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Investigating teacher-student relationships from classrooms to outdoor learning: *exploring engagement with learning by listening to 'the voices' of young people*

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This thesis is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

University of Cumbria
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Institute of Science and Environment

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Dedication

For my beautiful boy Jack, and all our future adventures outdoors.

Your love of the outdoors is infectious; may you always be wild and free.

And in loving memory of Christine and Davd Taylor,

my inspiration to embark on this journey.

Abstract

Despite acknowledgement that positive teacher-student relationships can support young people to engage as they transition through school, many students continue to disengage. Research identifies experiences outdoors can foster positive teacher-student relationships but does not adequately address young people's perspectives or experiences, offering limited explanations of the context and dynamic qualities of relationships. This thesis seeks to address this within the context of one English state secondary school. It investigates teacher-student relationships from classrooms to outdoor learning by listening to 'the voices' of young people to explore the impact of outdoor learning on students' engagement with learning. An interpretivist approach informed by critical constructivism is adopted to examine the formation of teacher-student relationships from the perspective of year 7 (aged 11-12 years). The research explores related social structures and concepts that might shape and define students' experiences to understand how fostering positive relationships between teachers and young people through outdoor learning might influence engagement with learning, thus creating positive learning environments. Reflective thematic analysis of the data reveals young people view teacher-student relationships to be influenced by behaviours, learning approaches and the learning environment. From this young people state their requirements for the formation of positive teacher-student relationships to include appropriate tasks and activities, calm, stress free learning environments and caring, supportive teachers who get to know them individually. The research offers a new perspective on teacher-student relationships, making a specific contribution to knowledge in the context of English Secondary Education, as young people state they require positive teacher-student relationships before they will endeavour to engage with learning and that the outdoors offers an effective environment for positive teacher-student relationships to be built. The practical implications of the research show outdoor learning provides an appropriate learning environment for young people's requirements to be met so they feel able to form positive relationships with teachers that encourages them to engage with learning. A key dimensions framework, created from the research findings, identifies young people's requirements to recommend how the findings can be interpreted and used in

developing educational policies and as part of educational practice, to build positive teacher-student relationships and thus support engagement with learning.

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and when to give me a hug. I love you more than words can say. Thanks for the late-night chats and loan of your artist sketch pad. I promise I’m going to tidy behind the chair now!

Author’s declaration

The thesis is submitted for the purpose of the application of PhD by published works. I hereby declare that except where explicitly stated otherwise, by reference of acknowledgement, this thesis is entirely my own. The work presented in this thesis has not been previously submitted, in whole or part, for an award at this university or any other institution. The resources to produce this report are entirely my own and not subject to funding, influence or support from any other individual or organisation.

1 Background to my research

1.1 Setting the scene

In introducing my thesis, my opening chapter presents my reasons for undertaking this research by explaining how my profession of teaching impacted on my decisions. I also discuss how my role as a volunteer influenced my choice to look at teacher-student relationships, engagement with learning and outdoor learning in an English state secondary. I consider different aspects of my profession that have not only influenced my choices but also helped to shape my research.

I begin this chapter in **section 1.2**, **Rationale**, by outlining why this research is important to me and how my role as a teacher made me want to undertake this research. I explain why I chose to research year 7 (the first year of secondary school, aged 11-12 years) and briefly discuss my choice of outdoor learning (1.2.1). In **section 1.3, Education, policies and my teaching**, to provide context for my research, I look at English educational policies and their impact on schooling, situating them within the social and political climate of the late 20th century and 21st Century. **Section 1.4, Why this research**, then provides justification for undertaking my research by first examining my role as a teacher in more detail and discussing how it influenced my thinking (1.4.1). For further context, I then look at research on young people's engagement with learning (1.4.2) before discussing the influence of outdoor learning on my research and briefly considering research into it (1.4.3). Finally, **section, 1.5. Aim and Key Questions,** summarises my aim and states the key questions that guided my research. Throughout this chapter, and the thesis, I have used first person where I felt it has been appropriate to my discussions and in keeping with my research approach and choice to be reflexive (Webb 1992).

1.2 Rationale

As a secondary school teacher in the English state system for over 16 years, I have witnessed many young people seemingly frustrated with school and listened to them voice exasperation over feeling that their teachers do not understand them, and that school is not designed for them. Throughout my teaching career, I have often considered how the English education system is designed and structured and how this might impact on the young people I teach. For example, Ball (2021) suggests that, since the 1980's, there has been an increasing emphasis on how education contributes to economic competitiveness, whilst broader social ideas of education have been neglected. Meanwhile, Baker (2014) argues that English educational policies have increasingly been geared towards creating a society that is economically productive by producing young people who can enter the job market with the skills, knowledge and creativity to further economic growth and improve the country's competitiveness on the international market. Indeed, in evidence of this, government proposals to reform the education system in England in the form of 'The White Paper 2010, The Importance of Teaching' (Department for Education (DfE) 2010) placed the economy at the forefront of its agenda, promising comparisons of test scores with international standards of test results for young people: *"we must make sure that the standards set by our qualifications match up to the best internationally in providing a good basis for future education and employment"* (Department for Education 2010, p41). In this way, as Ball (2021) suggests, English schools were required to compete on an international stage and education became centred around the learning of certain information, whilst measures and indicators of performance were used to show deficiencies in schools to justify the introduction of policies to combat these. Through the White Paper, the focus became about what young people needed to know to enter society and how teachers, schools and ultimately government, could check they knew it. As this is something that many researchers such as Bartlett and Burton (2020), Baker (2014) and Murray (2023) continue to debate, I will explore this further in chapter 2.

As a vocational teacher, teaching a subject that students opt to take and that links directly to a specific career, I have always had a passion for my subject and

accepted that what I teach can be considered valuable knowledge for the workplace. However, over the course of my teaching career, seeing young people who did not want to be in school or who did not engage in lessons left me thinking that school might have a negative effect on the young people in my care. As a teacher, I value my subject knowledge, but it appeared that not all young people shared this view. Was I missing something in my teaching? Was there more I should be doing to understand why the young people did not value the knowledge being taught? In reflecting on this, in the next section I will outline my choice to use year 7 (aged 11-12 years) students and briefly discuss why I chose outdoor learning, as this is discussed in more detail in section 1.4.3.

1.2.1 Year 7, Outdoor Learning and Engagement with learning

With evidence (Gilbert et al. 2021) to suggest that the move from primary to secondary school may impact negatively on young people's wellbeing, including a dip in academic performance, decline in motivation, school engagement, attitude to school and increased levels of absence, I decided to base my research on the first year of secondary school in state schools in England (Year 7). Having only ever taught Key stage 4 and 5 (ages 14-18 or Year 10, 11, 12 and 13), I perhaps naively assumed that these would be appropriate year groups to research as these are the year groups that undertake exams either for GCSEs (qualifications taken in year 11, aged 15-16) or A-levels (qualifications taken aged 17-18), and therefore the requirement for engagement would be more prevalent and the emphasis on achievement greater. Yet research by Wigfield et al. (1991) from the US shows that after transition from primary to secondary school, young people are more negative about school and themselves and have lower self-esteem and disengage. Meanwhile, in their study, 'The Impact of School Transitions and Transfers on Pupil Progress and Attainment', Rudduck, Chaplain and Wallace (1996) found young people become increasingly demotivated to learn as they progress through secondary school. They suggest this may be because the move to secondary school brings 'social upheaval' that is so preoccupying that students are unable to focus on the 'seriousness of learning' and progress can be hindered or even halted if they do not receive support to sustain their excitement about learning. As Lee (2014) suggests, the

earlier young people can become engaged, the less likely they are to face academic failure or have lower expectations. Smyth (2020) supports this, pointing out that an important driver of later expectations (in school and life) could be seen to be early achievement and engagement with school subjects at primary level. Reflecting on this, I decided to consider whether through outdoor learning, it is possible that young people can build teacher-student relationships that might support them to maintain their enthusiasm and engage with their learning.

I have chosen to focus on outdoor learning because as Quay, Dickinson and Nettleton (2002) point out, the outdoor learning environment is very different to that of the classroom. Certainly, for Christie, Beames and Higgins (2015) being outdoors can influence students' experiences by provoking their reactions so that they explore alternative perspectives and as Beames et al. (2024) suggests, this potentially ignites their enthusiasm for a topic or subject and inspires learning. Furthermore, Waite (2020) states that several reviews have shown significant evidence that outdoor learning improves young people's quality of life and points to how outdoor learning can meet many desired policy outcomes for young people's well-being now and in the future. However, as a teacher, I have experienced first-hand how difficult it can be to take students away from the classroom and was conscious that it might not be practical or possible to be in the outdoors in the same or similar ways as to how I experienced this through delivering the Duke of Edinburgh Award (DofE) Duke of Edinburgh Award, 2024). Consequently, I want to look at how schools might utilise the outdoors as a way of teaching as opposed to taking part in adventurous activities which are often offered as part of the end of the school year activity week, as a year group trip, as 'curricular enhancement' or through field work. In this way, as part of my research, I want to understand if outdoor learning could not only be used to build positive teacher-student relationships and how this might influence young people's engagement with learning, but also if my research might offer possibilities and ideas for other schools in terms of incorporating outdoor learning. Therefore, I chose a secondary school that was using outdoor learning as a way of delivering elements of the national curriculum (Beames et al. 2024), taking outdoor learning to be about 'active learning' (Greenaway 2005) and placing learning in 'real context' (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee

2005). My research considers if the building of teacher-student relationships through outdoor learning might offer a way to support young people to engage in learning. In the next section, I explore views of education, educational policies and my own teaching and how these have influenced this research.

1.3 Education, policies and my teaching

As discussed further in chapter 2, it has been argued by some (Apple 2004; Bartlet and Burton 2020; Nicholson 2016; Thomas 2013) that schools do not necessarily fulfil the role of education, depending on how it is viewed, and the different assumptions pose fundamental questions not just about how we understand education but how we view and value the purpose of education and consequently, school and learning. Peters (2015 in Bartlett and Burton 2020) points out that it is difficult to encompass all that education involves into one definition, reasoning that 'Education' can be viewed as the obtaining of certificates, diplomas and degrees, acquiring valuable qualities or in gaining knowledge and understanding. For the purposes of my research, I am using the context of formal education, as Villar and Celdrán (2013) remark, to be broadly aligned with schools encompassing learning which takes place in a designated institution, guided by a teacher with the aim of attaining an officially recognised qualification. This is because, as a qualified secondary school teacher working in the state sector in England, this for me summarises in the broadest sense, my professional (although not necessarily personal) view of my role as a teacher. This is something that I reflect on throughout my thesis. I chose to research an English state secondary school as I am most familiar with this, having only ever taught in the English state sector, in secondary schools, and I live in England, and there are, as Ball (2021 p5) points out, historical and current '*significant differences between the English Education System and English Education policy and the rest of the UK'.* This includes different starting ages, assessment types, ages and curriculums. In choosing to base my research around secondary schooling in England, I place this within the context of the education system, history and policies that have shaped the current system of schooling in England, by offering a brief overview of these to give a perspective for my research. I shall

then discuss and develop this further in chapter 2. Throughout this chapter and chapter 2, reference is made to progressive and alternative education. This is done not to discuss alternatives to mainstream schooling but to highlight different educational philosophies that have underpinned and continue to underpin thinking on the role of education and how education is understood. In referring to progressive and alternative education in this way, I explore how education and teaching might be viewed and executed differently through alterations to educational policies and curriculum delivery within mainstream secondary schools in England rather than discuss alternatives to education.

1.3.1 20th to 21st century English Education

In the years following the two World Wars, England saw a shift in attitudes and a move towards social reform and social reconstruction amidst calls for greater social equality (Lowe 2006). In this respect, Tisdall (2020) argues that children were seen to offer hope for a brighter, better future whilst the state was seen as corrupt and outdated. 'Progressive' thinkers such as Dewey (1938), Steiner (1861-1925) and Montessori (1870-1952), (see Leighton 2010), in contrast with traditional didactic educators, saw children as being distorted by being exposed to adult norms and in need of being free to obey their own natural laws of growth (Tisdall 2020). For Dewey (1938) progressive education was about learning through experiences and free activity in contrast to more traditional education which had standards and rules to follow and meant teaching students knowledge and skills and enforcing obedience and docility. Yet Tisdall (2020) suggests that there is little evidence that 'traditional education' existed as a body of thought and instead was usually used to refer to teaching methods employed to emphasise the innovation of 'modern methods' of teaching at any given time. Tisdall (2020 p.25-29) goes on to argue that within educational philosophies, there were two distinct ideologies of progressive education or utopian progressivism, and child-centred education or non-utopian progressivism. For Tisdall (2020) child-centred pedagogy characterised itself against the idea of 'a traditional education' by producing the concept of a 'traditional' education that had never actually existed.

Yet Tisdall (2020) points out that progressive or utopian and child-centred ideologies clashed as to the possession of definitive knowledge of the nature of the child and therefore how freedom should be offered, as well as being split by three conflicts. The first of these was that the child-centred definition of freedom was unclear, asserting that children be given more choices but restricting what they were allowed to explore, practise and learn as, although freedom was defined by the freedom to develop natural abilities, those abilities were defined by adults (Lane 1928 in Tisdall 2020). Secondly, there were inconsistencies within child-centred thought concerning the belief of an 'individual' and a 'natural' education arising from the idea that a child's development must be guided by an adult (Cunningham 1988 in Tisdall 2020). This meant that though child-centred pedagogy reasoned that children were unique, and this should be reflected in their education, it also argued that education should match the natural course of development, describing the needs of children at different stages so that despite the idea that children should progress along their own life course, in practice, the dominant model of development was likely to be followed. The third and final conflict was whether childhood should be preparation for adulthood or if it was a life stage to be valued alone and nurtured without reference to the needs of society or the child's own adult self (Tisdall 2020). Nevertheless, child-centred ideas of education, teaching to children's natural interests in line with their capabilities at various stages of development, were encouraged in English schools in the post-war period, as these were seen to be the most effective ways of learning (Tisdall 2020). Indeed, in the post-War years, 'new' teaching methods were encouraged, and with the establishment of the 1944 Education Act, schools were free to deliver learning as they saw fit, without a state directed curriculum to adhere to (Chitty 2014). Support for child-centred or progressive classroom approaches was even commended in the 'Plowden Report' (1967). However, by the 1970's, it is suggested (Chitty 2014; Lowe 2006) that opposition against progressive education had begun, with the Black Papers (1968 in Tisdall 2020) claiming that schools were lacking discipline due to teachers' commitment to the gospel of free education, and unfavourable press coverage of 'radical' teaching practices at London's William Tyndale Primary School during the mid-1970s (Davis 2002 in Tisdall 2020). Permissive ideology was accused of allowing children to do what they wanted, of failing to instil discipline and appropriate moral

standards and of encouraging low academic achievement. Consequently, teachers were blamed for the perceived breakdown of discipline in schools caused by progressive education, leading to falling standards (Chitty 2014; Lowe 2006).

Tisdall (2020) however, argues that this is oversimplified, and in fact a series of occurrences were more likely responsible for the changes that were to come in the 1970's and 1980's with regards to education and policy. By the 1970s Tisdall (2020) says, teachers, parents and the wider public had started to be afraid that children were not growing up as it had been anticipated that they would, failing to become the socially responsible and emotionally mature citizens the welfare state demanded. Alongside this there were existing tensions within child-centredness ideology which included frustrations over whether and how practices and ideas were being implemented in line with the ideas of child-centred practices versus progressive ideology. There was also a series of reports and surveys suggesting child-centred practices had little effect on learning and achievement as well as wide-spread and ongoing teacher resistance since the 1940's, to wholly implementing child-centred ideas in practice. In addition, ongoing changing concepts of childhood drove a 'backlash' against progressive education ideas as much as conservative fears about delinquency and the decline of traditional values (Tisdall 2020). In fact, in the 1970s, teachers often rejected new ideas by using the mantra that there had already been 'too much change' or 'change was moving too fast', evidenced in 'Teachers World *Talking the New Year in'* (1971 in Tisdall 2020), which criticised the 'frantic pace' of change, indicating the huge amount of educational research that was currently under way. Supporting the idea that teachers' reactions were a part of the reason for the backlash against progressive educational practices, (Wratten 1975 in Tisdall 2020) points out that teachers often explicitly resisted the findings of educational researchers, which they characterised as outside interference with their craft knowledge. For Tisdall (2020) this all creates the right set of circumstances for a reassertion of central control over education and radical transformation of educational policy, and as Avis (2007 in Tisdall 2020) notes, child-centred pedagogy was susceptible to appropriation by the 'New Right' as it lacked a coherent radical political programme. Yet it is worth remembering, Robinson (2017 in Tisdall 2020) points

out, that prior to the late 1960s, 'progressive' could not be solely associated with left-wing politics or the 'liberal elite' and instead was used by a wide range of political persuasions. Despite this, it is seen (Ball 2021; Baker 2014; Clarke and Mills 2021) that the 1988 Education Reform Act, brought in by a Conservative government, signalled a change in direction for education policy, brought about by *'fears over the competitive health of the nation, and the demands for a more structured, systematic and instrumental model of education'* (Clarke and Mills 2021 p18). Worried about the ability of industry and business to compete with the rest of the world economically, and with a desire to hold on to a glorious past and England's place as a global power, this is perhaps why the 1988 Education Reform Act, is viewed as a response to the liberal and progressive politics of the 1960's and 1970's, and education seen as a key focus to achieve the ends.

By introducing a centrally defined national curriculum enshrined in the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA) (1988), along with its central element of a mandatory and elaborate system for assessing students' performance and progress, Ackoff and Greenberg (2008) argue that schools were being designed and operated like factories whereby incoming students are treated as raw material to be processed into saleable products. This is a view shared by Giroux (2002) who uses the imagery of the factory to show how he views schooling and education as akin to a production line, and in a similar way, Ball (2021) and Baker (2014) compare schools to businesses, outlining how they produce an end product in the form of an 'educated' young person. Yet Davis, Conroy and Clague. (2020) caution against using such sweeping metaphors, arguing that in doing so, thought and understanding may be obscured. I reluctantly may have to agree here as though I identify many elements of my teaching role and contemporary schooling with the features of performativity, I am inclined to remain cautious and reflect on the possibility that applying such a rigid and uncompromising metaphor (Davis, Conroy and Clague 2020) as schools as factories or businesses does not reflect the complex realities of the classroom and the multiple relationships and activities that it supports (Dorn 2018 in Davis, Conroy and Clague 2020). In considering this, I am conscious that my professionalism as a teacher leaves me feeling trained to deliver a curriculum that I must subscribe to on some level, to feel an enthusiasm for and to deliver to the best of my abilities, but my own beliefs

and values leave me questioning whether the process of teaching does in fact mirror a factory line or business. In this respect, I chose to undertake my research to understand how this juxtaposition can be explained.

Nevertheless, as Ball (2021) points out, there is much support for the view that what has followed since the 1988 Education Reform Act has been a succession of policies that continue to endorse ideology that sees schools and by association, education, linked to economic development and by default, production lines, moves that could be seen to undermine the system in which child-centred progressive education had been introduced, (Tisdall 2020). Indeed, the 2016 White Paper *'Success as Knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, social mobility and student choice'* (Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) 2016) draws together national economic development, social mobility and student choice and therefore it could be argued that knowledge and education are viewed here as business products and that knowledge is increasingly seen as a factor of production, and education increasingly in terms of production capacity (Ball 2021). In a similar fashion The White Paper 'Educational Excellence Everywhere' (DfE 2016 p98), clearly links the importance of 'knowledge' to advancement and expansion of the economy stating that *'there is a body of research highlighting the importance of the most academically able in boosting a country's economic development and growth'*. The White Paper's overarching theme is to set out the Government's vision for young people to leave education ready for the world of work by ensuring that they are equipped with *'… core knowledge about the best that has been thought and written"* (DfE 2016 p89). However, this raises the question of which or whose knowledge should or is applied in school (Bourdieu 1977; Unwin and Yandell 2016). I explore this in more detail in chapter 2, examining educational policies further to understand the impact of viewing school as essential to economic growth and development. I also consider why education is, as Ball (2021) argues, often linked to economic productivity, something which David Cameron (2015) as then Prime Minister spoke of in a speech suggesting it was tied to economic reform, and the answer to a lack of economic opportunity. This shows how teaching 'knowledge' through education is used to determine the knowledge that should be taught in schools (Yandell 2021). Indeed, between the period of 2010-2014, the then Education

Secretary Michael Gove introduced policies with an emphasis on what might be termed traditional forms of pedagogy in a move away from 'soft, airy-fairy subjects' towards rigour and 'the best that has been thought and said' (Ball 2021). 'Traditional' in the way Gove was implying may be referring to subjects that teach certain knowledge and truths through a curriculum that reflects a society's cultural heritage and history rather than progressive or child-centred education which focuses on young people's interests (Dewey 1938). In fact, Fazackerley and Chant (2008) in their research into the implications for students of A-level choices for university admissions, point out that Cambridge and London School of Economics published lists of non-preferred subjects in 2008, including Art and Design, Dance and Drama, Film and Media Studies etc., suggesting that these are often referred to as 'soft' subjects. Therefore, perhaps by 'airy-fairy' and 'soft', Gove was implying subjects such as these.

Following more traditional approaches to education, or as Tisdall (2020) has argued, approaches that were not child-centred, policies on proving whether young people have retained the knowledge educational reforms seek to 'teach' them, have also been widely introduced in a move that has seen more progressive education pedagogies in England pushed to the periphery of education. Indeed, Clarke and Mills (2021) argue that criticisms of progressive practice in England have served to create a sense of crisis in education and consequently support for more traditional educational methods and content has increased. In a move Ball (2021) calls 'cultural restoration', he sees government policies as an unravelling of progressive education and the reinstatement of values seen in the education system pre-1944, such as higher levels of discipline, and a focus on subject specific content in the curriculum. This has been seen by Joyce (2012) as undermining teacher professionalism in terms of removing teachers' choice or autonomy over what to teach and how to teach it. For me this is important as there is often a feeling of lack of control over my teaching that leaves me pondering how this affects my role and my relationships with my students. Nicholson (2016 p150) suggests that the work of teachers has been devalued by school reforms and that now the ability to teach is viewed as requiring a set of technical skills that when implemented properly produce standardised results. Pettigrew and Curtis (2010) support this idea, seeing the

teacher's role in the classroom as being weakened by educational policies and accountability, calling it *de-professionalism'* of the teacher whereby teachers have lost autonomy, independence and status. So, I find myself reflecting on whether feeling devalued as a professional and experiencing a lack of autonomy is part of my frustration with the education system, and therefore how this might be linked not only to my relationships with my students but also to how I might unconsciously negatively influence students' desire to engage with their learning. I explore this further in chapter 5 and now will explain why I want to undertake this research and then discuss engagement with learning and views of education as these are at the centre of my research, before exploring them further in chapter 2.

1.4 Why this research?

1.4.1 Being a Teacher

As Unwin and Yandell (2016) suggest, I believe learning is complex rather than linear and so as a teacher, the push for more 'traditional' or didactic forms of education does not always feel appropriate for the young people I teach or for my personal views on learning and education. Instead, I find myself drawn to Dewey's (1938) description of progressive education in which he suggests young people learn through experience and should be allowed to express their individuality, growing and developing at their pace. Yet as Tisdall (2020) argues, the progressive educators of the 20th Century often operated within the state system rather than as separate to it and so were often bound either by choice or through default to the state system's 'norms and rules'. The fact that progressive education was never fully realised feels important for me as it is part of the juxtaposition I find myself in as a professional trained to teach a prescribed curriculum and, as a researcher, frustrated with the current education system and viewing the state system as having too much control.

I am mindful that as Tisdall (2020) points out, progressive theories were still measured based on the dominant, white, adult view and therefore I feel it is

important that my research takes young people's experiences and views as its starting point. Having often felt helpless seeing young people question why they are made to learn the content of a curriculum they do not feel applies to them, I want to explore ways I can negate or minimise the disparities between what I am told I must teach and the young people's views on what they would like to learn. Yet as Carr (2016 p28) points out, in state-controlled school in England, *'teaching is controlled and dictated to teachers through the national curriculum',* leaving little or no room for progressive or alternative education approaches. Therefore, conscious that I may be unable to change government policy or re-structure schools along alternative education ideas, I began to look at ways I could alter my classroom dynamics to lessen the negative effect I feel the current education system is having on young people's ability to engage with their learning. This is because as Unwin and Yandell (2016) suggest, there are possibilities for state education to be re-envisaged within the current climate of educational policies. This led me to reflect on my own teaching style and examine if there was something that might encourage my students to engage. I noticed that often just engaging in conversation with them about something other than classwork often led to them being more focused. This led me to consider whether my relationships with my students had any impact on them and on their engagement with their learning and if so, how this played out in a secondary school in England. This is because as Gehlbach, Brinkworth and Harris (2012) research found, over an academic year, from the perspective of students, teacher-student relationships became less positive.

On reflection, I felt that at times, I may have displayed potentially negative attitudes towards my students that may have left them feeling insecure and as though they had 'failed', which in turn may have led to disengagement or poor behaviour in the classroom. Considering my role as a teacher and my relationships with the young people I teach, I asked myself if my relationships with them were more positive, would the young people feel that they could engage in learning? A longitudinal study by Ross (2009) into disengagement from school among 14–16-year-olds highlights negative relationships as one of the factors that may lead to disengaged students viewing school negatively. For me, seeing successive educational policies as narrowing the curriculum and

undermining my autonomy to teach, I wanted to pursue this further through my research by exploring if positive teacher-student relationships might support young people to engage in their learning. In doing so I reflected on Becker's (1971) suggestion that as a teacher, I may make assumptions that the knowledge I have is also the knowledge my students need and so may not always take their opinions into account. It is possible that I lack an understanding of the culture, background and viewpoint of the young people I teach and that this may sometimes lead to negative relationships. As Waite (2011) suggests, in schools, learning can be easily appropriated by adults so that it becomes mediated by adults, and young people can feel that they are unable to identify with school or the curriculum. This can lead to them feeling unable or unwilling to participate in classroom activities or to engage with their learning, as they consider they are unable to access the curriculum and its content, believing it has little or no meaning to them (Bourdieu 1977).

Research (Battistich, Schaps and Wilson 2004; Eccles and Roeser 2011) has shown that positive teacher-student relationships have a positive impact on young people in terms of well-being and school related development. For example, a study by Battistich, Schaps and Wilson (2004) shows students experiencing positive teacher-student relationships have improved academic performance, increased social skills and higher emotional resilience, whilst Wentzel (2013) says research is consistent with showing a link between students pursuing academic and social goals and having positive teacher-student relationships. Meanwhile, Obsuth et al.'s (2017) research shows the quality of teacher-student relationships influences student behaviour both positively and negatively. Yet as Daniels and Perry (2003) point out, relying on teachers' individual personalities and approaches may not be enough to build and sustain relationships. In other words, as Gehlbach, Brinkworth and Harris (2012) say, teacher-student relationships can be manipulated or shaped, indicating that there may be factors other than teachers' personalities and approaches that can improve and sustain teacher-student relationships. I wish to explore these possible factors by listening to young people's experiences. I will now discuss the relevance to my research of choosing to look at young people's engagement with learning.

1.4.2 Reflecting on young people's engagement with learning

As a teacher, I wanted to look at how I might better support the young people I teach without compromising my own beliefs and values (1.4.1), but also whilst maintaining my professionalism and commitment to teaching the curriculum. Though I may not agree entirely with the content of the current English curriculum, I want to explore if there are ways to encourage the young people to want to engage with their learning and the curriculum to provide them with options for their futures by helping them achieve the qualifications valued by society and seen as important to achieving success in life (Ball 2021; Unwin and Yandell 2016). Furthermore, Cowen (1994) and Peterson (2006 suggest that having a positive attitude in school does not just lead to successful academic performance but may also enable young people to develop into lifelong learners who can take advantage of the vocational, interpersonal, and psychological *(skills training, stronger relationships and emotional resilience)* benefits on offer throughout their lives. However, research by Sanderson (2019), Schoon and Lyons-Amos (2016) and Wyn and Dyer (2000) shows that young people who leave school with few or no qualifications struggle not only to gain meaningful employment and keep it, but in terms of further education and the job sector, remain without the skills and knowledge to choose alternative pathways, establish themselves in the labour market or further their own careers. Therefore, I want to encourage lifelong learning skills (Fullarton (2002) in young people, by addressing low engagement because in my experience as teacher, as Schoon and Lyons-Amos (2016) point out, young people who disengage from school may never fully re-engage with their learning. To this end, Stefansson et al. (2018) suggest that academic achievement is often used as a predictor of future outcomes and success in school, whilst Chase et al. (2014) propose there is a reciprocal relationship between school engagement and academic achievement, pointing out that one often affects the other, either negatively or positively. Meanwhile, American research by Gallup 2015 (in Stefansson et al. 2018) has shown many students are not sufficiently engaged in school, corresponding with studies in other parts of the world (OECD (The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2012) also indicating low levels of engagement in school. In a similar way, a study by Cothran and Ennis (2000) found between 20% to possibly

over 66% of students reported low participation and disengagement in school, whilst a report from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2003) showed 25% of students in 43 countries reporting a low sense of belonging. This may be significant for my research as Osterman's (2000) review suggests, there is substantial evidence showing that a sense of belonging influences achievement through its effect on engagement. In terms of teacher-student relationships, if young people feel that their teachers accept them, they feel more positive and confident about school, displaying more pro-social behaviours. They are then more inclined to engage with learning and in turn, engaging in learning is more likely to lead to higher achievement.

In terms of engagement in learning, as Eccles and Roeser (2011) point out, engagement at school (in terms of academic commitment to learning) likely has a significant impact on young people in preventing academic failure, encouraging skill proficiency and influencing future outcomes. However, a poll by Gallup in the USA (2013) shows that children become less engaged as they move through the education system and in the UK, whereas 80% of early primary children described learning with a positive emotional tone and spoke about persevering in the face of challenges, by secondary school this drops to 40% (Educational Endowment Foundation 2019). This drop does not just suddenly occur but is most likely the culmination of enduring disengagement from school (Randolph et al. 2004 in Jung-Sook Lee (2014). Despite evidence (Gilbert et al. 2021; Wigfield et al. 1991) suggesting the move from primary to secondary school often leads to a dip in academic performance, decline in motivation, school engagement, attitude to school and increased levels of absence, for Smyth (2020) how primary and secondary schools affect educational expectations is not fully explored in existing literature. Therefore, through my research, I examine the interconnection between teacher-student relationships and engagement and the impact on young people, using outdoor learning. I shall now discuss my choice of using outdoor learning.

1.4.3 The influence of Outdoor Learning

In considering teacher-student relationships and engagement with learning, I reflected on my relationships with young people through my volunteer role as a DofE leader (1.2.1). This is because not only did my relationships as a DofE Leader often appear to be more positive than the ones I had in my classroom, but young people I supported on the DofE Award also appeared to engage more in my classroom. As a leader for the DofE Award, although the programme is run as an extra-curricular activity through secondary school, I often see young people both inside and outside the classroom as I 'teach' and support them to gain the skills and knowledge required to complete the award. Since the outdoors is often utilised in some capacity when I am volunteering in this role, I began to consider whether my positive relationships with young people was merely a co-incidence or if the outdoors and being away from the classroom was having a positive impact on my teacher-student relationships and consequently influencing the young people's engagement with learning.

Outdoor learning has been shown to complement indoor teaching by enhancing pupil engagement in academic studies (Fägerstam 2014) demonstrating how being outdoors can engage all ages (Maller 2005). Furthermore, several studies and researchers (Beames 2006; Cramp 2008; Kendall and Rodger 2015) highlight positive relationship building between teachers and students as an outcome of shared experiences that takes place outdoors. However, although I experience positive relationships in the outdoors through my volunteering role, evidence from the Monitoring of Engagement with Natural Environment (MENE) survey (2019) shows that only 6% of children under 16 years of age spent time outside with their school between 2018-2019 and the number of visits to the natural environment in an average month is declining. This is supported with research by Natural England (2022) showing that children self-report spending less time outdoors than previous reports showed, but that they wished to spend more time outdoors, particularly at school. For Maynard and Waters (2007) this represents missed opportunities in terms of using the outdoor environment, whilst Coates and Pimlott-Wilson (2019) and Miller et al. (2021) argue that the loss of nature-based and play-based learning in primary schools may have contributed

to the decreased amount of time children spend outdoors. This is interesting in that it may reflect changing beliefs about education throughout the 20th Century (see section 1.2) and suggests that views of education as 'exam factories and drivers of economic development' (Ball 2021; Giroux 2002) may have had an impact on reducing the amount of time given to young people to be outdoors at school. Certainly, in my own experience in secondary education as a teacher, I have rarely seen young people in the outdoors as part of the school day or curriculum and as the Natural England survey (2022) shows, only a small percentage of young people up to age 16 take part in the outdoors through compulsory schooling in England. Reflecting on this, I consider whether it is possible that through outdoor learning, young people could build teacher-student relationships that might support them to maintain their enthusiasm and engage with their learning? Indeed, as Gehlbach, Brinkworth and Harris (2012) state, at the very least, evidence shows enough of a causal connection between teacher-student relationships and student outcomes for there to be more research into it. My approach to outdoor learning and my choice of school is explained in more detail in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 respectively. I will now discuss my aim and research questions.

1.5 Aim and key questions

I want to understand how and why teacher-student relationships might be impacted through outdoor learning from young people's experiences and examine the influence on their engagement with learning. Therefore, the aim of my research is to explore from young people's perspective, the fostering of positive relationships between teachers and young people through outdoor learning, to understand how this might influence young people to engage in their own learning and thus create positive learning environments.

To explore this, I am using three key questions:

1. *What are young peoples' experiences of teacher-student relationships in secondary school and what impact does this have on their engagement with learning?*

2. *From the perspective of young people, what impact does outdoor learning have on building positive teacher-student relationships and their engagement with learning?*
3. *What can be learnt from the experiences of young people with respect to teacher-student relationships and outdoor learning?*

1.6 Summary

This chapter presented my rationale for my research, discussing how my role as a teacher has led me to consider the design and structure for the English education system and its impact on young people. I have explored my reasons for this research, outlining why it was important to me to look at outdoor learning, engagement with learning and teacher-student relationships, linking these to existing research to support my reasoning. I have examined how I feel educational policies have impacted my teaching and in turn influenced my choice to undertake my research in an English state secondary school. I have justified why I believe my research is important, showing how I relate it to my topic through a discussion on English Education in the 20th and 21st centuries. This has then been linked to my role as a teacher to show the importance of this research for me in my profession. Taking my key research topics, I have outlined how current research relates to my reasons for undertaking this research. This has provided background for further exploration of the research on my topics in chapter 2. I have summarised my aim and provided the key questions which guide my research. The next chapter will now discuss the literature in relation to my research to provide a review of the literature and secondary data already in existence in relation to my research topic.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Through my literature review, I offer a contextualised view of what is currently understood in terms of education and educational policies; teacher-student relationships; engagement with learning and outdoor learning. This is because through these I seek to offer a rationale for my research question by situating and explaining it within existing knowledge, theory and context (Braun and Clarke 2022). By evaluating existing literature, I have enhanced and consolidated my knowledge base around my research topic and identified where my research contributes to existing knowledge.

In this chapter, I begin with section **2.2, Education, School and Learning,** by examining views on the role and value of education and the influence on young people, as I situate my research within an English state school. I begin this section by looking at what education might be for and how it may be understood (2.2.1). To provide background and context for my research, I then consider educational policies as implemented in English schools, and what these mean for schools and teaching (2.2.2). I expand on this to look at the influence of educational policies on school and therefore young people (2.2.3) before consideration is given to school transition (2.2.4). This offers further context to my research which involves transition to and through secondary school, and the changing nature of teacher relationships.

The chapter then moves on to section **2.3, Teacher-student relationships,** where I explore research into teacher-student relationships to provide context for my research and for exploration in chapter 5 of how my research may contribute to understanding of this topic. I begin by considering how teacher-student relationships can be defined (2.3.1) before examining different perceptions of teacher-student relationships (2.3.2) to situate my research within these discussions and explore how young people experience relationships with their teachers**.** To inform my research further and understand young people's experiences, I finish this section with a discussion on how positive teacher-

student relationships benefit young people in relation to school and learning (2.3.3)*.*

In section **2.4, Engagement with Learning,** to provide context for my research and situate it within these ideas, I consider engagement with learning in relation to education and school. I begin by looking at how engagement with learning may be understood, and how young people are seen to engage (2.4.1). I then briefly consider how young people may experience engagement in school (2.4.2) which allows for exploration in chapter 5 of how my research may contribute to understanding of this. I finish this section by examining what I consider to be relevant factors influencing young people's engagement with learning in terms of my research (2.4.3).

The final section in this chapter, **2.5 Outdoor Learning,** is used to discuss outdoor learning in relation to school, positive teacher-student relationships and engagement with learning. I begin the section by considering what outdoor learning is and how I have chosen to use it in relation to my research (2.5.1). I then discuss how outdoor learning is viewed in terms of a learning environment (2.5.2) before looking at how outdoor learning is seen and used in the context of English state secondary schools in terms of my research (2.5.3). I finish this section by exploring the benefits of outdoor learning, as relevant to my research, in terms of engagement with learning, academic performance and teacher-student relationships (2.5.4).

The chapter begins by examining education, school and learning.

2.2 Education, School and Learning

The word 'Education' Thomas (2013) suggests, has become synonymous with school and having an education system, yet Peters (2015 in Bartlett and Burton 2020) has suggested that it is difficult to capture a precise definition of 'Education' as the concept has been used in many ways. Thomas (2013) however, says that education was once about passing on or down knowledge, skills and ideas from

previous generations, happening throughout life in myriad forms of communication. He argues that education in the 21st Century is more about what goes on in schools, owing to them being specialist institutions built for the purpose of education. Yet as discussed throughout this section, depending on how it is viewed, schools may not necessarily fulfil the role of education (Apple 2004; Bartlet and Burton 2020). Instead, the different views of education may pose fundamental questions about how education is understood and viewed, and what value is placed on the purpose of education, school and learning (Apple 2004; Thomas 2013; Nicholson 2016). Therefore, this section considers what education might be for in terms of formal schooling, teaching skills and acquiring knowledge, as well as educating to encourage natural learning and development. It also looks at how educational policies are implemented in schools and then considers their influence on schools and young people before briefly discussing youth transition in terms of my research and the potential influence of educational policies on this. I now look at what education is for.

2.2.1 Education is for…

Education as a concept could be defined as an experience, for example Murray (2023) suggests that we experience education informally from birth through everyday life, non-formally through hobbies or formally through structured teaching. Meanwhile, UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization 2023) defines education as *'the process of facilitating learning or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs and habits'.* This broad definition of education may imply that the teacher's role is not to regurgitate facts or information for the student to absorb but rather to allow the student to explore for themselves the world around them. In a similar way Dewey (1938) sees education and learning as an on-going process throughout our lives, enabling us to not only grow but continually educate ourselves. This aligns with how he views that children and young people grow, learn and develop through exploring and experiencing. In contrast, Peters (2010 in Bartlett and Burton 2020) says that to count as education, it must be seen to be meaningful. Yet as Noddings (2016) points out, this might see education linked to value judgements thus raising the question of what is considered 'meaningful' and by whom.

However, schools minister, Gibb's (2015a) speech on the purpose of education perhaps implies there is an agreed understanding of the knowledge and truths to be transmitted through school: *'Education is the engine of our economy, it is the foundation of our culture, and it's an essential preparation for adult life'. Yet a*s Barlett and Burton (2020) suggest, this may infer an acceptance from the learner to take part in education which, as Ball (2021) points out, formal education does not necessarily offer as an equal choice and as Carr (2016) states, does not necessarily lead to autonomy. These then might be factors for my participants in terms of disengaging from learning if they express that they have no choice over their learning.

Challenging ideas of what education is from a different angle, Bartlett and Burton (2020) agree with the idea that education may be about acquiring knowledge and developing skills and understanding, usually cognitive capabilities, but pose the question whether education is a process or product. In this way education is viewed as a commodity, is offered to all and serves as a common good ensuring the transference of the cultural and social values viewed as essential for entering the world of work and adulthood. This relates to the young people in my study who in a state school are required to follow the national curriculum which focuses on subject content and outlines "*the essential knowledge and understanding that pupils should be expected to have to enable them to take their place as educated members of society"* (DfE 2010, p42). The different ways education is viewed provide context to my research in terms of how these might influence young people's experiences, so I now examine these further.

Formal Education

Bartlett and Burton (2020) suggest people have always learned from one another in family and social groups, but systems of education have become formalised and expansive as society has become more large-scale and complex. Though we may still learn from those around us, they suggest the education system now plays a large part in our lives. Therefore, as already discussed (1.2), my research centres on formal education which, as Bartlett and Burton (2020) say, is open to all young people in England aged 4-18 years in the form of what Baker (2014)

calls mass education or attendance of large numbers of children and youth in an educational establishment.

Within a system of formal education Unwin and Yandell (2016) suggest that what might be taught or learnt within schools is likely to be considered and influenced by how decision makers view the purpose of education. For Nicholson (2016) this can be a source of tension in deciding or agreeing whether to educate according to the needs and interests of society or the needs and interests of the individual. Certainly, researchers and theorists propose different views as to the purpose of education such as Noddings (2005) idea that education is for happiness; Deuchar and Bhopal (2017) viewing education as a form of social control; Freire (1970) arguing for education for freedom, autonomy, agency and democracy; and Hirsch (1987) who sees education for the acquisition of prescribed knowledge. Viewing formal education as either in the interests of young people or society may influence young people in my study as formal education in England is argued (Apple 2004) to be viewed as being designed to meet the needs of society and to ensure young people acquire 'essential' knowledge. Therefore, I shall now discuss the idea of education for production and reproduction of society's norms and values and the acquisition of knowledge.

Education for production, reproduction and knowledge

Rather than support young people in their natural pre-disposition for learning, Apple (2004) argues that education reproduces the dominant culture and status quo through the curriculum, therefore not really assisting students in learning or achieving anything that is not dictated to them by the state. In a similar way Bentley (1998) proposes that schools serve to reproduce meritocracy by indoctrinating young people into society's values, even if those values are not shared by all. In viewing education in this way, (1.3), it may be seen to be about knowledge reproduction and the instilling of values, morals and facts that are seen as the most important or useful. Certainly, as Robinson (2016) sees it, in Western Capitalist societies, such as England, dominant values derive from an elitist ideology focused on economic growth and sustainability which are reproduced through the education system. Apple (2004) argues this is because schools are required to prepare young people for their future roles in particular

jobs, selecting and sorting individuals into positions required by the economic sector of society rather than educating and liberating young people. Ball (2021) supports this, suggesting that because meritocracy is seen to be vital to economic ideology, the value of learning increases with input, and that value can be measured and documented with grades and qualifications. In other words, schools play a role in improving the economy by 'guiding' young people to enter the world of work as skilled and knowledgeable individuals. This can be seen in the way English educational policies (DfE 2016) (1.2.1) focus on delivering core knowledge to ensure young people can achieve academic qualifications, thus increasing economic development and growth.

In providing all young people with access to core knowledge and the opportunity to gain academic qualifications, this may also mean opportunities to develop what has been described in educational policies (DfE 2010;2024) as essential skills for the workplace. In this way, teaching core knowledge is viewed as important to ensuring young people can take their place in society (DfE 2010) (2.2). Indeed Hirsch (1987) believes this means that education should be about ensuring students acquire 'the right' knowledge to integrate them into a common national culture. In this respect, he is an advocate of a knowledge-based curriculum, arguing that everyone should have 'appropriate background knowledge' and viewing this to be the collective and relevant wisdom in the dominant culture, which he denotes as core knowledge, that can and should be catalogued and taught in schools. Although Hirsch (1987) was writing about American culture, Yandall (2017) argues that his work continues to have a huge influence on educational policies in England. Indeed, Michael Gove (2009) (later to become Education Secretary 2010-2014) in a speech to The Royal Society for the Arts said that if entrusted with public power he would, *"completely overhaul the curriculum – to ensure that the acquisition of knowledge within rigorous subject disciplines is properly valued and cherished"*, suggesting that he viewed the national curriculum as not teaching the appropriate knowledge. Then the education minister Nick Gibb (2015b) wrote a piece to accompany a lecture given by Hirsch at the Policy Exchange (an educational research institute) in which he begins by explaining the influence of Hirsch's work on educational policy in England: *'Hirsch's work in America provided us with a tangible precedent for our*

thinking on the English National Curriculum'. He then describes how the 2007 National Curriculum was, *'actively hostile to teaching prescribed knowledge, and sought to minimise the importance of subject content wherever it could' (p16).* Gibb (2015b) went on to openly state that the curriculum had to change, criticising it for not teaching key knowledge and instead prioritising the acquisition of skills. It is possible, therefore, that in viewing Education for production and knowledge re-production, issues of what values, knowledge, and potentially skills, should be taught in school arise. This is because as Jackson (2011) states, education is deeply implicated in the pursuit of different kinds of truth and transmission of knowledge and that although teachers can challenge the system, they can also reinforce dominant and hegemonic value systems. Certainly, critics (Illich 1970; Yandall 2017; McLaren 1998) of knowledge-based ideas of schooling point out that that these ideas do not consider whose knowledge might make up the 'core' knowledge, taking no account of different cultures and backgrounds. McLaren (1998) for example, expresses concern that whether a conscious choice or not, the intention of having knowledge that is deemed appropriate to be taught in schools results in continuing the existing social order at a cost to the powerless, (which may be the young people). Furthermore, Hirsch's ideas and educational policies based on the premise of teaching prescribed knowledge are criticised by Yandall (2017) as lacking any understanding of learning, and therefore any sense of pedagogy. He argues that this accepts that there is body of knowledge to be communicated by the teacher and received by the learner. This is something Freire (1970) was especially critical of, calling it the "banking model" in which the primary purpose of education is to 'fill' the learner with knowledge. Again, in critique of knowledge-based ideas of schooling and education, there are those (Freire 1970; Apple 2004; Illich 1970) who believe that the prevalent ideas of a society are always the ideas of those groups who hold power and therefore it is their choice of knowledge that exists in educational curriculums. This is relevant to my research, as it is possible that given young people must follow the state curriculum (1.2.1) as Harris (1994) argues, in terms of schooling, my participants do not necessarily have or perceive that they have choice, control, or autonomy over learning. To this end, I shall now look at education as part of children and young people's natural development as this contrasts with the idea of education

for transmitting key knowledge by seeing education as supporting young people as naturally curious and self-motivated to learn.

Education through natural learning and development

Theorists in support of natural growth and development often propose the view that children learn best when learning is child-centred and focused on their natural abilities. Rousseau (2011) for example, believed that all 'humans' were born free and good, in a natural state in that they should be free to learn through exploration and experimentation. In a similar way, Montessori (1966) believed that children are natural learners, as part of a spontaneous process carried out by them as individuals. This happens, she felt, when children are left to experience the natural environment and spend as much time as possible outdoors. For her, the goal of education is to allow the child's optimal development (intellectual, physical, emotional and social) to unfold. Interestingly, a meta-analysis by Randolph et al. (2023) found academic outcomes to be in favour of a Montessori education, indicating that on average, across studies, academic outcomes where the Montessori method was followed, were higher than those using traditional education. In keeping with the idea of continuous learning, Dewey's (1938) ideas are based on the aim of education being about growth, growth leading to further growth. He believed that students' lives were often systematically sacrificed to some future good, stating that education is thought to have a purpose out there beyond the present interests and purposes of the students. This he believed ignores their wants and limits autonomy for learning, possibly leading to disengagement. However, Dewey (1938) argued students are active in learning, using experience to guide them and so should be encouraged to construct common values and knowledge by being provided with experiences that make values real and significant for them. In this way, Noddings (2016) suggests that perhaps Dewey (1938) was encouraging deeper discussion on the connection between present and future by asking questions of the future, so that the aim of education is more education. In other words, not necessarily attendance at school but fostering a desire to continually grow and learn. This may be of significance to my research in considering how young people might see schools as supporting their natural development and therefore encouraging choice and autonomy to learn. To this end, I am interested in how young people

in my research view the way education is delivered impacting on them and their engagement with learning.

I will now examine English educational policies as relevant to my research. By considering the justifications for educational policies, I look at how they shape schools and show what education policies state in terms of teaching core knowledge, to see how this may impact the structure of schools.

2.2.2 Educational Policies and school

For Murray (2023) prioritising learning over testing and providing lifelong learning opportunities encourages individuals to not just want to learn but to love learning and to discover and grow their talents. In other words, if young people are given autonomy in learning they may, as Dewey (1938) believes, develop and sustain a desire for lifelong learning. Yet formal schooling, Pettigrew and Curtis (2010) argue, ignores the experiences and interest of learners so that in reflecting on the priorities of education, consideration may need to be given to what is most important, educational or social outcomes – in other words, what young people learn or what they can do (Carr 2016). As Ball (2021) comments, since 1976, changes in education and educational policy in England represent a radical shift from ideas centred on welfare education to ideas based on market exchange and competition. This has altered educational policy, practice and the process of schooling perhaps because as Unwin and Yandell (2016) argue schools do not operate in a vacuum but within environments shaped by the interests, values and purposes of those who are able to influence the work that schools do. For some researchers, (Apple 2004; Ball 2021; Unwin and Yandell 2016) the influence on what schools teach has often been in the form of policies which are driven by education for economic productivity, focused on providing young people with skills and knowledge for the workplace through a regime of exam testing and the encouragement of academic excellence. Evidence of this is seen in a 2010 DfE White Paper *'The Importance of Teaching'* (Department for Education 2010 p42) stating how young people need to be taught core knowledge to ensure they can enter the world of work:

> *The curriculum should embody rigour and high standards and outline a core of knowledge in the traditional subject disciplines…. to enable [young people] to take their place as educated members of society.*

For Ball (2021), in using education to ensure young people can fulfil jobs in the work force, education becomes inextricably linked to economic improvement and development. This is evidenced in another statement from the White Paper which says, '*the better educated our society, the fairer, more cohesive, productive and innovative it can be* (DfE 2016 p5). Yet for Beckman, Cooper and Hill (2009) this means schools reflect the educational needs of the market where young people are primed for 'jobs', leaving little time on the curriculum for other aspects of education and personal development. This may be of interest in my study in seeing how the young people may view this affecting them, if at all, because as Unwin and Yandell (2016) suggest, politicians speak about the 'knowledge economy', claiming that to achieve national prosperity, the knowledge and skills of individuals need to improve but fail to consider students' individual desires in terms of their futures or learning. Noddings (2016) sees this as having a standardised education whereby all young people are given the same knowledge and expected to develop the same skills and character traits with the same experiences. Meanwhile, Pettigrew and Curtis (2010 p10) criticise educational policies for their focus on the transmission of knowledge and assessment, suggesting that in doing so they foster and reward qualities such as passiveness and conformity. Apple (2004) agrees suggesting that behaviour consensus, institutionalisation and compliance are part and parcel of education precisely because they are required. In other words, young people need to be able to sit and listen, to comply with teacher instructions and follow school rules to learn the necessary skills and knowledge to achieve and enter the job market. This idea is played out in David Cameron's speech on education as prime minister in 2011 when he stated that*: 'for the future of our economy, and for the future of our society, we need a first-class education for every child. It's clear what works. Discipline works. Rigour works'* (Cameron 2011). Consequently, 'discipline' in schools is seen as a requirement to enable young people to 'learn' and to counter

the drop in academic and behavioural standards in schools. In fact, Brown (2003) explains how in 2015 and 2020, the UK government took a 'militant approach' to education to raise failing standards by directing educational policies at strengthening schools' abilities to deal with young people's behaviour to improve discipline. Arguably this may be meaningful to my research in understanding how my participants might view poor behaviour in terms of their teacher-student relationships and engagement with learning. Taking into consideration how educational policies focus on core knowledge, I will now explore what this may mean for secondary schools in England and young people.

Teaching core knowledge

One impact of policies aimed at increasing economic activity has been changes to the curriculum which Pettigrew and Curtis (2010) argue means the content and structure of the curriculum is developed to achieve a specific goal, and knowledge is seen as valuable where it assists students to develop into effective workers or better citizens. This can be seen in the way English education policies, since the introduction of the national curriculum, have focused on young people being taught 'core' knowledge. For example, in 1987 in the introduction of the national curriculum it was stated clearly *'... that all pupils, regardless of sex, ethnic origin and geographical location, have access to broadly the same good and relevant curriculum and programmes of study'* (Department of Education and Science 1987 p4 in Yandall 2017). Then in 2010, a change to the curriculum stated that: *'The National Curriculum should set out clearly the core knowledge and understanding that all children should be expected to acquire in the course of their schooling'* (DfE 2010). Again, the launch of a review of the curriculum in 2024 declared that '*A broader, richer, cutting-edge curriculum that drives high and rising schools' standards and sets all young people up for life and work will be central to the government's vision for education' (*DfE 2024). However, Yandell (2017) challenges this continued model of education that focuses on core knowledge, arguing that it lacks understanding of learning. He states this model views that there is a body of knowledge to be taught, and the task of the teacher is to communicate that knowledge whilst the learner is meant to receive it. This is realised in the words of the education minister Gibb (2015b) when he commented that successful, self-taught individuals without formal education are

an exception, suggesting that it is difficult to navigate through this key knowledge alone and without formal education: *'But the truth is that the successful autodidact, finding their own way through literature, history and culture, with little formal education, is a rare exception'* (Gibb 2015b). In considering why 'core' knowledge is seen as essential, White (2004) suggests there is little reason offered as to why certain subjects made up the first English national curriculum in 1988 and that familiar subjects are included in most schools' curricula as it is taken for granted that these are what the curriculum should consist of. Certainly, Yandall (2017) views that 'core' knowledge is referred to as being that which is seen not only as the most appropriate, but which should be known and accessible to everyone. This is seen in Gibb's (2015b, p16) words in explaining the core knowledge to be taught in schools, *'The body of academic knowledge belongs to everyone, regardless of background, circumstance or job…This knowledge is a universal entitlement, then, a birthright'*. Yet for Nicholson (2016) this is about the knowledge and skills judged to be of the highest value to students or society exemplifying beliefs about what is worth knowing. Furthering this, Unwin and Yandell (2016) argue that the concentration of 'core' knowledge means that subjects and their content are viewed as unchanging, creating a gulf between the intellectual disciplines and schools' subjects as 'core' knowledge is interwoven into a curriculum by dividing the knowledge into separate subjects for all young people to learn. Unwin and Yandall (2016) continue, arguing that this supposes that knowledge exists separate from human activity and as a set of facts to be absorbed, yet knowledge is never quite so detached or abstract. In reference to the rhetoric on 'core' knowledge in the curriculum, Yandall (2017 p252) asks *'Whose culture, and hence whose literacy, is being represented? And whose culture, whose literacy is marginalised, or excluded?* This suggests that educational policies often ignore young people's backgrounds and culture, with Seltzer-Kelly (2012) saying that the rhetoric of these policies requires young people to participate in knowledge that is removed from their own experiences and current needs to serve the national priority of economic competitiveness.

As a result of economic driven policies, Carr (2016) notes that the language around the advantages these offer disguises how they have reinforced school's focus on traditional academic values. This may be because as Baker (2014)

suggests, a result of these policies is that academic skills are associated with cognitive skills, thereby placing excessive value on cognitive performance. This, Osterman (2000) points out, can be seen in the nation-wide emphasis on standardised achievement tests, academic achievement and the way that particularly secondary schools have their main priority as exam results. For Pettigrew and Curtis (2010) by focusing on conveying knowledge and prioritising assessment, qualities such as conformity and passivity are developed and rewarded in schools thus removing the joy of learning. It is possible then, as Watkins (2005) suggests, learning does not connect with being taught but is about obediently making sense of the information given. It may be interesting then to understood how the young people in my research view this given that as Hattie (2009) states, students should be encouraged to be active not passive learners and as Gordon (2009 in Pettigrew and Curtis 2010) suggests, teaching should foster experiences that necessitate young people being active participants in the learning process. However, Bentley (1998) claims schools do not do this effectively, so I will now consider school structure and environment.

School structure and environment

Osterman (2000) says that the socioemotional needs of students are neglected over a school's culture that favours individualism and competition. For Nicholson (2016), this may be in part due to the expectation that students learn and conform to social and procedural expectations such as acceptable conduct which Bernard (2012) sees as being inherent in school architecture that conveys cultural messages such as the box-like structure of schools and classrooms. Unwin and Yandell (2016) agree, stating that the way classrooms are organised makes a huge difference to the learning that is accomplished. Linked to this, according to Powney and McPake (1996) the predominate teaching style (in England) is the teacher up front in a classroom talking to students and intermittently checking their understanding. This, however, has been shown in a review of studies on learning environments by Bernard (2012) to be the least effective in assisting young people to achieve. Indeed, the studies Bernard (2012) reviewed found child-centred and active learning methods to be more effective and valuable than teacher centred, authoritative models such as those suggested by Powney and McPake (1996). As Bernard (2012) points out, studies support that the classroom

and school environment influence the quality of learning experiences and levels of learning. This may be of significance for my research in terms of how young people voice their experience of school structures and environments and consider how this compares to their experience of outdoor learning. It may also be of interest to consider their views on the influence of school structures and environments on teacher-student relationships and engagement with learning. Having discussed the relevance of educational policies for my research, I will now look at how educational policies influence schools and young people to allow for further exploration in chapter 5, when I discuss my own findings.

2.2.3 Influence of educational policies for school and young people

As a result of educational policies and practices, through their everyday activities (Baker 2014) believes schools have established an ideal for successful human development and performance based on cognitive skill, so that academic achievement is valued above all else. In doing so, White (2004) argues that this has damaging consequences for learning in that learning is attributed to specific conditions in so far as the presence of schools and expert teachers promotes the belief that learning occurs '*in special buildings, at specific times of our lives, in the hands of trained and qualified professionals"* (p160). For Dewey (1938) this ignores that we learn throughout our lives and as Illich (1970) states, learning may be more effective when done away from school. Meanwhile, Carr (2016) contends that parents and friends can support learning better than teachers who must compete with the impersonal context of schooling. Educational policies and practices are also seen by Habermas (1987 in Bernard 2012) to weaken the conditions for learning as they place unreasonable significance on individual achievement making it impractical for learning processes to happen, as these rely on the teacher-student relationship. The significance of this may be seen in research which Wubbels et al. (2012)) state shows the importance of interpersonal relationships, especially for psychological well-being. The relevance to schools of this is because as Collie, Shap and Perry (2011) point out, positive teacher-student relationships may limit teacher stress leading to positive environments, as stressed teachers tend to have less tolerance for

student behaviours. Research (Kedar-Voivodas 1983 in Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris 2004) suggests that this may be because teachers prefer students who are academically competent, responsible and conform to school rules, leading to teachers potentially providing different opportunities to behaviourally engaged students. This may be significant as Gurland and Evangelista (2009 in Seltzer-Kelly 2012) found in their research, that students' performance and achievement is influenced by how much (or how little) they believe their teachers like them and so understanding how participants in my study experience this may be interesting. It may also be interesting to see how the pressure to gain qualifications is viewed by my participants and how it may be linked to the ability of teachers and students to form positive teacher-student relationships. This is because as Kunc (1992) has suggested, testing, individualism and academic achievement form the conditions to be met by teachers so that schools end up with a set of common customs and ideas that include the belief that achievement is more important than a sense of belonging. Certainly, Coakley (2011) and Kendall (2003) state that when young people are seen not to embrace opportunities given them, perhaps through poor academic performance, it can leave them feeling rebuked. In this way, student achievement then becomes linked to feeling liked by their teachers but is associated with the need for relatedness as described by Ryan and Deci (2006) in that individuals are motivated to be acknowledged and loved by others. However, Ryan and Deci (2006) also argue that teachers often place specific conditions on young people that they must meet and the consequences of not meeting these conditions, perhaps for example, by displaying negative behaviour, are feelings of rejection and resentment towards the teacher. To this effect, Brown (2003) criticises the UK education system for valuing discipline and control (1.3.1 and 2.2.2) over 'care' and 'relationships'. To counter this, Bernard (2012) proposes that the most empowering situation for learning is to have an inclusive climate based on caring and respectful interrelationships, including between teachers and students and Noddings (2002) agrees, suggesting that caring is a prerequisite for education.

Yet those who support a teaching core knowledge model of education, Hursh (2005) argues, point out that it is necessary to improve educational and economic outcomes and to hold to account schools and teachers for the academic

standards of young people. However, Stuart and Walker (2019) suggest that holding teachers to account for their students' results has the effect of restricting what teachers can do, making their agency resource depleted and rule bound. Certainly, as Unwin and Yandell (2016) argue, education policies and school practices are based on a myth of reliable assessment with the assessment process assuming autonomy, independent of human agency, when in fact assessment is a social practice, involving, in this case, the teacher's judgement. When viewed with Lansdown's (2004) concern that young people are assessed from an adult frame of reference and through an adult filtering process, it is possible that this may lead as Stuart and Walker (2019 p9) suggest, '*to schools failing young people rather than young people failing schools'.* In this way, as Lumby (2011) says, educational policies and practices driven by academic performance may mean many young people are seen to 'fail' in school, pointing out that student 'failure' could also be attributed to a lack of enjoyment of learning and therefore seen as a cause of a failure to learn. Similarly, Shernoff et al. (2003) point to an association between disengagement in school and high levels of boredom. It may be of interest therefore, that in the Green Paper Every Child Matters (Department for Education and Skills, 2003) enjoying education as an outcome of school is seen as important suggesting, *'Children learn better when they are excited and engaged'.* In fact, research (Shernoff et al. 2003) proposes that a lack of enjoyment may be a central reason why young people do not achieve their potential. Furthermore, relatedness has also been shown by Ryan, Stiller and Lynch (1994) to affect the level of enjoyment, establishing that teacher-student relationships may have the strongest influence on young people's motivation. This may be of interest to see how young people in my research experience engagement with learning and if and how they view a connection between enjoyment, learning and teacher-student relationships. Yet educational policies not only affect young peoples' experiences of school in terms of focusing on academic achievement but may also influence transition both into and through secondary school. This is because as Sanderson (2019) argues, the notion of transition often seen in educational policy documents showing pathways for young people through schooling and into the workplace, are at odds with the patterns of life experienced by young people in the 21st Century. As my research involves year 7 students who have transitioned from primary to secondary school

and will transition through secondary school, I shall now discuss school transition in terms of what it means for my research.

2.2.4 School Transition

School transition, in terms of movement within an educational institution (Mumford and Birchwood 2021), is being considered here in terms of moving from primary to secondary school and through secondary school. This is because, as already discussed, research (Gilbert et al. 2021) (1.2.1) shows that not only can the move from primary to secondary school negatively affect young people's well-being, including school engagement, but that after transition young people are more likely to disengage (Wigfield et al. (1991) (1.2.1), and continue to disengage and feel demotivated to learn as they progress through secondary school (Rudduck, Chaplain and Wallace 1996) (1.2.1). Therefore, in terms of education, transition from primary and through the first year of secondary school is seen by Topping (2011) as a fundamental time for young people in terms of motivation and engagement with learning so that this period may be a precursor to future academic achievement, well-being and progress into further study and/or work. For Rudduck, Chaplain and Wallace (1996) declining motivation and engagement may be because moving to secondary school brings 'social upheaval' that it is so preoccupying, students are unable to focus on the 'seriousness of learning'. They argue that this means there may be difficulties in terms of later progress for young people if they do not receive support to sustain their excitement about learning. In this sense, school transition might be linked to learning environments and teacher-student relationships in that teachers who are seen to care about young people may be able to engage them with learning (2.2.3). Indeed, in their research, Tobbell and O'Donnell (2013) suggest that on transitioning into secondary school, young people require more space and time for teacher-student interactions to allow for the building of positive relationships. Despite the research (Rudduck, Chaplain and Wallace 1996; Wigfield et al. 1991) (1.2.1) showing young people become increasingly demotivated to learn as they enter and progress through secondary school, Jindal-Snape (2010, 2018) argues that, in terms of transition into secondary school, most young people not only assume a positive transition but also navigate it successfully. This is potentially significant

and so it may be interesting to understand how young people in my study experience transition. This because as Topping (2011) notes, although how school transition is experienced may be a factor in young people disengaging, it is a neglected area of educational research.

For Tseng and Seidman (2007) schools do not foster positive social processes and are ineffective climates for young people to be given equal opportunities for transition in school. This may be because as Schoon and Heckhausen (2019) suggest, young people are expected to make choices about their futures based on educational policies that compel them to academic achievement or force them to take sole responsibility if they do not achieve the standard expected. Furthermore, as Eccles et al. (1993) point out, school systems are designed to mirror a linear relationship between school and work in that school is where learning happens, and work is where learning is applied. Indeed, Wyn and Dyer (2000) point out that educational policies can seem locked into a view of secondary schools as a 'realm' separate from 'life' where young people are prepared for 'life', whilst MacDonald and Giazitzoglu (2019) view educational policy as somewhat too narrow. To counteract this, Schoon and Lyons-Amos (2016) suggest young people may find new expressions of agency as they create individualised journeys of transition through school. Sanderson (2019) believes that this is because young people are increasingly living complex lives that do not fit the traditional view of school-to-work transition. In other words, school does not always fit their individualised transitions and often the school environment is not always suited to young people's changing needs. This may be significant as a study by Raffo and Reeves (2000) found young people make their own decisions on how they relate to school and what they took from it. Their evidence shows young people developing their own perspective on schooling in which education is only one choice from a range of options they are dealing with and suggests that school and qualifications are not a key focus for many young people trying to juggle often complicated home lives with part-time work and study. However, Raffo and Reeves (2000) also argue that although young people may make individual choices in school, their ability to change, grow and develop could depend on changes in educational policies and practices as well as the resources available to them, so that they may not feel they have agency in school. Given

that Eccles et al. (1993) say that young people will be unlikely to do well, or be motivated to do well, if they are in social environments that do not meet their psychological needs, it may be significant for my research to understand how young people experience school transition in terms of teacher-student relationships and engagement with learning, and explore if and how these might interconnect.

Having discussed how educational policies may impact teacher-student relationships by making it difficult for young people to feel connected or 'cared for', the next section will explore teacher-student relationships in more detail to provide context for my research and for exploration in chapter 5 of how my research may contribute to understanding of this topic.

2.3 Teacher-student relationships

In relation to education and school, Pianta and Allen (2008 in Gehlbach, Brinkworth and Harris 2012) argue that positive relationships with adults at secondary school are the single most important factor in promoting positive youth development. Indeed, a study by Battistich et al. (1995) showed young people who have supportive and caring inter-personal relationships feel more satisfied with school, whilst studies by Connell and Welbon (1991) and Skinner and Belmont (1993) show young people with supportive and caring relationships in school also have positive academic attitudes, including being more engaged with learning. This is perhaps significant as research (Wigfield et al. 1991) (1.2.1) shows that young people can become more disengaged from school as they progress through the years, potentially as Bridgeland, Dilulio and Morison (2006) and Fine (1991) suggest because of weak student-teacher relationships as well as feeling alienated and anonymous. Furthermore, Gehlbach, Brinkworth and Harris (2012) found that students' and teachers' perceptions of teacher-student relationships at the end of the school year frequently differed from their initial perceptions at the start of the school year. Therefore, how a teacher relates to students may be one of the major contributors to students' school related development (Eccles and Roeser 2011). However, Noblit (1993) suggests

schools are not structured to support the building of relationships and connectedness. Therefore, I will now explore teacher-student relationships in terms of how they might be defined and perceived and what the benefits of them might be.

2.3.1 Teacher-student relationships are…

Dutton and Ragins (2007) suggest that in terms of a definition, scholars have struggled with what precisely constitutes a positive relationship making it difficult to characterise and research them. However, in terms of teacher-student relationships, Claessens et al. (2017) take an interpersonal perspective, seeing them as being about the meanings students and teachers attach to their interactions with each other. Noddings (2016) views teacher-student relationships as co-creations whereby teachers and students 'learn' together through mutual understanding and respect built on the perception of 'caring' actions or interactions. In a slightly different direction, social exchange theory (Blau 1964 and Homans 1974 in Dutton and Ragins 2007) a concept used to explore interpersonal dynamics, views relationships as a way of exchanging resources for the achievement of utility or power whereby relationship partners both focus on and evaluate their relationships based on the rewards and costs of the relationship. This could be more familiar to teacher-student relationships where the environment of education, and perhaps classrooms, lends itself more easily to teachers and students interacting in terms of their perceived understanding of the value of the relationship to them and what they feel they may get out of it. However, Dobransky and Frymie (2004) argue that relationships are seen as unequal as teachers may traditionally hold most of the power and control in the classroom and typically have greater status than students. This may be significant for my research, and it will be interesting to explore how the young people perceive this. This is because as Wentzel (2013) points out, there is little research investigating the dynamic qualities of teacher-student relationships and how they may alter in quality and function throughout school. Similarly, Wubbels et al. (2006) says that explanatory models that provide insights into the processes whereby teacher-student relationships have a meaningful impact on student outcomes are rare. Not only is there limited research into the processes of

teacher-student relationships but Dutton and Ragins (1999) and Berscheid (1999) suggest there is an incomplete definition as to the context of how the relationships are seen by both the teacher and the student emerging from research, as the emphasis is usually on examining the impact of positive teacher-student relationships, particularly on student's attainment. For this reason, I will now go on to explore teacher-student relationships in terms of how they may be perceived by young people as this can influence the forming of positive teacher-student relationships.

2.3.2 Perceptions of Teacher-Student Relationships

Teacher characteristics

Robinson (2013) points out, students can sometimes see teachers as non-human but if teachers are seen to care, then students' perceptions of them improves. Carr (2016) suggests this means teachers lacking certain qualities are unlikely to be effective. For Cooper and Miness (2014) this means students may define teacher-student relationships in terms of the characteristics that define a 'good' teacher or a 'good' relationship as well as how they see the role of their teacher or the type of teacher. They suggest students cite teachers as being caring; understanding; listening; being supportive; setting challenging tasks; encouraging and having a mutual respectful relationship. Poplin and Weeres (1992, p12) suggest this is because: 's*tudents desire authentic relationships where they are trusted, given responsibility, spoken to honestly, warmly and are treated with dignity'.* Supporting this, Robinson (2013) says that that when teachers appear to care about a student, they view the teacher positively as they see the teacher taking an interest in them and then respond positively. In his study, Robinson (2013) found that a 'caring' teacher was seen to be understanding, supportive, encouraging and focused on students and that displaying these characteristics motivated students to learn and achieve – although achievement here is measured in terms of an increase in grades and it is possible that there may be other factors that could have impacted on grades. Certainly Wilkins (2014) argues that displaying 'caring' characteristics might be considered central to the job of being a teacher and so forming relationships with students might be about more than a display of characteristics. Indeed, in

highlighting a possible difference between having caring characteristics and showing understanding, Noddings (2005) draws attention to the fact that although teachers are often assumed to have caring natures and be understanding, they may appear to have a relationship with their students, but this is not necessarily a positive relationship or necessarily viewed in the same way by their students. Instead, Noddings (2005) proposes that to have effective teacher-student relationships, teachers should immerse themselves in empathetic caring that takes account of students' needs on all levels and puts them first. For Schussler and Collins (2006 in Cooper and Miness 2014) this means that caring can be seen either as academic in terms of the support and assistance offered to students by the teacher and/or as personal care in terms of attending to a student's well-being and development. They say teachers who fully understand their students are better positioned to convey genuine personal care. Cooper and Miness (2014) take this one step further, with their findings suggesting that students view the most desirable care as individual care involving 'relational caring' (Noddings 2005). This means knowing the students personally and engaging with them about their personal lives alongside asking questions about their academic achievements.

Taking a slightly different direction, Wubbels and Brekelmans (2005) use an interpersonal perspective by considering the relationship between teacher and students to understand teacher-student relationships. Taking an interpersonal perspective, they suggest students respond to teachers they see as having a variety of characteristics, including caring and empathy, as this makes them feel cared for and understood. A positive attachment with that teacher is then thought to be cultivated which in turn allows them to grow and develop both emotionally and academically. In similar manner, Juvonen's (2006) research focused on students' sense of belonging and connectedness, proposing links between a student's sense of belonging, teacher-student relationships and motivation to learn. In this way, Juvonen's (2006) suggests that the behaviour of teachers can impact the formation of positive teacher-student relationships and that the quality of these can determine the extent to which students feel a sense of belonging. Meanwhile, Wentzel's (2013) (1.4.1) discussion supports a link between students pursuing academic and social goals and feeling emotionally supported by their

teacher. Wentzel (2013) argues that when students perceive their interactions and relationships with their teacher as offering clear expectations concerning the goals to be achieved, they take this on-board by modelling the teacher's values and use this as motivation to meet expectations they believe have been displayed. However, this may mean that students might not consider the teacher-student relationship but are merely interpreting behaviours and actions from the teacher and responding according to their understanding of the perceived expectations rather than engaging meaningfully with the teacher-student relationship (Noddings 2005). It is possible then that as proposed by some researchers (Cooper and Miness 2014; Cornelius-White 2007 and Noddings 2005), positive relationships might require a more interpersonal or person-centred approach from the teacher, within the right environment.

Being person-centred

In his meta-analysis Cornelius-White (2007) found that individualistic, emphatic, person-centred approaches had a stronger, more positive impact on students learning and development than other 'educational innovations'. Noddings (2005) suggests that this means teachers need to experience what she terms '*motivational displacement'*, by being able to see the world from the student's perspective to understand where the student is coming from and then responding to their needs accordingly. For Cornelius-White (2007) a person-centred approach requires empathy on the part of the teacher, as students prefer and are more responsive to empathetic teachers who show they care and are focused holistically on students. In a similar manner, Williams and Burden (1997 in Van Petegem et al. 2005) propose that teaching means creating and maintaining a positive, warm classroom atmosphere, conducive to learning, whilst Van Petegem et al. (2005) state that a person-centred approach may be able to create a friendly environment, distinguishable by positive interpersonal relationships where everyone feels good. This is possibly because as Baumeister and Leary (1995) point out, relationships give us a sense of belonging, so supportive teachers will make students feel that they belong and that they are part of something. Connell and Welborn (1991) agree, seeing interpersonal relationships in terms of ideas about belongingness and emotional connectedness to others where we can feel valued and a vital member of a social group. They suggest

that engagement in a socially valued activity such as learning, is more likely to happen if students believe their teachers care about them and want them to engage. For Cooper and Miness (2014) teachers must make themselves available to their students in ways that exceed expectations of students, implying that positive teacher-student relationships are more likely to develop if teachers get to know their students, can determine their wants and needs and then support them in meeting these. Indeed Carr (2016) suggests that the unique nature of teaching is such that informal relationships are an integral part of any relationship between teachers and their students, and that teachers must know their students as though they were friends to effectively support their learning:

> *One cannot really teach something well to others…until one has got to know them in a way that is perhaps more characteristic of friendship than of any formal professional association* (p. 270).

This might mean that young people perceive teacher-student relationships in terms of behaviours and actions.

Behaviours and actions

Wubbels and Brekelmans's (2005) review of research considering students' perceptions of their relationships with their teachers suggests that in relation to student outcomes, teacher–student relationships may be characterised by high levels of teacher influence and proximity towards students. This reflects the idea that behaviour is both central to relationships and affects them. In other words, students are seen to respond according to how they view their teacher's actions and behaviours in the classroom, meaning their perceptions of this form the basis of the teacher-student relationship. If for example, a teacher ignores a student's question because they do not hear them, the student might make a variety of inferences such as the teacher is too busy or the teacher thinks the student is not able to understand the answer (Wubbels and Brekelmans 2005). In a similar way Cornelius-White (2007) says that teachers may behave in empathetic ways towards students who participate, which in turn may increase student participation thus setting up a mutually beneficial cycle. Meanwhile Wilkins (2014)

argues that teachers will not invest time in students who do not reciprocate. Poplin and Weeres (1992) believe that to build positive teacher-student relationships students want authentic relationships where they feel trusted, have responsibility, are spoken to honestly, warmly and treated with respect. This might suggest that students respond positively to teachers' positive actions and behaviours and thus positive relationships can be formed. Indeed studies (Ladd and Burgess 2001; Pianta and Stuhlman 2004) show that children and young people who display negative behaviours in the early years of schooling are more likely to form negative relationships with their teachers. Similar to this, research by Split et al. (2011 in Evans, Butterworth and Law 2019) indicates that when a student's behaviour is seen as problematic by a teacher, the teacher forms a mental representation of the relationship as one of conflict and contention, which may then shape future interactions between the student and teacher and have a negative impact. This may be because the mental representations of the teacher-student relationship intervene with the teachers' affective responses to the problematic behaviour of the student. Indeed, Hamre and Pianta (2005) suggest that teachers' strict attitudes can be linked to student behaviours that may lead to conflict in the classroom. Agreeing with this, Hamre et al. (2008) found that teacher reports of conflicts with their students were explained by their judgements of problem behaviour, and research by Ladd and Burgess (1999) describes how students' problem behaviours may promote a forced sequence of interactions with teachers that may eventually lead to the development of less positive teacher-student relationships. This may be relevant as research by Driscoll and Pianta (2010) shows that a positive teacher-student relationship can reduce negative classroom behaviours and promote 'prosocial' behaviours. Furthermore, Sutherland and Oswald (2005) propose that students' negative behaviours can be seen to foster negative interactions and conflict with teachers which over time may intensify the negative behaviour thus confirming the negative expectations of teachers so that teachers and students become trapped in a negative cycle of declining teacher-student relationships and growing student problem behaviour. Conversely, Midgley, Feldlaufer and Eccles (1989) found teachers who display confidence in their abilities are inclined to interact with behaviours that improve student engagement and achievement with students, reporting increased self-esteem and competence and fewer problem behaviours (Roeser, Eccles and

Sameroff 1998). Therefore, as Hamre et al. (2008) point out, the self-efficacy of a teacher may prevent conflict in the teacher-student relationship. Nevertheless, as Doyle (2006) suggests, interactions between teachers and students may differ according to the context in which these take place so that perhaps the learning environment has an impact on whether students and teachers will perceive each other's actions and behaviours to be positive.

The learning environment and shared experiences

In their study, Eccles and Roeser (2001) found that students who reported high levels of engagement with school also reported perceiving teachers as creating caring, well-structured learning environments. Wubbels and Brekelmans' (2005) findings support this, as they observe that teacher–student interactions differ in teachers' perceptions, not only according to the quality of the relationship (positive or problematic) but also according to the context in which these take place. Similarly, Johnson, Johnson and Anderson (1983) believe positive interdependence creates a co-operative learning environment whereby students who undertook collaborative working with other students and the teacher, also positively viewed the teacher as more caring both academically and personally. They also found that competitive and individualistic learning experiences do not promote positive relationships between teachers and students as much as collaborative learning experiences. Meanwhile, a few studies (Robinson 2013, Beames 2006, Cramp 2008) highlight positive relationship building between teachers and students as an outcome of shared experiences, with the emphasis on the collective and interdependent nature of relationships. Noddings (2005) shares similar ideas but sees relationships as co-creations whereby teachers and students 'learn' together through mutual understanding and respect built on the perception of 'caring' actions or /interactions. She suggests good teachers might create the environment where natural caring is most likely to thrive. Consequently, as Dorman, Aldridge and Fraser (2006) state, the quality of the classroom environment has a '*significant influence on student learning'* and in Bernard's (2012) UNESCO report on learning environments, a critical factor for how successful students are, is the design of schools and classrooms, suggesting that this directly influences what goes on inside them.

When it comes to building positive relationships with students, Wubbels and Brekelmans (2005) argue that teachers might consider deliberately using interactions outside the classroom to help build a positive relationship that might have an impact on interactions inside the classroom. Evidence of the success of this can be seen in the Learning Away study (Kendall and Rodger 2015) which looked at the impact of residential experiences on young people, noting improvements in relationships as a secondary outcome and suggesting positive teacher-student relationships are formed and improved when using outdoor spaces. The study found that the outdoors provided the opportunity for teachers and young people to develop new relationships and enhance existing ones as it offered a context where attitudes towards one another could be changed and where more trusting and respectful relationship could develop. Robinson (2013) found similar outcomes in a study with year 9 students participating in an outdoor programme which showed teachers formed relationships with their students on a much deeper level than they perhaps otherwise would have done in the classroom. This may be because as Cramp (2008) suggests, intense experiences may positively alter teacher-student relationships. However, he also points out that those changes though noted, are often not explored in detail.

Yet outcomes which may influence teacher-student relationships are often considered, for example in a meta-analysis of outdoor education and adventure programmes, Hattie et al. (1997) found the effects on students' self-concept to be greater than those typically found in classroom-based programmes, suggesting that the use of outdoor spaces may have greater influence than the indoor classroom environment. Likewise, in a study into the use of outdoor education, Quay, Dickinson and Nettleton (2002) found caring between students was experienced in outdoor education to a greater extent than in other school classes. The results of their study suggest that the outdoors can be structured to provide a learning environment unlike that which is present within the generic classroom, and that this may influence student experiences of caring which could support the development of caring relationships. This may be because being outdoors reduces the 'normal' constraints and rules of a classroom (Davies and Hamiliton 2019) so that teachers and students may feel more connected allowing for a sense of community between teachers and students and thus the development

of positive teacher-student relationships (Noddings, 2005). I will now consider the benefits of positive teacher-student relationships.

2.3.3 Benefits of positive teacher-student relationships

Whatever the perspective of teacher-student relationships, there appear to be benefits for both the teacher and student of having a positive relationship. Dobransky and Frymier (2004) for example, looked at whether increased intimacy could be achieved between teachers and students through 'out-of-class communication' and if this would improve student learning. Their results indicate that as soon as students sense that power is shared between them and the teacher, they feel a greater positive attachment to their teacher and are more positive about engagement with learning. This may be because as Frymier and Houser (2000) suggest, when teachers and students see each other as individuals, (of a certain quality, i.e. feeling that each is understood and that their opinions are valued and listened to), they form interpersonal relationships which lead to greater respect and trust. This trusting and caring relationship in turn leads to a safe learning environment whereby students engage in learning and achieve. From this viewpoint, positive teacher-student relationships may develop when both parties engage in behaviour that is mutually considerate, and which encourages the student to feel protected and cared for.

It may not be just students who experience benefits from positive teacher-student relationships. Researchers (Cohen and Willis 1985 in Wilkins 2014) have concluded that satisfying relationships with students may serve as a buffer against teacher stress. In support of this, Hargreaves (1998) argues that teachers use strategies to build and sustain relationships that are shaped by their own emotional needs. This is seen in evidence (Chang 2009;2013; Spilt et al. 2011 in Evans, Butterworth and Law 2019) that suggests the negative impact of students' problematic behaviours on teachers' well-being may be because of how teachers respond and behave towards those students displaying problematic behaviours. Furthermore, Chang (2009; 2013 in Evans, Butterworth and Law 2019) found a positive association between teachers' levels of burnout and their negative responses to perceived student problematic behaviour. In addition, teacher-

student relationships seen by the teacher as being in conflict have also shown to be associated with negative outcomes for teachers (Hamre et al. 2008). This suggests that positive teacher-student relationships may benefit both parties provided their behaviour and actions are positive towards each other.

To provide further context for my research in the next section I will look at engagement with learning, how it may be understood, how young people may experience it and the relevant factors that may influence this.

2.4 Engagement with Learning

According to Fullarton (2002) to encourage lifelong learning skills, low engagement with school needs to be addressed because as Cowen (1994) and Peterson (2006) in Lewis et al. 2010) found, having a positive attitude in school not only leads to successful academic performance but may also enable young people to develop into lifelong learners. Yet Schoon and Lyons-Amos (2016) believe young people who disengage from school never fully re-engage with their learning and research by Headden and McKay (2015) shows that young people become less engaged as they move through the education system. As already discussed, (1.2.1), engagement at school is likely to have a significant impact on young people with Lee (2014) stating that the earlier young people can become engaged, the less likely they are to face academic failure or have lower expectations and Smyth (2020) saying that engagement with learning is an important driver of later expectations (in school and life). However, in their study into engagement, Chase et al. (2014) found that even if students engaged with their learning and saw school as important, if they could not do what was required of them in terms of behaviour, they were often academically unsuccessful. They also suggest that the reverse may be true in that students may not grasp how school could impact on their futures but may still apply themselves academically and achieve good grades. Additionally, research by Lumby (2011) into the connection between enjoyment and learning found that young people reported passive tasks as disengaging and although these activities may reflect intense engagement, they may also hide a lack of absorption and learning on the part of

the young people. Therefore, as Skinner and Belmont (1993) have suggested, enjoyment, engagement and learning may not necessarily be the same, although they may be linked, and it is possible that students who report enjoying school may nevertheless fail to learn anything. Eccles and Roeser (2011) say that engagement at school (in terms of academic commitment to learning) has a significant impact on young people in preventing academic failure, encouraging skill proficiency and influencing future outcomes. This may be why as Harris (2008) suggests, measuring engagement has become a focus of governments and policy makers as a way of providing accountability for poor exam results and as a means of linking poor behaviour to a lack of achievement. Yet disengagement does not just suddenly occur but is most likely the culmination of enduring disengagement from school (Alexander et al. 1997 and Randolph et al. 2004 in Lee 2014). In respect of this, I will now outline different ways that young people might be seen to engage with learning to explore how engagement with learning might be understood and experienced by young people.

2.4.1 Engagement with learning is…

Despite research (Balfanz et al. 2007 and Rumberger and Rotermund 2012 in Quin 2016) aimed at understanding the indicators of low engagement with school or learning, Harris 2008) suggests engagement in learning is not a straightforward concept. Indeed Lumby (2011) points out that much of the discussion around engagement assumes students are participating in 'learning' for enjoyment, and that learning is reliant on a willingness to engage. However, Blunsdon et al.'s (2003) review of research since the 1950s shows inconsistent results with regards to connections between learning, engagement and enjoyment. Instead, for Christenson, Reschly and Wylie (2012) and Fredricks, Reschly and Christenson (2019) signs of low engagement can be defined by disruptive behaviours, reduced attendance, academic failure, and dropout leading to a view that re-engaging students is a 'fix all' solution. Certainly, the UK government's implementation of the 'Engagement Model' (Standards and Testing Agency 2020) - a form of assessment for pupils working below the standard of the national curriculum tests and not engaged in subject-specific study - is for Buckley (2014) evidence of how re-engagement is seen as a mainstream solution to low

attainment. Hargreaves (2006) proposes that the model is built on the basis that engagement is the foundation of effective learning. However, Ashwin and McVitty (2015) point out that this ignores the complexities of engagement and in doing so neglects to understand what it is students are engaging with. Therefore, to have a broad understanding of how young people might perceive engagement with learning, I will now look at different types of engagement in terms of behavioural engagement, emotional and relational engagement (feelings of belonging), cognitive engagement and active participation.

Types of engagement

Nguyen, Cannata and Miller (2016) describe behavioural engagement as being three dimensional involving questions surrounding student conduct in class, their participation in school-related activities, and their interest in academic tasks. Meanwhile for McMahon and Portelli (2012) views of behavioural engagement seek to reinforce the status quo through measuring student's ability to follow the school rules, be compliant and complete the activities set. This is potentially relevant to my research in seeing whether it is possible that students who step outside of the expected norms of behaviour are assumed to be disengaged from school and learning, which may lead to disruptive behaviours. However, behavioural engagement, is for Skinner and Belmont (1993) and Engels et al. (2017) often viewed alongside emotional and relational engagement, denoting students' feelings during learning activities such as their level of interest, their happiness or enjoyment, any anxiety or anger. Davis, Summers and Miller (2012) further these ideas proposing a potential third type of engagement that includes students' feelings, sense of belonging and attitude but goes beyond this to explore motivation, perceived support, and relationships. They label this approach 'relational engagement' and suggest that relationships are an important aspect of student engagement. Certainly, Middleton and Perks (2014) agree, saying that research proposes a link between student motivation to learn or a willingness to engage in learning and strong relationships with teachers. Furthermore, research from Noddings (2005) shows that students are more likely to display higher levels of motivation and engagement when they view their teacher as caring about them. It has also been argued by some researchers (Roeser, Eccles and Sameroff 1998; Weinstein 1989 in Eccles and Roeser 2009)

that viewing their teachers as caring can also lead to cognitive engagement for students. Certainly Zepke (2018) agrees, suggesting cognitive engagement may involve students investing their time and energy into completing tasks and activities, as well as showing progress through higher test results. Furthering this, Eccles and Roeser (2009) link cognitive engagement to both behavioural and emotional and relational engagement in that if students perceive the teacher has high expectations of them, they learn more, experience a greater sense of self-worth and competence, feel more connected to their teacher and school and avoid participating in problem behaviours. However, as Harris (2008) points out, participating in a learning activity may not guarantee that students are cognitively taking part and for Lankshear and Knobel (2005) many students know how to appear engaged and involved in learning activities whilst in fact being off task. Therefore, as Conner and Pope (2013) point out, young people may be seen to be actively engaged by behaving and completing work but may show few signs of excitement, commitment or pride. In this way, as Newmann (1981, p548) states, young people's [active] engagement in learning may have limited educational value. Therefore, the relationship between active participation/ active engagement and learning may be queried in terms of the assumption that 'taking part' in an activity will lead to students furthering their knowledge and understanding (Lankshear and Knobel 2005). Yet for Dancer and Kamvounias (2005) participation itself is a process of active engagement in learning, whereby students are prepared for learning and contribute to class discussions. Furthermore, in viewing engagement as active participation, Eccles et al. 1993) suggest young people will be psychologically engaged and take an active part in school, valuing and enjoying the experiences of learning at school. Perhaps then, engagement may be seen as a multidimensional construct (Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris 2004) whereby students actively participate in academic and extra-curricular activities and commit to educational goals and learning (Christenson, Reschly and Wylie 2012). In this way, Stefansson et al. (2018) suggest that engagement in school is more about active participation through a combination of positive behaviour and participation in academic work along with emotional engagement as students feel a sense of connectedness and belonging with school and are cognitively engaged by showing an interest in learning. To

this end I will now look at how young people might experience engagement with learning.

2.4.2 How young people experience engagement

According to McMahon and Portelli (2012) different views about success (and how this might be seen) can determine how student engagement is viewed and a narrow focus in research and lack of student voice limits understanding as it does not show how engagement might alter from subject to subject, teacher to teacher, time, place, and age. In this way, as Nguyen, Cannata and Miller (2016) describe behavioural engagement as being points out, there is a narrow view of the complexities of engagement and how young people experience and 'use it'. For Coates (2005), student engagement is concerned with the extent to which students are engaging in a range of educational activities that research has shown as likely to lead to high quality learning. However, findings from Harris's (2008) research into teachers' perceptions of engagement show that learning may be considered implicit but learning outcomes are not a direct focus of all activities designed to 'engage' students. Instead, he suggests learners may be engaged but not learning and learning but not engaged as teachers strive to provide tasks that distract certain students from unwelcome behaviours. Indeed, a study by Shernoff and Schmidt (2008 in Chase et al. 2014) found school engagement and high-test results altered depending on how engagement was measured, for example the use of student-reported or teacher-reported. This implies that as McMahon and Portelli (2012) have argued, viewing engagement as consistent and calculable, linked to learning, not only ignores students' voices and views but diminishes learning to that which is observable, reinforcing authoritarian notions of school and the role of the teacher, and potentially misunderstanding engagement. As my research explores the complex nature of and links between teacher-student relationships and engagement, through outdoor learning, I am listening to the voices of young people as the basis for understanding engagement within the context of my research. In doing so, as Chase et al. (2014) point out, I may be able to give agency and autonomy to young people in expressing their views of the connection between teacher-student relationships and engagement with learning (Reschly and Christenson

2012). This is because I am mindful of McGaw et al.'s (1993 p174) conclusion that *'school effectiveness is about a great deal more than maximising academic achievement'.* Therefore, my research offers understanding of how young people view and experience engagement and its complexities, as well as identifies possible variables that promote and impact on engagement with learning (Stefansson et al. 2018). To this end I now consider potential influences on engagement with learning.

2.4.3 Influences on engagement with learning

Declining engagement

In their study Li et al. (2011 in Engels et al. 2017) found levels of behavioural and emotional engagement in the early years of secondary school were high but showed decline as students progressed through secondary school. In support of this, research by Topping (2011) on primary to secondary transition shows that performance and motivation tends to fall as students move into secondary school. This could be explained by the pressures placed on schools and teachers in terms of meeting specified outcomes such as exam grades (2.2.2) which Niemiec and Ryan (2009) suggests leads to teachers depending on strategies that leave no room for more effective, interesting and inspiring teaching methods. Interestingly, in relation to this, Heckman and Masterov (2006 in Chase et al. 2014) state that in secondary school, there is little that can alter students' academic outcomes as by this point their attitudes and views towards school are too embedded. This leads to what may be called a 'ceiling effect' which Engels et al. (2017) suggest, might be because students' enthusiasm and pleasure in learning activities drops and they become less actively involved as they progress through school. Meanwhile, Fullarton (2002) points out that drops in engagement could be because as students move from primary to secondary, school size increases suggesting that perhaps teachers have less time to focus on students. In a similar way, a study by Wigfield et al. (1991) shows a possible decline in students' beliefs in their academic ability which might account for decreases in engagement. However, as Smyth (2020) points out, there is limited evidence of the role that the transition process plays, not just as they move from primary to secondary but as they progress through school. Therefore, as Christenson,

Reschly and Wylie (2012) propose, the potential of young people 'to engage' may rely on understanding the power of influences such as teachers, the environment and the student. Indeed, research by Furrer and Skinner 2003 (in Dotterer and Lowe 2011) shows a link between a decrease in students' sense of relatedness to school and the quality of the teacher-student relationship following students' progress into early secondary school. However, why this happens is not clear. Therefore, I now consider engagement as connected to teacher-student relationships as they are often linked to students' sense of belonging (Cornelius-White 200, Noddings 2005/2006).

Teacher-student relationships

How teachers interact with students on a day-to-day basis may influence students' engagement (Nguyen et al. 2018, Quin 2016). Indeed, a study by Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris (2004) found positive relationships with teachers are shown to promote student engagement whilst evidence from Van Pategem et al. (2008) points to an association between teacher-student interactions and student outcomes. Certainly, a review by Quin (2016) of studies on teacher-student relationships and engagement found a positive connection between school-based indicators of engagement (behaviour, emotional and cognitive) and higher quality teacher-student relationships, along with a positive association between student-reported and official school records of academic grades. Therefore, improved engagement with learning may be because as Connell (1990) suggests, young people who clash with their teachers may not only feel disconnected from them but may also feel unsupported and so disengage from learning activities.

Research by Cooper (2014) and Martin and Dowson (2009) found that 'connective instruction', involving the teacher knowing and understanding their students on an academic, personal and emotional level is more effective at engaging secondary school students than cognitively demanding tasks set by the teacher or fun activities whereby students construct their own knowledge. This may be because 'connective instruction' shows the student that the teacher cares about them and sees the value of the learning for their current and future lives. It is perhaps therefore influential for engaging students because as Ainsworth et al.

(1979) says, the teacher-student relationship offers young people a secure base for exploring the school environment. Research by Sabol and Pianta (2012 in Engels et al. 2017) supports this, finding teacher-student relationships or interactions that are close and supportive assist young people in becoming academically more successful as well as helping them engage more. In a similar way, a study by Haapasalo, Valimaa and Kannas (2010) on students' self-reporting of school performance found students stating they had better quality teacher-student relationships and had a more positive perception of their own performance in school.

Teacher-student relationships may influence engagement, but this may also be bi-directional in that school engagement plays a role in promoting positive social relations between teachers and students (Eccles and Roeser (2011). Indeed, Hamre and Pianta (2001) agree, saying that students who have negative relationships with their teachers, particularly early in schooling, tend to have lower academic achievement and behavioural issues which is then displayed through disengagement with learning, leading to negative teacher-student relationships, perhaps due to perceived poor behaviour (2.3.2). Supporting this, Ladd and Burgess (2001) found the greater the conflict between teacher and student the more likely the student would be less engaged, enjoy school less and be more likely to have lower achievement. Pianta, Steinberg and Rollins (1995) suggest this is because positive teacher-student relationships provide a defence to promote resilience within the academic environment. However, for Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris (2004) teacher-student relationships are one factor influencing student engagement alongside teacher support, class structure and authentic and challenging tasks. Certainly Oolbekkink-Marchand, Driel and Verloop, (2007 in Van Uden, Ritzen and Pieters 2013) point out that teachers' beliefs may influence student engagement so that as Van Uden, Ritzen and Pieters (2013) suggest, teachers use their different experiences of their students as a basis for how they perceive student engagement and need to be aware of their own interpersonal behaviour and how this affects students' attitudes toward school and learning. For Stuart et al. (2019) this means teachers should avoid inadvertently suppressing students by being aware of their life experiences and

values and understanding how these might impact on their choices and actions (Bourdieu 1996) in the classroom.

If teacher-student relationships can both affect and be affected by students' engagement with learning, this may be because, as McMahon and Portelli (2012) point out, teacher and student interactions that embrace their differing perspectives and values can lead to engagement. This is possibly because students feel their opinions matter, and that they are listened to, valued, understood, and cared about, and so feel a sense of belonging and then want to engage (Noddings 2005/2016, Cooper and Miness 2014). For Cooper (2014), positive teacher and student interactions may also lead to students wanting to achieve as they feel their teachers are taking account of their values and views, which instils confidence in them as they see positive outcomes for their futures. Stuart et al. (2019) believe this means teachers need to be aware and take account of the influence of socio-cultural structures by understanding the unique contexts and lives of young people. In relation to this, I now look at how learning environments might influence engagement with learning.

Learning environments

Feeling a sense of belonging in school, Lee (2014) argues, along with believing their learning is valued as an activity, means young people are more likely to put sustained effort into their learning. Certainly, research by Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) suggests that engagement is more likely to take place in classrooms where students feel cared for and supported which may lead to a sense of belonging as students feel they can relate to the classroom context. In other words, the social and emotional environment of the classroom may be important for engagement with learning. In support of this, Wang and Holcombe's (2010) study shows student participation decreases along with their sense of belonging in classroom environments where the focus is on competition in terms of grades, whereas Dotterer and Lowe (2011) found students are more likely to engage in learning when they feel that their environment is 'enriching and supportive'. This is possibly because as Chase et al. (2014) and Klem and Connell (2004) suggest, in supportive environments, students feel able to make use of the support on offer. Conversely, Fielding (2012) argues that students'

capacity to learn is limited and damaged where suitable environments are not created. This is because as Pianta et al. (2002) point out, supportive environments are often student-centred and supportive of student autonomy, with teachers who deliver learning activities based on an understanding of their students' different needs and abilities. In other words, teachers who create supportive environments know their students well and can cater to their individual socio-cultural and academic backgrounds. However, Fielding (2012) notes that within the school environment, young people can be seen and see themselves as consumers required to make informed choices over learning opportunities which influence their future life.

In contrast to ideas of supportive classroom environments, Fullarton's (2002) study found that extracurricular activities offered a way to engage young people. She argues that students who consistently take part in extra-curricular activities in school have higher personal levels of engagement, leading to them experience a closer connection to the school community and possibly to positive impacts on academic achievement. This may because as some researchers (Connell 1990, Osterman 2000 in Dotterer and Lowe 2011) suggest, when young people feel a sense of belonging, through participation in extra-curricular activities, as seen in Fullarton's (2002), study they may internalise the expectations and values of their teachers which can include active engagement in learning activities. Research by Wang and Holcombe (2010) supports this, showing positive emotional and behavioural engagement linked to the support that teachers offer their students both academically and socially. Therefore, I now look at behaviours and actions in terms of engagement.

Behaviours and actions

Different actions or behaviours from the teacher impact on students' engagement ether negatively or positively. For example, De Meyer et al. (2014 state that controlling behaviour such as when a teacher uses tactics to pressure students to act, think or feel in specific ways by threatening with sanctions or yelling, can elicit disengagement from students. Similarly, Skinner and Belmont (1993) propose that teachers' unfriendly behaviour or excluding students can lead to less engagement, whilst Van den Berghe et al. (2013) observe that if teachers' pay

little attention to students or are distant or distracted, students are more likely to disengage. In contrast, motivating teacher behaviour was found by several researchers (Jang, Reeve and Deci 2010; Reeve et al. 2004) to be positively related to student engagement. Furthermore, evidence from Jang et al. (2016) and Niemiec and Ryan 2009, suggests that the behaviours of teachers may impact on students' engagement with learning in that student engagement is fostered when teachers support students' autonomy, provide them with structure, and offer warm interactions or relatedness support so that students experience greater need satisfaction. Additionally, Reeve et al. (2004) showed that students responded with greater engagement to teachers with higher levels of motivating teaching. Yet research by Cents-Boonstra et al.'s (2021) was unable to determine whether the teacher's behaviour generated positive student engagement or if it was engagement which elicited positive teacher behaviour. Certainly, research by Jang et al. (2016) would point to this being a reciprocal relationship in that more active student engagement leads to more motivating teaching behaviour and vice versa. This is similar to previous discussions (2.2.3) in so much as students' behaviours can be determined by the behaviours of the teacher and vice versa and so it is possible that the behaviours and actions of both teacher and student are an important factor in teacher-student relationships and engagement with learning.

Having explored teacher-student relationships and engagement with learning in more detail, I shall now explore Outdoor Learning to provide context for my research and for exploration in chapter 5 of how my research may contribute to understanding of this topic.

2.5 Outdoor Learning

The outdoor learning environment is seen by Quay, Dickinson and Nettleton (2002) to be very different to that of the classroom as it allows more freedom for movement and offers a rich sensory environment which can positively influence the student experience. As pointed out in the document 'Learning and Teaching Scotland' (2010), taking learning outside the classroom and into the natural

environment can also provide opportunities for an integrated, cross-curricular approach to achieving educational aims. Indeed, several reviews (Waite 2020) show significant evidence that outdoor learning not only improves young people's quality of life but also that outdoor learning can meet many desired policy outcomes for young people's well-being now and in the future. Yet there remains a limited amount of literature with regards to outdoor learning within the context of the UK. In particular, research focused on young people's voice and outdoor learning in secondary schools is lacking. Therefore, the literature referred to in this section is drawn from a UK context where available but otherwise offers an international perspective. The literature was chosen as it links as closely as possible to my research in terms of the age of the young people, the benefits of outdoor learning and the use of outdoor learning within a secondary school environment to investigate teacher-student relationships.

As I have chosen to explore the use of outdoor learning in my research, in this section I will consider how outdoor learning is viewed and state how I have chosen to apply it to my research (2.5.1). I will then look at what the outdoors means as a learning environment (2.5.2) and how outdoor learning is seen and used in schools (2.5.3), before examining the benefits of outdoor learning as applied to my research (2.5.4). I begin with considering how outdoor learning may be viewed.

2.5.1 Outdoor Learning is…

Outdoor learning can be seen as a pedagogy as it is a way of delivering different curriculums (Beames, Higgins and Nicol 2011) so that young people can take part in 'active learning outdoors' (Greenaway 2005) (1.2.1) and learn in a 'real context' (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee 2005) (1.2.1). In this way young people are not only seen to be engaged in their learning, whereby they may develop autonomy over it, but are also having meaningful experiences through exploring subject content and how this applies in practice. Davis (2018 in Passy et al. 2019) describes outdoor learning as being more focused than learning outside the classroom, which often includes educational visits. In terms of my research, outdoor learning refers to school-based provision using outdoor

learning to support the delivery of the curriculum (Fägerstam, 2014) as part of teaching and learning (Dolan, 2015) through regular, as opposed to short term, provision (Stern, Powell and Hill 2014). Examples include using the school grounds to understand weather or to practise maths skills through conducting surveys and creating data, investigating biodiversity and exploring environmental issues through litter projects in the local area. This is not restricted to purely academic learning but includes any use of the outdoors through the school timetable for the benefit of young people such as having 'quiet time' outdoors or taking nature walks. This is because through my research I want to understand - in terms of teacher-student relationships and engagement with learning- how, as Dudman, Hedges and Loynes (2019) suggest, experiencing and interacting with places and people might hold value for young people, and what the influence is of encountering a familiar place (such as the school grounds and local area) in a different way (Vander Ark, Liebtag, and McClennen 2020). Therefore, I now consider the outdoors as a learning environment.

2.5.2 The Outdoors as a Learning Environment

Moss (2012) points out that young people who learn outdoors '*know more [and] understand more…'.* This may be because as Beames, Higgins and Nicol (2011) believe, the location of learning is integral to the learning process, as opportunities to learn are enhanced by the relationship between the landscape, people and activities. Meanwhile, Beames, Higgins and Nicol (2011) say that when young people are given the opportunity to explore outdoor places, curiosity and curriculum combine to provide powerful stimuli for learning. It is possible that as Munkeby et al. (2020) explain, this is due the outdoors having the ability to transcend subject boundaries, which supports young people to connect and integrate knowledge by making tangible links to numerous subject areas or disciplines, that for Green and Raynor (2020) leads to connecting and building new knowledge. In this way, taking part in outdoor learning, particularly in the local area according to Beames, Higgins and Nicol (2011), can challenge perceptions which Fagerstam (2014) suggests can be empowering and enable young people to embed complicated jargon into real world processes. Certainly Fagerstam (2014) found that shared experiences in the outdoors can encourage

and build upon indoor teaching as well as be a starting point for indoor learning. It is, therefore, possible that outdoor learning positively impacts academic achievement, and this may be due to increased self-confidence that as Slade, Lowery and Bland (2013) report, stems from young people having freedom, time and space in the outdoor environment. Yet, despite this, outdoor learning is not formally integrated into English school curriculums and as Passy et al. (2019) state, though England has an enduring history of outdoor learning, it is not a national movement. Therefore, I will now outline how outdoor learning is used and the implications of this in English schools.

2.5.3 Outdoor Learning in English schools

Through a range of curriculum subjects, topics and initiative, Allison, Carr and Meldrum (2012) argue that outdoor 'learning' or outdoor 'education' has been taught in primary schools, yet research by Prince (2019) suggests that outdoor learning in primary schools is usually integrated within a particular programme of study (physical education, science and geography) rather than being a formal curriculum subject in its own right. As part of the PE curriculum at key stage 2, (primary school, aged 7-11 years), outdoor and adventurous activity challenges are listed as part of the subject content (DfE 2013), but no specific activities or challenges are mentioned, whilst in secondary schools, taking part in outdoor and adventurous activities again forms part of the PE curriculum at key stages 3 and 4, (secondary school, aged 11-16 years), (DfE 2013) but with no specific activities given. There is also evidence that delivering outdoor learning in schools is seen as important such as the Government's 'Learning outside the Classroom Manifesto' (DfE 2006) which Joyce (2012) says supports outdoor learning as a way of improving educational outcomes, as well as the 2018 policy initiative from Defra (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs 2018) 'A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment' which aims to *'Encourage children to be close to nature, in and out of school'.* As part of Defra's (2018) plan, the Children and Nature Programme led by Natural England (Passy and Cutting 2023) encouraged improvements to school grounds, visits to community forests and residential trips to encourage schools to widen access to nature for young people. Yet the 'Children's People and Nature Survey for England' (Natural

England, 2022) found that only 23% of children spent time outdoors during lesson time once a day and only 34% went out once a week, a drop from the previous year. Indeed, despite being part of the PE curriculum, an OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills) report in 2023, 'Levelling the playing field: the physical education subject report' found that *'in three quarters of schools, outdoor adventurous activities are either not taught effectively or not taught at all'* This suggests that many schools are either not using outdoor learning at all or use it minimally as part of the school timetable. Indeed, as already discussed (O'Neill 2019) (1.4.3) there has been a decrease in the amount of time young people spend outdoors compared to previous generations. For Waite (2010) there has also been a decline in the provision of outdoor learning in English schools with a range of factors contributing to this. James (2014) and Prince and Exeter (2016) suggest these factors include government education policies and the focus on improving pupil performance, as well as reduced budgets for schools (Prince 2019). It is possible, therefore, as Passy et al. (2019) point out, that the government's aim to change school culture by funding support for teachers in schools to implement outdoor learning rather than through curricular directives, might be in tension with the demands on teachers (1.3.1) and lead to less outdoor learning taking place.

Regardless of any reduction in outdoor learning across English schools, evidence (MacQuarrie 2018) shows that outdoor learning can effectively support curriculum delivery where outdoor experiences provide educational value and relate to classroom learning. Certainly, Fägerstam's (2014) longitudinal study of outdoor learning found that regular use of outdoor learning across different subjects in secondary school aided young people in additional learning back in the classroom, acting as a link between outdoor and indoor learning. Yet, although Maller (2005) and Waite (2008) argue that primary schools are well placed to offer children access to nature and learning outdoors, there is a marked decline in outdoor learning experiences between the early years and the later stages of primary education. Furthermore, Williams and Scott (2019) suggest that research shows that few teachers are taking part in structured lessons outside the traditional indoor classroom. Taking this into account, I now discuss the

benefits of outdoor learning and being outdoors, to understand how young people in my research may experience outdoor learning.

2.5.4 Benefits of outdoors and outdoor learning

According to MacQuarrie (2018) outdoor learning combined with 'normal classroom' learning offers a wide range of outcomes as outdoor learning complements young people's indoor experiences. As Dillon and Dickie (2012) point out, children develop their knowledge and skills to add value to their classroom experiences, whilst for Lloyd, Truong and Gray (2018) the motivation to learn is transferred from the outdoors to the indoors. I begin this section by looking at the benefits of the outdoors and outdoor learning in terms of engagement with learning.

Engagement with learning

The outdoors, Becker et al. (2017) propose, offers a multitude of opportunities for teaching and learning that can engage students in ways that being in a traditional classroom might not, by providing benefits to students' learning through active participation and more hands-on learning. Research (Quay, Dickinson and Nettleton 2002; Glackin 2017) shows that field experience alongside peers can help facilitate deeper learning whilst in a study by Marchant et al. (2019) young people reported that outdoor learning made them feel free and was fun compared to the physically restrictive environment of the classroom. In the study, both teachers and young people noted increased engagement in outdoor learning and overall school engagement, suggesting that the use of the outdoors rather than being classroom based could be central in improving engagement and learning. Furthermore, findings from a small-scale longitudinal study carried out by McCree, Cutting and Sherwin (2018) in a UK primary school indicate that positive wellbeing outcomes and learning competencies happen best when students are free to engage with 'living' environments and when the immediate focus on learning for assessment is removed. This may be because as King and Howard (2016) suggest, when students have choice in an activity, they perceive it as play. Meanwhile, a study by Lloyd, Truong and Gray (2018) found that the more time children spent in nature in their local area, the more curious they were about the

environment, becoming more aware of their surroundings leading to increased learning relevant to curriculum outcomes. The study also found that children's motivation to learn transferred to indoor tasks when activities were linked to the outdoor sessions and that the children completed a greater depth and quality of work than in general indoor-only tasks. A positive relationship between learning and the motivation to learn when using outdoor learning was also found by Dettweiler et al. (2015) and Bowker and Tearle (2007 in Becker et al. 2017), whilst research by Wistoft (2013) demonstrated the ability of the natural environment to promote a desire to learn. In a more recent study by Marchant et al. (2019) looking at curriculum based outdoor learning, students reported feeling 'free' and engaged not just in outdoor lessons but also back in the classroom. Pupils and teachers in this study commented on increased engagement with learning whilst in the outdoors as well as overall school engagement and improved concentration and behaviour. Participating in outdoor learning then is often connected with improved engagement and learning, as involvement in activities in outdoor environments is seen to improve students' concentration and work patterns (Fägerstam 2014) as well as having a positive influence on well-being, creativity and brain-function (Selhub and Logan 2014 in Marchant 2019). Certainly, a study by Neville, Petrass and Ben (2021) investigating outdoor learning experiences in a Year 7/8 English Writers Workshop found that outdoor experiences enabled students' access to more diverse ways of engaging with their work and that through a kinaesthetic, sensory, and experiential approach, the learning 'came alive'. This might be because as Quibell, Charlton and Law (2017) point out, using the outdoors to teach engages multiple senses which for Rao (2018) creates greater and more effective learning. Results from a study by Moeed and Averill (2010) showed that by taking part in outdoor learning, students can foster a commitment to developing their knowledge and skills, and that being immersed in the outdoors, using practical skills, improves motivation and engagement. It is possible then that the outdoors stimulates learning as it evokes young peoples' natural curiosities (Beames, Higgins and Nicol (2011) (2.5.4). This may be because as Richardson (1997) suggests, the outdoors provides open-ended experiences where children can participate in active learning. Or it is possible that as Neville, Petrass and Ben (2021) state, outdoor experiences can give students diverse ways of engaging and bring learning alive through kinaesthetic, sensory

and experiential approaches not evident within the traditional classroom. For Bentsen, Mygind and Randrup (2009) outdoor learning offers enjoyable experiences that promote engagement with learning, stimulate curiosity and improve social relations. This may lead to young people feeling empowered by their learning and as Allison (2000) points out, when young people feel empowered, they are more likely to engage with their learning and perform better as they take ownership of their environment and goals, and perhaps feel able to join in with learning without fear of giving an incorrect answer (Green and Rayner 2020). This may then have a positive effect on academic performance (Quibell, Charlton and Law 2017) so I will now look at the benefits of outdoor learning for academic performance.

Academic performance

Studies (Becker et al. 2017) looking at school based outdoor learning through the curriculum have found that they tend to have a positive effect on students' academic achievement. Research by Mygind, Bolling and Barfod (2019) noticed that by teaching the curriculum using the outdoor environment, there was weekly variation in learning methods, practices and settings, leading to a more joyful and motivating week for young people which may have created a more holistic environment, giving rise to increased academic outcomes (Skaugen and Fiskum 2015 in Mygind, Bolling and Barfod 2019). This may be because learning outdoors and outdoor learning provide 'real world experiences' which Marin and Halpern (2011) suggest gives young people opportunities to learn in ways that enhance their thinking skills as the outdoor environment offers an open-ended, student-led, enquiry-premised approach to learning that may be the 'pedagogical ignition' for the development of students' critical thinking. In fact, research by Christie, Beames and Higgins (2015) investigating Scottish secondary school teachers' and students' experiences of outdoor learning found the development of critical thinking skills to be a strong theme throughout the data. Similarly, in their mini-review of research looking at nature and learning Kuo, Barnes and Jorden (2022) found evidence to suggest that experiences of nature not only boost academic learning but also personal development and that young people's motivation, enjoyment and engagement were not only improved in natural settings but that this had a ripple effect into indoor learning and improved interest

in school in general. The review concluded that integrating nature into teaching improves academic achievement to a greater extent than traditional teaching, finding that exposure to nature boosts concentration and retention of subject matter. Indeed, studies (Fägerstam, 2014; Scott, Boyd and Colquhoun 2013) demonstrate that young people's concentration and work patterns improve after participating in learning activities conducted in outdoor environments. Furthermore, research by Hausfather (1996 in Coates and Pimlott-Wilson 2019) and Quay, Dickinson and Nettleton (2002) also shows that outdoor learning alongside peers can help facilitate deeper learning as the school environment can be counterproductive in promoting the social contexts for learning. This may because as Cudworth (2020) suggests, the outdoor learning environment is different from what he calls the neoliberal classroom where the focus is on achievement and testing and where movement is restricted, and learning is teacher-led. The learning environment then, may be an important factor with regards to academic performance, engagement with learning and teacher-student relationships. Therefore, I now consider the influence outdoor learning might have on teacher-student relationships.

Teacher-student relationships

According to Armbruster and Witte (2022) classroom practices can be seen to hinder the formation of positive teacher-student relationships and so it is interesting that some studies (Kendall and Rodger 2015, Robinson 2013) have noted improvements in relationships as a secondary outcome of outdoor learning, suggesting positive teacher-student relationships can and are formed when outdoor spaces are used for other aims. Indeed, there is evidence from Hartmeyer and Mygind (2016) and Wistoft (2013) that the outdoors encourages a sense of belonging as well as having positive associations with young people's informal interactions with teachers (Mygind, Bolling and Barford 2019). This may be because as Robinson (2013) found, the outdoors offers opportunities to connect at a personal level. As Quay, Dickinson and Nettleton's (2002) research shows, this may influence young people's experiences of caring, supporting the development of caring relationships since caring between students in their study was experienced in outdoor learning to a greater extent than in other school classes.

Taking learning outside of the classroom can support staff and students to work together which research by Santelmann, Gosnell and Meyers (2011) found supported the building of positive teacher-student relationships. Indeed, the final report for the Paul Hamlyn Foundation (2015) on the Learning Away project, illustrates the ways that the development of deeper relationships, cohesion and belonging has important consequences for young people and their confidence, highlighting how teachers and students learning together can break down status barriers and position everyone on the same level to strengthen relationships. Furthering this, a study by Fuller, Powell and Fox (2017) found year 9 (aged 13-14 years) students who took part in an outdoor residential spent time interacting in a less formal way, allowing them to connect across social spaces, and thus strengthening relationships and continuing them back in school. Similarly, Jordet's (2007 in Fägerstam 2014) study into school-based outdoor learning not only found a positive impact on social relations between students and teachers but also at the end of the project, changes in teacher–student relations were frequently mentioned as a positive outcome.

Well-being and Teacher's development

Roffey (2012) reports that good teacher-student relationships are foundational to teacher well-being and therefore it is not just young people who can benefit from outdoor learning. In a study by Mygind, Bolling and Barfod (2019) teachers reported feeling more deeply connected to their students, sharing learning experiences with them, and thriving in their teaching through the uncertain and unknown of the outdoor environment, as they used it as a learning opportunity for their own professional development. Meanwhile a study by Kerr (2019) looked at outcomes for teachers using outdoor learning and found teachers developed and improved their own subject knowledge and understanding, building skills and confidence to teach subject content and develop and use appropriate resources which left them feeling empowered and had long term positive changes to their teaching practices. Marchant et al. (2019) also found teachers reporting increased job satisfaction and wellbeing, which is also supported by a Natural England project (Dillon and Dickie 2012) which showed taking lessons outside can both empower and motivate teachers. Teachers reported that outdoor learning had a positive impact on them, stating improvements in teaching practice

and increased confidence in taking learning outdoors. Additionally, well-being benefits from nature experiences have been found by Twohig-Bennett and Jones (2018) to include lowering cortisol levels and decreasing heart rate and blood pressure, whilst a study into exposure to nature for stress recovery, by Ulrich et al. (1991) found that human's inherent connection to the natural world means being in nature can reduce mental stress as it is seen as less threatening than urban environments. Since teacher wellbeing is considered a critical factor in creating a stable environment for pupils to learn (Roffey 2012) and has been associated with academic achievement (Briner and Dewberry 2007 in Marchant et al. 2019), perhaps this strengthens the case for the use of outdoor learning in English Secondary schools.

2.6 Summary

This chapter has looked at education and educational policies and discussed existing literature on teacher-student relationships, engagement with learning and outdoor learning to not only provide context for my research but to also understand how my research may contribute to knowledge.

Views of education as being about core knowledge to reproduce dominant values and norms of society have been contrasted with education as understanding young people's natural learning abilities and natural development. Educational policies showed a focus on teaching core knowledge for skill development and achievement which may impact what is taught and possibly lead to negative learning environments. This may be viewed as placing pressure on students to conform and behave and lead to disengagement as they may not enjoy school or learning. Meanwhile disengagement was seen in relation to its potential to occur in transition from primary and secondary school and then continue through secondary school.

Positive teacher-student relationships were seen to possibly prevent disengagement as teachers who get to know their students on a personal level, and understand their needs are possibly more likely to build positive relationships

and engage students. It was seen that negative teacher actions and behaviours could lead to poor teacher-student relationships and students' disengagement. Benefits of positive teacher-student relationships were discussed for teachers and students in that it is possible teachers experience less stress and react more positively when relationships are positive.

Engagement with learning was noted as occurring if teacher-student relationships were positive and took place within supportive learning environments. Research on types of engagement showed students may be seen to be engaged if they follow the norms of behaviour within school, take part in and appear to enjoy learning, appear motivated and are actively involved so that engagement is potentially multidimensional. Although seen to decline as students' move through the school years, positive teacher-student relationships were seen to possibly improve engagement through students' desire for supportive, caring, student-centred environments.

The chapter concluded by stating my use of outdoor learning as school-based provision to support the delivery of the curriculum. Although outdoor learning was seen to offer a powerful stimulus for learning, research suggested young people experience little time taking part in outdoor learning or being outdoors. The benefits of outdoor learning, such as building skills and competencies, were seen to perhaps be transferable back to the classroom to aid learning and achievement and there was some suggestion that the outdoor environment offered enjoyable experiences that promote student engagement and improve social relations.

3 Methodology and Research Design

3.1 Introduction

As expressed in 1.5, the aim of my research is 'to explore from young people's perspective, the fostering of positive relationships between teachers and young people through outdoor learning, to understand how this might influence young people to engage in their own learning and thus create positive learning environments. In this chapter I set out how I will undertake this. By reflecting on myself as both a teacher and researcher, as Clarke, James and Kelly (1996) suggest, I have been able to understand my own views and beliefs on the production of knowledge and perception of reality This has allowed me to determine how to collect, interpret, and present my understanding of knowledge and reality through my research. Since I agree with Guba and Lincoln's (1994) argument that no paradigm can be definitive but instead relies on the persuasiveness of arguing that position as a researcher, I endeavour to create my own path with my research. Therefore, to demonstrate the approach my research takes and the way this underpins my choices and rationale for the design, collection and analysis of data, this chapter explores my philosophical position and methodological approach as this guided the direction of my research (Willis 2007).

I begin this chapter with **3.2, My Philosophical Position,** where I outline my philosophical position as related to my research in terms of my views and beliefs on reality and knowledge (3.2.1). I start with my philosophical position because this underpins how I conduct my research as well as how I approach my research. I then move on to discuss my research framework in relation to my philosophical position (3.2.2).

Section **3.3, My Research Approach**, discusses the approach I take to my research as this guides my research design. I start the section by looking at the theoretical principles underpinning the methodological rationale for my research, before exploring the two paradigms I align my research with and why as appropriate for my research (3.3.1 and 3.3.2). As part of this section, I explain

how my choice of research approach relates to my research in terms of listening to the voices of young people as this is important to my research.

The next section **3.4, My Research Design**, discusses how I chose to design and undertake my research and the data collection methods I used. I begin by outlining why I want an approach that supports me to be subjective and reflexive, discussing how this relates to my philosophical position and research, (3.4.1)). I then explain how I chose my sample (3.4.2) including my choice of outdoor learning, school and young people. A discussion on access, ethics and consent (3.4.3) follows this as these are part of how I designed my research. I go on to explain the research methods I used (3.4.4) and discuss how these were chosen in relation to my beliefs and values. I end this section by providing details of my data collection (3.4.5) in terms of my timeline, how I collected my data, and any collection issues faced.

This chapter concludes in section **3.5, Approaching Data Analysis**, with an explanation of my chosen data analysis approach. As part of this section, I discuss how my chosen data analysis approach relates to my philosophical position and how I have chosen to approach my research. I begin by explaining my reasons for choosing my approach to data analysis, (3.5.1 and 3.5.2). I then discuss how using my chosen approach supports being subjective, (3.5.3) reflexive and reflective (3.5.4) in my research as these are bound to my choice of methodological approach and show how I remain aware of my own influence on my research and the influence of the social context of school and how this impacts the data analysis. Next (3.5.5) I briefly outline how my choice of approach to data analysis works with my choice of methodological approach and how this impacts my data analysis. I end this section by outlining how I applied my data analysis approach to collect my data (3.5.6).

As previously noted, as this underpins how I conduct my research, I now start this chapter with an outline of my philosophical position in relation to my beliefs and values.

3.2 My Philosophical Position

To articulate my philosophical position, in this section I consider carefully my positionality and the position I adopt concerning my research and its social and political context (Rowe 2014 in Holmes 2020). I explore my views and beliefs about the nature of reality (what exists, how and why), and what can be known about the world, as well as my beliefs about the nature of knowledge (what can be known and how) and my assumptions about how individuals both interact with and relate to their environment (Holmes 2020). This is because as Guba and Lincoln (1994) state, my philosophical position, which underpins my views of the world and stems from my belief in the formation of knowledge and the nature of reality and truth, is also constructed from my own experiences and background. I shall now briefly discuss my beliefs and values and explain how they relate to my research.

3.2.1 My views and beliefs

As my beliefs and values form the basis of my understanding of the world and my positionality in my research, I start by exploring my ontological position as this concerns beliefs about the nature of existence and the structure of reality (Crotty 1998), as well as the nature of social entities in respect of whether they are or can be objective or exist independently from social actors or are social constructions (Bryman 2008). I explore my ontological position by stating my view on the form and nature of reality as well as the nature of the relationship between myself and what can be known (Guba and Lincoln 1994). I then explore my epistemological position, which considers what is or should be regarded as acceptable knowledge (Bryman 2008), referring to ways of looking at the world and making sense of it by considering what knowledge is possible (Crotty 1998). I explore my epistemological position by stating my understanding of knowledge and how I understand it to be formed, considering what I know and how I know it, as this forms the basis of my approach to my research.

My view of reality

My experiences both professionally as a teacher and personally leave me persuaded that meaning is not discovered but is constructed through individual and group interactions between humans and their world (Crotty 1998). I share (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2007) view that our personal awareness, perceptions and interpretations of our environments actively shape our experiences of reality and so the social world should be understood from the point of view of individuals participating in it. This relates to my research as I want to understand experiences of teacher-student relationships from the point of view of young people as my participants. Further to this, Ormston et al. (2014) suggest a social perspective on reality, asking questions as to whether social reality can really exist independently of human concepts and interpretation, and if there are shared realities or multiple context-specific realities. This resonates with my perspective of reality as being socially constructed and of the idea of multiple realities. In other words, as (Creswell 2007) suggests, I believe individuals' realities are formed and shaped by their interactions with others and their environment and so they will understand and experience reality in different ways according to their own experiences and perspectives. Therefore, there may be as many realities as there are individuals (Crotty 1998). Given that my research concerns my profession and is investigating young people's experiences within secondary school, I am interested in their specific constructed realities and in understanding reality as shaped by social, cultural and historic values. This is because I believe as Ritchie and Lewis (2003) suggest that that reality is only knowable through young people's socially constructed meanings. I shall now outline my understanding of knowledge.

My understanding of knowledge

In believing reality to be a social construct, my view of knowledge and how we come to know and understand the world (Snape and Spencer 2003) is that the world does not exist independently of individual or group knowledge of it (Grix, 2004 in Scotland 2012). Instead, as Crotty (1998) states, I see knowledge as a human creation, constructed differently by individuals in different ways. This relates to my research as I am interested in young people's experiences and interpretations. Yet as Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007, p27) explain*, "what*

counts as knowledge is determined by the social and positional power of the advocates of that knowledge". In other words, 'knowledge' is influenced by the status and power of the individuals and groups promoting those ideas. For Crotty (1998), this means there is a pre-existing system that we are born into so that meaning is already made, and knowledge is culturally derived and historically situated. I identify with this as professionally, and often personally, I feel compelled to question knowledge that has been legitimised, examining how and why this has come to be. This aligns with my research as I want to consider these influences on young people's experiences and how they may shape their understanding. As my research involves the experiences and perspectives of young people based within my professional role, I take Guba and Lincoln's (1994) view that I am interactively linked to my research and therefore both exert an influence on, and am influenced by it, so that my research is subjective in its nature and my findings value mediated. I am interested, therefore, in how young people construct knowledge, appreciating that this is not value free, and wanting to explore what affects young people's experiences in terms of social, historical, cultural and political forces. My understanding of the nature of reality and my view of knowledge and what it means to know, form the basis of my philosophical positionality and the framework to which I align myself and my research (Willis 2007). Therefore, I shall now briefly discuss my research framework.

3.2.2 My research framework

I began my research as Hudson and Ozanne (1988) suggest, with some prior insight into my research context yet as my view of reality is of it being multiple, unpredictable and complex, as Fain (2021) points out, the framework for my research is drawn from concepts of multiple theories as well as concepts from my review of literature in my topic areas. Whilst I may situate my research within what I deem an appropriate theoretical framework, based on my beliefs and views, I recognise that as Carson et al. (2001) point out, my chosen theoretical framework is not rigid but adopts a flexible structure. Although my view of the nature of reality and knowledge form my research framework, I am conscious that in applying labels I am potentially influencing the way the research may be understood and/or interpreted. This is because there is a risk of oversimplifying my philosophical

position so that reflection on the interconnectedness of these concepts with real-world practices may be missed. In terms of my research, there may be a danger of forcing the complex phenomenon of teacher-student relationships into a simplistic framework. Therefore, as I want to understand young people's views, I embrace Bevirs' (2009) idea that a philosophical position can draw upon a multitude of beliefs. This is because I accept that holding a belief does not equate to certainty about its truth, instead truth is applicable to individual constructs, thus emphasising the adaptability of knowledge (Bevir 2009). This means that I remain open to new knowledge throughout my research, allowing it to develop by listening to the voices of young people. However, I also acknowledge that there is pre-existing knowledge (Crotty 1998) (3.2.1) and that knowledge may as Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) (3.2.1) point out, be decided by the social and positional power of those that support that knowledge. I therefore recognise my beliefs and allow the research to unfold considering what I am learning and how it might both influence and be influenced by my views and wider society. Consequently, I remain reflexive in my approach, by accepting that I am part of my research, examining myself and decisions throughout my research journey (Finlay 2002). In doing so, as I allow my research to evolve, I am aware that as my knowledge grows, my positionality and approach might shift or adapt and so my data should be interpreted accordingly.

Having discussed my research framework, I now set out my approach to my research, explaining how my positionality influenced my choice of approach in terms of my research journey and my rationale for undertaking the research in the manner that I chose. I also explain how my understanding of reality and knowledge relate to my decision to use this research approach.

3.3 My Research Approach

Based on my beliefs, values, views and assumptions, Kuhn (2012) suggests that as a researcher, I may position myself somewhere along a spectrum of two contrasting paradigms – positivism or interpretivism (Kuhn 2012). This is because as Willis (2007) explains, a paradigm is a complete belief system, framework or

worldview that influences research and practice and suggests that the number and names of paradigms (along this spectrum) vary according to researchers. Willis (2007) points to three generally accepted paradigms as being positivism, interpretivism and constructivism whilst acknowledging Guba and Lincoln's (1994) addition of post-positivism and critical theory.

As I want to understand young people's experiences within a local context (an English secondary school) rather than identify universal laws of human behaviour (Willis 2007), I align myself with a broadly interpretivist paradigm as opposed to a positivist one, which ignores the intentionality of the individual and is unable to fully understand actions (Scotland 2012). Yet I am also interested in understanding how young people's experiences may be socially constructed, whilst exploring potentially oppressive systems that might constrain young people's experiences (Kincheloe 2005). Therefore, I feel my choice of paradigm also needs to be informed by an approach that enables exploration of students' experiences of their teacher-student relationships in relation to the historical, social, and political forces that may shape meaning for students, but also to remain aware of how my own background and views might influence the research (Wojnar and Swanson 2007). Therefore, I approach my research through an interpretivist paradigm informed by critical constructivism. This means that I prioritise understanding young people's subjective experiences of teacher-student relationships, whilst also considering power dynamics and social structures that influence how those experiences are constructed (Kincheloe, 2005/2008). In this way, critical constructivism forms my epistemological position (3.2.1) in that it questions the socio-political dimensions of knowledge production in favour of a more just and reflexive understanding of reality (Kincheloe 2008). As critical constructivism informs my research, my ontological position is characterised as a form of relativist ontology with a critical and emancipatory edge. This is because, I believe that rather than a universal truth, multiple, equally valid realities are constructed and negotiated by individuals and groups (3.2.1). In taking an interpretivist approach, I see reality not as fixed but socially constructed through language, culture, power relations and historical contexts so that knowledge and meaning are produced through human interaction and discourse (Bryman 2008; Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2007). However, this is

viewed through my critical lens of critical constructivism, which is influenced by critical theory, intended to examine and challenge systems of power, oppression and social inequality to promote human emancipation (Giroux 1997; Kincheloe and Steinberg 1997). Rather than traditional constructivism's focus solely on how realities are constructed, critical constructivism emphasises power structures, ideology and domination in shaping constructions of reality (Kincheloe 2005). In keeping with this, I see reality as shaped by unequal power dynamics (e.g. class, race, gender) and I am interested in how dominant groups impose their versions of reality. In exploring this through my research, I use critical constructivism (which I examine further in 3.4.2), to understand and expose previously excluded and marginalised knowledge. Therefore, my research approach is not arbitrary as whilst I acknowledge multiple possible realities (3.2.1), I also believe some constructions of reality are oppressive or dominant and can be challenged. In this way my view of reality is politically engaged as I strive to reveal and transform unjust social constructions. My research approach has an emancipatory focus in that through this research, I assume reality construction can and should be critiqued and changed to promote social justice, seeing research as not just about interpreting the world but transforming it (Kincheloe 2005/2008; Freire 1970/1973).

Walsham (1993) argues, from an interpretive perspective no theory is correct or incorrect but should be seen according to how interesting it is to the researcher. My research is approached from an interpretive viewpoint informed by critical constructivist ideas precisely because I believe it is the most appropriate approach for my research. In agreeing with Smith (1993 in Willis 2007 p. 120) that *"there is no particular right or correct path to knowledge, no special method that automatically leads to intellectual progress",* my positionality represents the most informed and sophisticated view both relevant to and based on my beliefs. However, I also understand my view to be a human construct and therefore believe that there is no universally 'right' truth being discussed or argued in my research but rather I offer a persuasive discussion to demonstrate my position and interpretations, as well as show the experiences of my participants (Guba and Lincoln 1994). My methodology represents what I consider to be the most appropriate way to undertake ethical, reflexive (Sultana 2007 in Streubert and

Carpenter 2011) and creative research that acknowledges the views and beliefs of the young people I am researching as well as my own. Thus, my methodology evolved with my research, remaining adaptable and flexible as an approach, to allow the research to emerge entwined with it. I will now explain my choice of interpretivism (3.3.1) and critical constructivism (3.3.2) as appropriate for my research.

3.3.1 Interpretivism

Unlike taking a positivist approach, from an interpretivist view, meaning is not discovered. Instead, Crotty (1998, p44) states *'it is constructed though the interaction between consciousness and the world. Consciousness is always consciousness of something'.* This corresponds with my understanding of how the groups and individuals I work with as a teacher might view their realities, and with how I see knowledge as being socially constructed (Bentley 2003). It also fits with my own experiences of teaching and as Grix (2004 in Scotland 2012) suggests, the idea that individuals construct reality so that there may be as many realities as individuals. I also understand young people's reality as inseparable from perception and that myself as researcher and the phenomena are interdependently connected with the multiple social constructs that are possible (Guba and Lincoln 1994). Due to this, I want to examine young people's experiences, feelings and perceptions alongside my own experiences, beliefs and views. Taking an interpretivist approach allows me to do this as I explore and understand the social world using my participant's views and my own (Ritchie and Lewis 2003). This is because I acknowledge that young people may each experience teacher-student relationships differently based on their own realities. In this way, I seek to acquire what Guba and Lincoln (1994) state are rich descriptions of relationships through meanings, interpretations, processes, and contexts from an interpretivist approach.

In both my professional role as a teacher and in my personal life, I am aware that young people often feel they are not listened to, so obtaining the views of young people is important for me. Yet, in understanding the views of young people, I am aware that young people's experiences and realities cannot be

fully comprehended by inference and assumption (Llyod-Smith and Tarr 2000 in Clark 2004 p5). Therefore, through my research, I want to ensure that I seek the views of young people in ways that avoid misinterpretation and misrepresentation of their experiences based on my own presumptions and insinuations. This is because as Fielding (2004 in Leitch and Mitchell 2007) state, though as participants, students may identify similar issues to adults as being important, they view schooling in a different manner, experiencing the nature and significance of issues in alternative ways. This is of significance for me as the research is undertaken within my profession. Thus, in exploring how these differences play out for students and how this impacts their realities, I want to achieve what Giddens (1976 p79 in Crotty 1998) describes as *'grasping the frames of meaning involved in the production of social life'* as understood by students and then reconstruct these. In doing this, I appreciate Denzin and Lincoln's (1994) suggestion that meaning is context bound so that I understand my findings are co-created within the structure of school and wider society. To this end, approaching my research from an interpretivist view informed by critical constructivism allows me to explore influences such as the structure of school and educational policies and so I will now explore critical constructivism in relation to my research.

3.3.2 Critical Constructivism

As a paradigm leaning towards the interpretivist end of the spectrum, Sale, Lohfeld and Brazil (2002) state that critical constructivist ideology understands reality as being socially constructed, constantly changing, and influenced by experiences and the world around. Bentley, Fleury and Garrison (2007) explain that critical constructivism is an expanded idea of constructivism in that it acknowledges the active role participants play in constructing knowledge but critically examines social, cultural and historical forces that create power dynamics to influence the formation of knowledge. Although Guba and Lincoln (1994) say that constructivism aims to understand and reconstruct perceptions individuals and groups initially hold, for Kincheloe (2005) it lacks the ability to examine and critique systems and structures which might influence experiences, meanings, and knowledge. Instead, under critical constructivism knowledge is

seen as socially constructed but power plays a key role in shaping the form those constructions take. This is important to me as my research is entwined with my professional and personal worldview (3.3) of socially constructed realities shaped by social, cultural and historic forces. Critical constructivism seeks to highlight how power imbalances and societal structures shape our understanding of the world and encourages the questioning of dominant systems of knowledge production whilst supporting dialogue aimed at promoting critical awareness (Kincheloe 2005 and Freire 1970; 1973). In this way, critical constructivism views knowledge to be controlled by dominant groups who persistently undermine alternative perspectives which contributes to oppression (Apple 2004; Bourdieu 1996; Freire 1970) (2.1.3). This leads me to agree with Denzin and Lincoln (2008) suggestion that knowledge and reality are subjective and as such require interpretation by the researcher to understand underlying meanings and influences such as power relations.

For Kincheloe (2005/2009), critical constructivism sees individuals' realities as shaped by the society they live in, acknowledging knowledge not as universal but influenced by time, place and the culture in which it is created. Therefore, in using an interpretivist approach informed by critical constructivism, I seek to interpret young people's voices in terms of teacher-student relationships whilst critically analysing the social forces of school and education that shape their perspectives, within the time and space in which they are created. In doing so, I choose to understand how the perceptions young people have of teacher-student relationships, and my own views, are constructed and to critique the influences on this as I want to gain insight into how power operates and impacts on young people (Kincheloe 2005). This is because my own experiences as a teacher lead me to agree with those (Bourdieu 1996: Freire 1973; Kincheloe 2005/2009) who view schools as part of a wider dominant ideology constructed within a set of values that influences students' experiences, privileging some and marginalising others (Bernstein 1975; Smyth 2020). This can lead to knowledge being 'constructed' through various discourses and systems of meaning (Burr 2015) that within school are intertwined with specific cultural and social contexts, influenced by dominant ideology and subject to power struggles (Anderson 1990 in Berkhout and Wielemans 1999).

By taking a critical constructivist approach I can critically reflect on educational institutions and practices and in doing so explore the social systems that might impact on young people and their experiences. This enables me to consider the way power works within and around the context of the teacher-student relationship and English school system. I am as Larochelle (1999 in Bentley 2003) points out, seeking to understand how students develop narratives and explanations to make sense of their experiences of teacher-student relationships, as well as how and why, if at all, these lead to engagement with learning. Yet as students engage with reality and make sense of it through their experiences, Crotty (1998) suggests that there is no true or valid interpretation. Instead, Larochelle (1996 in Bentley 2003) argues the meanings they construct have an adaptive function, helping them make sense of their experiences and orient their behaviours and actions. In other words, the narratives and explanations they create within school make it possible for them to engage with the habits and customs of school. Therefore, by choosing a critical constructivist approach I can interpret young people's realities of teacher-student relationships in a way that reflects their experiences and acknowledges the influence of culture, environment, and power (Hyslop-Marginson and Strobel 2007). However, Kincheloe (2005) argues that students not only create meaning but bring meaning to school from their experiences outside of school and the social contexts in which they have lived, suggesting that schooling and educational practice are politically contested spaces. In the school environment, this means young people can be surrounded by knowledge not of their making. Instead, for Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) this accepted knowledge is determined by the social and positional power of those that advocate that knowledge. In the case of my research this could be policy makers who determine educational curriculums and policies, school leaders who implement curriculums and teachers who deliver it.

Applying a critical constructivist approach enables me to consider the way power works within and around the context of the teacher-student relationship and English school system. This is of importance for me as previous research (2.2) struggles in its ability to allow exploration of the dynamics behind teacher-student relationships. Thus, by listening to the individual and collective voices of the

young people, I can critically investigate the subjective meanings that young people develop and hold about their teacher-student relationships. This allows me to understand how students construct and possess a disposition to knowledge in a positive way, that has meaning for them (Bentley 2003 and Bentley, Fleury and Garrison 2007).

In the next section I shall discuss my research design in terms of how I chose to design my research and why, and what I did to carry out my research and why.

3.4 My Research Design

Having reviewed the literature surrounding my research themes, I have been able to scrutinise gaps in the existing research and gain a greater understanding of how and why I want to conduct my research and the contribution my research makes. I use this along with an awareness of my positionality and methodological choices to guide the design, structure, and processes of my research. This section explains the structure and processes of my research beginning with outlining how my positionality allows me to be subjective and reflexive in the design of my research (3.4.1). I then explain my choice of outdoor learning and how I chose my school and participants (3.4.2) before moving on to discuss ethics and consent and explain how I obtained this and why (3.4.3). Next, I discuss my research methods which includes a discussion on the use of preliminary studies (3.4.4) before discussing my data collection in terms of my timeline and the use of questionnaires and focus groups as well as the practicalities of collecting my data (3.4.5). I now begin this section with an outline of my positionality, subjectivity and reflexivity in terms of the design of my research.

3.4.1 Researcher Positionality, Subjectivity and Reflexivity

As I believe in giving power and a voice to young people through my research, I want a research design that can privilege the voices, experiences, and lives of young people by creating opportunities for them to express their views freely and contribute to research agendas (Grover 2004) Yet I also need to be aware that even the notion of 'voice' may be subject to inequality and power issues because

as Canella and Lincoln (2004) point out, the notion of 'voice' means it may be intrinsically considered that young people's voices are suppressed as they speak out from behind dominant ideology, and as researcher, my voice will likely be viewed as the legitimate one. To address this, I intend to approach all aspects of my research reflexively so that I am consciously aware of and actively acknowledge my own beliefs, bias and judgment systems throughout my research process (Jamieson, Govaart and Pownall 2023).

In undertaking research from a critical constructivist view, I appreciate the way power shapes my research as well as my methods of representation and narrative voice (Kincheloe 1997). This is because the personal characteristics (Berger 2015 in Kaaristo 2022) of young people can have an impact on the relationship between them and myself as researcher by causing power dynamics which are then influenced by our respective social, cultural and physical attributes (Etherington 2007 and Wolf 1996 in Kaaristo 2022). Therefore, I remain subjective and aware that I bring my own history, values, assumptions, perspectives, and politics to my research, whilst being mindful that my accounts are also constructions (Bryman et al. 2021). It also means that as Rowe (2014 in Holmes 2020) points out, I acknowledge my own perspectives may alter over time as for Holmes (2020) a researcher's positionality is never fixed but instead is situation and context dependent. As a product of social interactions, teacher-student relationships are continually altering and so my research does not reflect a definitive reality, but a specific version (Bryman et al. 2021) as constructed and expressed by young people.

Through a reflexive approach, I *'identify, construct, critique and articulate my own positionality'* (Holmes 2020 p2) to recognise and divulge the influence this may have both on and in the research process (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2007). Reflexivity allows me as Bryman et al. (2021) state to be open to the ways my cultural, political, and social circumstances might affect my research, by considering how my role as a teacher might also influence the production of research (Braun and Clarke 2013). As part of this process, I documented my personal narrative by means of a research diary. This meant I was able to facilitate understanding of both the phenomena and the research process. By

drawing on excerpts from my diary, I self-consciously critique, appraise, and evaluate how my subjectivity and context influence the research process. Retrospective examination of my thoughts permits meaningful connections between theory and practice to be made, and my evolving knowledge of the complexities of the data and decisions taken during the research process can be understood in terms of how they may affect my research and interpretations of my data. This is because, in being reflexive, I consider the influence I have on my research by exploring my personal and professional experiences, beliefs and values, as well as reflecting on the purpose of my research, and identifying preconceptions I may bring to the research (Malterud 2001 in Holmes 2020). For Creswell and Miller (2000) being reflexive or exploring my own subjectivity, is critical for my research to result in high quality data without the need to try and regulate the social complexities of teacher-student relationships and/or the school environment. In reflecting and being reflexive throughout the research process I am able to identify preconceptions and interpret my findings as constructed by the young people. This is because I can embrace it as an intrinsic part of my research process and use it as part of interpreting and presenting my findings. This is shown in how I reframed my original research statement, which I discuss in 6.6.

Part of reflexivity is in understanding my positionality in terms of insider or outsider, or both. As an insider within the school environment, Gair (2011) suggests I may be more readily accepted as I potentially share characteristics with young people, whilst Heath et al. (2009) argue that I have the benefit of undertaking my research with more knowledge about the school and context of my research compared to 'outsider' researchers. Conversely, for Gasman and Payton-Stewert (2006) as an 'outsider' researcher, I am more able to separate myself emotionally from the context of my research. As a researcher in a school that I do not teach at, in a place I do not live in and researching a year group I do not teach, I have no direct experience of this specific context and so may be less susceptible to potential influence from pre-formed biases and assumptions. Yet I can still be influenced by my own knowledge and experience of being a teacher in a state secondary school. To this end, Day (2012) suggests researcher positionality is especially prominent when undertaking research within a

comparative social context (such as school and education) as here positionality is more complex, whilst Naples (2003) adds that my positionality within this context fluctuates with alterations to my identity as I undertake both researcher and teacher roles.

For O'Connor (2004), taking an insider or outsider position is not mutually exclusive, and so instead, as Dowling (2005) declares, as a researcher, I am not simply an insider or outsider but both as they can coexist concurrently. Rather than my positionality being fixed it has a more fluid nature resulting from interactions between myself as researcher and young people, and between myself and the research setting (Ateljevic et al. 2005). Therefore, as a reflexive researcher, I remain aware of the different aspects of being both an insider as a teacher, and outsider as a researcher, and understand the fluidity of my positionality and possible influences on my interactions in the research as well as my approach and interpretation of outcomes (Foote and Bartell 2011 in Holmes 2020). I will now explain how I chose my sample.

3.4.2 Choosing the sample

In choosing my sample, I carefully considered my choice to use outdoor learning as this is central to my research and essential in guiding my choice of school and subsequently my participants. This is because I required a school who were already using outdoor learning. I shall now look at outdoor learning before discussing the school and participants.

Outdoor Learning

My research examines teacher-student relationships linked to outdoor learning that young people take part in as part of the curriculum. This is because using an outdoor learning space as part of curriculum delivery can provide a 'neutral' or natural learning environment, as the outdoors lacks the constraints of a classroom (Higgins and Nicol 2002, Waite 2010). Carrying out my research in a school using outdoor learning as part of the school curriculum, meant I could explore the influence and impact of this on teacher-student relationships, as both teachers and students were in a neutral environment away from the classroom. I

chose not to use outdoor activities that young people might take part in as extra-curricular activities (i.e. outside of the school curriculum or timetable), as these are often voluntary or take place as one-off events throughout the year. Instead, as Becker et al. (2017) and Moeed and Averil (2010) have stated, regular outdoor learning as part of the curriculum has been shown to have several positive effects on students including positive relationships and academic achievement. Therefore, I wanted to understand how and why outdoor learning as part of the curriculum which young people took part in once a week, might influence, or impact the teacher-student relationships and be translated back into the classroom.

Hattie (2015 in Fuller, Powell and Fox 2017) notes the teacher is central to wherever learning is happening and therefore as outdoor learning was led by teachers from the school rather than outside agencies (Remmen and Iversen 2022), teacher-student relationships were more likely to be positive where the teacher was part of the outdoor learning programme. To this end, by researching young people who were taking part in outdoor learning with their class teachers once a week, I was able to collect data to explore teacher-student relationships.

The school and young people

Through my research I intended to listen to young people's experiences to give greater context and insight into teacher-student relationships and expand on my key themes (Creswell and Creswell 2018). Therefore, I chose to use one English state secondary school based in the Northwest of England. As I was seeking not only to develop greater understanding of the teacher-student relationship rather than generalisations (Barbour 2018) this allowed me to use a pre-existing group in the form of the year 7 students (the first year of secondary school). In this respect, my research was contextual to young people within that specific school resulting in what Cleland, MacLeod and Ellaway (2021) describe as thick, situated descriptions of teacher-student relationships that allowed for connections and associations based on experience. This meant I was able to focus on themes and interpretations that might allow for theoretical generalisability with other year 7 groups in other English secondary schools (Robson 2024). I could also make

theoretical inferences (Mitchell 1983 in Bryman et al. 2021) by comparing my results with previously developed theory from my literature review.

Based on pre-existing criteria of being a secondary school and already running an outdoor learning programme with year 7 students, I used convenience sampling (Andrade 2021) as the school were conveniently accessible and met my criteria. I intentionally limited my sample to a specific sociodemographic in that the criteria for the sample were purposefully chosen as relevant to my study (Andrade 2021). This may have limited external validity as I am unable to apply my findings to the population as a whole. However, generalisability is possible to the population from which the sample was drawn and to those in the population who have the same characteristics as the sample studied (Andrade 2021), based on being young people in year 7 in an English state secondary school.

Using one school in the Northwest of England meant both the school and participants were conveniently accessible to me (Braun and Clarke 2013). I chose a school who were running an outdoor programme for all year 7 students as part of their school day. As all year 7 students took part once a week as part of their school curriculum, I could keep the data collection manageable as I was able to undertake data collection during the school day. My research was longitudinal in that I collected data at 4 different points across the school year. The senior leadership team at the secondary school that had agreed to be the research school wanted to understand if the outdoor learning programme was effective and what the impact on engagement, learning and relationships was. Therefore, all year 7 students were asked to participate in the initial stage of the research before a smaller sample size was used later in the main data collection (see 3.4.4).

The secondary school I carried out my research in is a mixed sex school, with students aged 11-16 years old. It has on average 500 pupils on roll. As part of their key stage 3 curriculum (the subjects the students learn about at year 7 to year 9), all year 7 students take part in outdoor learning for one half day a week. The following is taken from the school's information on the outdoor learning

curriculum for year 7's which provides a brief overview of the outdoor learning programme:

> *'Where possible, we take full advantage of our beautiful surroundings and regular beach trips bear testament to this. Taking pride in our surroundings is always encouraged and, as well as quiet reflection time in the outdoors, we also ask students to demonstrate their passion for our environment by partaking in litter picks and beach cleans'* [1]*(Sample School Document, 2024).*

An assistant head teacher oversees the outdoor learning which is supported by six other teachers who all teach at least one subject to the year 7 students. Students take part in the outdoor learning as a year group split across two days. They are introduced to the different topics they will cover at the start of each half term and then work on projects based on these topics as groups, pairs or individuals depending on preference. Teachers have minimal input in terms of 'teaching' and the sessions are run collaboratively with staff and students often working together. For example, at the beginning of the year, the students are introduced to the local area and undertake a walk on the beach to see what they observe. This is then taken further into a beach combing experience for litter, and a litter project is undertaken. As part of the project, the students keep a record of the litter they observe each week and convert this to data to use in a presentation. They are then asked to design a survey for the rest of the school on their opinions of litter and launch a campaign within school to tackle litter.

3.4.3 Access, Ethics and Consent

My research was approved by the University of Cumbria Ethics Committee following their Research Ethics Policy. This included approval of the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form as well as Letter of Invitation for parents. The headteacher, as the primary gatekeeper deciding on my access to the school, (Felzmann 2009) shared my contact details with the member of staff

[1] *Reference does not appear in reference list to keep the anonymity of the sample school*

running the outdoor learning programme and I was able to liaise with them throughout the research. As Heath et al. (2007 in Felzmann 2009) suggest, the gate-keeping practices and ethos of the school and my limited resources did not facilitate me being able to distribute the questionnaires myself. Instead, I delegated this to the lead teacher who took responsibility for ensuring the questionnaires I sent them were handed to students at the appropriate times throughout the research and completed questionnaires were returned promptly (Felzmann 2009).

Focus groups were conducted during the school day on the school site so that students were available to take part if they wished. This also minimised any potential child protection issues in terms of leaving the young people vulnerable by being alone with me in a part of the school building. As a serving teacher I have a background check to clear me to work with children and young people which the school had seen and accepted and there was always at least one member of teaching staff in the next room and/or across the corridor where the focus groups took place.

Although the young people may be seen as autonomous and capable of giving their own consent (Williams 2016 in Jensen and Laurie 2016) and whilst as a researcher I should be aware of not underestimating children's abilities (Ashcroft et al. 2003 and Morrow and Richards 1996 in Felzmann 2009) consent is based on the idea of being at an age consent can be given (Barbour 2018) and so assumes children's decision-making capabilities are not as developed as adults. Therefore, as they are unable to give informed consent, since I was carrying out research with young people, I sought assent (Felzmann 2009) by gaining informed agreement to participate in the research using information suitable to their level of cognitive and emotional development (Ford 2007 in Felzmann 2009) by ensuring the wording was appropriate, simple and clear to read. However, although assent gives young people consent to take part in the research, for Felzmann (2009) informed consent through parents or guardians is more binding and as I also did not want to potentially be in violation of child protection laws, I gained parental consent as well. Consent was required to ensure that all those involved in the research understood what the research was about, that they had

the option to withdraw their participation and understood any potential risks (Bryman et al. 2021; Jensen and Laurie 2016). The consent form sought separate consent for each aspect of the research process so that consent was obtained to include data in my findings, consent to use anonymous quotations, and consent to use audio recording. This is because as Braun and Clarke (2013) state, it is important to not assume complete consent but rather secure consent for each specific activity to allow participants to make informed decisions on what they are willing to consent to. Prior to undertaking the research, and throughout the process, participants were advised of their right to withdraw their informed consent at any time (UK Statistics Authority 2022)

As all year 7 students in the school took part in the outdoor learning programme, consent forms, participant information and a letter of information was sent to all year 7 parents via the school and handed out to students and teachers by the lead teacher, prior to the research commencing. This was done primarily to save time by giving all students the option to take part by returning the forms. It also ensured there was enough time for these to be completed before the research started so that everyone involved was fully informed about the nature of their involvement and so I had signed records of consent in case of concerns or issues later raised by the young people, their parents, and teachers (Bryman et al. 2021). Obtaining consent from young people and teachers was also about ensuring they understood that the information they shared in the questionnaires and focus groups would be anonymised so that they were unlikely to be identifiable in the findings (Bryman et al. 2021; Jensen and Laurie 2015). This was of particular importance as the research was using young people in a school and the findings were to be shared with the school, so the students may have had concerns over information they shared being identified by their teachers (Barbour 2018). All data was stored using encrypted files, accessed by a secure password. To maintain strict participant confidentiality, identifying details of participants were stored separately to the data itself as advised by the General Data Protection Regulations (Data Protection Act 2018).

In ensuring that my research was ethical, besides gaining access, consent and protecting individual privacy, I remained aware that my research could not be

conducted in a value-neutral way and remained aware of potential power dynamics and the differing status of the young people and myself as researcher (Bryman et al. 2021). To do so meant being conscious of 'taking sides' and addressing distorted perceptions of the young people and myself (Mies 1993 in Bryman et al. 2021).

Having explained how I designed my research and why, I shall now discuss how I carried out my research, exploring the methods I used and why.

3.4.4 Research Methods

I begin this section by discussing why I used preliminary studies as these guided how I approached designing and undertaking my research. As it is important to my research to listen to the voices of young people, I then discuss how I approached the young people participating in my research. I finish this by outlining the data collection methods I used and why.

Preliminary studies

Prior to the main study two preliminary small data collections, using questionnaires, were conducted in two secondary schools to survey young people's opinions on aspects of the main study. I chose to undertake preliminary studies as Bowen et al. (2009) suggest this is a useful starting point to gather information when researching under investigated topics (2.2 and 2.3) such as teacher-student relationships and outdoor learning. In this way, the preliminary studies allowed me to consider various aspects of the main study and to evaluate the feasibility and acceptability of the research (Bowen et al. 2009). I was then able to use the results from the preliminary studies to inform and adapt the design of my main study (Tashakkori and Teddlie 1998) where appropriate. This guided the methods I used by establishing if my research would be effective in its functioning (Bryman et al. 2021).

With the support of the headteacher and permission from the parents, I was able to trial my questionnaires in a secondary school where the whole school were taking part in a form of outdoor experience for a week. For Moser and Kalton

(1986 in Van Teijlingen et al. 2001) the most constructive use of preliminary data collection is being able to evaluate the suitability of the research tool, i.e. questionnaire. Using questionnaires with both open-ended and closed questions, I was able to assess the feasibility of my research and refine my research in terms of design, by highlighting any potential misunderstandings and checking understanding of the concepts used. Therefore, I used this to understand young peoples' understanding of teacher-student relationships, engagement with learning and outdoor learning.

Following the questionnaire, I was then able to use a small number of students from a different school to assess the wording and flow of the questionnaires. I did this with students by asking them to read the questions and answer them to see how they understood and interpreted the questions. I used my preliminary data collections to inform and then adapt my main data collection. This as Gillham (2007) states, allowed me to identify possible answers to the questionnaire and structure the main study questionnaire appropriately. In making use of preliminary studies, as Bryman et al. (2021) state, since the questionnaire for the main study was to be a self-completion questionnaire using both closed and open-ended questions, I was able to check if the instructions were clear, whether there might by any unclear or problematic questions and if the questions flowed. This also served to provide guidance as to the choice of wording for the main study, by ensuring as Bryman et al. (2021) and Creswell and Cresswell (2018) suggest, that I could check young people's understanding and interpretation of terminology such as *outdoor learning; teacher-student relationships and engagement* as relevant to my research.

I was able to deduce that it would be possible to have a self-completion questionnaire but that I would need to adjust some of my wording, particularly the questions on engagement, as Van Teijlingen et al. (2001) state, these appeared not to be clear to the students and had produced widely different answers. The preliminary studies helped me reconsider aspects of my main study (Van Teijlingen et al. 2001) and aided in focusing the wording of the questions to language that students were more likely to understand and therefore answer honestly, thus minimising any misunderstandings when answering the questions.

Using this information, I adapted the questionnaires in the main study, guiding the wording of the questionnaires to adapt the questionnaire's flow and structure and ensure appropriateness (Moser and Kalton 1986 in Van Teijlingen et al. 2001) for young people in being able to complete it.

Young people's participation in my research

Although it was valuable to my research to obtain young people's views, Lushey and Munro (2014) warn that participatory research has the potential to be tokenistic whilst (Larrsson et al. 2018) consider the execution of participatory research, what it is and how it should be used, to be varied to the point that this can lead to missed opportunities in terms of reciprocity and partnership leaving young people unable to play an active role in change. Therefore, I was aware of these potential issues and considered how and to what extent, the young people could participate in my research. Evidence (Ozer, Ritterman and Wanis 2010; Rudduck, Chaplain and Wallace 1996) shows that schools can increase student learning, motivation (and engagement) by involving young people in the processes of the school (Leitch and Mitchell 2007). There is some agreement (Clark 2004; Leitch and Mitchell 2007; Lushey and Munro 2014) that this can be done by involving the young people in research concerning them as it can give young people a voice so that they can play a valuable role in promoting change in schools. Gross (1997 in Clark 2004) meanwhile argues that garnering the views of young people is not only important but can also help to offer richer, more in-depth data and provide insight into how young people experience their lives. For the purposes of my research, I saw participation as gathering the young people's views (Clark 2004; Leitch and Mitchell 2007; Lushey and Munro 2014) whilst remaining reflexive and flexible to allow my research to adapt. Yet using participatory research to its fullest by involving young people in the design and implementation of the research was not possible as I had limited time and access to young people. For Kilpatrick et al. (2007) and McLaughlin (2006 in Lushey and Munro 2014) timescales for research involving participatory approaches can be longer than traditional methods. However, as Thiollent (2011) points out, research participation should not be seen as a binary issue, all or nothing, as there is a great deal of subtlety in the way participation can be imagined and understood. Therefore, it was more appropriate for my research to involve young

people by listening to their voices to understand their experiences and views so that I could create theory to inform practice and potentially affect policy. In this way, though they may not have been involved in designing the research or know the extent of their involvement in finding solutions, in allowing them the freedom to express their views openly and to guide the direction of the data collected, they may feel a sense of empowerment and control (Clark 2004 and Leitch and Mitchell 2007). There is then the possibility that this leads to indirect change as the young people collaborate with teachers to make changes from within the school.

My data collection methods

In designing my research, as Woodside and Wilson (2003) suggest, I gave thought to the most appropriate methods for my research which were dependent on my positionality and the phenomena I wanted to study. To establish a baseline of opinions of young people as a starting point for the main data collection, (focus groups) questionnaires (Appendix 1) (A1-A2) were used at the beginning of the study to understand how students felt about their relationships with their teacher and to ascertain what their level of engagement with learning was. These were used again at the end of the study prior to the final data collection, (focus groups) to track if there had been any changes (Appendix 2) (B1-B2).

As I wanted a way that would enable young people's voices to be heard so they could participate in the research and have free-flowing conversations to 'take over' discussions, I chose to use focus groups for the main data collection, in the context of one school, as a form of participatory research. By involving young people in the research process, through a critical positionality, I could examine potential oppression (Creswell 2009 in Scotland 2012), critiquing the current situation to build new knowledge, and present alternatives (Thiollent 2011). For Chiu (2003 in Kumer and Urbanc 2020) focus groups have an inherently participatory approach based on group processes which as Lune and Berg (2017) in Kumer and Urbanc 2020) point out, assisted in providing rich data as they enabled the young people to talk in-depth about their experiences and opinions. This provided a more 'naturalistic' account through exploration of the processes of interaction (Wellings, Branigan and Mitchell 2000) in teacher-student

relationships. This participatory nature of a group structure for the focus groups stimulated dynamic dialogue amongst the young people which allowed all group members to be engaged and active (Kumer and Urbanc 2020) at various points. To this extent, the use of focus groups is participatory research in that it provided insights and detailed and distinctive accounts rather than outcomes or a record of attitudes or experiences (Barbour 2018). The interpersonal and interactive nature of the focus groups allowed for information that might not be gathered from a single respondent (Agar and MacDonald 1995 and Greenbaum 2003 in Guest et al. 2017) and therefore generated a wider range of views and ideas.

Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2013) state that though not naturally occurring, focus groups allow for close approximations to natural interactions and can generate a swathe of knowledge and understanding as they allow access to particular social phenomenon that other research methods might not allow in the same way. I chose to use focus groups in the context that Kitzinger and Barbour (1999 in Barbour 2018 p2) describe as being *"any group discussion…(where) the researcher is actively encouraging of, and attentive to, the group interaction".* This is because, in this way, focus groups are distinguishable from group interviews which do not openly include participant interaction as part of the research process (Wilson 1997). Due to the informality of focus groups, they offered the capacity to 'give voice' to young people's experiences (Barbour 2018), unlike interviews that might deny access to this type of data due to their group dynamics (Watts and Ebbutt 1987 in Wilson 1997) and which include a lack of attention to the group interaction or researcher-interviewee power imbalance (Wilson 1997). I chose focus groups rather than group or individual interviews as not only are they potentially more time efficient but also, they may provide the same or have little difference in depth of data (Kumer and Urbanc 2020) and offer additional (Seal et al. 1998 in Kumer and Urbanc 2020) and greater breadth and context (Stokes and Bergin 2006 in Kumer and Urbanc 2020) to data that individual interview data does not give. As Morgan (1988 in Barbour 2018) points out, focus groups could also uncover not just what the young people thought but why they thought it. This meant I could explore specific experiences in more detail and understand the young people's construction of knowledge (Krueger and Casey 2015 in Kumer and Urbanc 2020) by allowing patterns of similarities and differences to be

revealed Morgan (2019 in Barbour 2019) that might show hidden features (Longhurst 2010 in Kumer and Urbanc 2020) of teacher-student relationships. As I was able to engage with the young people in a way that encouraged elaboration on their perspectives and experiences which might not have occurred using other methods (Barbour 2018), I not only gained extensive data, but young people's reflections and opinions added to my own distinct ideas on teacher-student relationships (Bloor et al. 2001 in Kumer and Urbanc 2020). However, there were potentially disadvantages to using focus groups such as Fine and Sandstrom (1988) identifying that the young people may be reluctant to express dissent or dissatisfaction, or the possibility of one student dominating the conversation or participants feeling unwilling to talk, particularly if group characteristics are not well matched. These potential issues were minimised by ensuring that I facilitated the group appropriately, that the focus groups shared similar characteristics as they were all year 7 students from the same school and that the focus groups were small (Braun and Clarke 2013).

In situating my research in one English state secondary school to use focus groups to gather collective and individual insights from students about their experiences of teacher-student relationships, this could be seen as a case study (Sturman's 1994 in Bassey 1999). However, I was not undertaking an in-depth exploration of the school to understand teacher-student relationships (Green and Thorogood 2009). Instead, in undertaking critical constructivist research to provide a 'voice' to young people I chose to use focus groups involving elements of participatory research. By designing my data collection in this way, it allowed me to investigate the processes and influences on teacher-student relationships from the students' own understanding and experiences.

I am now going discuss how I collected my data and why, including my timeline for data collection.

3.4.5 Collecting my data

Using the information gathered from my preliminary data collections, I began my research with questionnaires given to all year 7 students at the start of the

academic year. Between September and July, once a week, the year 7 students at the secondary school I was using for my research took part in outdoor learning experiences. As the young people had no prior experience of the school's outdoor learning programme prior to beginning the secondary school, this questionnaire established a foundation of understanding about their views on teacher-student relationships and outdoor learning (Creswell and Creswell 2018). I used this information to inform the subsequent focus group discussions which took place at the beginning of the academic year and then again at the end of the academic year.

The questionnaires allowed for general patterns to be identified and by following up on the questionnaires with focus groups, I explored these further to gain deeper explanations and understanding, as combining the two methods in this way allowed the questionnaire data to be expanded on in the focus group discussions (Creswell and Creswell 2018; Jensen and Laurie 2016). By administering questionnaires again prior to the second focus groups, I was able to track patterns in the data and establish if there had been any changes in the teacher-student relationship, engagement, or learning (Creswell and Creswell 2018). The focus groups were then used again to explore experiences and views as well as to discuss changes in the relationships, engagement and learning and explore possible reasons why (Creswell and Creswell 2018; Jensen and Laurie 2016). To establish how teachers viewed their relationships with students and to examine how this may differ or be similar to young people's views, I conducted one focus group, with teachers involved in outdoor learning, at the beginning of the study, after the student questionnaires. This was to gather information on their opinions on any relationship changes they may have observed, as well as any changes to students' engagement and learning and why. This enabled me to see if there were any specific experiences which might trigger any changes to the teacher-student relationship and why. I believe this provided adequate data for my research as it yielded data that supported some of the literature review findings, the preliminary research and the data gathered from students.

Timeline

Figure 1 shows when the administering of questionnaires to inform the focus groups took place and when the focus groups were conducted and how each stage informed the next throughout the academic year. Information of interest or any themes that emerged across the first focus groups was followed up through the subsequent questionnaire and these then used to inform the final focus group session. If it had been difficult to contextualise or ascertain any common themes from the focus groups, I had the questionnaires that could be adapted to focus in on one recurring factor.

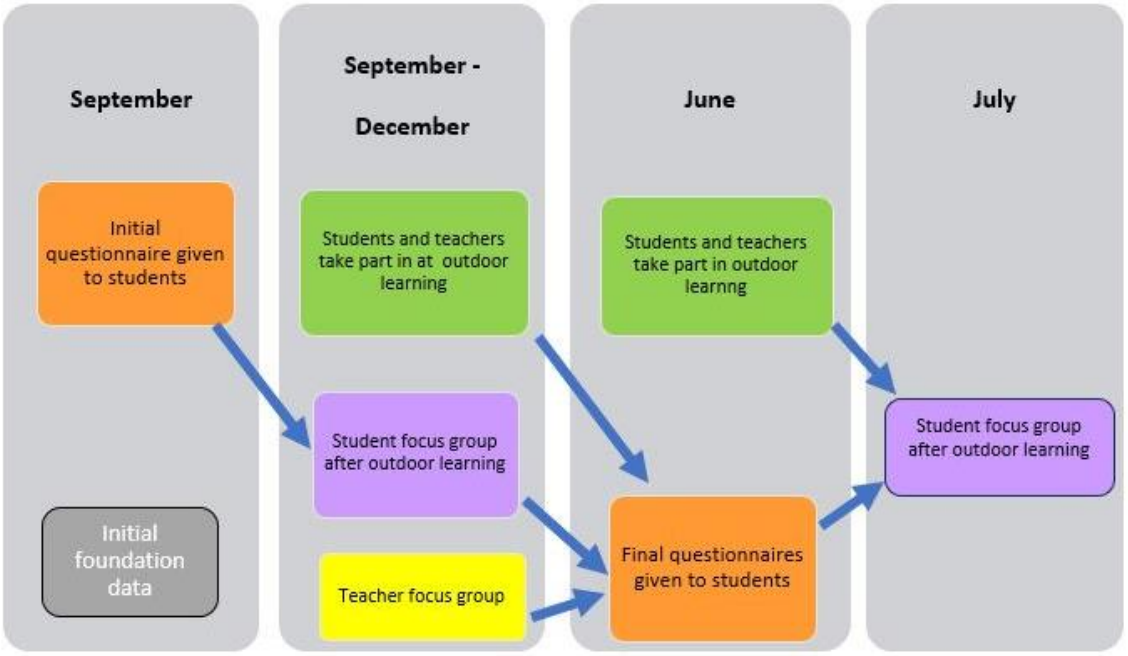

Figure 1 - Timeline

Pre-focus group questionnaires

The use of questionnaires prior to the focus groups with young people allowed for a large sample size to be taken (Rowley 2014) comprising of the year 7 students (chapter 1). The questionnaires made use of my preliminary studies findings and were designed using closed questions to show the young people's descriptive responses rather than offer any detailed explanations. This gave me the opportunity to examine commonalities across the data that might highlight differences or similarities to be explored further in the focus groups. In making use of my preliminary data collections to help identify possible answers, I structured the questions in a way that allowed me to collect data on the frequency

of young people's opinions and experiences on teacher-student relationships (Rowley 2014). To do so, I used questions that were simple, closed-ended and included instruction on how to answer the questions. This meant that I could easily process the answers for analysis and could make the questionnaire as straight forward as possible to ensure the young people understood how to respond and could make the appropriate selection in the answers. However, since it can be difficult to make fixed-choice answers exhaustive, I chose to offer the category of *'other'* on some questions to cater for all viable options (Bryman et al. 2021).

As I wanted to capture an overview of the year 7 cohort views on teacher-student relationships within a limited time, I opted to use Likert scale style questions as Nemoto and Beglar (2014) say, they lend themselves to gathering data quickly from many respondents. Tiered linear Likert scale questions were used to indicate the extent to which the young people agreed or disagreed with statements on teacher-student relationships, outdoor learning, and engagement (Kusmaryono, Wijayanti and Maharani 2022). In this way, the questionnaire asked young people to indicate their level of agreement to statements through a series of points which were scaled with a range of responses (Jamieson 2004). This allowed for the ability to measure young people's attitudes to the phenomenon as a foundation for the main study through assuming the intensity of attitudes on a continuum (Likert 1932 in Kusmaryono, Wijayanti and Maharani 2022). The analysis of the questionnaires is discussed in more detail in 3.5.1.

Focus Groups

Following on from the questionnaires, focus groups investigated young people's perceptions of and any perceived changes in three key areas - *teacher-student relationships, outdoor learning, and student engagement*. The focus groups took place within the school setting and ran as 4 groups with 6-8 students from the school in each group at two points across the academic year. For Brown (2015 in Barbour 2018) this allowed the participants to feel comfortable and secure and for complex data to emerge. A Group size of 6-8 and having 4 groups allowed for patterns across the data to be suitably analysed (Terry and Braun 2011), whilst providing enough data to tell a rich story but not so much that it precluded deep,

complex engagement with the data in the time available (Onwuegbuzie and Leech 2005). To this extent, the number of focus groups and size met optimal suggested standards (Barbour 2018; Kumar and Ubanc 2020, Wilson 1997) for saturation point both in terms of theoretical saturation (when data collection no longer reveals new theoretical insights) and code saturation (where no new codes appear) (Glaser and Straus 1967 in Morgan 2019). Research by Hennink and Kaiser (2022) has shown that saturation points for codes (i.e. the presence of issues in data) can be reached between 4-8 groups as this is the point at which no additional categories are revealed in terms of codes. Four groups are seen to be sufficient to identify a range of new issues (code saturation), but more groups are needed to fully understand these issues (meaning saturation) (Hennink, Kaiser and Weber 2019). As I wanted to use the focus groups at different points in the research, it may have made sense to reconvene the same focus groups later in the study to chart developments across the groups as they become more familiar with one another, which may have offered additional insights (Jarvinen and Demant 2011, Whitley and Campbell 2014 in Guest 2018). However, I was reliant on a senior member of teaching staff at the school to lead not only the handing out and completion of the questionnaires but also arranging who took part in the focus groups. I was also restricted by my time allowance (see 3.4.6) and faced unexpected school closures beyond my control. Due to this, the subsequent focus groups became a mixture of students from across the year group, with a few but not all, having taken part in the first focus groups. Therefore, although using solely repeat students would have allowed me to hear from the same students to understand how their experiences might have altered or to see if new material had been generated, a mixture of one off and repeat focus groups generated data which aligned across the groups and so re-enforced key themes. Using 4 groups that were not reconvened in the subsequent focus groups with the same students, I was able to generate an adequate amount of data for my research to reveal any new issues in teacher-student relationships (Barbour 2018).

The focus groups were unstructured in that I had three key themes for discussion (Miller and Scoptur 2016 in Kumer and Urbanc 2020) which were supported by the data from pre-focus group questionnaires. As Laurie and Jensen (2016)

suggest is appropriate, I introduced the themes using open ended questions to stimulate discussion and allow for it to be steered along my key themes. By being less structured I was able to reveal the young people's perspectives to find new thoughts and insights into teacher-student relationships (Morgan 1988 in Kumer and Urbanc 2020). As facilitator or moderator, I provided the themes to discuss, ensuring all young people had the opportunity to speak and enabling the discussions to unfold naturally (Barbour 2018; Jensen and Laurie 2016). The low numbers of young people in the focus groups and having a facilitator rather than interviewer minimised group power issues by being less intimidating, making it easier for the young people individuals to feel able to take part, and by allowing me to quickly identify and address problems (Braun and Clarke, 2013). For Wilson (1997) this open and supportive environment of discussion can make the focus group feel more accessible and more natural, thus enabling the young people to explore and clarify their views. This is because as Coenen et al. (2011) explain, the non-directive nature of the focus groups allows young people to share their experiences, comment, explain and disagree. This interaction with each other leads to elaborated and detailed accounts of their experiences as they can respond instinctively and honestly (Barron 2000 in Grover 2004) and meant I was able to gain their unique perspectives and experiences.

As the focus groups were conducted on the school site during the school day, I had limited time with the groups. Therefore, since the nature of focus groups is to enable open discussion (Barbour 2018; Guest et al. 2017), I needed to ensure, as much as possible, that I kept the group focused whilst allowing them to freely discuss their experiences, share their views and develop their own perspectives. Introducing the focus groups sessions, therefore, was not only designed to help relax the young people and encourage them to feel comfortable in discussions (Barbour 2018; Bryman et al. 2021) but also allowed me to introduce the key themes and prompt group interactions. I did this by asking students to record their initial thoughts under the three key themes on a basic visual (Figure 2) to encourage involvement (Clark et al. 2013). However, for Bragg and Buckingham (2008) the use of visual methods is not a neutral tool as individuals use them with their own backgrounds and knowledge of different cultural forms and conventions within the context of the school environment so that they may produce

recognisable 'genres' of response rather than unmediated presentations of their viewpoints or experiences. For this reason, I chose to use the visuals as a starting point to the discussions rather than as a recording of student's experiences and perceptions. Though I began the initial focus groups by introducing the sessions using a basic visual format, I chose not to do so in the subsequent focus groups as it had become clear the young people preferred to verbalise their thoughts and discuss after an initial basic verbal introduction of the themes. This was part of allowing the research process to unfold naturally and being adaptable and flexible as the moderator of the group (Murphey et al. 1992 in Barbour 2018) and researcher, plus the visuals had been used in the same way as the questionnaires, to provide a foundation to the subsequent focus groups.

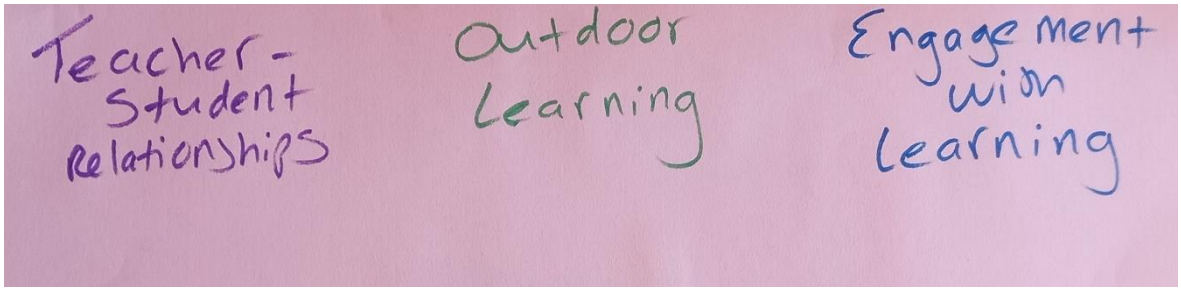

Figure 2 - Basic visual

After the introduction, I focused on one of my themes at a time enabling the young people to lead the direction of the discussion but prompting responses to further answers or raise issues that were not spontaneously given (Barbour 2018). By doing this, it helped to produce data that was reflective of the students' views and experiences (Woolner et al. 2012) of teacher-student relationships. The focus groups were audio recorded but not videoed and transcribed later as I did not wish to analyse non-verbal communication. However, by not videoing it, it limited the ability to see who was speaking when transcribing the focus group data later. Yet by not videorecording the focus groups, it made the experience less intimidating for the young people and more likely that they would be open in their discussions (Barbour 2018). Minimal hand-written notes were taken to allow students to feel more at ease when speaking but to allow me the opportunity to capture the key discussion points to use as guidance when transcribing. I was not able to control issues that students potentially had with other students within the school, however as Barbour (2018) points out, this can be used to clarify

viewpoints and encourage the young people to explore ideas further. As a secondary school teacher with over 14 years' experience, as Puchta and Potter (2004 in Barbour 2018) point out, I possessed transferable skills to enable me to facilitate the group discussions, working with the young people in the age range I was researching within the formal school environment. I did however, need to remain aware that my role was not to control the group discussion (Bloor et al. 2001 in Barbour 2018) but to facilitate it and to continually examine any expectations I may have had about the degree of power I held within the group (Barbour 2018) as De Oliveria 2011 (in Barbour 2018) suggests, young people likely possess a high degree of group skills to regulate the discussions.

3.4.6 Practicalities/ Data collection issues

Students who took part in the focus groups were invited by the lead teacher at the school and these students had all returned individual and parental consent forms to agree to take part in the research. I was provided with a space to conduct the focus groups so the conversations could be recorded without too much background noise and so that the students could relax and be more open in their discussion. The time I had available to conduct the focus groups owing to the school having to provide time during the school day, reduced the amount of time for each focus group session to around 40 minutes. However, as Heary and Hennessy (2002) suggest the ideal length of time to be 60-90 minutes for year 7 aged children (11-12 years) whilst Morgan et al. (2002) suggest two 20-minute sessions with a break in-between, I believe 40 minutes was appropriate for the young people in my research.

Having discussed my research design and methods, I will now explain how I approached analysing my data, including how this connects to my research approach.

3.5 Approaching Data Analysis

By focusing on young people's experiences and voices, I want to use my data collection to examine their understanding and interpretations of teacher-student

relationships (Spiegelberg, 1975) and how they make sense of them. My approach to analysing my data takes an overall interpretative view in alignment with my positionality and is flexible so that my research can evolve from each data collection point. This is of particular importance for me in terms of how I have chosen to use my data to build up a picture of teacher-student relationships and applied each stage of data collection to inform and guide the next. To this end I analysed my questionnaires and focus group data separately using two different approaches to account for my questionnaires being designed using Likert Scales.

In this section I explain how I have chosen to analyse my data and how I approach doing this. I begin by outlining how I analysed the pre-focus group questionnaires (3.5.1) before explaining my reasons for using a different approach to data analysis for my focus groups (3.5.2). I then discuss how using reflexive thematic analysis for data analysis supports being subjective in my research (3.5.3). Next, I discuss how my approach to data analysis allowed me to remain aware of my own influence on my research and the influence of the social context of school as well as how this impacts my data analysis (3.5.4). I then briefly outline how my choice of approach works with choosing to take a critical constructivist approach to my research and how this impacts my data analysis (3.5.5). I finish the section discussing the process of undertaking my data analysis and why (3.5.6). I start with outlining how I analysed the pre-focus group questionnaires.

3.5.1 Analysing the pre-focus group questionnaires

As already explained (3.4.5) the questionnaires were designed for young people to indicate their level of agreement to statements through a series of points. As a foundation for the main study, these points were scaled with a range of responses so that the ability to measure young people's attitudes to teacher-student relationships could be measured by assuming the intensity of attitudes on a continuum. Yet Rowley (2014) suggests that this continuum presumes each young person is 'coming from the same place' when there is no way to know if the questions are understood in the same way. As Jamieson (2004) states, this is because the intervals between the values are not equal. Therefore, the data were assigned a score, (i.e. 5 for strongly agree, 4 for agree, 3 for no opinion, 2

for disagree, and 1 for strongly disagree) and these scores used to convert the students answers to percentages (Jamieson 2004). Yet as Bishop and Herron (2015) point out, the original scale was ordinal so that participant responses could be seen to be greater or lesser than other responses but without the concept of distance to understand by how much by. After assigning a score, the scale becomes an interval and thus has the concept of distance for example between strongly agree and agree, but that distance is the same so that the information provided may be exaggerated (Bishop and Herron (2015). In other words, it is difficult to understand by how much more participants might strongly agree as opposed to agree they have positive relationships with their teachers. For Nemoto and Beglar (2014) this means Likert scale questions are limited as the numerical data cannot provide a complete picture of teacher-student relationships. However, as Bishop and Herron (2015) argue, I used the questionnaire with Likert scale questions as a tool to consider my data and what it might show. The questionnaires were a way to gather data on young people's attitudes that could be explored further. To do so, I adapted what Gillham (2007) calls a tandem approach to allow deeper exploration of the data from the questionnaires, by using them in conjunction with focus groups. In this way, converting the questionnaire data scores to percentages allowed me to identify areas to discuss further in the focus groups and so I shall now explain the approach I took to analyse my focus group data and why.

3.5.2 Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA)

As I am aware of how my roles as both researcher and teacher influence the production of research (Braun and Clarke 2013), I approach the research process reflexively (3.4.2) and chose to analyse my data using what Braun and Clarke (2021) refer to as Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA). This approach, developed by Braun and Clarke (2022) places emphasis on me as the researcher in that it is a more focused means of analysing my data by approaching it as a *'subjective, situated, aware and questioning researcher'* through the practice of critical reflection (Braun and Clarke 2022 p5), thereby being a reflexive practitioner. Braun and Clarke (2022) consider RTA as part of a 'family' of thematic analysis approaches. For them it is the most fully qualitative approach to analysis in

qualitative research. In other words, it encapsulates qualitative research, within a qualitative paradigm, using qualitative tools, techniques, and philosophy. For me RTA aligns the most appropriately with my chosen method and research aim, objective, and positionality. This is because RTA uses guidelines rather than rules which are grounded by qualitative values (Braun and Clarke 2022) and it values subjectivity as essential to undertaking successful reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2022; Finlay 2002).

RTA supports my research goals of wanting to explore deep, complex, nuanced meaning and understanding (Braun and Clarke 2022) in terms of teacher-student relationships. Using an RTA approach to my data analysis means not necessarily having a set structure or rigid framework which allows for my analysis to be organic and fluid (Braun and Clarke 2022. In RTA there is no strict system to follow in terms of how to analyse or report my data findings but rather Braun and Clarke (2022) offer guidelines for the analytical process in the form of six phases: *(1) dataset familiarisation; (2) data coding; (3) initial theme generation; (4) theme development and review; (5) theme refining, defining and naming; (6) writing up.* These phases are not a method but rather are part of a bigger set of values, assumptions and practices which collectively make up the method. Braun and Clarke (2022) acknowledge that as a reflexive researcher, I may circle back to different points of my analytical undertaking, meandering until I am comfortable with my understanding and interpretations of the data.

In RTA themes are not seen to exist within the data but rather develop from the analytical process. In this way, RTA embeds reflexivity into the analytical process so that as multiple codes are combined, themes develop which are formed as part of both interpreting the data and examining my own beliefs, assumptions, and practices to understand how they affect my research (Braun and Clarke 2022). The continuation of reflexivity as part of this process leads to further theme development as patterns in the data are noticed and linked together to show shared meanings clustered around a core commonality or point that Braun and Clarke 2022) call a central organising concept.

As discussed in 3.4.2, I am undertaking subjective research and as Braun and Clarke (2022) point out, I approach my research subjectively. Therefore, I will now discuss how this relates to using RTA.

3.5.3 Using RTA to be subjective

In being subjective, (3.4.2 and 3.7.1) I not only consider my own position in my research but also look at the interpretation of the subjective experience of young people. To do so, I take account of how they experienced teacher-student relationships and acknowledge my own experiences and influence on the research. As Gough and Madill (2012) point out, I am unable to 'read the minds of young people' so my analysis of the data deduces meaning of young people's experiences, locating their accounts within the context of school and within educational policies. My approach to subjectivity means not only understanding how young people feel and what they think about their teacher-student relationships, but why multiple divergent views might exist (Lundberg, Fraschini and Aliani 2022). My choice of RTA allows me to analyse my data in a way that acknowledges the multiple subjective experience of young people as well as my own positionality and how my interpretations of the data may be influenced by my positionality and influence the analytical process. Engaging in reflexivity throughout the research process, but particularly in my data analysis, allows me to explain how my subjective perspective moulded my research as it was interwoven with my choice of a qualitative research process (Olmos-Vega et al. 2023). Not only have I chosen to approach my research subjectively but have also chosen to be reflexive (3.4.2). Therefore, in the next section, I will explain how being reflexive works with my choice of reflexive thematic analysis to analyse my data.

3.5.4 Using RTA to be reflexive and reflect

I take the view Braun and Clarke (2013) offer that my analytical interpretations during my research in terms of what I might hear, see or experience throughout my research are affected by my values and assumptions. As Greenbank (2003 in Holmes 2020) and Bourke (2005 in Holmes 2020) point out, a researcher brings

their own history, values, assumptions and perspectives, both personal and professional to the research and so these along with my ethics, personal integrity, and social values as well as competency, may influence the research process. By choosing to be reflexive in both my approach and analysis, I gave critical attention to the way young people's experiences and my own views might influence my research and considered how my role as a researcher and a teacher might impact the production of research (Braun and Clarke 2013). I remained continually aware of the context of the research being the school and of the social and political nature of educational policies and societies understandings of education and school.

For Lincoln (1991 in Guba and Lincoln 1994) as the researcher, I am an active and invested participant in my own research, enabling interpretation and understanding of the young people's voices as well as my own. My experiences, particularly within education, my views and personal meanings helped shape my research questions (1. 5) and through an examination of myself, these helped to form my primary evidence (Moustakas 1994 in Finlay 2002). From personal introspection Finlay (2002) suggests that I may perceive 'new' thoughts about my research. This has led to deeper self-awareness as I am reflecting on my personal reactions, emotions, and experiences, but as Finlay (2002), cautions, I need to ensure that I do not close off the voices of the young people through focusing too much on myself. Instead, my personal revelations are used as the launch for interpretations and general insights. Therefore, I reflected on the research relationship to explore the mutual meanings and any conflicts between myself and young people, by considering how my role as the researcher and a teacher might impact our interactions as I may also be viewed as having some kind of authority and influence (Ballinger and Payne 2000 in Finlay 2002).

Using an RTA approach to my data analysis means not necessarily having a clear structured framework which allows for my analysis to be organic and fluid as it is conducted in an open manner (Braun and Clarke 2022).Through the process of reflection, I therefore explored what my choices and viewpoint might permit or reject (Wilkinson 1988) in terms of my analysis. Hertz (1997 in Finlay 2002) advocates doing this by being aware of my own position and interests and by consciously situating myself within my research. Braun and Clarke (2022)

propose exploring, understanding, and being clear about ideas regarding myself, the world and my beliefs and values before reflecting on how they influence the way I interpret and make sense of my research. As I used focus groups, being an active participant in my own research (Lincoln 1991 in Guba and Lincoln 1994) meant I was able to hear and take account of the multiple voices of the young people who may offer conflicting views, thus, enabling me to explore how meanings might be negotiated and co-constructed between myself and young people (Finlay and Gough 1995 in Finlay 2002). Yet my research is within the context of a school environment and the English school system, and so I applied a social critique to my reflexivity during data analysis in that I wanted to acknowledge tensions that might arise from differing social positions, such as the teacher-student relationship, as well my own position as both a researcher and teacher. For Finlay (2002), a strength in this is that I can recognise numerous shifting researcher-participant positions. This is of particular importance to me in being able to strike a balance between exploring the influence of my own and students' positions, and wider social context, whilst ensuring that I do not enter what Finlay (2002) calls endless 'deconstructions of deconstructions' so that meanings become lost.

As I am using a critical constructivist approach (3.2), I will now outline how my choice of RTA works with choosing to take a critical constructivist approach to my research and how this impacts my data analysis.

3.5.5 RTA and Critical Constructivist view

Using RTA means I can explore the meanings of teacher-student relationships from young people's view, applying a critical constructivist (3.3.2) lens to interpret the data whilst remaining representative of young people's experiences (Braun and Clarke 2006/2022) and understanding these within the school context and wider society. As Kincheloe (2005), suggests I may be unable to notice how power and its dominant ideologies position themselves in relation to my analytical writing, yet by taking a reflective thematic analysis approach in my data analysis, through reflexivity, I can expose this dynamic which Kincheloe (2005) argues, is essential to undertaking critical constructivist research. This is because the

reflexive nature of RTA supports giving critical attention to the influence of myself on my research and my roles as researcher and teacher, as well as how the social structures of school and education may impact my research. In this way I consider how these might affect my interpretation of the data by exploring the influences on it and documenting them through my analysis.

The flexible nature and adaptability of RTA (Braun and Clarke 2006) means I can allow my data analysis to be fluid and organic which supports using a critical constructivist lens. This is because it enables me to view my data from the young people's perspective whilst acknowledging my influence on this and exploring how the English education system might operate to reproduce or challenge dominant social-political and economic structures (Kincheloe 2005) and to understand how this might impact young people and the teacher-student relationships. By engaging with my data, I can understand young people's beliefs, values and perspectives and thus understand teacher-student relationships from their viewpoint. Through RTA, I can both reflect on and decipher reality as opposed to just understanding the young people's experiences of reality to generate theory that is grounded in the data (McLeod 2011). I can analyse my data to address issues of power and listen to the 'voices' of young people (Carspecken 1996), examining how power and its dominant ideologies might be positioned in relation to the data the focus groups produced (Kincheloe 1997).

3.5.6 Undertaking Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA)

I chose RTA as there is no right or wrong way to approach or undertake the analytical process. Instead, Braun and Clarke (2022) (3.5.1) suggest guidelines to undertaking RTA with six different phases *(see Table 1*). This six-phase process is not fixed or one-directional but instead multi-directional with different phases that can be undertaken at any or all relevant points of the research process and re-taken again if and when necessary. In this way, Braun and Clarke (2022) suggest that as a researcher, though I may move along a trajectory from dataset to developed analysis, this can involve moving backwards, sideways and sometimes even in circles as part of the process. I intend to use Braun and Clarke's (2022) six-phase process as it gives me the opportunity to construct and

often dismantle and reconstruct my ideas from the data so that I can interpret and connect elements of the data (Braun and Clarke (2006) for my overall analysis. The flexibility in being able to move in different directions throughout my research analysis means that I feel able to explore the various elements of my data from the personal accounts of the young people's experiences and understandings to wider constructs in the school environment and larger social contexts (Braun and Clarke 2013).

From a practical stance, applying reflective thematic analysis to my research required that I was not only reflexive (Trainor and Bundon 2021) but that I approached my analysis in a way that allowed me to be reflective and thoughtfully engage with my data and the analytical process (Braun and Clarke 2019) Therefore, I feel that analysis of the different data from my studies needed to be done in a way that not only reflected my own positionality with regards to my research but also provided an approach that allowed me to explore the data for meanings, connections, and context (Braun and Clarke 2006).

Table 1 - (adapted from Braun and Clarke 2022 p35-36)

Phase 1 *(Data familiarisation)*	Familiarising myself with my dataset by reading and re-reading the transcripts and making notes on insights or analytical ideas.
Phase 2 *(Data coding)*	Coding by identifying interesting, relevant, or meaningful segments of my data and applying labels relevant to my research question and my analytical understanding.
Phase 3 *(Initial theme generation)*	Generating initial themes by identifying shared patterned meanings across the dataset which might offer a 'meaningful' answer to my research question.
Phase 4 *(Theme development and review)*	Developing and reviewing themes and ensuring they make sense in relation to the coded extract and full data set to highlight the most important patterns across the dataset in accordance with my research question.
Phase 5 *(Theme refining, defining and naming)*	Refining, defining, and naming themes, building them around a strong core concept, defining them concisely and clearly
Phase 6 *(Writing Up)*	Writing up, including note writing throughout my analytical process and formal writing up of my analysis to weave together my analytical story about my dataset to address my research question

Phase 1 - Getting to know my data

As my focus group data is the main data collection, taking a more naturalistic and interpretive approach (Denzin and Lincoln,1994) to data analysis allows for interpretation of this data. I began the analytical process by immersing myself in my data, (Phase 1, see Table 1), listening to the focus group recordings, then reading and re-reading my transcripts of these, jotting down notes and creating diagrams to critically view what I was hearing and reading. This helped me to not only make sense of my data but allowed me to question, critique, and query it whilst also reflecting on the influence of my own positionality (Trainor and Bundon 2021) and my role in the production of knowledge (Hill and Dao 2020 in Trainor and Bundon 2021).

Phase 2 - Coding

I did not begin my research journey with a hypothesis that required testing but rather with an 'idea' or concept that I wanted to explore (Braun and Clarke 2022). Therefore, in choosing RTA I was not using a pre-determined set of codes or using codes to evidence themes, but rather building codes from which my themes emerged as I treated coding as part of the building blocks of my analysis, with clear labels of their own and existing on their own merit (Braun and Clarke 2022). By familiarising myself with my data through phase 1, I was able to explore different meanings from it, identifying patterns and placing labels in the form of codes on the parts of the focus group transcripts that I felt might be potentially relevant to my research questions. I chose to code by hand, reading my hard copies of the data and identifying codes to label as this worked best for my way of seeing, thinking about, and processing the information, (Phase 2 see Table 1). In this way, coding, as part of my reflexive approach to thematic analysis, was subjective and interpretive (Braun and Clarke 2022).

As I intended to 'give a voice' to young people and understand their expressed experiences, I looked for meaning within the data by coding inductively to identify patterns linked to the data (Patton 2015), without using a pre-existing coding frame. Being reflexive was essential as Fine (1992 in Braun and Clarke 2022) points out, who I am shapes my data and how I interpret and express meaning about it. Although my coding began by looking at what young people had said, exploring meaning (semantically) through their expressed ideas, I also explored implicit and sometimes abstract meanings (latent) that were potentially hidden. This is because as Braun and Clarke (2022) suggest, the level at which coding can be done, either semantic or latent, should be seen as two ends of a spectrum and approaches to data coding can be combined depending on the research aims. As I wanted to explore the young people's experiences and make sense of them, through reflexive thematic analysis my initial coding was semantic and then where appropriate veered towards latent.

Phases 3, 4 and 5 - Themes and Development

My use of RTA enabled me to look for and identify common threads across the focus groups (DeSantis and Ugarriza 2000), yet my reflexive approach was not designed to tell a standardised or singular story (Nadar 2014 in Braun and Clarke 2022) but to communicate a patterned meaning through exploring themes from my data. I used the common threads I identified to interpret and understand the young people's behaviours, thoughts, or experiences (Braun and Clarke 2019/2022) of teacher-student relationships and outdoor learning.

I explored the shared meanings young people conveyed about their teacher-student relationships across the different context of the classroom and outdoors. In generating themes, my research was able to show how my research question could be seen and what the significance of this might be (Braun and Clarke 2022). This was done by engaging with my codes and gathering potentially connected codes (ones that might share a similarity of meaning) together to explore further. Through RTA, I used the data to not only construct themes but to reframe, reinterpret, and/or connect elements of the data (Kiger and Varpio 2020). I did this by immersing myself in a process of identifying themes, then analysing and classifying these to fully explore and report on teacher-student relationships and possible interconnections (Niasse 2023). I used my own method of thematic mapping (Braun and Clarke 2022), drawing tables and diagrams to help me to visualise my themes and the connections. For Ely et al. (1997 in Braun and Clarke 2022) themes come from our thinking about our data and in the links we create as we understand them and so my theme development was not a linear process, but rather more flexible as I adjusted and revised them, moving both forwards and backwords in the process. Thus, this was an important part of RTA in being able to engage with my data and myself thoroughly and openly (Braun and Clarke 2022). My analysis of the focus group data using RTA explored what the young people understood and experienced in terms of teacher-student relationships and outdoor learning and allowed me to examine why (Rabiee 2004).

Phase 6 - Creating and telling my analytical story

In developing themes, I considered my approach to the data in terms of whether I was analysing individual students or the students as part of a larger group. Morgan (1997 in Massey 2011) for example, suggests that the focus group is the unit of analysis and therefore when reporting a single response, I was aware of its articulation as part of a larger social context (Hollander 2004 in Massey 2011). However, I did not wish to attached meaning to specific individuals but rather looked at what was said in the group overall. Meanwhile, Myers and Macnaghten (2001 in Massey 2011) state that the process of interaction between young people is what it is important, whilst Hyden and Bulow (2003 in Massey 2011) suggest the focus group data that emerges contains individual features as well as features that arise as distinctive to being members of a group. For them, the interaction of the young people as part of the group, generates something which cannot be simplified to individual members (Hyden and Bulow, 2003 in Massey 2011). This means that when analysing and writing up my data, in representing the voices of the young people, by taking an RTA approach, I had to consider my own editorial power and choose not only what I would include or leave out but also how I would represent the views of the young people so as not to re-describe or reshape their views through my own interpretation (Leitch and Mitchell 2007). As Fine (2002 p218) argues, even a 'giving voice' approach *'involves carving out unacknowledged pieces of narrative evidence that we select, edit, and deploy to border our arguments'.*

3.6 Summary

This chapter began by explaining my philosophical position, which included my views and beliefs of reality and understanding of knowledge as this underpins my research and how I approach it. I outlined my research framework to show that although I may choose a particular approach, I am aware that this is not rigid and explained that throughout the research process, I remain reflexive.

My approach of interpretivism informed by constructivism was discussed in terms of how they connect with my own views and beliefs. I linked these to my research

approach to show I want to understand young people's experiences from their perspective as well as understanding how their experiences might be socially constructed. In using both an interpretivist and constructivist approach, I explored how I will seek the views of young people whilst acknowledging the influence of my own views and experiences and examining the role that school and educational policies might have in shaping young people's perspectives, within the time and space in which they are created. My research design was discussed in terms of my approach and explained my sample, my reasons for undertaking a preliminary data collection and choice to use questionnaires and then focus groups. My data collection was outlined in terms of the methods used in line with my beliefs and values and I have explained how I collected my data and the timeline for this and included any issues with this.

My approach to data analysis concluded the chapter to explain how this links to my approach and why. I explain how I undertook my analysis of my data to show how my questionnaires and focus groups were analysed separately owing to how the questionnaire data was used to inform the focus group discussions. Therefore, the next chapter explores the data to discuss what I understand it shows from young people's perspectives. As the questionnaire data was used to inform the focus group discussions and establish students understanding of teacher-student relationships at the start of year 7, this data is looked at first.

4 Students' Voices – looking at the data

4.1 Introduction

My research focuses on young people in an English secondary school and using focus groups, is designed to listen to their views, thoughts, and opinions. I take a reflexive thematic analysis approach not just to my data analysis but throughout the research process as I critically reflect on my positionality, my role in and influence on the research process and the data. In doing so, I am, as Braun and Clarke (2022) say, a 'subjective, situated, aware and questioning researcher' using my research not to find 'truths' but to interpret young people's views and explore how these may be located within and contextualised by young people's experiences as well as the social, cultural, and political context.

Focus groups (3.4.4) were used to gather data at two points across the academic year, so to ease identifying any comments made by students that I will discuss in chapter 4 and 5, I have included a table (*Focus Group Participants, Table 2*). The table also includes the codes I have given to the three teachers I spoke to in the first focus group sessions. When referencing students' or teachers' comments throughout chapters 4 and 5, these codes will be used.

Table 2 - Focus group participants

November focus groups	**Student**	**Code**		**November focus groups**	**Student**	**Code**
1	A	FG1N/A		2	A	FG2N/A
	B	FG1N/B			B	FG2N/B
	C	FG1N/C			C	FG2N/C
	D	FG1N/D			D	FG2N/D
	E	FG1N/E			E	FG2N/E
	F	FG1N/F			F	FG2N/F
November focus groups	**Student**	**Code**		**November focus groups**	**Student**	**Code**
3	A	FG3N/A		4	A	FG4N/A
	B	FG3N/B			B	FG4N/B
	C	FG3N/C			C	FG4N/C
	D	FG3N/D			D	FG4N/D
	E	FG3N/E			E	FG4N/E
	F	FG3N/F			F	FG4N/F
	G	FG3N/G			G	FG4N/G
	H	FG3N/H			H	FG4N/H
July focus groups	**Student**	**Code**		**July focus groups**	**Student**	**Code**
1	A	FG1J/A		2	A	FG2J/A
	B	FG1J/B			B	FG2J/B
	C	FG1J/C			C	FG2J/C
	D	FG1J/D			D	FG2J/D
	E	FG1J/E			E	FG2J/E
	F	FG1J/F			F	FG2J/F
3	A	FG3J/A		4	A	FG4J/A
	B	FG3J/B			B	FG4J/B
	C	FG3J/C			C	FG4J/C
	D	FG3J/D			D	FG4J/D
	E	FG3J/E			E	FG4J/E
	F	FG3J/F			F	FG4J/F
	G	FG3J/G			G	FG4J/G
	H	FG3J/H			H	FG4J/H
Teachers		**Code**				
	1	TFGN/1				
	2	TFGN/2				
	3	TFGN/3				

In chapter 3, I explained I had undertaken two preliminary data collections using questionnaires, to establish a foundation for my research. Although the questionnaires were used as a starting point for my research, one questionnaire revealed data of its own as the students voiced their interpretation of the term 'engagement'. As I will be referring to the phrases and words used by the students individually in chapter 4 and 5, I have coded individual students from the preliminary questionnaire shown in table 2, (*Preliminary questionnaire participants, Table 3).*

Table 3 - Preliminary questionnaire participants

Student	Code	Student	Code	Student	Code	Student	Code
1	QPL.1	6	QPL.6	11	QPL.11	16	QPL.16
2	QPL.2	7	QPL.7	12	QPL.12	17	QPL.17
3	QPL.3	8	QPL.8	13	QPL.13	18	QPL.18
4	QPL.4	9	QPL.9	14	QPL.14	19	QPL.19
5	QPL.5	10	QPL.10	15	QPL.15	20	QPL.20

Together, this data aids my understanding of what students believe builds good relationships as well as what impedes them. It shows how and why outdoor learning impacts on teacher-student relationships, along with how both teacher-student relationships and outdoor learning influence each other, and students' engagement with their learning. Therefore, in this chapter, I consider my data by stating what I understand it shows and through reflexive thematic analysis, lay out the foundations for a deeper discussion in chapter 5.

To help identify different elements of my data, aid the flow of my discussion, and show my thoughts and interpretations about what the data might be saying, I have used sub-headings throughout this chapter. My sub-headings relate to three overarching themes that I have considered and reflected on to offer an interpretation of the impact of outdoor learning on students' engagement with their learning. In this respect, I have used reflexive thematic analysis to make sense of my data (Patton 2015) and offer a critical narrative of students' views on teacher-student relationships, outdoor learning and engagement with learning. In chapter 5, I use my three themes to explore interconnections between the

literature, theory and general context of my research, as well as the implications of this, by critically reflecting on my interpretations through my research questions (Braun and Clarke 2022, p.132).

I begin this chapter with section **4.2, Students' views of teacher-student relationships** by considering the students' thoughts and feelings of their teacher-student relationships. This is because this is the beginning of the journey for my research and sets the scene for later themes as my research centres around students' experiences of relationships with teachers. During focus group discussions students began by expressing their thoughts on teacher-student relationships in classrooms. This forms the basis for further discussions and lays the foundations for understanding students' reports of teacher-student relationships by offering context for their experiences and the themes I have interpreted from this. In sections 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5, I discuss my data under my three themes.

My next section, **4.3, Theme one: Behaviours,** considers teacher and student behaviours by reflecting on students' reasonings that both teachers and students' behaviours can either build or undo a positive relationship with their teacher. I explore the extent to which the students argue that behaviour influences engagement and learning and what they feel this means for teacher-student relationships, as well as the way that students feel the behaviour of both teachers and students is impacted by the learning environment.

Section **4.4, Theme Two: Contrasting Learning Environments and Approaches** centres around the contrast between indoor and outdoor learning environments. This is because for young people in my study, there is a distinction to be made between being in a classroom and being outdoors. Through this theme, I explore the restrictiveness of the classroom contrasted with the sense of freedom the outdoors offers. This contrast between the two environments impacts on both students and teachers, and consequently teacher-student relationship, as well as students' engagement with learning. Therefore, I reflect on how and why the different learning environments underpin the students' willingness to engage in learning as well as how and why students' abilities to

build positive relationships with their teacher are affected by the learning environment.

My final section **4.5, Theme Three: Requirements** refers to the students' interpretations of what they view as key to building and sustaining positive teacher-student relationships. By reflecting on what the students stated they require for positive teacher-student relationships, I examine the interconnection of these and their relationship to the learning environment, as well as teacher and student behaviours, to understand how students perceive how this influences their engagement with learning.

4.2 Students' views of teacher-student relationships

As students participated in outdoor learning across year 7, I start by looking at my pre-focus group questionnaire data as this identified students' initial views on their relationships with teachers as they began year 7 and started secondary school. By beginning with my questionnaire data, it provides a starting point for further discussion on students' views of teacher-student relationships. I then look at the focus group data and consider the final pre-focus group questionnaire to identify changes in students' views of teacher-student relationships by the end of the academic year. This is because I want to understand what impact outdoor learning has on teacher-student-relationships and what the influence of this is on students' engagement with learning throughout year 7.

At the start of the school year, my initial questionnaire showed a large proportion (73%) of students felt they had a good relationship with all or most of their teachers, whilst only a small minority (3%) of students felt that their relationships were poor. The remaining students stated that some of their relationships were good. This may be significant as research by Eccles and Roeser (2001) (2.3.2 and 2.4.3) and Juvonen (2006) (2.3.2) suggests students are more motivated to learn when relationships with teachers are seen as positive. In a similar way, my questionnaire data shows that at the beginning of the academic year, a large majority (77%) of year 7 students perceived that **all** or **most** of their teachers in

secondary school would be *'friendly and nice'* to them. A small amount (16%) of students felt that some teachers would be *'friendly and nice'* and the final 7% stated that none of the teachers would be '*friendly and nice'.* This is line with Jindall-Snape's (2010,2018) (2.2.4) research which suggests most students have no reason to believe that they will have poor transitions from primary to secondary and therefore it is possible that most students would not anticipate poor teacher-student relationship upon beginning secondary school. Indeed, as one student commented, *"We've only just arrived in school…we've just met the teachers and like we'll obviously start with good relationships …"* (FG3N/D). Yet for a small number of students, relationships with their teachers at the beginning of the year were not viewed as positive and a small number also felt that none of the teachers would be *'friendly and nice'* to them. Why this may be the case is something that I will explore further in this chapter and chapter 5 by considering students' experiences of teacher-student relationships. However, students' discussions in the initial four focus groups at the beginning of the year reflect the idea that students were generally in agreement about believing most of their teachers in the school were *'friendly and nice'* and felt they had positive relationships with most of them at the beginning of year 7, as shown in one student's comment that *"…relationships with the teachers are pretty good...'* (FG3N/B). This points to students being enthusiastic and positive about starting this secondary school and about their teachers. Indeed, in FG4N when asked whether students felt they had good relationships with their teachers overall, there was a collective response of *"yeah"* (FG4N). This appears to suggest that students felt they had made a positive transition into year 7 in terms of interpersonal relationships with teachers. This is supported by Jindal-Snape's (2010, 2018) (2.2.4) research, suggesting that most children are not only enthusiastic about starting secondary school but are also able to confidently navigate the transition from primary to secondary. Yet, the data at the end of the academic year showed a decrease in the number of students in year 7 who believed that teacher-student relationships remained positive when referring to being in classrooms. This corresponds to a slight increase from the beginning of year 7 in the number of students believing that they did not get on with most teachers or that none of the teachers liked them. The discussions in FG1J, FG2J, FG3J and FG4J support this as students talked about how they felt some teachers were *'…a bit too strict'* (FG3J/C) and that to

have a positive relationship with them they should *"be nice"* (FG2J/E). It may be that the good relationships with teachers at the beginning of year 7 might not be sustainable throughout their time in school and may deteriorate as they moved through the school. Certainly, student A believed this as when discussing what relationships with teachers might be like as students move through school, they stated, "*They might be worse" (*FG3N/A). This could be significant as research from Gehlbach, Brinkworth and Harris (2012) (1.4.1) found that from the perspective of students, teacher-student relationships over the course of a school year, become less positive. If students are inclined to lose positive relationships with their teachers as they progress through secondary school, then regardless of how positive the transition from primary to secondary, the students may be experiencing something that leads to the decline of the teacher-student relationship. This is perhaps significant as Rudduck, Chaplain and Wallace's (1996) (1.2.1) literature review found evidence to suggest a decline in motivation, engagement, and attitude as students' progress though year 7 and the remainder of secondary school. However, it is unclear in their review, if the impact is due to transition to secondary school or other factors. Yet there may be a link to teacher-student relationships as Tobbell and O'Donnell (2013) (2.2.4) state their findings suggest that on transitioning into secondary school, young people require more space and time for teacher-student interactions to allow for the building of positive relationships. Therefore, in my discussions in chapter 5, I will reflect on why the students feel their relationships on outdoor learning remain positive, yet their relationships with teachers in the classroom might decline.

4.3 Theme One: Behaviours

In this section I will look at students' views of their own behaviours as well as how students perceive their teachers' behaviours, and the subsequent responses elicited from these which may not only affect teacher-student relationships but also the willingness of individual students to engage in learning.

Across all eight focus groups, students were keen to express their views not only on how they felt their behaviour might impact on teacher-student relationships but

also on the effect teacher's behaviour has on students and the teacher-student relationship. It is noteworthy that the students thought their negative behaviour may have a negative impact on the teacher-student relationship. At the beginning of the year, in FG3N students were vocal in suggesting that their behaviour may reverse positive teacher-student relationships. Indeed, in a discussion on whether teacher-student relationships would remain positive, the group responded that it was based on how well behaved they were, as seen by the comment made by student A, *"...it all depends on how good you are in school"* (FG3N/A). However, the responses made by students in the focus groups suggest that they collectively felt frustrated by what they see as poor behaviour from other students, as student H illustrated in reference to other students' behaviour, *"They just need to stop messing around"* (FG1J/H). Although most students suggested that relationships with their teachers were good overall at the beginning of the year, (see 4.2) a small number of students felt their relationships were negative at the start of the year. In considering student A's (FG3N/A) comment, it may be that students assumed poor behaviour would create and sustain poor teacher-student relationships. In this way negative teacher-student relationships might be seen to arise from a student's poor behaviour in the classroom that in turn may provoke a negative reaction from the teacher and subsequently impact the teacher-student relationship negatively. At the beginning of year 7, students in FG3N felt that their teachers reacted negatively towards students who they saw as misbehaving, as one student commented:

> *"…it's if you are just like say naughty, the teachers tells you, gives you a warning and you just ignore the teachers or something, that's what I feel like the teacher would dislike you for some reason"* (FG3N/F).

For student F, the suggestion here is that witnessing students behave poorly and then seeing this elicit a negative teacher response, leads to poor teacher-student relationships as the teacher is seen to 'dislike' the student. Indeed. these opinions did not appear to have altered by the end of year 7 as seen in FG1J and FG2J where students stated that their poor behaviours were still seen to affect the teacher-student relationship negatively. Therefore, this will be explored further in

chapter 5 to understand how students viewed their behaviour affecting their relationships with teachers at the start of year 7 and end. It is also noteworthy that discussions around how their relationships with their teachers might be improved, led many students in all eight focus groups to respond that positive behaviour from them and 'engaging' in lessons would create positive teacher-student relationships. It may be a consideration that students' experiences of 'engagement' were often linked to teacher-student relationships. This is seen in student F responding to a discussion on what might improve their relationships with their teachers, *"Listening and being responsible*" (FG1J/F). Therefore, further exploration of students' experiences of engagement and how they connect it to teacher-student relationships will be undertaken in chapter 5.

4.3.1 Individual student's behaviour

When discussing student behaviours, predominately, students appeared to be referring to how other students in their lessons behaved, yet several students conveyed the idea that their individual behaviour was detrimental to the teacher-student relationship. This was shown across FG1N, FG2N and FG3N whereby in a discussion on whether they had positive relationships with all their teachers, students felt confident enough to suggest that they did not, with student E stating *"Not like all of them"* (FG1N/E), and student D saying *"just a few"* (FG4N/D), whilst student D in focus group 3 said, "*I don't like some teachers*" (FG3N/D). Student H took this idea further, suggesting that teacher-student relationships were seen to be negative when teachers had bad days, *"just like on the bad days"* (FG1N/H), whereas student D, supported the idea that it was their own behaviour that may have had something to do with negative teacher-student relationships, *"...I get stressed and end up snapping"* (FG4N/D). By the end of the year, student E also supported this, stating that their behaviour negatively impacted their relationships with their teachers, *"…it's because I play up…"* (FG1J/E). Furthering this, students implied that individual poor behaviour might impact their relationships with their teachers if it continued. This is illustrated by student C in FG3/N talking about how they felt that their relationships may decline as they age if their behaviour deteriorates, *"…we'll obviously start with a good relationship but if we get more like bad and that then the relationships could go down"* (FG3N/C).

4.3.2 Behaviour is variable

It is not just that students saw poor behaviour as impacting the teacher-student relationship, but also that they viewed student behaviour as altering over time. In this way, students saw the impact on teacher-student relationships as being variable, in that they may decline or improve with student D suggesting "…*might be worse" (*FG3N/D), and student A commenting that*, "some might get worse as they grow older" (*FG3N/A). Meanwhile student E commented that behaviour might improve over time, taking the view that *"there's a few people in my old school that were like just dead naughty and now they are not as naughty"* (FG4N/E). Whilst students D and A suggested relationships with teachers may decline, for student E, relationships with teachers were seen as having the potential to improve. In other words, teacher-student relationships may improve if student behaviour improves, and they may not always remain stable as students' individual behaviour may deteriorate over time. This was suggested by student G in FG4N as they commented that, *"growing older people are more mischievous obviously, some people could go dead naughty…"* (FG4N/G). Student B expanded on this, pointing out that relationships with teachers might not just be affected by student behaviour but that it may be difficult to get a good relationship back after poor behaviour, explaining it is difficult to have a good relationship with a teacher *"…once you hate them"* (FG1J/B). Chapter 5 will be used to explore this further and to understand why students view behaviour as variable.

4.3.3 Teacher responses

Where student behaviour was viewed as declining with age, the teacher-student relationship was seen to be negatively impacted because of what students saw as ongoing poor behaviour eliciting a negative response from the teacher, therefore creating a negative teacher-student relationship. This is illustrated in FG4N by student D's comment about relationships with teachers, *"…they'll get worse cos they'll get more mischievous…cos the teachers would get fed up of us"* (FG4N/D). Students may have felt that not only did poor behaviour have a negative impact on the relationship's they had with their teachers but that this

was due to teachers' reactions to what they saw as disruptive or poor behaviour, as student B stated in a discussion on what might prevent good teacher-student relationships, *"when you get told off by the teacher"* (FG4J/B). This idea was furthered by student B in suggesting that teachers might possibly dislike students displaying negative behaviour thus creating a negative relationship, *"…say if you were misbehaving…then you're really just gonna get on the bad side of things with the teacher"* (FG3N/B). In addition to a teacher potentially taking a dislike to students who display disruptive behaviour, it is possible that teachers' negative reactions lead to continued poor behaviour from students. As student E stated, with reference to a particular teacher they have a poor relationship with, "*He always sends me out, he never listens* (FG1J/E).

Over the year, students across the focus groups expressed their experiences of teachers reacting negatively to their poor behaviour in the classroom and how they felt this impacted their relationships with those teachers. One student suggested teachers might react to several students' poor behaviour not just one individual, *"…sometimes he'll shout but that's for all the other people that are being silly in lessons"* (FG3N/B). Student B refers to how the teacher shouts as a reaction to students not behaving in an appropriate manner and so in this respect students might see poor behaviour as having a direct impact on how the teacher responds. Certainly, the comment from student H would support the idea of teachers responding negatively to student poor behave, *"...so like if we were bad children at school and the teachers start to dislike you…"* (FG3N/H). In addition to this, teachers' behaviour towards students affects not only how students view them but consequently the teacher-student relationship. Yet this potentially has several dimensions or elements to it in that on the one hand, a teacher may react negatively towards one student for what they see as one student's poor behaviour but may also react negatively towards a whole class for one student's poor behaviour. As one student explained, *"when the teachers are stressed out, they take it out on others"* (FG4J/A). This will be looked at more closely in the next section and further in chapter 5 to understand why students experience this and what it means to them.

4.3.4 Impact of teacher responses

Across the focus group discussions, there appeared to be consensus that those teachers that students had negative relationships with shared similar behaviours or responses. Students in FG1/N for example, agreed that they did not or felt they could not have positive relationships with teachers they viewed negatively, stating that it was because, *"some are a bit shouty"*, (FG1N/A), *"some are strict"* (FG1N/B) *"some are just nasty"* (FG1N/C). Students also felt they struggled to relate to those teachers they saw as being moody, as student D points out in a discussion on when it might be difficult to form good relationships with their teachers, *"Like when they are in a mood"* (FG1N/D). This suggests that positive teacher-student relationships are difficult to build with teachers whose behaviour is seen as negative towards students. This is important as students saw negative responses from teachers as being due to teachers being stressed, *"I feel like the stricter ones are a lot more stressed"* FG4N/G). Student E explained that teachers' negative response towards the whole class to disruptive behaviour were also due to teachers becoming stressed, *"...if one person in the class starts like disrupting them and getting all stressed and that like, stressing the teacher out and then they take it out on the rest of the class"* (FG4J/E). Consequently, a negative response towards a whole class was seen to create negative teacher-student relationships as students perhaps felt the repercussions of a teacher feeling stressed and then having a bad day and maybe did not wish to then be on the teacher's radar. Student C captured this by saying, "*I get scared when teachers have shouted at a kid and then it's my next lesson with that teacher, like they are gonna be in a mood...I feel I'd better hide, it's like scary" (*FG1N/C). This might further impact the teacher-student relationship negatively, and given student A's comment about feeling that teachers might be permanently stressed, *"teachers are stressed anyway"* (FG2N/A), this is explored later in this section and in chapter 5 to understand how students view the influence of the outdoors on teachers and teacher stress.

In addition to this, students across the focus groups talked about the negative impact of teachers' negative responses and behaviours in the classroom. For example, student F mentioned feeling unable to go to or trust teachers who they

saw as too harsh or strict, *"…some teachers that are harsh, dead strict…you just don't want to go to…you don't feel you could trust to talk to"* (FG4N/F). This might suggest that students view teachers as at least partly responsible for creating an appropriate learning environment and so when teachers display behaviours that make the students feel uncomfortable the teacher-student relationship becomes negative. Certainly, the comment from student H supports this idea, "*because with the teacher like that [shouty] you might not be able to trust"* (FG4N/H). Equally, students felt that to have a positive relationship with their teachers, behaviour should be reciprocal, *"If they don't have respect then neither do you"* (FG2J/E). The idea of positive common behaviours and responses was also seen in discussions on how relationships with teachers might be improved, as student E suggested that *"…you have to change your attitudes like and the teachers like…"* (FG3N/E).

4.3.5 Appropriate behaviour

Not only do students see positive reciprocal behaviour as affecting the teacher-student relationship positively, but they also view it as important in preventing teachers' negative responses towards the whole class. As student A pointed out in FG2J, to ensure teacher-student relationships can remain positive, students should *"be nice to the teachers; cos they'd be nice to us back* (FG2J/E). This might suggest that students feel that how individual students behave impacts the reaction of teachers in terms of whether they will like the student or not and then determines whether their reactions will be negative or positive, thus allowing a positive or negative teacher-student relationships to be built. Indeed, when talking about how teacher-student relationships can be negative, student G proposed that disruptive behaviour from students leads to the teacher disliking them and then reacting negatively towards them, thus creating a negative teacher-student relationship:

> *"…say… we were bad children at school and the teachers start to dislike you … it literally depends on your behaviour, and it doesn't*

> *depend on how you act in front of them, it depends on if they start shouting at you for something that you did…" (FG3N/G).*

In a similar manner, student C put forward the idea that perhaps if students' attitudes and behaviours were more agreeable for teachers, then the teachers would not dislike them, thus presumably preventing a negative relationship from forming between them, *"…cos if you be polite, they'll like you more"* (FG2J/C). In addition to this, students in FG1J at the end of the year, offered several suggestions as to how they felt all students should behave to ensure that teachers did not react negatively towards them or the rest of the class. For example, student A suggested that students *"… just need to stop messing around"* (FG1J/A). It is possible that to ensure students do not draw attention to themselves from the teacher, thus preventing the teaching reacting negatively to them and/or the rest of the class, students feel the need to behave appropriately. Indeed, student C felt that students should be behaving more appropriately as they stated, *"I think that students need to act better when they are like, more responsible and just work"* (FG1J/C). Student C not only refers to it being important to not display poor behaviour, but also to getting on with work that is given to them and so it may be that students do not see solely positive behaviour as creating positive teacher-student relationships but also engaging with learning. Certainly, comments from students F and C would support this as student F suggested students need to be "*Listening and being responsible"* (FG1J/F), whilst student C said students should be "C*ontributing"* (FG1J/C). Students' comments from the preliminary data collection resonate with the views of engagement students expressed, such as *"You have to listen and write down and ask questions"* (QPL.S9) and *"to concentrate with classwork"* (QPL.S5), as well as *"Taking part and showing an interest"* (QPL.S20). Arguably, this might mean that students feel that by being seen to engage with learning, this might create a positive environment and consequently positive relationships. Yet this does not necessarily mean that behaviours students express as engagement are the same as how the teachers view engagement, and it may be that this is how the students view the teachers' expectations of what engagement looks like in the classroom. For example, when discussing when teachers might respond negatively towards students, one student stated when they were "e*rm answering back"* (FG1J/G),

whilst another simply said when they were *"Not listening"* (FG1J/A). It Is possible that student's comments on how they view students need to behave may indicate engagement to be understood differently by both teachers and students and so might define what is viewed as poor or disruptive behaviour and thus what the impact is on the teacher-student relationship. Therefore, further exploration of teachers' and students' experiences of engagement will be undertaken in chapter 5.

4.3.6 Behaviour and outdoor learning

Discussions so far centre around students feeling their relationships with their teachers are reliant on their own and other students' behaviour as well as teachers' responses or behaviours towards them and other students. Yet students make little reference to negative behaviour in relation to outdoor learning when discussing being outdoors and instead, when mentioned, students in FG1/J for example, collectively stated that behaviour was *"better"* outside (FG1J/A-F). Students appear to feel that they do not get told off by teachers on outdoor learning, *"[teachers] …don't tell you off or anything"* (FG2N/E). This was reinforced by teachers in their discussion about outdoor learning, with teacher 1 stating that in relation to outdoor learning, *"I don't think I've really told anybody off…"* (TFGN/1). In the same way that students saw positive teacher-student relationships being about students' behaviour, both students and teachers saw being outdoors as meaning students displayed 'good behaviour' and consequently there was no need to be 'told off' by teachers. Positive behaviour when outdoors appears to mean that students are more likely to feel they have better relationships with their teachers when outside. Certainly, student B FG2/N supports this, when they stated that being outdoors improves the teacher-student relationship, *"I feel outdoor education…actually help[s] to lift relationships"* (FG1N/A).

In contrast to students' comments about poor relationships with teachers who displayed negative behaviour towards students, so that students perceived these teachers to be *'stressed',* when talking about teachers on outdoor learning, students suggest they are less stressed. Student C in FG4J at the end of the year

said that with regards to teachers' behaviour outside, *"…they're not as stressed*" (FG4J/C). Student E expanded on this to explain why teachers may not be as stressed when outside, *"They are more relaxed"* (FG4J/E. In addition to this, when talking about their relationships with their teachers in general, students said that when on outdoor learning, teachers were not just less stressed but also less strict and nicer, *"Nice and not strict"* (FG4N/C) and *"…they're a lot nicer and a lot less stressed out"* (FG2N/D). From this point of view, it may be that students see being outdoors as having an impact on teacher's positive behaviour. Based on these responses, it could be argued that for students, teacher-student relationships are influenced by the behaviours displayed by both them and the teacher and that the learning environment impacts both students and teachers to determine whether they display positive or negative behaviours. Furthermore, students may see being outside as altering their own and teacher's behaviour so that neither is viewed negatively, and they are then able to build positive relationships. This will be discussed further in section 4.4 and explored as part of chapter 5.

4.4 Theme Two: Contrasting Learning Environments and Approaches

Closely linked to students' views of behaviour on outdoor learning being positive, there was a difference in how students viewed the classroom or indoor learning environment and associated approaches to learning, compared to how they saw the outdoor learning environment and associated learning approaches. It is these expressed differences which they felt impacted on the teacher-student relationship, that I will discuss in this section.

4.4.1 Indoors versus Outdoors

Movement and Space

Across all focus groups, students voiced strong negative opinions about being indoors and inside the classroom, talking about how they felt classrooms were restrictive, that there was often a lack of space and that they had little opportunity

for movement when in the classroom. Student F echoed the feeling of being restricted by remaining indoors when they said, "*I don't like being stuck in a classroom for 50 minutes like 6 times a day" (*FG1N/F), whereas another student explained that "*In a classroom it's more like everybody's… in one small space"* (FG1JB). Another comment from student D about what they do when in the classroom compared to outdoors, "s*itting"* (FG4J/D) suggests students feel that when indoors there are limited opportunities to move about. Indeed, student E's thoughts about outdoor learning support this idea as they stated, *"I like going outside, yeah instead of being stuck in a classroom" (*FG1N/E). It is interesting to consider the way this might suggest that students view outdoor learning as offering more space and the opportunity to move around. For example, when comparing learning in the classroom to outdoor learning, one student suggested that being outside was different as their surroundings were more open, stating they go "…*on the field"* (FG3J/A), whilst for another student being outside was about the ability to move, "…*we go on walks" (*FG1/N/F). Arguably, students saw their relationships with teachers in the outdoor learning sessions as different to those in the classroom, citing more space and the ability to move about. Student E captures this idea in proposing that relationships with teachers are different on outdoor learning because inside students are sat down usually writing, whereas outdoors they can be in motion, "…*in a classroom you're sat down and like you write and that but then you don't do owt for 50 minutes unless you're writing…and when you go outside you move around (*FG1N/E). It is therefore possible that students see having more space and the ability to move more freely as helping everyone (students and teachers), to feel less confined and therefore possibly more relaxed. Certainly, student B in FG4M would agree, explaining that outdoor learning allows everyone to have air and space so they don't feel that they are constrained thus allowing students and teachers to feel less stressed and build good relationships, "*I feel like it's that because everyone gets more air, more space and we're not all cramped together and it lets everyone just let out a little more stress out easier*" (FG4/NSB). In fact, so important is the sense of space that even when students feel a teachers negative behaviour might create a difficult relationship, when on outdoor learning they feel more able to manage any issues with their teachers, as seen in student C's comment, *"When you're in a classroom with a grumpy teacher you can't really like escape it, if you're outside*

like you can just walk away and just leave them" (FG1N/C). Furthermore, after commenting on how the classroom was a small space, student B from focus group one stated that, in relation to why they felt relationships with their teachers were seen as better on outdoor learning compared to in the classroom, it was due to the lack of restrictions on outdoor learning, *"whereas in the outdoors, everybody can kinda do their own thing"* (FG1J/B).

Freedom

Feeling able to *'do your own thing'* (FG1J/B) was something that some students spoke about in terms of feeling that they were free perhaps to wander or just be themselves when on outdoor learning. This was seen in the collective responses of students from FG1J of *"yeah"* and *"yes"* (FG1J/A-F) upon being asked if they felt there was more freedom on outdoor learning. Similar to this, one student spoke about freedom more in terms of having a choice over what to do during outdoor learning sessions, suggesting that they were free to wander and perhaps be more independent, *"We kinda get to go off and do our own thing" (*FG2J/F). This was linked to forming positive relationships with their teachers, with student C commenting that on outdoor learning it was different compared to being in the classroom as outside students are given more freedom to be independent. This student C argued, helps reduce stress for the teacher and calms both teachers and students down, allowing for positive relationships to be built:

> *"Sometimes when we are outside, like from inside, different from in a classroom it's when we're all doing our own things and the teacher like doesn't stress out as a much, so it's like calmer for everybody" (*FG1J/C).

It is noteworthy that teachers also support the idea that students have more freedom on outdoor learning, especially in terms of being able to move about. This was seen during the teachers' discussions when one teacher spoke about giving students freedom to be more independent, *"We give them quite a bit more freedom than they normally have to go off wandering around"* (TFGN/T1). It is possible that feeling less stressed helps teachers in displaying positive behaviours towards students (see 4.3) that encourages a positive teacher-

student relationship. Certainly, T1 also viewed that giving students freedom on outdoor learning led to positive relationships with students as they were less stressed, "…*I do find yeah probably I am more relaxed with them" (*TFGN/T1). In turn, students agreed with the idea that a sense of freedom on outdoor learning led to better teacher-student relationships. The notion that being given freedom might lead to positive teacher-student relationships was also seen in FG3J and FG4N, with some students expressing how they felt that on outdoor learning they had freedom to explore the local area, especially the beach. When discussing how classrooms might not be good for building relationships with their teachers, student D echoed previous comments seen in FG1J with regards to classrooms feeling restricted compared to the outdoors. Student D added to this the idea that the freedom to explore might lead to better relationships as, *"You're stuck inside…instead of doing fun tasks outside, where you get to explore things"* (FG3J/D). Whilst for student H, exploring meant not just going outside but specifically being able to go to the beach, *"…outdoor ed is probably one of my favourite lessons because you get to go outside and some of the time you get to go to the beach…"* (FG3N/H). Student C reasoned that not only did outdoor learning provide students with the space to just be themselves but that this in turn meant teachers did not have to worry about the students and so had more time to do other things, *"….well for teachers it [outdoor learning] gives them time to do other stuff and not just looking after the kids cos they're outside and they've got a lot more area to like say mess about" (*FG2N/C). This was suggested by student C in the context of discussing what helps to create positive teacher-student relationships outdoors and as it may also relate to how students view teachers as being more relaxed outside, will be expanded on further in chapter 5.

Fresh Air

Furthering the concept that for students, being outdoors is preferable to being 'stuck' inside the classroom, several discussions across the focus groups saw students voice their views on why they love being outside and how they feel this creates positive relationships with their teachers. For one student, it was simply more pleasurable to be outside, "*It's more enjoyable to be outside than being in the classroom" (*FG4J/A). This may be because students view the classroom

environment as being restrictive, reinforcing barriers to their interactions (4.4.1). In fact, for student A, when talking about why their relationships with their teachers might be better on outdoor learning than inside, they cited having to be silent in the classroom, *"Because you have to be like quiet…" (*FG2J/A). This was clarified by student G from a different group, who explained that being in silence means students are unable to build good relationships with their teachers as they cannot interact with them, *"You have to like sit in silence and then obviously if you can't talk then it doesn't build a good relationship with them"* (FG4N/G). This is interesting as students noted feeling free to interact with others when on outdoor learning. Students discussed this with reference to different aspects of connecting so that being with their friends was seen as important to having positive teacher-student relationships, explained by student D when discussing why their relationships with their teachers were better outdoors, *"because you can be with your friends" (*FG1J/D). Whilst student A saw interacting with other students and teachers as a reason for enjoying outdoor learning and therefore feeling able to build positive relationships with their teachers, *"The reason why I feel it's amazing, is because…its exciting…you go outside and you get to interact with each other…"* (FG3N/A).

Sitting or being in silence was another element of comparisons between the classroom and outdoors and students made links to the importance of this and being with their friends. One student compared how the classroom was different to being on outdoor learning suggesting that students were often not with their friends and instead had to be in pre-determined groups, presumably set by the teacher, "*You get put in certain groups in certain classes …. you might not be friends with that much"* (FG3J/E). In explaining why the outdoors was viewed as better than being in the classroom, student F offered their insight into how important they felt being with their friends and interacting was:

> *"…because if you are in the classroom you are all in your seating plans and you don't get to sit wherever you want, you're in proper seating plans so you don't get to see them, whereas when you're in outdoor learning, you can go outside and that and actually play with*

> *your friends that you have that you can't sit next to in lessons" (*FG3/NF).

As seen as part of how students feel about outdoor learning, perhaps because in the same way that students expressed being outside helps them to feel better, *"[I feel] more positive [outside]"* (FG4J/G) and "*Like it just makes me feel better* "(FG4J/H) being with friends has a similar impact. Comparable to how being outdoors allows teachers and students to feel relaxed, (mentioned previously in 4.4.1 in terms of a sense of space and freedom to roam), being able to interact with their friends, other students and teachers, without the constraints of a classroom, allows students to feel relaxed. Indeed, student H supports this, explaining why being outside makes them feel less stressed, *"Seeing people I don't normally see in classes"* (FG4N/H). Certainly, discussions across the focus groups around how outdoor learning makes students and teachers feel relaxed and calm leading to positive student-teacher relationships, support this. As student F proposed when talking about how students feel about the outdoors, *"It's really good for when you have struggles...going on you have somat to relax cos outdoors normally helps people" (*FG2N/F). Student C in FG4J stated when discussing teachers' behaviour outdoors, "*They are more relaxed" (*FG4J/C) and student F in FG2J pointed out when asked why relationships with teachers were seen as better outside, because "*They're more calm outside"* (FG2J/F). This is in comparison to how teachers are seen to behave in the classroom environment, as when discussing this, student B from FG2J commented they are "*Moody, shouting"* (FG2J/B). Arguably, this might suggest that being outdoors and in fresh air leads to feelings of calmness for both teachers and students which then helps build positive teacher-student relationships. Indeed, student F's comment that *"the fresh air" (*FG2N/F) is what helps teachers and students relax outdoors would support this. In addition, students C, A and E's responses also support this, discussing why they viewed outdoor learning as supporting positive teacher-student relationships, *"cos you get like fresh air and time to calm down*" (FG3N/C); *"it's a calmer lesson…for the students" (*FG3N/A) "*and the teachers" (*FG3N/E). The idea that being free to interact with their friends, other students and teachers outdoors in fresh air where everyone is more relaxed and calmer,

is something many students mentioned across the focus groups, and so further discussion on how this is seen to support the building of positive relationships with teachers appears in the next section as well as chapter 5.

Stress

Being outdoors on outdoor learning was seen to be good for mental well-being, reducing stress for both students and teachers. This was seen in student H's response to a conversation in relation to what it was about the outdoors that led to feeling less stressed, "*tranquillity" (*FG2N/H) and then when student A suggested that "*Fresh air"* (FG4N/A) might reduce teachers' stress, and finally with student H talking about why teachers might be less stressed outside, *"Well just being outside makes you feel a lot more calm*" (FG4N/H). It may be therefore, that when outdoors, as teachers are calmer, more relaxed and feel less stressed, they do not respond negatively to students. Certainly, student F would agree as they explained that being outside reduces teachers' stress and consequently their negative behaviour towards students, *"I feel like the ones that are stricter have a lot more stress… because every time they've gone outside, they'll have felt a bit less stressed out and therefore been a bit less strict"* (FG4N/F). Equally, student E suggested that teachers might not be stressed outside as students were not as stressed outside and therefore were not possibly displaying negative behaviours, as *"Seeing you less stressed"* (FG4N/E) was seen to have a positive impact on teachers. Similarly, another student from the same focus group spoke about how being outdoors helped reduce stress and was therefore good for well-being which meant they had good relationships with their teachers. They suggested this may also help students to try hard to engage with learning:

> *"I find it good because you don't stress much and like it helps with your mental health and I feel I do get along with the teachers because like if I am doing bad I just try my best anyways"(*FG4N/F).

Feeling able to engage with learning whilst outdoors, and possibly back in the classroom, was something other students also spoke about. For example, in a conversation with FG4N on why outdoor learning helps students to engage,

student F said, "*It's good for my mental health being outside…"* (FG4N/F) whilst student H stated, "*I feel like it just removes stress…"* (FG4N/H). For student C in FG1N, being outdoors helped students engage not only during outdoor learning sessions but also possibly back in the classroom, *"Cos like an outdoor education, it puts you in a good mood for the rest of the day"* (FG1N/C).

The comparisons students made between teachers' behaviour on outdoor learning and the classroom environment might suggest students' relationships with their teachers are linked to the learning environment, which in turn has an impact on how teachers and students might feel and therefore behave. This was seen in focus group four when discussing relationships with their teachers on outdoor learning. Student A said that they were *"yeah, different"* (FG4N/A), and student C clarified, "*because we're going outdoors, they are a lot different in a way…"* (FG4N/A). Student A went on to say that they felt the reason there was a difference between the indoor and outdoor learning environment and better relationships outdoors was, "*…because they [the teachers] are not seeing us in a classroom they're seeing us outside, it's a different picture to in a classroom"* (FG4N/A). In FG3N, student H took this idea further and offered their experience of why teacher-student relationships were positive on outdoor learning as they explained that teachers were kind, not strict and helped students. Student H also suggested that outdoor learning supported positive relationships with teachers because it was fun, interesting and allowed them to learn at their pace:

> *"Well they're kind to*
> *us, and they are not like strict... they are not like 'oh you've got to do this work', they like guide us…to the level we need to be…in this case with outdoor learning…its really fun because we're learning about the outdoors and going on trips to…beach or something… but at the same time we're also learning but it's not like strict learning its more at your own pace" (*FG3N/H)

This and previous students' responses indicate that being in the outdoors is seen positively in comparison to being in the classroom and therefore students feel more able to build positive relationships with their teachers on outdoor learning.

Indeed, student A not only agrees but suggests that being away from the classroom, (in the outdoors), makes you happier and therefore nicer to each other and so positive relationships can be forged, *"…I feel that outdoor education is actually help to lift relationships because it lets you go out of the school, which makes you happier, which makes you nicer to people" (*FG2N/A). This in turn could be seen to reduce stress and create a sense of calm which enables the forming of positive teacher-student relationships as there is no longer tension between teachers and students in the form of negative behaviours. As previously suggested (4.4.1) students see teachers as tending to like or prefer students whose behaviour is seen as appropriate. Therefore, it may be that both teachers and students find it easier to build relationships when on outdoor learning as the outdoor environment encourages calm, relaxed behaviour. Students in FG2N agree with this as when discussing why they felt their relationships with their teachers were affected by being outdoors, student D said "*I was going to say because they're a lot nicer and a lot less stressed out"* (FG2N/D) whilst student B stated, "*Because they erm get nicer to you and they don't tell you off or anything"* (FG2N/B). It may be then that the outdoors is more beneficial for positive teacher-student relationships than being inside a classroom as teachers can relax and perhaps focus on interacting with students. Indeed, as student B said, in reference to having good relationships with their teachers outdoors, "*Yeah cos they get a clearer mind"* (FG2N/B). Therefore, if teachers are not as stressed outside and can interact with students more than in the classroom, perhaps students feel more connected to them as they can also relax and have fun, thus building better relationships. Student B from FG4J, would agree with this as when asked if they had a connection with their teacher outside, they confirmed, *"Well you do because, er like you're enjoying yourself" (*FG4J/B). It is noteworthy that not only is a clearer mind seen to aid teacher-student relationships outdoors, but student E suggested that it may also help teachers in their other lessons, "*yeah, they get clearer minds [outside] and then on the other lessons they can just not be stressed"* (FG2N/F).

In addition to this, it appears that teachers also support the idea that their relationships with students are better on outdoor learning than in the classroom. This is possibly due to both students and teachers feeling more relaxed and then

interacting with each other more which was confirmed by T3 who used one student as an example of how they had talked more in the outdoors to the students:

> *"Yeah you find erm you talk about different things, I have [a] student in our group and he's just fascinated, [laughing] I have bizarre conversations with him about nature and 'do I know this about jelly fish' and 'do I know…', you know …"(*TFGN/T3).

Meanwhile, T1 agreed that their relationships with students were perhaps better on outdoor learning as not only were they more relaxed but that they were enjoying themselves outside and this possibly had a knock-on effect in the way that they were able to interact more with the students,

> *"…I think we've built that relationship; I love going to the beach, although every Saturday I look at the weather report and I am filled with anxiety [laughs]…But yeah no, I do enjoy it and I was worried I wouldn't, but I am"(*TFGN/1).

The contrast between the outdoors and the indoors, particularly in terms of freedom, feeling relaxed and having calm, stress free teachers and students, is discussed again in section 4.5 in terms of what students view as a requirement for positive teacher-student relationships and engagement with learning. In relation to the research question, this contrast between the indoors and outdoors is also explored further in chapter 5 to understand why students might consider it a requirement.

4.4.2 Learning Approaches

Contrasting the indoor learning environment with the outdoor learning environment continued with students discussing learning approaches in terms of tasks and activities, content, and ways of learning. Students saw the outdoors as being preferable to being inside the classroom, with one student commenting

that, *"it's just a fun kind of lesson…"* (FG4N/B). Several comparisons were made as to why outdoor learning might be considered better than learning in a classroom. For example, whereas indoors students viewed there to be severe time restrictions on learning, as one student stated about learning in the classroom, *"It's strict. Erm, like if you don't finish your tasks on time"* (FG3J/G), outdoors students felt that learning was more relaxed. This was seen in Student E's statement in terms of how long they had to complete tasks, "*The whole lesson"* (FG3J/E). Furthermore, student B felt that in the classroom tasks had to be completed within a timeframe but on outdoor learning, they were able to learn at their own speed, *"Yeah…you have to stay inside…and finish the task…cos you have to finish that task…but outside you can do that task at your own pace then your finished*…" (FG3J/B). Another student talked about how learning outdoors meant that there was very little work for the teachers to plan *"They [the teachers] don't have to like tell us what to do, set the work and get the work sorted for us"* (FG4N/C) - outdoor learning sessions were planned by one teacher then delivered as a group – thus perhaps negating the need for strict timeframes for the completion of tasks. Further exploration in chapter 5 will be undertaken to understand the impact of time pressure on students.

It is possible that this links to the idea that for students, time restrictions on learning can be explained by the pressures on teachers in the classroom of having a lot of students to teach and having to teach lessons to exam content, which means little or no time for anything else. This was summed up by student F when discussing the difference for teachers between learning in the classroom and outdoors, *"Like, they've got so many kids that it makes you like different … then you've got things like exams, whereas if you go down to the beach or something they're just like… outside…"* (FG4J/F). Other students also talked about the lack of exam pressure on outdoor learning, viewing it as about doing tasks and activities to learn rather than to pass exams. As student A explained, on outdoor learning it is "*less pressure because it's not really…something, it's not like a goal of an exam, it's more like a goal of 'well done, you've learnt this'" (*FG3N/A). Student C agreed, suggesting that outdoor learning was about learning in short bursts and then completing small written tasks and that this is calming:

> *"…with outdoor education it's not like there is a big goal or something, it's more of ok go outside and do this, work with rubbish and tally it or make a poster, like learn about this, write a big paragraph about erm, about this fact that we've learn about…its more calm" (*FG3N/C).

The pressures from being 'taught to exams' might explain why students feel that classroom learning is demanding as they compare tasks such as "*creating a litter tally or poster" (*FG3N/C) on outdoor learning compared to being in the classroom where they view the work to be difficult and boring. This was summed up by student A who stated that in the classroom, teachers, *"…give you more work that's harder" (*FG3J/A). For student A in another focus group, learning in the classroom was seen as boring *"Most of the lessons [indoors] are boring"* (FG4J/A) and when asked about how this affects their relationships with their teachers, student B cited it as a contributing factor to their relationships being negative indoors, *"It's just more boring so you don't you get that connection with the teacher"* (FG4J/B). This contrasts with outdoor learning where across the focus groups, several students saw being outside as preferable to learning in the classroom as it is 'fun', 'is not difficult' and they 'get on with their teachers'. As student A expressed at the end of the year when talking about why they had a better relationship with their teacher outdoors, *"Its funner outside … I just find it more fun outside than in the classroom"* (FG3/JSA), whilst student B, when talking about outdoor learning, simply said, "*It's fun"* (FG1/JSB). In a different focus group, student A explained why they enjoyed outdoor learning, *"The reason why I feel it's amazing, is because…its exciting but it's not like erm hard, its calm, its usually fun, its different from the other classes, you go outside"* (FG3/NSA).

Interestingly, despite some initial reservations, even the teachers agreed that outdoor learning is not only more fun, but that they have good relationships with their students due to the outdoors. Teacher 1 explained this, expressing how at first, they found the difference between classroom learning and outdoor learning difficult as being outdoors meant giving students more freedom than indoors, *"I erm, I found it a bit hard like the difference between a classroom-based subject*

and the kind of giving them the freedom and initially I found that difficult…" (TFGN/T1). This may be because compared to in the classroom, on outdoor learning teachers are not responsible for the planning of activities as these are all done by the teacher in charge of the programme. It could be that teachers find this transition to outdoor learning difficult at first as in the classroom they are used to being in control of the students' learning. However, by allowing students freedom to learn outdoors (possibly by giving students time and space to complete tasks) T1 reported they had a good relationship with them, stating "…*I absolutely love that now because I trust them I think we've built that relationship; I love going to the beach,…I do enjoy it and I was worried I wouldn't but I am"* (TFGN/1). Furthermore, as seen in T1's explanation, by seeing teachers enjoy themselves on outdoor learning it shows them relaxed and so arguably students feel comfortable interacting with them and thus positive teacher-student relationships are built.

The contrast in the way students view approaches to learning between the classroom and outdoor environment may be significant as students feel that they gain more from taking part in outdoor learning. This was seen in comments from students in FG3N as when asked how they felt about outdoor learning, they said *"amazing"* (FG3N/G)*; "cool"* (FG3N/B); *"cool and fun"* (FG3N/B) and *"exciting and fun and important and inspiring"* (FG3N/B). It is notable that two students commented that not only did they really enjoy outdoor learning, but they also felt it taught them something when they stated it is *"educative and exciting"* (FG3N/F) and *"educational and fun and one more word ecstatic"* (FG3N/F). This may be because outdoor learning offers activities and tasks that mean something to the students, for example, student A in focus group one, said *"I like the photo competition" (*FG1N/A) when talking about what they liked about outdoor learning. This was an activity linked to understanding their local environment where students were asked to take photos outdoors to create a campaign about litter. Whilst in FG3N, student D confirmed that they not only enjoyed outdoor learning but that they viewed it as an important lesson, *"Well there was a time when outdoor education wasn't here…the year before it became a lesson, and I feel it was a really good idea and it's really good…"* (FG3N/D). Arguably, this may be because the content they learn on outdoor learning is viewed as important to

students so that when students feel the tasks and activities are relevant to them, they are more likely to enjoy them and feel able to learn without pressure from exams but seeing outdoor learning as part of the curriculum. Other students from FG3N would agree, with student F sharing their passion for what they felt students learnt on outdoor learning lessons, "*I think it's a really important lesson because erm we're learning about our earth and stuff… it's just really important to learn about it because a lot of people don't really care about it"* (FG3N/F). Similarly, student B expressed their enthusiasm for learning about the world around them through outdoor learning and feeling they could make a difference, if only in their school:

> *"the thing is outdoor education saves schools because it can save schools from litter and all kinds of bad things that happen in school, and all around the world and that's why outdoor education is really good for all students"* (FG3N/B).

Students' passion and enthusiasm for outdoor learning lessons continued in FG3N with student F calling it their favourite lesson, citing being outdoors and learning about litter as reasons for this,

> *"…outdoor ed is probably one of my favourite lessons because you get to go outside and some of the time you get to go to the beach and...I just like it cos it's my favourite class cos talks about litter campaigns and stuff" (*FG3N/H).

Student E agreed but added the activities as reason for enjoying outdoor learning, *"I also like it cos we get to make stuff out of litter (*FG3N/E). This is interesting as in FG4N when talking about how outdoor education helps them to engage in lessons, student E said it helps but it is activities, *"yeah like the activities it's not a lesson, its activities" (*FG4N/E). This contrasts with students D, F and H from FG3N, who state that outdoor learning is a lesson. It may be that given the level of contentment felt by students from taking part in outdoor learning, as well as the lack of exams, for some it is not seen as a 'traditional' classroom lesson. Instead, it could be argued that by embracing the tasks and activities on outdoor

learning, which they see as being relevant to them, students focus on the enjoyment of learning and are thus engaged in learning without feeling the constraints to their learning that they state they feel in a classroom as so do not see outdoor learning as a lesson.

The idea that students might engage with learning if they find it relevant and enjoyable is supported by students' suggestions across the focus groups that they not only enjoy learning when on outdoor learning but find it more stimulating and often more relevant compared to learning in the classroom. Indeed, student B related outdoor learning to feeling engaged in learning by saying that it helped them engage *"cos you don't know what you'll be doing the week after, like you could go to the beach, you could be doing something just fun, cos outdoor education isn't really like a lesson its summat fun for the kids"* (FG4N/B). Yet suggesting that enjoyment will help students engage is a contrast to the findings from the preliminary study, which show that when asked to provide their definition of *'engagement with learning'*, students do not mention enjoying learning but instead focus on participation and being focused or appearing interested. For example, S13 said that engagement was about, *"Interest and attention that you have for learning in class"* (QPL.S13), whilst for S9 engagement meant *"You have to listen and write down questions to learn"* (QPL.S9). Students in the preliminary study also suggested that engagement was about, *"Participating with the class and making sure you are paying attention and no zoning out"* (QPL.S8) as well as "*Being focused; understanding the lesson"* (QPL.S2). This could imply that students view engagement as displaying behaviour that they deem acceptable by teachers. Yet, interestingly, also in the preliminary study, S7 alluded to the idea that stimulating lessons might mean they enjoy learning and therefore engage when they suggested that engagement with learning was, *"not being incredibly bored"* (QPL.S7). As already discussed, enjoying learning is associated with outdoor learning by the participants in the focus groups and so presents an interesting area for further exploration as it may be that engagement is linked to the way in which outdoor learning is approached and delivered compared to lessons in the classroom. This may make students more likely to enjoy these lessons, as well as posing the possibility that in the classroom students may be

passively engaged and displaying behaviour, they assume teachers wish to see. Therefore, this will be explored further in chapter 5.

In a similar way, student H considered outdoor learning to be relevant and enjoyable in terms of what they learn, "*because you could know a lot about the outdoors and errr if you took it as a GCSE, it could tell you how do you survive in a certain place" (*FG4N/H). Outdoor learning then is seemingly valued not just for feeling relevant and not being the same as a classroom lesson, but also possibly for what is learnt as student D states, *"I like it because they're teaching us a lesson that I've not done before in school…it's something different"* (FG4N/D). Perhaps this is because students feel it is important to learn topics they might not learn in a classroom, for example, about the outdoors and the environment. This is highlighted by the following two students' statements about their feelings on outdoor learning, *"…I think it's like good because we er get to learn new stuff and we like create things to stop littering and stuff and we know about what's going on in the outdoors"* (FG2N/B) and *"it's good because you learn about litter and the environment" (*FG4N/A). As well as this, student D highlighted the fact that on outdoor learning, it is also the unknown that perhaps stimulates learning, *"It's exciting because you never know what you are gonna do"* (FG1J/D). In addition to this, in FG1N and FG3N, students felt that not only could they engage with their learning whilst outdoors but also back in the classroom because of how being outdoors left them feeling. This was evident in the way they agreed when discussing if they thought outdoor learning had helped them engage in other lessons, *"Yeah"* (FG1N/D); *"Yep"* (FG1N/F) "*Definitely"* (FG1N/C) and a collective *"yeah"* (FG3N/D). Several students then clarified why they felt this way, with one saying they engaged back in the classroom because "*You get a fresh mindset"* (FG1N/A), whilst another said it was because "*You get summat to look forward to"* (FG1N/A). Meanwhile student D gave the reason that, "*It's nice to start the week of with outdoor ed"* (FG1N/D). In FG3N, student D said outdoor learning helped back in the classroom "*because you get to have time outside and away from like all the hard work"* (FG3N/D) and for student F it was because, "*you are not always doing hard work"* (FG3N/F). Given the way that students view outdoor learning as more enjoyable and stimulating, and less difficult than classroom learning, it is possible that having relaxed and had fun during their outdoor

learning lessons, upon returning to the classroom, students feel more focused and able to engage. This will be looked at in more detail in chapter 5.

In addition to engaging by enjoying outdoor learning, students also feel that enjoyment and learning new things also leads to positive teacher-student relationships. This was discussed by student D in FG4N who said they got on better with their teachers outside as they enjoyed outdoor learning because it offered something unique in terms of learning, *"It's enjoyable because it is teaching you lots of different things and you like the teachers more"* (FG4N/E). This was also echoed by the teachers who when discussing how their relationships with students outdoors are better, felt that outdoor learning helps with building teacher-student relationships as it was not the same as classroom learning. For T1, the suggestion of movement whilst learning helped to make their relationships with students easier, "*I think I've found my relationship with them more relaxed…it's a bit different to making them sit down and write an essay…"* (TFGN/T1). Meanwhile, T3 expressed enjoyment at the more hands-on and artistic activities and tasks *"…It is good doing practical things and creative artistic things"* (TFGN/T3). For T2 they talked about their enjoyment of teaching the different topic areas on outdoor learning, *"I enjoy it, I really enjoy it, getting out and about and doing different things I've done different topic areas … I've really enjoyed it so far"* (TFGN/T2). Importantly, students agreed that teachers' enjoyment of outdoor lessons had an impact on the teacher-student relationships, with student E suggesting that the reason their relationships in the classroom were not as positive is because indoors the teachers, "*They're not being as fun"* (FG3J/E). In a similar way, students spoke about how their own enjoyment and fun when on outdoor learning equated to having good relationships with their teachers with one student explaining that, *"it's just a fun kind of lesson and you get on with the teachers"* (FG4N/B). Whilst two students in FG4N said that they felt they had better teacher-student relationships on outdoor learning as it was fun and exciting and they enjoyed it, *"...with the actual outdoor ed it's fun and it's like when you know you've got that lesson you could get like excited, especially when it's the first lesson"* (FG4N/B) and *"It's fun and I like doing it because I like being outdoors"* (FG4N/C). To this end, students appear to see the outdoors and outdoor learning in contrast to the indoor classroom and view that the outdoors

offers them an environment where they not only feel more comfortable building and sustaining positive relationships with their teachers, but also where they feel they are able and willing to engage with learning.

4.5 Theme three: Requirements

As already discussed, students expressed views that the behaviour of themselves and their teachers, as well as the learning environment and approaches to learning all had an influence on their relationships with their teachers as well as their desire to engage with their learning. Furthering these ideas, students appear to suggest that to achieve positive teacher-student relationships and feel able to engage with their learning, they have certain criteria that they feel are required. These requirements are tied to the other themes already discussed (Behaviours and Learning Environments and Approaches) in that it is possible that students measure them against what happens on outdoor learning compared to what takes place in the classroom. Arguably this is seen in students love of the outdoors as two students in FG2N spoke about this when discussing why they enjoyed outdoor learning, *"Outdoors just like there's tress everywhere and they give off oxygen which helps us live"* (FG2N/C) and "*I just put trees, like the connections"* (FG2N/F). I am now going to explore students' discussions on what they expressed as requiring for positive teacher-student relationships.

4.5.1 Appropriate tasks and activities

Across the focus groups, students talked about 'fun' in terms of lessons, teachers, and tasks to have good teacher-student relationships. In FG4N, when asked which teachers they felt they could talk to and would have a good relationship with, student E replied, *"The teachers that set fun work*" (FG4N/E). For student D in a different focus group, they felt teachers should "*…make the lessons more fun" (*FG4J/D) to give them better relationships with their teachers. Meanwhile, students A and E in FG3J suggested that their relationships were better with teachers they saw as fun and in response to talking about why some teachers were their favourite, said, "*The way they act in lessons… yeah, they're funny"*

(FG3J/A) and "*They have a sense of humour instead of sitting there doing work all day"* FG3J/E). Also, in FG3J student F felt that the number of activities in the classroom compared to on outdoor learning affected their relationships with the teachers. In a discussion on how to improve teacher-student relationships, student F stated, "*The teachers in the classroom could do more activities…*" (FG3J/F). In FG2J however, student B saw the type of tasks as impacting relationships, saying that their relationships in the classroom were not as good as on outdoor learning as in the classroom, *"…you have to do like book work, don't you"* (FG2J/B). It may be that students see classroom activities as boring and since they appear to prefer 'fun' teachers, tasks, and lessons, which they view as helping build positive teacher-student relationships, they may require to enjoy learning to have positive teacher student relationships and engage with learning.

Conversely, two students in FG1J felt that they wanted autonomy over their learning and saw having choice as being a requirement for better relationships with their teachers. When talking about how relationships with their teachers could be improved, the students said, *"Let us pick our lessons/ subjects" (*FG1J/B) and "*Should be able to make choices"* (FG1J/D). In contrast, other students in the same group talked about the level of difficulty impacting on teacher-student relationships. For students A and D to have good relationships with their teachers, they required their teachers to, *"Make lessons more easy"* (FG1J/D) and make learning "…*more simple"* (FG4J/A). Similarly, in a different focus group, the amount of work was viewed as influencing the teacher-student relationship. In a discussion on what improves relationships with their teachers, students A and E both agreed that *"Er the teachers could give us less work*" (FG4J/A) and *"They could like not give us as much work … and wouldn't be as stressed"* (FG4J/E). As student E suggested that too much work makes them feel stressed it could be argued that harder tasks and too many tasks in the classroom, possibly linked to teachers having strict timelines to teach to exam content, causes stress for students. This may make students feel overwhelmed and find no enjoyment in learning and thus mean they feel unable to build positive teacher-student relationship.

As teaching to exam content can be linked to educational policies (1.3 and 2.2.2) this will be looked at further in chapter 5 to understand how this may affect students' experiences of teacher-student relationships. Certainly, student B in FG4N would agree that finding work difficult has an impact as they explained why they felt they did not have good relationships with some teachers, "*Because I find the work hard…it makes it harder to communicate with the teachers for me because I get stressed with the work and I end up snapping" (*FG4N/B). In the same focus group, student C supported feeling that difficult tasks and boring lessons create negative teacher-student relationships, explaining that they do not like some teachers because, "… *they don't like make the lessons like fun and they just make it like hard work"* (FG4N/C). Student E, also in FG4N, agreed, stating that they disliked some teachers, *"because they're pushing us to our limit"* (FG4N/E). Interestingly, two other students from this focus group suggested that pressure from teachers to complete certain work created stress for students and led to negative teacher-student relationships. Student D, felt that as a year 7 student, negative relationships were a result of being given work that was too hard and instead required teachers to wait until later in their school journey to give them more difficult tasks,*"…some of the teachers give us work that's for like year 11 and its making it harder and stressful…we've still got a few years to go so they should wait, I think they should wait a bit"* (FG4N/D). For student A, relationships with their teachers would improve over time if teachers became aware of the stress they were causing the students, "*they may realise that they are putting too much stress on the kids which is making the kids stress which is making the teacher stress"* (FG4N/A).

In addition to feeling the stress of too much work and work that was seen as too difficult, meeting deadlines, and facing exam pressure appears to mean the pace of learning in the classroom was seen as faster than on outdoor learning and so students mention feeling that they learn more on outdoor learning than in the classroom. Indeed, when talking about feeling that they learnt more on outdoor learning than in the classroom, student E said it was because, "*We have a double lesson [of outdoor learning] every week" (*FG1NE), suggesting that they felt there is more time to learn on outdoor learning lessons than in a classroom. Agreeing with this, student H from a different focus group, said that on outdoor learning,

*"…we're learning about the outdoors and going on trips...but at the same time we're also learning but it's not like strict learning its more at your own pace" (*FG3N/H). Supporting the idea that the pace of learning is too fast in the classroom, in another focus group, student A pointed out that in the classroom, *"… they [the teachers] hurry you up*" (FG2J/A)*,* and from the same group, student C showed their frustration at the speed of learning in the classroom, "*Sometimes you can't like work at that pace"* (FG2J/C). It is possible therefore, that to build positive teacher-student relationships and then engage with learning, students require not only to have fun teachers, lessons, and tasks, but also for those tasks not to be difficult to access and for them to be able to work at a suitable pace. This might suggest that how students feel about learning and possibly therefore engage with it, is determined by whether they enjoy it or not and therefore whether they feel they can have a good relationship with their teacher. Interestingly, the teachers suggested that they agree with this and that it is certainly the case on outdoor learning. As T2 explained when discussing their relationships with their students, they see students more engaged on outdoor learning and having good relationships with them as they are enjoying it, "*I think cos they enjoy it as well they tend to be engaged so the relationships quite good because they tend to enjoy what they doing*" (TFGN/T2).

4.5.2 Learning Environment

In a similar way to how they discussed appropriate tasks and activities, students also suggested that by being in the outdoor learning environment they have good relationships with their teachers. Student G proposed one requirement for building positive teacher-student relationships to be, *"We could do more activities like outside"* (FG3J/G). In considering that relationships are better outside, student C agreed by supporting the idea that easier work makes relationships with teachers positive and that this happens on outdoor learning, "*It's just easier to do [work outdoors]"* (FG2J/C). The requirement by students to learn outside so they can have positive relationships with their teachers is expanded on through conversations about the learning set-up in the classroom. Firstly, two students stated that they found it difficult to have a good relationship their teachers if they were in silence, suggesting that they require the ability to talk to build

relationships. For student G, in the classroom, *"you have to like sit in silence and then obviously if you can't talk then it doesn't build a good relationship with them"* (FG4N/G). Whereas student A considered how the outdoor learning environment built better relationships with teachers compared to the classroom, saying that the reason they were worse in the classroom was because, *"…you have to be like quiet…"* (FG4N/A).

Not sitting in silence was seen as part of a bigger requirement for building positive teacher-student relationships in terms of the learning environment, as students desire to either sit with friends, alone or be able to work with friends on tasks. Student A reinforced not sitting with others when they explained what would make their classroom relationships with their teachers better, "*Not like have to sit next to someone"* (FG2J/A). It is possible that student A is expressing their dislike of seating plans implying that sitting alone is preferable to a seating plan. Meanwhile, student C suggested their relationships with their teachers would be better if they could, "S*it with whoever you want"* (FG2J/C). The lack of ability to be with friends is contrasted with outdoor learning when student D says in a discussion on how they feel about outdoor learning, that not only is being outside better, but they are also better behaved, "*Because you can work with your friends, and you don't have to sit next to someone…*" (FG1/J/D). This again suggests frustration at seating plans that place students next to other students, or students who are not their friends. This is expanded on further in FG3N when student C compared outdoor learning to classroom learning suggesting they felt more restricted inside in terms of seating arrangements. They also commented about not being able to see or be with their friends in contrast to being outdoors where they were free to be with friends or choose to go where they wish:

> *"…because if you are in the classroom you are all in your seating plans and you don't get to sit wherever you want, you're in proper seating plans so you don't get to see them, whereas when you're in outdoor learning, you can go outside and that and actually play with your friends that you have that you can't sit next to in lessons" (*FG3N/C).

For other students in FG3N, it was not just being with their friends that was a requirement but being able to work with them to complete tasks. This is evident in student E's comment on their feelings about outdoor learning, "*you like get to work together with them [friends]*" (FG3N/E). It was also seen in student H's response to why they enjoy outdoor learning when they explained that it was because you can work with your friends who may be in different classes inside, *"you get to go to the beach and the other groups are in outdoor ed at the same time so if your mates aren't in the same group, when you go down to the beach you can all like partner with the other people from other classes"* (FG3N/H). In a similar way student A talked about outdoor learning offering the chance to talk to other students and work together with them on tasks, echoing the idea that in the classroom, they not only work in silence but perhaps feel there are not enough opportunities for collaborative working. As student A stated about outdoor learning, "*you go outside and you get to interact with each other; like when you're making a poster, you can join with a different partner and then um, you have teamwork and then it's all fun"* (FG3N/A). Students' enthusiasm for working with their friends, and other students, on outdoor learning activities may indicate that this makes them enjoy it more than the learning set-up in a classroom. Through their comments, they appear to imply that compared to learning in the classroom they do not find it stressful in outdoor learning lessons, perhaps because they feel they have the support of their friends and other students, and they can work together. Therefore, they may feel relaxed and can have positive relationships with their teachers. This will be explored in chapter 5.

4.5.3 Behaviours and actions

The requirement to have appropriate and suitable learning tasks and learning environment were talked about by students as part of a wider scope of requirements around the teacher-student relationship and engaging with learning. Students felt they required the behaviour and actions of the teacher to be appropriate, with some students specifically talking about the need to feel understood by their teacher to have a good relationship with them. For example, in FG3J in a discussion on teacher-student relationships, student D said that they could build good relationships if, *"The teachers could understand more"*

*(*FG2J/D), whilst student G in a similar discussion in FG3J, explained that they learnt with teachers they had a good relationship with because *"…they are like better understanding of you…"* (FG3J/G). It is interesting that student G followed this with, "…*that if they don't know who you are then so what" (*FG3J/G) possibly implying that they do not feel compelled to learn if the teacher does not feel compelled to get to know them. In contrast, in FG3N, one student felt that the reason they had good relationships with all their teachers was because they were understanding and helpful, "*I have a really good relationship with all the teachers because I never find I have, dislike anything about them. They are kind, they are understanding, if you don't know what to do, they'll help you" (*FG3N/E). It is possible therefore, that to have positive teacher-student relationships and engage with their learning, students require to feel that their teachers acknowledge who they are and are not left feeling ignored. This idea is seen in FG2J and FG3J in discussions on teacher-student relationships when several students talked about how the relationships could be improved, implying that they felt teachers they had a negative relationship with are not engaging with them. For example, student B said that good relationships could be built with their teachers if they, "*Get to know us better"* (FG2J/B) and student E said if they, "*Pay more attention to ya" (*FG2J/E). Whilst for student C and E in the same focus group, when asked if they felt they could ask every teacher for help they replied, *"No"* (FG2J/D) and *"No, they just don't reply"* (FG2J/A). Also supporting the idea that their teachers do not necessarily pay them attention, student G explained that they are unable to have a good relationship with a teacher if they, "*won't help you as much" (*FG3J/G). Furthermore, in requiring being able to feel that they can engage with their teachers and not feel ignored, students suggest that to have positive relationships with them, they want to be able to talk to their teachers. This is shown in discussions on negative relationships with some teachers where students speak about not feeling listened to and feeling unable to ask for or get help as well as feeling that some teachers react negatively to them if they do ask for help. In responding to why they felt their relationships were different with teachers they have a negative relationship with, one student said because, *"You're shy, you don't like to ask them"* (FG1J/E), whilst another student replied, "*If you ask a question, they'll like shout at you" (*FG1J/B). Whilst student E may be suggesting that a lack of confidence means they were unable to talk to their

teachers, it is possible that as student B suggests, students feel unable to talk to teachers as they are worried about their negative reactions. This is possibly because as already discussed by students, they are required to sit in silence in some lessons in the classroom which inhibits interaction, or it may be that as seen in section 4.4, if a student displays negative behaviour in the classroom, a teacher reacts negatively and then students may not feel comfortable to interact with them. Certainly, student G might have viewed it this way when they explained how the behaviour of students might impact the teacher-student relationship, *"It's horrible…The teacher always says that…I can't control… Erm, he always sends me out and he never listens to me"* (FG1J/G). Similarly, student B agreed that they do not feel able to interact with teachers stating instead that they respond negatively to negative responses of teachers "*I don't know, I just snap back until they [the teachers] seem quiet…then I just work it out myself in the end"* (FG4N/B).

In chapter 5, consideration will be given to why students feel they require teachers who get to know them and leave them feeling that they can ask questions of them. Perhaps, students require teachers who they feel are approachable and friendly, who they feel they can talk to and ask questions of. In FG3N, for example, student F spoke about a teacher who they felt was a good example of what they wanted in a teacher to have a positive relationship with them, stating approachability and understanding as two of the criteria, *"...xxx is a very good and understanding teacher with the children and if you have anything wrong you can just go and speak to her and that…"* (FG3N/F). Equally, feeling that they would have better relationships with teachers who were friendly and approachable, student B said that to improve teacher-student relationships the teachers, "*…could be nicer"* (FG3J/B). In a similar manner, two students also implied that having friendly and approachable teachers would build positive teacher-student relationships when they said good relationships with their teachers meant, *"You have the ability to ask them stuff"* (FG1J/F) and *"Don't be shy and then get on and ask questions" (*FG1J/C). If students require approachable and friendly teachers to have a positive relationship with them, then it may be that being approachable means students feel able to interact with them, perhaps by asking questions, but also

that friendly teachers are possibly more likely to interact with students and get to know them, thus helping to build positive teacher-student relationships.

In addition to being approachable and friendly, to have positive teacher-student relationships, students also felt that trust was a requirement, with student G saying that they had good relationships with *"the teachers that are nice not dead strict and er you could trust em, the ones you can trust"* (FG4N/G). By having a good relationship with their teachers through trust, student B viewed that it helped them engage and learn. As they explained, they learnt more with teachers they had good relationships with as they can trust them and so feel able to ask them questions, "*You can ask… yeah, you can have like trust to ask a lot"* (FG1J/B). Conversely, another student felt they struggled to learn if the relationship with their teacher was negative as they did not feel they trusted the teacher and explained that they might not want to learn if they had a negative teacher-student relationship, *"Because they're not… you don't have the trust in the teacher. They don't make it sound fun"* (FG3J/E). It is interesting that student E suggested that the teacher did not make the lesson 'fun' as it is possible that the lack of trust means students view learning as boring and not fun and as already seen in section 4.5.1, they feel work is more difficult and so struggle to build a positive teacher-student relationship. Indeed, FG3J group three would agree when students shouted a collective *'yeah'* (FG3J/A-H) to being asked if they found work more difficult if they did not trust the teacher. Further exploration of the need for fun teachers who are approachable, and understanding will be undertaken in chapter 5.

Students' requirements for a positive teacher-student relationship also have a positive impact on their view of being able to engage with their learning. Across all focus groups, students agree that having a positive teacher-student relationship helps them to engage in their lessons and to learn. When talking about whether good relationships with teachers were good for learning, a collective "*yeah"* (FG2N/A-F) from FG2N shows that they agree. Whereas in FG1J two students explained that they were able to engage more in lessons with a teacher they had a good relationship with, *"Because the teachers nice"* (FG1J/D) and because *"It's the good relationship*" (FG1J/D). Similarly, student G

in the same focus group stated that they learn more when they have a good relationship with their teacher, "*Because you can engage fully into the lesson*" (FG1J/G). It is possible then that if students feel able to talk to their teachers and trust them, as they find them approachable, that they not only like the teacher but are able to enjoy their lessons more. Certainly, the comment from student A when discussing if students felt more able to learn where there was a good teacher-student relationships would support this, *"Yeah because you like, like that lesson…you enjoy it more"* (FG4J/A). Whereas this student felt they were more able to learn if they had a good relationship with their teacher because they would not only like the lesson but would enjoy it, student D expressed the opinion that students might not want to listen to teachers if they did not like them and so they may not engage in those lessons, *"Because if you don't like the teacher you don't really wanna listen to them"* (FG3J/D). For student F, having a good relationship before learning was important to engaging as they explained that to learn, *"…you need to get on with the teacher before you do the lesson with them" (*FG3J/F). Exploration of the requirement by students for positive teacher-student relationships prior to engaging with learning will be done in chapter 5.

Additionally, other students offered reasons as to why having a positive teacher-student relationship might support them to learn, with student D having suggested that it was due to the positive benefits of good relationships, *"It can like boost your mental health like towards doing the work"* (FG4J/D). Student E meanwhile explained that having a positive relationship with their teacher meant they were able to go to them if they had any issues and then were able to learn as they had shared their worries and relieved their stress to allow them to engage in learning, *"because when you worry they have someone to go to and worrying blocks the mind so you can do better and they have someone there in school"* (FG2N/E). In contrast, student A felt that the teacher-student relationship influenced students' engagement if they were engaging with learning, *"I think the teachers and the students have a better relationship if it impacts on peoples learning and lets them do better"* (FG2N/A). This may be linked to the idea that teachers might prefer students who are engaged in lessons (4.3.3 and 4.3.5). Indeed, two students in FG3J agree with this, as they said that teacher-student relationships can be improved if students, "*Become better at your work and stuff, maybe like ask more*

questions to the teacher" (FG3J/B) and *"it might not really depend on how many questions you ask but it might get your relationship up with the teacher again"* (FG3J/D).

Perhaps if students suggest they require to be listened to, they feel able to engage with their teacher and that their teacher is willing to get to know them and understand them by being approachable and friendly. Therefore, they form a positive relationship, and students feel comfortable to not only ask questions but to also get to know their teachers, to trust them and then engage with their learning. As already discussed, (4.3 and 4.4), outdoor learning may offer a suitable environment for this to happen and as T2 said when asked if students are engaged on outdoor learning, "*they are certainly engaged when we're out…*" (TFGN/T2), suggesting that the circumstances for this to happen might be achievable through outdoor learning. This will be looked at further in chapter 5.

4.6 Summary

This chapter began by considering students' thoughts and feelings of teacher-student relationship at the beginning of year 7 and then across the year. Whilst teacher-student relationships were reported by students to be mostly positive at the start of year 7, relationships with teachers were seen to decline throughout the year and more students reported that they did not get on with teachers by the end of year 7. Three themes that emerged from the data have been considered to investigate students' experiences of teacher-student relationships in year 7.

The theme of 'Behaviours' was discussed to show that students believe that both their own and teachers' behaviours can negatively impact teacher-student relationships. Students felt that continued negative behaviour and responses were likely to sustain negative teacher-student relationships but that the behaviour of students could alter, and thus positive relationships could be formed. Outdoor learning was seen to foster positive relationships with teachers, partly because students saw teachers as being more relaxed and less stressed when outdoors. This in turn meant that behaviour was positive outside. The theme of

'Contrasting Learning Environments and Approaches' was discussed to show how students made a distinction between classroom learning and outdoor learning. Whereas inside the classroom, students felt pressure in terms of not having time to complete tasks, having to do work they found too difficult and not enjoying learning or finding it relevant, students believed that outdoor learning helped them and the teachers to feel relaxed, calm and less stressed and thus created a suitable environment for interacting positively with teachers. The theme of 'Requirements' showed students' interpretations of what they viewed as being key to building and sustaining positive teacher-student relationships. Students felt that it was important to have appropriate tasks and activities and to be able work collaboratively with their friends and other students and to be given freedom and space. It was also seen by students to be important that teachers got to know them, understood them and listened to them as this was seen to support students so that they felt they could have positive relationships with teachers.

The three themes will now be explored further in chapter 5 by considering the research questions to explore how students' experiences of behaviour, classroom and outdoor learning environments and approaches to learning, as well as students' requirements for teacher student relationships can be understood.

5 Interpreting student voices

5.1 Introduction

In chapter 4 I considered what my findings might show using my three key themes of behaviours, contrasting learning environments and approaches, and requirements. In this chapter, I discuss these three themes in relation to my research questions (see Box 1) to explore possible meanings from young people's views.

Box 1

Research Questions:

Research question 1: *What are young peoples' experiences of teacher-student relationships in secondary school and what impact does this have on their engagement with learning?*

Research question 2: *From the perspective of young people, what impact does outdoor learning have on building positive teacher-student relationships and their engagement with learning?*

Research Question 3*: What can be learnt from the experiences of young people with respect to teacher-student relationships, engagement with learning and outdoor learning?*

Using each research question, I explore how my findings weave together and provide interpretation as to the significance of these for teacher-student relationships. I approach this through my research questions to make sense of the data by highlighting young people's experiences of teacher-student relationships from beginning year 7 through to the end of year 7, showing their views of the impact on engagement with learning and implications for outdoor learning. Throughout this, in-thesis referencing is used to provide links to previous literature (chapter 2) and the data (chapter 4), and where appropriate, to provide clarity and context to my interpretation (chapters 1 and 3). To guide the flow of my discussions, throughout the chapter sub-headings are used. These are not direct quotes but an overview of young people's voice to summarise the content within each section.

This chapter begins in section **5.2, Young peoples' experiences of teacher-student relationships in secondary school and the impact on their engagement with learning**. This uses research question one to consider how young people experience their relationships with teachers from the start of year 7 through to the end of year 7, and what this might mean from their perspective in terms of engagement with learning.

The section starts by looking at the students' views of relationships with teachers as positive at the start of the year before exploring why they reported a drop in positive teacher-student relationships at the end of year 7. This is done through the themes of learning environments, approaches, and behaviour, which are used to interpret young people's expressions of their understanding of how classroom environments impact teacher-student relationships. I consider how learning approaches in classrooms might affect engagement with learning and why young people suggest this creates poor teacher-student relationships. I then look at students' views on how classroom environments are seen to affect behaviour for both students and teachers and negatively impact teacher-student relationships that can lead to disengagement.

The next section **is 5.3, The perspective of young people on the impact of outdoor learning on building positive teacher-student relationships and their engagement with learning.** This section uses research question two to look at what young people say about teacher-student relationships in relation to outdoor learning by considering the theme of learning environments and approaches. This theme is used to understand young people's experiences of positive relationships with teachers on outdoor learning and why they report positive and exciting experiences on outdoor learning. I explore how young people contrast the outdoors with being in the classroom and how this connects to their sense of approaches to learning outdoors. Looking at the significance of being outdoors for young people, I consider why outdoor learning is seen by them to support both building positive teacher-student relationships and engagement with learning.

The final section is **5.4, What can be learnt from the experiences of young people with respect to teacher-student relationships, engagement with learning and outdoor learning?** This uses research question three to reflect on the meaning of young people's experiences of teacher-student relationships. Through the theme of requirements, I examine what young people view as being important for building positive teacher-student relationships and encouraging engagement with learning. By exploring requirements for positive teacher-student relationships, as voiced by young people, the meaning of these is considered and interpreted to understand the relevance for young people's engagement with learning. The significance of this is then explored to show what this might mean for building positive teacher-student relationships through outdoor learning to encourage and support engagement with learning.

For all sections, analysis under my research questions is used to support discussion on how my findings add to understanding of teacher-student relationships and engagement with learning within the context of outdoor learning. I have chosen to do this to aid my exploration of young people's experiences as to the significance of outdoor learning for teacher-student relationships and engagement with learning. It also allows me to show how the data can be viewed with reference to my research statement which was, *"fostering positive relationships between teachers and young people through outdoor learning encourages engagement with learning thus creating positive learning environments"* (Chapter 1).

When discussing the data through my research questions, I apply reflective thematic analysis (see chapter 3) to aid my interpretations by reflecting on meaning and significance of the data for my participants and how my role and position may impact this.

5.2 Young peoples' experiences of teacher-student relationships in secondary school and the impact on their engagement with learning

We think our teacher-student relationships begin positive but then decline

My study examines young people's experiences of teacher-student relationships and the impact on their engagement with learning. At the beginning of year 7, many students in my study talked enthusiastically about having positive relationships with teachers overall (4.2), whilst student FG3 stated that having only just begun school, it was likely that teacher-student relationships would be positive, *"We've only just arrived in school…we've just met the teachers and like we'll obviously start with good relationships …"* (FG3/ND) (4.3). This is in line with research by Jindal-Snape (2010, 2018) (2.2.4) suggesting little reason why students would not begin secondary school positively and showing most students to be enthusiastic about starting secondary school. My study found most young people reporting positive relationships at the beginning of year 7. Yet, students also appeared to be aware that teacher-student relationships may not remain positive as they moved through the school year (4.2), seen in student FG3's comment that, "*They might be worse" (*FG3/NA) (4.2). This suggests, as Gehlbach, Brinkworth and Harris (2012) (2.3.1) research found, that students in my study show an awareness that their perceptions of teacher-student relationships by the end of the school year may differ from their initial views. My results are also consistent with Gehlbach, Brinkworth and Harris (2012) (1.4.1) findings that teacher-student relationships from students' perspectives tend to reduce in positivity over the course of a school year as student A pointed out. Indeed, towards the end of the academic year, students in my study reported fewer positive relationships with teachers in the classroom (4.2), viewing them as having declined across the year. In this way my results support previous research by Tobbell and O'Donnell (2013) (2.2.4) and Bridgeland, Dilulio and Morison (2006) (2.2) by showing a link between positive teacher-student relationships and transition into and through secondary school in the way that relationships may alter and be affected by moving through school.

Along with a decline in teacher-student relationships, students also spoke about becoming more disengaged in the classroom (4.4.1 and 4.5.1) towards the end of year 7, echoing Rudduck, Chaplain and Wallace' (1996) (1.2.1) findings of declining motivation, engagement and attitude as students move through secondary school, and matching Ross's (2009) (1.4.1) evidence that negative teacher-student relationships are a factor in viewing school negatively. My findings suggest young people believe negative teacher-student relationships occur for a variety of reasons such as being given too much work, feeling restricted in the classroom and not enjoying learning. Therefore, by considering the themes of learning environments, approaches, and behaviour, my research adds to understanding of how young people experience teacher-student relationships in terms of what Wentzel (2013) (2.3.1) suggests may be missing in research. In doing so I investigate how and why relationships change for young people and understand how students view the impact of this on engagement with learning. This is now explored further throughout this section.

We think there is a negative impact of class work

Students in my study voiced (4.4.1, 4.5.1 and 4.5.3) that teacher-student relationships were affected by approaches to learning. For example, they suggested there were time restrictions on learning (4.4.1), that the speed at which tasks needed completing was too fast (4.4.1 and 4.5.1), preventing them from learning at their pace, and that they were given too much work (4.5.1) which was seen as too hard (4.4.1 and 4.5.1). As expressed by students in my study, these views may account for why my results are comparable to research from Rudduck, Chaplain and Wallace (1996) (1.2.1) showing a decline in engagement with learning, and research from Wigfield et al. (1991) (1.2.1) showing a decline in motivation to learn as students move though year 7. Equally, not connecting with teachers was seen by my students to lead to work being viewed as boring (4.4.1), which as Lankshear and Knobel's (2005) (2.4.1) suggest, potentially shows young people in my study knew how to appear engaged and involved in learning activities whilst in fact being off task. An explanation for this may be that my findings also indicate that as Harris's (2008) (2.4.2) study shows, though teachers may perceive activities they set support students to learn, this is not always the case and instead students may engage in an activity but not actually be learning,

and equally they may be learning but not engaged. This was implied by students in my study, seen in the following comment from student FG4, *"Most of the lessons (indoors) are boring"* (FG4/JSA) (4.4.2). Therefore, as suggested by Watkins (2005) (2.2.2) it could be argued that my results show that for young people, learning does not necessarily connect with being taught but can be about passively making sense of what is being taught. This is because my data shows young people expressing frustration over classroom teaching (4.4.1) as they talked about how they "...*don't like being stuck in a classroom for 50 minutes like 6 times a day" (*FG1/NJSA) (4.4.1). This points to disparities between young people's expectations of education and school, and educational policies which Yandall (2017) (2.2.2) argues, accept there is body of core knowledge (Hirsch 1987) (1.2.1) to be communicated by the teacher and received by the learner. Yet, though teaching core knowledge is viewed as important for economic success and productivity (DfE 2016) (2.2.1); and (Apple 2004 and Ball 2021) (2.2.2), to ensure young people obtain qualifications to enable them to enter the world of work (DfE 2010) (2.2.2), my findings show my students to be frustrated over classroom learning. This is seen in comments that suggest students felt a lack of autonomy over learning when they say, "…*in a classroom you're sat down and like you write and that but then you don't do owt for 50 minutes unless you're writing…" (*FG1/NSE) (4.4.1*).* The implication here may be that as Barlett and Burton (2020) (2.2.1) suggest, educational policies focused on teaching core knowledge signify consent thereby suggesting agreement by students to take part in learning. However, students in my study expressed, as Harris (1994) (2.2.1) argues, that they did not necessarily have or perceive to have choice, control, or autonomy in learning. Jackson (2011) (2.2.1) notes, this may be because education is deeply implicated in the pursuit of different kinds of truth and transmission of knowledge. Arguably, then my students might feel school does not fit the role of what they consider to be the purpose of education (1.2) in that schools focus on teaching *'essential knowledge'* (DfE 2010) (1.2), (DfE 2016) (2.2.1) rather than as Dewey (1938) (1.3.1 and 2.2.1) suggests, supporting young people to learn through experience. Yet for Murray (2023) (2.2.2), if learning was prioritised over testing, the young people in my study would be encouraged not just to want to learn but to love learning. Interestingly, this is seen in my results in that young people reported viewing classroom work as too difficult for their age

group, stating that they felt sometimes work taught to them should be for the top year of secondary school, *"… some of the teachers give us work that's for like year 11 and it's making it harder and stressful…"* (FG4/NSD) (4.5.1). Therefore, rather than enabling students in my study to feel empowered (Allison (2000) (2.5.4), it could be argued that their enthusiasm and pleasure in learning at the start of year 7 declines as even if they are perceived to be engaged in learning they may not be learning (Harris's 2008) (2.4.1), possibly as they perceive the work as not appropriate.

Consistent with Engels et al.'s (2017) (2.4.3) findings, it is possible that my students' enthusiasm and pleasure in learning at the start of year 7 declines as they become less actively engaged as they progress through school. This could be because they feel 'forced' to learn knowledge that does not suit all learners equally (Bourdieu 1977) (1.4.1) or because as Ball (2021) (2.2.1) suggests, schools do not necessarily offer equal choice in terms of learning, again perhaps pointing to students in my study not feeling they have autonomy over learning (Carr 2016) (2.2.1). Interestingly, my students reported that boring lessons meant negative teacher-student relationships as they felt unable to connect with the teacher (4.4.1), which implies that as Osterman (2000) (2.2.2) says, schools may neglect the socioemotional needs of students as for Noblitt (1993) (2.2.2) they are not designed to support relationship building and connectedness. This may be due to the pressure schools find placed upon them in terms of having to teach core knowledge and achieve high attainment outcomes which reduces the possibility of more motivating teaching practices (Niemiec and Ryan (2009) (2.4.3).

Finding work boring and feeling a lack of control over learning may also show how students in my study saw learning as 'owned' by teachers rather than themselves. This is because students appeared to equate classroom learning with teaching to exams *"… then you've got things like exams…"* (FG4/JSF) (4.4.1) and described feeling pressure to learn content that was too hard, *"I find the work hard…" (*FG4/NSB) (4.5.1) or too advanced (4.5.1) and which they saw as stressful *"because they're [teachers] pushing us to our limit"* (FG4/NSE) (4.5.1). As stated by Waite (2011) (1.4.1), this could leave my students feeling unable to

identify with school or the curriculum as by viewing the work as too difficult or creating stress for them, as Bourdieu (1977) (1.4.1) points out, students in my study could see class work as having little or no meaning for them. When taken as part of a wider view of education policies which Ball (2021) (2.2.1) states, guide young people into the world of work, the frustration young people in my study display over a lack of relevant learning content could possibly be seen in reference to what Robinson (2016) (2.2.1) says is about teaching core knowledge derived from elitist ideology to reproduce dominant cultural values. Therefore, it could be argued that for students in my study, their frustration over classroom learning inhibited their natural learning and curiosity (Rousseau, 2011) (2.1.1), (Montessori 1996) (2.1.1), (Carr, 2016 (1.4.1), which is seen in my students' comparisons of classroom learning not being as fun, interesting or as easy as outdoor learning (4.4.2 and 4.4.5).

In addition to this, my results found young people reported that by the end of year 7 they felt pressure to learn content taught in classrooms, expressing irritation at being given too much writing and book work, not enough fun activities (4.4.2) and little time on tasks. For student FG3, their frustration with classroom learning was voiced by comparing it to outdoor learning, stating that, "*"…you have to stay inside…and finish the task…cos you have to finish that task…but outside you can do that task at your own pace then you're finished*…" (FG3/JSB) (4.4.1). It could be argued that this is consistent with research from Engels et al. (2017) (2.4.3) showing students to not only be less actively immersed in learning activities as they move through school but with reduced enthusiasm and enjoyment. The pressure young people in my study spoke about in terms of expectations to learn in the classroom also left them describing feeling pushed to their limits (4.5.1) which might, as Wigfield et al. (1991) (2.4.3) suggest, lead to a decline in students' belief in their abilities, if they feel the work is too difficult or not set at the right level (4.5.1), accounting for a decrease in engagement with learning. Interestingly, my research found students not only reported feeling stressed by the amount of work and level of difficulty but viewed this as creating stress for the teachers (4.5.1). This was then seen to cause poor teacher-student relationships (4.5.1) and as Collie, Shap and Perry (2011) (2.2.3) found, having a positive relationship with teachers is seen to limit teacher stress. An explanation for this

finding is that educational policies focused on academic competence, exam performance and accountability, according to Joyce (2012) (1.3.1), can create a situation whereby teacher professionalism is undermined as choice and autonomy over what to teach and how is removed. This for Nicholson (2016) (1.3.1) devalues the work of teachers, which for Pettigrew and Curtis (2010) (1.2) weakens their role in the classroom. Furthermore, as Stuart and Walker (2019) (2.2.3) point out, reducing young people to exam results creates indifference to individuality, limiting the freedoms of schools and teachers as the attainment discourse dominates learning. In this way, my study extends previous research by Lumby (2011) (2.2.3) implying that young people feel no sense of proficiency in the classroom but rather that lessons are imposed on them with too much writing so that they do not connect with learning but with achieving the goal of taking exams. Consequently, the young people in my study suggest that this leads to negative teacher-student relationships when they view teachers in the classroom as setting boring, limited tasks and activities that are not fun, work that is too difficult or where there is too much of it (4.5.1). Arguably, through students' expressions of frustration over classroom learning, as Stuart and Walker (2019) (2.2.3) found, my results suggest that holding teachers to account for students' results restricts what teachers can do in the classroom, which for Jackson (2011) (2.2.1) makes their role resource depleted, and rule bound so that although they can challenge the system, teachers can also reinforce dominant and hegemonic value systems.

Notably, students in my study implied that they did not find being in the classroom enjoyable (4.5.1) and in a similar way to prior findings from Lumby (2011) (2.3), teachers were seen by students in my study as a source of pressure and stress which left young people feeling unable to form relationships with them (4.4). This result highlights students' need for enjoyment in learning, which is supported by previous research from Shernoff et al. (2003) (2.1.3) that points to enjoyment being a central reason why young people do not achieve their potential, and the Every Child Matters document (Department for Education and Skills, 2003) (2.1.3) citing that *'Children learn better when they are excited and engaged'.* However, this statement does not appear to have been realised in educational policies and instead policies continue to focus on '*A broader, richer, cutting-edge*

curriculum that drives high and rising schools' standards' (DfE 2024) (2.2.2) which as Ball (2021) (2.2.1) says believes that the value of learning increases with input and that value can be measured and documented with grades and qualifications. To achieve high grades and qualifications, Brown (2003) (2.2.2) states discipline in school is seen as essential but comes at the cost of de-valuing care and relationships. For young people in my study, this translated to finding it difficult to build positive relationships with teachers who were more authoritarian (4.3.7), demonstrated by student FG4, talking about feeling uncomfortable with teachers who displayed less friendly approaches, *"…some teachers that are harsh, dead strict…you just don't want to go to…you don't feel you could trust to talk to"* (FG4/NSG) (4.3.7). In addition to this, having a positive reaction from teachers to form positive relationships was seen by students in my study to help them engage with learning, as shown in student FG1's statement declaring that they learn more with teachers they have good relationship with as, "*You can ask [questions]… ,you can have like trust to ask a lot"* (FG1/J SB) (4.5.3). One explanation for this is Ryan, Stiller and Lynch (1994) (2.2.3) research that shows feeling connected to the teacher affects the level of enjoyment for students.

We think the behaviour of students and teachers has an impact

Results from my study show young people seem to understand their behaviour to have a positive or negative effect on teacher-student relationships (4.3). At the start of year 7 my participants were aware that poor behaviour from themselves and other students might reverse positive teacher-student relationships (4.3). There is some alignment here with a prior study from Ladd and Burgess (2001) (2.3.2) showing that young people who display negative behaviours in the early years of schooling are more likely to form negative relationships with their teachers. My students also described poor teacher-student relationships as occurring when they messed about in lessons, lost their tempers or had bad days (4.3) as student FG1 explained, they saw their behaviour negatively impacting relationships with their teachers, *"…because I play up…"* (FG1J/SE) (4.3.1). As Christenson, Reschly and Wylie (2012) (2.4.1) and Fredricks, Reschly and Christenson (2019) (2.4.1) found, my students' disruptive behaviours could characterise low engagement so that teachers viewed the students as not being engaged due to poor behaviour. Buckley (2014) (2.4.1) argues that education

policies are often focused on the view that re-engaging young people will lead to higher attainment yet interestingly, although the young people in my research spoke about the need to listen and behave well (4.3), they did so in relation to creating positive teacher-student relationships rather than to do better in exams. In contrast to Eccles and Roeser's (2011) (2.3) review, results from my data show that for my students, engagement is linked to teacher-student relationships rather than attainment or academic success with students in my study expressing that they were better able to engage when they had a positive relationship with teachers (4.5.3). However, my results do correspond with a review by Eccles and Roeser's (2011) (2.4.2) to suggest that engagement has an influential role in promoting positive teacher-student relationships as my data shows students speaking about the appropriate behaviour to avoid eliciting a negative response from teachers, as being students *"… just need to stop messing around"* (FG1/JSH) (4.3.7).

Student FG1's comment show that my results arguably point to what Nguyen, Cannata and Miller (2016) (2.4.1) describe as being describe as behavioural engagement in that young people in my study are seen to be engaged when displaying appropriate classroom behaviour and showing an interest in learning. It could also be possible that my results show my students to be what Zepke (2018) (2.4.1) explains as being cognitively engaged as they 'willingly' invest time and energy into completing tasks and activities. However, students in my study may do this to ensure a positive teacher response as they reported that what might improve their relationships with teachers would be "*Listening and being responsible"* (FG1/JSF) (4.3.7) and by "C*ontributing"* (FG1/JSC) (4.3.7). For students in my study, both forms of engagement are done to ensure they receive the teacher's positive attention. In this respect my findings reveal that young people felt that if they acted better, worked, listened, contributed, asked questions and showed an interest then they would form good teacher-student relationships (4.3). A possible explanation for this is that students in my study believed that being seen to engage with learning makes the teachers like them because as previous research from Kedar-Voivodas (1983 in Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris 2004) (2.2.3) found, teachers favour academically competent, responsible students who follow rules.

An important strength of my research is that it shows behavioural engagement is important to young people in terms of supporting them to build positive teacher-student relationships as they felt teachers responded better when they were displaying positive behaviour. This contrasts with Chase et al.'s (2014) (2.4) findings that if students felt unable to meet expected requirements in terms of behaviour, they were unsuccessful academically, as my results show students saw poor behavioural engagement to mean poor teacher-student relationships. Having a positive teacher-student relationship then, allowed students in my study to feel able to engage with learning better because teachers' responses were positive. In this way, my research adds to Eccles and Roeser's (2009) (2.4.1) research by also linking cognitive engagement to both behavioural and emotional engagement. This is because students in my study also expressed that they felt teachers' high expectations of them were shown through positive teacher-student relationships so that students felt more connected to teachers and tried to avoid displaying problem behaviours that might contribute to negative teacher-student relationships. Young people in my study also talked about continuing poor behaviour throughout year 7, contributing to a decline in teacher-student relationships which was seen to be sustained if students disliked a teacher (4.3). This is in contrast with Li et al.'s (2011 in Engels et al. 2017) (2.4.3) conclusion that behavioural engagement remains high in the first few years of secondary school as my results suggest that engagement begins to decline during year 7. In addition, my study provides evidence that being told off for poor behaviour by the teacher also contributes to negative teacher-student relationships (4.3). In discussions on what affects teacher-student relationships, student FG3 responded, *"...like if we were bad children at school and the teachers start to dislike you…"* (FG3/NSH) (4.3.6). This is consistent with research by Split et al. (2011 in Evans, Butterworth and Law 2019) (2.3.2) suggesting that if a teacher sees student behaviour as a problem, they may build an image of the relationship as one of conflict, shaping further interactions to form negative teacher-student relationships.

My participants also highlighted that student behaviour may be variable, as they suggested teacher-student relationships may be affected by factors that they view as being adaptable in that changes can be made by both teachers and

students to improve relationships (4.3). This includes how the teachers react to students' negative or poor behaviour as student D suggested in relation to relationships with teachers, *"…they'll get worse cos they'll [students] get more mischievous…cos the teachers would get fed up of us"* (FG4/NSD) (4.3.4). The student's comment highlights that if students demonstrate poor behaviour the teacher may eventually tire of this and then react negatively towards students creating negative teacher-student relationships that continue (4.3). In this way, my evidence supports Sutherland and Oswald's (2005) (2.2.2) proposal that teachers and students can become captive to an ongoing cycle of declining teacher-student relationships and student problem behaviour as teachers' negative expectations are confirmed through students' continuing negative behaviours. For students in my research, they believed teachers were likely to dislike students who misbehaved, responding negatively to those who did not conform to their expectations of listening or who argued with them. It is possible that this is because, as found by Wilkins (2014) (2.2.2), teachers in my study did not feel able to build positive relationships with students they felt did not react or respond in the way they felt they should, demonstrating positive behaviours.

Similar to Hamre et al.'s (2008) (2.3.2) findings, students in my study reported feeling that teachers' judgements of problem behaviour led to teachers reacting negatively towards students. This is seen in a comment from student F when discussing teachers' reactions, *"…it's if you are just like say naughty, the teacher…gives you a warning and you just ignore the teacher or something, that's what I feel like the teacher would dislike you for some reason"* (FG3/NSF) (4.3). Arguably, as found by Ladd and Burgess (1999) (2.3.2), my results show students reported teachers reacting to poor behaviour which fostered a chain of negative interactions with teachers, resulting in poor teacher-student relationships. Furthermore, students reported teachers reacting negatively towards whole classes because of some students' poor behaviour, suggesting that *"...if one person in the class starts like disrupting them… the teacher…take[s] it out on the rest of the class"* (FG4/JSE) (4.3.7). Young people in my research viewed this as creating negative teacher-student relationships, suggesting they felt the repercussions of teachers feeling stressed and did not wish to be on the teacher's radar next lesson. Student C captures this by stating, "…*when teachers have*

*shouted at a kid… like they are gonna be in a mood...I feel I'd better hide…" (*FG1/NSC) (4.3.7). In this way, my findings add to previous research from Hamre and Pianta (2005) (2.3.2) who found teachers strict attitudes in the classroom can result in poor student behaviours which lead to conflict, as my results indicate students did not feel able to trust or talk to teachers who they felt were too harsh or strict and thus a positive teacher-student relationship was not possible (4.3). My results also extend Driscoll and Pianta's (2010) (2.3.2) findings that negative behaviours can be reduced through positive teacher-student relationships, as my data shows my participants believed students behaved *"better"* (FG1/JSA-SF) (4.3.9) outside and that teacher-student relationships were positive (4.3.9). Therefore, it is possible that, as students voiced (4.4), the outdoor environment led to positive teacher-student relationships which reduced negative behaviour.

When teachers display strict attitudes in the classroom, students in my study stated that they responded negatively to teachers and so my research aligns with Wubbels and Brekelmans's (2005) (2.3.2) findings to suggest teacher-student relationships are based on students' understanding of teachers' actions and behaviours. Arguably this is because my students felt that although teachers respond negatively to negative behaviours, it was the positive response of the teacher that led to positive teacher-student relationships. As student D explained, *"…cos if you be polite, they'll [teachers] like you more"* (FG2/JSD) (4.3.9) showing that students feel the need to display positive behaviours for teachers to like them. In addition, my results provide evidence to support previous research from Connell (1990) (2.3.2) which shows students both respond to, and influence teachers' actions as not only did my students feel they received support depending on the level of engagement they showed but that engagement was dependent on how much they felt the teacher liked them (4.3). Furthermore, comparable to Ladd and Burgess's (2001) (2.3.2) findings, my data also indicates that students reduce their engagement if conflict with teachers is sustained or worsened, as my participants reported at the end of year 7.

An interesting finding from my study is that students stated teachers who displayed negative responses in the classroom shared similar responses. Students reported these as being shouting, strict, nasty and moody (4.3.7),

explaining that they felt these responses were due to teachers being stressed, *"I feel like the stricter ones are a lot more stressed"* FG4/NSG) (4.3.7). Teachers were then seen by my participants to take their stress and frustration out on the rest of the class with student A stating that *"when the teachers are stressed out, they take it out on others"* (FG4/JA) (4.3.6). In this way, my research lends support to prior research from Chang (2009;2013 in Evans, Butterworth and Law 2019) (2.3.3) as my findings also point to a connection between teachers' negative responses to perceived poor student behaviour and teacher levels of stress, suggesting teachers become stressed when responding to negative student behaviour. Similarly, as my students pointed out that teachers respond to negative behaviour negatively because they are stressed, my results add to Hamre et al.'s (2008) (2.3.3) conclusion that when teachers view the teacher-student relationship as being in conflict, there are negative outcomes for teachers. This potentially creates a cycle whereby students in my study reported finding it difficult to form positive relationships with teachers if they displayed negative actions, *"Like when they are in a mood"* (FG1/ND) (4.3.7), which students said were due to stress (4.3.7). My participants then self-reported poor behaviour in response to stressed teachers which continued the cycle of negative teacher responses and relationships conflict. It could be argued that these findings match (Chang's 2009/2013 and Split et al.'s 2011 in Evans, Butterworth and Law 2019) (2.3.3) results to show that teacher well-being is negatively impacted when teachers respond negatively to negative behaviour as they experience higher stress levels. This is significant as my results found that teachers reported on outdoor learning *"I don't think I've really told anybody off…"* (TFG/NT1) (4.3.9) suggesting they had not responded negatively to poor behaviour, whilst young people stated that teachers were less stressed outdoors and more relaxed (4.4.1), implying that if conflict is experienced, teachers experience negative well-being.

Furthermore, my study found students viewed teacher stress as being part of the job with student A explaining that *"teachers are stressed anyway"* (FG2N/SA) (4.3) As Niemiec and Ryan (2009) (2.4.3) argue, this finding may demonstrate that educational policies impact teachers in the way that they exert pressure on teachers to teach to exams. They suggest this undermines the autonomy of

teachers, which leads to what my students agree is lower enthusiasm and creativity in the classroom, resulting in less interesting and inspiring activities that students say negatively impacts teacher-student relationships (4.4.2 and 4.5.1). In contrast to this Collie, Shap and Perry (2011) (2.1.3) found positive teacher-student relationships limit teacher stress and create positive learning environments. Their findings may account for why young people in my study reported feeling scared, for example, stating "*I get scared when teachers have shouted at a kid and then it's my next lesson with that teacher…it's like scary" (*FG1/NSC) (4.3.6). This is because if, as Collie, Shap and Perry (2011) (2.1.3) suggests, stressed teachers tend to have lower tolerance for poor student behaviours, it is possible that students wanted to minimise stress for teachers by avoiding further conflict to ensure positive teacher-student relationships and a positive learning environment (4.3).

Participants in my study also believed that showing a positive attitude towards teachers meant that teachers would respond with positive attitudes, and this would lead to positive teacher-student relationships (4.3). This is comparable to findings from Cornelius-White (2007) (2.3.2) in that students in my study saw that when teachers behaved compassionately towards them it was sometimes due to being viewed as engaging with learning which then further improved their engagement, creating a mutually beneficial cycle. My results also indicate that my students felt all students needed to be polite to teachers and to *'…stop messing around'* (FG1/JH) (4.3) so that the teachers would like them (4.3), suggesting students believed they should not draw attention to themselves to avoid eliciting negative reactions from the teacher. In this way, as Kedar-Voivodas (1983 in Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris 2004) (2.2.3) found, students in my study appeared to understand that teachers preferred students who were seen to be engaged and academically competent, as they were not seen to be behaving poorly. My results support the idea that this influences the quality of the teacher-student relationship. This was seen in the way some students voiced feeling ignored and not always listened to by teachers, such as student FG1's comment on a poor relationship with one teacher, "*He always sends me out, he never listens"* (FG1J/SE) (4.3). In addition, my students felt that when they asked some teachers for help, "*they just don't reply"* (FG2/JSA) (4.5.3) and that this

leads to not having a good relationship with those teachers as they "*won't help as much"* (FG3/JSG) (4.5.3). As my students suggested they would not listen to teachers that they did not have a good relationship with (4.5.3), my research adds to Connell and Wellborn's (1991) (2.3.2) findings which suggest engagement is more likely to happen if students believe their teachers care about them and want them to engage. This is because young people in my research suggest that when teachers are perceived to display characteristics such as caring, students feel able to form a positive relationship with them (4.5.3). Arguably, young people in my study viewed teacher–student relationships in the same way as Wubbels and Breklelmans' (2005) (2.3.2) review of findings, in that positive relationships with teachers can be characterised by student perceptions of the level of teacher guidance and closeness towards them.

We think classroom environments impact teacher-student relationships and engagement

My results show that students also viewed aspects of the classroom environment as impacting negatively on teacher-student relationships, voicing that they found classrooms restrictive, "*I don't like being stuck in a classroom…" (*FG1/NJSA) (4.4.1) and felt confined, "*In a classroom it's more like everybody's… in one small space"* (FG1/JB) (4.4.1). This may be due to what Bernard (2012) (2.2.2) describes as the box-like structure of schools and classrooms which can leave students feeling trapped. My students' sense of confinement indoors could also be explained through what Nicholson (2016) (2.2.2) sees as the structure of classrooms conveying cultural messages such as the need to conform to expectations of acceptable conduct. In this way my students found it difficult to be indoors with teachers who they saw as displaying negative behaviour as they felt they could not do anything, as student C states, *"When you're in a classroom with a grumpy teacher you can't really like escape it*" (FG1/NSC) (4.4.1). The strong opinions voiced by young people in my research about being indoors also included feeling there was a lack of freedom, space and movement (4.4.1) which they suggested was monotonous. For example, students felt they were made to sit still indoors explaining that "…*in a classroom you're sat down and …you write… you don't do owt for 50 minutes unless you're writing…" (*FG1/NSE)

(4.4.1). This is in line with Lumby's (2011) (2.4) findings, which showed young people viewed passive tasks, for example writing, as disengaging. Furthermore, for the young people in my research, engagement with learning was seen to take place when they were *'not being incredibly bored'* (QPL.S7) and felt they were '*understanding the lesson'* (QPL.S2). As students in my study described classroom learning as 'boring', stating that they felt they did nothing but sit and/or write for 50 minutes (4.4.1), it is possible that students in my study were referring to what Powney and McPake (1996) (2.2.2) describe as the primary teaching style of teacher upfront talking. As Bernard's (2012) (2.2.2) findings suggest, teacher-centred authoritative models of teaching may be less effective and desirable to young people for learning than child-centred, active learning models which may explain why students in my study said they engage more outdoors where they feel the learning is more active and student focused (4.4). Teacher-centred authoritative models of teaching are seen by Habermas (1987 in Bernard 2012) (2.2.3) to be a result of educational policies and practices which place excessive focus on individual achievement thus limiting teacher-student relationships. This may explain why students in my research report that owing to the pressure placed upon teachers to teach to exams, classroom learning feels teacher-centred in comparison to outdoor learning where there are no exams (4.4.2).

Teacher-student relationships were also reported by students as being affected by having to sit in silence as this led to not being able to build a relationship with their teachers, *"… obviously if you can't talk then it doesn't build a good relationship with them"* (FG4/NSG) (4.5.2). This was then linked to not being able to sit with their friends or work with them and instead having seating plans (4.5.2). Seating plans were then seen to impede teacher-student relationships, as when asked why relationships with teachers in the classroom might be negative, student FG3 replied, *"…because... in the classroom you are… in your seating plans and you don't get to sit wherever you want, …you don't get to see (your friends)" (*FG3/NSC) (4.5.2). This result appears to suggest that a more authoritarian model of teaching rather than collaboration learning prevents students from building positive teacher-student relationships. It supports Johnson, Johnson and Anderson's (1983) (2.3.2) results showing that when

students work collaboratively with peers and teachers, they view the teacher as more caring academically and personally as interdependence creates a co-operative learning environment. In contrast, Johnson, Johnson and Anderson (1983) (2.3.2) also found that competitive and individualistic learning experiences were not seen to promote positive teacher-student relationships.

My finding that young people were frustrated by a lack of collaborative learning could be linked to educational policies in that as Apple (2004) (2.2.2) states, young people are required to comply with school rules and teacher instructions in the classroom, such as sitting in silence and in seating plans, to ensure they learn the necessary skills and knowledge to achieve and enter the job market. In this way, as seen in a speech by Prime Minister David Cameron in 2011, there is a view of the need for discipline and rigour so that learning and achievement can happen, and the future of the economy can be secured (Cameron 2011) (2.2.2). Yet my results show that strict rules around being silent, sitting still and not sitting or working with friends led my students to form negative relationships with teachers because they "*have to be…quiet*" (*(*FG2/JSA) (4.4.1) and are "…*stuck in a classroom for 50 minutes…6 times a day" (*FG1/NJSA) (4.4.1). A possible explanation for my students' frustrations with this may be seen in Pettigrew and Curtis's (2010) (2.2.2) work which criticises educational policies and schools for their focus on the transfer of knowledge and assessment which encourages and rewards passivity and conformity.

Furthermore, if students in my study view that in the classroom the focus is on competition in terms of grades, seen when they spoke about teaching to exams, it may be that as Wang and Holcombe's (2010) (2.4.2) study showed, student participation decreases along with their sense of belonging. It could be argued that this because where suitable learning environments are not created, as Fielding (2012) (2.4.2) argues, students' capacity to learn is limited. Perhaps then, as Dorman, Aldridge and Fraser (2006) (2.3.2) point out, students in my study view the condition of the classroom environment as having a considerable influence on their learning. Therefore, my findings extend previous research by Dotterer and Lowe (2011) (2.4.2) in providing insight to show students are more likely to engage in learning when they feel that their environment is 'enriching and

supportive'. In this way, as Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) (2.4.2) propose, students relate to the classroom context when they feel cared for and supported, and as Chase et al. 2014 (2.4.2) and Klem and Connell 2004) (2.4.2) found, students make use of the support offered by the teacher.

Having considered young people's experience of teacher-student relationships and the impact on engagement with learning, the next section will now examine what the young people say about these in relation to outdoor learning by considering the theme of learning environments and approaches.

5.3 The perspective of young people on the impact of outdoor learning on building positive teacher-student relationships and their engagement with learning

We think teacher-student relationships are positive outside

My results show that the young people in my study viewed their relationships during outdoor learning sessions to be more positive than in the classroom, with students suggesting that being away from the classroom made them happier and this therefore supported the building of positive relationships: *"…outdoor education… actually help[s] to lift relationships because it lets you go out of the school, which makes you happier, which makes you nicer to people" (*FG2/NSA) (4.4.1). Teachers reinforced this view, agreeing that they also had more positive relationships with students when on outdoor learning, "*I think I've found my relationship with them more relaxed…"* (TFG/NT1) (4.4.2). Positive teacher-student relationships outdoors were partly accounted for due to positive student behaviour which was seen as *"better"* outside (FG1/JSA-SF) (4.3.9) as students explained teachers "*…don't tell you off or anything"* (FG2/NSE) (4.3.9). This extends previous research from Berscheid (1999) (2.3.1) who suggest research often focuses on the impact of positive teacher-student relationships on student attainment, as my research highlights how in the context of being outdoors, relationships were seen by both teachers and students to be relaxed and happier. Arguably, my results show how on outdoor learning, students and teachers were

not focused on how relationships impacted learning instead displaying a sense of joy at how relationships were positive outside. In this way, my research also adds to Robinson's (2013) (2.3.2) findings which showed students who participate in outdoor programmes can forge a better connection with their teachers than they may otherwise do in a classroom as my students pointed out that they have better relationships outside.

Adding to this, my research also supports evidence from the Learning Away study (Kendall and Rodger 2015) (2.3.2) which found positive teacher-student relationships could be formed and improved when using an outdoor learning space. This is because as my study also showed, this provided a context in which teacher and student attitudes towards each other could be altered and where more trusting and respectful relationships could develop. For example, my results emphasise this in the way teacher 1 spoke about having trust in relationships with students on outdoor learning, *"… because I trust them, I think we've built that relationship…"* (TFG/NT1) (4.4.2). Additionally, my research found, as Becker et al. (2017) (3.4.2) found in their systematic review of research, that outdoor learning supports the building of positive teacher-student relationships. This could be explained by Wubbels and Brekelmans's (2005) (2.3.2) suggestion that teachers' perceptions alter according to where the relationship takes place and the quality of the relationship in terms of being positive or problematic. Students in my research confirmed this explaining teacher-student relationships were positive outside, "*…because they [the teachers] are not seeing us in a classroom they're seeing us outside, it's a different picture to in a classroom"* (FG4/NSA) (4.4.1). My students also implied teacher-student relationships were not the same as when indoors because, "…*we're going outdoors, they are a lot different in a way…"* (FG4/NSA, 4.4.1). From my results, it appears young people see teachers as viewing students in a more positive way when outside and thus both teachers and students can interact on a more equal level. This was seen in the way teacher 3 discussed the kind of relationships they had with students on outdoor learning, "…*you find…you talk about different things, I have [a] student in our group, and he's just fascinated, I have bizarre conversations with him about nature …" (*TFG/NT3) (4.4.1). My findings then add to findings from Learning Away (Kendall and Rodger 2015) (2.5.4) to support the idea that outdoor learning breaks down

barriers, allowing young people and teachers to develop a stronger, more cohesive, and deeper connection as they are placed on the same level.

We find being outdoors a positive experience

Positive teacher-student relationships when taking part in outdoor learning were explained by young people in my study to be formed due to feeling calm when outside (4.4.). Yet students expressed not only feeling calm but talked about being outside with a passion not expressed when discussing being in the classroom (5.2): *"The reason why I feel it's amazing, is because…it's exciting… its calm…"* (FG3/NSA) (4.4.2). My results show young people found outdoor learning to assist in not only calming everyone involved, including the teacher, but also to support being able to de-stress (4.4.1). Students in my study spoke about how being outdoors helps everyone "*…let out a little more stress … easier*" (FG4/NSF) (4.4.1) and how when they are outside, *"… the teacher like doesn't stress out as a much, so it's like calmer for everybody" (*FG1/JSC) (4.4.1). My students' comments on the outdoors reducing stress and being calm are in line with Twohig-Bennett and Jones's (2018) (2.5.4) findings that nature experiences can lower cortisol levels and decrease heart rate and blood pressure.

Furthermore, the young people in my study viewed being outdoors as offering them opportunities to de-escalate potentially negative situations and avoid conflict with teachers, thus allowing positive teacher-student relationships to develop. This is seen in discussions around why teacher-student relationships were seen to be positive on outdoor learning, as student C stated, *"…if you're outside like you can just walk away and just leave them*" (FG1/NSC) (4.4.1). Additionally, being calm was talked about by students in my study in terms of having fresh air and time to work through emotions for both teachers and students, *"cos you get like fresh air and time to calm down*" (FG3/NSC) (4.4.1). An explanation for this may be that as Ulrich et al.'s (1991) (2.5.4) study shows humans' innate connection to natural environments means my students viewed them as less threatening than urban environments, such as the classroom, thus my students' stress levels were lowered outdoors. In this respect, my young people could be seen to be embracing their natural instincts thus allowing them

to relax and build positive relationships with teachers outdoors since as student B suggests, they connect with their teachers *"…because, er like you're enjoying yourself" (*FG4/JSB) (4.4.1).

My student participants also reported that teachers in my research were calmer outdoors and less stressed, indicating that it was because they were outside, "*They're more calm…"* (FG2/JSF) (4.4.1). This was then linked by my students to creating positive teacher-student relationships on account of teachers behaving positively outside, "*…they're a lot nicer…"* (FG2/NSD) (4.4.1) and *"they don't tell you off or anything"* (FG2/NSB) (4.4.1). Students in my study then suggested that positive teacher behaviour outdoors was due to them being a "*… lot less stressed out"* (FG2/NSD) (4.4.1) and having "…*a clearer mind"* (FG2/NSB) (4.4.1). This is an important strength of my research as it broadens previous research by Marchant et al. (2019) (2.5.4) who found teachers reported an increase in wellbeing whilst taking part in outdoor learning, as my results show that positive teacher well-being meant reduced stressed which was seen by my students to promote positive teacher-student relationships. In this way, my results suggest that outdoor learning offers an environment for fostering teacher wellbeing that can create learning contexts for students to build positive relationships with them.

As Roffey (2012) (2.5.4) reports, good teacher-student relationships are foundational to teacher well-being so that arguably my findings imply that being outdoors not only improves well-being for teachers but also creates positive teacher-student relationships and vice versa. My results also add to research by Cohen and Willis (1985 in Wilkins 2014) (2.2.3) which concluded that satisfying relationships with students can act as a shield against teacher stress as students in my study reported how teachers were less stressed when outdoors and that relationships with them were positive. Perhaps because teachers were outside, they felt less stressed and their behaviour towards students was then viewed in a positive manner by students who also felt less stressed. This suggests a reciprocal response comparable to that seen in Cornelius-White's (2007) (2.3.2) research which showed teachers reacted compassionately towards students who

displayed positive behaviour. The results of my research support this in that as student E stated, relationships are formed because teachers are *"seeing you less stressed"* (FG4/NSE) (4.4.1) suggesting that when teachers viewed students as more relaxed it assisted the formation of positive relationships with them.

Interestingly, being outdoors was linked by my students to stress relief for teachers and seen as sustainable beyond outdoor learning sessions, being transferrable back to the classroom (4.4.1). Young people in my study expressed that by being outdoors not only did teachers "…*get clearer minds…"* but that "…*on the other lessons they can just not be stressed"* (FG2/NSF) (4.4.1). My students linked this to teachers' behaviour, suggesting teachers who were strict were so due to stress. After being outdoors, my findings show students believed stress was reduced so that teachers reacted more positively towards students (4.4.1). It could be argued that as Bernard (2012) (2.2.2) points out, authoritative models of teaching are less effective than child-centred and active learning and therefore teacher-student interactions outdoors may have eliminated authoritarian behaviours, possibly because as students in my study commented, teachers were not as stressed outdoors and so did not display authoritarian behaviours such as being strict.

In addition, and consistent with Roffey's (2012) (2.5.4) findings, engagement with learning may have occurred due to positive teacher wellbeing, seen as a critical factor for stable environments for students to learn. This allowed for positive engagement with learning as my students associated outdoor learning with feeling renewed and having time away from the hard work of classroom learning, suggesting that they were able to engage back in the classroom because "*You get a fresh mindset"* (FG1/NSA) (4.4.2) and "*because you get to have time outside and away from…all the hard work"* (FG3/NSD) (4.4.2). Engagement with learning was viewed by students to happen on outdoor learning because *"…outdoor education… puts you in a good mood for the rest of the day"* (FG1/NSC) (4.4.1) and thus this was carried back into the classroom environment. Additionally, both students and teachers reported teachers feeling more relaxed outdoors, "*They (teachers) are more relaxed" (*FG4/JSC) (4.4.1) and "…*I do find yeah probably I am more relaxed with them" (*TFG/NT1) (4.4.1).

A possible explanation for this may be that as Fuller, Powell and Fox (2017) (2.5.4) found, students and teachers can interact in less formal ways outside which supports connections across social spaces, not only strengthening relationships but continuing them back in school. This can then encourage engagement with learning as students are motivated to make more of an effort to learn due to being outdoors, as student F says, "*… because… like if I am doing bad, I just try my best anyways" (*FG4/NSF) (4.4.1). My results then support the notion that Williams and Burden (1997 in Van Petegem et al. 2005) (2.3.2) propose that creating and maintaining a positive and warm (learning) environment is conducive to learning.

The outdoor learning environment was seen by young people in my study to be positive and encouraged students to build healthy teacher-student relationships and engage with learning as it supported their wellbeing. My results show how students reported feeling more positive outside (4.4.2) indicating that being outside "…*just makes me feel better* "(FG4/JSB) (4.4.1) and "*It's good for my mental health being outside…"* (FG4/NSF) (4.4.1). This is in line with previous research by McCree, Cutting and Sherwin (2018) (2.5.4) who found that being in nature has positive benefits for well-being, including emotional health and decreasing negative emotions. Furthermore, the young people in my research expressed that being outside was good for helping them to deal with their emotions, *"It's really good for when you have struggles…cos outdoors normally helps people" (*FG2/NSF) (4.4.1). This extends Hattie et al.'s (1997) (2.3.2) meta-analysis results in showing that outdoor learning programmes affect students' self-concept in a positive way to a greater degree than classroom-based programmes. One possible explanation for this finding is because the outdoors provides students and teachers with "*Fresh air"* (FG4/NSB) (4.4.1) and "*Tranquillity" (*FG2/NSA) (4.4.1) which in turn helps in managing emotions because "…*it just removes stress…"* (FG4/NSH) (4.4.1). This may be because being in nature has numerous health benefits, including stress relief (Twohig-Bennett and Jones 2018 and Ulrich et al. 1991) (2.5.4). It is also possible that as Fagerstam (2014) (2.5.2) found, shared experiences of being outdoors can aid learning, building upon indoor teaching and offering a starting point for indoor learning. This might explain why my students said that they felt able to engage

back in the classroom after outdoor learning (4.4.1). An explanation for this may be as Wistoft's (2013) (2.5.4) findings show, being outdoors promotes a desire to learn. Yet, in contrast to Fagerstam's (2014) (2.5.2) findings and Mygind, Bolling and Barfod (2019) (2.5.4) research, rather than the shared experience necessarily being about learning together, students in my study implied it was "…*because everyone gets more air...*" (FG4/NSF) (4.4.1). This may be because they felt that benefits of being outdoors in terms of well-being had a greater impact on teacher-student relationships and engagement than sharing the experience of outdoor learning.

Being outside and sharing experiences was, for students in my study, not necessarily about the learning that was taking place but about what being outside represented for students. In this way, my results extend previous research by Quay, Dickinson and Nettleton (2002) (2.5) conveying the idea that students felt being outside offered freedom, movement and space, particularly when compared to classrooms, removing or minimising stress and improving well-being (4.4.1) which enriched their enjoyment (4.4.1). Young people in my study also expressed genuine passion for outdoor learning, which was contrasted with the way they spoke less enthusiastically about being in classrooms, *"I like going outside, yeah instead of being stuck in a classroom" (*FG1/NSE) (4.4.2) and "*… I just find it more fun outside than in the classroom"* (FG3/JSA) (4.4.1). Equally, young people referred to the ability to move around when outside (4.4.1) which teachers agreed with stating that, "*We give them quite a bit more freedom than they normally have to go off wandering around"* (TFG/NT1) (4.4.1), to suggest that as Marchant et al. (2019) (2.5.4) discovered, classrooms are seen as restrictive. This may hinder the creation of an appropriate environment for building positive teacher-student relationships as Tseng and Seidman (2007) (2.2.4) argue, positive social processes are limited in classrooms and thus classrooms are ineffective environments for students to have equal opportunities for transition, impacting year 7 students in my study negatively (4.3 and 4.4).

Conversely, compatible with Marchant et al.'s (2019) (2.5.2) results, my findings show that young people feel free outdoors, and that engagement with learning is increased as outdoors it is *"educative and exciting"* (FG3/NSF) (4.4.2) and

"educational and fun…" (FG3/NSF) (4.4.2). This was again linked to feeling less restricted outdoors, with student F stating that, "…*because everyone gets … more space and we're not all cramped together…*" (FG4/NSF) (4.4.1). This may be why the outdoor environment could be seen as valuable for young people in my research in improving engagement and learning through the building of positive teacher-student relationships.

In accordance with Beames, Higgins and Nicol (2011) (2.5.2), students in my study felt that outdoor learning gave them the opportunity to explore and that this helped them to build positive teacher-student relationships, as they explained why they felt they had poor relationships in the classroom compared to outdoors, *"You're stuck inside…instead of doing fun tasks outside… where you get to explore things"* (FG3/JSD, 4.4.1). In terms of learning, outdoor learning environments as Christie, Beames and Higgins (2015) (1.2.1) point out, can be seen as different to classrooms as being outdoors can provoke students to respond by exploring different viewpoints. This, as Beames et al. (2024) (1.2.1) say, may be because the outdoors sparks enthusiasm and inspires learning which my results suggest comes from forming positive teacher-student relationships outdoors. Teachers in my study saw this to be the case as teacher 2 explained, "*I think cos they enjoy it…the relationship's quite good because they tend to enjoy what they're doing*" (TFG/NT2) (4.5.1). Comments by my students about feeling free to explore learning because *"… in the outdoors, everybody can kinda do their own thing"* (FG1/JSB) (4.4.1), also strengthen Becker et al.'s (2017) (2.5.4) proposal that outdoor learning provides opportunities to engage students that traditional classrooms might not offer, as the outdoors involves active participation and more hands-on learning.

Additionally, students in my study suggested that on outdoor learning, the teachers, *"… don't have to …tell us what to do, set the work and get the work sorted for us"* (FG4/NSC) (4.4.2), possibly signifying that learning in nature goes beyond subject boundaries (Munkebye et al. 2020) (2.5.2). Indeed, in my study, outdoor learning sessions were planned by one teacher so that the rest of the teachers supported delivery of the sessions. This might show how outdoor

learning for my students engaged them in ways that traditional classrooms do not (Becker et al.'s (2017) (2.5.4) as teachers are free from the constraints of teaching core knowledge so can interact and connect with students. As Cudworth (2020) (2.5.4) explains, outdoor learning contrasts with classroom teaching under neoliberal ideas, as it provides a different focus to that of the neoliberal classroom. Under a neoliberal education agenda, academic achievement through standardised testing is viewed as essential, where students must take individual responsibility for their own learning of state-imposed core knowledge (Ball 2021) (1.3.1). For young people, a neoliberal system of education restricts their movements, providing teacher-led activities and restricted opportunities for learning (4.4.2; 4.5.1; 1.2 and 2.1). In contrast to this, my results support Cudworth's (2020) (2.5.4) view to show that young people experience a sense of time and less pressure when learning outside, stating that not only were they given whole lessons to complete tasks (4.4.2) but that they were given the freedom to work at their own pace, *"…outside you can do that task at your own pace then you're finished*…" (FG3/JSB) (4.4.2). It may be that given the way students spoke about their enjoyment of outdoor learning, which they explained led to positive teacher-student relationships and engagement (4.4.1), that, as Slade, Lowery and Bland (2013) (2.5.2) report, having time, space and freedom outside can support an increase in self-confidence. Kendall and Rodger (2015) (1.4.3) support this as they found that positive relationships developed when teachers and students were outside learning together and that this fostered confidence and improved engagement.

Students in my research also associated outdoor learning with not only having more time but being free from academic pressures. They cited this as a factor in building positive relationships with teachers outside, saying that outdoor learning, "…*it's not like a goal of an exam, it's more like a goal of 'well done, you've learnt this'" (*FG3/NSA) (4.4.2). This may be because as Robinson (2013) (2.5.4) found, outdoor learning provides opportunities to connect at a personal level, possibly accounting for my results showing positive relationships with teachers when outdoors. By feeling less pressure to achieve academically when on outdoor learning, it may also be the case that as McCree, Cutting and Sherwin (2018)

(2.5.4) findings suggest, my young people have more positive well-being outcomes and so are able to engage with learning. Besides feeling free to learn and explore during outdoor learning, students reported being with friends and peers outside not only reduced their stress but was also an important aspect of outdoor learning for them (4.4.1). They compared outdoor learning to the restrictiveness of classrooms that did not allow them to be with their friends, *"…when you're in outdoor learning, you can go outside and … actually play with your friends … that you can't sit next to in lessons" (*FG3/NSC 4.4.1). My results support evidence from Hartmeyer and Mygind (2016) (2.5.4) and Wistoft (2013) (2.5.4) showing that being outdoors might support young people in developing interpersonal connections. This is because interpersonal connections, as (Quay, Dickinson and Nettleton 2002) (2.3.2) found, coupled with being able to experience the outdoors alongside peers, appear to have assisted students in my study to facilitate deeper relationships. For Quay, Dickinson and Nettleton (2002) (2.5.4), the outdoors provides a more positive environment for this as the school environment can be counterproductive in promoting social contexts for learning.

We love being outdoors

When asked about teacher-student relationships outdoors, the young people in my research spoke at length about feelings of excitement on outdoor learning stating, *"…its exciting…outside"* (FG3/NSA) (4.4.2). My students displayed a sense of joy and enthusiasm at how different being outdoors was compared to classroom learning, saying *"… I just find it more fun outside than in the classroom"* (FG3/JSA) (4.4.2). Students described being able to go on the field, go on walks and go to the beach (4.4.1) and outdoor learning was viewed by students as their preferred time at school, "*…outdoor ed is probably one of my favourite lessons because you get to go outside and some of the time you get to go to the beach…"* (FG3/NSH) (4.4.1). Interestingly, teachers echoed this, with teacher 1 demonstrating similar enthusiasm for being outdoors, *"… I love going to the beach… I do enjoy it, and I was worried I wouldn't, but I am" (*TFG/NT1) (4.4.1). My results appear to show that experiencing a variety of places outdoors helped teachers and students build positive relationships possibly because as described by Cramp (2008) (2.3.2), the intensity of experiences can create the appropriate conditions to positively alter teacher-student relationships. Furthering this,

discussing their thoughts on taking part in outdoor learning, students in my study also expressed enjoyment at never knowing what each session would bring and excitement over the range of things they did and places they went, *"…you don't know what you'll be doing the week after, like you could go to the beach, you could be doing something just fun…"* (FG4/NSB) (4.4.2). Adding to this, the results of my study also show students linked their positive feelings about outdoor learning to being able to forge positive connections with teachers (4.4.1). This supports research by Robinson (2013) (2.3.2) and Beames (2006) (2.3.2) emphasising that positive teacher-student relationships may occur because of shared experiences, which for my participants took place outdoors.

It could be argued then that my results highlight the collaborative and interdependent nature of relationships as outside, teachers and students may both support and rely on each other. In this way, my students co-created with teachers to 'learn' together through mutual understanding and respect (Noddings (2012) (2.3.1). This enables positive teacher-student relationships to be built because unlike in the classroom, power and 'control' may be experienced as shared as (Dobransky and Frymier 2004) (2.3.1) suggest. My results then, may provide further insight into the dynamic qualities of teacher-student relationships (Wentzel 2013) (2.3.1), offering an explanation into the processes whereby teacher-student relationships have a meaningful impact (Wubbels et al. 2006) (2.3.1). This is because students in my study imply that relationships are positive outdoors because of the environment, but also due to the activities they take part in, sharing experiences with teachers and how being outdoors makes them feel. This then aids students to engage with learning and suggests that to form positive relationships with teachers, students require several factors such as a positive learning environment and appropriate activities. Moreover, students described experiencing a sense of fun and excitement in outdoor learning, explaining that when outdoors *"It's exciting because you never know what you are gonna do"* (FG1/JSD) (4.4.2). This provides support to the possibility that not only might positive teacher-student relationships be built and enriched outdoors but that the outdoors as a learning environment is an essential element in the learning process. This is because as Beames, Higgins and Nicol (2011) (2.5.2) state, possibilities to learn are enhanced by the connection between the outdoor

environment, teachers and students, and activities. In expressing their passion for outdoor learning by describing it as, *"…important and inspiring"* (FG3/NSB) (4.4.2), making students feel *"…ecstatic"* (FG3/NSF) (4.4.2), my study potentially demonstrates how outdoor learning can present enjoyable experiences that promote engagement with learning and improve teacher-student relationships (Bentsen, Mygind and Randrup (2009) (2.5.4). What is noteworthy about this result is that it is not just students who found being outdoors enjoyable. Having originally found outdoor learning difficult, teachers also expressed finding a passion for it later on: *"I found it a bit hard like the difference between a classroom-based subject…I found that difficult, but I absolutely love that now…"* (TFG/NT1) (4.4.2). This may because students and teachers are able to connect on a deeper level outdoors as the 'normal' constraints and rules of classrooms are removed (Davies and Hamiliton 2019) (2.3.2).

We feel outdoor learning activities are more relevant and interesting than classroom tasks

Alongside displaying enjoyment and excitement for outdoor learning, my results reveal that young people saw outdoor learning to be important and relevant to them, explaining how, when outdoor learning became a lesson, "*… it was a really good idea and it's really good…"* (FG3/NSD) (4.4.2) and that outdoor learning *"…saves schools…from…all kinds of bad things that happen in school… and…is really good for all students"* (FG3/NSB) (4.4.2). It is possible that in a similar way to the results of Moeed and Averill's (2010) (2.5.4) study, being immersed in the outdoors supported students in committing to improve their knowledge and skills, increasing motivation and engagement and thus making them more focused on the content they were learning. In describing outdoor learning as a being a good idea, students also suggested it had potential significance, "*because you could know a lot about the outdoors and…if you took it as a GCSE it could tell you how do you survive in a certain place" (*FG4/NSH) (4.4.2). This focus of young people in my study on the excitement they felt for what they were 'learning' during outdoor learning sessions possibly relates to Wyn and Dyer's (2000) (2.2.4) argument that secondary school educational policies appear to be fixed on viewing schools as separate to 'life' but where young people are prepared for 'life', thus showing disparities between the content they are expected to learn and

what young people feel is important to know. For the young people in my study, outdoor learning was viewed as important precisely because, "*… it's like good because we … get to learn new stuff and … create things … and we know about what's going on in the outdoors"* (FG2/NSB) (4.4.2). When contrasted with classroom learning, which was seen as boring and unable to stimulate engagement (4.4.1 and 4.5.1), this adds to MacDonald and Giazitzoglu's (2019) (2.2.4) view that educational policy is somewhat too narrow.

An important strength of my findings then is that they go beyond previous findings by Dettweiler et al. (2015) (2.5.4) showing that outdoor learning creates a positive relationship between learning and motivation to provide insight into young people's motivation for engagement outdoors. In this way, my results may signify that when content is viewed as being relevant to them, students are motivated and engaged as they feel greater enjoyment and passion, "*I think it's a really important lesson because erm we're learning about our earth and stuff… it's just really important to learn about it because a lot of people don't really care about it"* (FG3/SF) (4.4.2). This is possibly because, as demonstrated by Wistoft (2013) (2.5.4), being in the natural environment promotes a desire to learn, thus supporting both Hattie (2009) (2.2.2) and Dewey's (1938) (2.2.1) view that students are naturally active rather than passive learners. Therefore, my findings are significant in highlighting how being outdoors fuels young people's natural enthusiasm and passion for learning, leading to engagement, in contrast to formal schooling in classrooms which Pettigrew and Curtis (2010) (2.2.2) argue, disregards young people's interests and experience so they are unable to understand the relevance of classroom learning.

In addition to this, part of my students' enthusiasm for outdoor learning appeared to stem from the activities and tasks they took part in during outdoor sessions (4.4.1 and 4.4.2), with students seeming to enjoy what they saw as a contrast to the classroom, "…*its different from the other classes, you go outside"* (FG3/NSA) (4.4.2). This is consistent with Mygind, Bolling and Barfod (2019) (2.5.4) results which found that teaching the curriculum through the outdoor environment allows for variation in learning methods, practices and settings and leads to a more joyful and motivating experience for students. Consequently, the young people in my

study viewed outdoor learning not as a lesson but as a series of activities which they not only enjoyed, *"…like the activities, it's not a lesson, it's activities" (*FG4/NSE) (4.4.2), but saw as being relevant and engaging. This may be due to the approaches that were used to deliver content, because in the same way that Neville, Petrass and Ben (2021) (2.5.4) study found, outdoor experiences can enable students' access to more diverse ways of engaging with their work and through kinaesthetic, sensory, and experiential approaches, learning can 'come alive'. My results support this in the way students spoke about outdoor learning, mentioning specific activities, *"...I just like it cos it's my favourite class cos [it] talks about litter campaigns and stuff" (*FG3/NSH 4.4.2). In a similar way to Santelmann, Gosnell and Meyers (2011) (2.5.4) findings, outdoor learning then appears to boost learning due to students' active participation and hands-on learning. This may empower young people which for Allison (2000) (2.5.4) leads to them to engaging with learning so that as Green and Rayner (2020) (2.5.4) suggest, they take ownership of their environment and goals. It is possible then that where my students describe outdoor learning as less pressured and feeling less structured compared to traditional classroom environments, they also see the content and approach to activities as offering them freedom, autonomy and choice (4.4.4 and 4.4.5).

It is noteworthy that it was not just young people who spoke enthusiastically about outdoor learning activities, but teachers also appeared to feel a sense of joy not just from being outside, but from the content and approaches to learning, *"…it's a bit different to making them sit down and write an essay…"* (TFG/NT1) (4.4.2). For the teachers this was linked to their relationships with students in that they suggested this was why they were more relaxed with students outdoors (4.4.2), possibly due to the nature of the learning activities as teacher 3 spoke of enjoying more hands-on, active tasks, *"…It is good doing practical things and creative artistic things"* (TFG/NT3, 4.4.2). This may extend research by Cooper (2014) and Martin and Dowson's (2009) (2.4.3) findings that 'connective instruction' rather than fun activities supports engagement. Although my results show that both students and teachers felt fun activities helped build positive teacher-student relationships, *"it's just a fun kind of lesson and you get on with the teachers"* (FG4/NSB) (4.4.2), activities outdoors, as already discussed, (5.2) led to

engagement with learning. This may be because in a similar way to Eccles and Roeser 's (2011) (2.4.3) results, my findings show a bi-directional connection between engagement with learning and teacher-student relationships. As already explained (5.2), engagement may play a role in promoting positive social relations between teachers and students as well as encouraging engagement, as student E suggested, outdoor learning *"…is enjoyable because it is teaching you lots of different things and you like the teachers more"* (FG4/NSE) (4.4.2). Furthermore, teachers' enthusiasm for outdoor learning, seen in teacher 2's passionate description, *"I enjoy it, I really enjoy it, getting out and about and doing different things I've done different topic areas … I've really enjoyed it so far"* (TFG/NT2) (4.4.2), may also support the building of teacher-student relationships and thus engagement with learning. It is possible that this is because as Dillon and Dickie (2012) (2.5.4) found, outdoor learning can empower and motivate teachers, leading to a positive impact on them, which for Marchant et al. (2019) (2.5.4) means increased job satisfaction and wellbeing outdoors, all of which students in my study say they respond positively to.

We feel able to engage with learning more outside

An important strength of my study could be seen in how young people not only viewed outdoor learning as different, more fun and exciting compared to classroom learning, but did not see it as a lesson, instead offering the following description, *"cos outdoor education isn't really like a lesson, it's sommat fun for the kids"* (FG4/NSB) (4.4.2). In this way, it appears as King and Howard (2014) (2.5.4) point out, if young people feel they have free choice over activities and learning they are more likely to experience fun. Thus, as my results suggest, they engage with learning and form positive teacher-student relationships, possibly because as Wyn and Dyer (2000) (2.2.4) suggest, free choice in schools can be limited for many young people. As student C says, *"…with outdoor education it's not like there is a big goal or something, it's more of ok go outside and do this …it's more calm" (*FG3/NSC) (4.4.2), appearing to suggest that my results show that providing opportunities for exploration through outdoor learning is, as Beames, Higgins and Nicol (2011) (2.3.4) point out, powerful for students' learning. This allows young people's instinctive abilities to learn and engage to occur naturally (Rousseau (2011) (2.2.1) and Montessori (1966) (2.2.1). Yet this

did not just happen during outdoor learning, as young people in my study reported they engaged back in the classroom (4.4.2), which is consistent with Fägerstam's (2014) (2.5.2) study, demonstrating that following outdoor learning, young people's concentration and work patterns improved and motivation to learn was transferred from the outdoors to the indoors. Interestingly, my results extend Lloyd, Troung and Gray (2018) (2.5.4) findings and add to Kuo, Barnes and Jorden's (2022) (2.5.4) evidence that the outdoors boosts motivation, enjoyment and engagement providing a ripple effect into indoor learning, to show that young people become more motivated to learn back in the classroom. This is because as my students say about outdoor learning, "*You get a fresh mindset"* (FG1/NSA, 4.4.2), and it is "…*sommat to look forward to"* (FG1/NSA, 4.4.2), as well as "*…nice to start the week…"* (FG1/NSD, 4.4.2). Thus, as Dillon and Dickie (2012) (2.4.3) say, students develop their skills and knowledge outdoors to add value to their classroom experiences.

5.4 What can be learnt from the experiences of young people with respect to teacher-student relationships, engagement with learning and outdoor learning?

We have requirements

My results show that young people viewed teacher-student relationships as positive on outdoor learning, believing that they engaged with learning whilst outdoors, and that this subsequently transferred back to the classroom (5.2 and 5.3). This may indicate that, as McCree, Cutting and Sherwin (2018) (2.5.4) found, when students can freely engage with nature and when there is no immediate focus on learning for assessment, they are more likely to experience positive outcomes such as engaging with learning and positive connections with teachers. Yet students in my study also expressed how being outdoors and outdoor learning was different to being in the classroom and classroom learning. Comparing being in the classroom to outdoors, my study found students suggested that outdoor learning was more conducive to building positive teacher-

student relationships as they were able to be with their friends, "*you like get to work together with them"* (FG3/NSE) (4.5.2) as opposed to classrooms where they *"…have to be like quiet…"* (FG4/NSA) (4.5.2). Whilst being with friends was not directly linked by students to engagement, as already seen (5.3), positive teacher-student relationships were associated with engaging in learning. Therefore, this finding extends prior research by Dotterer and Lowe (2011) (2.4.2) to show that to engage students may require being able to interact with friends in addition to forming positive connections with teachers as the students stated, this makes the learning environment more enjoyable, "*you go outside and you get to interact with each other; like when you're making a poster, you can join with a different partner and then um, you have team work and then it's all fun"* (FG3/NSA) (4.5.2). In this way, as Dotterer and Lowe's (2011) (2.4.2) results show, an enjoyable environment may also contribute to young people's desire to pay attention and engage in learning.

Furthermore, my findings imply that not only might students require an enjoyable learning environment but like Pianta et al.'s (2002) (2.4.3) findings, they require an environment that is supportive of their autonomy, student-centred and where activities are based on an understanding of students' differing needs and abilities. This is because young people in my study stated "…t*eachers in the classroom could do more activities…*" (FG3/JSF) (4.5.1), that students "S*hould be able to make choices"* (FG1/JSD) (4.5.1) and that *"…teachers could give us less work*" (FG4/JSA) (4.5.1), *"Make lessons more easy"* (FG1/JSD) (4.5.1) and make learning "…*more simple"* (FG4/JSA) (4.5.1). In this way, students appear to feel that teacher-student relationships are positive outdoors compared to classrooms as they contrast outdoor learning with indoor learning in terms of the amount of work they are given, the time to complete tasks, the level of difficulty, and ability to choose tasks and activities, as well as stating that they feel classroom learning should have more activities (4.5.1).

The comparisons students make between indoor and outdoor learning might suggest that in contradiction to Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris (2014) (2.4.3) findings, rather than teacher-student relationships being one factor influencing student engagement alongside teacher support, and authentic and challenging

tasks, my results show teacher support and tasks primarily influenced the formation of relationships, which then leads to engagement. Additionally, although young people desire authentic tasks, they require these to be fun, not too challenging, completed at their own pace, and to be given autonomy over choosing activities and how to complete them. This is seen in response to discussions on why teacher-student relationships are more positive outdoors when students responded that it was because "… *they don't like make the lessons like fun and they just make it like hard work"* (FG4/NSC) (4.5.1) and "*Sometimes you can't like work at that pace"* (FG2/JSC) (4.5.1). In this way, students in my study viewed engagement with learning to be directly influenced by positive teacher-student relationships when requirements in terms of approaches to learning and learning environment were met that supported connections with teachers.

Seen in Wang and Holcombe's (2010) (2.4.3) study, it may be that where the focus is on competition in terms of grades, student participation decreases along with their sense of belonging, but when the focus on grades is removed, such as in outdoor learning, students are able to enjoy learning and form positive teacher-student relationships, "*because you get to have time outside and away from like all the hard work"* (FG3/NSD) (4.5.1). This is interesting as it appears to show how students view the outdoor learning environment compared to the classroom learning environment, pointing out that outdoors is very different to being in the classroom, as there are *"…just like…trees everywhere…"* (FG2/NSA) (4.4.2). It is possible therefore, that as noted by Quibell, Charlton and Law (2017) (2.5.4) using the outdoors to teach, engages multiple senses and as my results show, the requirements for positive teacher-student relationships can be met as students suggest, *"…we're learning about the outdoors and going on trips...but at the same time we're also learning but it's not like strict learning it's more at your own pace" (*FG3/NSH) (4.5.1). White (2004) (2.2.3) argues there can be damaging consequences for learning as it is often attributed to specific conditions such as taking place in a classroom, yet my results appear to show that when students take part in outdoor learning, they experience enjoyment and feel they can learn. This is shown in the way they talk about learning outdoors, because "*It's just easier to do [work outdoors]"* (FG2/JSC 4.5.2) and *"I like it because*

they're teaching us a lesson that I've not done before in school…it's something different" (FG4/NSD) (4.4.2). Perhaps then this is due to outdoor learning being seen as 'active learning outdoors' (Greenaway 2005) (1.2.1) and learning in a 'real context' (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee 2005) (1.2.1). Therefore, as Doyle (2006) (2.3.2) suggests, interactions between teachers and students may differ according to the context in which these take place so that my research shows that the learning environment may impact whether student and teachers perceive each other's actions and behaviours to be positive.

We require fun, meaningful and relevant lessons and activities

An important strength of my findings is seen in how young people expressed requirements they viewed as important for building and sustaining positive connections with teachers to support engagement with learning. Firstly, students in my study desired fun lessons and activities, stating that "…*teachers that set fun work*" (FG4/NSE) (4.5.1) and "*…make the lessons more fun" (*FG4/JSD) (4.5.1) are the teachers they feel able to connect positively with. This is consistent with findings from Bentsen, Mygind and Randrup (2009) (2.5.4) which suggest outdoor learning offers enjoyable experiences that improve social relations such as teacher-student relationships and promote engagement with learning. My findings show that students felt, "*It's more enjoyable to be outside than being in the classroom" (*FG4/JSA) (4.4.1) yet they also voiced that learning needs to be meaningful and relevant, discussing how in the classroom, *"…you have to do like book work…"* (FG2/JSB) (4.5.1) which prevents positive teacher-student relationships but could be solved if teachers, *"Let us pick our lessons/subjects" (*FG1/JSB) (4.5.1). It is possible that this can be linked to educational policies that make core knowledge the focus of schooling and education, determining that all young people should acquire core knowledge (DfE 2024) (2.2.4) and demonstrate this through meeting set standards of attainment (DfE 2010) (2.2). Yet as Unwin and Yandell (2016) (2.2.2) point out, this means subjects and their content are viewed as unchanging, and 'core' knowledge is interwoven into separate subjects for all young people to learn, which, as Seltzer-Kelly (2012) (2.2.2) suggests, may mean young people are expected to 'know' knowledge removed from their own experiences and current needs to serve a national priority of economic competitiveness. In this way, they face a standardised education,

given the same knowledge and expected to develop the same skills and character traits with the same experiences (Noddings 2016) (2.2.2). However, my findings appear to show that when learning is given preference over testing, young people feel supported to want to learn and find a love for learning (Murray (2023) (2.2.2), as student FG3 says, *"Well there was a time when outdoor education wasn't here… it became a lesson and I feel it was a really good idea…"* (FG3/NSD) (4.4.2).

Besides desiring activities and learning that are meaningful and relevant, students in my study also expressed that they could form positive relationships with teachers who they viewed as fun (4.5.1) and perhaps relaxed so they were more able to interact with them as, "*They have a sense of humour instead of sitting there doing work all day"* (FG3/JSE) (4.5.1). In a similar way to Kerr's (2019) (2.5.4) findings, it is possible that, as teachers in my study implied, (4.4.2 and 5.3) outdoor learning may support teachers to improve their own knowledge and understanding, developing skills and confidence which lead to positive changes in their teaching practice, *"…I found it a bit hard…the difference between a classroom-based [lesson] …but I absolutely love that now…I do enjoy it and I was worried I wouldn't but I am"* (TFG/NT1) (4.4.2). In turn, as suggested by students in my study, this may meet students' requirements for fun, meaningful, relevant activities, which they state are important for building positive teacher-student relationships as outdoors teachers "…*get clearer minds and then on the other lessons they can just not be stressed"* (FG2/NSF) (4.4.1). This is potentially important as my findings show that students feel in the classroom teachers "…*are putting too much stress on the kids which is making the kids stress which is making the teacher stress"* (FG4/NSA) (4.5.1) and preventing positive connections with students. However, as research by Collie, Shap and Perry (2011) (2.2.3) and Cohen and Willis (1985 in Wilkins 2014) (2.3.3) found, positive relationships with students can both limit and act as a buffer to teacher stress and so that perhaps, if as already suggested by teachers and students, the outdoors helps teachers relax (4.3) this allows for positive teacher-student relationships to be built which in turn reduces teacher stress and potentially sustains positive connections.

We require feeling teacher's 'care

To ensure positive relationships with teachers so that they felt able to engage with learning, my findings show that young people needed to feel listened to, understood, feel supported and believe that teachers want to get to know them (4.5.3). This may because as Juvonen's (2006) (2.2.2) research found, there is a link between teacher-student relationships, a sense of belonging, and motivation to learn, stating that teachers' behaviours may impact the formation of positive teacher-student relationships and how much students feel a sense of belonging. Indeed, students in my study spoke about how having a positive relationship with teachers meant they felt able to speak to them, particularly if something was worrying them, *"because when you worry, they have someone to go to…"* (FG2/NSE) (4.5.3). It is possible that as Poplin and Weeres (1992) (2.3.2) suggest, this may be due to students needing genuine relationships where they feel valued, as student FG3 says about one teacher, *"...xxx is a very good and understanding teacher… if you have anything wrong you can just go and speak to her…"* (FG3/NSF) (4.5.3). Perhaps if, as Brown (2003) (2.2.3) states, English schools value discipline and control over 'care' and 'relationships' then as Bernard (2012) (2.2.3) recommends, focusing on caring and respectful interrelationships may create an empowering environment for learning. This is because, as young people in my study reported, if *"…teachers could understand more" (*FG2/JSD) (4.5.3) about them, this would foster positive connections between teachers and students, and that students would learn more as teachers *"…are like better understanding of you…"* (FG3/JSG) (4.5.3). A possible explanation for this is seen in Frymier and Houser's (2000) (2.3.3) findings, that when students and teachers feel understood, valued and listened to, they form a positive relationship that leads to greater respect and trust, which in turn creates a safe learning environment where students engage with learning. This is likely because as Robinson (2013) (2.3.2) found, a 'caring' teacher is viewed as being understanding, supportive, encouraging and focused on students thus motivating learning.

Furthermore, supportive teachers were seen by students in my study to nurture positive teacher-student relationships as it meant *"You have the ability to ask them stuff"* (FG1/JSF) (4.5.3), whereas it was seen as difficult to form a

connection with teachers if they "*won't help you as much" (*FG3/JSG) (4.5.3) and thus students were unlikely to engage in learning as they responded negatively "…*I just snap back…then I just work it out myself in the end"* (FG4/NSB) (4.5.2). This may be due to, as Baumeister and Leary (1995) (2.3.2) state, the idea that relationships give us a sense of belonging so supportive teachers make students feel they belong and a close supportive interaction between teachers and students, as Sabol and Pianta (2012 in Engels et al. 2017) (2.4.3) found, aids young people to engage with learning. Yet the young people in my study expressed that they required more than just being understood or supported, saying that they felt teachers should, "*Get to know us better"* (FG2/JSB) (4.5.3) and "*Pay more attention to ya" (*FG2/JSE) (4.5.3). In this respect, students may be seen to be requesting what Van Petegem et al. (2005) (2.3.2) state is a person-centred approach distinguishable by positive interpersonal relationships where everyone feels good. This is because as Cooper and Miness's (2012) (2.3.2) findings suggest, it is more likely that positive teacher-student relationships will be co-created if teachers get to know their students and their backgrounds by demonstrating Noddings' (2005) (2.3.2) theory of 'relational care'. This involves teachers immersing themselves in empathetic caring, so they take account of students' needs on all levels and experience '*motivational displacement'* whereby they view the world from students' perspectives to understand them better and meet their needs accordingly (Noddings 2005) (2.3.2). For students in my study this is achieved by teachers not inadvertently suppressing students by ensuring they remained aware of students' life experiences and values (Stuart et al. 2019) (2.4.3) because as student FG3 implied, they may not want to connect with their teachers or learn if teachers "…*don't know who you are then so what" (*FG3/JSG) (4.5.3). In this way, as found in Cornelius-White's (2007) (2.3.2) meta-analysis, empathetic, person-centred approaches have the strongest and most positive impact on learning. Interestingly, my findings may further this with students in my study suggesting that positive teacher-student relationships occur with teachers *"…you can trust"* (FG4/NSG) (4.5.3) as it allows students to "…*have like trust to ask a lot"* (FG1/J SB) (4.5.3). This perhaps suggests that feeling cared for on a relational level by teachers supports teacher-student relationships as this embraces differing perspectives and values, leading to engagement (McMahon and Portelli (2004) (2.4.2) as students do not want to learn if they have negative

relationships with teachers because *"… you don't have the trust in the teacher. They don't make it sound fun"* (FG3/JSE) (4.5.3).

We think outdoor learning is important

My research shows that being outdoors enables positive teacher-student relationships and supports engagement with learning. This is because students in my study say they are motivated to learn with teachers when outdoors because of *"…the good relationship*" (FG1/JSD) (4.5.3). This may mean if students build positive teacher-student relationships they feel teachers are more approachable, explaining that they want to learn, *"Because the teachers [are] nice"* (FG1/JSD) (4.5.3). Therefore, a good teacher-student relationship for the students means they "…*can engage fully into the lesson*" (FG1/JSG) (4.5.3) and then, as students stated,*"…because you like, like that lesson…you enjoy it more"* (FG4/JSA) (4.5.3) which may lead to feeling more motivated and therefore engaged, as a good teacher-student relationship *"… can like boost your mental health like towards doing the work"* (FG4/JSD) (4.5.3). For the students in my study, establishing positive teacher-student relationships was important to engaging with learning as they felt that *"…you need to get on with the teacher before you do the lesson with them" (*FG3/JSF) (4.5.3) and that potentially *"… if you don't like the teacher you don't really wanna listen to them"* (FG3/JSD) (4.5.3). This is consistent with a previous study by (Battistich et al. 1995) (2.3) proposing that supportive and caring relationships help young people to engage with learning. However, in research by Shernoff and Schmidt (2008 in Chase et al. 2014) (2.4.2) reports of engagement differed according to how it was measured such as teacher reported, or student reported. Therefore, it is noteworthy that as my research used student voice to explore their experiences of engagement (3.4.4), my results suggest that students believed themselves to be engaged on outdoor learning (4.4.2), commenting on how vital outdoor learning was for them, "*I think it's a really important lesson because…we're learning about our earth and stuff…"* (FG3/SF) (4.4.2). This is interesting, as McMahon and Portelli (2012) (2.4.2) have surmised, student voice can often be ignored when viewing engagement, reducing learning to what can be seen so that engagement may be misunderstood.

Furthermore, Split et al.'s (2011 in Evans, Butterworth and Law 2019) (2.3.2) research indicates that teacher perceptions of engagement can dictate teacher interactions with students so that when a student's behaviour is seen as problematic, the teacher forms a mental representation of a negative relationship, which may shape future interactions with the student. Therefore, it is possible that when students in my study discussed what might improve teacher-student relationships, in suggesting to "*Become better at your work and stuff, maybe like ask more questions to the teacher"* (FG3/JSB) (4.4.2) they were implying that by displaying appropriate behaviour students appear engaged with learning and as teachers may prefer students who are engaged (Wilkins 2014) (2.3.2), they respond positively to them (5.3) and thus a positive relationship is built (5.3). This can be seen in teacher 2's observation in regard to outdoor learning, "*I think cos they enjoy it as well they tend to be engaged so the relationship's quite good because they tend to enjoy what they are doing*" (TFG/NT2) (4.5.1). Arguably, this could be because as McMahon and Portelli (2012) (2.4.1) state, students are viewed as being behaviourally engaged when they follow school rules, are compliant and complete activities so that the teachers in my study saw students as being engaged not necessarily because they were enjoying learning but because they were not displaying poor behaviour. Yet, in contrast to Cents-Boonstra et al.'s (2021) (2.4.3) findings, my results suggest that positive teacher behaviour fostered positive teacher-student relationships which then elicited engagement with learning, but students were aware and able to appear engaged to cause positive teacher reactions. Whilst consistent with previous findings by Jang et al. (2016) (2.4.3) that a reciprocal relationship exists so that more active engagement from students leads to more motivating teacher behaviours and vice versa, my results also seem to show that students' positive engagement was designed to create positive teacher-student relationships. For students in my study, this was done by eliciting appropriate behaviours from teachers, *"it might not really depend on how many questions you ask but it might get your relationship up with the teacher again"* (FG3/JSD) (4.5.3). This is interesting, as Lumby (2011) (2.4.1) states, discussions around engagement assume participation in engagement for enjoyment so that learning is conditional on the motivation to learn, in that students willingly engage. However, my results appear to denote students display engagement to foster positive teacher-student

relationships (4.5.3) and equally, students require to enjoy learning to build a positive connection with teachers, subsequently enjoying learning enough to engage when they feel a positive teacher student relationship is built. As students in my findings expressed, they were more able to learn and engage where there was a good teacher-student relationships as *"…you like, like that lesson…you enjoy it more"* (FG4/JSA) (4.5.3) and therefore, *"it can like boost your mental health like towards doing the work"* (FG4/JSD) (4.5.3).

Outdoor learning builds relationships with teachers and helps us engage

In contrast to previous research by Heckman and Masterov (2006 in Chase et al. 2014) (2.4.3), my results suggest that negative attitudes to school may not be as embedded as believed and that through positive teacher-student relationships, students can engage with learning. For students in my study, this is achievable through stimulating, active learning environments where students are given autonomy, and feel cared for by teachers (4.5.2). One explanation for this may be as Ryan, Stiller and Lynch (1994) (2.2.3) study shows, teacher-student relationships may have the strongest influence on young people's motivation and thus engagement with learning. Furthermore, both students and teachers appear to view that outdoor learning provides an environment whereby positive teacher-student relationships develop, and students engage, stating that *"…I feel that outdoor education is actually help[ful] to lift relationships…" (*FG2/NSA) (4.4.1) and *"They are certainly engaged when we're out[doors]…"* (TGF/NT1) (4.5.3). In this way my research offers possible explanations as to why, as found by Randolph et al. (2023) (2.2.1) the use of non-traditional education (1.3 and 2.2.1) improves academic outcomes more than traditional education (1.3 and 2.2.1) and why as Kuo, Barnes and Jordan (2022) (2.5.4) found, nature boosts concentration and retention so that integrating nature into teaching may improve academic achievement more than traditional teaching.

My findings add to Wentzel's 2013) (2.3.1) argument to provide insight into teacher-student relationships from the young people's perspectives and how these may change and be affected by both student and teacher behaviour, approaches to learning and being outdoors. Therefore, the results of my study indicate that, as Wubbels and Brekelmans (2005) (2.3.2) suggest, building

positive relationships on outdoor learning, may impact interactions inside the classroom. This is possibly because, like Dobransky and Frymier's (2004) (2.3.3) results show, students in my study felt being away from the classroom gave a sense that power is shared and thus they developed a positive attachment to teachers to engage with learning, as the students viewed classroom relationships as often unequal, with teachers holding most of the power and control (4.3 and 4.4). As seen in my results (chapter 4), consistent with previous findings, (Kendall and Rodger 2015; Robinson 2013; Beames 2006 and Cramp 2008) (2.5.3), outdoor learning may foster relationships as teachers and students learn together. It is likely, that as Eccles and Roeser (2011) (2.4.3) point out, as young people do not thrive in environments that do not meet their psychological needs, my results add support to Quay, Dickinson and Nettleton's (2002) (2.3.2) findings in that students in my study also reported feeling they experienced caring in outdoor learning more than in classrooms (4.3, 4.4. and 4.5). An explanation for this is possibly that as Davies and Hamiliton (2019) (2.3.2) state, the outdoors provides a learning environment which is different from a generic classroom as being outdoors minimises the usual constraints and rules of a classroom. Therefore, as discussed previously (1.3 and 2.2.3) and as Kunc (1992) (2.2.3) suggests, my findings show how my students may be affected by school's common customs and ideas focused on testing, individualism and achievement. For my students, these can feel more important than a sense of belonging or caring (Kunc 1992) (2.2.3), impacting teacher-student relationships and ultimately a desire to engage with learning (4.3, 4.4. and 4.5). Yet, as students in my study point out, in line with research by Connell (1990) and Osterman (2000) (2.4.3) young people can feel a sense of belonging when 'learning' away from the classroom. This is important as my results show that young people feel that to engage with learning, they need positive relationships with their teachers but that to achieve this they require to feel they are valued, understood, listened to and given autonomy with activities that are appropriate and relevant and can be completed at a suitable pace. Therefore, as pointed out by students in my findings (chapter 4) there is a link between engagement with learning and teacher-student relationships in that they require positive relationships with teachers to feel confident and motivated to engage (Middleton and Perks 2014) (2.4.1). Students suggested that this is most likely to happen in outdoor learning where the

environment is calm and relaxing and reduces stress for teachers and students. Therefore, it is possible that my study agrees with Gehlbach, Brinkworth and Harris (2012) (1.4.1) in showing teacher-student relationships to be malleable, suggesting that they can be manipulated or shaped, perhaps by meeting the requirements stated by students in my study which can be done by using outdoor learning.

5.5 Summary

Using reflexive thematic analysis, I have interpreted students' experiences of teacher-student relationships in classrooms and on outdoor learning. My results offer an insight into students' views over what they require to form positive relationships and how they may deteriorate as well as how positive relationships with teachers lead to engagement with learning.

My data shows young people experience positive teacher-student relationships at the beginning of year 7, after transition from primary school to secondary school. However, students report relationships with teachers begin to decline throughout year 7 and anticipate that may continue to decline throughout secondary school. This was seen by students to be due to poor behaviour, negative teacher responses, negative classroom environments and approaches to learning that students did not find suitable, which led to students feeling unable to engage with learning.

In contrast to negative classroom experiences, my findings show that young people's experiences of teacher-student relationships on outdoor learning were positive. Outdoor learning was met with enthusiasm and students reported really enjoying being outdoors and away from the classroom. Relationships and engaging with learning were seen by students to be transferable back to the classroom as they had enjoyed the outdoors, felt empowered by having freedom and the choice to learn at their own pace, and they had been with their friends.

For students to have positive relationships with their teachers, they suggested that they required several factors. These were centred around approaches to learning, learning environments and teachers' behaviours. Building positive relationships with teachers was seen as important to students but to do so they needed to believe that teachers understood them, listened to them and got to know them. Outdoor learning was seen as a suitable learning environment for students to forge positive connections with teachers as it was a relaxing, calming space where teachers and students could feel less stress.

Therefore, the results of my research show that students view outdoor learning as being a positive learning environment that fosters the building of positive teacher-student relationships to support students' engagement with learning.

In the final chapter I offer my concluding thoughts by reflecting on my research, considering the significance of my findings and my contribution to knowledge. To aid my summary by providing an overview which can be used in practical application of my results, I make use of a key dimensions diagram (Fig 3) (6.2.2) which is discussed further in chapter 6.

6 Concluding thoughts

6.1 Introduction

The focus of this chapter it to bring together my research journey to provide my thoughts on my research, discuss the limitations I found and explain how my research contributes to knowledge and how this may impact practice and offer ideas for further research. I begin the chapter with section **6.2, Reflecting on my research,** to offer a summary of what I did, why and how. I then reflect on the significance of my findings by considering previous research findings in relation to teacher-student relationships, engagement with learning and outdoor learning, to show how my research adds to and furthers these areas. In section **6.3, Limitations of my research**, I take account of the constraints and limitations of my research to show how these may have affected my findings. Based on the significance of my findings, I then use section **6.4, Practical Implications,** to explore how my findings might impact teaching practices and education policies before offering potential avenues for further research in section **6.4, Possibilities for further research**. The chapter is concluded with **6.6 Final Thoughts**, where I summarise if my research has achieved my aim.

6.2 Reflecting on my research

My research, situated in an English state secondary school, set out to explore, from the young people's experiences, how and why year 7 (age 11-12 years) student relationships with their teachers might be impacted through outdoor learning, and to examine the influence of this on their engagement with learning in general. The aim of my research was to explore from the young people's perspective, the fostering of positive relationships between teachers and young people through outdoor learning, to understand how this might influence young people to engage in their own learning and thus create positive learning environments (1.5). To examine teacher-student relationships within classrooms and on outdoor learning I used three key questions (1.5):

1. *What are young peoples' experiences of teacher-student relationships in secondary school and what impact does this have on their engagement with learning?*
2. *From the perspective of young people, what impact does outdoor learning have on building positive teacher-student relationships and their engagement with learning?*
3. *What can be learnt from the experiences of young people with respect to teacher-student relationships and outdoor learning?*

My research explored young people's experiences through listening to their voices as part of the wider social context of school and educational policies. This was done as my research is entwined with my professional and worldview (1.2, 1.3 and 1.4) and the approach I chose allowed me to explore young people's understanding of the social structures and concepts that might shape and define their experiences of teacher-student relationships (3.2.4*).* By using young people's voices, I examined their interpretations and views. As Chase et al. (2014) (2.3.2) suggest this gave agency and autonomy to young people in my study to express why and how teacher-student relationships impacted on their engagement with learning. My research design using focus groups was chosen to privilege young people's voices and experiences, by giving what Grover (2004) (3.3) says are opportunities for students to freely express their views and contribute to research agendas. I did this as I wanted to understand their experiences and views so that my research might contribute further knowledge on educational practices and policies (3.2.4). This is because as McMahon and Portelli (2012) (2.4.2) suggest, a lack of student voice limits understanding so that it is difficult to know how engagement might alter within different context such as place.

I approached my research from an interpretivist viewpoint informed by critical constructivism (3.3.) I view reality as subjective and varying between individuals (Scotland 2012) and see meaning and knowledge as socially constructed (3.2.1). Therefore, I explored young people's experiences of teacher-student relationships within the context of an English state secondary school, whilst examining how related social structures might influence the way their

experiences were constructed (Kincheloe 2005) (3.3.). Thus, by listening to the voices of young people in my study, I critically investigated their subjective meanings of teacher-student relationships but remained aware of how my own background and views might influence my research (Wojnar and Swanson 2007). My results were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis as this aligned with my views in terms of wanting to represent young people's experiences to interpret my data (Braun and Clarke 2006/2021) (4.4.). By actively engaging with my data, I remained subjective in my research and analysis allowing me to contemplate my own position. However, to do so, I needed to take account of how young people experienced teacher-student relationships. Therefore, through my analysis I explored meanings of teacher-student relationships from young people's views, placing these within the context of school and wider educational policies. By doing so, I explored how as Kincheloe (2005) (3.3.2) explains, the English education system could be seen to reproduce dominant social-political and economic structures as seen in educational policy (1.3 and 2.2.2) to understand how this might impact young people and teacher-student relationships. Taking a reflexive thematic analysis approach meant I was able to, as Braun and Clarke (2006) explain, explore and analyse my data for meanings, connections and context in a way that reflected my own positionality. In doing so, I reflected on the analytical process as I considered my position as both researcher and teacher and thoughtfully engaged with my data as I interpreted my students' experiences and meanings (Braun and Clarke 2019) (3.5.5). In discussing my findings, I considered my research questions. I then weaved my themes of behaviours, contrasting learning environments and approaches, and requirements that had arisen from the data into these to interpret young people's experiences.

6.2.1 Transferability

In approaching my research subjectively, through interpretivism and critical constructivism, the young people are unlikely to provide general interpretations (Scotland 2012) and my research 'conclusions' might be seen to have limited transferability. This is likely due to my data being linked to a specific context, viewpoint and values (Saunders et al. 2012). Yet creating generalisations may

ignore the young people's voices so that I am unable to fully explore and understand their actions and experiences. This can make it difficult for me as researcher to develop a detailed understanding of teacher-student relationships (Saunders et al. 2012). Instead, my research participants provided in-depth of understanding of their experiences of and constructed meanings about teacher-student relationships in different ways (Crotty 1998). Therefore, as Pring (2000 in Scotland 2012) suggests the young people were co-constructors in meaning.

By undertaking qualitative research, as Polit and Beck (2010) state, I was able to develop higher level concepts and theories that are applicable beyond the year 7 cohort in one English state secondary school. Transferability in this way is achieved when my interpretations are reasonably extrapolated so that inference is made to other similar contexts (Polit and Beck 2010). Consequently, as Braun and Clarke (2022) discuss, the transferability of my research lies in ensuring I located my participants not just in terms of their demographics but by showing understanding of the context of my data collection. This was shown through my chosen methodology of interpretivism informed by critical constructivism as this focused my research on young people's experiences of teacher-student relationships rather than producing generalisations about them (Remenyi et al. 1998). In doing so, as Scotland (2012) and Saunders et al. (2012) suggest, I can look at context specific accounts from young people's subjective individual experiences, values and views. The context of my participants and my data collection included historically, culturally and socially locating the English School system and educational policies, and analysis of young people's experiences of teacher-student relationships and representations of outdoor learning. By both acknowledging and exploring context in this way, I have reflected on the ways the characteristics of my participants, (*year 7 students*) and the context and setting of my research (*an English State School using outdoor learning*) shaped and varied my results. I also remained aware of my own opinions and ideologies which have influenced my research and recognise that deductions from my research may not be the only interpretations.

6.2.2 Key dimensions of my research

There are challenges and potential limitations in listening to young people's voices to determine educational practices and pedagogy. In empowering and valuing young people by listening to their experiences and acting on this to enact change, there is the possibility that teacher voices may be diluted. This may have the effect of the research findings not acknowledging teachers' perspectives on how young people's requirements can be implemented and embedded through educational practices and pedagogy. This can be seen in the way young people in the study state their requirements for work that is not too difficult as by focusing on this, there is a chance the findings overlook the complex nature of learning which raises issues for teachers in trying to ensure they meet the requirements of the curriculum and educational policies.

There is the possibility that in suggesting the need for less difficult work, young people were identifying how they felt unable to understand work when their relationships with teachers were seen to be negative. This was seen in the findings when young people stated feeling unable to trust teachers they did not have positive relationships with, feeling unsupported by them and thus finding the work harder. In contrast, on outdoor learning, where their relationships with teachers are viewed as being more positive, they find tasks easy or easier (5.3).

This raises questions over positioning indoor and outdoor learning as binaries, which both young people and teachers did. Participants in the study overwhelmingly agreed with outdoor learning being positive, contrasting it with indoor learning in less positive ways but this may not reflect the complex realities of the classroom and the multiple relationships and activities it supports (Dorn 2018 in Davis, Conroy and Clague 2020) (1.3.1). This may pose a challenge in understanding how educational practices and pedagogy might be determined as such a binary position may lead to disregard for the value of young people's perspectives based on their maturity or capability (Hudson 2012; Stafford 2017).

However, there is also a danger of viewing the findings through our own positionality which may not only be influenced by culture, history and the social-

political context, but also by dominant views and unequal power dynamics. In discussing the challenges and limitations of listening to young people, I am aware that as a researcher and teacher there may be a danger that I am cautious of learning what young people think and experience due to the consequences of responding to such insights (Hudson 2012; Sandberg 2017). This may cause issues with implementing young people's requirements in terms of educational practice and pedagogy. Teachers potentially find themselves caught between shifting policy demands and priorities (Parry et al. 2013), so that there becomes the need to measure teaching practices and outcomes by focusing on curriculum and key competencies. This can mean in determining educational practices and pedagogy young people's voices are lost as they become a thing to be measured rather than hearing what is of interest to young people (Bourke and Loveridge, 2016).

Although there may be challenges and potential limitations of listening to young people's voices in determining educational practices and pedagogy, this research explored young people's experiences and listened to their voices in terms of their frame of reference. In choosing to undertake this research informed by a critical constructivist approach, through reflexivity, I am aware of my own bias in my interpretation of the findings and acknowledge the issue of seeing the findings from a reference point of a position of power and hierarchy, influenced by traditional situated approaches.

My results suggest that students in my study experienced a change to their relationships across year 7 from mostly positive at the start of the year to a larger number of negative relationships by the end of year 7. Alongside this my results show that students felt more disengaged with learning by the end of year 7. For my young people fewer positive relationships with teachers and disengagement by the end of year 7 was influenced by several factors which led students to state their requirements for positive teacher-student relationships. Drawing on the findings from my research I have created my key dimensions diagram (Figure 3) (*please note a larger version is available in appendix 3, C1*)* to show what students in my study felt they required to form positive teacher-student relationships. The diagram offers an overview of the students' experiences of

teacher-student relationships within the context of classrooms and outdoor learning. It states their requirements (5.4) and identifies how students who took part in my research saw these in terms of two of the themes - behaviours and environments - that emerged from my research (5.2 and 5.3) It is designed to not only offer a summary of the research but to provide a guide to the factors and requirements that young people feel influence their experiences of teacher-student relationships and to show how these interlink. In this way the key dimensions diagram can then be used in practical application through education and schools.

I will now use my diagram to summarise my findings and outline the requirements and factors that impact teacher-student relationships.

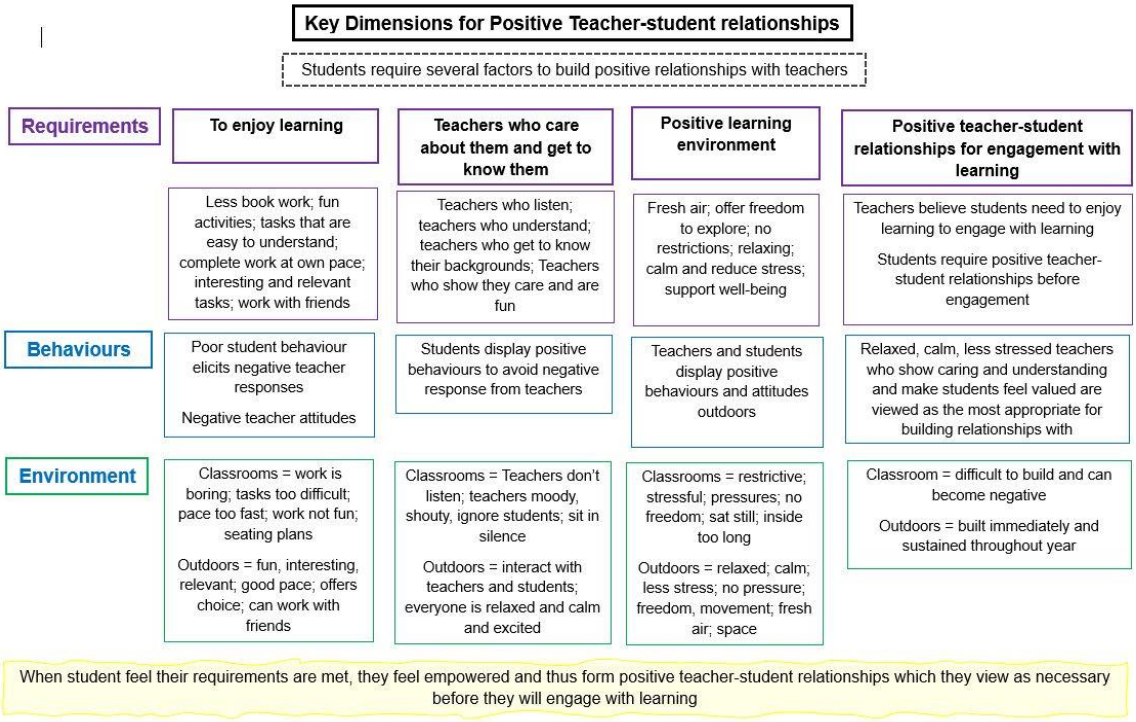

Figure 3 - Key Dimensions (Appendix 3) (C1)

Requirements

As shown in the key dimensions diagram (Fig 3), my findings show students have several requirements to enable them to form positive teacher-student relationships. They want to enjoy learning which they suggest can be achieved by teachers offering more activities and less book work, making work simpler, less difficult and without the pressure to learn for exams. Learning tasks are

important to students in forming positive teacher-student relationships as they want fun, not too challenging tasks that they can complete at their own pace so that they are given autonomy over activities and tasks. In this way, being able to learn outdoors is seen as important to young people as they feel the activities are more interesting, relevant and enjoyable and find teachers to be nicer and less stressed, so they can connect with them. Enjoying learning is seen as being required to build positive connections rather than enjoying learning leading to engagement with learning.

The key dimensions diagram shows how students require teachers to show they care about them by listening to them, understanding them and supporting them. In this way students want to feel valued and want teachers to get to know them and their backgrounds rather than just focus on what they can or cannot do academically. Students require teachers to take a student-centred approach as they feel that if they cannot trust their teacher because they do not get to know them, then they cannot have a positive teacher-student relationship as the learning environment is not enjoyable. Yet it is important for students to get on with teachers before they can engage because they feel if they do not like a teacher, then they will not want to listen to them. They also want to work with their friends and other students so that they can be collaborative and enjoy learning. Being outdoors is therefore seen as preferable to being 'stuck' inside a classroom as the outdoors offers a sense of space. In this way, students want to feel free to explore, breath fresh air, and be able to move so they can feel calm, relaxed and less stressed and enjoy themselves. Interestingly, teachers believe students require to enjoy learning in order to engage with learning and that this leads to positive teacher student relationships, whereas students state they require positive teacher-student relationships, often created as they feel they enjoy learning, before they will engage with learning.

Behaviours

The key dimensions diagram (Fig 3) (C1) shows how students believe their self-reported poor behaviours impact teacher-student relationships in that if they see their own behaviours in the classroom as negative, they feel teachers' behaviours and reactions towards them are also negative. Negative teacher behaviours are

seen by students as teachers being strict, harsh, moody and shouty and lead to students responding negatively back thus positive relationships with teachers are not formed. To avoid conflict and elicit a positive response from teachers, students feel the need to show positive attitudes, appear to be engaged, listen, ask questions and behave appropriately. However, outdoors students view teachers and students as relaxed and less stressed so that students feel that behaviours and attitudes on outdoor learning are positive and positive interactions between students and teachers take place. Therefore, students view teachers who are calm, relaxed, less stressed and make students feel valued as the ones they can form positive teacher-student relationships with. For students, teacher-student relationships are at least partly based on their perceptions of teachers' actions and behaviours as well as on the need to feel valued, cared for, listened to and understood.

Environment

The learning environment is displayed in the key dimensions diagram (Fig 3) (C1) in terms of how the data identified a contrast between classrooms and outdoors. The classroom environment is viewed by students as being restrictive, lacking fun activities and freedom, feeling monotonous and makes students feel 'stuck' indoors for too long with 'moody' teachers, pressures to achieve, too much working to exams and boring tasks. Having to sit in silence and not being able to sit with or work with friends due to seating plans is viewed by students as negatively impacting teacher-student relationships as students feel unable to work co-operatively with other students. Students see these factors as teachers not caring about them so do not want to build positive relationships with them as they feel it creates an unsuitable learning environment.

As students view outdoor learning in terms of having no goal of exams, learning is seen as less structured and lacking in pressure. Students enjoy learning outdoors as it is different, inspiring and important and teachers support this, expressing how they too love outdoor learning. Students see outdoor learning as being empowering in terms of having choice over things such as learning pace and activities and that being outside is more fun than classroom learning. Being able to explore the local surroundings when outdoors gave students a sense of

autonomy over learning in contrast to indoors where learning is seen to be teacher-led. For students being outdoors is calming, reduces stress, clears the mind and is good for health and well-being. In this way, teachers and students are seen by students to be less stressed outside which fosters positive teacher-student relationships as both students and teachers feel more relaxed in their interactions. On outdoor learning, students feel able to connect positively with teachers and build positive teacher-student relationships as the natural environment promotes a sense of enjoyment over learning and students respond positively to teachers' positive behaviours outdoors. If students feel their requirements have been met through positive behaviours of the teacher and positive learning environments, they feel they form positive relationships with their teachers which supports them to engage with learning. This offers a contribution to knowledge on teacher-student relationships and engagement with learning which I will discuss in the next section.

6.2.3 Significance of my findings and contribution to knowledge

My findings show how my research can contribute to understanding teacher-student relationships from the viewpoint of young people. My interpretations of student experiences are positioned in relation to literature to show how my research addresses uncertainties or provides further knowledge around teacher-student relationships and outdoor learning (chapter 5). As discussed in the literature review (2.3.1), previous research by Berscheid (1999) into teacher-student relationships suggests incomplete understanding of the context of how relationships are seen by both teacher and student, instead examining the impact of positive relationships on students' attainment. My research addresses this by showing how young people experience teacher-student relationships in the classroom and outdoors and offering their suggestions of how to build positive-teacher student relationships to support engagement with learning. The results of my study also provide further insight into the dynamic qualities of teacher-student relationships as my findings explain the processes in terms of requirements (Fig 3) (6.2.2) (C1) that students feel led to teacher-student relationships having a meaningful impact (Wubbels et al. 2006) (2.3.1).

Overall, my findings show that students believe it is possible to engage in learning throughout their time at school if certain requirements are met which allow them to build positive teacher-student relationships, which they state can foster engagement with learning. These requirements include positive behaviours and responses from teachers, appropriate approaches to learning, teachers who understand, listen to them and get to know them and positive learning environments (Fig 3) (6.2.2) (C1). Students, and to some extent teachers, both view outdoor learning as providing the context for these requirements to be met. This is because students see being outdoors as being able to improve well-being, leaving teachers and students feeling relaxed, calm and with less stress and allowing for wider and more active learning approaches. In this way, positive connections are made as teachers show students, they can understand them and get to know them. This reduces power dynamics, giving students a sense of autonomy and empowering them in their learning. As young people then enjoy learning they are more inclined to build positive relationships with teachers. In this way, teacher-student relationships have a strong influence on young people's motivation and engagement with learning.

Through my findings, I have also provided some insight into the role that transition through year 7 might play in affecting educational expectations (Smyth 2020) (1.4.2). This is because my results highlight how educational policies can be seen to impact students in that they view indoor learning as restrictive, boring and demotivating. My findings also show how students view that teachers may feel the stress of teaching core knowledge which they display through negative behaviour towards students. Thus, a negative cycle of poor behaviour and negative teacher-student relationships may continue. However, my results provide knowledge on how an intense experience such as outdoor learning can positively alter teacher-student relationships (Cramp 2008) (2.3.2). By being outdoors, my findings show the constraints of the classroom are removed so that young people experience teachers caring about them and gain benefits in terms of well-being and enjoyment. The results of my study show students may forge better connections outdoors than indoors as the context of outdoors can be seen as a more appropriate environment for students to trust teachers and feel they care about them, thus breaking down barriers. According to my research findings,

engagement with learning is then more likely to happen if students believe teachers care about them as they form positive teacher-student relationships which allow them to feel able to engage.

Throughout my results, I present the implications for students when teacher-student relationships are not positive and show students' requirements to build positive teacher-student relationships. This includes students indicating that positive teacher-student relationships are formed best when outdoors and that positive connections with teachers preclude any engagement with learning. The findings here demonstrate that my research could have significant impact on teaching practice and practical implications for educational policy.

6.3 Limitations of my research

My study has effectively explored my aim to provide insight into my research questions yet there are potential constraints or limitations to my findings. My response to some of those potential limitations is set out below:

1. My data represents the voices and experiences of young people from one state secondary school in the North West of England who had recently transitioned from primary to secondary, (year 6 to year 7). Whilst their views and experiences are context specific accounts from their subjective experiences of teacher-student relationships in the context of year 7, they do offer a cross-section of students' experiences in a state English secondary school so that my findings are broadly applicable to the wider school community of year 7 students (6.2.1). In this way my finding may be of interest to other schools in understanding how positive teacher student relationships can be formed from the perspective of young people to benefit both teachers and students.

2. My data collection was undertaken across one academic year so that there is a possibility of a lack of context and understanding around what may precede the academic year to influence teacher-student relationships or

what may follow. However, my research represents the voices of young people in that school, at that time and so reflects their experiences but still allows my interpretations to be reasonably extrapolated so that inference is made to other similar contexts (Polit and Beck 2010) (6.2.1).

3. As I did not collect much data from teachers this may be seen to present a limitation in understanding their perspectives. Yet my research was approached from the point of view of 'listening to the voices of young people' as this was important to me as a teacher (1.4.1) in exploring my role and students' experiences. I also wanted to contribute to the lack of research from young people's perspectives (2.4.2). Therefore, my data was collected to enable me to understand the experiences of the young people whilst taking account of teachers' views.

4. Finally, it is possible that in not doing a comparative study between classroom and outdoor learning there may be limitations in the data in that I am not able to explore the similarities and differences between classroom learning and outdoor learning. However, I wanted more in-depth knowledge and collective and individualised insights into teacher-student relationships, from the perspective of young people, rather than identifying commonalities and variations, and so chose to use focus groups (3.4.4).

6.4 Practical implications and recommendations

The findings of my research have found implications for future practice for teachers, schools and policy makers. Though I do not claim this research provides a definitive view of teacher-student relationships, my data offers an alternative (1.3) direction for schools, teachers and policy makers to consider when designing and implementing curriculums in terms of how outdoor learning might be incorporated into these to support the formation of positive teacher-student relationships and thus engagement with learning. My research is also significant for those with an interest in education and outdoor learning as well as researchers. My key dimensions diagram (Fig 3) (6.2.2) (C1) should be used as

a summary and guide to the factors and requirements that young people feel influence their experiences of teacher-student relationships to show how these can be applied through education and schools.

I will now discuss the different implications of and recommendations for my research by highlighting who the recommendations are for and then discussing the implications.

- **For students:** Existing research (2.3.2) along with data from my findings show young people desire positive connections with teachers to support them in their engagement with learning. Young people also want to feel autonomy in their learning and to enjoy learning. This study shows that this can be achieved through outdoor learning where students feel positive teacher-student relationships are built more effectively than in the classroom. I recommend that students use their voices to affect change perhaps though existing school councils or through the creation of one if these do not already exist. Students might also consider how they can affect change by using their voice to engage in positive conversations with senior staff in schools to express their requirements.

- **For schools and teachers:** As previous research (2.5.3) shows, the use of outdoor learning in schools is not widespread and currently only written into the PE curriculum as 'outdoor and adventurous activity challenges' listed as part of the subject content (DfE 2013) (2.5.3). Therefore, it is recommended that schools and teachers consider looking at their curriculum offerings and discuss how they could develop outdoor learning across the school to support relationship building and engagement with learning. It is recommended that headteachers and senior leaders could consider training for school staff to better understand the advantages of positive teacher-student relationships for young people and the benefits of using outdoor learning to achieve these. This could facilitate productive conversations around practical implications for schools, teachers and students and allow for discussion on how best to manage these. It would

also allow for any fears and misconceptions around implementing outdoor learning programmes to be discussed openly.

- **For local government and councils:** My research provides evidence why Local government, including county councils should consider providing increased support for outdoor learning in schools to provide experiences for young people as relevant to their local environments, as well as nationally and globally. This could also include communication with headteachers, senior leaders and school staff to build knowledge and understanding around outdoor learning. Cooperation between child-care providers and primary and secondary schools in terms of using outdoor learning with young people would also aid in building positive teacher-student relationships across students' school journeys, thus providing support for transition.

- **For policy makers:** At a higher level the research I have undertaken shows why Government policymakers should acknowledge the importance of young people's voice in education and consider what is important to young people to allow them to feel supported to build positive teacher-student relationships and engage in learning. Enhancing the alignment between students' requirements and education policies and practices could increase young people's engagement with learning by encouraging schools to integrate outdoor learning into everyday education practices. It is therefore recommended that policymakers consider how educational policies and practices can be adapted or altered to take account of my findings.

- **For those with an interest in education and/or outdoor learning:** My research specifies young people's requirements for positive teacher-student relationships and shows how they feel these are met outdoors rather in classrooms. Organisations, charities and groups who work with young people therefore are recommended to consider how they meet the requirements of young people. The development or adaptation of outdoor

programmes to incorporate young people's requirements should also be considered as well as the influence organisations, charities and groups may have on policymakers to encourage alignment between students' requirements and education policies and practices.

- **For researchers:** Data from my findings recommends to other researchers the value of listening to young people in research concerning them as my research has provided them with a voice to state what is important to them in terms of teacher-student relationships. My research could also be of interest to researchers who wish to consider undertaking further research into teacher-student relationships and for those who may wish to explore the connection between outdoor learning and teacher-student relationships further.

6.5 Possibilities for future research

Whilst specific to the school in my study, my research revealed larger insights surrounding teacher-student relationships and outdoor learning. Therefore, I intend to ensure my research is accessible to stakeholders and interested individuals and groups, by presenting at conferences and writing for journals. There is also scope for further possible research in several areas outlined below:

1. Further research could look at year 6 students undertaking outdoor learning with secondary school teachers as part of the transition process. This would allow for focus on students' perceptions of teacher-student relationship formation at the point of transition into year 7 and further understanding of how outdoor learning could be used to ease transitions. There would also be the possibility of exploring if positive teacher-student relationships built with teachers prior to transition can be sustained after transition into secondary and for how long these might be sustained and why.

2. Though my results show positive relationships transferred back to the classroom along with engagement, it is unclear if this would remain the case in subsequent years. Therefore, there is potential for a longitudinal study to consider the impact of outdoor learning in subsequent school years, following participation in outdoor learning in year 7.

3. My research could be extended by exploring outdoor learning with all year groups in secondary to understand how this may impact the building and sustaining of positive teacher-student relationships and engagement with learning and what the impact might be for engagement with learning.

4. Further research with teachers could be undertaken to understand their views of the requirements for teacher-student relationships and examine how teachers might envisage these to be implemented, if at all, within teaching practice.

5. There is scope to consider how teacher-student relationships may be formed and impacted when using outdoor learning as part of the curriculum within different settings, such as outdoor centres.

6.6 Final thoughts

I began my research by considering the statement that:

"fostering positive relationships between teachers and young people through outdoor learning encourages engagement with learning thus creating positive learning environments" (1.5).

Yet due to my findings, I have re-worded my statement to reflect what I understand the students' experience:

"fostering positive relationships between teachers and young people through outdoor learning creates positive learning environments that encourage engagement with learning"

This is because I began my research journey from my own experiences that meant I believed that being away from the classroom and outdoors, students would form positive relationships with teachers and then engage with learning so that positive learning environments were created. However, as my research has shown, on reflection, I was potentially taking young people's positive behavioural engagement as being engaged in learning as this led to a calm classroom. However, my findings show that in the outdoors, students form positive relationship with their teachers as the outdoors meets their requirements for the basis of positive teacher-student relationships. Therefore, a positive learning environment is created so that young people feel able to engage in learning as they view the teacher as caring and the learning as enjoyable.

Though my research may have some limitations (6.3), areas for future research (6.5) are proposed to enhance the usability and applicability of my findings. My research then offers several findings which provide significant contributions to education and outdoor learning by identifying young peoples' requirements for positive learning environments to build positive teacher-student relationships

Appendix 1

Student Questionnaire 1

Student Questionnaire (1)

Please answer as many questions as you can. *You do not need to give your name*

Please tick the sex you currently identify as:

Male ☐ Female ☐ Other ☐ Prefer not to answer ☐

1. Thinking about your overall relationships with teachers in **this school**, please **tick** the **ONE** statement that you **agree** with the most:

☐ I have good relationships with **all** my teachers

☐ I have good relationships with **most** of my teachers

☐ I have good relationships with **some** of my teachers

☐ I have poor relationships with **most** of my teachers

☐ I have poor relationships with **all** my teachers

2. Overall, how would you rate your current relationships with your teachers in secondary school? (*Tick ONE statement only*)

☐ I feel that **all** my teachers are friendly and nice to me

☐ I feel **most** of my teachers are friendly and nice to me

☐ I feel that **some** of my teachers are friendly and nice to me

☐ I feel that I do not get on with **most** of my teachers

☐ I feel that **none** of the teachers like me

☐ I do not think that I need to have good relationships with my teachers

3. How would you describe your current relationship with your class teacher on outdoor learning day? (*circle the box the describes it the best*)

Extremely negative	Mostly negative	Sometimes negative	Okay – (*haven't really thought about it*)	Often good	Mostly good	Excellent

4. Taking part in outdoor learning with my teachers is helping me to build positive relationships with them:

Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Sure ☐

5. Do you think that having a positive relationship with your subject teachers helps you to learn during lesson time? *(Circle the box that describes your answer the best)*

No, it makes no difference at all	It makes very little difference	It makes some difference	Not sure/don't know	It makes some difference	It mostly helps	Yes it 100% helps

6. Do you think that knowing what job you want in the future helps you engage in lessons?

Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Sure ☐

StQst- No. 1 (pre-focus groups) S Hayden

7. What does '***engagement***' mean to you? *(Tick all that you agree with)*

☐ Taking part in lessons by asking questions and completing activities and tasks

☐ Being focussed in lessons

☐ Having a positive attitude to lessons

☐ Having a positive attitude to school

☐ Enjoying learning

☐ Working together with other students and the teacher

☐ Trying your best, even if you find it difficult

☐ Understanding the lesson content and tasks

☐ Other (*please list*): _____

8. Thinking about your attitude to learning in class, what do you think would help you to be more positive about lessons and want to learn more? (*Tick all that you agree with*)

☐ Group activities and tasks

☐ Activities and task to complete on my own

☐ Having a positive classroom environment

☐ A good relationship with my teacher

☐ Taking part in outdoor learning activities outside the classroom

☐ My teacher wanting to get to know me better

☐ Lessons which have interactive activities

☐ My teacher listening to me

☐ Lessons which are more interesting

☐ Feeling that I can share my opinions in lessons

☐ The teacher talking and students taking notes

☐ Other (*please list*): _____

9. Which characteristics do you think a teacher needs for you to have a positive relationship with them? (*Circle all that apply*)

Fair	Kind	Friendly	Open-minded	Approachable
Sense of humour	Helpful	Trustworthy	Caring	Knowledgeable
Happy	Enthusiastic	Respectful	Positive	Encouraging
Firm	Strict	Calm	Listens	Funny
Nice	Honest	Understanding	Good listener	Good communicator
Confidence	Relatable	Shows interest in you	Interesting	Fun

10. Do you think that if your parents/carers are positive about learning you will also be positive about learning?

Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Sure ☐

Appendix 2

Student Questionnaire 2

Student Questionnaire (2)

Please answer as many questions as you can. *You do not need to give your name*

Please tick the sex you currently identify as:

Male ☐ Female ☐ Other ☐ Prefer not to answer ☐

1. Thinking about your overall relationships with teachers in this school, **please tick** the **ONE** statement that you **agree** with the most:

☐ I have good relationships with **all** my teachers

☐ I have good relationships with **most** of my teachers

☐ I have good relationships with **some** of my teachers

☐ I have poor relationships with **some** of my teachers

☐ I have poor relationships with **most** of my teachers

☐ I have poor relationships with **all** my teachers

2. Overall, how would you rate your current relationships with your teachers in this school?
(*Tick ONE statement only*)

☐ I feel that **all** my teachers are friendly and nice to me

☐ I feel **most** of my teachers are friendly and nice to me

☐ I feel that **some** of my teachers are friendly and nice to me

☐ I feel that I do not get on with **some** of my teachers

☐ I feel that I do not get on with **most** of my teachers

☐ I feel that **none** of the teachers like me

☐ I do not think that I need to have good relationships with my teachers

3. Do you feel you engage more in lessons where you have a good relationship with the teacher?

Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Sure ☐

4. As you move through each year of secondary school, do you feel your relationships with your teachers will: (*Tick ONE statement only*)

Stay the same ☐ Improve or get better ☐ Get worse ☐

5. Do you feel that your relationships with your teacher are affected by: (*Tick ONE statement only*)

Your behaviour/attitude ☐ The teacher's behaviour/attitude ☐ Both ☐ None ☐

6. What do you feel affects you having positive relationships with your teachers?
(*Circle ALL that apply*)

Teachers not liking me	Not working hard or trying in lessons	Lessons that are not fun	Lessons held in silence	Lessons with no activities	Being inside a classroom all the time	Finding the work hard

StOst- No. 2 (pre-focus group no .2) B.Hordern

7. How would you describe your current relationship with your class teacher on outdoor learning day? (*Circle the comment that describes it the best*)

Extremely negative	Mostly negative	Sometimes negative	Okay – (*haven't really thought about it*)	Often positive	Mostly positive	Extremely positive

8. Do you feel that taking part in outdoor learning with your teachers is helping you to build positive relationships with them?

Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Sure ☐

9. Do you feel you engage more in outdoor learning lessons than in the classroom?
(*Tick ONE statement only*)

I fully engage more in the classroom	I mostly engage more in the classroom	I engage some of the time in the classroom	I do not engage in lessons outdoors or in the classroom	I engage some of the time outdoors	I mostly engage more outdoors	Yes, I fully engage more outdoors

10. Do you feel outdoor learning lessons are better than being in the classroom learning?

Yes ☐ *(Go to Q's 11)* No ☐ *(Go to Q's 12)* Not Sure ☐ *(Go to Q's 12)*

11. What makes outdoor learning lessons better than being in the classroom?
(*Tick ALL that apply*)

☐ Fresh Air
☐ Calming
☐ Teachers are happier
☐ Clears your mind
☐ Be with friends
☐ More space
☐ Learn at your pace
☐ Connect with nature
☐ Learn about environment
☐ Relaxing
☐ Not hard work
☐ Fun activities
☐ Teachers are friendlier/nicer

12. What might help you improve your relationships with your teachers in this school?
(Circle ALL that apply)

My behaviour being positive	Listening more in lessons	Teachers being nicer	Lessons being more fun	The opportunity to sit/work with my friends	Being outside for some of the lessons	Working on projects
Having less or no exam pressure	Doing more activities	Teachers not shouting	Teachers being less stressed	Being able to move around the classroom	Completing work that was more relevant to my life	Doing work I understand

Appendix 3

Key Dimensions for Positive Teacher-student relationships

Students require several factors to build positive relationships with teachers

	To enjoy learning	Teachers who care about them and get to know them	Positive learning environment	Positive teacher-student relationships for engagement with learning
Requirements	Less book work; fun activities; tasks that are easy to understand; complete work at own pace; interesting and relevant tasks; work with friends	Teachers who listen; teachers who understand; teachers who get to know their backgrounds; Teachers who show they care and are fun	Fresh air; offer freedom to explore; no restrictions; relaxing; calm and reduce stress; support well-being	Teachers believe students need to enjoy learning to engage with learning Students require positive teacher-student relationships before engagement
Behaviours	Poor student behaviour elicits negative teacher responses Negative teacher attitudes	Students display positive behaviours to avoid negative response from teachers	Teachers and students display positive behaviours and attitudes outdoors	Relaxed, calm, less stressed teachers who show caring and understanding and make students feel valued are viewed as the most appropriate for building relationships with
Environment	Classrooms = work is boring; tasks too difficult; pace too fast; work not fun; seating plans Outdoors = fun, interesting, relevant; good pace; offers choice; can work with friends	Classrooms = Teachers don't listen; teachers moody, shouty, ignore students; sit in silence Outdoors = interact with teachers and students; everyone is relaxed and calm and excited	Classrooms = restrictive; stressful; pressures; no freedom; sat still; inside too long Outdoors = relaxed; calm; less stress; no pressure; freedom, movement; fresh air; space	Classroom = difficult to build and can become negative Outdoors = built immediately and sustained throughout year

When student feel their requirements are met, they feel empowered and thus form positive teacher-student relationships which they view as necessary before they will engage with learning

Figure 3 - Key Dimensions

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