made are from young people's lived experiences and perspectives. By approaching the research in this way, I have taken steps to safeguard its authenticity and ensure that findings have not come about through coercive power.

The research values and approach taken are reflected through the cards on the table in Figure 31; I ensured a caring, fair and inclusive approach to the research process, enabling the values of trust, respect and integrity to permeate throughout. The foundations of the research were from a social constructivist standpoint; it was conducted through action research with youth participation at the fore; egalitarian dialogic learning (Gómez et al., 2011) took place that

created emancipatory knowledge (Langhout & Thomas, 2010). This transformative process introduced critical inquiry to the school and contributed to the deconstructive process connected to hegemonic school power. As highlighted in the findings, young people's trust in the school grew, as did their self-confidence. Feeling empowered, they took on a responsibility to act to improve and change their school. By developing YPDAR, I have created a new perspective on young people as researchers in schools and the impact it can have on school character.
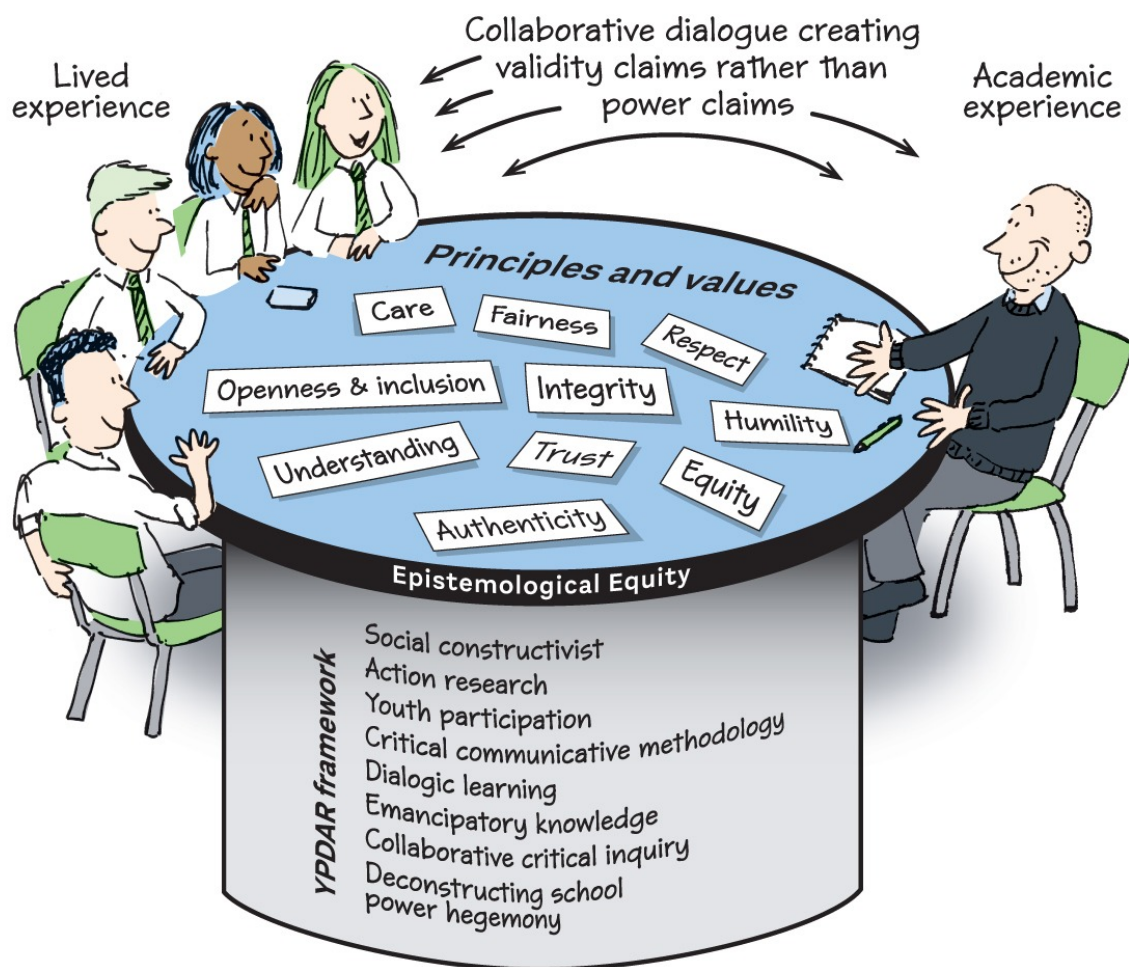

Figure 31: YPDAR framework for schools

YPDAR and the framework above are well-founded in both theory and practice. There are two additional elements needed that will further enhance it and also ensure the principles behind it are adhered to; these elements include (1) how analysis within YPDAR is conducted and (2) why relational ethics is an essential concept underpinning it.

9.4.1   YPDAR analysis

The processes I explored in the method chapter and summarised in Figure 9 were central to the research analysis. The research was a collective act where dialogue was used to understand, explain and learn from a social reality (Gómez et al., 2011). Habermas (1987) suggested this was a consensus perspective on truth created by dialogue within a community of competent inquirers. This was not about me interpreting their information but supporting the YRT to interpret their own information. The nuance within this process is also important to consider. Whilst my focus was on the YRT and their interpretations, it would be impossible for me not to have conscious thoughts about what was and needed to happen. This was a challenge for me as once I had thoughts, I could not remove them from my consciousness; they were with me, and I needed to embrace them positively. I decided to record anything noteworthy, and in the planning for the following group meeting, I would consider their appropriateness; thus, utilising reflexive deliberation. What was also important during this time was my alignment with Habermas' (1987) postulates, as explored in section 5.3. To fully understand the theory behind these and appreciate the importance of my approach, they need further exploration. By synthesising CCM with YPAR, I adapted theory from Habermas, taking a new perspective and creating unique insight on how we may collaborate with young people in schools and enable them to have a more significant say in an aspect of school improvement.

As I describe in section 6.5, the analysis process was challenging due to several tensions. In chapter 6, I explain how my initial intentions were to complete the analysis myself. This was my PhD and, therefore, my responsibility to draw conclusions. I wrestled with this dilemma and concluded that the YRT had as much right as I to write the analysis, recommendations and findings. One of the practicalities, however, was that these were young people studying for their A levels and had limited time for the research. I was careful not to pressure them, which I continually questioned myself about. The thought that they had committed to this research and therefore needed to deliver crossed my mind occasionally. I sometimes reflected that I had been too easy on them and did not push them enough. On a number of occasions, I asked if any of them had time to develop a model, write up our collective thoughts or summarise a diagram. When no one stepped forward, I took it upon myself to complete the

task. My concern then was whether this was my interpretation of the work or whether it was theirs.

An example of this is my framework (**Error! Reference source not found.**), which looks at the determinants of mental health in schools. My safety net to protect against my potential bias was the reflexive process highlighted above, where I encouraged the YRT to challenge me. On this occasion, I shared my framework with the YRT, who were encouraged to evaluate and adapt it. They did this individually before we came together to discuss it. This resulted in Figures 20 and 21.

Whilst I sometimes question my approach to the YRT, I also see another side to it. After our initial setbacks related to COVID and school closures, we were a happy, stable team. 13 YRT members committed to the research project, and they stayed throughout. In many ways, they went above and beyond what I expected of them. This included us writing an academic paper and attending conferences to present findings. I have written about the relationship development between myself and the YRT, particularly how trust developed and how we reached communion (Freire, 1970). I, therefore, have to consider whether, if I had pushed them harder, they would have been as engaged. Therefore, it is impossible to judge whether one way or the other was correct or misguided. Instead, it is important to recognise this as a tension, and when developing the research with others this tension needs to be addressed early within the research process. The decision around who should be involved in the analysis was organic; it emerged as we worked through the action research cycle. This was also the case in how we completed the analysis, which I explore below.

My initial thoughts about how to complete the analysis were taken straight from the literature and I identified a thematic approach as being appropriate (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Whilst we started in this direction and used thematic principles, our approach was more of crystallisation than triangulation (Richardson, 2000). We were developing praxis by looking for themes, talking about what was becoming apparent and revisiting the themes through our action research cycle. Every week, our action research cycle would deliver new and different knowledge we would take forward and act upon. In both my YRT meetings and the meetings where the participants and YRT met, we would discuss and test ideas before bringing new thoughts back to the team. Having worked this way for several weeks we wrote the analysis and recommendations together, before presenting them to the headteacher. This is illustrated in Figure 24.

9.4.1.1 YPDAR analytical framework

The aspects of how analysis fits as part of YPDAR are essential if this methodology is to be followed and maximised. I have therefore adapted the framework above to help clarify the importance of analysis in YPDAR. The intention is to emphasise the value base of YPDAR, but also include the essential elements that enable the analysis to take place through this process. The theory and practice I have discussed above have evolved into Figure 32 below. The framework is based on the principle of validity claims (as opposed to power claims) through collaborative dialogue. Still, as I discuss in chapter 6, the analysis focuses on crystallisation which comes through both individual and collective reflexivity and leads to multi-voice analysis. This is about subjective interpretation by young people and is, therefore, egalitarian. Using this analysis framework alongside the YPDAR framework will enable researchers and schools to understand the principles of this research process, and the philosophy underpinning it. A substantial outcome of this research is how, interpreting theory from Freire and Habermas for use in school research with young people, I have created a form of analysis that is true to the values of YPDAR and contributes to young people's development and school character. The final piece of this jigsaw is how relational ethics is also an essential aspect of YPDAR.
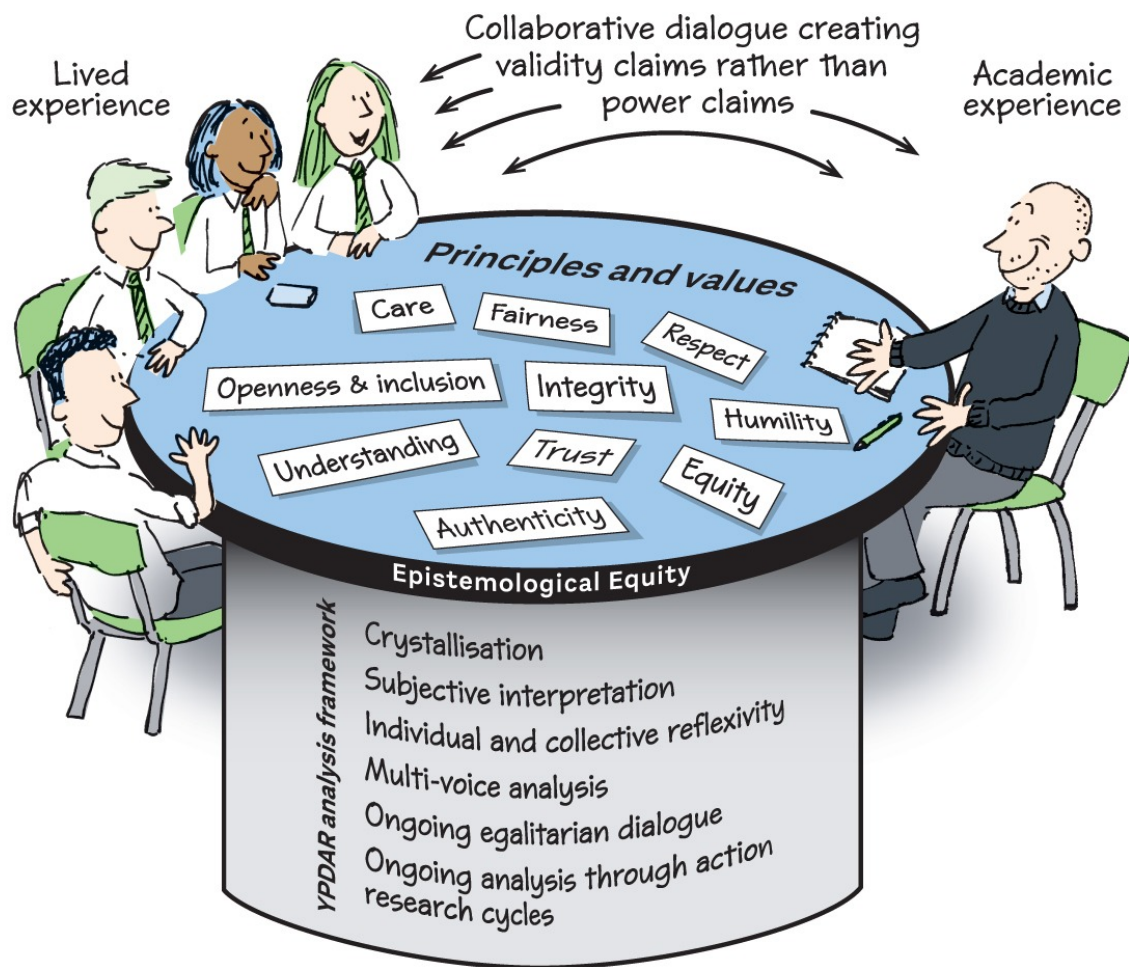
Figure 32: YPDAR analysis framework

9.4.2   Relational ethics in YPDAR

Chapter 7 explored how my approach to ethics changed from protectionism to relational. As my research grew, I started to appreciate the significance of my ethical positioning within it. As the dialogic approach became a focus, YPDAR emerged and I became aware of the importance of relationships. As I explored in chapter 7, how I was shaping connections between myself, the YRT and participants, meant a shift towards a relational approach was almost inevitable. This was about being attentive and responsive to others and showing empathy with and for the YRT and participants. As the researcher, I had a responsibility to be open with the YRT, as it was essential I was available for them and responsive to their reflections and needs; this was what Freire (1970) called 'love'. As I commented in chapter 7, it was about being in this together (Austin, 2007). I suggest this required me as the researcher to walk alongside them as a partner, supporter, and advocate. This had moved from a

protectionist position to a relational one. To protect the integrity of YPDAR, a relational ethics framework is required, something I discuss below.

9.4.2.1   A framework for relational ethics within a school YPDAR project

My aim in developing this framework was to ensure relational ethics can be understood in the context of school-based YPDAR. The principal thread that runs through this research is the essential positioning of young people at the centre of this work, and how their relationship with the researcher enables and safeguards this. The framework (Figure 33), below, acts as a guide for researchers and young people, and supports their ethical deliberations before and during the research process. It ensures that the ethics align with the research and the everyday life of the collaborators. As research relationships developed, I became aware that, just as I showed care and attention for the YRT, they too showed similar care for the participants. Teo (2009) calls this conscious act virtuous living, and differentiates it from following ambiguous utilitarian beliefs.

YPDAR, in any circumstance, but particularly within a school environment, is subject to a unique context. This framework (Figure 33) is again based on the original YPDAR framework, but its foundations (the table front) have been adapted to prioritise a sequence-ensuring relational ethics approach. Whilst the values and principles are similar throughout all three frameworks, the relational aspect of this model requires fundamental acceptance and commitment from any schools adopting it. As I discussed previously, power issues at play in schools require them to engage with young people as active partners in research. This would require a shift in school ethos for many.

As the findings demonstrate, developing the trust and confidence of the YRT was crucial to the success of the research. It empowered them to take responsibility for aspects of the work, something that would previously not have happened. Therefore, engaging young people in school-based research requires a rebalancing of young people/staff power relationships. Mutual respect comes not from instruction but through a demonstration of open and honest dialogue, and as such it comes via "acts of cognition not transferrals of information" (Freire, 1970, p.52), and is a step away from teacherism. This links directly to the discussion earlier in this section, where I explored my hopes for the teacher-led project and, in time, one led by young people. Although I imagine the YPDAR ethics framework may need adjusting further

as teachers take on the role of the researcher, the dynamic teachers have with young people in school are likely to differ from that of a researcher and young people. I aim to explore this as the Trust schools' research develops.

If this framework is to be effective, there must be engagement with it prior to the start of the research, in addition to its being used as a reference point during the research. It will thus ensure all involved are clear about the value base of the project and are fully invested in the moral purpose of the work. The initial engagement and exploration of the framework, conducted by the researcher and the researched, enables the relationship development process to commence. It has been suggested that marginalised groups are more likely to doubt whether the researcher has their best interests at heart (O'Doherty & Burgess, 2019). Trust issues may not be resolved regardless of the informed consent process; the power imbalance between adults and young people in schools is likely to accentuate this further. Using the framework as a starting point provides an opportunity to initiate and develop relationships engendering honesty, integrity, and trust between the researcher and the researched. What better way to start to develop trust than to engage in discussions about the values and purpose of the research? The opportunity to explore and disentangle a school's intent and position in relation to researching with young people is designed as an exercise in equality; it lays bare school structures, opening them up to critique whilst simultaneously empowering young people. In this respect, and as explored in section 5.7, I agree with Ko & Krist (2019) that school structures send variable messages about the role staff and young people play in deciding the value of different knowledges, including how the knowledges should be constructed. One of the differences between this framework and the previous YPDAR ones is that the intent of how YPDAR will work is a sequential series of commitments and actions. It starts with a commitment to young people as partners in school improvement. This is achieved by the school setting out their vision of collaborating with young people to be researchers in school. Developing an ethos of respect where young people and teachers learn from each other to counter teacherism should be discussed early in the process, further empowering young people. From the outset, I ensured young people understood how the research would work and how the research may be challenging for the school. The school was not used to young people collaborating with staff to make decisions; therefore, the research was likely to uncover tensions as some staff pushed back against it. This is, in fact what happened on occasion.
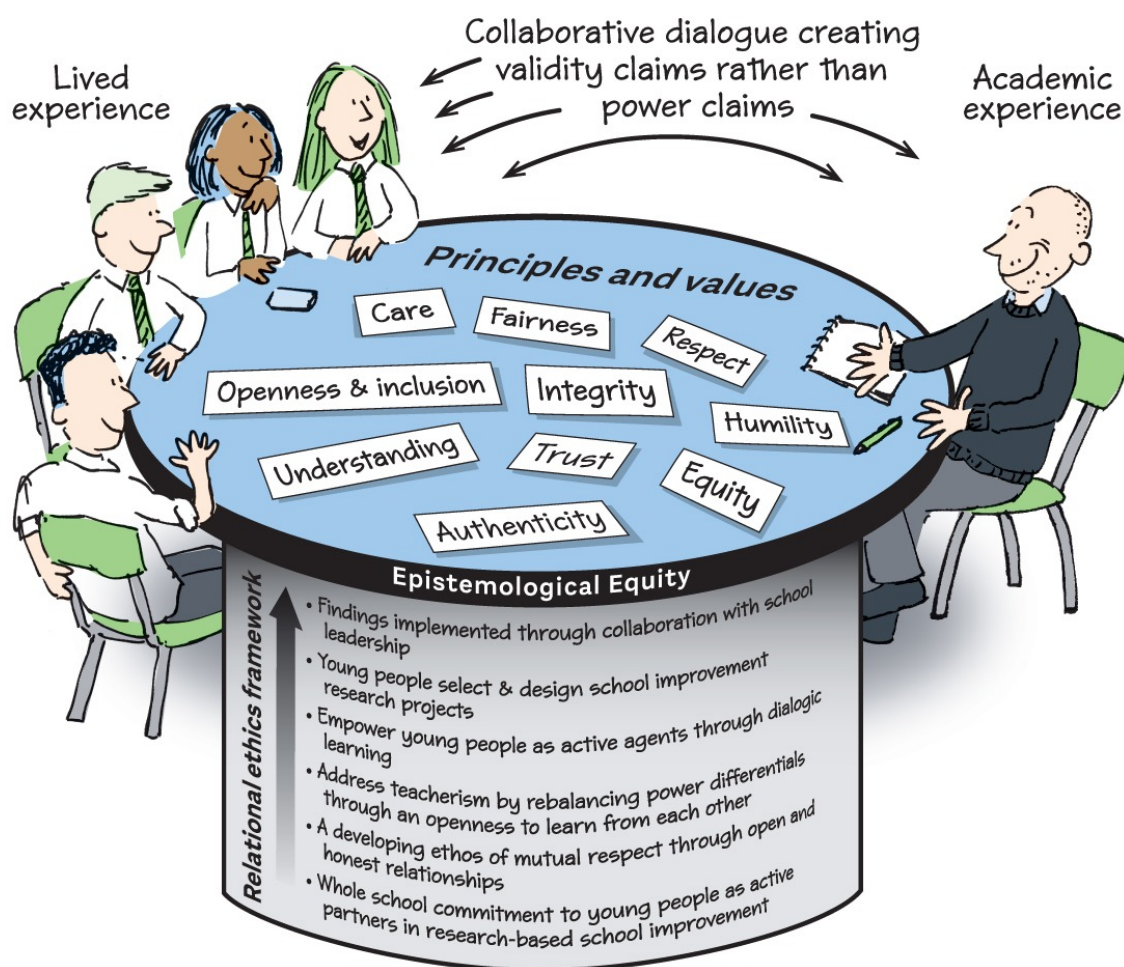
Figure 33: A relational ethics framework for YPDAR in schools

9.5 Applying YPDAR for use in schools

Having laid out the benefits derived from this research, and set out a vision for young people's involvement in school improvement via research, it is important to develop a working model for how this can be established in schools. I address this below with my model for Young people's participation in schools.

Returning to the models of participation in chapter 5 can help define where this research sits in relation to participation. Whilst the limitations of the Hart (1992) model bring little to this process, the Treseder (1997) model can offer insight. Over the data collection period, the YRT involvement clearly shifted from being consulted and informed to an adult-initiated, shared decisions with children process, something that is closer to my initial aim. However, my research has demonstrated the potential for a school model of participation that goes one

step further. Taking learning from Treseder (1997), I would adapt the model to create a sixth spoke for use in schools. Young people's participation level will be equal to school staff; there will be collaboration between them. Projects will be young person-initiated and directed with school staff acting as collaborators; staff as co-researchers will have the responsibility to develop academic knowledge in the given area of investigation. Also, Habermas' three postulates, which I synthesised into the creation of the YPDAR methodology, 'universality of language and action', 'absence of interpretative hierarchy' and working on an 'equal epistemological level' will underpin the research.

> **Young person initiated. Shared decision making in a collaboration with school staff.**
> Young people in school decide on an aspect of school improvement they wish to investigate. In discussion with school leaders' agreement is reached regarding which groups of young people will be involved. Young researchers then work with participants to undergo school improvement research, staff act as academic experts. The young researchers write up findings and recommendations which are presented to the school leadership team and disseminated to all young people in school.

Figure 34: Young person level of participation in school research (after Treseder, 1997)

Whilst the various models of participation can be used to categorise work in school, there is a clear need to develop a school-based model. A model, which encompasses that of Lundy et al., (2020), is required to ensure the views of young people are given due weight, and they comply with young people's rights. As I discuss in chapter 5, schools have a role to play in ensuring that young people's rights are upheld. It is important that schools are at the forefront of this work as they need to be leading by example and making explicit to young people their rights; by running my proposed model, they will be going out of their way to demonstrate this. Taking this approach will enable the views of young people to be taken into account and acted upon. The messages this research will send to young people are also important. There will be a gentle power shift as schools move to a more collaborative model where young people start contributing to the decision-making process. My proposed model below, Figure 35, has been developed to ensure this research is examined through the lens of Article 12 from the UNCRC. The model is designed to make explicit the contrast between how schools have operated as zones of control and how YPDAR can develop zones of empowerment. By giving young people their full rights to participate in decisions affecting them, schools will be

confronted with issues related to power and control. This returns me to how school values have changed over the past 40 years, and how I see YPDAR as a way of redressing the balance so schools can once again focus on the welfare of young people explicitly, rather than on the welfare of the institution. When young people are given the opportunity to instigate and lead research projects that are endorsed by the school and feed into the school improvement process, young people are likely to feel more engaged and empowered (Das et al., 2020). However, where schools only use surveys or dysfunctional school councils as tokenistic gestures to appease students or provide evidence for OFSTED, my experience suggests young people are likely to feel disengaged and disconnected from their institution.

9.5.1 A model for young people's participation in school research

The young people's participation in school model below (Figure 35) suggests schools need to move from a control-based approach to empowering young people. By encouraging them to participate in decisions leading to school improvement, schools will be investing in a transformative process which has the potential to improve outcomes for young people and school character. This is not about tokenistic involvement, but about ensuring young people's rights to make decisions about issues affecting them. To do this, it is important that a safe space is created where children are "able to express their views without fear of rebuke or reprisal" (Lundy, 2007, p. 935), which is why I have incorporated Lundy's model of participation within my model. As I have already demonstrated in this chapter that the benefits for the school and young people, be they participants or YRT members, are extremely positive. The Youth participation in school model incorporates a new perspective on work by Habermas; I adopt the three postulates mentioned above as underpinning and core theory for the participation model. In this way, it develops additional knowledge on school power through young people's research. To ensure this, I have also incorporated the principles from the Lundy model of participation, again developing new insight from an already well-accepted scholar.
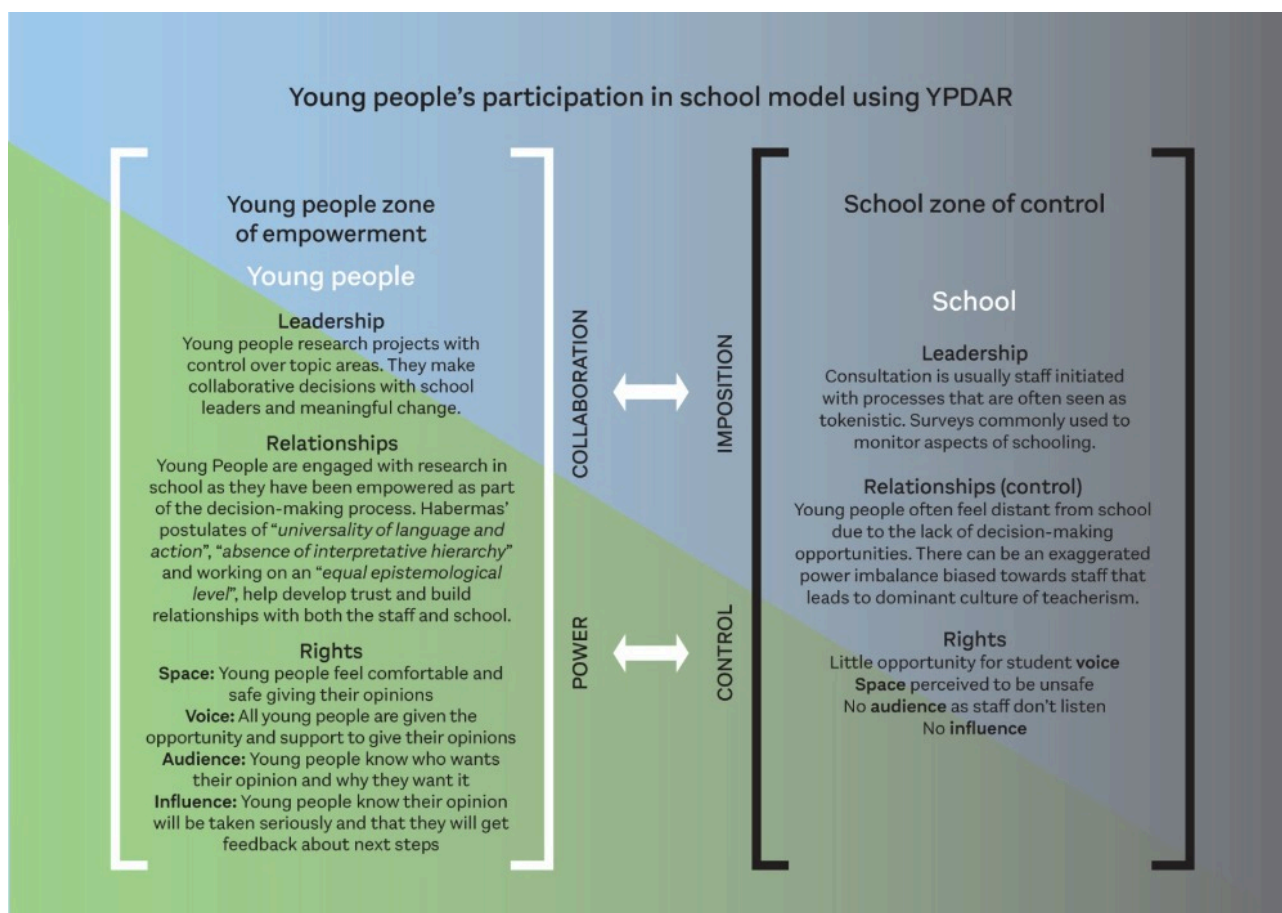
Figure 35: Young people's participation in school model (incorporating aspects of Lundy's Model of participation (Lundy et al., 2020))

As previously suggested, there will need to be a seismic shift from those in power to accept and value that young people not only have the right to, but also can, contribute to the way in which their schools are run. Furthermore, should this shift happen and such methods are accepted as the way forward, there will still be significant work to do. From my own experience, I argue that many well-meaning teachers, who possibly see themselves as child-centred, would initially find it challenging to work in the way I have described, as their behaviour is a dysconscious act seen as adultism (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002; Delgado, 2008) as well as teacherism in schools. Furthermore, there are also a significant minority of other teachers who could not and possibly would not work in this way. The challenge, therefore, is to ensure work such as this is shared and celebrated to ensure the benefits are clear to headteachers, teachers, professional associations, and policymakers alike.

9.6 Limitations and challenges

9.6.1 Limitations

As I set out to conduct research into a whole school strategy, I was aware of many of the potential pitfalls relating to the authenticity of this research, including researcher bias and potential trust issues between young people and the ex-teacher turned researcher. Whilst this particular context may be seen as a limitation, I believe that by developing this as a participative study and incorporating a reflexive process into it, I have been able to counter such claims. I am confident that the checks and balances I have introduced have ensured that the findings from this research can be held up as authentic and make a valuable contribution to both young people's mental health education and the field of youth participative action research.

This small-scale study was conducted in a rural comprehensive school in northeast Cumbria and was never intended to be representative of all UK schools. The design enabled an in-depth study by having only a small number of participants with a limited age range. If the participant numbers had been greater, the research would not have benefited from the detail I was able to draw from this approach. Although the school's ethnic diversity was minimal, it was a truly comprehensive school that drew from a socio-economically diverse catchment. I argue that it is typical of many other schools in the country. Other schools wishing to refer to this research need to be aware of the specific research context. Still, they can take learning from the findings in relation to the whole school strategy and the potential benefits of YPDAR as a research tool in school. The strengths of this approach are that whilst it may be small scale, the detail we were able to focus upon has given a real insight to the thoughts and feelings of the young people involved.

My approach to this research was focussed on the young people as I wanted their input on the whole school mental health strategy. Whilst I stand by this, I have also realised that the school staff do have a part to play as they are the ones who hold the power and without their cooperation, change in schools will not happen. I therefore believe that to develop this work further, I need to ensure that staff are included in regular feedback and involved in the process. In this way they will be fully informed, feel included and have a level of investment which then enables them to support changes suggested by the young people and research.

9.6.2 Challenges

As suggested above, an ex-teacher returning to his previous school can be potentially problematic. My relationship with the YRT was a potentially challenging one. This was a collaborative project; as we were partners in research, co-researchers and working on an equal epistemological level. I wanted a horizontal structure with us working side by side. Over the research period, we made substantial progress in this direction as we learnt to trust each other. By employing reflexive processes, I challenged the YRT to take more control of the research and, in turn, challenge me. It was not perfect, and I am not sure that it could ever be perfect; much of the behaviour we exhibit is unconscious and therefore there was a power differential between us. This is something that I managed and reduced as far as I possibly could.

As the research progressed and we drew towards the analysis, findings and recommendations stages, these trials continued. I had to continue to challenge myself both in terms of whose findings these were and who should make the decisions in this respect. I was forever telling the research team that this was joint research and these were joint findings. I would check and re-check with the YRT that what was being put forward was what they wanted. Over the months in which I worked closely with them, we grew together, becoming more cohesive as a team; we developed a collaborative mentality within the group; this was down to the reflexive approach that I encouraged (Simmons et al., 2021).

As the research progressed, it became clear to me that this research may have benefitted from an understanding of two further linked areas. The first was student voice; I became conscious that there was a body of literature related to my concerns about young people being listened to in schools. Unfortunately, I needed more time to investigate either this area or another linked area, that being the impact of peer mentoring in schools. Whilst both bodies of work may have given me further insight, I decided to focus on young people as researchers and the potential impacts this could have on young people and schools.

The most significant practical challenge occurred at the start of the data collection process as it coincided with the COVID lockdown of spring 2021. Face-to-face meetings were impossible as the school was forced to close. I worked with school staff to set up safe online

meetings and attempted to collect data in this way. Unfortunately, the YRT and the participants were reluctant to engage, and only three of the YRT and five participants opted to partake. It proved unworkable, and after a month of trying, we abandoned it and awaited the re-opening of the school. On reflection, young people lacked the willingness or on-screen confidence to participate. At the commencement of the data collection, I reflect that relationships between the two groups of young people needed more time to develop sufficiently to allow trust between the parties. Also, new to the research, the YRT likely lacked confidence in the process reflected. Once school reopened and even though young people were working in bubbles, the weekly process of meetings engaged all parties, enabled relationship building and yielded rich data collection.

Chapter 10: Future research, recommendations and conclusion

10.1 Future research, recommendations and impact

My discussion chapter explores how the findings relate to the school's mental health strategy. As part of the discussion, and in an attempt to apply my research, I develop several models for use in schools. Due to time constraints, I have not been able to evaluate the models and frameworks fully, and this is now required. The Conceptual framework for emotional wellbeing and the School mental health model would benefit from in-school evaluation.

One of the key findings concerning the school mental health strategy is how poor relationships can hinder young people from asking for help. Many mental health strategies are focussed on educating young people to come forward for mental health support. Schools are positioned as places which can offer such support. However, should my research findings be applicable across all schools, relationship development would significantly contribute to the school mental health support debate. I, therefore, suggest that the area of young people/staff relationships and how they impact a young person's ability to ask for help requires further research.

My thesis suggests my research has been taking place within a school, which is a structure of oppression. I discuss teacherism and the impact this has on relationships, and introduce the positivity created as I collaborated with the YRT. As I attempt to scale up my work and position it as school improvement research led by young people, I see school staff taking on the role of lead researcher, the part I played. What needs further investigation, however, is whether school staff, as researchers, can break through the shackles the school structures impose to create beneficial relationships similar to those made through my work with the YRT. Further work is also required about the autonomy of young people in YPDAR and whether they can develop research independently of the school staff.

By using YPDAR and developing participative dialogic action research communities, we can have an opportunity to bring about change by working with those in power. Relationships are at the centre of YPDAR, and further research is required to identify the benefits that were gained by all the parties involved. There were clear benefits to both the YRT and participants,

as highlighted in the findings. I have shown how this way of working has improved the confidence and trust of young people, empowered them, and improved their socio-emotional skills. My PhD was time-limited research; therefore, a longer-term investigation is required to test the longevity of my initial results. Does this, as I suggest, improve trust between the school and young people over a longer period, and is this trust enduring? My Youth participation in schools model also requires evaluation. Further questions need to be answered regarding how YPDAR impacts school staff.

In my thesis, I suggest that YPDAR could be transformational in relation to school character. This will require several years to develop. Over time, as young people become empowered and start to influence school policy, so relationships and trust should develop. This will likely take five years or more to impact school character. Therefore, a longitudinal study is required to track YPDAR in a school(s) over a prolonged period. Another area of benefit could well be the use of YPDAR in other youth settings, such as youth clubs or young person's advisory boards. Alongside such projects, complete evaluations could add further value to this methodology.

In my thesis, I highlight a number of areas where the process has benefitted young people. The relationship between the YRT and their participants was beneficial to both parties. However, I posit that the participants benefitted from an attachment-like bond that developed between them. This is something that requires more focused attention and further research. The development of research as a way of improving the socio-emotional skills of young people is another area for future research.

10.2 Conclusion

The aim of this research was threefold. Firstly, I wanted to explore how the whole school strategy could be improved. Secondly, it was important to me that young people were at the heart of this research, and they informed any investigation. My final aim was to work with them to develop a process to counter my potential unconscious bias. My chosen methodology of YPAR was fundamental to this, and this is what grew into YPDAR. Therefore, the two primary outcomes of this research were my new methodology and findings related to whole-school mental health strategies.

In addition, learning from Freire, Habermas, Flecha, Gomez, and Lundy has enabled me to use the research and reflect on the underlying state of this UK state school, one I suggest is typical of many in the country. I have discovered that many young people today find school difficult as they attempt to fit into systems created by neoliberal society. These systems pressure their communities by using exams as the currency of success at the expense of their broader education; social and cultural capital opportunities are often overlooked. Schools are anti-dialogic, and relationships, something required for young people to feel accepted in school, are sometimes neglected or ignored. Young people can have a poor sense of identity and lack confidence and agency, resulting in disempowerment. The systems set in place by the school to support mental health rely on trust in both staff and systems. However, some young people lack trust in teachers, meaning support systems are less effective than they should be.

By developing YPDAR, however, this research has the potential to be part of the solution. It allows schools to initiate a change process by collaborating with young people as research partners. By committing to YPDAR's dialogic process, opportunities open up to build trust and confidence with young people, and empower them to act and develop them as critical thinkers. YPDAR is about relationships, building them, restoring them, and ensuring that they are at the heart of school values and culture. This is about transforming a deficit-based institution into one that has asset-based approaches.

10.3 Impact

The initial aim of this research was to explore the efficacy of a whole school mental health strategy, but the impact of the research goes far beyond this. By taking an inclusive approach through the use of PAR, I have included young people in transformative work that can positively impact their and others' lives. In discovering the strategy's flaws relating to trust, I have uncovered a valuable insight that, once disseminated, has the potential to impact school leaders' thinking.

This work has also directly impacted those young people involved in the research. The YRT have grown through the research. Their confidence was boosted through the process where they built relationships and supported their younger peers, developed research skills, co-wrote an academic paper and presented at conferences. The research has also allowed them to

see their school in a different light; a trust-building process has commenced. They have become empowered to act as agents for school improvement. In addition, their effort as co-researchers has developed their socio-emotional skills as they worked with their younger peers. The participants benefited from the research, and their confidence and sense of agency grew, recognising that the school valued their work. Furthermore, their relationships with the YRT members have positively impacted them.

YPDAR has been developed as a methodology that ensures young people are at the centre of decisions impacting them in school; it is a research model for young people's school improvement. The potential impact YPDAR may have on school character is untested, but the potential for transformative change is there.

Whilst my PhD may be complete, my research is not. In the spirit of action research, the work continues through praxis. As I develop the research, I do so by acting and reflecting. Dialogue is central to all of this work, as school staff, academics, and young people are encouraged to learn from one another in this ongoing, long-term reflective process.

Epilogue

I refer to myself as 'becoming a researcher' in my thesis. As I conclude the research process, I reflect on this three-year journey which has seen me grow and change from a task-driven teacher into a creative and process-driven researcher. As the pastoral lead in a large school, my role required me to be reactive. No two days were the same, and I regularly failed to complete any of my planned tasks as day-to-day events took over. Everything was frenetic and had to be done straightaway, leaving a long list of things to do with little time to do them in.

As I started my research, it took me many months to recognise and appreciate the different mindsets required to become a researcher. It was all about time. As a teacher, I had little time to do the many things required. However, as a researcher, I started realising that a prerequisite was the ability to stand back, observe and question, listen and think before further action. This involved me building reflective skills, such as reading, deliberating, and questioning. As I became more and more aware of the necessity of this approach, I also realised that young people with whom I was collaborating may also benefit from working in this way. If my experience as a schoolteacher is anything to go by, then I expect the same to be true for young people in schools. They have little time to reflect, learn and process. This certainly aligns with my thoughts about the changing value base of schools.

In the prologue, I wrote about how my values of inclusivity, integrity, honesty and trust are important to me and how I believe in relationship building. I now realise that, as a teacher, the structure of oppression in which I was working created barriers. On occasions, this meant it was difficult for me to express my values as I might have wished to. The PhD has given me the opportunity to live out my values from within the research. As a researcher, I have put my belief and trust in young people into practice. My work with them has been value-driven as I have completed substantial research by collaborating with them on an equal level. I believe productive relationships are essential in an altruistic society, and my work partnering with young people has exemplified this, as we problem solved and often clarified complex issues.

One of the joys of this research has been working alongside young people to find solutions to a common cause. By developing this research together, we have created a new methodology with the potential to transform a societal structure, meaning this corpus of work has been about social justice and young people as activists. We have also made valuable contributions to the debate around young people, mental health and schools.

This research has been a life-changing journey of discovery for me. My belief in relationships, young people and the ability to draw on my educational experience has enabled me to grow and mature as a researcher. I am excited about the next steps on this journey. I aim to work with colleagues both in the UK and abroad to champion young people as researchers and to support them to become transformative activists as they impact their own and others' lives.

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