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“WHO ME? – WHAT DID I DO?”: A CASE STUDY TO EXPLORE
LEARNER PERCEPTIONS OF REASONS FOR PERSISTENT
DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOUR AND THE POSSIBLE OUTCOME OF THIS
IN LEVEL TWO CLASSES IN A COLLEGE OF FURTHER
EDUCATION

CHRISTINE AUDREY BINNER

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Abstract

This research uses learner voice to explore low level disruption in level two classrooms in a college of further education. The aim of the research is to develop a better understanding of factors influencing classroom interaction and learner achievement, and to suggest ways in which the findings may be used to minimise disruption in the classroom.

The learners who took part in the research had been identified by teaching staff as persistent disrupters in level two vocational classes. The purpose of the research was explained to each individual and the research comprised of three stages: individual interviews were held with learners; a card sorting exercise, selected for its interactive qualities, was conducted with each learner; and college-held data was used to establish factors which affected behaviour in the classroom.

The research findings have been theoretically grounded in Giddens' structuration theory. Structuration theory facilitated recognition of changes in behaviour in classrooms, and the identification of explanatory patterns. It has been used to underpin the final argument; that reasons for disruption are complex, different for each learner, and can be critical to learner progression.

The findings demonstrate that individual, home and community and institutional factors have the capacity to influence learner behaviour in the classroom. Whilst the impact of these factors can vary from individual to individual, they can all be seen to be of significant relevance to achievement and progression. The value of learner voice can be seen in the insight gained into individual learner experiences and in the attempt taken to use this information to address the balance of power in the classroom.

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Abbreviations

ALG	Adult Learning Grant
AD/HD	Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
CTLs	Course Team Leaders
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DMs	Divisional Managers
EdD	Doctor of Education
EMA	Educational Maintenance Allowance
FE	Further Education
FEDA	Further Education Development Agency
FEFC	Further Education Funding Council
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GNVQ	General National Vocational Qualification
HMIE	Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
LSD	Lysergic Acid Diethylamide
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
SFEFC	Scottish Further Education Funding Council
UK	United Kingdom

Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction

The focus of this research is the study of disruptive behaviour on level two vocational programmes in a college of further education (FE). A case study approach, designed to facilitate the voice of the learners, will be used to investigate disruptive behaviour and why it occurs. The learners involved will be those who have been identified by teachers in the college as causing disruption in the classroom. The aim of this is to provide views which are not always heard and ones which could facilitate our understanding of this issue and how it can be addressed. The case study has an action research dimension in that it could be used to address what is perceived as a growing problem for staff teaching in the college: the issue of disruptive behaviour and in particular, that on level 2 programmes of study. Justification and consideration for this approach will be addressed in chapter three.

The overall aim of the study is to develop a better understanding of factors influencing classroom interaction and learner achievement and to suggest ways in which the findings may be used to minimise disruption in the classroom. The objectives are: to investigate the student perspective; and to explore and explain the nature and the dynamics of the relationships between disruptive behaviour and underachievement amongst students in one FE College.

Research questions asked will include:

- What factors, such as college organisation and design; family circumstances; employment issues; and relationships with tutors and peers influence young people's behaviour?
- What are the nature and dynamics of the relationship between disruptive behaviour and underachievement amongst level 2 learners in the educational context of this college of further education?
- What are the characteristics and enablers of a college climate that is conducive to social harmony?

The research setting is a FE college and, for the purpose of this research, shall be known as Percy College. It is situated over several sites in a town in Yorkshire. The College, whilst also having a commercial arm, is mainly a FE college with 2,000 full-time and 4,000 part-time learners. It has until very recently served a predominantly rural area; however, recent changes in government policy and organisation have meant that the College now operates and competes in a much wider arena covering the broader region of Yorkshire and Humberside, the Aire Valley Corridor and the Leeds City Region. There are ten curriculum areas in the College and provision ranges from level one courses to higher education courses delivered through links with local universities.

Including young people in decision-making is a relatively new phenomenon in colleges, developing mainly since the 1970s (Fielding, 2001; Fielding and Rudduck, 2002; Rudduck, 2003 and Fletcher, 2004). Only recently has it

been suggested that learner views should be seriously canvassed concerning the delivery and management of education; and colleges are being encouraged to 'use data from the learner' to address areas of concern (Learning and Skills Council (LSC), 2009, p.16). 'Good' organisations are deemed to be those that take 'the views and feedback of the young people, parents, and carers they serve very seriously' (Ofsted, 2008-9, p.10).

Minimal learner involvement, and thus learner voice, in addressing disruptive behaviour in colleges of further education led Flutter and Rudduck (2006) to conclude that the extent of learner involvement often appears to be quite limited and short term. They also found that very few research projects involving learner voice had been evaluated and that the impact of learner voice was largely anecdotal.

The researcher's role in the case study project was as Lead Trainer for cross college staff development in the area of managing learner behaviour. This role stemmed from working as a coordinator and lecturer for the Health Studies, Care and Counselling curriculum area in the College; a significant amount of experience of teaching 14-16 year olds from local secondary schools, a background in social care services, previously held roles of Equal Opportunities Coordinator and Inclusive Learning Coordinator for the College; and a natural enthusiasm and interest in young people. The researcher's values and their potential to influence the research project will be examined in chapter three.

This chapter introduces and justifies the need for research, explains the aims of the research project and sets it in context by looking at earlier research, the changing nature of disruptive behaviour, and policy developments which have the potential to impact on it. It moves on to define disruptive behaviour before outlining its potential causes. The case for using learner voice and the causes of disruptive behaviour will form part of the literature review in chapter two. The chapter concludes with an outline of the thesis and a summary of this chapter.

Defining disruptive behaviour

Acknowledgment of the changing nature of disruption brings to the fore the need to provide a definition of disruptive behaviour, one that shows awareness of not only its dynamic nature but also the diverse range of activities which can be used to disrupt learning. For the purpose of this research project, disruptive behaviour is the generic term which will be adopted throughout to 'include a range of behaviours along a continuum from the irritating to the serious' (Mitchell et al., 1998, p.11). The term has proved useful to others in the study of behaviour in colleges and shall be defined as 'patterns of repeated behaviour which significantly interrupts the learning of others or threatens their personal security or well-being, or brings the organisation into disrepute' (Mitchell et al., 1998, p.11).

Mitchell et al. (1998) in their exploration of the types of disruptive behaviour most likely to occur in FE colleges classified the various types as

being: ‘childish behaviour such as ‘winding up’ or name calling; aggressive behaviour such as fights, verbal abuse and physical violence; behaviour that inhibits learning such as non-co-operation, poor attendance and non-completion or submission of work; relationship problems such as disrespect, challenging authority or passive behaviour; environmentally challenging behaviour such as graffiti, litter or vehicle misuse; and anti-social/criminal behaviour such as theft, drug use and dealing and group or gang behaviour’ (Mitchell et al., 1998, pp. 33-34). This research acknowledges the wide variety of disruptive behaviour suggested by Mitchell et al. (1998) and, at the same time, adds an additional category: that of technological misuse, such as use of mobiles and computers or other technological equipment to detract or interrupt teaching, or to cause harm to others in the classroom.

At this point it is also of value to ascertain the nature of the behaviour, as well as some of the types of behaviour classified as being disruptive. Gannon-Leary (2009) in his study of disruptive behaviour in classes in higher education appears to explore the nature of disruptive behaviour as well as the types and forms. Learners do not have to be active to disrupt and behaviour, as well as engaging others, can equally be passive by nature. By passive disruption he was referring to ‘non-attendance,’ lack of preparation’ and ‘non-participation in class’ (Gannon-Leary, 2009, p. 40). Gannon-Leary (2009) suggests that ‘passive’ forms of disruptive behaviour are becoming increasingly common yet remain under-researched.

Our understanding of the nature of disruptive behaviour can be further developed using Paul Willis’s *Learning to Labour*, an ethnographic study of

working-class boys at school in an English industrial town in the 1970s. Of importance to this research is the fact that Willis highlighted the ‘culture of resistance the boys created in opposition to authority.’ As Willis wrote, ‘the opposition is expressed mainly as style. It is lived out in countless small ways which are special to the school institution, instantly recognised by the teachers and an almost ritualistic part of the daily fabric of life for the kids’ (Willis 1977 p.12).

Despite the fact that Willis’s work was undertaken in a secondary school, whilst Mitchell et al.’s (1998) was in FE colleges and Gannon-Leary’s (2009) in a university, all three reveal generic behaviours or commonalities which are typical of any classroom. This indicates that disruptive behaviour is an issue across different age groups; that it is still prevalent and that practitioners feel there is a need to deal with it. Mitchell et al. (1998) felt that the FE sector particularly warranted study of this nature for several reasons which remain relevant today. These reasons they suggest exist at different levels, ‘strategic, systems and delivery’ (Mitchell et al. 1998) and arise primarily because of the way in which colleges are staffed, with a high proportion of part-time staff and reduced hours of delivery; curriculum issues and lack of attention to learners; their individual needs and the fact that they are coping with transitions from school to college and the cultural differences of learners, are all seen to be contributory factors (Mitchell et al, 1998, pp. 40-41).

Earlier research into disruptive behaviour in colleges of further education

An initial review of the literature on disruptive behaviour in FE colleges has revealed that, whilst it is acknowledged as an issue of concern for teachers, very little research has actually been undertaken, or perhaps it has been undertaken but not published. In the late 1980s the Elton Committee highlighted a chronic lack of national statistics and research evidence relating to behaviour and discipline (Elton Report, 1989) and it would appear that, although this situation has changed somewhat owing to the accumulation of research (Munn et al., 2004), evaluation (Hallam et al., 2005) and inspection evidence (Ofsted, 2005), it remains unsatisfactory for several reasons.

Research to date has predominantly been undertaken by government funded bodies such as Ofsted. This is a politically influenced inspection body affected by issues such as ‘Widening Participation’, ‘Inclusive Learning’, and the ‘14-19 Agenda’. Such initiatives, whilst bringing new constituencies of learners into colleges, may have also generated circumstances which have influenced behaviour in class. These circumstances could include: differing expectations; a diverse or varied range of needs, some of which may not be addressed; limited human and physical resources; the need for change and the attitudes of those affected to embrace these altered circumstances. There is little evidence of independent research into how these essentially political issues have affected FE. It is also important to consider that a great deal of the research carried out in FE colleges often forms part of teachers’ study,

such as that carried out as part of a masters degree or more recently as part of a Doctor of Education (Ed D) programme, a substantial proportion of which will not be published. There is an intention here to publish research findings.

A considerable proportion of the literature on disruptive behaviour comes from the United States of America (Young, 2003; Seidman, 2005 and Malone, 2009). Morrisette (2001) and Boice (1996) suggest that what appears to be an unwillingness to report disruptive behaviour in colleges could be attributed to teacher/college embarrassment in acknowledging misbehaviour; the prevalence of disruptive behaviour in areas where there is less status, something which is typical of FE colleges in the United Kingdom; or for fear of being perceived as incompetent and that their teaching would come under scrutiny (Amada, 1992).

As the majority of research has tended to focus on disruption in schools this provides further justification for the current study of disruptive behaviour in FE. Recent reviews, (Powell and Tod, 2004 and Stafford et al., 2004) and policy documents (the Steer Report, 2005 and Ofsted, 2005), have identified a number of important gaps in current understanding mainly because research has focused on dealing with inappropriate behaviour rather than explaining it. Perhaps more importantly, there has been a tendency to overlook the learner perspective (Stafford et al., 2004). Learners in colleges may have many reasons for disruption, arising from personal, social or college-based factors. There is limited evidence to suggest that these have been adequately researched.

Learners themselves felt that disruptive behaviour was an issue of relevance to them when they ‘were critical of others who disrupted work’ and ‘often wanted lecturers to take a firmer line’ (HMIE, 2004, p.17). A second report states that ‘their behaviour troubles others, affects the climate of the learning community, and disrupts their own and others’ progress’ (Ofsted, 2005, p. 3). Both these reports endorse the decision to approach this study from the learners’ perspective. This will redress, to some extent, the bulk of research which tends to look at disruptive behaviour from the teacher rather than the learner’s perspective.

In 1998 Mitchell et al. published a report based on a study of disruptive behaviour in eight colleges. The report *Ain’t misbehaving* (Mitchell, 1998) attempted to highlight ‘a crucial issue for colleges’ (Mitchell et al., 1998, p.23). The report focused on ‘a lack of coherence of approaches in colleges for dealing with disruptive behaviour’ (Mitchell et al., 1998, p.23).

Mitchell et al. (1998) referred to four reports which highlighted the need to address disruptive behaviour as an issue which required continual re-visiting in the light of changing policies and context issues: Sir Ron Dearing’s report examining qualifications for 16-19 year olds; Professor John Tomlinson’s *Inclusive Learning Report* (FEDA, 1998); Baroness Helena Kennedy’s *Widening Participation: learning works* (FEFC, 1997); and Lord Elton’s *Discipline in Schools* (1989). With this in mind, four further reports need to be taken into account. The HMIE (2004) Report of Scottish Colleges where learners themselves raised the issue of disruptive behaviour and their desire

for it to be addressed; the second, the Steer Report (2005) which echoed the belief that low level disruption was a common feature in classrooms; the third that of Ofsted (2005) where disruptive behaviour yet again emerged as a theme which warrants attention; and the final, Steer's latest *Review of Pupil Behaviour* (2009) where he expresses the view that 'Problems of bad behaviour do remain and in some areas these can be significant' (Steer, 2009, p.2).

The changing nature of disruptive behaviour

One of the problems associated with limited literature in this area is that little attention has been paid to the changing nature of disruptive behaviour. Research in the 1990s tends to cite 'childish behaviour, aggressive behaviour, behaviour that inhibits learning, relationship problems, environmentally challenging behaviour and anti-social or criminal behaviour' (Mitchell et al., 1998, pp.33-34) as being examples of the types of behaviour staff found to be disruptive. Lack of reference to behaviour which stems from the use of technological aids or devices such as mobile phones and iPods highlights the need to continually appraise our understanding of what constitutes disruptive behaviour.

Hall, (2002); Katz, (2005) and Chen and Katz, (2009) have made some headway in this area in raising our awareness of the 'negative aspects, including cheating, harassment and delinquency.... damage to attention spans, critical thinking skills and respect for learning and teachers' (Katz,

2005, p.102), mobile phone use can have in the classroom. Not only has technology added a new dimension to the study of disruptive behaviour, it has also added to the complexity of disruptive behaviour itself. Katz (2005) highlights this when he considers how mobile phones allow those who are not present in the classroom to 'play a part in the disruption,' for example, parents conversing with learners and something which could be presented as parents condoning disruptive behaviour of this nature (Katz, 2005, p.103). Of equal concern is the notion that this behaviour could also present the teacher with learners who are 'mentally absent even while being physically present' (Katz, 2005, p.103). So, whilst the mobile phone has been described as 'the most radiative domestic appliance ever invented' (Coghill, 2001, p.28), we can see negative outcomes in the classroom where both individuals and groups can be distracted from the learning taking place.

Other technologies with the capacity to distract from or disrupt learning include the MP3 player, cameras, personal computers or laptop computers and within this usage, the wireless internet. Increasingly teachers are now reporting instances of inappropriate mobile phone use, using cameras, phones and the internet to bully and harass other learners whilst in class, adding yet a further dimension to disruptive behaviour, one which can result in harm to peers as an integral part of it. The internet, with its capacity to access social net-working sites and games, provides young people with new ways of disrupting learning and leads some to suggest that we now find ourselves in a 'culture of perpetual contact.....' where 'learners now easily communicate with the world beyond the classroom and engage with endless entertainments and distractions' (Katz, 2005, p.92).

The work of Hall, (2002); Katz, (2005) and Katz and Chen, (2009) acts as a reminder that disruptive behaviour is constantly changing in accordance with changes in society and acknowledging changes can bring new dimensions to our understanding of disruptive behaviour.

Causes of and factors associated with disruptive behaviour

Mitchell et al. (1998) have suggested that the problem of disruptive behaviour stems primarily from 'systems failures' within the colleges; a rather narrow perspective that fails to consider the learner as an individual and the social context disruption operates within. It is for these reasons that this perspective is rejected in favour of one presented by Ogilvy (1994), who suggested that 'the debate about causation revolves around three sets of factors' (Ogilvy, 1994, p.197): those emanating from within the individual; those emanating from the home or the community; and those pertaining to the educational environment, in this case a FE college. Community in this sense refers to the broader social context taking into account structured socio-economic inequalities. The content of these categories has similarities to those of Mitchell et al. (1998), for example factors emanating from within the individual could focus on issues such as learning difficulties and failure to accommodate individual needs; those from the home and community could focus on culture; and those from within the college could focus on relationships with teachers. These categories have been selected for several reasons, one of which is their capacity to identify more readily the root

causes of disruptive behaviour, ones that Mitchell et al. (1998) themselves described as being both 'complex and individual' for each learner (Mitchell et al., 1998, p. 16). This approach has also been selected for its compatibility with both Giddens' (1984) Structuration Theory and Pierre Bourdieu's (1990) concept of habitus, both of which will be used in the exploration of factors and in the analysis of findings. By 'habitus' Bourdieu (1990) was referring to

the generative principles of distinct and distinctive practices – what the worker eats, and especially the way he eats it, the sport he practices and the way he practices it, his political opinions and the way he expresses them are systematically different from the industrial owner's corresponding activities.....habitus are also classification schemes, principles of classification, principles of vision and division, different tastes. They make distinctions between what is good and bad, between what is right and what is wrong, between what is distinguished and what is vulgar, and so forth, but the distinctions are not identical. Thus for instance, the same behaviour or even the same good can appear distinguished to one person, pretentious to someone else and cheap or showy to another (Bourdieu, 2003, p.8).

Habitus in this sense has the capacity to explore group influences within all spheres: individual, home and community and the college, and Structuration Theory has the capacity to examine the individual in relation to and independent of these spheres. The categories, covering the individual, home and community and the educational environment, provide us with scope to acknowledge that different areas of a person's life and their perceptions of these, can have an impact on their behaviour in the classroom. Whilst Mitchell et al. (1998) identify that reasons for disruptive behaviour 'can include family disadvantage or dysfunction, poor parenting skills, poor

experiences at school, bullying, difficulties in learning and psychological difficulties,' (Mitchell et al., 1998, p.41) they offer no explanation of these factors. This possibly stems from their adoption of the systems perspective, which fails to take into account cultural and social issues when studying causes of disruptive behaviour.

Summary

This chapter has been used to justify the need for studying disruptive behaviour in FE colleges and in particular, the one the researcher works in. It has highlighted the nature of much of the research in this area and the need to extend our knowledge and understanding of disruptive behaviour if we are to make informed changes to address it. Previous research in this area has not been used to examine the impact educational policy such as Widening Participation can have on behaviour in the classroom, highlighting a need to show consideration for this in the present study. Providing definitions of terms which will be used throughout the study has supported a review of the different forms and nature of behaviour. This chapter has presented a case for the adoption of an appropriate model for examining the causes of disruptive behaviour, one that acknowledges the dimensions of individual, home and community and the institution as being influential determinants. Chapter two will address any propensity to provide a tutor-defined perspective and thus an imbalance to our perception of what disruptive behaviour is. By dedicating a significant section to the issue of learner voice

in this area there is scope to determine learner perception of disruptive behaviour.

Chapter Two: The Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter initially discusses the usefulness of using Giddens' (1984) structuration theory to structure, analyse and explore the findings of the research project. It then considers the researcher's intention to use and raise learner voice in this piece of research. Social class will be examined as it is impossible to separate this from the various aspects of the study, something which suggests that there is value in looking at it as an intrinsic aspect of all factors. The factors which have emerged as being of relevance to this study will then be considered using Ogilvy's (1994) categories, which lend themselves to study of the individual, groups and social systems. Finally, the literature review will conclude with an examination of gender issues pertinent to the study of disruptive behaviour in classrooms, an area which has received attention in previous studies and may prove to be useful in this study. It is recognised that this review does not cover all factors which could affect behaviour in classrooms; rather it is a review of those which are salient to the themes which emerged from the interviews carried out with learners in the current study.

Structuration theory

This section of the literature review will focus on structuration theory and will present a case for its use as a theory of social action, one that presents us

with a conceptual framework suited to exploring how people produce the systems and structures that shape their practice. Drawing on the work of a range of scholars, Giddens developed his structuration theory in an attempt to merge the notions of structure and action which he said should be seen as a duality rather than two separate entities. He suggested we could do this by recognising the capacity of both to produce and reproduce social reality.

Action theories

emphasise the individual actor as the creator of society; actors possess consciousness and therefore have agency, the capacity to plan and reflect upon their conduct. They give meaning to their circumstances and act towards one another on the basis of these meanings. The outcome of these actions is the formation of relationships and patterns of action that ultimately make up what we refer to as a society (Cuff et al., 2006, pp. 312-313).

Alternatively, structural theories characterise society in terms of patterns and forms which (1) are independent of individual actors and their structures and (2) constrain the possibilities of action' (Cuff et al., 2006, p.313). Giddens suggests that the theories are 'complementary and mutually interdependent' (Cuff et al., 2006, p.313) and that as such they can be used to 'account for the ways in which social systems are produced and reproduced in social interaction' (Giddens, 1984, pp. 25-26). If we apply Giddens' structure – agency duality theory to the FE college we can see that social structures are represented in the choices learners make during their education and that they reflect the social situations learners exist in. At the same time, the learners themselves shape and re-shape social structures. Giddens argues that this is the recursive nature of life, and that the theory is one that will provide researchers with an ontological framework for the study of human activities.

Giddens expands this by saying

by ontology here, I mean a conceptual investigation of the nature of human actions, social institutions and the interrelationship between action and institutions (Giddens, 1991, p.201).

By 'institutions' Giddens (1984) is referring to the established patterns of behaviour, which are produced and reproduced across time and space serving the purpose of 'structuring society, coordinating stable activities, and production of goods across time and space' (Giddens, 2001, p. 348). Giddens believes people act as social constructs, either consciously or unconsciously, to bring about change, change we should look for and study to see what it can tell us.

This will support consideration of the complex nature of disruptive behaviour as the behaviour itself, consider why it is used and how it affects others, systems and organisations. Giddens' work differed from that of Willis (1977) in that he attempted to combine structure and action. Whilst Willis acknowledged the active roles played by the young people he studied, he failed to consider any relationship between this and the organisation they were operating in. This will provide the scope needed to study cause and effect and at the same time show consideration for the interdependence between human action and organisational structures.

Willis's work gave a cultural dimension to the structural accounts of learner behaviour; raising our awareness of the value of looking at aspects of culture and considering the learners as active, rather than passive participants, in their educational lives. Willis up-dated known methods of

analysing culture, he did this in a way which was both creative and provoking. This approach is a positive one, one that supports exploration of the communities surrounding young people and can assist analysis in this area. Willis adopted a holistic approach, one that allowed him to examine aspects of everyday culture which impacted on the lives of young people. There is scope to bring a new dimension to how Willis approached his work by considering how changes in communication have impacted on culture, communities and the behaviour young people display in class today.

Willis also demonstrates that adoption of a theoretical stance is very important. Whilst he is essentially a neo-Marxist, the humanistic approach he appears to embrace sits very nicely with the values which underpin this study, where there is a desire to hear what learners have to say. The humanistic approach evident in Willis' work appears to stem from the citing of his work in the social sciences, as opposed to the theoretical scientific arena. He was concerned with 'resistance' and 'struggle' (Willis, 1977, p.92) criteria which focus very significantly in any study of disruption and ones that require empathetic exploration rather than scientific investigation. This approach will hopefully lead to a heightened degree of openness, identification and analysis of the meanings young people give to their behaviour. In common with Willis's stance, there is also a desire to construct rather than reflect what is observed, giving added value to what learners have to say.

Justification for choice of theory

The study of social systems

Depicted by Giddens as an on-going process, structuration prompts us to view the learners as both participants of, but also determinants of the social systems of which they are part, with the autonomy and capacity to bring about change. Giddens encourages us to consider new reasons for disruptive behaviour; ones that may have arisen because of societal or institutional change. This could include policy changes that learners have no control over but have the capacity to affect learners' choice of programme and thus their demeanor and behaviour towards others. It also encourages attempts to try and explain what the learners believe and ask if it is true.

Thompson (2003) endorses Giddens' theory as being one that, like his own has the capacity to draw on the work of others such as Althusser, (1971); Foucault, (1980); Giddens, (1984, 1991) and Laing, (1965), to develop a theory suited to investigating equality and diversity in society. He believes that inequalities in society stem from structural patterns and that these structures are crucial to our understanding of social phenomena. This prompts consideration of what structural patterns exist within and around the college that may contribute to inequalities and if there is any association between these and disruptive behaviour.

Thompson's use of structuration theory to examine inequalities in society also demonstrates the capacity of the theory to critically combine the

subjective and the objective dimensions of the findings, showing us how it can be used to analyse as well as explain research findings. It can therefore be used to categorise and present findings in a clear way. Giddens highlights the interplay between human interactions, rules, the knowledge individuals have and the accepted norms of society which are all constantly changing as a result of this interplay. The capacity this theory has to do this underpins and supports the selection and use of Ogilvy's (1994) categories: the individual, the family, the community and the institution to examine factors affecting young people and their behaviour. Ogilvy's categories provide the study with both structure and a means of classification to support the exploratory and explanatory powers of Giddens' structuration theory and Bourdieu's ideas of structure and agency.

In structural terms, Giddens portrays organisations as being three dimensional; the first being 'structures of significance' (Giddens, 1984, p.17) or interpretative rules which cover basic guidelines for effective communication, facilitating shared understanding and meaning which itself can be still open to misunderstandings and misinterpretations because of changes over time-space and context. These rules can contribute to what Giddens terms 'stocks of knowledge' which can be used to support meaningful interactions with others (Giddens, 1984, p.18).

The second dimension, that of 'structures of legitimation' (Giddens, 1984, p.28) ensure acceptance of rules related to social conduct; they are sanctioned and act as a moral guide for what people do. Giddens suggested that all agents are involved in determining these rules and that all have equal

power to change and adapt them at any time. This does not however take into account the variance that may exist between staff and learners as to what acceptable behaviour in class should be and who has the final say in determining what becomes a rule and what does not. Notions of what is acceptable have been contested to some degree but there is scope for further investigation in this area. Giddens believes that individuals can call upon different resources to exercise their power in this area, namely resources such as 'allocative resources' such as raw materials or technology, and 'authoritative resources' such as communication skills, both of which he classes as 'structures of domination' (Giddens, 1984, p.28). Whilst acknowledging that authority is not fixed as it changes with time and space, Giddens does associate allocative resources with authoritative encounters which can be governed by resources such as timetables and routines. Giddens' ideas here can be used to consider disruptive behaviour as a resource learners draw upon to negotiate their position in the classroom.

Culture

Thompson (2003) adds a third dimension that of culture, to the interplay Giddens suggests exists between agency and structure. He defines culture as 'a 'symbolic universe', a set of meanings, representations and values on which belief systems, norms and practices are based....a ready-made, albeit changing and evolving framework through which to make sense of the world and our experience within it' (Thompson, 2003, p.195). Thompson criticises Giddens for presenting the relationship between agency and structure as a

direct one, suggesting that ‘in concentrating on these two areas, (agency and structure) it neglects a third – namely the cultural level’ (Thompson, 2003, p.38). There is intention within this investigation to consider the role culture may play. By culture we mean ‘people’s way of life’ (O’Donnell and Garrod, 1990, p. 10). Without this, reasons for disruptive behaviour may not be revealed and as Thompson (2003) suggests, the part it plays in determining power relationships may also be overlooked. Thompson (2003) suggests that culture legitimises power and that we need an appreciation of structure and agency to explore power fully.

Thompson (2003) brings both holistic and humanistic dimensions to Giddens’ work in his suggestion that we can question structures and cultures to address the ‘ontological insecurity’ (Giddens, 1991, p.47) individuals experience when they are unable to answer questions related to human existence. His work is holistic in the way he addressed fundamental aspects such as structure, agency, space, time and culture simultaneously, an example worth following in the current study. Willis (1977) adds endorsement to paying attention to culture when he demonstrated the capacity culture has to wield power in the classroom. Willis’ work, in his attention to cultural phenomenon, encourages us to question whether or not norms, habits and beliefs could influence disruption in college classrooms.

Time and Space

Notions of time and space will now be examined in greater detail explaining how these may be utilised in the examination and explanation of disruptive behaviour in the classroom. Giddens' idea of contextuality, this being 'the situated character of interaction in time and space involving the setting of interaction, actors, co-present and communication between them' (Giddens, 1984, p. 373) is he suggests, crucial to the examination of social reproduction. Giddens refers to time in three different ways; he describes life-span time as irreversible and says it covers the time from birth to death. The 'durée' and the 'longue durée' are irreversible; the 'durée' (Giddens, 1984, p. 60), he suggests describes

the continuous flow of routines and rituals during daily activities that constitute agents' practical knowledge' of how to 'go on in' the world and this results in the 'routinisation', of practice which affords individuals with 'a sense of ontological security (Giddens, 1984, p. 60)

something which in turn constitutes institutional time the 'longue durée'. When there is a disruption to the 'longue durée', the sense of security previously experienced by the actors is lost leading to a critical situation (Giddens, 1984, p. 60). Giddens suggests that people make space for interactions or what he refers to as 'locales' (Giddens, 1984, p. 61) which, whilst creating opportunities for individuals, can equally place constraints on them. He also suggests that by making space, space can also make people. Agents constantly negotiate and renegotiate time and space producing 'regionalisation' of activity (Giddens, 1984, p.61).

A college setting could be viewed as a locale with set routines, predictable time-space patterns of interaction and regionalisation of activities such as registration periods, timetables for different lessons, defined lunch breaks and clearly defined start and end times for each day. Giddens talks about interactions agents are involved in as 'bands or strips of time-space' (Giddens, 1984, p. 71). He suggests that these are opportunities individuals utilise to engage with others and that they are necessary for their social integration. This encourages analysis of the accounts for signs of this. Alternatively, we could consider them as signs that learners are not coping. It may be of value to consider whether or not learners are consciously or unconsciously using time and space to take part in exchanges which they feel they need.

In conjunction with the concepts of space and time, Giddens uses Goffman's (1972) concept of front (public) and back (private) regions. Giddens suggests that norms dictate what can and cannot be said, how they say it and who they can say it to during front or public interactions. However, he also suggests that in the back regions there may be some resistance to this. An extension to this concept could be that there may be some resistance to this conformity (Craib, 1992) where learners as agents consciously or unconsciously allow the back regions to spill over into the front, challenging the power held by teachers and others in authority. This could arise from social class differences, where norms in social etiquette can differ within, as well as from, one social class to another. In an increasingly inclusive environment it could stem from learner frustration if they have weak study

habits or they are struggling to learn. It could also arise as a form of retaliation for perceived slights or lack of respect from teachers.

Structuration theory has the scope to reveal how aspects of social structures can enable or restrain learners and whether or not disruptive behaviour is a result of, or stems from, social structures. How learners formulate the rules that Giddens sees as pre-eminent in social action and what this means in the classroom can be examined.

Power and control

The literature review has already revealed that power and control are significant in explaining behaviour in educational settings and concepts inherent in Giddens' structuration theory specifically relate to power and control. Giddens (1984) suggests that the researcher looks for moments of consensus and conflict during social encounters, noting commonalities and differences, and exploring communicative structures in relation to power differences that result in an element of consensus. This process

requires reasoning to be revisited across time and space, linking the findings with participants' responses, constantly checking and rechecking the information as being credible (Hardcastle, Usher and Holmes, 2005, p. 225).

Any inconsistencies in findings should be embraced as 'having the potential to reveal new claims to truth in acknowledgement that truth and knowledge

can change and that old truths can be questioned and re-visited' (Carspecken, 1996, p.84). The FE college involved in the project has already invested time and resources to the study of disruptive behaviour and should therefore be willing to respond to requests for change.

The learners, as agents, are knowledgeable about their environment and the interactions across time and space they take part in (the contextuality) as they access and use the rules and resources (structural properties) which are available to them. The research participants are 'agents of action' enabled and constrained by knowledgeability that is 'everything which actors know (believe) about the circumstances of their action and that of others' (Giddens, 1984, p.375). Giddens also points out that it is the level of knowledge the agent has that determines his/her capacity to act or exercise their 'agency' (Giddens, 1984, p.375). This, Giddens suggests, is more to do with their ability or capacity to act in the first place and their power to do so using the structural properties (the rules and resources) they have access to generate modalities of social control. These actions are also governed by rules which are not always spoken or explicit but which guide the individuals. In this sense resources can be used to generate power and in exerting their power individuals will be governed by 'cultural conditions (norms and social conduct) or resources and constraints (law and economics) to act in broadly predictable ways' (Carspecken, 1996, p.84).

Caution should be applied here in interpreting the extent to which learners can have control over their actions and factors which, in turn, can prompt action when being knowledgeable may be different to having control over

one's actions. Regular displays of disruptive behaviour could become standardised practices in classrooms, something which may conflict with the norms of the setting, and as such, lead to changes in the structural properties employed by staff to deal with them. This, in turn, could lead to power struggles and social change. Giddens suggests that power struggles could in fact be challenges to the position of authority some hold over others, challenges which in the college setting could be evidenced by disruption in the classroom (Giddens, 1984).

This differs from Willis' notion that, rather than challenge authority, the 'lads' in his study articulate a counter-school culture which is part of, as opposed to being against, the general school culture (Willis, 1977, p.12). Willis depicts the 'lads' as knowing the rules which exist and suggests that they manipulate rather than challenge them. This indicates that the lads in Willis' study accepted the basic principles inherent in the teacher/pupil relationship.

Willis paid limited attention to social change. Unlike those who now study in FE colleges, Willis' 'lads' had a pre-defined route. Today, extended transitions and the blurring of class and gender distinctions in the labour market have acted to make it difficult to define 'working-class' jobs. Willis did not have to contend with behaviour changes which have emerged from technological developments and the impact this can have on behaviour in classrooms, nor did he encounter the changing nature of learner: teacher relationships now evident in FE. Arguably these relationships have led to

changed norms in the classroom, ones which could impact on learner behaviour.

In addition to organisational power, Giddens acknowledges power interplays between individuals and those exerted by the wider context and that all power constantly changes over time. This aspect of Giddens' theory provides scope to examine power relationships, if they exist and consider what bearings they could have on behaviour in college classes.

Ball et al.'s (2000) study of young people as they move from compulsory schooling into further education, higher education and employment provides another example of how Giddens' theory of structuration can be used in educational research. Major themes of this study (agency and structure) are described by Ball et al. as 'the extent to which young people now see their decision making as individual 'choice' rather than the 'product of structured constraints' (Ball et al. 2000, p.2). This suggests that constraints cannot always be seen, but this does not mean that they do not exist and if they do, they may be subtle yet powerful in their influence over the actions of young people.

Emancipatory concepts are crucial to the current investigation reflecting Thompson's (2003) notion that any 'practice undertaken in working with people and their problems is pivotal with regard to discrimination and oppression' (Thompson. 2003, p.40). If we are to analyse disruptive behaviour in a way that acknowledges its complexity and the possibility that it contains elements of power as a related issue, we need a theory that

supports identification of this. Raising learner status, a key aspect of this investigation, gives learners in a college of further education a voice, one that has rarely been heard before and this in itself is emancipatory by nature. Some have been critical of 'attempts to increase levels of learner participation' seeing it as part of 'a new culture of managerialismthat required colleges to improve quality in a market situation in which they compete for learners' (Robson, 1998, p.597). This cynicism may reflect genuine concerns about the professional identities of teachers in FE but could equally breed mistrust in teachers who genuinely want to hear what learners have to say about their experiences in education. It is a key aim of the research to elicit the needs learners in the classroom have and to consider how these needs can be addressed. Emancipatory approaches have the capacity to raise the learner's profile in our analysis of disruptive behaviour, demonstrating respect for those who are at the heart of the research topic.

Social Class

Before any analysis of social class can take place it is important to identify a theory which has the capacity to do this, and an important consideration here is that it also needs to be one which is compatible with those of Ogilvy and Giddens, which have already been selected, justified and explained.

Bourdieu's theories on 'structure' and 'agency', 'habitus' and 'field', and 'capital' (Bourdieu, 2003, p.7) meet this criteria, providing a useful framework for examining and making sense of social class issues

surrounding disruptive behaviour in educational settings. Bourdieu brings an added dimension to the use of structuration theory allowing the exploration of social class issues in a reflexive way. This stems from his ability to combine structure and agency to uncover the objective system of relations (both internal and external) which determine the conduct and representations of individuals (agents). He believes the practices individuals take part in, are not objectively determined, or the product of free will; rather they are a result of the interplay between the two. This approach provides the opportunity to consider the influences and impact social class issues can have without resorting to a 'cause and effect' approach.

Bourdieu developed theories of social stratification which have the capacity to analyse social positions based upon 'social', 'economic', and 'cultural' capital (Bourdieu, 2003, p.7). Economic capital, marked by possession of high or low income, tends to shape an individual's early existence, as do the social conditions which shape social capital. Bourdieu suggests that it is cultural capital, acquired within the family 'through the process of socialisation' (Bourdieu, 2003, p.66), which dictates a person's social class position, with class distinction evolving from an individual's dispositions, tastes, and preferences which have been acquired through the aesthetic preferences expressed by those around them.

Both Giddens and Bourdieu see social structure as including patterns of distribution of material resources which contribute to class distinctions and meanings; however, where they diverge is in their assessment of the value of conscious intention in the reproduction of social structure. Bourdieu's ideas

can be used to consider whether or not the problem of disruptive behaviour in class is a conscious action and even whether it is a cultural or an individual problem. Social class issues which impact on learners in class can be considered and used to determine whether or not there is a relationship between social class and behaviour.

Bourdieu uses concepts of 'habitus', 'practice', 'field' and 'capital' (Bourdieu, 2003, p.7) in an attempt to give a concrete body to the influences institutions could have over the individual. Cuff describes habitus as

a structure of dispositions to action, but also to thought, perception and understanding which the actor acquires as a member of a social group or class. It is something like a mental or behavioural set which the actor takes for granted and which structures the way he or she experiences the world and responds to it (Cuff et al., 2004, p. 322).

Bourdieu's work may be used to consider the college's culture as a factor influencing behaviour and within this any positive or negative influences. In Bourdieusian terms, the College would be the 'field', with 'physical, economic and above all, symbolic power relations' (Bourdieu, 2003, p.68). This approach has the capacity to identify disharmony between dispositions and practices for the learner, teacher or both. An example of this could be the learner attending college willingly but misbehaving in class.

The status of FE colleges in the education sector is reflected in the regard or lack of it, that it is held in by others, and recent research by educationalists would suggest that nothing has occurred to dispel FE's image as a 'second-best option' (Wallace, 2009, p.8). Preoccupation with a vocational

curriculum and ‘active rejection’ by higher-achievers from higher social classes appear to dictate that ‘FE is positioned within lifelong learning as a provider of academic and vocational courses whose common feature is their lower status compared with those offered by more prestigious institutions, such as universities, sixth-form colleges and school sixth forms’ (Thompson, 2009, p.30). Wallace suggests that this image has left learners with a negative perception of the learning environment, one that provides them with ‘temporary occupation’ only, which, in turn may have a negative impact on both motivation and behaviour’ (Wallace, 2009, p.8). Robson suggests that the image we have of FE is exacerbated by the compromise teachers experience between their primary career in industry and their secondary career in teaching. She believes that teachers’ ‘strong allegiances to their first occupational identity’ and the earlier failure to ensure mandatory teacher training for all teachers in FE has led to a lack of unity amongst staff and to the ‘low status of the professional group as a whole’ (Robson, 1998, p.599). The status of FE may reflect the dispositions of the social classes it serves, highlighting the relevance of this area of analysis.

Thompson was interested in the ‘structural inequalities in how young people are included’ and how ‘the classed nature of FE manifests itself’ (Thompson, 2009, p.30). He has tried to up-date our current understanding of FE colleges by illustrating a significant middle-class presence. However, because this presence is based on the restricted options underachieving middle-class learners face, it does little but compound the negative image it has acquired.

Like Wallace, Thompson acknowledges that social class has the capacity to influence behaviour. He suggests that the forms of employment parents are in, not only define their social class but also influence the family habitus, which in turn structures 'the repertoire of behaviours of family members' (Thompson, 2009, p.35). Thompson believes that middle-class families engaged in 'employments based on a 'service relationship' characterised by autonomy, security and authority' and those 'based on a 'labour contract' characterised by close supervision, control and conflict' define family habitus in middle and working-class households. These employment characteristics could influence the educational setting young people enter and their behaviour there.

Busy Work

Mindful of social class issues, Bates reasons that the process of raising occupational awareness amongst young people has been more about helping them to 'reach a compromise between individual wishes and the opportunities available', as opposed to helping them 'to develop and formulate their aspirations'(Bates, 1984, pp.182-3). She argues that vocationalised education prepares non-academic people for jobs which whilst making 'surrogate satisfactions' available, 'allow little scope for personal development' (Bates, 1984, pp.197).

Bates also suggests that the introduction of vocational qualifications has highlighted and emphasised social inequalities, bringing 'social advantage and disadvantage more forcibly than ever into play' (Bates, 1993, p.5). The

notion that ‘occupational sifting, screening and further socialisation takes place in the context of training’, and that ‘vocational training....mediates the gravitational pull from labour market segment to class-gendered fraction’ (Bates, 1993, p.29), leads us to question the value of the qualifications the young people in this study are undertaking.

Bathmaker highlights social inequalities in educational programmes when she argues that vocational courses in FE help to produce ‘workers who are ready to follow instructions, rather than people with initiative and problem-solving capacities’. She suggests this is part of a general drive ‘to ensure acceptance and compliance with particular sets of values’ (Bathmaker, 2001, p.85). Like Bates, Bathmaker also argues that young people are aware of the unequal status between vocational and academic qualifications and that many qualifications only have ‘value as a stepping stone to the next level of qualifications.....a sort of educational ladder’; one that provides them with ‘a second chance rather than clear routes into employment’ (Bathmaker, 2001, pp.95-96). These ideas suggest that one of the key purposes of vocational programmes is that of occupying, rather than preparing young people for the world of work.

Atkins argues that vocational programmes involve learners in ‘busy work’ which she describes as study which holds ‘scant educational value’. It is characterised by

activities which were criticised by some of the students themselves as unchallenging and which are of very limited educational or occupational value and focuses more on personal development and enhancing self-esteem (Atkins, 2009, p.149).

Vocational programmes have thus been portrayed as having little educational value. They are useful to fill in time; can prepare a certain type of worker for a certain type of job; have the capacity to instil desirable behaviours and can keep young people busy (Bates, 1984, 1993; Bathmaker, 2001 and Atkins, 2009). Growing awareness of the limited value society places on vocational education highlights social class issues; issues learners themselves may be aware of. Arguments about the role and nature of these courses may be relative to this study of disruptive behaviour in class.

Atkins adds further credence to the supposition that social class can impact on learners' behaviour in her description of working-class learners as 'those problematised within a deficit model as low ability, disengaged and disaffected' (Atkins, 2009, p.19). She believes learners pick up on the 'negative discourse surrounding them and their educational experiences' and are conscious of the fact that 'structures such as class, race, gender and disability, as well as perceptions such as economic value, all become criteria to judge a person's worth' (Atkins, 2009, p.19). This endorses Bourdieu's theory that actions are consciously undertaken. This approach considers class as a locus of resources individuals can use, either consciously or unconsciously, to explain actions and consequential impacts on structure.

Atkins's work provides us with an example of how class issues in FE can be identified through examination of parental occupation and experiences; by focusing on perceptions and aspirations in young people's narratives and through the identification of emerging themes. She considered class distinctions implicit in educational maintenance allowances and benefits criteria; young peoples' place in FE and on the vocational programmes; their gendered roles; their leisure pursuits and their idols. Finally, she compared and contrasted her findings with those of others. Atkins identified social class as a source of oppression which she felt was used by fundamental structural forces to constrain young people's learning; leaving them without the agency and cultural capital they needed to realise their aspirations.

Nayak (2010) examined the lives of working-class young men who were experiencing long term inter-generational unemployment. His work is of value in that he suggests that changes at both structural and cultural level have altered the routes into work for both men and women, and that these changes have strengthened rather than weakened class distinction. He believes that young people have used their working-class identities to survive in a new social world. Like Atkins, he cites their approach to leisure pursuits, such as drinking, to provide a sense of 'collective history and mutual experience' (Nayak, 2010, p.819). He suggests that sub-cultural groups are ones that can be defined by tastes in music and fashion and even violence.

Nayak's work suggests that it is possible that disruptive behaviour in classes is evidence of the emergence of sub-groups in FE, sub-groups who are trying

to express their cultural identities. Nayak unearths the ‘layered and differently patterned cultural habitus of what has historically been defined as the ‘rough’ and ‘respectable’ working-class’; both of which ‘are found wanting under the gaze of the middle-classes’ (Nayak, 2010, p.825).

Nayak argues that young people often ‘have few resources to effectively alter the material conditions of their existence’ and that when they are caught in the flux of transition and negotiating felt and understood pathways through it...they adapt their responses as they see fit’ (Nayak, 2010, pp 825-6). Just as some of the young people in Nayak’s study openly admitted taking part in illicit activities as part of the ‘culture of the estate and a daily extension of their daily youth scapes,’ the young people in college were predominantly open to disclosing and discussing incidents of disruption in class, suggesting that this may be a recognised part of the learners’ culture or reflections of their class background. Nayak suggests that ‘while social class may rarely be discussed directly by young people it continues to be threaded through the daily fabric of their lives; it is stitched into codes of respect, accent, dress, music, bodily adornment and comportment’ (Nayak, 2010, p.828).

These ideas expressed by Wallace, Thompson, Atkins and Nayak all reinforce Paul Willis’s earlier belief that because major changes would have an impact on the ontological security individuals experience, we are more likely to find reproduction and transformation of ‘what is already made’ as opposed to radical change (Willis, 1984, p.171). Willis was able to use his

findings to explain how young people interact with material conditions to transform and reproduce class structures.

This could suggest that certain groups still use FE Colleges as a means of ‘transmitting dispositions and attitudes’ (Frykholm and Nitzler, 1993, p.434) with a view to perpetuating predefined classed positions. This study of disruptive behaviour aims to provide the required scope to explore the notion that a relationship between class and disruptive behaviour does exist and in conducting the research with social class issues at the fore, will acknowledge the ‘social context in which it is situated’ (Colley et al, 2003, p.475).

Levels of consciousness

Levels of consciousness and the notion of knowledgeability are particularly relevant to the study of disruptive behaviour. Giddens suggests that there are ‘three levels of consciousness or awareness’ (Layder, 1994, p.139). The unconscious level being the ‘motivational level that represents emotions and desires which may or may not be acted upon, the practical level where actions may be semi-automatic or routine patterned practices become taken-for-granted across time and space’ and the ‘discursive level where actions are discursively expressed’ (Layder, 1994, p.139). Giddens also suggests that control at the different levels can be varied with control increasing as it moves from the unconscious to the discursive level. This could provide scope for determining the levels of consciousness learners have in their use of disruptive behaviour and is particularly relevant to the belief that it is the

‘repetitive’ nature of disruptive behaviour which makes it such a cause for concern. For Bourdieu, conscious reflection on one’s habitus is a possibility but not a naturally occurring part of the social process. He suggests that ‘social agents have “strategies” which only rarely have a true strategic intention as a principle’ (Bourdieu, 2003, p.81), whereas for Giddens, reflexivity is an essential and potentially transformative process.

Willis (1981), in *Learning to Labour* (1977), provides us with one example of how structuration theory can be used to explore different levels of consciousness in individuals. He noted that the lack of articulation the ‘lads’ had to express their aims and objectives could render a great many of their actions to the realm of unconscious actions as they struggle to make known their knowledge of the practices they use.

The sociological explanations offered by Thompson, Willis and Ball highlight generic themes in the study of social phenomena namely, culture as a significant factor; power and its interplay in social events; the need to adopt a critical stance to the analysis of findings; and the need to introduce emancipatory elements to the presentation of the views of the researched. Whilst Willis demonstrates an affinity with the lads he studied, championing them as underdogs entrenched in a situation over which they have very little control, he also acknowledges that they may have no desire to challenge this situation. His work was critical in that he exposed the political undertones which underpinned the educational programmes and social contexts he was researching but his overriding concern appeared to be one of gaining knowledge and understanding. Willis offered a critique of the situation as it

was, exposing classroom cultures and inequalities, something which resulted in an exemplar piece of ethnographic study rather than a cry for change. The presentational format Willis used was comprised of ‘an ethnographic depiction of the boys, their habits and cultural opposition to the school’ and an ‘analytical reconstruction of the dynamics of the cultural development, reinforcement and determination which the counter-school culture undergoes’ (Hadberg, 2006, p.2) both of which were designed to describe and explain, as opposed to expressing judgements. Awareness of the capacity such an approach has to raise awareness of key issues in research “could be crucial” to the success of the current research project if it is to raise the profile of the learner’s voice to a position of eminence.

In summary, structuration theory is a useful theoretical approach to the practical and discursive world of educational practice with the potential for change to occur and, as such, there is credibility in utilising this theory to investigate disruptive behaviour in a college of further education.

Learner voice

It is hoped that once young people in education are given a voice, and the opportunity to speak about their experiences in the classroom, that they will be eloquent, sensitive, fair and accurate in their judgements. This may not however be the case, and it is essential that attempts made to support learners include a suitable conceptual framework and vocabulary. Learners

are rarely consulted and when they are, it is often at the end of a learning programme when little use may be made of the learner's views and opinions. Often different voices are not seen to be equal or valid. One of the main aims of this research project is to raise the learner's voice to a position from where they can provide the researcher with detailed information about their perceptions of disruptive behaviour in the classes in which they participate. The focus here will be on raising the learner's voice and the benefits of so doing, for the current research project.

Although learner voice is a well recognised concept it is useful to provide a baseline definition. Fletcher (2005) describes learner voice as the 'unique perspective of the young people...' going on to say that 'experience and education helps learners to create opinions, ideas and beliefs to which they give their voice' (Fletcher, 2005, p1.). To support young people and in order to give them a voice there needs to be a process of engagement, one that allows us to capture learners' perspectives on issues affecting their educational experiences (Fielding and Rudduck, 2002). However, the validity of learner voice may be influenced by the relevance of what is being said and the personal experiences they have which allow them to reflect. Learner experiences in this area could be quite limited.

Whilst the welfare of learners and staff is of paramount importance in addressing disruptive behaviour in this FE college, the broader policy context is also relevant. The *Review of the Future Role of FE Colleges* (Foster, 2005) suggested that learners be engaged and their voices used to inform service planning and delivery; the Further Education White Paper

Further Education Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances (DfES, 2006) set out the expectation that all Learning and Skills Council (LSC) funded FE providers must have a learner involvement strategy which is published and reviewed as part of their self evaluation for inspection purposes (LSC, 2007 and Ofsted, 2005). The Every Child Matters Agenda (*Every Child Matters: Change for Children*, DfES, 2004) promotes the right of children and young people to be involved in the decisions that affect them to improve policy and services and is broken down into the five outcomes: being healthy; staying safe; enjoying and achieving; making a positive contribution; and achieving economic well being; all of which are relevant to the topic of disruptive behaviour. Further initiatives have stemmed from the LSC *Framework for Excellence and Learner Involvement Strategy* (LSC, 2006), the Quality Improvement Agency's *Improvement Strategy* (2006) and the DfES's *Personalisation Agenda* (DfES, 2006). It would appear that much official discourse around education appears to mask underlying issues such as class, inequality and the lack of employment which can offer meaningful progression for young people.

Studies such as those conducted by Rutter et al., (1979); Bennett et al., (1984) and Keys and Fernandez, (1993) have shown that in a significant proportion of classes, learners are relatively passive recipients of teaching. It is anticipated that this study, by raising the profile of learners' voice, will encourage and facilitate a participative approach to both the process of education and the issue of disruptive behaviour. It is also anticipated that as researchers have suggested 'student voice may have a key role to play in creating better learning environments' (Flutter and Rudduck, 2006, p.2) and

that learner voice may bring a fresh or 'unique perspective' to the study of disruptive behaviour in a college of further education (Lackney, 2001, p.5). Hodkinson and Bloomer (1998), in their study of learners' attitudes as they moved from secondary to post-secondary education, felt that using learner voice allowed them to 'deepen their understanding of students' experiences of learning' (Hodkinson and Bloomer. 1998, p.10). This approach enabled them to 'uncover the complexity and variety of young people's learning careers' and 'understand and empathise with the young people concerned' (Hodkinson and Bloomer. 1998, p.10).

Of importance here is the concept of learner autonomy, something learners express a desire for but one that equally they appear to be ill at ease with. Hodkinson and Bloomer found that many of the learners in their study 'did not know what their needs were and, for a significant minority, their wants were whimsical and ephemeral' (Hodkinson and Bloomer. 1998, p.83). Hodkinson and Bloomer also suggest that even with good guidance these issues cannot be resolved and that 'young people, needs, wants and intentions, or as we would put it dispositions to knowledge and learning change over time' (Hodkinson and Bloomer. 1998, p.84).

Hodkinson and Bloomer (2001) and Forrest et al. (2007) in their college-based studies both revealed a dichotomy between learners' requests for autonomy and their request that teachers deal with the perpetrators of disruptive behaviour, especially those who affect group dynamics, in a manner where the individual is punished. They also revealed that learners, whilst expressing this desire to be independent, were still reliant upon

teachers for support in articulating their own views, something which appears not to have been examined in the literature to date. There may be value then in giving learners a voice so that we can elicit their understanding of whose responsibility disruption in the classroom is.

These issues of respect for the learner and his/her levels of autonomy are underpinned by the responsibilities these issues confer on both the learner and the teacher, issues which can in turn raise value positions and disputes. It is proposed that in this study the approach to exploring and addressing disruptive behaviour in the classroom should be underpinned by open communication with those affected and in this case, this is open communication between the learners and researcher and there should be some scope to present and consider learner views and opinions in a reflexive way, one that recognises the potential for bias. Giddens (1994) identifies four ways in which value disputes can be resolved: embedding of tradition, which in modernity is undermined; disengagement, the possibilities of which are limited; discourse or violence (Giddens, 1984, p.105). In summary, Giddens suggests that a post-traditional order facilitates and supports the possibility of a 'cosmopolitan conversation of humankind' (Giddens, 1984, p.100).

It is anticipated that one of the main benefits that could arise from raising the learner's voice could be that of producing a definition of disruptive behaviour, informed by learner's perceptions. Learners will, in the interviews used, have the opportunity to say what disruptive behaviour, in

their opinion, is. This, in turn, could provide a useful insight into learner perception of disruptive behaviour.

Factors affecting young people

It is highly likely that the young people taking part in the current research project will have lives which have been influenced by a complex combination of social and economic factors and that these factors could affect their behaviour in college. Social factors could be the family type they are part of; whereas economic could be the access they have to financial support, or part-time employment. These factors could act either directly or indirectly as drivers for inappropriate behaviour in class; therefore, it is relevant here to consider what these factors could be and how they could affect their behaviour in the classroom. Longhurst, in his study of learner absenteeism in a FE college, suggests there is value in ‘investigating factors which influence student’s attitudes towards educational activity’ (Longhurst, 1999, p.74). Longhurst suggested that these have a noticeable impact on levels of attendance and achievement and could therefore be of equal importance to the study of disruptive behaviour.

Hodkinson and Bloomer (2001) prompt consideration of the analysis of disruptive behaviour as that which arises from complex reasons rather than straightforward singular ones. They also prompt caution about highlighting and labelling contributory causes by encouraging us to acknowledge what could be the ‘serendipitous’ nature of arising factors and events. Many of the issues Hodkinson and Bloomer identified as contributors to early drop out

also appear to have a relationship with disruptive behaviour. Disruption was seen as either stemming from these issues, for example when a learner is disillusioned with the programme and this leads him/her to display disruptive behaviour, which in turn can exacerbate the problem. Alternatively, it could be when the disruption itself leads to the learner struggling with the programme to the extent that they consider leaving the course.

The examples of factors highlighted in the work carried out by Longhurst and Hodkinson and Bloomer all relate to action and structure. Arguably both aspects express a 'partial truth' (Cuff et al., 2006, p.313) which can be combined to discover new truths.

Individual factors

Learning difficulties

An important and very personal factor for each learner is his/her own relationship with learning and any barriers s/he may face should there be a learning difficulty. The idea that each learner's needs should be critically assessed on entry to FE, with a view to matching needs to suitable programmes of learning, was an outcome of John Tomlinson's (1996) Inclusive Learning Initiative. It was unexpected as Tomlinson's initial work focused on learners with learning disabilities not main stream learners. It

also led to significant numbers of learners with mild learning difficulties, ones who had often not previously been recognised or provided with support for learning, being identified. Colleges were forced to acknowledge the impact even mild learning difficulties could have on the learner's capacity to complete a course of learning and the part this played in retention and achievement figures.

Tomlinson's work in this area drew a mixed response from teachers some of whom felt that it allowed some people into college who should not be there and others were intimidated by an initiative which they believed would lead to an increase in their personal workload.

Kinder et al., (1996); Huey and Weisz (1997); and Parker et al. (2004) all argued that it was important to identify a learner's individual needs and where necessary diagnose any learning difficulties which emerged. They also stressed we should take into account that the nature of a learning disability or difficulty itself may lead to disruptive behaviour in the classroom. There may be value at this point in providing some clarity with regard to the terminology being used in this section.

Learning difficulties, commonly known as learning disorders or disabilities

describe significant and impairing difficulties with reading, writing and math domains measured by individually administered standardized tests, that are substantially below that expected when given the person's chronological age, measured intelligence and age appropriate education. If sensory or neurological deficit is present, the difficulties are in excess of this usually associated with it (Mugnaini et al., 2009, p.256).

This definition suggests that learning difficulties can lead to significant issues for people who are trying to learn, but care must be taken to not assume that a learning difficulty presents every person with problems especially when, as Mugnaini et al. suggest, there are three categories of learning difficulty ranging from ‘high-incidence disorders... which include mild retardation and emotional behavioural disorders’ in the first, to ‘reading difficulties’ in the second and the third category ‘which is represented by individuals with ‘any type of learning disability’ (Mugnaini et al., 2009, p.257). People can experience learning difficulties at different levels and the impact whilst severe for some, may be negligible for others. It is for this reason that consideration will be shown for two very common difficulties, using these as examples to explore the capacity each can have to lead to disruption in the classroom.

The first, dyslexia is classified as a learning disability and has been defined as ‘significant difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition’ (Mugnaini et al., 2009, p.256). These difficulties can include problems with ‘reading, writing, number work, short-term memory, hand control and visual processing, time-keeping, sense of direction and interpersonal skills’ (Mugnaini et al., 2009, p.256, all of which can leave a sense of frustration. Dyslexia could fall into any of Mugnaini et al.’s (2009) three categories, dependent upon the level of severity the extent to which it affects learners will vary significantly.

Attention deficit disorder/hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD), the second difficulty to be considered, is classified as a disorder rather than a disability and has been defined as ‘a persistent (and relatively precocious) pattern of inattention-impulsivity that is dysfunctional and significantly frequent or severe’ (Mugnaini et al., 2009, p.257). It has also been suggested that there is a high risk of ‘comorbidity between dyslexia and AD/HD’ (Mugnaini et al., 2009, p.259), which can, in turn, lead to what can only be described as ‘high rates of discomfort for the individual’ (Mugnaini et al., 2009, p.259). There are also signs of increased comorbidity between learning difficulties and depression and anxiety (Halonen et al., 2006; Diakakis et al., 2008), which have the potential to affect behaviour in classrooms. Research has shown that individuals with AD/HD

show more fidgeting, lower self esteem and life satisfaction. They have more interpersonal problems, more conflicts with friends, more problems with making up with friends, more social anxiety, depressed mood and a weaker relationship with their mothers. Finally they become victims of direct (shoves, insults, derisions) and indirect bullying (threats, gossip and group exclusion) (Mugnaini et al., 2009, p.260);

all of which are recognisable features of disruptive behaviour in class. Murray and Greenberg (2006) suggest that learning difficulties such as AD/HD can lead to poor relationships with both peers and teachers in class and a bad relationship with school in general, one that ultimately leads the young person to view any learning environment as unsafe. This notion of fear and lack of security in educational settings is endorsed by Mugnaini et al. (2009) who suggest that ‘dyslexia and reading problems consistently

contribute to higher depressive and anxiety symptoms in learners from first grade to university' (Mugnaini et al., 2009, p.262).

The comorbidity between learning difficulties such as dyslexia and AD/HD and anxiety disorders is outlined in Mugnaini et al.'s (2009) belief that dyslexia acts as 'a specific risk factor for increased internalising, anxious and depressive symptomatology', one that in turn increases 'the level of social support' young people with such disorders requires (Mugnaini et al., 2009, p.256). Mugnaini et al. offer the view that internalising problems for young people are 'characterised by depressive and anxious-like symptoms or social withdrawal, whereas externalising problems are indicated by overactive, impulsive, or aggressive behaviours' (Mugnaini et al., 2009, p.256), all of which have associations with or can lead to disruption in class.

Mugnaini et al.'s (2009) notion regarding dyslexia's comorbidic relationship with anxiety disorders is reflected in Rogers' (2009) research findings arising from studies with young people who were studying on Aim Higher programmes in FE which suggests that psycho-social support for young people on FE programmes was crucial to their success. From her interviews with ten young people she stated that the support young people talked about and valued 'provided high levels of what could be termed 'psycho-social support' (Rogers, 2009, p.112). Rogers (2009) suggests that this level of support is particularly crucial for vulnerable learners who have had poor previous experiences of education.

Learners with dyslexia and/or AD/HD could be classed as vulnerable as they are frequently exposed to bullying (Mugnaini et al, 2009), or when they are continually struggling in the classroom. Rogers revealed instances where learners felt that there was a real lack of psycho-social support for them and of interest to this particular research project, was her notion that this lack of support was linked to factors associated with disruption in class. She provides an example of this when she describes how one young adult 'felt he was isolated and unsupported. He explained how he began to fall behind in his coursework and felt unable to catch up, so he became dispirited and started missing lessons' (Rogers, 2009, p.115). Whilst there is no suggestion that this young person had a learning difficulty, the value of Rogers' work is that it highlights the importance of psycho-social support to young people when there are difficulties in the classroom.

The belief that learning difficulties have an association with disruptive behaviours in class is not a new one. Mitchell et al. found that 'the nature of the difficulties was a contributory factor in disruption in the classroom and in the college in general' (Mitchell et al., 1998, p.27) leading them to suggest that research in this area be extended. They also suggested that their findings revealed that 'the forms of challenging behaviour are on the increase' (Mitchell et al., 1998, p.28) and 'the physical, psychological, educational and emotional needs of learners are more complex than ever before', something which justifies paying attention to the effect learning difficulties can have on behaviour in the classroom. Mitchell et al.'s study also acts to remind us that to ignore such behaviour can be financially costly to the college itself when the 'high costs of losing just one student due to

disaffection, disruptive behaviour by other students, or family or mental health problems' can be significant (Mitchell et al., 1998, p.28).

Mitchell et al. (1998); Parker et al. (2002); and Mugnaini et al. (2009) argue that the impact of learning disorders such as AD/HD and learning difficulties such as dyslexia can have on young people, can be described as 'a constant hindering factor to the full development of an individual's potentials' (Mugnaini et al., 2009, p.256). They also add credence to the suggestion that they could lead to a propensity among young people to disrupt in class. Parker et al. (2002) add: AD/HD 'persists in adolescence and adulthood' and that one of the behaviours associated with this is 'disruptive classroom behaviour' (Parker et al., 2002, p.978). The notion that dyslexia can also act as a cause of disruption in class has been supported by the growing understanding that learners with learning difficulties such as dyslexia are likely to 'exhibit disruptive behaviour in the classroom' (Mitchell et al., 1998, p.26).

The review of literature in this area has shown that learning difficulties can take on a wide variety of forms and the impact these have on learning can vary from one individual to another but that all have the capacity to act as causes of disruption in class. The examination of two forms of difficulty: dyslexia and AD/HD has revealed the negative impact they can have on behaviour and the need to take these into consideration in the present study. This has undoubtedly added a new dimension to the current study of disruptive behaviour in class, one that on mainstream programmes has been shown only limited attention in the past and thus warrants further attention.

Relationships with peers

Social and cultural capital, as well as including influences from parents, is also affected by the peer relationships that young people in the study enjoy and participate in. Whilst many have suggested that there are clear links between disruptive or delinquent behaviour and peer group influences (Hargreaves, 1967; Lacey, 1970 and Willis, 1979), Smith (1987) suggests that rather than acting as a negative influence, peer groups can be a positive resource for the young person.

Smith defines the peer group young people find themselves part of as an 'informal institution which impacts upon how young people relate to education and the authority they face in class' (Smith, 1987, p.58), and on an informal level we can define peer groups as 'a group of friends who share similar likes and interests' (Gleeson et al., 1990, p. 110). These definitions imply that peer groups can have an impact on their lives and on their behaviour in educational settings.

Caught between childhood and adulthood, the peer group young people find themselves part of, provides them with 'the support and opportunity for experiment that they need to cope with this transitional period of time' (Smith, 1987, p.42). Hargreaves (1967) suggests that young people form and use sub-groups as problem solving tools. He suggests that working-class boys resort to forming anti-school groups as part of their working-class approaches to solving problems. Lacey's (1970) work in a grammar school allowed him to identify sub-cultures which were class-based, with an 11 plus

success group emerging as a distinctly separate sub-cultural group, largely comprised of working-class children, in stark contrast to the middle-class normative group. This was something which Willis (1977) describes as a counter-school culture, formed by the working-class lads which prepare them for working-class jobs. This demonstrates that the areas covered in this study can very easily become blurred by peer and class relationships.

Smith acknowledges that peer and parental pressures are often determined by the social class values the family and peer group hold and that these in turn exist in a 'system of power' (Smith, 1987, p.58).

Home and community factors

Relationships with parents

The young people under study are, at approximately sixteen years of age, likely to still be heavily influenced by their parents and their family situations. This could influence their decision to enter post-compulsory education, choice of course, attitude towards learning or, perhaps of most significance to this study, have a bearing on the behaviours they display in class.

Researchers including Foskett and Hesketh (1977) and Ball, Maguire and Macrae (2000) have suggested that parents are influential in providing

frames of reference for learners to operate within, frames of reference which reflect the values parents hold and pass on, and can, the researchers believe, highlight class differences. Ball et al. (2000) have suggested that working-class families provide 'looser' frames and that, in contrast, the majority of middle-class families provide their children with 'tight' frames (Ball, Maguire and Macrae, 2000, p.144), which have been defined by parental systems of sifting and selection. These systems of control have evolved as part of the socialisation process and can take on various forms such as financial and opportunistic restraints.

Whilst there is no intention to directly involve the parents of those who disrupt in class in the present study there will be scope to consider parental influences and to take familial values into account via the learner's accounts.

In addition to relationships with families, Gannon-Leary (2008) in his study of disruption in university classrooms suggests that there is also value in taking socio-economic factors into account. He attributes disruption to several factors, one of which stems from the widening participation agenda which led to the integration of learners from backgrounds 'where students are generally despised' (Gannon-Leary, 2008, p.13). He also believes the problem has arisen from a societal issue reflected in a 'decline in good behaviour or manners' and a lack of respect for authority figures generally' (Gannon-Leary, 2008, p 13). Others, including Nash, (2002) and Marjoribanks (2006) prompt caution about making stereotypical assumptions about class and misbehaviour in classrooms.

Linked to the idea that parents provide frames of reference for learners is Hurtig et al.'s suggestion that these can vary by family type. Hurtig et al. (2005) studied behavioural problems in relation to family environment in Finland. This led them to suggest that 'adolescents living in other than intact families and adolescents living in families with low social status report more attention and behavioural problems than other adolescents' (Hurtig et al., 2005, p.474). They also argued that these behavioural problems could be the result of insufficient support for the adolescent and 'problems with limit setting or conflicts in a new situation with a new member or new members in the family' (Hurtig et al., 2005, p.474). This would appear to confirm Maguire et al.'s earlier view that family structures and relationships have led to altered lifestyles for young people and that young people in further education today are still influenced by and 'dependent for housing, finance and emotional well-being on their family structures' (Maguire et al., 2001, p.208).

Huang (2009) in her study of social capital and learner achievement in Norwegian secondary schools found that learner social capital, which comes from learner social relations with parents, teachers and peers, has a significant influence on their achievement and, within this, learner behaviour. Huang (2009) used data which in part covered 'student relationships with parents' and 'problematic behaviour' from a national survey in Norway to consider the impact the social capital of learners can have on young people and their educational experiences (Huang, 2009, p. 321). Her findings are of particular interest for the association they revealed between positive learner: parent relationships which are defined as human

social capital and positive influences on learners and their relationships and behaviour in school. Huang's research was conducted in part with learners of a comparable age range to those being researched in the current study, findings revealed that

student social capital contributes considerably to school achievement both by exerting direct effects and by mediating influences from the home background (Huang, 2009, p.324).

Huang's (2009) work prompts us to pay attention to the influences parents may bring to bear on the young people in the current study in terms of affecting or influencing their behaviour in class and to consider each family at individual as well as societal level. They may also prompt us to consider increasing parental involvement in achieving discipline in the college setting. The idea that the family is powerful marries with those of Pierre Bourdieu when he suggests that families and educational establishments as institutions have immense power to manage others in ways which are not always visible or knowingly experienced (Bourdieu, 2003, p.22).

Bourdieu acknowledges the power families have over young people and their 'function as a field, with its physical, economic and, above all, symbolic power relations, and its struggles to hold on to and transform these power relations' (Bourdieu, 2003, p.68). However this acknowledgement of the power the family holds is tempered by his reminder that

agents with a feel for the game, who have embodied a host of practical schemes of perception and appreciation functioning as instruments of reality construction, as principles of vision and division of the universe in

which they act, do not need to pose the objectives of their practice as ends (Bourdieu, 2003, p.80).

Bourdieu is highlighting the indiscriminate nature of many of the acts agents perform, ones that may have no prescribed course or even be planned.

In their exploration of parent: learner relationships amongst college learners Baharudin and Zulkefly (2009) tried to see if the quality of the relationships in any way correlated with self-esteem and academic achievement. Their findings implied that although there was a correlation between good relationships between parents and their children and high levels of self-esteem, there was no correlation between high levels of self-esteem and academic achievement. Baharudin and Zulkefly found that 'students with low level self-esteem performed better in their academics' (Baharudin and Zulkefly, 2009, p.92) prompting recognition of the learners' levels of self-esteem when considering which factors could contribute to disruption in the classroom, ones that may also stem from, or have links with, family environment and relationships.

There are obvious limitations to making generalisations from the work of small-scale projects and their findings, each with their own research agenda or boundaries. However, what can be drawn from the work of Huang (2009), Stewart et al., (1998) and Baharudin and Zulkefly (2009) is that there is evidence of the influences parents can have on young people and their values; that this influence may be in a form that has not previously been considered; that there are cultural variations between families; and that

parents have the capacity to influence the behaviour young people display. This study with its emphasis on young people's views, may support identification of areas of disharmony between the young people and their parents, something which can lead to 'greater conflict which affects learners' inner harmony' (Stewart et al., 1997).

Institutional factors

It is possible that the college as an educational institution has the potential to affect or influence learner behaviour. Organisational practices, instructional, organisational and management processes may act as invisible influences not only on educational achievement but also learner behaviour. Teaching styles and learners' perceptions of the learning environment have been studied and have been found to be related to learner learning and learner behaviour (Barnet, 1985; Brophy and Good, 1986; and Fraser et al., 1991). Brophy and Good identified that learner behaviour varied according to teacher approach (Brophy and Good, 1986).

Relationships with teachers

The interpersonal relationship between the teacher and the learner is one that requires examination with a view to developing an awareness and understanding of the relationship, if any, between this and disruption in the classroom. According to Moos (1979) the relationship between teachers and learners is an important dimension of class climate and exists as one of three

key determinants or dimensions of classroom atmosphere; the two remaining dimensions being personal development and goal orientation and maintenance and changes within the system. This approach overlooks external issues and the cultural capital and 'habitus' both teacher and learner bring into the classroom. The classroom climate is generated from recognition of shared perceptions, mutual relationships and the organisation of the teaching situation and within this framework arguably there exists the important relationship between the teacher and the learners. Others have suggested that, whilst the behaviour of the learner influences the teacher, at the same time the teacher influences the learner (Wubbles and Levy, 1993) highlighting the importance of this factor in any analysis of disruptive behaviour in the classroom.

This relates to some classic work on 'labelling theory' and work to determine learners' academic outcomes based on the labels they have been given in class and consequently the expectations that they have obtained from teachers and organisations. According to Rist (1997) 'within the framework of labelling theory... a major emphasis has been placed upon the role of institutions in sorting, labelling, tracking and channeling persons along various routes depending upon the assessment the individual has made of the individual' (Rist, 1997, p.155). Concerns have been voiced that young people may accept and internalise negative, or 'deviant' labels, others attach to them, so they may accept and internalise it, believing it of themselves. Becker (1963) and Lemert 1972) developed this latter aspect of the theory in educational contexts, with Hargreaves et al. (1975) and Rosenthal and

Jacobson (1968) suggesting that it could create a self-fulfilling prophecy in schools such that young people defined as 'bright' would live up to expectations. Hargreaves' notion that 'deviance' is 'a question of social definition' and 'arises when some other person(s) defines that act as deviant' encourages examination of 'those who label as much as those who are labelled' (Hargreaves et al., 1975, p.3). It is also worth noting that individuals who disrupt classes can be labelled by teachers as deviants and these actions could act to aggravate, rather than address the problem of disruption. The literature in this area appears to reveal sub-themes of respect, the qualities learners desire in relationships with teachers, and finally the power issues which emerge from these relationships.

A common feature throughout the literature was what learners wanted from the teacher: learner relationship; it is therefore important that what has been revealed in this area is examined. Zhan (2008) suggests that the characteristics of a good teacher-learner relationship are 'equality, mutual trust, a comfortable and friendly working relationship, mutual respect and concern and partnership and mutual dialogue' (Zhan, 2008, p.13). Linked to this idea that learners have a clear understanding of what they want from the teacher-learner relationship is Schlechty and Atwood's (1997) belief that whilst the teacher is constantly developing strategies to induce learners to behave in class, in a similar way

students develop strategies - sometimes consciously, more often subconsciously and unarticulated - to induce teachers in ways learners perceive to be in their own interests (Schlechty and Atwood, 1997, p.285).

This suggests that learners use strategies to try and meet their predetermined needs and requirements in the classroom. This suggestion of a two-way relationship, one that for learners is based upon their evaluation of teachers in terms of their 'norms for appropriate teacher behaviour', which is to 'have a laugh' and to 'understand' (Schlechty and Atwood, 1997, p.286), also has the potential to touch on possible reasons for disruptive behaviour. If learners do not feel that their needs are being met in the learner: teacher relationship it may be that they act in a disruptive way, one that reflects this dissatisfaction.

We can see from the work of both Schlechty and Atwood (1997) and Lewis (2005) that relationships between learners and teachers are based upon levels of respect, behaviours and perceptions of control and power on both sides. Schlechty and Atwood (1997) raise some important points surrounding issues pertaining to power, control and the levels of consciousness both learners and teachers have in the actions they take and the importance of recognising the two-way nature of the learner: teacher relationship. The current research project will allow learners to voice their views related to the relationships they have with teachers and consider to what degree this influences their behaviour in class, something which Lewis et al (2005) felt had not been previously explored. According to Lewis et al. (2005) teachers 'need to make the opportunity to let learners talk about their side of things so that it can be clearly understood, to get them to understand why their behaviour is a problem for others' (Lewis et al., 2005, p. 739).

Pomeroy (1999) in her study of excluded learners' perceptions of their educational experiences and their relationship with teachers, used learner voice to explore disruption in the classroom. Pomeroy (1999) makes a significant contribution to our understanding of why learners misbehave in class in her supposition that

the three key factors identified as problematic by the interviewees are relationships with teachers, relationships with peers and factors outside of school e.g. home life, involvement in criminal activity. Overall, relationships with teachers was the most salient and consistently described feature (Pomeroy, 1999, p. 466)

highlighting the relevance of exploring relationships as a potential cause of disruptive behaviour. Pomeroy does however prompt caution in attributing all poor behaviour to the relationship between teachers and students by suggesting that for some learners this may not be an important issue especially where learners were more concerned with 'relationships with peers or circumstances outside the school environment' (Pomeroy, 1999, p. 469).

Pomeroy's work provides us with an insight into the benefits of adopting an individual rather than a group approach to the study of young people. When consistency of view emerges from individual accounts, not only does it have greater powers of persuasion but it also identifies unique perspectives. Pomeroy found throughout the research with individuals that their views with regard to learner: teacher relationships 'remain predominantly consistent' (Pomeroy, 1999, p.469). Pomeroy was focusing on teacher:

learner relationships, therefore social and economic features, which learners often demonstrate limited awareness of, may not have emerged, or been explored as contributory factors. These features often form a back-drop against which relations are carried out.

Pomeroy used her research to identify qualities in teachers young people like and those they do not. The three main qualities they liked were having the capacity 'to form a relationship'; 'to manage the class and use discipline to do so' and 'the ability to teach' (Pomeroy, 1999, pp.470-472). Whilst being quite 'loose', these were the terms which emerged from the interviews with learners. The participants in Pomeroy's study revealed that they wanted the teacher to be 'caring', be willing to 'talk', 'explain', 'listen', 'assume the student perspective' and they wanted the relationship to 'reflect the teacher's belief in the students' work' (Pomeroy, 1999, p. 477).

This 'caring' aspect of teaching has more recently been explored by Jephcote and Salisbury (2009) in their study of FE teachers' accounts of their professional identities. They found that despite facing huge pressures from college managers to prioritise duties which stem from bureaucratic requirements linked to data and policy changes, teachers are still

privileging what they understand to be the needs and interest of students, even where this involved subverting the demands being made upon them by college managers (Jephcote and Salisbury, 2009, p.971).

Jephcote and Salisbury describe this as 'adoption of a principle ethic of care' (Jephcote and Salisbury, 2009, p.971), something which was evidenced in

teachers dealing with the social problems their learners experienced. In addition to its recognition of this ‘caring’ aspect of teaching as an important feature of the learner-teacher relationship Jephcote and Salisbury’s work is also of value for its reminder that the study of disruptive behaviour must be understood within the ‘cultural, economic and social settings in which it is generated and when it encompasses the interactions of both teacher/s and learner/s’ (Jephcote and Salisbury, 2009, p.971). Hierarchical, semi-structured interviews in the current research project will be used to prompt learner discussion of the impact deeper issues such as cultural, economic, and social factors can have on interactions in the classroom.

In keeping with Pomeroy (1999) and Jephcote and Salisbury (2009) Morrison (2009) found that both learners and teachers valued the relationships they had. The significance of these relationships to both parties and the power they have to frame young people’s actions was evidenced when

Interviews with teaching staff revealed they shared the students’ perceptions of a warm, supportive learning environment. Moreover the pastoral aspects of their role were seen to be as fundamental to being a good lecturer’ and ‘strong staff: student relations emerged as an important reason for wanting to remain at the College... (Morrison, 2009, p. 221).

Morrison suggests that ‘close teacher: student relations are a way for students to extend their social ties’ (Morrison, 2009, p.222) which eventually leads to ‘fluid systems of social capital’ (Raffo and Reeves, 2000, p153). Morrison also suggests that learners benefit from these positive relationships

in that they offer them ‘the potential for strategic action about life choices’ (Morrison, 2009, p.222). Whilst Morrison’s work is of significance it does not take account of outcomes which stem from failure of learners to develop a positive relationship with teachers and what the results of this could be. By looking at positive outcomes only, Morrison ignored the potential relationships have to elicit disruptive or unwanted behaviour. Morrison failed to look at how power was used in relationships.

Thompson, (2003) in his discussion of the double bladed-edge that power can wield talks about power in a positive way, when he suggests it has ‘the ability to influence or control people, events, processes or resources’ but in a negative way, has the potential to be ‘a very destructive force’ (Thompson, 2003, p.44). Giddens suggests that

Power is an ever-present phenomenon in social life. In all human groups, some individuals have more authority or influence than others, while groups themselves vary in terms of the level of their power. Power and inequality tend to be closely linked. The powerful are able to accumulate valued resources, such as property or wealth; and possession of such resources is in turn a means of generating power (Giddens, 1984, p.209).

Both Giddens (1984) and Thompson (2003) in their portrayal of power as a resource, provide us with a reasoned case for examining the power relationships which exist between teacher and learner, and learner and learner in the classroom and the relationship if any that exists between power and disruptive behaviour. There is a possibility that learners who underachieve in the classroom may feel that they have less power than their more able peers.

The current research project will allow learners to voice their views about the relationships they have with teachers and consider how this impacts, if at all, on their behaviour in class. Lewis et al. (2005) felt this had not been previously explored. There may also be the opportunity to identify whether or not learners feel there are issues related to power in their interactions with teachers in the classroom.

Gender issues

A great deal of attention has been paid in earlier studies to masculinity in the lives of schoolboys; (for example, Willis, 1977; Kessler et al., 1985; Walker, 1988 and Mac an Ghaill, 1994). To a lesser extent, femininity and its impact on the educational experiences of girls and young women has also been examined, (see Kann and Hannah (2000); Beaman et al. (2007) and Gannon-Leary (2008)). With the exception of Gannon-Leary (2008) who studied issues pertaining to gender and disruptive behaviour in a higher educational setting, the majority of this earlier research focuses on learners of school age and again, with the exception of the latter study, tends to focus on girls' capacity to achieve (Eccles, 1987) leaving their gender and its association with disruptive behaviour virtually untouched. Of equal importance is that any analysis of girls and underachievement has tended to focus on those of school age and very few have dealt with young girls in FE (Kelly, 1988).

Walshaw (2006) in her study of 'Girls' workplace destinations' makes a link between the impact social class has on the subjectivity of women and the impact of this on their capacity to pursue an identity through education. Walshaw draws on the earlier findings of Reay (2003) to present an argument for considering the impact social class can have on women and their participation in education. Reay (2003) suggests that working-class women struggle to put themselves first, something which results in 'guilt, anxieties and feelings of personal inadequacy' (Reay, 2003, p. 311). Reay (2003), Walkerdine (2003) and Walshaw (2006) all note the additional barriers women from working-class backgrounds face when attempting to present themselves as individuals in society, reveal their personal identities or justify their access into education.

The current research project, as well as providing scope for further exploration of the impact social class can have on young people, also has the potential to identify and examine links between gender, class and disruptive behaviour.

Mairtin Mac an Ghaill, (1999) in his study of the impact training organisations (and included in these FE colleges) can have on the sexual identities of young males suggests that part of a college's role in this process is to act as a 'sexualising agency', one that shapes the male's identity through notions of what constitutes the nature of work (Mac an Ghaill, 1999, p.430). Mac an Ghaill explores what he perceives as the loss of young men's identities through his analysis of the changing nature of training programmes and their impact on the sexuality and gender of young men. He believes

sexuality and gender cannot be examined in isolation and that the two are actually interwoven.

Mac an Ghail's work evokes consideration of the impact educational environments, cultures and programmes can have on young people's identities, and what part their sexual and gendered identities can play in affecting their behaviour in the educational setting. It prompts analysis of the impact the 'hidden curriculum' could have, paying attention to whether or not FE colleges with their rules and regulations, can, contribute to a young man or woman's resistance to this reproduction in society. Mac an Ghail's theories relating to the dislocation of young people and their limited clarity of sexual and gender specific identity might also lead us to question whether or not the blurring of lines between male and female roles could have led to 'laddish behaviour' amongst females.

Mac an Ghail developed the notion of young men who, at a loss to develop a sense of identity from their occupational work, turn instead to 'performing heterosexuality', something which was he said designed to give them masculine power and status (Mac an Ghail, 1999, p.437). Within this, Mac an Ghail explores three approaches the young men adopt in performing heterosexuality, the first the 'fashionable heterosexuals' is based upon a consumer lifestyle; the second, is where the 'explicit heterosexuals' attempt to make an extreme statement of their heterosexuality when the young men actively disrupt the formal curriculum with overt and covert references to their maleness and sexual competencies (Mac an Ghail, 1995, p. 438). The third approach is that evidenced when the 'fashionable' and 'explicit'

heterosexuals gang up against the 'sexual outsiders', something which involves then in sexually harassing and intimidating younger males (Mac an Ghaill, 1995, p. 438). This highlights the value of analysing vocationally gendered college groups such as Construction or Child Care to see what patterns related to sexual identity exist.

As well as considering the impact organisations can have on young males and their role in the formation of gendered sexual forms, Mac an Ghaill also highlights the need to acknowledge the potential impact of wider issues such as class, ethnicity and age. He argues we should place the 'multidimensional view of power at the centre of any analysis of young trainees' identity formation' with a view to understanding the 'complexity of its dynamic within different institutional sites' (Mac an Ghaill, 1995, p.441).

At this point, it may be useful to consider some of the earlier ideas Willis (1977) explored related to the culture the working-class boys developed and any potential links here with disruptive behaviour. Willis suggests that an important aspect of this culture the lads developed was one that espoused elements of resistance and opposition to authority. As Willis writes

the opposition is expressed mainly as style. It is lived out in countless ways which are special to the school institution, instantly recognised by the teachers and an almost ritualistic part of the daily fabric of life for the kids. These boys spend their days 'dossing, blagging and wagging' and above all else they believe that 'having a laugh' is key (Willis, 1990, p.12).

This touches on the notion of low-level minimal disruption as an intrinsic part of the everyday behaviour, the lads display in asserting their presence and status in the school and perhaps links with Mac an Ghaill's notion of 'explicit heterosexuality' (Mac an Ghaill, 1995, p.437) . Willis suggests

opposition to the school is principally manifested in the struggle to win symbolic and physical space from the institution and its rules and to defeat its main perceived purpose; to make you 'work' (Willis, 1990, p.26).

These resistances are directed at both those who are in position of authority and of equal significance those who conform to institutional and classroom authority. The usefulness of Willis' work here is that it highlights the embedded nature of low-level disruption, its situated position in everyday life and the fact that it can be directed at and can have an impact on other learners as well as teachers. Willis' work also suggests that the actions whilst subtle are consciously carried out and that they are done so in an attempt to avoid having to do school work.

Willis' work is also of interest because it paid attention to the sexist and racist attitudes he observed and the role of these attitudes, particularly those that centred on the 'masculinity' of manual work and the devaluation of 'femininity', in educational spheres. 'Traditional' male work has shrunk significantly since the 1970s but Willis' attention to the way in which the lads associate masculinity with manual work and, in turn, to their own exploitation highlights the impact gender issues can have on behaviour and cultural reproduction. Of real significance to this study is Willis' suggestion

that the lads as a group attach meaning to their behaviour, something which can be explained, justified and valorised. This concept contributes to the persuasive argument Willis puts forward that the behaviour in class, instead of being enacted by individuals, is part of a group movement to challenge authority and control. This contrasts sharply with the consistency in individual accounts sought by Pomeroy. Willis' approach here gives support for identification of cultural and group influences which may not emerge in individual accounts.

Willis' detailed attention to the lives of the lads he studies also acts as a prompt to ask why he failed to consider use of comparative groups or consider the role of females in both cultural reproduction and their behaviour in educational settings. McRobbie (1991) levels an important criticism at Willis by suggesting that, in his conceptualisation of culture as a group process, he overlooks women who predominantly operate individually or in dyads or triads. Thus, she suggests that Willis's work is flawed in that it favours group dynamics over those of the individual and in so doing also ignores the external influences females in the private sphere might exert on individual group members.

Related to the recognition of both individual and group forms of and approaches to disruptive behaviour, is the notion that inappropriate use of information technology can be used in either way to bring about disruption in the classroom. Learners can text or email each other in the classroom as a group approach, or on an individual basis can use technology to make

contact with external sources which can equally act as a disruptive influence on those around them.

In terms of gender differences and the use of information technology to disrupt classes, the literature review in this area has revealed a definite lack of consensus. Ybarra and Mitchell (2004) revealed in their research that ‘males and females are equally likely to report harassing another person online in the last year’ (Ybarra and Mitchell, 2004, p.331) and Williams and Guerra (2007) agreed with this supposition stating that ‘no gender differences were found for prevalence of internet and verbal bullying’ (Williams and Guerra, 2007, p.520). These views were further supported by Weatherbee (2010) in his research when he concluded that ‘we have not generated sufficient empirical evidence to determine if gender is strongly related to information and communication technology misuse or not’ (Weatherbee, 2010, p.37).

Gender differences were however revealed by Chen and Katz (2009) in the reasons for information technology related misbehaviour in class. They suggested that whilst ‘both male and female students expressed their need to use their mobile phones to sustain the ‘great relationships’ they have with parents’ (Chen and Katz, 2009, p.186) and with their friends, gender differences linked to psychological dependencies emerged between males and females. This was evidenced in the girls’ comments with a seventeen year-old-girl stating that ‘if no-one has contacted me I get really depressed and I’m like no-one loves me’ (Chen and Katz, 2009, p.186). Males, in contrast, highlighted the importance of social networking without placing an

onus on psychological dependency; this was explained by a twenty year old male as 'it's the thought that someone might be contacting you and I don't want to miss it' (Chen and Katz, 2009, p.186).

This examination of individual and group forms of disruption using information technology provides a balance to Willis' group approach and a cautionary note to me to pay equal attention to the notions of both group and individual approaches to disruptive behaviour in the classroom. It also prompts consideration of the influences others, both males and females, in the private sphere, may have on the individuals under study and the way in which gender differences may or may not play a part in challenges to authority. In doing so there may be scope to avoid what has been described as the 'masculinist bias' Willis has adopted in his work. (McRobbie, 1991a, p.21).

Francis (1999) in her work *Lads, Lasses and (New) Labour: 14-16 year-old learners responses to the 'laddish behaviour and boys' underachievement debate* (Francis, 1999 p.355) makes a significant contribution to understanding the way in which behaviour is gendered. Of importance to the current project she attempts to elicit both male and female learners' perceptions of constructions of gender and learning.

Francis who defines 'laddish' behaviour, as 'having a laugh', 'disruptive behaviour' (Francis, 1999 p.357) used classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews with 50 girls and 50 boys to address a range of topics covering favourite and least favourite school subjects, further education,

career aspirations, learning styles, and gender constructions in the classroom.

As well as displaying respect for learner voice and showing that young people themselves can articulate reasons for disruptive behaviour, Francis illustrates in her analysis of findings that there can be gender specific differences in explanations for disruptive behaviour. Francis suggests that whereas girls tend to draw on social explanations for disruptive behaviour, boys tend to cite 'natural', or 'inherent biological' reasons such as girls mature more quickly than boys' (Francis, 1999, p.360), something which could be analysed further in association with the internal versus external influences debate.

Francis' suggestion that boys tend to perceive their disruptive behaviour as stemming from internal rather than external forces provides a balance to the view that external forces rather than internal tend to influence boys' behaviour (Oswald, 1995; Kann and Hanna, 2000 and Arbuckle and Little, 2004). Francis's work also endorses the belief that has emerged from other studies (Willis, 1977 and Mac and Ghail, 1994) that peer pressure plays a significant part in disruptive behaviour amongst males in the classroom and that it 'plays an important part in boys' social status among male friendship groups' (Francis, 1999, p.361). Francis alludes to the feminisation of education evident in the discourses of both the boys and girls, suggesting that the boys used feminine connotations attached to working hard and achieving as a reason for misbehaving. In common with Mac and Ghail, Francis suggests that laddish behaviour can stem from a need to impress the

girls in the class with what they see as being 'hard' 'macho' behaviour (Francis, 1999, p.363).

Francis offers a reflexive view of her results by highlighting challenges to the generalisability of her findings. Amongst these are the notions that women contribute to encouraging male disruption by adopting a construction of laddish behaviour as being 'appealing' to women. She noted this response not only amongst the girls in the study but also amongst female teachers and even in her own personal responses to observed laddish behaviour. Francis posits the view that teachers and individuals could actually be contributing to the manifestation of disruptive behaviour at both a micro and macro level.

The powerful hegemony of the gender dichotomy means that different kinds of behaviour are desired of girls and boys, women and men and the behaviour of men and women is constructed in different ways. (Francis, 1999, p.369).

Francis' work provides a cautionary note to be aware that respondents can and do use stereotypically gendered constructs to explain disruptive behaviour, and of equal importance is her example of creating a balance in the analysis of gender differences in disruptive behaviour.

Single sex groups in the college under study may provide an interesting insight into the views offered by Mac and Ghail and Francis where laddish behaviour cannot be explained by the presence of members of the opposite sex and there may be a need to look at other factors to explain disruptive behaviour.

Merrett and Wheldall (1992) suggest that a great deal of the attention paid by teachers to male learners in class is of a negative nature, but more importantly it also reveals that the association between gender and disruptive behaviour can often mask the association between gender, underachievement and disruptive or negative behaviour. This prompts consideration of underachievement as a key determinant of disruptive behaviour or in contrast, consideration of disruptive behaviour as an indicator that a learner is underachieving. Put simply this may lead to an analysis of learning environments to elicit characteristics which can lead to positive learning experiences for all learners irrespective of gender.

This section of the literature review has been both stimulating and thought evoking thus promoting the value of acknowledging the different dimensions gender can bring to the study of disruptive behaviour in the college.

Conclusion

There would appear to be a significant body of research relating to disruptive behaviour in classrooms in the UK and other countries; however what has emerged from the literature review is that there is nothing which can reflect the unique nature of one FE college with its own situation, its own set of problems to deal with in this area and its own set of resources to deal with these problems. This has been evidenced by the selective areas different colleges have focused on. This study is not about generalising the problem of disruptive behaviour in anticipation of providing yet another 'toolkit' which can be used in a generic way to solve the problem of disruptive behaviour in every college, it is about getting to the heart of disruptive behaviour for the teachers and learners in this one college. The review has identified emerging themes such as social class processes that can be drawn on to inform and enhance understanding of the current situation. There is a distinct lack of information regarding disruptive behaviour in FE colleges compared to schools, with very little evidence of research into disruptive behaviour having been carried out in colleges since Mitchell et al.'s study in 1998. What research that has been carried out has shown is that this topic is still an issue for teachers and learners in colleges.

The review has revealed that disruptive behaviour can be a changing entity and that the literature available to date does not reflect this, nor does it pay sufficient attention to the part information technology now plays, what impact this can have on our understanding of this changing phenomena, and

how it can be used to inform how disruption in the classroom is addressed. Learner voice, whilst being acknowledged as an important concept in educational research and quality improvements today, is still in its early stages of use, mainly because as revealed by the review, very few learners have the support they require to voice their views in coherent and meaningful ways, ones that attract attention and an actual response to the issues revealed. This aspect of the review has shown that attention must be paid to creating a suitable forum for learners in this project. There is very little evidence of research in colleges into the impact learning difficulties can have on behaviour in the class and, where this does exist, it has not been combined in any significant way with learner voice, something which could have led to teacher bias should there be an over reliance on teacher rather than learner accounts.

The myriad of information and theories which have been considered have been useful in placing the issue of disruptive behaviour in context and supporting identification of suitable literature and theories of relevance to the study of individual ability; gender; social, emotional, and economic capital; habitus and lifestyle choices as factors operating at both macro and micro levels.

The theories examined can be roughly divided into four categories. Giddens' (1984) notions of structure and agency have proved to be particularly influential in the first category, acting as an umbrella for looking at disruptive behaviour as a social phenomena affected by gender, social class,

equality, and culture. Giddens' approach is compatible with those of Willis (1977), Bourdieu (1990), Ogilvy (1994), Mac an Ghail (1994) and Thompson (2003) allowing scope for critical analysis of findings.

The second category develops earlier theories by looking at their relevance to FE and the lives of young people today. They hold appeal for the specialist insight they provide. Atkins (2009), Thompson (2009) and Nayak (2010) have demonstrated the capacity earlier theories still have to analyse contemporary issues and they inform and develop our understanding of what impact these issues can have. They will provide a useful forum for comparison of findings and add credibility to the development of new theories.

Specialist knowledge emerges again in the third category and is particularly marked in the work of Pomeroy (1999) and Mugnaini (2009). Their studies act as informed reminders of how individual factors can have a significant impact on the lives of the young people under study. Mugnaini's work in particular is influential in providing proof of a relationship between learning difficulties and behaviour in class.

Finally, the work of Tomlinson (1998) Johnson (1994) and Parahoo (1997) have proved influential in identifying suitable research ethics, approaches and methods, ones that are suited to working with young people in a respectful way.

All of these theories can also be used to highlight contrasts and make comparisons with, different perspectives and as such will provide a very useful forum for analysing and theorising the problem of disruptive behaviour in one college setting.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

Chapter one introduced the aims of the study: to develop a better understanding of factors influencing classroom interaction in one college and learner achievement and to suggest ways in which the findings can be used to minimise disruption to learning. This had to be ‘doable within the time, space and resources available’ (Blaxter, 1999, p.25); therefore, the focus now, derived from the research questions and the literature review, is the factors that influence young people’s behaviour and how a better understanding of these by practitioners can be used to work effectively with learners and reduce disruption in class.

This chapter outlines and explains the methodology deployed in this study and examines the literature which informed the choice of methods. The chapter begins with examination of the research design and ethical considerations. The case study approach and the research methodologies which underpin it is then discussed. The chapter continues with an overview of the research using Johnson’s (1994) model of action research to examine the various stages of the investigation. Issues pertaining to validity and reliability are addressed throughout this chapter.

Research design

Justification of a suitable research design, ‘the strategic plan of the project that sets out the broad structure of the research’ (Brewer, 2000, p.p. 57-58), warrants an initial examination of the underlying problematic of the subject being investigated, that of disruptive behaviour in a particular FE college; and more importantly the research questions the research is attempting to answer. Guidance here was sought from Yin who suggested that the research design ‘deals with a logical problem and not a logistical problem’ (Yin, 1989, p.29). This indicates that issues of sampling, methods of data collection and the design of interviews were all subsidiary to the matter of what evidence was needed. The research questions presented in the research proposal were further developed and influenced by the literature review. Personal, family and community and institutional factors and how they could influence a person’s behaviour in the classroom emerged. Learner voice was identified as a suitable vehicle for researching this issue.

Ethical considerations

According to Parahoo (1997, p.186) ‘there are ethical issues at every stage of the research process’; May (1993, p.34) also highlights ‘the need to be aware of the issues which surround the production of a piece of work and the place and influence of values within it’. These values could be the

researcher's own and those of the institution as well as those of the respondents. In undertaking this research, the researcher's personal values have already been placed within the research framework and consideration of these must be acknowledged throughout.

Educational research is unique in that it is 'grounded epistemologically, in the moral foundations of educational practice' but equally it is affected by the 'moral values of those who conduct it' (Sikes, 2003, p.2). Personal experiences at numerous schools throughout my childhood and involvement with young people who disrupt in class, has led me to believe that those who do disrupt, do so for different, yet meaningful reasons; reasons which stem from very unique individual needs. Occupational practice in health and social care environments, where people faced numerous social disadvantages; and involvement in inclusive learning and equal opportunities initiatives have all informed my values in this area.

It is important to acknowledge the part that researcher values can play to ensure 'transparency and openness' (Sikes, 2003, p.5) when educational research is

grounded in personal decisions and that personal decisions have to do with personal, subjective experiences and perceptions – located within, and influenced by, particular historical contexts (Sikes, 2003, p.33).

Ethical standards in research are guided ‘by the individual’s conscience’ and ‘each situation encountered requires a different ethical stance’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p.21). In an attempt to build ‘open, sharing relationships with those investigated’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p.21), this study was conducted using the contextualised-consequential model which

builds on four principles: mutual respect, non-coercion and non-manipulation, the support of democratic values and institutions and the belief that every research act implies moral and ethical dimensions that are contextual. (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p.21-22).

This approach presumes that investigators are committed to an ethic that ‘stresses personal accountability, caring, the value of individual expressiveness, and the capacity of empathy and the sharing of emotionality’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p.22). This was particularly relevant in this study where power relations between the researcher and the learners existed and there was acknowledgement that

educational research is often concerned with social justice issues and can, ultimately, have implications for life chances’ and that ‘decisions and experiences can come to have wider significance and implications for other people (Sikes, 2003, pp.33-34).

Power relations were an issue when as a curriculum coordinator, a subject tutor, or even just a member of staff my roles could act to intimidate learners, or lead to a power differential with the capacity to disadvantage or reduce the levels of autonomy learners hold. According to Parahoo ‘every

attempt should be made to ensure that the power relation is not unfairly tilted in the researcher's favour' (Parahoo, 1997, p18). This meant consciously monitoring power relations throughout through use of critical reflection and analysis of findings.

An appropriate framework for addressing educational research should encompass issues concerned with beneficence, non-maleficence, justice, veracity, confidentiality, and autonomy. According to Parahoo 'the research project should benefit the participating individual and society in general' (Parahoo, 1997, p.175) and whilst alternative views to the contrary exist, there is a desire here, to benefit learners in FE. Learners taking part in the research project would have completed their course and left the college before research findings were used and would not therefore benefit directly from the findings.

In keeping with Denzin and Lincoln's recommendation that researchers be alert to 'the ethical dimensions of their work particularly prior to entry' (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p.90); the research followed a pre-planned, staged approach. This process included sending a letter to the College Principal to gain permission to undertake the research (see Appendix page 1). Upon receipt of this, a letter was sent to Divisional Managers (DMs) and Course Team Leaders (CTLs) explaining the purpose of the research, the criteria to be used when selecting participants, and how access to learners would be managed through them (see Appendix page 2). Once CTLs had used the criteria to identify potential respondents; 1:1 meetings between the

researcher and the learner were held to explain the nature of the research, the respondent's role and commitments, issues around informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity, and to answer any questions they had.

In this study informed consent was interpreted as 'consent received from the subject after he or she has been carefully and truthfully informed about the research' (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p.372). In light of context and setting, this interpretation was also broadened to address the necessity for parental consent. Where parental consent was declined no further approach was made to the learner.

This approach acknowledged the 'need to serve competing interests' (Usher, 1989, p.122). It highlighted the situatedness of the research and the need 'to act in the light of a particular situation', whilst acknowledging that the welfare of those involved 'must be taken into account' (Usher, 1989, pp. 180-182). This involved use of what Sikes describes as 'interior reflexivity' as an 'anchor for moral practice' rather than 'exterior guidelines'. She advocates 'dialect between the two' but 'favours interior reflexivity....when it comes to matters of moral definition and decision' (Sikes, 2003, p.48).

Once the learner had made an informed decision to take part in the study; with their agreement, and in recognition of the fact that all learners were under eighteen, a letter was sent to their parents. This letter outlined and

explained the aims and objectives of the study and incorporated a permission slip to facilitate and support informed consent (see Appendix page 3).

Non-maleficence means that ‘research should not cause any harm to participants’ (Parahoo, 1997, p.174) this included allowing learners the right to choose whether to participate or not, to withdraw at any point should they wish to do so and the right to refuse to answer any questions they were uncomfortable with. Learners were also guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity throughout all aspects of the research process. Confidentiality in this context has been interpreted as

a common principle at the beginning of the research, to gain trust and encourage participants to speak openly and honestly. It assures them that any information they reveal, which is sensitive, personal or problematic, that they wish to keep confidential, will be respected and that they will not be exposed (Simons, 2009, p.103).

The need to establish ‘a relationship with participants that respects human dignity and integrity and in which people can trust’ (Simons, 2009, p.96) requires the researcher to be alert throughout the research process to ‘issues individuals wish to keep private’. However, ‘at the same time there is a common understanding that findings will become public’ (Simons, 2009, p.106).

The issue of anonymisation ‘is a complex one’ (Simons, 2009, p.106), one that requires vigilance and attention on the part of the researcher.

Anonymity means that the ‘name of the person is not revealed’ (The Oxford Dictionary, 1998, p.29). It was an important issue if learners were going to feel supported enough to discuss issues of relevance to the topic; and that they could trust the researcher not to discuss findings with other members of staff. Equally, if members of staff were discussed by name, this would not be included in any literature and no slight would be conferred on any tutor as a result of any comments made.

In keeping with Simons’s recommendation that anonymity should be used where individuals may not be ‘fully aware of the possible repercussions’; or ‘where identification may restrict what participants say’; and where you cannot guarantee that ‘those who read your case study will respond fairly and sensitively’; pseudonyms were used to ‘anonymise individuals and offer them some protection of privacy’ (Simons, 2009, pp.106-7).

There was always the chance that the interview could trigger feelings of disquiet in the learner and care was taken to ensure that all interviewees had follow-up details should they feel the need to discuss anything after the interview. Dilemmas around informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity highlight the

relational and situated nature of ethics’ where ‘it is only in the field, supported by procedures and negotiations over what is fair, relevant and just in the precise socio-political context, that we can know if we have acted ethically in relation to those who are part of our case (Simons, 2009, p.110).

Veracity according to Parahoo involves building ‘trust between the participants and researcher’ (Parahoo, 1997, p.174), which was addressed through the respectful nature of the relationship which evolved between all parties. Initial demonstrations of trust between the researcher and the tutor who facilitated access to the learner appeared to act as an indicator that the relationship between the researcher and the learner would be a supportive one, one that was respectful of the young person.

Justice means that the needs of the respondent will be of paramount concern ‘and must come before the objectives of the study’ (Parahoo, 1997, p.173). This respect had to take into account the time constraints the interviews placed on learners, the teaching they might miss and the questioning they might face from peers who were not involved in the study. All of these issues were discussed with learners, with suitable times negotiated in advance with teachers and learners forewarned that others may question their movements.

The purpose of the research itself could also present ethical dilemmas in terms of confidentiality and ownership. The college the researcher works for will have access to, if not ownership of, the findings and as such may choose to use the findings for purposes other than those originally intended. Whilst this is not ideal, I have to acknowledge the commitment in time and money the college has shown, and the recognition they have shown for the ‘agency of teacher and learner’ (Anderson, Barton and Wahlberg, 2003, p.501).

Research was initially carried out for two reasons, personal and practical, the latter addressing teaching and learning but the overriding fact that ‘external stakeholders largely determine the strategic objectives of education institutions’ (Anderson, Barton and Wahlberg, 2003, p.507) may mean that even the college has limited control over the end results. It is hoped that any further use of findings would involve negotiation with the researcher.

Case study

In keeping with the researcher’s desire to investigate a ‘real-life’ situation, with its associated issues and problems, case study was adopted as the dominant approach. Case study research means that ‘people and their experiences are closely described and interpreted in unique contexts’ (Simons, 2009. P.96). It was hoped that this method would provide the scope needed to ‘investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident, and in which multiple sources of evidence are used’ (Yin, 1984, p.23).

This method is not without its limitations and critics have suggested it lacks rigor and sophistication in comparison to other methods such as a survey.

Kyburz-Graber suggests this could be the case if

case study documentation is missing; the case study report is superficial and is not related to the data; a theoretical basis for the case study does

not exist or is set not set out; the data collection or interpretation procedure is not triangulated; the chain of evidence is missing or insufficiently stringent; and the theoretical foundation for generalisation is not appropriate (Kyburz-Graber, 2004, p.63).

One of the key strengths of this method, for this particular project, lay in the capacity it has to support exploration of a research topic that has no clearly defined hypothesis underpinning the research which requires testing using figures, rather it was selected for its ability to support the interpretation of events, opinions and perceptions of the young people involved in the study. It allowed for the use of multiple sources of information and technique.

The boundaries of the case study were defined by both ‘intrinsic and instrumental reasons’ (Simons, 2009, p.30). Intrinsic in that the researcher was interested in raising learner voice and learning about the dynamics of disruptive behaviour in one college setting; instrumental in that there was a need to address issues surrounding achievement and retention on level 2 vocational courses in the college.

The case study method looks beyond the surface features of numbers and documents to allow us to ask ‘what motivates learners ?,’ ‘why are young people behaving in this way?’ how do inter-relationships between teachers and learners affect behaviour and what are the features of a positive classroom climate?’ The data gathered was mainly qualitative but the expressed intention to combine the qualitative with quantitative made this approach a very attractive one. The use of quantitative methods supports the

classification of data, making the various stages of the process more transparent and systematic thus increasing the validity and reliability of results. Combination of the two supports rigorous and systematic pursuance of the topic, where checks can be made to identify and explain both consistencies and inconsistencies in findings to see what they reveal.

When conducting case study research, Simons argues that researchers have an ‘obligation not necessarily to generalise but to demonstrate how, and in what ways, our findings may be transferable to other contexts or used by others’. She suggests that this is particularly the case where ‘usability’ can lead to comparison, developed concepts or even a ‘universal understanding or insight arrived at through intense, in-depth particularisation’ (Simons, 2009, p. 164). Here Simons concurs with Bassey in suggesting that there is value in findings being ‘relatable’ rather than ‘generalisable’ (Bassey, 1981, p.85). Relatability is

the extent to which the details are sufficient and appropriate for a teacher working in a similar situation to relate his decision making to that described in the case study. The relatability of a case study is more important than its generalisability (Bassey, 1981, p.85)

Relatability informs Bassey’s notion of ‘fuzzy generalisation’ which ‘arises from studies of singularities and typically claims that it is possible, or likely, or unlikely that what was found in the singularity will be found in similar situations elsewhere: it is a qualitative measure’. Bassey believes that fuzzy

generalisation exists where case study research leads to the construct of a worthwhile and convincing argument' (Bassey, 1999, p.12). It is

the kind of prediction, arising from empirical enquiry, that says that something may happen, but without any measure of probability. It is a qualified generalisation carrying the idea of a possibility, but no certainty (Bassey, 1999, p.46).

This approach encourages other educators to 'enter into discourse', 'to reflect on the issue, to test it out in their own classroom' and 'report on the outcomes' (Bassey, 1999, p.52). When reporting on a case study 'it is expected that the researcher will refer to related research as reported in the literature and show how this study fits into the general picture' (Bassey, 1999, p.73). This can also provide access to 'context-dependent knowledge' for policy makers (Simons, 2009, p.165).

Action research

Informing the main case study approach are elements of action research. Action research in the context of educational research is the

conducting, by or for practitioners themselves, of investigations of a researching nature that produce useful findings that may initially only be relevant to the particular situation and people and subject studied, from which the findings were obtained (Battacharya, Cowan and Weedon, 2000, p.99).

As notions such as commitment, improvement, change, development, values, ethics, responsibility, care and emancipation, are all integral parts of this paradigm, it is apparent that it fits with many of the features of this particular study. McNiff (1988) suggests that action research has the capacity to improve education through both emancipatory and participatory principles, ones that are particularly suited to raising learner voice, especially when it has been suggested that other key features are 'change' and 'collaboration' between the researchers and the researched (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995, p.27).

There are many models of the research process, most of them devised as a series of stages. Cohen and Manion (1994) identify eight stages of action research, which appeared rather too scientific an approach where there was an intention to understand learners' views and perceptions. Johnson identified the following 'stages of activity which must be worked through in carrying out an investigation' (Johnson, 1994, p.172).

1. Establishing the focus of the study
2. Identifying the specific objectives of the study
3. Selecting the research method
4. Arranging research access
5. Developing the research instrument
6. Collecting the data
7. Pulling out of the investigative phase
8. Ordering the data
9. Analysing the data

10. Writing up

11. Enabling dissemination

(Johnson, 1994, p.172).

Whilst it is acknowledged that this is a 'simplification and idealisation of the research process' and that research is 'anything but linear' (Blaxter et al., 1999, p.7), Johnson's stages, with clearly defined small steps, have been used to guide this particular enquiry. Johnson also moves beyond the thesis as being the final stage, through to the dissemination of findings which has always been a significant aspect of this piece of research. This will predominantly take place in staff development sessions within the College. Using the Johnson model the remainder of this chapter describes and explains the methods which were undertaken in the twelve month period of research.

Establishing the focus of the research

This was relatively straightforward as it stemmed from my working with young people in college, from previously held roles as Equal Opportunities and Inclusive Learning Coordinators and as lead trainer for challenging behaviour in the college. Blaxter et al. (1999) see research as being 'powerfully affected by the researchers own motivations and values' (Blaxter et al., 1999, p.15) and this seems to be essential in order to sustain

interest over a period of time, to be able to utilise strengths and prior knowledge and for the research to be useful in the researcher's professional life.

Identifying the specific objectives of the study

Ofsted (2005, p.3) noted that low level minimal disruption acted to 'wear down staff and interrupt lessons,' a view that was echoed in numerous staff development sessions at Percy College. Johnson advises that it is important to 'attempt to define specific objectives in advance' (Johnson, 1994, p. 173) and these expressions of concern from professionals provided the trigger to assist in 'identifying particular objectives', including help with 'choosing the research method and deciding on the forms of access needed' (Johnson, 1994, p.173).

Background reading and the on-going literature review influenced the 'formation of research objectives' (Johnson, 1994, p.173) but references in educational reports, specifically Steer, (2009) reinforced the researchers own findings and highlighted questions of significance to the college in this area.

Selecting the research method

Guided by Johnson (1994, p. 174) it was noted that the selection of research methods was a ‘crucial element’ in the research process. A decision was made to use a variety of complementary research methods which were largely qualitative through interviews with the learners, use of a sorting game and examination of documentary evidence to provide demographic data of significance to the study. This proved useful in defining the sample.

Arranging research access

Through my longstanding presence at the college and the cross-college roles both previously and currently held, I was ‘totally enmeshed in the subject’ of the research and ‘an active participant’ (Blaxter et al., 1999, p11). Permission to undertake the research was sought in writing from the College Principal, which allowed contact to be made with DMs in the College who would assist in sourcing both teachers and groups who could be involved in the study. An introductory letter was sent to the DMs outlining the aims of the research, the groups of learners who were to be involved and the support that would be required. The DMs cascaded the information to CTLs of groups who identified learners using criteria provided by the researcher. The criteria covered the level of programme (Level 2), evidence of a history of personal disruption and a willingness to take part in the research project.

Potential dangers in this approach were considered. There was a possibility that some CTLs in the college would be reluctant to take part in the project because of concerns it would increase their personal workload; that it would disrupt teaching and learning; lead to relationship problems between learners and teachers; that learners would feel embarrassed or slighted when they were identified; or that teachers themselves would be perceived as being weak or not coping if they acknowledge disruptive behaviour in their classes. There was also the notion that if parents were contacted it could lead to relationship problems between parent and learner.

These potential barriers were addressed by following letters up with informal chats with CTLs, explaining exactly what was involved. Once learners were identified, they had an opportunity to say whether or not they were willing to be approached, and if they agreed they were provided with explanatory letters to parents (the majority of learners were under the age of eighteen and therefore parental consent was required) which included a permission slip for parents to complete and return. The letter to parents was worded carefully so as not to imply that specific incidents of disruptive behaviour had occurred or were being discussed.

Developing the research instrument

The sample was ‘purposive’; which ‘involves the researcher in deliberately choosing who to include in the study on the basis that those selected can

provide the necessary data' (Parahoo, 1997, p.156). The sample was comprised of twenty young people, all classified as 'white British' on application forms. They were learners on level two vocational programmes of study from six of the ten main curriculum areas in the college namely: Horticulture, Agriculture, Early Years and Child Care, Health and Social Care, Travel and Tourism and Construction. A broad range of curriculum areas as opposed to a single one was used in an attempt to address gendered or vocationally biased responses. This bias could stem from subcultures influenced by the teacher and his/her professional background or behaviour patterns in certain industries. Those areas not represented were either not running level 2 courses or learners did not match the criteria for participation. The average age of respondents was sixteen and the sample included fourteen females and six males. The stark gender differences emerged from the gendered nature of the programme areas willing or able to participate in the research project where three of the five Divisions comprised mainly of females and as a natural entity through tutor identification of learners. Three main research instruments were used during this work.

Method 1: Hierarchical focused interviews

A hierarchical focused interview was developed following an initial pilot with 2 learners and used as the key research method for gathering qualitative data. A pilot study revealed significant errors in both the wording and the style adopted by the researcher which needed to be addressed and the

findings of the pilot were discounted. The basic aim is to 'elicit as spontaneous a coverage of as much of the interview agenda as possible' (Tomlinson, 1989, p.169). This is carried out by posing an 'initial access question and non-directively facilitating the interviewee's elaboration and expansion of the view point they started to express' (Carr and Kemmis, 1986, p.165) through both verbal and non-verbal strategies. This method was selected for its capacity to combine the key advantages of un-structured and structured interviews, the coverage of the researcher's agenda in the former and the minimal framing and interviewer input in the latter, reducing researcher bias. The first semi-structured questions were taken from the initial research focus respectful of Tomlinson's guidance to 'identify those aspects and elements of your topic domain whose construal you wish to elicit from interviewees' (Tomlinson, 1989, p.162). A 'question hierarchy' (Tomlinson, 1989, p.162) was then produced as a guide.

This method supported the researcher's desire to raise learner voice. It demonstrated respect for each learner, allowing him/her to examine areas of interest to them. Disadvantages of this method are that it is extremely time consuming and the qualitative nature of it cannot guarantee complete reliability and validity. However reliability where the reality as it is for the young people was the desired outcome here, rather than validity. Interviews were analysed using thematic analysis.

Method 2: Card sorting exercise

The second method employed was that of a card sorting exercise which ‘involves the sorting of a series of cards, each labeled with a piece of content or functionality into groups which make sense to the users or participants’ (Mauer and Warfel, 2002, p.2). The method was initially used in a quantitative way, in that once instructions had been provided, the researcher allowed the respondent to work independently. This method was selected because it is a simple method which can be amended and simplified to match the level of ability of those involved and the degree of complexity of the information required. Part of its appeal lay in the fact that the findings can be presented in a spreadsheet which can support the discovery of basic patterns, although this should not overlook the individual participant’s response. The categorisation stage tended to be more qualitative. Instead of looking for singular quantitative answers; it was used to support development of qualitative explanations. The categories can also provide structure to the overall analysis and presentation of findings.

One of the main reasons for selecting and using card sorting was for its user-centred approach. Learners on level 2 programmes frequently state their dislike of being inactive in class and the physical activity embraced these preferences. Taking the effort to involve learners in a practical way seemed to demonstrate respect for what they could do and tell you; doing the card sort was actually as important as the end result.

Giving learners some control over this aspect of the interview could act to limit researcher bias but it has to be acknowledged that there are flaws with this method which necessitate a reflexive approach. Too complex an activity could leave learners confused and reluctant to ask for help, affecting reliability and validity; findings are still based upon the subjectivity learners apply to their decision making and qualitative analysis by the researcher can further compound this element.

Learners were asked to sort possible factors which could lead them to disrupt in class into categories, according to their relevance to each person and their propensity to misbehave. A wide range of groups of learners on level 2 courses were used to contribute ideas for factors for each card and the pilot study of the research method comprised 2 learners sorting the cards using instructions provided by the researcher. This exercise led to revisions in approach, the removal of cards which led to duplication and the addition of cards with new factors with the resultant number being 32. The pilot also revealed the need to allow learners to introduce an initial sorting stage, that of discarding any cards which they felt were of no relevance to themselves and their reasons for disrupting in class. They were then required to sort the remaining cards into no more than four categories ranging from those most likely to those least likely to contribute to disruption.

The cards covered a wide range of reasons why individuals might disrupt in class. Each 'reason', such as 'boredom', 'lack of interest' or 'worried about

a problem at home' was placed on a numbered card and a closed sorting exercise, one that can be used 'for testing information categories and labels that emerge from an open sort exercise' (Maura and Warfel, 2004, p.2), was used to identify quantitative characteristics about the propensity of factors to lead to disruptive behaviour. It was appreciated that the card sort may capture surface-data only, but it was hoped it would compliment the results from the interviews. Once the cards were sorted they could then be categorised and used to explore and theorise the findings. It was hoped that the card sorting exercise would, as well as fulfilling basic requirements for tapping into learner meanings, introduce a level of learner-centredness to the identification of causes of disruption. As well as being inexpensive, this method encourages learner activity in a relatively straight forward and simple exercise to follow, it is easy to replicate and easy to manage as well as use.

Method 3: Documentary evidence

Organisations frequently gather personal information about the individuals they work with and the college is no exception to this, holding numerous personal documents. Brewer (2000) suggests that 'all of these documents and written records provide data for the aspiring researcher' (Brewer, 2000, p.72). 'Contemporary secondary data' which is data 'compiled as a document at the time and containing a record of data as it happens' (Brewer,

2000, p.72) was drawn from the college system to assist in locating demographic data of relevance to the participants and the study. This data covered information pertaining to home address, receipt of Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA), Additional Learner Support records, enrolments on courses and achievement. Postcodes were entered into an on-line property evaluation system to obtain further information related to the family's financial status. Flaws in this latter approach were acknowledged, especially when this method did not reveal whether or not the learner's parents were the owners of the property or tenants. However it was felt that this system would provide some intimation of financial background. Permission to use college data had been sought from the College Principal and the learner. There were several advantages to be gained from using this data in that it already existed which in turn meant that it was inexpensive to use, the documents had been 'compiled under natural conditions as a routine part of the operation of society, so they were not contrived' (Brewer, 2000, p.73) and it was possible to check the authenticity of the documents against the details provided by the learner him/herself. Whilst acknowledging the benefits of using this data it was also acknowledged that inaccuracies in it could exist.

Collecting the data

Following the receipt of parental permission, interviews were set up with twenty young people, with anonymity and confidentiality assured. At the onset of each meeting, the research was explained and the opportunity to ask

any questions or withdraw from the research was provided. The session commenced with the sorting exercise, something which enabled the learner to focus on the activity and relax, rather than think about being interviewed. The interviews were then conducted and taped and later transcribed. Data held by the college and the results of the card sorting exercise were input into two separate spreadsheet templates to facilitate quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data. The spreadsheet analysis supported identification of patterns which indicate areas of similarity and difference. Spreadsheet analysis also has the capacity to identify differences associated with gender, vocational area and learning ability. The interviews took place over a twelve month period. The findings from all three methods of data collection were then analysed through identification of themes and patterns that emerged from the data rather than being imposed in the data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The researcher must be 'theoretically sensitive' continually seeking new insights into the data itself (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p.104). The constant comparative method of interpretation is 'concerned with generating and plausibly suggesting many categories, properties, and hypotheses about general problems (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p.104). Given the researcher's position and familiarity with the learners there is always a danger that themes could be inadvertently selected or prioritised. This will be addressed by submitting a valid, reasoned, argument for the theme, and drawing on and referring back to previous literature.

Pulling out of the investigative period

The practical research stage was undoubtedly the most interesting and rewarding and learners appeared to enjoy having a voice and taking part in the research project. Extracts from learner voices, based upon their perceptions and learning experiences will be used to support the validity of findings and conclusions. Atkins believes that by quoting ‘the young people verbatim’ we can be seen to ‘attempt to demonstrate value and respect for the young people’ and ‘enable their voices to be heard as loudly as possible’ (Atkins, 2009, p.9). By doing this she suggests we can develop a ‘dialogic process’ with young people addressing some of the problems related to ‘power’, ‘exclusion’ and ‘discrimination....lower level vocational learners’ experience, where development of ‘a more collaborative and empowering relationship can be engendered’ (Atkins, 2009, p.47). Atkins (2009) demonstrated that learner voice has a credible place in educational research, something which lies in its capacity to reflect ‘the many layered complexities of their (student) transitions’ (Atkins, 2009, p.109).

Whilst the research was small scale, it was also time-consuming and required a significant degree of flexibility on the researcher’s part, especially when learner absenteeism meant returning several times to undertake the interviews or attendance at teaching sessions took priority. There was also the need to liaise carefully with teachers on different sites to support access to individuals and check room availability. The early decision to focus on

twenty learners ensured that interim research targets were met and adhered to.

Ordering the data

All the interviews were recorded, transcribed and numbered and kept for subsequent analysis and held on file even after the research was complete so that the researcher was 'prepared to be accountable for the investigations' (Johnson, 1994, p.179). Data from the sorting exercise and college based systems were held securely in readiness for analysis.

Analysing the data

The data collected from the interviews forms much of the substance of Chapter Four to help evaluate the learners' specific perspectives in order to make generalisations for disrupting in class in this case study.

The tension between the study of the unique and the need to generalise is necessary to reveal both the unique and the universal and the unity of that understanding (Simons, 1996, p.238).

The findings from the research are compared to findings from the background reading and those from official reports such as Ofsted, to avoid the weakness noted by Johnson that in many dissertations 'little use is made of the data collected in the eventual discussion of the thesis topic' (Johnson,

1994, p.179). The college-held data and the results of the card sorting activities were analysed using a discursive, as well as statistical and tabular approach. The interviews were analysed and the data presented as discussion which is supported through use of quotations from learners. The findings have been used to make recommendations which can be found in Chapter Five.

Writing up

The aim of this stage was that ‘the overall conclusions or ‘message’ of the research be summarised in an assimilable and memorable form’ (Johnson, 1994, p.179) and to communicate ‘the researcher’s empirical experience’ to a wider audience (Johnson, 1994, p.180). Whilst sharing the overall ‘research experience’ with readers was important, there was also an overriding desire to prioritise the learner’s voice over that of the researcher. For this reason the more formal and traditional stance of writing in the third person was adopted.

Enabling dissemination

The topic of disruptive behaviour was one that had been identified as being of relevance to teachers working in this college and the findings and particularly the recommendations will be used in staff development sessions and training events to raise teachers’ awareness of learner perceptions of

disruptive behaviour and to consider ways in which this information can be used to address the issue. This piece of research may not give set answers to questions surrounding disruption in classrooms but it is anticipated that it will contribute to our examination of this complex social issue. Findings will be used to develop teacher awareness of the issue, examine teaching practices in the light of the findings, and consider how the learning experience can be enriched for all learners.

Chapter Four: Findings

Introduction

The first part of this chapter begins with the findings of the hierarchical focused interviews which were developed through thematic analysis. The interviews were designed to elicit, through attention to learner voice, the factors young people believed contributed to their disruption in class. The objective for collecting this qualitative data was to ascertain from the learners' perspective why disruption in class occurs. The themes which have emerged are presented in dialogue using wherever possible Ogilvy's (1994) categories of individual, home or community and institution to provide structure to this first section. Issues that are generic rather than specific, such as social class and gender, have been interwoven throughout the different areas.

The second part of the chapter presents the findings from the card sorting exercise. The objectives for collecting these data were to examine quantitative characteristics about the propensity of factors to lead to disruptive behaviour. These will be used to support a fuller exploration of the findings for this particular case study.

The third part presents the findings from the documentary evidence drawn from established records in the college. The objective for collecting this data was to provide demographic data pertaining to social class, vocational area, gender and age.

Findings from the hierarchical focused interviews

Learner definitions of disruptive behaviour

Learners were not articulate when asked to define disruptive behaviour in class. Definitions provided tended to focus on the nature of disruption rather than a definition.

Learners made repeated references to failure to complete work. In doing this we can see that learners associate disruption with interruptions to work and learning.

Learner	Comments
Linda	‘Not getting on with your work and not concentrating, just messing about ...’
Jean	‘Not getting on with their work.’
David	‘You just sit there, you just don’t do it.’
Audrey	‘Mucking around – not taking work seriously.’
Judith	‘Shouting out and just refusing to do work and messing around basically.’

Learner perceptions of the types of disruptive behaviour

In addition to the types of disruptive behaviour most likely to occur in colleges of further education namely: 'childish behaviour such as 'winding up' or name calling; aggressive behaviour such as fights, verbal abuse and physical violence; behaviour that inhibits learning such as non-co-operation, poor attendance and non-completion or submission of work; relationship problems such as disrespect, challenging authority or passive behaviour such as non-compliance; environmentally challenging behaviour such as graffiti, litter or vehicle misuse; and anti-social/criminal behaviour such as theft, drug use and dealing and group or gang behaviour' (Mitchell et al., 1998, pp. 33-34); the following new types emerged:

Learner references to use of 'just talking' to disrupt

Twelve (60%) of learners (8 female and 4 male) repeatedly referred to 'just talking' as an example of the disruptive behaviour they participated in.

Learner	Comments
Linda	'Won't shut up- just talking.'
Jean	'Just talking.'
Philip	'Chatting to other people.' 'Talking to them and them talking to me.'

Ryan	‘Basically talk and talk and talk and talk until it annoys the teacher.’
Allan	‘Just mainly talking.’ ‘I wouldn’t say I misbehave, like I said if you’re talking you know it’s not as if I am shouting.’
Jo	‘If you are sat next to friends you tend to talk to them more than do your work.’
Betty	‘Talk when I wasn’t supposed to.’
Tom	‘Just chatting away.....talking to your friends.’
Natalie	‘I tend to chat when I am bored and I don’t understand what is going on.’
Rachael	‘Just like talk a lot with my friends.’
Christine	‘Gone into conversations with others while the teachers are trying to talk.’
Heather	‘Yes I talk.’

Learner references to use of physical space to disrupt

Nine learners (45%) made reference to use of physical environments or spaces in classrooms to disrupt.

Learner	Comments
Linda	‘Not sitting in the right place all of the time...moving around the classroom.’
Jean	‘Running around the classroom all of the time.’

David	'I'll just spin around on my chair or walk outside.'
Philip	'Sometimes walk and roll around.' <i>Interviewer prompt: what on?</i> 'the computer chairs.'
Audrey	'Lock the door' 'switch the light off and hide' 'get in the bed.'
Stephen	'Throwing stuff around classes' hammering or hammering something'

Learner references to use of psychological distancing to disrupt

One learner made specific references to the use of her capacity to distance herself psychologically from the session to disrupt, with others making references to day dreaming as a means of challenging tutor authority. Seven learners (35%) made references to difficulty in concentrating.

Learner	Comments
Emma	'Sometimes I wander off...right in your mind, distancing yourself.'
David	'You don't pay attention.'
Ryan	'I tend to wander off the topic.'
Tom	'You start drifting away from it.'
Natalie	'Not concentrate on their work.'

Learner references to use of technological behaviour to disrupt

Learners made repeated references to use of various types of technology such as mobile phones, computers, the internet to access games, music, or social websites. By far the most prevalent was use of the mobile phone with nine learners (45%) spontaneously including this as an example of disruptive behaviour; of these learners one was male.

Learner	Comments
Linda	‘Going on other web sites.’
Jean	‘Use of my phone.’
Philip	‘Stuff to do with the computers.’
Ryan	‘Messing around with the computers.’
Helen	‘Messing around on the internet.’
Emma	‘Listening to music.’
Jo	‘Going on your mobile phone and just trying to get attention.’
Betty	‘Sitting there on your phone.’
Judith	‘Using your mobile phone.’

Individual factors

Learning difficulties

Seven (35%) learners (4 female/3 male) have a defined, recognised, learning difficulty. Learners in this category may or may not have formal support for this depending upon learner choice, the nature of the difficulty, the nature of the agreed support and the level of need. This provision could be 1:1 in or away from the teaching session or it could be use of a generic teaching assistant supporting several learners in the group or an individual. Throughout the study the presence of one classroom teaching assistant was evidenced by learner comments in two groups, the Agriculture/Horticulture Information Technology sessions and in Travel and Tourism English classes.

Ten learners (50%) (7 female and 3 male) had no diagnosed learning difficulty and the remaining 3 learners (15%) (all female) felt that they had an undiagnosed learning difficulty. Two of those who felt that they had an undiagnosed learning difficulty were from the Travel and Tourism Division and one from the Health and Social Care Division. Those formally diagnosed were from the Travel and Tourism (2), Health and Social Care (1), Horticulture and Agriculture (3) and Early Years (1) Divisions. None of the learners from Construction had been formally diagnosed or personally felt they had a learning difficulty.

Learner views on the association between learning difficulties and disruption in class

Learners were able to articulate the association between learning difficulties and disruptive behaviour acknowledging that whilst learning difficulties could impact on behaviour, poor behaviour could in turn lead to struggles with learning. Learners often felt that they had no control over their disability, how it was assessed and what support they could receive.

The systems in place to both identify and assess specific need seemed to aggravate the issues learners faced when the systems failed to respond to individual need. Learners expressed concerns about loss of face in class.

Learner	Comments
Linda	<p>‘I have difficulty understanding things more than others and sometimes you need it explaining to you more than once ... you get so mad and frustrated that you just give up on listening. You give up on concentrating.’</p> <p>‘It (disruptive behaviour) makes me struggle more with my work... I find it harder to understand.’</p> <p>‘I can take a dyslexia test if I want but I don’t want that, I don’t think I have that at all because my sister has it and I know what it is like, I don’t think I have dyslexia at all.’</p> <p>‘We had helper teachers and like in English they would always just help me a lot more.’</p>
Joanne	<p>‘It is like I get distracted very easily and I distract others.’</p> <p>When asked if she thought she might have a learning difficulty Joanne said ‘I have thought about it a bit really, Mum thought I might have ADHD because I can’t keep still...I am always hyperactive’ and ‘no matter how many times I read something through I never get it.’</p>

Lorraine	<p>‘College have sent me for a dyslexia test, I always knew I struggled and that I was the last one to finish reading...if I don’t understand a topic, I get frustrated if it is not explained and I am not helped.’</p> <p>‘I would ask for help and then I would have to wait and then I would get bored, start messing around because it is more fun than waiting.’</p> <p>She was also able to see that her disruption aggravates the problem ‘You can’t take things in.’</p>
Jean	<p>‘I can’t read properly, I hate reading, I am alright when I am reading in my head, reading from a book or something but it is when I am reading out loud, I stutter, I can’t read the words properly and I can’t write; my writings not good. I can’t spell and I wondered if I was dyslexic or something.’</p> <p>‘If I am trying to read or something and I can’t do it, I’m just like, I give up, I’ll think well that’s fine if I can’t read it I’ll give up and that’s when I start looking around the class.....’</p>
David	<p>In reference to the generic classroom support available in IT lessons David states ‘A will tell me the answer and then just explain how you have done it so then I know how to do it.’</p>
Philip	<p>‘I don’t want 1:1 because it will make me feel like that I’m dumber, like thicker than all of the rest.’</p> <p>It just gets too much for me....I’ve asked for more handouts but teachers say I must copy it from the whiteboard so that I understand it.’</p>
Ryan	<p>‘I struggle to concentrate for long periods of time’ ‘with the noise in class I can’t stay focused.’</p> <p>‘I lose concentration on what I am doing and then I can’t get back onto it again.’</p> <p>‘I have asked for help before.....I know quite a lot of the answers but it’s just when people are messing around I just lose it cause I always ask A to come down and write what I say down on paper because I’ll just forget it.’</p>

Audrey	<p>‘I always thought I had a problem because I can’t concentrate when it is quiet...I will misbehave if I need help and I am not getting it.’</p> <p>Audrey feels she needs support in some subjects than others ‘subjects like English or Maths I need help on them.’</p>
Natalie	<p>‘I find it difficult to follow instructions and I have got poor organisational skills...I had a statement at primary and secondary school and I had help... I had help here, it has been 1:1 but not when people are about which I prefer because I don’t like people knowing.’</p> <p>‘I don’t misbehave, I just talk and mess about, sometimes if they go on about text and that I think that I need some help and the tutor might be busy with a different pupil and so...’</p>
Rachael	<p>‘They’ve told me to do something (teachers) and I’ve come to do it and I don’t know how.’</p>

Peer support and relationships

Seventy five percent of learners were aware of the negative impact disruption has on others. Learners were aware that disruption annoys their peers, stops learning and can lead to conflict. Learners were also aware of the capacity friends and relationships with peers can have to affect their behaviour. Learners faced both negative and positive influences from others and influenced others in negative and positive ways.

Gender differences were noticeable with physical violence being a prominent feature in male relationships and emotional issues more prevalent in female relationships. Linda, Joanne and Lorraine made reference to having been bullied at school, and Linda was currently experiencing

problems with another group of learners which restricted her movement around the college. Helen, Jo, Judith and Betty reflected on relationship problems in their current groups. Male respondents gave examples of recent incidents involving physical violence.

Acknowledgement and discussion of the impact they can have on peers also highlights the conscious, planned, nature of the disruption. Nineteen learners (95%) referred to disruptive behaviour as a conscious act, with four (25%) alluding to a group approach. This latter implies elements of power and control between learners. The comments made by learners would suggest that relationships with their peers are very important to them and both negative and positive relationships are influential in determining behaviour in class. Positive peer relationships with the suggestion of support, can act as a boost to the self-esteem of individual learners.

Talking, identified earlier as a form of disruptive behaviour, also appears to be an instrumental form of emotional support, especially when references to this are coupled with those made to relationship problems at home. Learners made reference to the use of humour in class, a feature also linked to attention seeking and self-esteem needs. The comments learners made highlighted the importance of peer relationships to this age group and the capacity they have to influence behaviour.

Learner	Comments
Linda	<p>‘It (poor behaviour) can distract them from doing their work, get them to mess around.’</p> <p>‘I love them to bits but like the other day they left early and I was sat with some others and I got loads more work done.’ ‘I fell out with some of the other learners....that’s why I wouldn’t go for my dyslexia test...I don’t want to go up there (different college site) and bump into them’.</p>
Joanne	<p>‘Some people tell you to shut up...if you don’t like being told to shut up by another pupil that causes conflict.’</p> <p>‘Me and her like we just get off on each other’s vibes....we are not doing it to be disruptive, it is just another relationship, we are doing it between ourselves.’</p> <p>‘I just feel that it is a sign of my confidence to get my point across in a silly way.’</p>
Jean	<p>‘You will be distracting them so it is stopping them from getting on with learning or getting on with their work. They will be getting a bit annoyed as well.’</p> <p>‘They will come over to you and distract you and because I am easily distracted I want to be involved all of the time.’</p> <p>‘I have a best mate she is up at (different college site)...she is like my mum she tells me what to do...she texts me and says “make sure you keep that tenner for college”.’</p>
David	<p>‘I pulled them down to my level and I realised this myself...I get on with every one of them, I have had a bit of up and down with one guy, A he’s called’.</p> <p>‘Because I’m the biggest I’ve never felt threatened, it’s just like I’ll walk over to them and it’s sorted, friend for life. I know a lot of people I’ve probably got ten to fifteen close mates that I go around town with. But then I’ve got mates I can just say hi to...I’ve never been threatened apart from them mechanics down there, they are walking around as if there was a spanners war or something, you know walking round like they were big lads. That annoys me so I just give them a bit of mouth. Like yesterday something kicked off...the mechanics were squaring up to N..... he couldn’t throw a punch if he wanted to and I don’t normally want to jump in but basically I put this guy on his arse.’</p>

Philip	‘We all get on well together and have a bit of a mess about at break.’
Ryan	‘It stops them concentrating. Like sometimes a couple will come up behind us and smack us on the back of the head while we are working and like it stops us concentrating because we’re focusing on our work and then you’re constantly looking back to see if they are going to do it again.’ ‘I brought this guy down from another site and A totally lost it and started going on at everyone threatening them....I ended up getting thumped in the earand I got the blame which I didn’t think was right. I got hit and I didn’t hit back so I’m a better person but they were all laughing...’
Audrey	‘If I have a poor relationship I would be quiet in class and get on with my work, if there is a good relationship I will misbehave more.’
Helen	‘I used to go to school with one personwe used to clash when we were younger and then we started to clash here for the first couple of weeks but she is not here anymore.’
Stephen	‘Me and J we just mess around between us two...throw a bit of dust at each other...J and me we are good mates...we just have a little joke now and again.’
Tom	‘They (peers) will have less of an education and stop learning.’ ‘Obviously you messing around draws attention onto you...I’d crack the odd joke.’
Emma	‘It probably puts them (peers) off learning...sometimes we mess around....you encourage them and they encourage you.’
Jo	‘It probably puts them off doing their work...there has been a bit of a fall out in our group and just not everyone talks to everyone now so you just talk to your friend next to you. You do your work and you are always thinking about it’. ‘My best friend encourages me to miss college if she wants to hang out rather than go to college.’
Judith	‘Things they do make me do it (misbehave).’

Natalie	<p>‘It will have an effect on other people because they won’t do their work, so I am distracting them from their work.’</p> <p>‘My friends want me to do well.’</p>
Rachael	<p>‘They’ll (peers) start messing around too, because they’ll lose concentration the same as me.’</p> <p>‘If I’ve had an argument with friends I’ll go quieter...I normally go quieter and get on with my work if I fall out with friends, but if we’re friends we’re more likely to talk and get shouted at a lot more.’</p>
Heather	<p>‘Not being able to get on with their work...if they are messing around I’d mess around too’.</p> <p>‘I try and wind people up being giddy.’</p>

Home and Community factors

Relationships with family

Despite considerable evidence of relationship problems the majority of learners commented upon the support parents gave them to attend college. This support could be emotional, financial, practical, or through enforcement of rules which manage the young person’s behaviour. There was evidence of pressure from some parents to get a job and learners felt that at times there was little empathy for the need to undertake college studies in the home.

Learner	Comments
Linda	<p>‘My mum gives me £20.00 per week.’</p> <p>‘My step-father is always on at me to get a job.’</p> <p>‘If I got a job at weekends as well I would be in college three days, Wednesday and Thursday are my study days so I just wouldn’t have any time to myself.’</p>

Joanne	‘I got a letter the other week from college saying ‘your daughter is doing well, making good progress’ and mum gave me a tenner for it.’ ‘My mum is proud; she tells everyone at work and her mates that I come to college.’
Jean	‘My EMA hasn’t been coming through so I get it from my mum.’
Allan	‘They advised me to go to college.’
Jo	‘Demands to help in the home are stressful.’
Judith	‘Well my dad wants me to stay in college.’
Natalie	‘My mum puts a bit of pressure on me saying “you need to do well to get a good job”.’
Rachael	‘My mum does say you need to do this or need to do well on this and stuff like that, but she is only looking out for me and wanting the best for me.’
Heather	‘I think everyone outside college supports me to come.’

Family status

Seven learners (35%) were part of a single-parent family. Three were part of re-constituted families and the remaining ten were part of a nuclear family. Whilst the majority of those in single-parent households enjoyed very supportive relationships with the parent, two of the three in step families did not enjoy positive relationships. One learner talked about the limited housing options she had whilst being under eighteen and dependent upon her family for income. Two learners talked of having been asked to leave the family home and currently reside with grandparents, evidencing wider family involvement. When asked if relationship problems at home affected their behaviour in the class some learners professed to having developed

strategies for coping which limited the impact family relationships could have on behaviour in class. Others said they recalled arguments throughout the day, talked more with friends or acknowledged that this did affect behaviour in the classroom.

There were gender differences in family status and relationships with families. All of the males interviewed said they enjoyed good relationship with their families irrespective of family type. None of the males were in reconstituted families. One male was adopted.

Learner	Comments
Linda	'I don't get on with my family; at home I don't get on with the people that live there....I feel like an outsider in my own home, that's why I never go home and if I do, I just go to my own room, or go on the computer or something.' I don't get on with them at all, I don't get on with my stepdad the most; he is an idiot. I was thinking about getting in with Foundation Housing. They are horrible and mum says "Oh you won't cope on your own" but I am going to have to'.
Lorraine	'Mum and I have a bit of a problem, I moved out from home and then came back; I don't have a relationship with dad.'
Jean	'I've been chucked out from home and I am at my Nana's now, My mum has been with her boyfriend for years now and I have never got on with him properly, I get on with him now and again but I don't like the way he is, it's like we clash....we have always been like that, he always wants to pick on me for nothing really, but my mum she is getting more like him and she is really annoying me so we fell out. She told me to stay away for a couple of days but it is weeks now'.

Audrey	'If your parents stress you in the morning you feel stressed for the rest of the day, you may be reluctant to go home and face the issues...sometimes it just pops into your head and you dread going home.'
Betty	'I do have relationship problems at home but you just put them behind you and sort it out when you get home.'
Rachael	'Like if you have had an argument at home with your brother, or your dad, or your mum you'll be a bit upset about it and then you'll come to college and tell your mates or whatever.. it makes me talk more and that's when I get into trouble.'
Christine	'It's my eldest brother...we have arguments and I lose it when I come to college and stuff....if we have an argument the night before or in the morning it's stuck in my head about the argument we have had; so when I come to college it's still in my mind and I can't concentrate.'

Family responsibilities

As well as having specific household duties and responsibilities, two of the learners were carers. One learner cares for her daughter, and until recently, her grandmother; the latter involved tasks such as visiting, shopping, preparing meals and cleaning. Her grandmother has recently been taken into care. She is also sole carer for her daughter. She was given support in this area from her mother but did indicate that these responsibilities were a source of arguments between them. It was felt that her status as a learner lent itself to undertaking these caring roles, whilst her mother's employment reduced her capacity to fulfill these roles. A second respondent had significant child care responsibilities which involved collecting her sister

from school, preparing meals and child-minding. Both learners expressed some resentment at the expectations placed upon them.

Learner	Comments
Linda	'Me and my mum had a big argument this week because I usually pick up my little sister from school, but I planned to go to my boyfriend's house and I refused to do it. She went absolutely mental about it..... I went to pick her up on Thursday and she had got someone else to do it.' 'She expects me to clean the house from top to toe because I am there at home, even though I still have my work to do; she expects me to walk the dog but I need to get on with my work as well.'
Helen	'My mum expects me to go and see my grandma a lot more...she is always saying "will you go and see her?" I spend a lot of time with her but it is hard for me to get there and I have no money. I want to spend every day with my grandma but I can't now.'

Part-time employment and income

Six learners (30%) held part-time jobs which varied significantly in terms of hours worked. One learner was engaged in seasonal farm work. Nine learners were actively seeking part-time jobs. Three (15%) learners were currently working in the family home in return for payment from parents. The amount of money obtained for this varied from £10-20 per week. This work involved child care and household tasks. All the learners seeking employment were facing pressures from parents to do so. Money issues were cited as one of the main reasons for relationship problems at home.

One learner was a single parent receiving state benefits. This learner expressed anxieties about what she could earn before benefits would be withdrawn. She explained that she struggled to manage on the income she had, with feeding and clothing her child being her main concerns. Two learners talked of weekly contributions of £10.00 from fathers who had left the family home. One learner talked about the debt she had incurred with loans from her mother. Three learners had no financial worries.

Many of the learners talk of exploitation and poor levels of respect they are afforded in their employment positions. Only two learners make an association between money worries and behaviour in class. Whilst learners talked at length about part-time work only two made an association between this and poor behaviour in class.

Leisure pursuits

Fourteen respondents (70%) discussed leisure pursuits involving alcohol consumption implying that alcohol played a significant part in their leisure lives. Ten learners (50%) referred to drug use in the past tense. Previous use of a variety of different drugs such as cannabis, LSD, pills such as ecstasy and cocaine were revealed. The levels of this previous usage varied but one learner talked of significant mental health problems arising from drug misuse, one referred to receipt of alcohol counselling whilst still at school, and one learner referred to the need for money to pay for alcohol. Drinking

was repeatedly described as ‘weekend-based’ to reduce any impact on college and to avoid feeling ill at college. This implies that the level of consumption was high enough to have a negative impact on health and well-being. Reference to other leisure pursuits was negligible with one learner referring to playing pool and another mentioning Face-book.

Learner	Comments
Linda	‘I smoked weed, pills, ‘coke’ everything, well not everything...I drank as well, every weekend.’ I was just a paranoid wreck.... I wouldn’t dare do it now; the thought of it makes me sick.’ ‘I had to go to the doctors and everything, my mum knew at the time.’
Joanne	‘Yes, I went through all of them...I went through a very bad patch.... cocaine, LSD, mushrooms things like that...all I do now is just drink.’
Lorraine	‘I smoked weed, drank every weekend, it doesn’t affect me. I had an alcohol counsellor at school; it was all because of my mum; if I had an argument with her I would get a bottle and have a drink by myself. Mum doesn’t let me smoke but she can’t stop me drinking.’
Jean	I’ve used weed, I have tried ‘coke’, cocaine, but I am not ever doing it again, I don’t see the point in it’. ‘Since I have been at college I have not really drunk at all.’
Ryan	‘I only drink on a Saturday so that I’ve got a day to recover.’
Allan	‘I like few beers at the weekend.’
Audrey	‘I did drugs at school but I don’t use them now...if you know you are going out that night and you will be drinking that leads to misbehaviour in class because you are excited, you get giddy and start messing around.’
Helen	‘I used drugs when I was younger, I don’t now....I like to have a drink and my friends do influence that at home (single parent)....but not during the week just at weekends,

	you don't want to drink on a Sunday and feel ill.'
Stephen	'I smoke and drink alcohol on a weekend.'
Emma	'I've used a bit of cannabis before.'
Jo	Reflecting on alcohol use and coming to college Jo said 'you just want to die on the table.'
Betty	'Only at weekends and not when I am at college.'
Judith	'At weekends, that's it...Fridays and Saturdays that's it.'
Natalie	'I never drink the night before I come to college, not on a college night, just at weekends.'
Rachael	'I never drink on a week night or on a Sunday night when I've got college, not when you know you are going to feel rough.'
Christine	'Only on a Saturday.'

Environment

Learners' comments reflected their understanding of the impact environment could have on them and their learning. Learners from rural areas had to contend with travelling long distances and perceived the time they spent travelling as 'wasted time'; time when they could be doing other things. Travel also acted as a drain on their finances. Some learners avoided this by staying with boyfriends or friends who lived nearer to the college. Financial issues for learners living in rural areas were further compounded by the lack of employment in the vicinity and the impact the economic recession had had on rural families.

In contrast some learners were prepared to travel to what they perceived to be a more affluent area. Joanne talked of attending this college to escape the drugs culture which pervaded her home town, and with this, her previous drug related experiences.

Learner	Comments
Linda	<p>'I've been living with my boyfriend five days this week'.</p> <p>'I'm always skint. I don't have a job, I've been trying but there is nowhere at the moment'.</p> <p>'Mum gives me twenty pounds a week but I never have any spare, its £17.00 per week on the buses.</p>
Joanne	<p>'I come from K., I mean K... do you know it?.....they are scratters there...'. 'You have to be a different sort of person to fit into K..., over here you can be yourself. In K.... you misbehave and cause some trouble...it's a bad road to go down'. 'I've been looking for one (job), a Saturday job or a part-time one but I am not getting anywhere with it. I filled in an application for a card factory yesterday'.</p>
Lorraine	<p>'I don't live near college so I don't have many friends.... I live seventeen miles away'.</p>
Philip	<p>'If I know there is stuff going on at home that's fun, I don't want to be here I want to be going home...it messes about with my personal life at home...I miss it all, there's jobs at home that I miss doing'.</p> <p>'I go down round the auctions and looking at the sales.... I'm a farmer, I like to go and see what stuff's doing....I really miss it (home).</p> <p>'It wasn't too bad when I was at school because it only took about five minutes to get home, but now I am coming here it is about an hour and I'm missing loads of stuff I could be doing on the farm'.</p>

Experiences

Nine learners (45%) made references to negative school experiences where disruptive behaviour was an accepted part of the school day. The behaviour they described was of a much more physical nature and had often led to expulsion or poor achievement. Many spoke of coming to college for a second chance or in an attempt to re-dress the damage their previous educational or leisure experiences had incurred. Several felt that they had let their parents down and that attending college was an opportunity to address this.

Learner	Comments
Linda	'It was a rubbish school, I hated it.'
Joanne	'I didn't get the GCSEs that I wanted, I was pretty good and do you know I felt ashamed, you know when I was looking at my mum.' 'At secondary school additional support got called 'oasis' and you got called away into another room with teachers and they would just sit you down. Because I wasn't allowed in any of my lessons I used to go in there all of the time, it got quite boring actually because you had to sit in there quietly and just do your work. If you didn't you had to go and see the headmaster.' 'I was evil to everyone...when I needed friends I lost them because of my attitude and my bad behaviour...me and my mum used to fight and I got kicked out.....I went through a very bad patch.'
Lorraine	'I was always in trouble at school for it (bad behaviour in class).....I don't have many friends here, at school I had lots, so here I behave better...I did get into a lot of trouble, not bad enough to get thrown out.'

Jean	‘At school there were some teachers I liked and some I didn’t, when I didn’t like the teachers I messed around’.
David	<p>‘I did twelve years at private school.... for a lot of money I came out with five Ds and two Es so nothing...yes, that’s what came out of it... a shit job for life’. ‘I got tested for ADHD at one stage.’</p> <p>‘I mainly did it for my parents (coming to college); my sister came out of school at sixteen, went to two colleges and dropped out, she’s twenty now and still doing bugger all...she was drinking at twelve, doing drugs at thirteen, she’s still doing it now....I said to her I’m going to do further education, I’m going to do myself a favour and make our mother proud of me.’</p> <p>‘I just didn’t listen; I was thinking about things, the slightest thing would make me flip and stuff like that.’</p>
Philip	‘At school it was the same every parent’s evening...I was a pain...always distracting other people in the lesson...the teachers they were trying to teach other people and I was getting bored and making it harder for them.’
Ryan	‘My behaviour at school was quite bad, I had to start quite low down and work my way up. I was always attention seeking, I used to mess about...I was like the class clown, I used to do stuff to get people’s attention.’
Helen	‘I was really naughty at school.’
Tom	‘I really kicked out at school, I didn’t get on with a lot of the teachers, I was always arguing so it just resulted in me being kicked out. This was the problem I had at school, they would actually pick on me, single me out of a group...the teachers actually enjoyed shouting at you, they enjoyed the confrontations...at school if you were just talking away they were shouting in your face...you were treated like a little four year old so you acted like a four year old.’
Natalie	‘I had a statement at primary school and at secondary school I had help there.’

Power and social position

In general learners did not question their social position and expressed the belief that they had the chance to control their destiny through their educational pursuits. Money was seen to be a crucial aspect of social mobility and education was the means of achieving money. This association between education and power was evident in their perception of the levels of power educational providers and teachers had over their access to college courses. Those who had entered into the disciplinary process because of poor behaviour were aware of the consequences further poor behaviour could lead to. When questioned, fourteen learners (70%) could see a link between poor behaviour in class and future success, four (20%) could not and two (10%) refrained from answering.

Learner	Comments
Linda	'It could mean not getting the qualifications you need to get the job.'
Joanne	'If you don't have qualifications what are you going to do? Clean toilets?'
Jean	'You have got to learn to stop doing it (disrupt) because it could affect you and you won't get work.'
David	'If I get kicked out of college they won't let me back in the army at the rank I was at'. 'I have said to S if I get kicked out it is my own fault, so I've never tried to blame anyone else for my own actions, it's my own fault if I do something wrong, I'd have to go with the consequences.'
Philip	'I don't know if my behaviour will stop me getting the qualification, maybe, I don't know...if you get a job you're lucky now.'

Allan	'If I get one more warning that's a year suspended from college....one step out of line and that's it now.'
Audrey	'You might not get the grades you need to go to university.'
Helen	'I might not be able to get to the standard of work I need to get to.'
Stephen	'You might not get the grades you need to do the second course you want to do.'
Betty	'Instead of getting the job you want you might end up in a shop or something.'
Natalie	'You won't get onto different courses and college.'
Rachael	'They'll look at your records and they might think "she's a person that messes about and there's no point employing her.'
Christine	'If I was misbehaving I wouldn't pass the course...it won't let me get the job that I want in the future.'
Heather	'If I don't get good grades I can't get onto the next course.'

Aspirations

Learners did have aspirations and whilst some of these were unrealistic others were attainable and founded in their current experiences. The chance to address misdemeanors from the past was a current theme, as was achieving a qualification as a means of attaining a good job, one that would generate a decent income. Others talked of re-paying parents for sacrifices they were making. They also believed that education would allow them to improve the relationships they had with their families. Aspirations often reflected the working- class backgrounds the young people had, with hopes of a solid job for life. This was evident in Ryan's yearning for a job with the

‘council’. Given that learners were on a level two course expressions of desires to join the army, be a nurse, a painter and decorator, a joiner or an air hostess were not unrealistic but did require a sustained commitment to further study for at least five more years and as learners were already experiencing financial and learning difficulties this may not be a feasible option. Learners like Tom were aware of the need to obtain qualifications to support his aspirations. He had visited the job centre and was aware these were fundamental requirements for most jobs. Tom was also aware of the value of transferable skills and their contribution to different areas of his life. Learners like Tom appeared to value the part college could play in the achievement of his goals. Aspirations to be a pilot and a graphic designer were not realistic. There were notable differences in expressed aspirations in the different curriculum areas. Child care learners made no reference to future career aspirations at all. Two learners reflected on the current economic situation and the negative impact this was likely to have on their future. Seventy-five per cent of learners made no mention of a specific career.

Learner	Comments
Joanne	‘All I want to do really is have a nice house, some money, a good job and my family.’
Jean	‘I want to be an air hostess, but there is a lot of things we can do with this course so I might end up changing my mind.’
David	‘I’ll be a gunner...after when I go to Lance Corporal I can fly helicopters and when I’ve done that for six years I can fly Hercules planes and that’s a very big wage. You come out after twenty five years on full army pay...that means I’ll be forty-three then come out and go to British Airways,

	Easy Jet whatever, get a Boeing 7437, I've got my plane license, a pilot's license and a job for twenty-five grand a year.'
Ryan	'I want to get a job on the council...if I can't get that I might get a job at the community centre where I have been on placement, they are trying to get funding for that.'
Helen	'I want to be a nurse.'
Tom	'I want to be a graphics designer, like design new models of cars.'

Institutional Factors

Relationships with teachers

Learners were very vocal in this area. Of paramount importance was the fact that they themselves identified an association between relationships with teachers and disruptive behaviour. Learners recognised the capacity relationships have to shape and influence behaviour and of equal importance the capacity behaviour had to determine their relationships with teachers. Six learners (30%) made reference to morality (being good or bad) in their discussion about relationships with teachers and 12 learners (60%) made direct references to respect/disrespect in relationships.

Learner	Comments
Linda	'If you have a good relationship in class you just get on more with your work...because they respect you and you respect them.....I feel they are not listening and I get wound up.'

	<p>‘When I am in their classes (teachers with whom she has a good relationship) I always seem to do loads more work than when I am in others.’</p>
Joanne	<p>‘You start disliking people and that makes you do it (disrupt) all the more.’</p> <p>‘If the teacher reacts in a bad way I carry on doing it, I like carry on misbehaving.’</p>
Lorraine	<p>‘I didn’t really get on with S at first. But then I apologised to him and we sat down and he says “I don’t want this experience going through college to be a bad one” and so I said I was sorry and him and me we get on alright now.’</p> <p>‘If you have got a good relationship you get your head down more and you focus more on your work because you want to impress that teacher. But if you don’t have a good relationship it makes you misbehave and wind them up a bit more because if she doesn’t like you then she is not going to like you any more is she? So you just misbehave a lot more’.</p>
Philip	<p>‘It’s hard work for them....they have to work hard at trying to get me from stopping what I am doing.’</p> <p>‘Some of them want you to do things that are hard and when you want to stop for a bit of a break they don’t want to let you, they want you to keep going.’</p> <p>‘Some of them are alright, some of them understand it, some of them don’t.’</p> <p>‘The teachers they were trying to teach other people and I was getting bored making it harder for them.’</p>
Audrey	<p>‘If I don’t concentrate the teacher might decide not to teach you, it affects the relationship.’</p>
Helen	<p>‘When you are not listening to what they are saying, you don’t know what they have said that can help you with your work, so you have to ask them to do it again...they get right mad with us.’</p> <p>‘I think there are some of them that don’t like me, there are two that I think don’t like me and that makes me feel like I have to put my guard up.’</p> <p>‘The other day one of them spoke to me and I didn’t like it, the way she spoke to me, it felt like I was being spoken to</p>

	like I was a child.'
Jo	'It (poor behaviour) makes them angry with us; they are trying their hardest with us and we are still not doing our work.'
Betty	'It (poor behaviour) causes them stress.....it puts them down, they feel angry and they feel they can't teach properly.'
Natalie	'It (poor behaviour) makes her angry...it has an effect on the other pupils because they won't do their work, so I am distracting them from their work.'
Rachael	'They get annoyed, start shouting and I get chucked out for a bit...or they might just ignore you.'
Christine	'The tutor might think you don't want to learn, we don't want to be there'. 'If they are busy with others, I just start talking.'
Heather	'If it's a teacher I don't get on with I just can't concentrate properly.'

Characteristics of a good relationship

Learners were able to highlight features of what they perceived to be a good and poor relationship. Key features of good relationships were identified as: respect, equity, empathy and understanding, interesting teaching styles and positive responses to learning and learning activities. The latter was also emphasised in suggestions that boring lessons led to disruption. A good relationship was one where the learners were aware of learner and teacher responsibilities, usually ones that have been negotiated. This approach appeared to generate a degree of fairness which was appreciated and acknowledged by the learners. Learners were aware of the relationship

between production of coursework, or failure to do this, and tutor relationships.

Learner	Comments
Linda	'If you have a good relationship in class you just get on more with your work'...because they respect you and you respect them....when I am in their (teachers with whom she has a good relationship) class I always seem to do loads more work than when I am in others.'
Lorraine	'If you have got a good relationship you get your head down more and you focus more on your work because you want to impress that teacher'. 'She made it fun, she talked as well as used Powerpoints, we had games to play.'
David	'That's why I get along with him because he sees it from our side as well as the teacher's side....he's cool....compared to school they all see it from your point of view.'
Philip	'I usually do my work for Mr M, I like him, I get along with him, he's sound so if he says do this I do it so I'm up-to-date with my course work.....it's a two way game, if you do his stuff and then you say can I do this he'll say if you've done my stuff you can.' 'Like it's rewarding us because we've done something for him.....Mr M helps you to the extent he'd drill it into you and tell you how to do it.' 'I rattled off all of my course work and it took me about six hours but I did it and he was happy.' 'Some of them are all right some of them understand it, some of them don't.'
Rachael	'If you've got a good relationship with them and get on with them and you can talk to them and stuff.'

Characteristics of a poor relationship

Features of a poor relationship were found to be poor communication between learner and teacher, lack of respect, clashes in personalities, poor classroom management or inconsistencies in management over a period of time. This was evidenced in learners' references to 'levels of strictness'. Where teachers were not consistent, or did not set clear boundaries, learners appeared to lose respect for the teacher and his/her capacity to manage and control the situation, or the learners' behaviour. Learners frequently made reference to teachers not 'liking them', often using this as a means of differentiating between good and bad relationships.

Learner	Comments
Joanne	'You start disliking people and that makes you do it (disrupt) all the more.'
Lorraine	If you don't have a good relationship it makes you misbehave and wind them up a bit more because if she doesn't like you then she is not going to like you any more is she? So you just misbehave a lot more.'
Philip	'I know his exact words "You're stupid, I'm not working with you, I'm not teaching you". 'He doesn't look at you, he doesn't teach you....he doesn't let you smoke all morning and that's from eight o'clock till twelve o'clock'. 'Sometimes we are going to be out all day, but he does not tell us the week before and we come the next week and we'll be out from eight o'clock in the morning until half three and we've had no food.'
Helen	'There are some of them that I think don't like me....that makes me think that I have to put up my guard with them'. 'One of them spoke to me and I didn't like it....it felt like I was being spoken to like a child...I don't want to be spoken to like that because I am not going to be treated like a

	child.'
Jo	'If you don't like the tutor you don't do the work.'
Natalie	'Well if they are a bit of a wimp, then you are just going to walk all over them.'
Rachael	'If you've got a bad one you'll be moaning about them all of the time and then you want to be bad for them and bad behaviour winds them up.'

The effects poor behaviour has on the teacher

Learners were perceptively aware of the impact poor behaviour could have on teachers. Learners were aware that teachers could be upset, angry, disillusioned, depressed, ineffectual in their jobs, or feel stressed by the poor behaviour. Some outcomes of teacher responses to poor behaviour were very obvious, such as punishment or lack of help; whereas other reactions were more subtle and included lack of attention, a negative impact on learner grades, or just reaching the conclusion that learners did not want to learn.

Learner	Comments
Joanne	'If the teacher reacts in a bad way I carry on doing it, I like carry on misbehaving.'
Ryan	'the teacher gets stressed....he loses his patience really quickly and we're not doing anything wrong we're just doing normal stuff.....I'm just trying to get his attention to get my points across ...he just thinks I'm winding him up and I'm not.' 'The teachers let all the learners walk all over them, they

	try to stop them but there's only a certain amount of stuff you can do.'
Allan	'I made the tutor look a fool in college....staff like that wind me up.'
Helen	'They get right mad with us.'
Betty	'It causes them stress.....makes them feel down, angry and feel they can't teach us properly.'

Lack of choice

Three learners commented upon the lack of choice they experienced in selecting a course. One learner was experiencing an extended programme of learning because of limited progress. This incurred repetition which led to learner dissatisfaction and disillusionment. Two learners were undertaking courses which were not their first choice because they did not have the entry requirements for level three. These learners were repeating GCSE qualifications in an attempt to improve their grades and thus gain access to the next level. This again incurred repetition.

Learner	Comments
Linda	'I wanted to do child care or beauty, not travel and tourism...the course is different to what I thought it would be...to be honest I don't want to work in a travel agents.'
David	'I wanted to do public services but I didn't get the grades.'
Ryan	'I thought I was only here for one year but she told me it was two, then she told me three and then four before I finally got on the course I am on now.'

Judith	'I'm not happy with the course.'
Natalie	'It is not what I want to do but I wouldn't say that I dislike it.'

Three learners felt that poor programme planning led to repetition of the same topic making coverage uninteresting and clashes in submission dates for assessed work. These issues caused learners to feel stressed and unheard.

Learner	Comments
Philip	I've done all of that and we do it again the week after, we go to the same place and do it again.'
Jo	'It is boring, we just keep doing the same topic again and again in all of the lessons.'
Ryan	'I thought I was only here for one year but she (tutor) told me it was two, then she told me it was three and then four. Finally I got onto the course I'm on now....now I want to do it but I don't want to do it, if you know what I mean... I've been here so long and I've just like lost the topic.'

Teaching and Learning

Learners consistently expressed preferences for teaching and learning which involved practical aspects of learning and a general dislike of theory. They felt that an over emphasis on assessment and written assignments was onerous and burdensome and inspired neither interest nor enthusiasm.

Learners felt that some aspects of teaching and learning contributed to poor behaviour. This was the case where the subject was hard to understand and they struggled to cope or even concentrate.

One learner commented on the disadvantage she experienced from being part of a large class of twenty seven. She felt that she was unable to access assistance when she required it and this led to disruptive behaviour.

Learner	Comments
Joanne	‘There is only one teacher in a class of twenty-seven and it is quite hard for her and she is doing her best trying to help everyone, so you have got to respect that but then you think you are not getting the help then there is no point in doing it and you might as well talk to someone.’
Philip	‘I don’t like writing a load but I don’t mind writing a little bit but when they ask me to write three pages it just gets a bit too much.’
David	‘I love Tuesdays because we do tractor driving, welding or building something; I’m interested in cars, tractors and planes... if I’m interested in it time goes quick.’
Stephen	‘Brick laying is a bit boring but I still get on with it.’
Tom	‘I like to do things where it can help you in later life.’
Betty	‘There are other people that need help and they scream for the attention and with them screaming they go to a different person first and then go back to them and I just sit there.’
Judith	‘If I don’t understand I end up writing stuff I don’t know.’
Natalie	‘We just copy from our notes because we get handouts and basically we are just putting it into our own words, well we are learning but we are not researching it ourselves so it is boring.’

Rachael	'You get bored.'
Christine	'I love doing the topic.' 'If I need help and the tutor is busy with somebody else I start talking.'

Discipline

There was evidence of a lack of consistency in terms of discipline. Some believed teachers ignored the need for it, others implemented the disciplinary procedures and learners talked of those who had been asked to leave the course as a result of poor behaviour. Two learners had entered the disciplinary process for persistent poor behaviour. Ten of the learners felt that the levels of firmness applied by staff was just right. Three learners liked the levels of leniency or autonomy they were afforded, particularly in comparison to those they experienced at school. However two learners felt that reasoning and negotiation were elements that were missing. One learner admitted that she alternated from feeling that levels of control were apt to them not being so; evidence perhaps of the serendipitous nature of learner experiences in this age group.

Learner	Comments
Joanne	'You get warnings don't you; you don't want warnings do you?'
Jean	'They really treat you like an adult here but it is still like you need to knuckle down.'

David	'I've had two verbal warnings and a written warning; I'm on my last warning now.'
Helen	'The only thing I have had to ask for help with is the assignments really...you get given all of these assignments all at once and you get all muddled up with them.'
Emma	'I don't think they are strict enough.'
Jo	'Sometimes they tell us off for stupid things and there is someone else in the group who is back chatting all of the time and nothing gets done about it.'
Natalie	'I think they can be a bit soft, for example always giving out breaks and stuff, saying you can go out for a fag or whatever, so I think we can do what we want.'

Personal safety

Seventeen learners felt safe in the college. One learner (female) refused to attend another site for a dyslexia test for fear of being bullied by previous classmates on another programme. One learner (male) had been physically attacked by a group of males on college premises and a third learner (male) talked of 'fights' in college. Although the figures are small here they highlight the issue for both males and females and they also evidence the impact personal safety can have on the individual's general well-being.

Learner	Comments
Linda	'That's why I won't go to the other site for my dyslexia test because I knew I would bang into them' (learners from another course who have threatened Linda). 'I don't feel safe on that site, that's why I didn't do maths either this year...I feel safer down here.'

David	<p>‘They got A by the neck and pushed him against the wall.’</p> <p>‘Cause I am one of the biggest I have never felt threatened, it’s just like I’ll walk over to them and it’s sorted.’</p> <p>‘I’ve never felt threatened apart from them mechanics down there, they are walking around as if there was a spanner’s war; you know walking around as if they are big lads...that annoys me I give them a bit of mouth sometimes.’</p> <p>‘The mechanics were squaring up to him and I said, for God’s sake N I don’t want to jump into this one, but basically I put this guy on his arse.’</p>
Ryan	<p>‘He just totally lost it and went off on one and starting going on to everyone, threatening them and this was in the common room and everyone is laughing and egging this lad on and I ended up getting thumped in the ear.’</p> <p>‘I wanted to take it down the channels to get him kicked out and I got the blame for it.’</p> <p>‘I don’t want to fight, I’m not that sort of person but I kind of got ignored by my teachers which I thought was wrong.’</p>

Findings from the Card Sorting exercise

Card No.	Card type			Card descriptor	Overall prevalence	Level of importance	Gender composition		Learning Difficulties			Division					
	I	H/C	Inst.				Male	Female	Yes	No	Self-diagnosed	A	C	EY	H	HSC	TT
1	✓			No friends in the class	1	L1 - 0											
						L2 - 1		1		1						1	
						L3 - 0											
						L4 - 0											
2			✓	Poor relationship with the tutor	9	L1 - 5	3	2	2	3							
						L2 - 3	2	1	1	2		1	2	1	1	1	
						L3 - 1		1			1		1			1	
						L4 - 0											1
3	✓			You like playing the 'fool' in class	9	L1 - 5	2	3	1	3	1		1	1	1	1	1
						L2 - 2		2		1	1					1	1
						L3 - 1		1	1								1
						L4 - 1		1		1						1	
4	✓			Friends encourage you to misbehave	9	L1 - 3		3	1	2				1		2	2
						L2 - 4	1	3	1	2	1		1			1	1
						L3 - 2	1	1	1		1				1		
						L4 - 0											
5		✓		You are worried about problems at home	10	L1 - 7	1	6	2	3	2			1	1	4	1
						L2 - 3		3	1	2						2	1
						L3 - 0											
						L4 - 0											
6	✓			Attention seeking	8	L1 - 6	1	1	1	4	1		1	2		1	2
						L2 - 2	1	1	1	1		1				1	
						L3 - 0		1									
						L4 - 0											

Table V

Abbreviations - Card types: I (Individual) H/C Home and Community Inst. (Intuition)

Division: A: Agriculture C: Construction EY: Early Years H: Horticulture HSC: Health and Social Care TT: Travel and Tourism

Findings from the Card Sorting exercise

Card No.	Card type			Card descriptor	Overall prevalence	Level of importance	Gender composition		Learning Difficulties			Division					
	I	H/C	Inst.				Male	Female	Yes	No	Self-diagnosed	A	C	EY	H	HSC	TT
7	✓			You have a learning difficulty	9	L1 - 3	1	2	2	1		1		2		1	
						L2 - 3	1	2	1	2			1				1
						L3 - 2	1	1	2						1		1
						L4 - 1		1			1					1	
8	✓			You cannot concentrate in class	12	L1 - 8	2	6	4	3	1	1		3	1	2	1
						L2 - 3		3		2	1					2	1
						L3 - 1	1			1			1				
						L4 - 0											
9	✓			You feel ignored	8	L1 - 4	1	3	2	2		1		1		2	
						L2 - 1		1		1						1	
						L3 - 2	1	1	1	1			1				1
						L4 - 1		1	1								1
10	✓			You need more help	10	L1 - 6		6	2	4				2		4	
						L2 - 2		2	2								2
						L3 - 1		1								1	
						L4 - 1		1		1	1					1	
11		✓		You have money worries	5	L1 - 2		2		2				1		1	
						L2 - 3		3	2		1						
						L3 - 0											3
						L4 - 0											
12	✓			You do not like attending college	5	L1 - 1	1			1			1	1			
						L2 - 2	1	1		2			1			1	
						L3 - 2	1	1	1		1	1				1	
						L4 - 0											

Table V

Abbreviations - Card types: I (Individual) H/C Home and Community Inst. (Intuition)

Division: A: Agriculture C: Construction EY: Early Years H: Horticulture HSC: Health and Social Care TT: Travel and Tourism

Findings from the Card Sorting exercise

Card No.	Card type			Card descriptor	Overall prevalence	Level of importance	Gender composition		Learning Difficulties			Division					
	I	H/C	Inst.				Male	Female	Yes	No	Self diagnosed	A	C	E Y	H	H S C	T T
13	✓			Poor relationship with a group member	9	L1 - 4	1	3	1	3	1		2			2	
						L2 - 3	1	2		2			1			2	
						L3 - 2	2		2			1			1		
						L4 - 0											
14		✓		You are worried about your part-time job	4	L1 - 1		1		1				1			
						L2 - 2		2		1	1				2		
						L3 - 1		1	1								1
						L4 - 0											
15	✓		✓	You do not understand what is being covered in the class	7	L1 - 3		3	1	2				1		2	
						L2 - 2	1	1	1		1	1					1
						L3 - 2		2	2								2
						L4 - 0											
16	✓			You are not interested in the subject	9	L1 - 3		3	1	2				2		1	
						L2 - 4	1	3	1			1				3	
						L3 - 0			2		1						
						L4 - 2		2									1
17	✓			You feel frightened to be your true self	2	L1 - 1		1			1						1
						L2 - 1		1		1						1	
						L3 - 0											
						L4 - 0											
18		✓		You are tired from helping at home	5	L1 - 2		2	1	1				1		1	
						L2 - 1		1			1						1
						L3 - 2	1	1	1		1				1	1	
						L4 - 0											

Table V

Abbreviations - Card types: I (Individual) H/C Home and Community Inst. (Intuition)

Division: A: Agriculture C: Construction EY: Early Years H: Horticulture HSC: Health and Social Care TT: Travel and Tourism

Findings from the Card Sorting exercise

Card No.	Card type			Card descriptor	Overall prevalence	Level of importance	Gender composition		Learning Difficulties			Division					
	I	H/C	Inst.				Male	Female	Yes	No	Self-diagnosed	A	C	EY	H	HSC	TT
19	✓			You think your diet is wrong	4	L1 - 0											
						L2 - 2		2		2						2	
						L3 - 1		1	1								1
						L4 - 1		1			1					1	
20	✓			You have ADHD/ADD	4	L1 - 2	1	1					1			1	
						L2 - 1	1		1	2					1		
						L3 - 1		1	1								1
						L4 - 0											
21	✓			You do not feel comfortable with self	2	L1 - 0											
						L2 - 1		1			1						1
						L3 - 1		1	1								1
						L4 - 0											
22	✓			You do not feel comfortable with the group	4	L1 - 1		1	1					1			
						L2 - 1		1			1					1	
						L3 - 2	1	1		1	1		1				1
						L4 - 0											
23			✓	The tutor is not enthusiastic enough	4	L1 - 2	1	1	1	1			1			1	
						L2 - 0											
						L3 - 2		2			2					1	1
						L4 - 0											
24	✓			You feel afraid to ask for help	6	L1 - 3		3	1	2				1		2	
						L2 - 1		1			1					1	
						L3 - 2		2	1		1						2
						L4 - 0											

Table V

Abbreviations - Card types: I (Individual) H/C Home and Community Inst. (Intuitive)

Division: A: Agriculture C: Construction EY: Early Years H: Horticulture HSC: Health and Social Care TT: Travel and Tourism

Findings from the Card Sorting exercise

Card No.	Card type			Card descriptor	Overall prevalence	Level of importance	Gender composition		Learning Difficulties			Division					
	I	H/C	Inst.				Male	Female	Yes	No	Self-diagnosed	A	C	EY	H	HSC	TT
25			✓	You think the tutor doesn't like you	3	L1 - 3	1	2		3			1	1		1	
						L2 - 0											
						L3 - 0											
						L4 - 0											
26	✓			You feel ill	2	L1 - 2		2		2				1		1	
						L2 - 0											
						L3 - 0											
						L4 - 0											
27	✓			You are hungry/thirsty/need caffeine	5	L1 - 2		2	1	1				1		1	
						L2 - 3	1	2	2		1				1	1	1
						L3 - 0											
						L4 - 0											
28	✓		✓	Boredom	19	L1 - 14	5	9	5	8	1	1	4	3	1	3	2
						L2 - 3	1	2	2	1					1	1	1
						L3 - 2		2		1	1					1	1
						L4 - 0											
29	✓		✓	You do not see the relevance of the topic to you	11	L1 - 4	2	2	3	1		1		1	1	1	
						L2 - 3		3	1	1	1					1	2
						L3 - 3	2	1	1	2			1		1	1	
						L4 - 1		1			1					1	

Table V

Abbreviations - Card types: I (Individual) H/C Home and Community Inst. (Intuition)

Division: A: Agriculture C: Construction EY: Early Years H: Horticulture HSC: Health and Social Care TT: Travel and Tourism

Findings from the Card Sorting exercise

Card No.	Card type			Card descriptor	Overall prevalence	Level of importance	Gender composition		Learning Difficulties			Division					
	I	H/C	Inst.				Male	Female	Yes	No	Self-diagnosed	A	C	EY	H	HSC	TT
30			✓	You don't like the teaching methods	4	L1 - 3	1	2	2		1	1				1	1
						L2 - 1		1	1								1
						L3 - 0											
						L4 - 0											
31	✓			Tiredness	13	L1 - 8	2	6	2	6			2	2	1	3	
						L2 - 3		3	1		2						3
						L3 - 1		1	1								1
						L4 - 1		1			1					1	
32			✓	Poor environment/ the room is too hot/cold/noisy/air conditioning nor right/smelly room/you are uncomfortable	11	L1 - 8	2	6	2	6			2	2	1	3	
						L2 - 2		2	2								2
						L3 - 1		1								1	
						L4 - 0											

Table V

Abbreviations - Card types: I (Individual) H/C Home and Community Inst. (Intuitive)

Division: A: Agriculture C: Construction EY: Early Years H: Horticulture HSC: Health and Social Care TT: Travel and Tourism

Card labels were identified with a large group of level two learners in the early stages of the research project. The cards therefore reflected learner voice in this area. However it should be noted that the large number of 'individual' cards (20) generated using this method could act to bias the findings. What emerged were 20 cards with individual reasons; 4 cards with home and community reasons; 5 with institutional reasons and 3 which could be classed as both individual and institutional.

Table V reveals that in total the twenty learners selected Individual reasons for disrupting one hundred and sixty-eight times, rating eighty-three of these at level one. The learners identified Home and Community reasons twenty-four times, with twelve of these at level 1 and Institutional reasons sixty-eight times, with forty-two at level 1.

Findings from the card sorting exercise

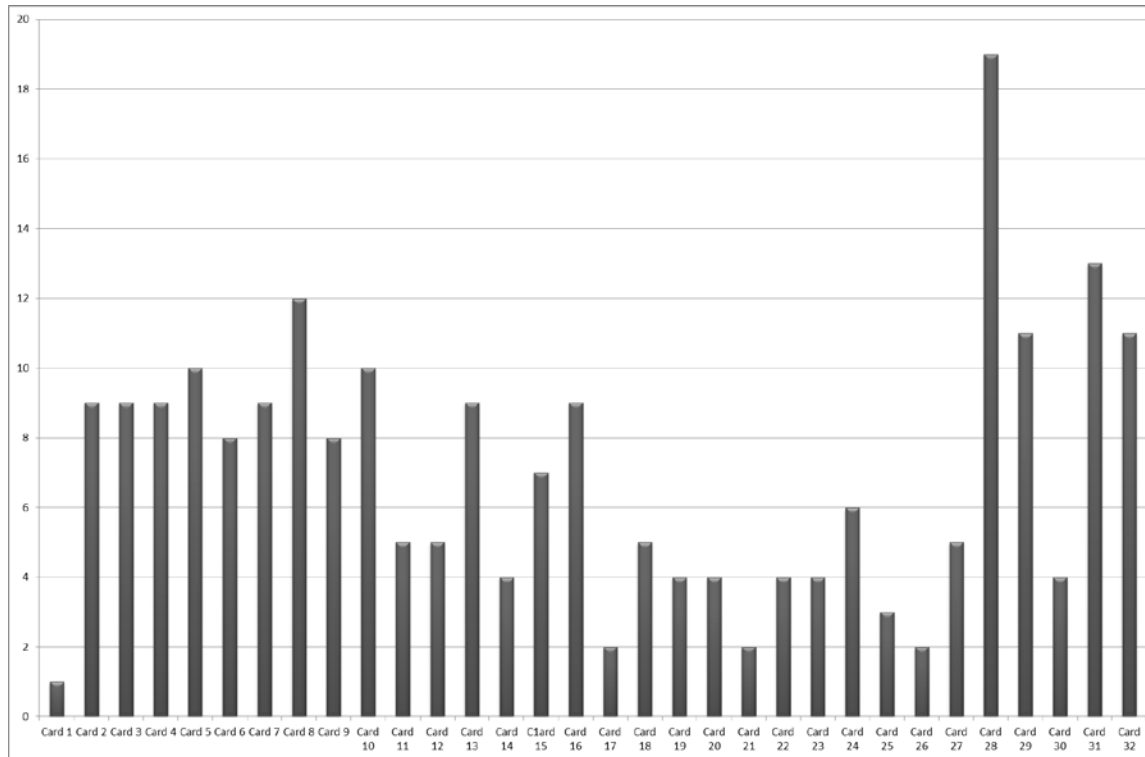


Table A: Overall selection of cards

Individual

Table A reveals that the most frequently selected cards (10 or more) are 28 (Boredom - 19 learners); 31 (Tiredness – 13 learners); 8 (Inability to concentrate in class – 12 learners) and 29 (You do not see the relevance of the topic to you – 11 learners) and 10 (you need more help – 10 learners).

Home and Community

Card 5 (You are worried about problems at home – 10 learners)

Institutional/individual

Card 18 (Boredom – 19 learners)

Card 29 (You do not see the relevance of the topic to you – 11 learners)

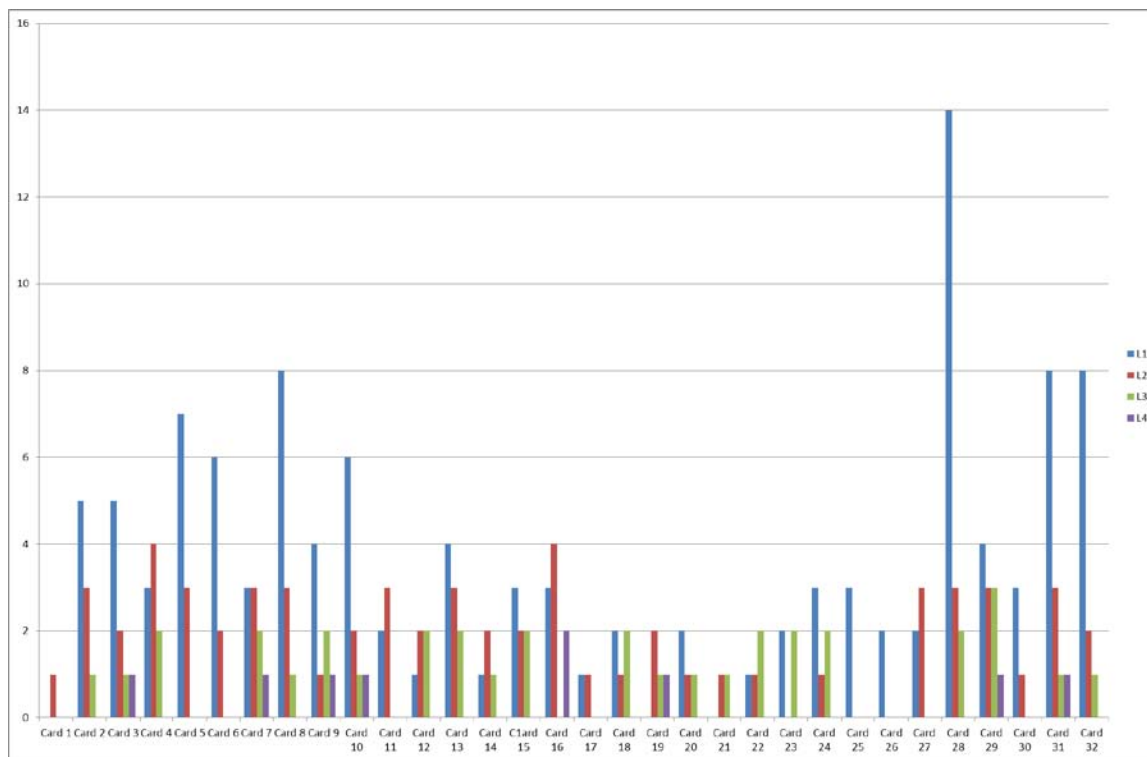


Table B: Selection of cards by scale

Grading Level 1 (L1) (Very important) – Level 4 (L4) (Significant)

Individual

Table B reveals that Card 28 (Boredom) was rated at level 1 by fourteen learners; Card 7 (You have a learning difficulty) was rated at Level 1 by eight learners and Card 31 (Tiredness) was rated at L1 by eight learners.

Home and Community

Card 11 (You have money worries) was rated at level 1 by one learner; Card 14 (You are worried about your part-time job) was rated at level 1 by two learners; and Card 18 (you are tired from helping at home) was rated at level 1 by two learners.

Institutional

Card 32 (Poor environment) was rated at L1 by eight learners.

Table C: Card selection by learning difficulty

Table C reveals that, of the ten learners with a defined or self-diagnosed learning difficulty, more than 60% (12) selected:

Individual

Card 3 (you like playing the fool); Card 4 (friends encourage you to misbehave); Card 8 (You cannot concentrate in class); Card 19 (You think your diet is wrong); Card 22 (You do not feel comfortable with the group); Card 24 (You feel afraid to ask for help); Card 28 (Boredom) and Card 29 (You do not see the relevance of the topic),

Home and community

Card 5 (You are worried about problems at home)

Institutional

Card 23 (The tutor is not enthusiastic enough), 28 (Individual and Institutional) (Boredom), 29 (Individual and Institutional) (You do not see the relevance of the topic), Card 30 (You don't like the teaching methods).

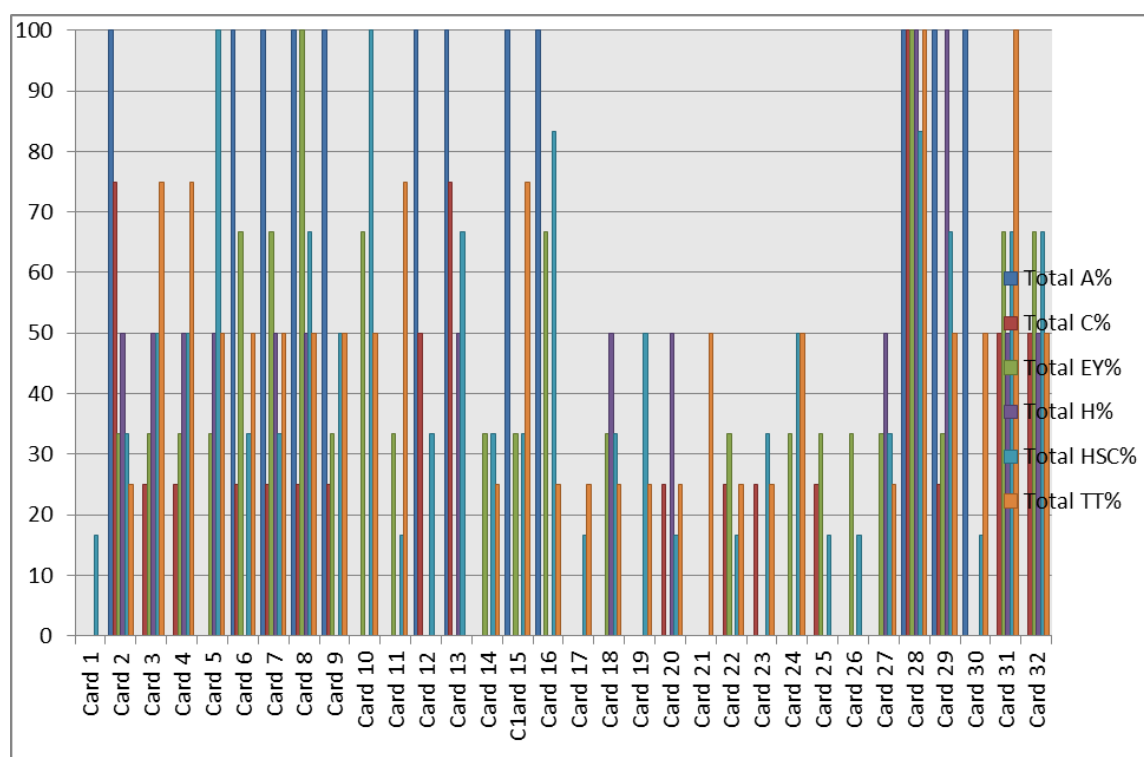


Table D: Card selection by Division

The findings revealed that the learners in the Health and Social Care Division selected Individual reasons fifty-six times in total; Travel and Tourism thirty-seven times; Early Years twenty-five; Construction twenty; Horticulture twelve and Agriculture ten. Home and Community reasons were selected nine times by Health and Social care learners; seven times by Travel and Tourism learners; four times for both Early Years and Horticulture and they were not selected at all by Agriculture and Construction learners. Institutional reasons were selected twenty-one times by Health and Social care learners; fifteen times by Travel and Tourism learners; ten times by Construction; nine times by Early Years; seven times by Agriculture and six by Horticulture. These findings reveal significant vocational and gender differentiation in selection of reasons for disruptive behaviour.

Findings from the documentary evidence

Individual

Learning Difficulties

Table E below reveals the learning difficulties profile of the respondents.

No.	Name	Division	Diagnosed Learning Difficulty			Gender	
			Yes	No	Self-diagnosed	Male	Female
1	Linda	T and T	✓				✓
2	Joanne	T and T			✓		✓
3	Lorraine	T and T	✓				✓
4	Jean	T and T			✓		✓
5	David	Horticulture	✓			✓	
6	Philip	Agriculture	✓			✓	
7	Ryan	Horticulture	✓			✓	
8	Allan	Construction		✓		✓	
9	Audrey	H and S Care			✓		✓
10	Helen	H and S Care		✓			✓
11	Stephen	Construction		✓		✓	
12	Tom	Construction		✓		✓	
13	Emma	Construction		✓			✓
14	Jo	H and S Care	✓				✓
15	Betty	H and S Care		✓			✓
16	Judith	H and S Care		✓			✓
17	Natalie	Early Years	✓				✓
18	Rachael	Early Years		✓			✓
19	Christine	Early Years		✓			✓
20	Heather	H and S Care		✓			✓
Total			7	10	3	6	14

Table E: Learning difficulties profile

Of the seven learners with a formally diagnosed learning difficulty, two have Dyspraxia (2 females); three have dyslexia (2 females/1 male) and two have ADHD (2 males).

Home and Community

Economic status

No.	Learner	Division	Received EMA	Did not receive EMA	Postcode	Financial status according to postcode
1	Linda	T and T		✓	BD23 4LZ	£235,000.00
2	Joanne	T and T	✓		BD20 6NS	£140,000.00
3	Lorraine	T and T		✓	BB7 1LZ	£141,000.00
4	Jean	T and T	✓		BD22 7AP	£107,000.00
5	David	Horticulture		✓	BB7 1EU	£310,000.00
6	Philip	Agriculture		✓	BD21 5QF	£370,000.00
7	Ryan	Horticulture	ALG		BB8 9AN	£64,000.00
8	Allan	Construction	✓		BD20 8TY	£92,000.00
9	Audrey	H and S Care		✓	BB18 6PB	£57,000.00
10	Helen	H and S Care		✓	BB18 5NU	£66,000.00
11	Stephen	Construction	✓		BD23 2PH	£103,000.00
12	Tom	Construction	✓		BD23 1TL	£93,000.00
13	Emma	Construction	✓		BB18 6DG	£76,000.00
14	Jo	H and S Care		✓	BD22 7SW	£245,000.00
15	Betty	H and S Care	✓		BB7 2HS	£169,000.00
16	Judith	H and S Care	✓		BB7 2EU	£381,000.00
17	Natalie	Early Years	✓		BD20 8UX	£144,000.00
18	Rachael	Early Years	✓		BD20 85D	£144,000.00
19	Christine	Early Years		✓	BD23 2BT	£140,000.00
20	Heather	H and S Care	✓		BD23 2RT	£174,000.00

Table F Economic status of learners

Table F reveals that eleven learners were in receipt of EMA and one learner was in receipt of an Adult Learning Grant (ALG). Eight learners received no financial support for learning. EMA data appears to be consistent with financial status however anomalies exist for learners 9 and 10 where EMA has not been awarded yet house value falls below £100,000.00 and numbers 2, 4, 11, 15, 16, 17, 18 and 20 where EMA was received yet house value is in excess of £100,000.00. Table F reveals that the majority of learners (65%) live in houses where the value is less than £150,000.00 and seven learners (35%) live in houses where the value is in excess of £150,000.00. The data do not reveal whether the house is owned or rented.

Institutional Success and Disciplinary Issues

No.	Learner	Division	Completed course		Reason for leaving
			Yes	No	
1	Linda	T and T		✓	PR
2	Joanne	T and T	✓		
3	Lorraine	T and T		✓	DO
4	Jean	T and T		✓	PR/DO
5	David	Horticulture	✓		
6	Philip	Agriculture	✓		
7	Ryan	Horticulture	✓		
8	Allan	Construction		✓	DO
9	Audrey	H and S Care	✓		
10	Helen	H and S Care	✓		
11	Stephen	Construction	✓		
12	Tom	Construction	✓		
13	Emma	Construction	✓		
14	Jo	H and S Care	✓		
15	Betty	H and S Care	✓		
16	Judith	H and S Care	✓		
17	Natalie	Early Years	✓		
18	Rachael	Early Years	✓		
19	Christine	Early Years	✓		
20	Heather	H and S Care	✓		

Code: PR = Personal Reason DO= Disciplinary Outcome

Table G Learner success and disciplinary records

College held data revealed that four learners (20%) did not complete their learning programme and sixteen (80%) did. Two learners (10%) left for personal/health reasons and two learners (10%) for disciplinary reasons.

Summary of findings

Learner definitions of disruptive behaviour

Learners focused on the nature rather than the concept of disruption and they associated disruption with interruptions in learning.

Learner perceptions of the types of disruptive behaviour

The findings revealed that disruption is a conscious action. New forms of disruption were identified and need to be recognised, these include: ‘just talking’, ‘use of physical space’, ‘psychological distancing’ and ‘use of technology’.

Individual

Hierarchical Focused Interviews

A high proportion of learners who disrupt have a learning difficulty and most importantly learners make an association between disruption in class and learning difficulties. Learners did not feel that the support they received in class met their needs. Peer relationships were very important to learners and could be influential in terms of behaviour in class. Gender differences in how the different forms of behaviour are evidenced emerged.

Card Sort

The card sort reinforced the emphasis learners place on individual reasons for misbehaving. Learners selected these seven times more than home and community and four times more than institutional. Card selection also reinforced the emphasis learners place on learning difficulties. Card selection by learners with learning difficulties revealed clear associations between disruption and failure to produce work. Learners selected 'tiredness' as a major reason for misbehaving. Analysis of card selection by division revealed both gender and vocational differences with health and social care learners, who were all female, five and a half times more likely to select individual reasons than male learners in horticulture and agriculture.

Documentary evidence

Analysis of data revealed that fifty per cent of disrupters have a learning difficulty (seven formally diagnosed and three self-diagnosed). Fifty per cent of those formally diagnosed were male.

Home and Community

Hierarchical Focused Interviews

Relationships with family are very important to the learners. Half of all learners were from families which had broken down and those living in re-constituted relationships with step-parents were predominantly unhappy with current relationships. There was evidence of support from extended family especially grandparents. Gender differences emerged in family relationships with all of the males in the project experiencing good relationships with their family. Whilst the parents were supportive of the learners and their commitment to further study, learners complained about the lack of empathy or understanding parents had for what this entailed. Relationship, household and money worries were constant features of the discussions demonstrating that issues at home have the capacity to affect learners in class. The fact that learners had discussed the development of strategies for coping with these issues highlighted their relevance.

Part-time employment is an important part of the learners' lives with sixteen of those interviewed in employment and one seeking it. This also highlighted the limited income some learners had and their reliance on parents for support in this area. Those in reconstituted families were often reliant on ad hoc payments from absent parents.

References to leisure pursuits frequently made reference to alcohol consumption. Almost half of the learners described very negative previous school experiences which had resulted in disappointing outcomes for themselves and their families.

All learners could see the value of their current educational opportunities to improve their future lives. Seventy percent of the learners could see an association between behaviour and future success. The learners had feasible aspirations for the future, ones that could in time be achieved.

Card Sorting

Learners did see an association between disrupting in class and issues at home. Twelve of the twenty learners selected issues at home at Level 1 reinforcing aspects revealed in the interviews. Gender and vocational differences emerged with a high proportion of learners from Health and Social Care, who were all female, concerned with home and community issues whereas the predominantly male populated areas of Horticulture, Agriculture and Construction were noticeably less likely to select this as a reason for disruption in class. Five of the learners with concerns at home had learning difficulties.

Documentary evidence

Documentary evidence revealed that the sample of twenty learners came from diverse economic backgrounds with the value of properties varying from £64,000.00 to £381,000.00. This would suggest that class background may not be a determinant of poor behaviour in class. Postcodes also revealed that thirteen of the learners came from an area where feeder school Ofsted reports were poorly rated.

There is a likelihood that all of these learners attended the same secondary school and that learned disruptive behaviour could have been a feature of that school.

There was considerable evidence seen that males and females were entering gendered industries with disruptive learners from Travel and Tourism, Early Years and Childcare and Health and Social Care groups being totally comprised of females and only one female learner seen in Agriculture, Construction and Horticulture.

Institutional

Hierarchical Focused Interviews

The interviews revealed relationships between the learner and teacher; teaching styles; equity; the production of work and disruptive behaviour. Learners utilised their knowledge of a 'good' and 'bad' relationship and the effects this had on the teacher to consciously adjust and guide their behaviour in class. Learners frequently evidenced their desire for increased levels of negotiation which were not always possible. An example of this was the limited choice learners experienced in terms of course, repetition of previous qualifications and level of entry. Learners were able to articulate their dislike of theory based courses and theory laden delivery which failed to enthuse which often led to poor behaviour in class. Learners also commented on the inconsistency in discipline in the class; between different teachers and in different areas.

Gender issues emerged in the analysis of issues of safety with males providing examples of physical violence they had been involved in whilst females frequently referred to emotional bullying.

Card Sort

Institutional issues were selected sixty-eight times (forty two of which were graded at Level 1) as reasons for disrupting in class. Institutional issues of relevance to the learners included: relationships with tutors, inability to concentrate; the need for teacher help and being afraid to ask for it; lack of teacher enthusiasm; not seeing the relevance of the topic, dislike of teaching methods and being 'bored'. Being 'bored' was the highest rated card in the whole exercise with 19 learners suggesting this would lead to disruption in the class. Learners with learning difficulties particularly highlighted lack of teacher enthusiasm, boredom and not seeing the relevance of the topic. The findings in this area were consistent between male and females and vocational areas.

Documentary evidence

The data revealed that four of the learners taking part in the study did not complete their learning programmes or obtain their qualification. Of the four, three had been asked to leave the College following serious misconduct. Three of these learners were from one curriculum area (Travel and Tourism) and the fourth learner was from Construction. This has financial implications for the college and more

importantly results in a negative outcome for the young person. This also endorses the College's decision to support this particular piece of research where previous data had shown that learners asked to leave the College because of serious disciplinary outcomes had all been previously identified as persistent disrupters in class.

Chapter Five: Summary, Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

This chapter begins with a summary of the research findings. These findings are then explored using Ogilvy's (1994) categories of Individual, Home, and Community and Institutional reasons for disruption in relation to the research objectives. Learner perceptions of disruption are then discussed and compared to what has previously been known about disruption in the FE classroom. The implications of the research findings for existing interpretations of disruptive behaviour are also considered and, perhaps most importantly, new ideas are constructed, before conclusions are reached. Finally specific recommendations are made about how to tackle disruptive behaviour in the case study college.

There was a clear intention within this study to discern, from the learner's point of view, whose responsibility disruptive behaviour in the classroom is, and to develop a contemporary learner definition of disruption, one that reflects learner perceptions in this area. This has been taken directly from learner comments. This section will include an examination of the value of using learner voice in this study.

Summary of research findings

Learner definition of disruptive behaviour

Focusing on the nature rather than the concept of disruption, learners made a clear association between disruption in class and interruptions to learning, or the failure for learning to take place. They introduced the notion that disruption in class was simplistic in nature and that it was a naturally occurring and expected aspect of classroom interaction. Learners also introduced a moral dimension to the study of disruptive behaviour. This was evidenced in their articulation of what was deemed to be ‘good’ and ‘bad’ behaviour and in their reluctance to have been seen to participate in what they knew was deemed to be ‘bad’ classroom behaviour. Learners also revealed an association between what they perceived to be injustices against them in the classroom and justification for misbehaving.

Learner perceptions of disruptive behaviour

In addition to acknowledged forms of disruptive behaviour, new or developing ones emerged; these included ‘just talking’, ‘use of physical space’, ‘psychological distancing’ and ‘use of technology’. Learners perceived disruption to be a conscious action.

Individual Factors

The findings revealed that individual factors affecting learners could have a significant impact on behaviour in class. Individual learning difficulties, and in particular those which had not been addressed or catered for, frequently lead to disruption in class. Learners considered lack of support for learning difficulties to be a recognised precursor to poor behaviour. They were however very reluctant to address the issue directly in class for fear of loss of face. Learners with learning difficulties and a fear of asking for help were amongst those frequently resorting to disruptive behaviour. Learners felt that learning difficulties contribute directly to 'poor levels of concentration' and 'tiredness'. Male learners were less likely to select individual reasons for disrupting in class. The findings revealed that peer relationships were also significant in determining behaviour in class.

Home and Community Factors

Half the learners were from families which had broken down; these learners were now living in single-parent, re-constituted or extended family types. This latter structure emerged where grand-parents had taken in their grand-children when relationships with the parent/step-parent had broken down. Gender differences emerged when all of those experiencing poor relationships with family were female. In the card sorting exercise one of the males identified family issues as being a factor, whereas in the interviews, all males professed to experience positive family relationships irrespective of type. This could mean that the males were reluctant to discuss relationship problems.

Learner voice was particularly strong when discussing negative relationships with families. These problems were also closely related to financial problems, pressure to contribute to family income, and the need to undertake or obtain part-time employment. Learners felt that whilst parents broadly supported their undertaking FE, they lacked empathy or understanding of the pressures this brought to bear on them. Learners made frequent references to negative previous learning experiences and the guilt they experienced because of the impact these had had on parents.

Learners made few references to leisure pursuits, but where references were made, alcohol was seen to be an integral part of these. Thirteen of the learners lived in properties where the house value was less than £150,000.00 and these learners all lived in the catchment area for a 'failing' secondary school. This term is used by the government's regulatory body the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) to describe educational organisations

which have been judged to provide an inadequate experience of education and training for their learners' demonstrating 'an inability to focus primarily on outcomes for learners as opposed to processes and procedures (Ofsted, 2004, p.1).

Gender differences revealed the gendered nature of both course and vocational uptake, and that females were more likely than males to cite home and community reasons for disruption in class.

Institutional Factors

Poor relationships with teachers epitomised by lack of respect and equity; limited choice; uninspiring teaching and repetition, frequently led to a conscious decision on the part of the learner to disrupt in class. Gender issues emerged with males resorting to physical violence both inside and outside the classroom, whilst females made repeated references to use of emotional forms of behaviour to disrupt.

Inconsistencies in response and application of the disciplinary procedures to deal with this appeared to exacerbate the situation. Learners could readily articulate the components of a 'good' and 'bad' relationship and were willing and had the capacity to adjust their behaviour accordingly.

Learners felt that classroom activities were often repetitive by nature, 'boring' and involved limited opportunity for either negotiation or choice. They also voiced their general dislike of theory-based sessions and teaching which failed to either enthuse or engage them. This endorses Atkins's belief that young people are involved in 'busy work' which limits their choices and opportunities and does not allow them to experience a more meaningful or 'different kind of pedagogy' (Atkins, 2009, p.139). Atkins advocates change in the 'nature of education'; change that 'provides real opportunities for all young people' and involves 'considering what a good educational might be like, or indeed whether a good vocational education is a possibility' (Atkins, 2009, p.139).

The findings in this area also support Bates's notion that an emphasis on theory-based courses which involved 'continual assessment and the completion of assignments', acted as a 'constant source of worry' for learners (Bates, 1993, p.78).

This suggests that the content and the means of delivery do not match the needs of the learners undertaking them. The lack of choice and opportunity depicted in the findings indicate that the drive to vocationalise the curriculum in schools and FE has led to a 'tendency to dwell on what might be termed the superstructure rather than the substructure of the subject' (Bates et al., 1984, p.170). They highlight the classed nature of the vocational courses being offered in FE and endorse Atkins's argument that these 'broader contexts' act to 'constrain the agency of the young people undertaking them', leaving them with 'high occupational aspirations' which 'are impossible dreams' (Atkins, 2009, pp.138-140).

There was clear evidence that low level minimal disruption can lead to serious misconduct, poor retention and ultimately failure for both the learner and the college.

Patterns of repeated behaviour which significantly interrupts the learning of others or threatens their personal security or well-being, or brings the organisation into disrepute (FEDA, 1998, p.11)

Like teachers, learners made a clear association between disruption in class and interruptions to learning, or the failure for learning to take place. Learners also displayed an awareness of the capacity their behaviour had to disturb others but made minimal reference to safety. Where references were made to safety these were primarily related to safety outside the classroom, and with the exception of one female learner all comments were made by males. Learners displayed little understanding of the impact that disruptive behaviour could have on the organisation and its capacity to function effectively as a learning environment.

Learners introduced the notion that disruption in class was ‘simplistic’ by nature and that it was a ‘naturally occurring’ and even an ‘expected’ aspect of classroom interaction. This was evidenced in learners’ repeated references to behaviour which was acceptable in class. ‘Just talking’ was referred to twelve times when learners were asked to provide examples of disruption in class. In this presentation of disruptive behaviour as a natural phenomenon, individuals appear to seek to legitimise their actions as both non-confrontational and acceptable, and as a naturally occurring aspect of the session. Learners also legitimised their actions by referring to talking as a natural reaction to lack of attention from teachers

‘If I’m stuck on something to write or whatever, I’ll ask teachers and if they are busy with others I just start talking’ (Christine).

Talking can be non-confrontational and requires minimal effort; it can also be justified as an expected aspect of teaching and learning.

Christine’s comment provides evidence of the moral dimension learners frequently brought to the study. Behaviour was continually referred to as ‘good’ or ‘bad’; personal involvement was often denied or referred to as ‘a thing of the past’, and responsibility was frequently apportioned elsewhere. As interviews with learners progressed, they frequently abandoned this stance in their recollections

‘I used to go on websites but I don’t anymore.....sometimes I just can’t stop talking, or I keep sitting in the wrong place’ (Linda)

inadvertently with change of tense, making reference to the currency of such activity. Aligned to this moral stance learners often displayed a sense of injustice in their reflections, especially when they suggested that teachers used their power

and position to make judgments about them and to act on personal prejudices. Allan talked about a poor relationship he experienced with one of his teachers. The poor relationship was exacerbated when Allan pointed out a spelling error the teacher, who was dyslexic, had made on the board and who consequently used his position to deny Allan a place on a trip

‘He ended up sending me home because I’d made a fool of him because I was right. Staff like that wind me up’ (Allan).

Allan’s sense of injustice and indignation stemmed from his understanding of right and wrong; using this to assess the outcomes of the situation. Learners were consistent in their expressed need for their interactions with others to be based on fairness and respect.

All of the learners portrayed disruption as a conscious action, one that was often planned, negotiated and could involve a group as well as an individual approach. Learners in the Agriculture Department had even integrated new forms of language into their understanding of the concept of disruptive learning: an example of which was the use of the term ‘drifting’, a term used to describe ‘racing tractors and being stupid, driving too quickly really’ (Alex).

These findings endorsed Gannon-Leary’s (2009) suggestion that passive forms of disruption are becoming increasingly common in the classroom. Gannon-Leary made reference to passive forms of behaviour such as non-attendance’, ‘lack of preparation’ and non-participation’ but made no reference to talking. Passive behaviour used by the learners in this study included increased use of what the researcher has termed ‘psychological distancing’, something whereby learners:

‘wander off...right in your mind’ (Emma); ‘you don’t pay attention’ (David); ‘you start drifting away from it’ (Tom) and simply ‘not concentrating’ (Natalie).

Using learner perception we can thus define disruptive behaviour as

Disruptive behaviour can be good or bad. It is an activity which has the capacity to stop learning from taking place and to disturb others in the classroom. Disruptive behaviour is a natural aspect of the teaching classroom and is frequently used by learners, in a conscious way, to attract the attention of people around them. Disruption can act as a signal that learner’s needs are not being met (Learners, the Case Study College).

Learner perception of types of disruptive behaviour

Respondents readily identified known forms of disruptive behaviour endorsing Mitchell et al.’s (1998) various category types of ‘childish’, ‘aggressive’; ‘passive’; ‘environmentally challenging’; ‘anti-social/criminal’; ‘behaviour that inhibits learning’ or ‘relationship problems’. The use of passive behaviour defined as ‘not acting, submissive; inert’ (The Oxford Dictionary, 1998, p.461) was also acknowledged. Talking, a form of disruption repeatedly referred to by learners, is unique in that it has the capacity to be defined as both a passive and an active behaviour.

Compared to behaviours such as shouting and using physical acts of violence talking can be perceived as passive, non-threatening and suited to the classroom environment where teaching and learning often necessitates that talking takes place. However, on the other hand, it also has the capacity to take attention away from the teacher; provide others with a distraction; make it difficult for others to

concentrate; and ultimately, it requires and elicits a response from others, making the distractions or interruptions protracted by nature.

Psychological distancing was used frequently by learners to disassociate themselves from what was happening in the classroom. Described by learners as ‘day-dreaming’, ‘drifting away from it’ or simply by ‘not concentrating on work’; these actions were passive but conscious ones with the capacity to disrupt by disassociation. The learner’s capacity to discuss and label these evidenced an increased presence of this form of disruption, and the capacity learners have to develop strategies for disrupting.

Whilst the concept of talking as a form of disruptive behaviour is not a new one, enhanced understandings of why it occurs brings with it new dimensions previously unexplored by researchers in college settings. Talking would appear to be a behaviour learners use frequently to meet a multitude of personal needs. Talking allows the individual to express unmet need or dissatisfaction with the level of attention or support they receive from tutors. It can act as a source of emotional and psychological support when they are struggling with tasks; it can instigate social networks of support; and it can be used to extend these networks into the community and outside the classroom; it can alleviate boredom or provide entertainment.

Learners are aware that talking has the capacity to ‘annoy’ and challenge the teacher, provoke a response in others and act as a distraction. Talking requires minimal effort and can be undertaken whilst completing other tasks, is not readily visible with its capacity to be readily masked in general classroom activities, and

can be ceased very quickly should it be challenged. Talking can also be justified as ‘normal’, ‘acceptable’ classroom behaviour, something learners were keen to portray in their emphasis on the ‘just’ talking.

This attempt by learners to present talking as a natural occurrence is consistent with Bourdieu’s notion of the development or ‘orchestration of habitus’, concerned with bringing about a ‘consensus of meaning of practices’ and ‘harmonisation’ (Bourdieu, 1977, p.80). By bringing a sense of commonplace to the practice of talking the learners elicit its recognition as both ‘taken for granted’ and ‘foreseeable and intentional’, allowing them to undertake this in a legitimate way.

Bourdieu describes what is happening here when he states that

The objective harmonising of group or class habitus which results from the homogeneity of the conditions of existence is what enables practices to be objectively harmonised without any intentional calculation or conscious reference to a norm and mutually adjusted in the absence of any direct interaction or, a fortiori , explicit coordination (Bourdieu, 1977, p.80).

In this sense learners have manipulated the situation to the extent that talking now becomes an accepted, legitimate practice in the classroom; one that even with its capacity to disrupt can be practiced at will, and one that is difficult for teachers to challenge. Bourdieu goes on to suggest that any reaction by the teacher to the practice of talking can equally be defined as ‘habitus’ and as such brings nothing new or unexpected to the situation. Bourdieu has suggested that learners may adopt these responses in

relation to a system of objective potentialities, immediately inscribed in the present, things to do or not to do, to say or not to say, in relation to a

forthcoming reality which in contrast to the future conceived as ‘absolute possibility (Bourdieu, 1977, p.76).

This could also explain the learner’s acceptance of the reaction they elicit from the teacher evidenced quite clearly in Rachael’s’ comments

‘They get annoyed, start shouting and I get chucked out for a bit...or they might just ignore you’ (Rachael).

These actions also prompt us to acknowledge the learner’s ability to shape and re-shape the social structures of which they are a part (Giddens, 1984). Rather than view learners as passive recipients of the treatment they receive from others, we can see that they can and do make active decisions to influence what takes place in the classroom environment.

Nine learners commented on the ‘use of physical space’ to disrupt in class. This can involve ‘not sitting in the right place all of the time...moving around the classroom’ (Linda); ‘throwing stuff around the classroom’ (Stephen) or ‘spinning around on my chair or walking outside’ (Philip). Learners appeared to have a pertinent understanding of how space and ownership of that space has the capacity to challenge authority in the classroom.

The increased use of technology certainly appears to have brought new and challenging dimensions to disruptive behaviour in class. It would also appear to have generated a degree of sophistication in the different forms it takes which holds appeal for learners and responds to their social and emotional needs young people have. Whilst the use of the mobile phone was by far the most talked about use of technology in the classroom, also of note was technology’s capacity to stave

off boredom 'using games', 'accessing internet web sites', 'listening to music' and 'using social websites'. However, gender differences emerged in usage of technology with only one of the nine male learners expressing preferences for using the mobile phone in class. This endorsed Chen and Katz's (2009) notion that girls display signs of psychological dependency on mobile phone usage, with an over-reliance on the social and emotional support they derive from this medium.

The types of behaviour observed can be described as 'immature' in that they reflect those frequently observed in schools; this can lead to suggestions that the learners were not sufficiently mature to cope with certain approaches to study in an FE college. This could be attributed to what Smith refers to as the 'transitional period of time the young people find themselves in' (Smith, 1987, p.42). Alternatively it may be a consequence of the learners' extended stay in education; being kept at the same level of study for another year, a basic lack of respect for learners who appear to struggle at level two or even from having been labeled as failures.

Evidence from previous studies (Hargreaves (1967) and Willis (1977) suggests that learners adopt these behaviours as part of a 'sub-culture' as a reaction to the positions they find themselves in in the educational system. This section of the study has revealed that learners have an informed understanding of the concept of disruptive behaviour and can identify innovative ways of using different forms of disruption. Learners are not passive recipients of events in the classroom, rather they are in a position where they are trying to negotiate what is and is not acceptable behaviour, but often lack the required skills or position to do this.

Individual factors

Learning difficulties

The literature review revealed that, whilst the association between learning difficulty and disruption in classes in colleges of further education had been acknowledged, it had not been effectively explored. Mitchell et al (1998) highlighted the high costs colleges pay in terms of retention and success rates if they ignore it. But generally they appear to do little to investigate the association between learning difficulties and disruption in class. The findings in this research project also reveal that despite Tomlinson's Inclusive Learning Initiative (1998), and the message that all learners should have their learning needs identified, this does not always take place and when it is ignored can lead to disruption in class.

Ten of the learners involved in the research had a diagnosed or self-diagnosed learning difficulty, and of these learners made a clear association between this and their behaviour in class. In acknowledging that disruptive behaviour could both lead to, and stem from, the learning difficulties they experienced they acknowledged the far-reaching impact this had on their experiences in the classroom. Learners believed that the learning difficulty they experienced affected not only their capacity to learn but also their ability to concentrate for significant periods; their status amongst peers in the class; and their personal well-being.

Dealing with a learning difficulty led to learners experiencing a variety of emotions from anger to frustration and despair.

‘You get mad and frustrated’ (Linda)

‘I get frustrated...bored’ (Lorraine)

‘I just give up’ (Jean)

‘It just gets too much for me’ (Philip).

‘I struggle to concentrate for long periods of time...I can’t stay focused’ (Ryan).

These findings support the belief that learning difficulties can lead to ‘high rates of discomfort for the learner’ (Mugnaini, 2009, p.257).

Male learners confirmed Mugnaini’s belief that there is a high risk of ‘comorbidity between dyslexia and AD/HD (Mugnaini, 2009, p.257), whilst girls were able to articulate an association between ‘signs of increased comorbidity between learning difficulties and depression and anxiety’ (Halonen et al., 2006 and Diakakis, 2008).

All learners were concerned that revelations about their learning difficulties would lead to embarrassment and ‘loss of face’ in the classroom. Classes in two of the curriculum areas, where generic support from one classroom teaching assistant was available to all, was welcomed by the learners, mainly because the assistant had not been ascribed to any one learner. This fear of being judged or perhaps ridiculed was clearly evident

‘I don’t want 1:1 because it will make me feel like I’m dumber, like thicker than all of the rest’ (Philip)

‘I don’t like people knowing’ (Natalie).

The presence of generic support assistants clearly made a difference in that it alleviated this fear of exposure.

Mugnaini expressed the view that individuals with learning difficulties

show lower self-esteem...have more interpersonal problems, more conflicts with friends...more social anxiety ... and that they become the victims of direct and indirect bullying (Mugnaini, 2009, p.260).

Negative learning experiences learners had endured at school also explain, in part, their unwillingness to voice their struggles in the FE classroom. Moreover this could explain three of the learners’ reluctance to pursue their belief that they had a learning difficulty, even if this leads to restricted support. Learners appeared to bring with them the belief that learning environments were ‘unsafe ones’ leading them to internalise the problems they experienced. Mugnaini suggested that internalisation can lead to ‘overactive, impulsive or aggressive behaviours’ (Mugnaini, 2009, p. 256). They also appeared to contribute to the low levels of self-esteem many of the respondents displayed. Early research into self-esteem has tended to define it as either being about a sense of worthiness (feeling good about yourself), or about a sense of effectiveness, or competence. Branden believed it was about both and defined self-esteem as ‘Confidence in our ability to think, confidence in our ability to cope with the basic challenges of life’ (Branden, 1994, p.74). Of significance here is the belief that

Low self-esteem is widely recognised as a factor that is associated with poor educational attainment and non-participation in education and training (Lloyd and Sullivan, 2003, p.19)

Low self-esteem manifested itself in a variety of ways which included expressions of self-doubt and the blaming of self for inability to study independently or behave in class. These findings lead us to question why learners do not get the support they need. Learners readily acknowledged their part in not accessing support for fear of 'losing face' in the classroom, but what part does the previous and current teacher play? Three of the twenty learners involved in the study had not been formally identified as having a learning difficulty but were able to justify their self-diagnosis with comments such as

'I can't read properly, I hate reading...I can't read the words properly...my writing's not good...I can't spell' (Jean)

'It is like I get distracted easily...I can't keep still...no matter how many times I read it through I never get it' (Joanne)

suggesting lack of diagnosis both at school and college. There are several explanations for this. Individual ones include learner dismissal or refusal to accept the issue or help. Institutional ones such as the class size the learner finds him/herself in; the failure of systems to detect the difficulty; staff reluctance to identify the need based upon the need to provide more support requirements which they feel unable or unwilling to provide; and increased paperwork. Home and community issues can revolve around the need to share information with parents who were unwilling or unable to accept or perhaps even deal with it. Social inequalities facing the learner can compound and underpin many of these issues

the learner experiences. The social stigma attached to any form of disability limits the open approach to identification and support; and social class distinctions can lead to learners from working-class families feeling unworthy of such support and effort.

Despite policies to integrate learners with learning difficulties into mainstream education, such as Tomlinson's Inclusive Learning Initiative, this is clear evidence that these learners do not feel supported or that their needs are being met. Learners felt that the system available for the identification and response to identified learning needs lacked flexibility and that the support available was insufficient to meet their needs. This endorses Mitchell's belief that 'the physical, psychological, educational and emotional needs of learners are more complex than ever before' (Mitchell et al., 1998, p.28).

Giddens (1984) encourages us to question what cultural systems and actions would willingly lead to this oversight on the part of the college. Do the positions that learners with learning difficulties hold negate the allocation of the resources they need to support them in their progression and their learning lives? If the answer is the financial constraints FE colleges face, this appears to be a wider issue than that previously thought. The lack of support can then be traced back to the position individuals with learning difficulties are given in society in general, and the limited value placed on their full integration.

All of the learners in the case study expressed dislike of the theory-based nature many of the vocational course assumed; they were also aware of the capacity this approach had for them, to negate meaningful learning. This discourse also prompts

questions about why learners with problems related to learning felt the need to embark on courses which invoke such negative feelings. These findings suggest that the learners in the study were attracted to vocational education because they perceived it to be 'easy' and that it 'involved no pressure to write, think hard or work alone' (Bates, 1984, p.207). Many of the learners saw FE as a means of addressing previous misdemeanors in educational institutions, ones which had left them feeling worthless and rejected.

This research suggests that learners with learning difficulties are more likely to disrupt in class than those without learning difficulties. Those with learning difficulties more often than not have low levels of self-esteem; they fear loss of face in the classroom and experience constant struggles with learning. Learners with learning difficulties revealed high levels of un-met need. The learners in this study were selected by tutors as those who disrupt in class and this criteria alone revealed that a high proportion of learners who disrupt have learning difficulties.

Peer support and relationships

Peer relationships were very important to learners and they were honest in their appraisal that these relationships can act as both positive and negative influences on them. This endorsed findings by Hargreaves (1967); Lacey (1970) and Willis (1987). The main form of disruptive behaviour used by learners 'talking', would be virtually impossible without other peers or technology to contact others outside the classroom. The learners talked extensively about the emotional support they

derived from their relationships with others in the group; something which frequently led to 'talking'. This was evident in learner comments

'I have a best mate...she is like my mum she tells me what to do...she texts me and says "make sure you keep a tenner for college";

'Me and J we are good mates...we just have a little joke every now and then'.

This need for support was evidence of the 'counter-culture' Willis discovered in schools and can be seen to be embedded in the everyday actions of the young people. The comments learners made also suggested that learners, in their identification of strategies for coping in the classroom, have the capacity and willingness to adopt a group approach to disruption. This has led to learners defining their own 'structures of significance' (Giddens, 1984, p.17) in the peer relationships they develop, and from which they gain the psycho-social support they require. It stems from policy changes such as Widening Participation (Kennedy, 1997) and Inclusive Learning (Tomlinson, 1998) which have placed many young people from low income groups in educational settings where the support to meet their complex and varied needs can be very limited. Learners' knowledge of the impact their behaviour can have in the educational setting and on the teachers provides them with 'stocks of knowledge'. They can draw on these to establish their position, one which is safe when it is based upon meaningful relationships with peers.

Learners demonstrated limited awareness of the emotional insecurity they experience. References to safety were frequently interpreted as a physical rather than an emotional issue. However learner comments repeatedly revealed the

discomfort and emotional insecurity they experience from exposing their 'additional support needs' to what appeared to be 'unsympathetic' teachers

'I don't want to go to the teacher and say I'm stuck, I am scared everyone else will hear' (Joanne).

'I just feel they are not listening and I get wound up' (Linda).

'I get mad, arguments start....I say I am not doing it' (Lorraine).

'Some of them are all right, some of them understand, some of them don't' (Philip).

Social and emotional support was clearly derived from peer rapport, with learners frequently talking about the benefits they derived from working cooperatively with friends in class. Learners also used associations with peers to deal with relationship or personal problems away from the college. These problems predominantly revolved around family issues and money. Peer interactions would appear to be very important to this age group.

Willis (1977) failed to look at the relationship between learners' actions and how the organisation was structured. This approach overlooked aspects of structure that could prompt learners to adopt coping strategies and within this a group approach. The findings of the case study reveal that learners were actively engaging in exchanges of emotional and social support; support they felt they were unable to access from sources either inside or outside the college. The peer relationships in which they participated were based on mutual respect, something they felt was also lacking in some of the relationships they experienced with teachers. This

perception of lack of respect from teachers was clearly depicted in the comments the learners made about teachers.

‘You’re stupid, I’m not working with you, I’m not teaching you...he doesn’t look at you, he doesn’t teach you’ (Philip);

‘There are some of them (teachers) that I don’t think like me ...that makes me think I need to put up my guard with them’ (Helen).

These findings support Atkins’s belief that the lack of respect learners encounter stems not only from the attitudes of the teachers but from the human value society places on young learners; with ‘individual value being dependent on individual wealth or achievement’ (Atkins, 2009, p.39). Atkins argues that learners operate in ‘educational spheres’, which themselves are categorised by class distinction, and that vocational education in particular is ‘regarded as inferior’ (Atkins, 2009, p.39).

That learners can detect this lack of respect in their relationships with teachers would suggest that teachers in some way pass this message on to the learner either in their approaches or the relationships they experience with the learner. The feelings of inferiority the learners experience because of their position in the educational system and the disadvantages they were able to highlight from having learning difficulties exacerbated this problem. It also provided some understanding of the low levels of self-esteem the learners appear to be experiencing and their desire to seek emotional and social support from their peers.

Bourdieu’s concepts of ‘fields’ and ‘habitus’ provide some insight into this process when he describes the impact the organisation as a structure can have on learners and their behaviour. He refers to the ‘habitus’ as a ‘socially constituted system of

cognitive and motivating structures, and the social situation in which the agents' interests are defined, and with them, the objective functions and subjective motivations of their practices' (Bourdieu, 1977, p.76). This implies that the organisation can act as the instigator of the poor behaviour we see in class, when learners through their positioning; their experiences and perceptions, and responses to these, display negative behaviours.

Power issues were evident within the relationships learners had with their peers when learners talked about their capacity to influence the behaviour of others or to be influenced themselves. The study revealed that learners were able to articulate an association between peer influences, power and work productivity

'I love them (friends) to bits but like the other day they left early and I was sat with some others, another group of girls and I got loads more work done' (Linda).

Power was also inherent in group approaches to disruption in class where learners would work together in a planned, coordinated way to challenge the power held by the teacher.

'It's just like me and J....., we just mess around between us twome and J are good mates... we know how far to take it....we just have a little joke now and again....I encourage him and he encourages me' (Stephen).

'We do it together; back chat to the tutors, arguing amongst each other...getting mobiles out and just not getting any work done' (Jo).

Peer relationships provided learners with sources of support against potential threats from other learners in the college, and just as importantly from perceived

threats from the teacher. They also provided learners with angst where relationship problems existed

‘There has been a bit of a fall out in our group and not everyone talks to everyone now...you are always thinking about it’ (Jo).

We can see from this that relationships can have a significant impact on learners and their emotional well-being.

Using Bourdieu’s approach, the college and the classroom are fields which house power relations which can influence behaviour (Bourdieu, 2003, p.68). These power relations he believes have their substance in the economy and have the capacity to disadvantage learners in institutions. Willis felt that the ‘lads’ he studied were accepting of the position they were in, happy to mount a counter-school culture (Willis, 1977) but never expecting to change the social order they were faced with. The current study resonates with this approach in that learners were aware of the disadvantages they faced but had no real expectation that they would change the overall imbalance in power they experienced. There may be evidence here that the strategies the young people adopt are those of survival as opposed to challenge; akin to those Nayak (2010) believed young people used to survive in a changing world.

The emphasis learners placed on emotional support is a sign that individuals from working-class backgrounds need this form of social and emotional support to survive in what is perceived to be a predominantly middle class environment. The learners in the study were in the main, from working-class background (over half being in receipt of EMA or ALG) and their need for peer support indicates that

Walshaw's notion that working-class women struggle to pursue an identity through education is a valid one. This piece of research indicates that this is also an issue of significant importance for males.

The findings of this study add to the evidence provided by Reay, (2003); Walkerdine (2003) and Walshaw (2006) which suggests social class is a key determinant of behaviour in the classroom. These class distinctions may also prove informative in a consideration of why learners feel unable to ask for support in the classroom. If learners already feel disadvantaged by their classed situation the need to ask for help may add to, and compound, these feelings of inferiority and thus be avoided by learners.

Gender differences emerged in the analysis of peer relationships when males made reference to bullying, physical violence and fighting whereas female references to this were minimal and were associated with emotional rather than physical threat.

This was in keeping with Mac an Ghaill's (1999) suggestion that young men in FE had a cultural identity that they needed to protect. The male learners talked about incidents and fighting which came about from learners from other sites coming into their territory

'I brought this guy down from the other site and A totally lost it and started going on at everyone threatening them...I ended up getting thumped in the ear' (Ryan).

This supports Mac an Ghaill's (1999) belief that training programmes have the capacity to impact on the sexuality and identity of young men and that they have to

consciously defend their dignity and identity to maintain levels of respect in a gendered environment.

The findings suggest that learners turn to peers to address unmet intellectual, social and emotional needs. They would also indicate that there is evidence of a counter-culture which operates to coordinate the learner's position in the classroom, one that necessitates challenges to teacher authority if the learner is to remain 'safe'. Learners gain support and power from this group approach fearing ridicule, embarrassment or isolation if they are left to deal with it alone. There is evidence that social class plays a significant part in classroom interactions and, in turn, learner behaviour. Lack of attention to learner need suggests that the organisation and teachers do not prioritise these sufficiently to ensure participation and inclusion for all. The Inclusive Learning objective of integration for all learners with learning difficulties has not been evidenced in this study. Learner relationships revealed that gender differences exist in the types of interactions young people are involved in, and the extent to which they have to protect their sexual and gendered identities. The research findings also suggest that this preservation of identity is much more of an issue for males than females as they contend with the threats their continued position in education brings about.

Home and Community

Whilst acknowledging that house prices can be quite a blunt measure of social class, there is some scope in using this as a proxy for social class in the present study. The fact that thirteen of the learners lived in properties where the house

value was less than £150,000.00 suggests that social class issues were of relevance to the learners in this study and more importantly their behaviour in class. The fact that nine of the twenty learners were not in receipt of EMA and thirty-five per cent lived in houses where the value was in excess of £150,000.00, with two properties in excess of £200,000.00 and two in excess of £300,000.00 would suggest that that Thompson's (2009) understanding that there is now a significant middle-class presence in FE is correct. It also supported Thompson's (2009) argument that these middle class learners were generally under-achievers when three of the four living in houses in excess of £150,000.00 had additional learning needs. These findings also suggest that learning difficulty is as powerful a determinant of behaviour in the classroom as social class.

College data revealed that thirteen of the learners from low income families lived in the catchment area for a 'failing' secondary school. These learners attended this school and the data appears to support an association between previous schooling experiences and practices and current behaviour in the classroom. Nine of the learners made references to negative school experiences, some of which resulted in expulsion, failure to attain General Certificates of Secondary Education (GCSEs), and the disadvantage they felt at having to start again in college.

Although learners made no explicit reference to social class their discourse implied one of social disadvantage and they were able to reflect on the outcomes their social class positions generated for them. These included repetition in programmes of study, poor levels of self-esteem and difficult relationships with parents. Learners frequently expressed anxieties about their low levels of income; their need to obtain employment; or over-reliance on parents for financial support.

‘I’m always skint. I don’t have a job, I’m trying but there is nowhere at the moment...my mum gives me £20.00 a week but I never have any spare because like 3 days per week on the bus it’s £17.00 just for 3 days’ (Linda)

‘Well I haven’t got a job, I have been looking for one.....but I’m not getting anywhere with it. I get EMA and I get £10.00 per week, I do a lot of housework for my mum’ (Joanne).

‘Yes, I always need money...money problems would not lead to poor behaviour in class but might lead to missing college if there was the chance of extra money’ (Audrey).

‘If you don’t have a good education what are you going to do? Clean toilets? No. I don’t want that, I want a good job so that I can pay my mum back for all that she has done for me....all I want to do really is have a really nice house, some money, a good job and my family’. (Joanne).

The terminology used by learners indicates a class-based analysis of their social situation; one from which it can be deduced that learners experience social hardships related to low income and an awareness of their social position. Learners expressed the belief that education was a way in which they could improve their future lives, implying that educational qualifications and money were powerful determinants of social mobility. Fourteen of those involved in the study could see an association between behaviour and future success. This did not however prevent learners from adopting a fatalistic approach to the management of their behaviour in class, often failing to identify how changes in behaviour could be made.

The findings here supported Atkins’ view that learners picked up on the negative discourse surrounding them and their educational experiences. She argues that society judges learners according to characteristics such as ‘class, race, gender and

disability' (Atkins, 2009, p.38). Learners had been quick to make an association between learning difficulties and behaviour in the classroom; their awareness of the class-based challenges they faced in their lives was much more tenuous. Learners in receipt of EMA were undertaking vocational courses with firm associations with working-class culture and lower academic status. These vocational courses were gendered by nature, typical of those undertaken by their parents, and their leisure pursuits were reflective of the classed society they existed in. Only one learner displayed understanding of, and recognition for, her social position

'I come from K..... I mean K..., do you know it?.....they are 'scratters' thereI know what it is like in K....you have to be a different person to fit in K...' (Joanne).

Although learners could articulate situations, particularly in circumstances related to employment where they were socially disadvantaged, they did not make associations between this and social class, implying rather that it was related to their personal situation

'I'm in debt with my mum... I need a job' (Stephen)

'I'm working and stuff; I get so much money a fortnight, like I owe my mum money and everything and then it is all gone by one week so I've got nothing until I am paid' (Jo).

In the main, learner aspirations were feasible and founded in their current experiences. Whilst being critical of the need to undertake further study many learners perceived qualifications to be the answer to many of their problems, something which was not always realistic. They believed achievement of the qualification would lead to a good job, one which gave them financial stability,

would allow them to re-pay parents for the sacrifices they had made and thus improve their relationships with their families.

Learners displayed no awareness of the value Bourdieu places on social and cultural capital in the autonomous fields and the ‘agents’ within these who can determine their social positions (Bourdieu, 1977, pp.183-4). Lack of insight into the impact cultural and social capital can have on social classes ‘enables particular groups to practice primitive accumulation of cultural capital’ (Bourdieu, 1977, p.187). Bourdieu’s suggestion that ‘academic qualifications are to cultural capital what money is to economic capital’ (Bourdieu, 1977, p.187) provides us with an insight into the value individuals, and in this case the learners, place on qualifications as a means of obtaining ‘positions’ and the ‘distribution of these social attributes, among biological individuals’ (Bourdieu, 1977, p.188). This view does not cater for those who struggle to obtain these qualifications society respects but could in some way explain the frustration they experience in following the dictates of this ‘established order’ (Bourdieu, 1977, p.188). Learner comments clearly displayed the problems they experienced in their attempts to comply with these structures

‘The teachers say I need to get Merits and stuff to get a better job but I’m not bothered, a jobs a job’ (Philip).

‘Yes I did my GCSEs but I didn’t get good grades in them’ (Ryan).

The learners were all undertaking Level 2 courses which, despite their vocational nature, more often than not did not provide them with a work-based qualification.

Officially, the vocational qualification they have undertaken is the equivalent of four GCSEs and can include limited vocational experience. Learners hoping to progress to the level three courses would have to attain maths and English GCSE alongside their vocational qualification to make this progression, and this period is frequently epitomised by a growing sense of awareness that this may not be achievable. Learners aspiring to employment or apprenticeship programmes can also face rejection for this failure to attain level two qualifications in maths and English. This growing recognition of the challenges they face has the capacity to act as an instigator of disruptive behaviour in the classroom.

Part-time employment was an important issue for learners. Sixteen of those interviewed were employed on a part-time basis, something they felt was crucial to their survival on the course. This reflected the financial problems many of the learners faced, problems which were often compounded by family status and limited income, rural location, high costs of travel and the dearth of employment opportunities in rural areas.

Part-time employment necessitated juggling the demands of college and home study, with the need to work and obtain an income. This may partially explain the 'tiredness' learners revealed in the card sorting exercise, where thirteen learners attributed their poor behaviour in class to this. Furthermore, learners frequently commented on the lack of respect they encountered from employers, something which added to their feelings of worthlessness and poor levels of self-esteem

This study has helped to understand how family breakdown and new forms of family can affect the educational experiences of young people in FE. Learner voice

was particularly strong when discussing negative relationships with families. These problems were closely related to financial problems, pressure to contribute to family income, and the need to undertake or obtain part-time employment. Learners felt that, whilst generally parents supported their move to undertake FE, they lacked empathy or understanding of the pressures this brought to bear on them.

These views endorsed Gannon-Leary's theory that in extreme cases 'learners have come from backgrounds where students are generally despised and had difficulty seeing themselves as students' and teachers frequently encounter

a much wider cross section of students, some of whom have little appreciation of what is expected of them and have had little contact with others who have gone through the system' or simply saw their learning experience as 'an extension of school (Gannon-Leary, 2008, p.13).

The findings also support Bourdieu's theory that cultural capital is linked to social class. Cultural capital supports access to education and then higher occupational positions (Bourdieu, 1997, p.184). Bourdieu believes the social inequality which exists in educational attainment is attributed to differences in cultural capital in different groups. For Raymond Boudon (1973) there are two key factors involved in educational inequality; the primary effects of socialisation which involves the subcultural processes between social classes as outlined by Bourdieu, and the secondary effects of socialisation or positional theory which stems from a person's position in the class structure. Boudon states that

although the effects of cultural disparities is essentially dissipated over time, the secondary effects of stratification are essentially multiplicative or, rather, exponential (Boudon, 1973, p.86).

This suggests that even without cultural differences between classes, educational inequality would still exist because the individuals start at different positions in the stratification system. Boudon speaks of ‘cost benefit’ analysis referring to the encouragement given by upper and middle-class parents to their children to opt for courses leading to professional qualifications and employment (Boudon, 1973, p.23). In contrast, working-class parents who may not have as much money to support their children in the educational system, may be more than happy for their children to settle for other work. The current research findings support Boudon’s (1973) belief that levels of ambition, like levels of parental encouragement may be underpinned by material circumstances as well as cultural values.

Further analysis of the findings revealed that of the learners experiencing relationship problems at home, seven of the eight were living in houses with a value of less than £150,000.00. This would indicate that relationship problems were disproportionately experienced by those living in lower income groups.

The fact that half of those involved in the study were from single-parent or re-constituted families suggests that the changing nature of the family has the capacity to affect young people’s behaviour and that this, in turn, can act as an influence on behaviour in the classroom. A great deal has been covered in the press about grandparents and the support they give to the care of very young children when parents are at work highlighting that

one in three families rely on grandparents to provide some kind of childcare on a weekly basis, among single-parent families that figure rises to between half and two-thirds (Osbourne, 2010, p.20).

This study indicates that this can extend to the care of adolescents; can be on-going by nature and acts as a safeguard against the threat of homelessness. This reflects Maguire et al.'s findings that 'young people in FE remain dependent on family for housing, finance and emotional well-being' (Maguire et al., 2001, p.208).

Changing family types and financial concerns appear to generate changed roles for young learners in FE. Parental income and employment type; child and wider family care responsibilities, have changed the levels of responsibility young people now have. These issues are significant and affect family relationships to the extent that learners feel they take precedence over them and their learning programmes. This was articulated quite clearly by several learners

'I don't get on with my family, at home, I don't get on with the people that are there...I feel like an outsider in my own home, that's why I never go home...I don't get on with them at all, I don't get on with my step-dad the most, he is an idiot' (Linda).

'Mum and I have a bit of a problem, I moved out from home, came back and I don't have a relationship with dad...work would not pay me and I got really mad, I couldn't get any dinner. Mum wouldn't give me any money so I had no money for two months. It got to me a bit in class' (Lorraine).

This situation leads to feelings of resentment and the belief that parents lack empathy with them and their situation. Linda's comments reveal that this can stem from the young person's inability to look at the bigger picture parents face in their

struggle to support their sons and daughters at college, and generate sufficient income to allow this to happen. Learners in re-constituted or single parent families frequently made references to ad hoc rather than established payments from absent parents and the struggles they faced to manage on limited income.

There is also the possibility, as Gannon-Leary (2008) suggested, that learners from poorer economic backgrounds could lack respect for learning and education. He also believed that Widening Participation had led to the recruitment of learners from backgrounds where socialisation processes had paid scant attention to the development of 'good behaviour or manners' (Gannon-Leary, 2008, p.13), something which has resulted in poor behaviour in classrooms.

Hurtig et al. suggested that learners who lived in 'other than intact families and adolescents living in families with low social status report more attention and behavioural problems than other adolescents' (Hurtig et al., 2005, p. 474). This was reflected in the current research findings where, of the eleven who made reference to relationship problems at home and demonstrated poor behaviour in the classroom, seven had a learning difficulty; nine were from low income families, three lived in single parent families and three in re-constituted families.

Learners themselves were able to articulate an association between relationship problems with families and their behaviour in class. Five learners made direct reference to the feelings of stress they experienced, and the strategies they had developed to contend with the pressures they faced from the relationship problems they had with their family. The card sort reinforced these findings when ten of the learners selected and placed 'issues at home' and their likelihood of affecting

behaviour in the classroom at level 1. Gender differences in this area revealed that females as opposed to males tended to experience these relationship problems. This might be explained by male lack of willingness to discuss this issue especially when one male indicated concerns in this area in the card sorting exercise but did not in the interview.

The current findings challenge Huang's notion that positive learner relationships with parents generally lead to positive influences on the learner's behaviour in educational settings. All the males in the study enjoyed positive relationships with family irrespective of family types and yet still misbehaved in class. They also challenge Bourdieu's belief that although families wield an enormous amount of power over young people they will still act in indiscriminate ways. The findings suggest that all of those who were experiencing problems in the family were acting in a disruptive way in class. This indicates consistency rather than indiscrimination in the way they are responding to the social problems they are facing.

The study revealed a correlation between learners who experienced relationship problems and low levels of self-esteem. This was also associated with failure to obtain employment and to manage effective relationships with teachers and peers, or to manage the responsibilities they are given in the home. Low self-esteem was evidenced when Joanne suggested that being in FE was akin to being on the dole. She believed she compared unfavourably with her sister who has been in full-time employment since leaving school.

Linked to the notion that learners with learning difficulties are prone to comorbidity between their learning difficulty and anxiety, there is also firm

evidence that part of this anxiety can lead to low levels of self-esteem. Five of the eight learners experiencing concerns at home had learning difficulties and all these learners displayed low levels of self-esteem.

The findings revealed that learners from lower social classes are more likely to attend secondary schools where educational achievement is significantly lower than that experienced by middle-class children. There is also evidence to suggest that their educational experiences in these schools are negative ones which contribute to the learner entering FE to repeat GCSEs, and struggle to undertake level 2 courses where Level 1 programmes do not exist.

The classed position the majority of the learners experience means that they encounter a myriad of problems related to travel, part-time employment, family pressure to undertake care and household responsibilities, and make a contribution to income. Learners found these issues to be quite insurmountable when coupled with the problematic relationships they experienced in their families. Noticeably learners appear to lack the social skills and emotional stability required to deal independently with these problems and their coping strategies in class appear to manifest themselves to others as disruptive behaviour.

Institutional factors

The interviews revealed that relationships between the learner and the teacher were perceived by learners as important and associated to their behaviour in class. This confirmed Moo's (1979) belief that the relationship between teachers and learners is an important dimension of class climate. In addition to this, the current study also highlighted the importance learners placed on teaching styles and practices, which were deemed to be important facets of the learning experiences, ones that again had the capacity to influence learner behaviour.

The findings also suggest that the behaviour displayed by teachers informs the learner when s/he makes judgments about their relationship with the teacher. Teachers who are seen to be supportive and most importantly discreet in their provision of support are those who gain most respect from the learners. There was also evidence that learners were aware of the labels different teachers ascribed to them, and that these again contributed to low levels of self-esteem amongst learners.

Pomeroy (1999) in her identification of the importance learners attribute was insightful in her recognition of the fact that social and economic features were contributory factors in these relationships. Her findings demonstrate the importance the learners in the current study have attributed to these aspects. What has not been fully explored previously has been the learner's capacity to use their knowledge of relationships with teachers to inform their behaviour. Learners demonstrated the importance of these relationships to them by investing a great

deal of effort in the analysis of these relationships and how their knowledge can be used to gain power and control over what happens in the classroom.

A large factor influencing a learner's relationship with a teacher was the learner's perception of the level of support they were able to gain from the teacher, and the way in which this support was accessed. Learners, who feared losing face by asking for help when support had not been freely given, used this position to label or judge the relationship with the teacher as a 'poor' one. A poor teacher was one who did not respect the learner and his or her needs; did not listen to them or give them a voice; did not appear to be in control of the classroom situation and was inconsistent in his/her management of learners.

Learners had a very keen sense of 'equity and fairness' which was entrenched in how teachers treated them in class

'If you have a good relationship in class you just get on more with your work because they respect you and you respect them' (Linda).

'That's why I get on with him because he sees it from our side as well as the teacher's side' (David).

Learners appeared to be unable to view relationships with their teachers in a professional light, something which was evidenced in repeated references to teachers 'liking' or 'disliking' them. Their perception as to whether a teacher 'liked' or 'disliked' them was a key determinant in their behaviour

'If she doesn't like you she is not going to like you any more is she? So you just misbehave a lot more' (Lorraine).

‘You start disliking people and that makes you do it (disrupt) all the more’ (Joanne).

Characteristics of a ‘good’ relationship with a teacher were clearly articulated by learners. A good relationship was perceived as being based upon mutual respect; equity, negotiation, empathy and understanding, and interesting teaching and learning activities. Each of these characteristics were ones that the learners themselves were prepared to give in return for support from teachers. Learners displayed a considerable amount of empathy for the position many teachers found themselves in because of institutional policies. These positions could revolve around having to integrate learners with learning difficulties into mainstream classes without the assistance of classroom teaching assistants. It could be about teaching classes with large numbers, where the level of need was diverse, or even trying to manage a group where behaviour was difficult

‘They have to work hard at trying to get me from stopping what I am doing’ (Philip).

Learners also demonstrated perceptive awareness of the power their behaviour had to affect teachers

‘They get annoyed, start shouting and I get chucked out for a bit...or they might just ignore you’ (Rachael).

‘The teachers were trying to teach other people and I was getting bored, making it harder for them’ (Philip).

‘The teacher gets stressed’ (Ryan).

Learners were aware that their behaviour could be used to make teachers feel proud, happy, stressed, disillusioned, depressed, angry, upset, helpless and ineffectual.

Discussion of these issues raised awareness of the impact policy can have on classroom interactions. Actions to implement Tomlinson's recommendations in the Inclusive Learning (1998) and Kennedy's Widening Participation (1997) have clearly affected teachers and learners, and more importantly may have inadvertently acted to increase the levels of poor behaviour in class. This would appear to have occurred where learners with learning difficulties have been integrated into mainstream classes without appropriate support or resources. All learners were required to undertake initial assessments of learning needs on entry to the college and individual support programmes drawn up using ILPs; however, despite this, learners have the option to decline offers of support in favour of managing their learning independently. This would appear to have been the case for seven of the learners in the study with a defined learning difficulty, none of whom were in receipt of 1:1 support. Learners in two curriculum areas were in receipt of generic classroom assistance.

Since the research was carried out the college has changed its system for managing initial assessment by introducing a compulsory test for dyslexia for all learners. However, learners still have the opportunity to decline any offers of support. Loss of face would appear to be a crucial element here, where learners resist support for fear of being judged to be less able than their peers.

Chan was interested in the concept of ‘loss of face’ suggesting that teachers failed to address disruptive behaviour in the classroom for fear of loss of ‘face’ (Chan, 2002, p.11). He believes Chinese teachers operate in classrooms which are more ‘harmonious’ by nature and they experience fewer incidents of disruptive behaviour (Chan, 2002, p.11). This was a result of ‘relation-orientated’ aspects of Chinese culture which bring about social harmony and is dependent on successful relationships between people, and most importantly the protection of an individual’s prestige or ‘face’. Put simply ‘social interactions should be conducted so that no-body’s face is lost’ (Chan, 2002, p.11). This idea suggests that it is of the utmost importance to both teachers and students, for different, yet equally important reasons, that no one lose ‘face’ in the classroom, a theory which is supported by the findings of this study.

Learners felt that inconsistencies in approaches to discipline from different teachers also contributed to indiscipline in the classroom.

‘I don’t think they are strict enough’ (Emma).

‘Sometimes they tell us off for stupid things and there is someone else in the group who is ‘back chatting’ all of the time and nothing gets done about it’ (Jo).

‘I think they can be a bit soft, for example always giving out breaks and stuff, saying you can have a ‘fag’ or whatever, so I think we can do what we want’ (Natalie).

Should the relationship between inconsistencies in discipline and disruption in the classroom be established, the college may consider changing its strategies in this area. College data suggest a clear link between low level disruption in class and serious misconduct leading to non-completion, and thus poor levels of retention

and achievement. Of the learners who took part in the study and did not complete, three were female and one was male and all had been identified by teachers as disrupters in class.

The relationship learners experienced with teachers appeared to be at the crux of the moral dimension learners brought to the study. Pring (2000) believes that any educational situation requires the teacher to face ‘moral demands’ and that he or she is required to apply ‘professional judgement in the ‘educational practice’ (Pring, 2000, p.142). To date little or no attention has been paid to the moral dilemmas and judgements the learner is called upon to face and make, and what informs their decisions. This moral dimension relates to Bourdieu’s concept of ‘structures of legitimation’; moral guides which exist to inform practices (Giddens, 1984, p.28). The current research findings demonstrate that learners play an active role in determining rules in the classroom and that they draw on disruptive behaviour as a resource to address what they perceive to be an imbalance in power in the classroom.

Conclusions

One of the benefits of using learner voice in this study of disruption was that it encouraged the researcher to focus on the learner and his or her needs. In this way learners have been provided with the scope to become empowered contributors in the research project. The issue of disruption in class is one that involves all participants, despite the previous imbalance in whose voice has been heard. The current research project has tried to address this. If the issue is to be managed effectively, a starting point should be to develop a shared approach to dealing with it. If a reduction in disruption requires an altered culture, this should be based upon equity and openness, and shaped by the views and opinions of all involved.

Learner voice has proved to be beneficial in supporting many theories pertaining to social inequalities, gender differences and learning difficulties in education. The research has provided tangible evidence that disruption in class changes with time, providing learners with new ways of disrupting and teachers with new types of behaviour to contend with. Careful analysis of reasons for disruption has endorsed Giddens' (1984) theory that these are complex and different for each learner; that learners as agents call upon different resources to exercise power in the classroom, and that this in itself can lead to authoritative encounters with teachers. The findings have also shown that there are explanatory patterns.

The findings support Ogilvy's (1994) belief that disruption can arise from individual, home and community, and institutional factors; and that they can be critical to learner progression. Disruptive behaviour can, and does, lead to power struggles in the classroom, reinforcing Thompson's (2003) theory that structural

patterns in society can lead to inequalities in educational systems. The findings also support Bourdieu's (1997) theory that cultural capital is linked to social class; Willis' notion that norms, habits and beliefs can influence disruption in classrooms; and Boudon's ideas that material circumstances, as well as cultural values, can underpin levels of ambition and parental support. They support contemporary views that young people are cognisant of their classed positions in education, and in society in general, and that this can influence the behaviour they display (Atkins, 2009 and Nayak 2010). The findings also support the belief that vocational education reinforces rather than addresses social inequalities. It can be meaningless; and of limited value to those who have undertaken it; and it can exacerbate the inequalities young people endure (Bates, 1984, 1993; Bathmaker, 2001; and Atkins, 2009).

Differences in situation can generate circumstances whereby all parties involved in the educational setting fear a loss of respect should they be seen to lose 'face'. One of the major areas of concern learners have is that they will be seen to be unable to do the very thing the institution and teachers require of them; that is to learn. The sense of injustice learners experience around this is notable and appears to be compounded by their feelings of inadequacy and lack of support.

The findings supported Mac an Ghail's (1995) theory that physical violence was a prominent feature in male relationships; Chen and Katz's (2009) beliefs that emotional issues, family status and relationships with families were more prevalent in females; and Francis' (1999) belief that girls use social explanations for disruptive behaviour whereas boys use biological ones. The findings also supported the theory that learning difficulties can lead to poor relationships with

both peers and teachers in class, and with school in general (Mitchel et al., 1998; Murray and Greenberg, 2006; and Mugnaini, 2009).

The original contribution to knowledge this study has made exists in the new dimensions to many of these theories it has provided, and for the insight it has given into the impact such inequalities can have on the lives and learning careers of young people. The study has generated new theories related to the changed nature of disruption and the impact technology has had on the types of disruption now used in the classroom. It has revealed the impact family type can have on learner lives and educational experiences; and given us an insight into the influences individual economic circumstance can have on educational experience in FE. It has raised awareness of the need to help teaching staff recognise reasons for disruption in classrooms. It has also demonstrated how learner voice could support use of critical pedagogy to address the issue of disruption.

Perhaps the most profound discovery has been how, despite the existence of all of these theories, old and new, learners remain to have unmet needs in so many areas. Learner voice has allowed the unmet needs of learners in this FE College to be brought to the fore, and the following recommendations will hopefully allow strategies to be developed which may go some way to addressing factors which contribute to disruption in the college.

However, much of this cannot be addressed by college policy as it relates to external factors based in social class, inequality, previous negative educational experiences, and each learner's individual identity. Structuration theory has provided the research project with a powerful analytical framework for the study of

disruption in classrooms in one FE college. It has furthered understanding of disruption in the classroom, but more importantly, in highlighting the complex nature of the reasons for it, has facilitated recognition of the associations which exist between society in general and what happens in the classroom and the limits this places on the college's capacity to address this issue.

Recommendations

Whilst having recognised that many of the reasons for disruption are beyond the control of learner, teacher or institution, the research findings inspire identification of new ways of addressing factors that can lead to disruption in class.

Learners and teachers would benefit from open discussion of the topic of disruption in class; the different forms disruption can take; the implications it has for teaching, and learning and what strategies are available to them to seek help or attention. This shared exploration could be integrated into induction and tutorial provision and on-going support for the learner. This open approach is about a critical pedagogy, creating a partnership between teacher and learner to understand underpinning reasons for disruption, and where possible challenge inequality.

Identification of learning needs should be a shared process; one that provides scope for, and supports, learner voice in this area. The research findings revealed that despite several opportunities for screening, learner's support needs were not fully addressed, and this resulted in disruption in the classroom. New ways of identifying learner needs must be explored, and ways of offering support be matched to learner requirements.

The College needs to recognise the diversity of different family forms and the pressures these can bring to bear on young learners. Increased family involvement can improve relationships between college staff, learners and their parents. Parents can be better informed of the advantages FE has for young people and the responsibilities education confers on them. Learners often appeared to be

struggling alone with a fear of failure, a sense of duty to parents to succeed, and insufficient support or guidance as to how problems they encountered could be managed or resolved.

Many of the learners were experiencing severe financial hardship which they were willing to tackle independently should an employment opportunity be made available. The College would benefit from acting as a broker assisting local employers to establish links with young people in search of part-time work. This could be a reciprocal arrangement with employers meeting changes in demand with a mobile and responsive workforce.

Traffic light systems have proved to be of benefit in several areas of the College. This practice could be extended to use an alerting system for learners who are experiencing problems in different areas. This system would also support the targeting of specialist support for learners in need, and ensure that unmet need does not occur.

All staff should be in receipt of training which raises their awareness of potential reasons for disruption in class. A great deal of the provision available to teachers focuses on how to deal with disruption, as opposed to understanding the causes and triggers. Increased understanding of the latter aspects could create a more empathetic and well-informed approach to pedagogy. Staff should be cognisant of the changing nature of disruption and the legitimisation of ‘talking’ and its consequences. This will hopefully give staff the necessary support they need to deal with emerging forms, and the capacity to develop altered approaches.

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Appendix

Appendices

Appendix 1: Letter to Principal

Appendix 2: Letter to DM and CTL

Appendix 3: Letter to parent/permission slip

Appendix 1: Letter to Principal

13 January 2008

Mr XX
Percy College
The High Street
Skipton
North Yorkshire
BD23 1JY

Dear X,

I am currently undertaking a four year programme of study with Huddersfield University to obtain a Doctorate in Education. I have successfully completed the year one taught phase of the qualification and am now embarking on my research project for the final three years.

I am writing to seek your permission to undertake research in the college for my research project. The emphasis for this will be student behaviour. I hope to examine predictors of inappropriate behaviour in college and show consideration for learners' perceptions of this with a view to reviewing current strategies for dealing with it.

This topic links in with creating a 'safe' learning environment, something which was highlighted as being of major importance to learners in some earlier research I have undertaken. It also underpins the promotion of the 'health and well-being of learners', 'equality of opportunity' and the 'every child matters' agenda which are current key areas of focus in the college. I am sure you will agree that this will prove that we are committed to providing learners with the best possible environment in which to learn and study, one that can be sustained and developed through learner participation and consultation.

I have taken the opportunity to discuss my ideas with several senior managers in the college (W, Y and J) and they are all of the opinion that this would be a valid and worthwhile area of study to pursue. I hope you will support my endeavours in this area by granting permission for this study. My research findings will respect all aspects of confidentiality and the findings will be available to the College.

Yours Sincerely

Christine Binner

Appendix 2: Letter to DMs and CTLs

Topic: Research into low level minimal disruption on level 2 programmes

Dear Colleague and Course Tutor on a Level 2 programme

This year as part of my Doctorate in Education I am researching low level minimal disruption in level 2 groups and its impact on teaching and learning. As a sample I have selected Level 2 programmes. This research has been given the full backing and support of the Principal and SMT team and I would be grateful if you could assist in this research by:

- Distributing a letter to parents at the beginning of the term explaining in brief what the research is about and requesting parental permission should their son/daughter be approached at a later date (I will provide you with the letters ready for sending out as soon as I know numbers).
- Identifying and referring to myself students who meet the following criteria:
 - Disrupts a teaching and learning session on a daily/on-going basis
 - Displays inappropriate behaviour in class hindering teaching and learning
 - Displays disinterest in the learning programme
 - Presents as a potential early leaver

I have tried to make the research both interesting and innovative and if they are willing to take part in the research (they are under no obligation to do so) identified learners will as well as being interviewed, take part in a game. All information will be gathered and handled protecting anonymity and confidentiality at all times and in keeping with research ethics.

My initial analysis of previous cases of serious misbehaviour in college (incidents involving the police and/or resulting in requests for learners to leave) have all been preceded by low level disruption in class, making a good case for finding out why this happens and what we could do to prevent it.

Benefits to the college will hopefully focus on improved retention and achievement, development of a useful resource (the game) which tutors can use to support learners with problems impacting on learning, a reduction in classroom disruption and fewer incidents of a serious nature.

If you have any questions regarding this research project please do not hesitate to get in touch either by email or by contacting me on Ext 693832.

Kind regards

Christine Binner

Coordinator for Health Studies, Care & Counselling

Appendix 3: Letter to Parent/Carer

Dear Parent/Carer,

As an educational provider Craven College continually strives to analyse its provision and where possible make improvements which can lead to very positive learning experiences and successful outcomes for all learners.

This academic year as part of a Doctorate in Education I shall be researching behaviour which could lead to low level minimal disruption in class on Level 2 programmes, something which can, if not addressed lead to poor achievement, distraction and failure to complete.

In practical terms this could mean that your son or daughter could be approached and asked to take part in the research project (being interviewed and participating in a game). Learners are under no obligation to take part and can withdraw from the research at any point should they choose to do so. Anonymity will be guaranteed and confidentiality respected at all times and no real names will be used.

The benefits of taking part are numerous and include having the chance to highlight something which is preventing the young person from learning and gaining support for this, improving provision for all, reducing distractions for other learners and the tutor and improving levels of achievement.

As many of the learners on level 2 programmes are under 18 I am writing to ask you to give your parental consent should your son/daughter be approached. You can do this by using the tear off slip below and returning it in the envelope provided.

Yours Faithfully
Christine Binner
Coordinator for Health Studies, Care & Counselling

- ☐ **I give** parental consent for my son/daughter to take part in the research project looking at low level minimal disruption on level 2 programmes
- ☐ **I do not give** parental consent for my son/daughter to take part in the research project looking at low level minimal disruption on level 2 programmes

Student name:

Programme of study:

Name of parent:

Signature of parent:

Date:

