

MAPPING THE VIRTUAL SCHOOL ENSEMBLE:
THE ROLE OF LOSS, GRIEF, LOVE, AND CARE

BY

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A thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

School of Education
College of Social Sciences
University of Birmingham
September 2022

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Abstract

For young people in local authority care in England, who now number over 80,000, loss and grief are necessarily evoked upon entry into care. This loss and grief, which is predominantly non-death and oftentimes ambiguous, refers to both the material and the immaterial; parent(s), siblings(s), time, place, identity, and so on. Subsequently experienced within a system skewed toward crisis intervention, this affective dimension of young people's lived experiences is disenfranchised (unattended). One such aspect of this disenfranchisement refers to the performative channelling and conversion of love and care so that these affective experiences and responses might be rendered measurable and, therefore, 'valuable' by the neoliberal education machine. Focussing on such processes within the context of education, an area in which there has been limited research to pinpoint the key factors associated with the perpetual and systemic educational attainment gap between young people in local authority care and their peers, this thesis turns its attention to the Virtual School. Not a physical school setting, the Virtual School brings together local authority employees, led by a Virtual School Head Teacher, as a policy measure intended to close this attainment gap. Using policy as an entryway into the Virtual School ensemble, that is the collection of techno-bureaucratic and affective elements which come together to form a recognisable 'whole', this thesis proffers itself as a contribution to the field of critical education policy sociology.

Using a Deleuzo-Spinozian approach to ontology via ethics within a fertile space between assemblage and Actor Network theories, this thesis documents a kind of abstract 'mapping' of the Virtual School ensemble. Tracing the material relations between the affective and the performative, ethnographic data, from eight months spent in a Virtual School in England and additional interviews with other Virtual School staff members, are presented and analysed as

a way in which to critically explore the articulation of four elements of the ensemble. These elements, which cover the techno-bureaucratic and affective, are ambiguous (non-death) loss, money (Pupil Premium Plus), corporate parenting policy, and Personal Education Plans. Through an analysis of these elements, attention is drawn to the fleeting opportunities for loss, grief, love, and care to escape into the ensemble before it is captured and converted, channelled, or made into something ‘unspeakable’. Focussing on the limits placed on the affective by the performative forces of the neoliberal education machine, this thesis draws attention to the resultant disenfranchising nature of the Virtual School ensemble. In doing so, this thesis reveals the Virtual School’s contingency as it is made intolerable. Rather than presenting a set of discrete actions required for its improvement, this thesis begins to imagine a future Virtual School ensemble which positions itself as an affectively-led political community. Thinking in this way opens a space for a critical conversation, at both the level of policy and practice, which takes seriously the ambiguous loss and grief experiences of young people in local authority care and the role love and care can play in its enfranchisement.

Acknowledgements

This thesis was supported by an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) studentship.

When I started my PhD in 2018, I was unaware of the hardship I would face in the years that followed. After the diagnosis of a life-threatening illness in 2019 which led straight into a global pandemic in 2020, forcing me to ‘shield’ away from society for months on end, the completion of this thesis feels like a bigger achievement than I could ever possibly articulate. This thesis represents not just an exploration of a topic I feel deeply passionate about but one of the most rewarding and simultaneously challenging tasks that I might ever face in my academic life. We are often discouraged from being openly proud of our achievements, but in submitting this work, I make a promise to believe in myself and celebrate my achievements because:

I am proud of my work and in awe of my strength, resilience, and determination.

First, I wish to thank my supervisors, Dr Ian McGimpsey and Professor Kalwant Bhopal. Without you both, this thesis would not have been possible. Your encouragement, support, care, and academic wisdom have been invaluable in this process. Ian, thank you for putting up with me since 2013, for pushing me to do my best, and for committing so many hours to support me through supervision. Kalwant, thank you for your unwavering encouragement, for sharing your years of experience as a supervisor and examiner, and for committing many hours to read and provide comments on my work. I could not have wished for a better supervisory team.

This thesis would also not have been possible without those who agreed to participate in my research. Travelling around England to observe your practice and hear about what you do was, without a doubt, the highlight of my PhD experience. To every one of you, thank you - keep doing what you do best; caring for the young people in local authority care despite the systematic challenges you face in your daily practice.

During my time as a doctoral student, I have met some amazing individuals, all on their PhD journey, each of whom have played their part in keeping me going, inspiring me with their commitment and passion for their area of research. Our Teams or Zoom catchups have proved invaluable in providing me with renewed enthusiasm during a time when circumstances prevented us from meeting in person. Thank you, particularly, to Bobby who has spent plenty of time listening to me, encouraging me, and always being at the other end of the phone when I am finding things difficult. And, of course, thank you to Michael, Alejandra, Megan, James, and Laura.

To Sammy, thank you for providing me with free coffees and snacks when I spent hours on end in the coffee shop working away at my thesis and periodically watching the world go by. I told you I would acknowledge your support; it did not go unnoticed.

The biggest thanks, of course, goes to my husband, Lewis, my family, and friends. Lewis, I am sure you thought you would never see the day when this thesis was submitted; but here we are. Thank you for your steadfast love, even when the going got incredibly tough. You encouraged me to keep going even when I did not think I could and for that, I am forever in your debt. Mum and Dad, thank you for your unwavering support and encouragement. I am sure that you never imagined your nervous wreck of a daughter whom you packed off to

university in 2013 would be submitting her thesis in 2022. Thank you for always acting as a sounding board, and for always showing your love and pride in my achievements, you are both amazing and I would not be who I am today without you. To Paul and Rachel, thank you for providing office space, for keeping me going through everything, and, most importantly, for loving me like your own. To Phil, my 'little' brother who provides so much wisdom and support, thank you for taking time to understand me and rationalise my anxious thoughts. I feel so fortunate to have a brother who is also a best friend. To Imogen, Helen, and Mireille, I could not be more thankful that my university life produced three wonderful sisters. From the moment we met in 2013, I knew there was something special within our friendship. We have experienced life's highs and incredible lows together and, without you all, I do not know where I would be. And, of course, to my special furry friend, Luna, who has provided company and distraction throughout. I wish you could read this so you know how special you are but giving you a treat will have to suffice.

Finally, my biggest thanks go to God. My rock and my guide. My rainbow of hope.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

‘This moment is a once in a generation opportunity to reset children’s social care. What we need is a system that... puts lifelong loving relationships at the heart of the care system and lays the foundations for a good life for those who have been in care. What we have currently is a system increasingly skewed to crisis intervention, with outcomes for children that continue to be unacceptably poor and costs that continue to rise. For these reasons, a radical reset is now unavoidable.

Achieving this reset starts with recognising that it is loving relationships that hold the solutions for children and families overcoming adversity. While relationships are rich and organic, children’s social care can be rigid and linear. Rather than drawing on and supporting family and community, the system too often tries to replace organic bonds and relationships with professionals and services’

The Independent Review of Children’s Social Care

(MacAlister, 2022:8)

1.0 The Care Landscape: A Brief Introduction

The number of young people in local authority care in England has been rising year on year and in 2021 rose to its highest ever recorded level (80,050 young people, representing a rate of 67 per 10,000) (Gov.uk, 2021). Young people under the age of eighteen who are found to have suffered, or be at risk of suffering, significant harm (HM Government, 2018) account for the majority of those in care (66%), where ‘Abuse or Neglect’ is recorded as the ‘Primary Need’ (the ‘need ‘highest’ up the list’ that gets reported) (Gov.uk, 2021:no pagination). As a result, almost 80% of these young people are subject to a Care Order under the Children Act

1989 which divides legal parental responsibility (PR) between the local authority and birth parents (Heptinstall, 2000; Gov.uk, 2021). Over recent decades, ‘public care for children in England has undergone a significant transformation moving almost exclusively towards foster care as the preferred mode of delivery’ (Cronin, 2019:1). It is unsurprising, therefore, that 71% of young people in local authority care are placed within an approved foster placement (Gov.uk, 2021). Whilst an emulation of family life through foster care is viewed as the ‘ideal place for children’s socialization and moral guidance’ (Cronin, 2019:1), ‘placement instability...remains a major issue’ (Konijn et al., 2019:483), with 1 in 11 young people experiencing three or more placements in a year (Gov.uk, 2021). Furthermore, with males accounting for 56% of young people in local authority care, 10-15-year-olds 39%, and White young people 75%¹ (Gov.uk, 2021), there exists evidence for inequalities in intervention rates in terms of ethnicity and levels of socio-economic deprivation (Bywaters et al., 2014; Bywaters et al., 2017). Explored in greater depth later in this thesis, in short, ‘children and/or their parents face unequal chances, experiences or outcomes of involvement with child welfare services that are systematically associated with structural social dis/advantage and are unjust and unavoidable’ (Bywaters et al., 2015:9). Although these inequalities will not be the focus of this thesis, it is an important aspect to note when contextualising the care landscape; the landscape upon which this thesis is built.

Beyond such structural inequalities relating to entry into local authority care, it has been recognised for decades that such young people experience acutely poorer outcomes than their peers in a significant number of areas including (mental and physical) health, employment, and education (Hook and Courtney, 2011; Simkiss, 2012; Sebba et al., 2015; Teyhan et al.,

¹ 23% aged 16+, 19% aged 5-9, 14% aged 1-4, and 5% aged < 1 year. 10% Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups, 4% Asian British, 3% other ethnicities/unknown, and 1% unrecorded (Gov.uk, 2021).

2018). Choosing to focus on education, there exists a pervasive attainment gap between young people in local authority care and their peers across all levels of education. In 2019², ‘the average Attainment 8 score for looked after children was 19.1 compared to 44.6 for non-looked after children’ (Department for Education, 2020). This attainment gap is contextualised, in part, by the disparity in levels of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) where 53% of young people in local authority care have a recognised SEND at the end of Key Stage 4 compared to 14% of those not in care (Department for Education, 2020). However, whilst such differences must be considered (Sebba et al., 2015), alongside the complexities of pre-care experiences, low expectations, and family background, to name but a few (Berridge et al., 2009), there has been limited research to ‘pinpoint the key factors associated with looked after children’s lower attainment’ (Sebba et al., 2015:4). Despite this, the educational attainment gulf remains a historically sustained (inter)national concern (Sebba and Luke, 2019) which transcends party politics and provides the context of influence (Bowe et al., 1992) for myriad educational policy initiatives including *Corporate Parenting*, the *Virtual School*, *Pupil Premium Plus*, and *Personal Education Plans*. Using these four policy initiatives as an ‘entryway’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 2019 [1987]:12), namely the Pupil Premium Plus, this thesis seeks to trace the connections and articulations between policy (and other techno-bureaucratic elements) and the affective as a way to form a ‘mapping of places, times, people, and becomings’ (Mazzei, 2017:9) as these elements come together within what is described as the *Virtual School ensemble*.

The first of these, Corporate Parenting, was introduced into the political arena by the Utting Report (1997:no pagination) in which young people in local authority care were described as

² I refer to the 2018-2019 statistical release due to changed statistical release reporting in 2019-2020 / 2020-2021 and the cancellation of/changes to examinations during the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic.

‘children for whom the state has assumed the role of parent’. This was extended in 2000 when Frank Dobson MP posed a question to the House of Commons: “*Would this be good enough for my children?*”; a phrase which has become embedded in the cross-party political narrative in relation to the expectations of the state to care for young people in local authority care (see for example Department for Education and Skills, 2003; National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, 2013; Department for Education, 2015; Children and Social Work Act, 2017). Leading to the development of the *Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000* (Grover et al., 2004), the phrases ‘corporate parent’ and ‘corporate parenting’ were formally introduced as ‘local authorities and their ‘relevant partners’ (Department for Education, 2018a:4) were called upon to ‘do what might be described as what normal parents do’ (Dobson MP, House of Commons, 2000:cols.377-378). This role was formalised in 2017 by the *Children and Social Work Act 2017* which made corporate parenting principles a legal requirement through the imposition of seven ‘Corporate Parenting Principles’. Corporate parenting has since become an integral aspect of the political rhetoric surrounding young people in local authority care and has, as a result, undergone criticism including questioning whether the State can ‘corporate parent’ (Bullock et al., 2006).

The second of these, the Virtual School, was introduced as a ‘pilot to support the education of children in care’ (Sebba and Berridge, 2019:539) across eleven local authorities between 2007 and 2009 (Berridge et al., 2009). Not a physical school, the Virtual School pilot brought together a Virtual School Head and ‘virtual school teams’ to work with schools and other external services to improve the educational outcomes of young people in local authority care (Sebba and Berridge, 2019) ‘as if they were attending a single school’ (Berridge et al., 2009:3). In 2014, the *Children Act 1989* was amended by *The Children and Families Act 2014* to place statutory responsibility on all local authorities in the United Kingdom (UK) to

appoint a Virtual School Head (Drew and Banerjee, 2019). The importance of this policy initiative, designed to attend to the attainment gap between young people in care and their peers, is exemplified by the small, but growing, discussion within academic literature (see for example Rivers, 2018; Drew and Banerjee, 2019; Sebba and Berridge, 2019), the formation of the National Association of Virtual School Heads in 2016 (NAVSH), and the publication of the Virtual School Handbook in 2019 (National Association of Virtual School Heads, 2019).

One key responsibility of the Virtual School Head and their team is to manage the Pupil Premium Plus which is designed to ‘improve the attainment and progress of looked after children’ (National Association of Virtual School Heads, 2019:40). The Pupil Premium Plus represents an extension of the Pupil Premium policy which was introduced in 2011 in response to the Coalition government’s promise to ‘fund a significant premium for disadvantaged pupils from outside the schools budget by reductions in spending elsewhere’ (HM Government, 2010:28). In 2013, it was recognised that young people in local authority care “*face unique challenges at school*” and that it is “*vital that these vulnerable children are given the targeted support they need and the education they deserve to help them get on in life*” (Timpson and Department for Education, 2013:no pagination). Formally introduced in 2014, the Pupil Premium Plus provides additional per capita funding which is centrally allocated to Virtual School Heads according to the numbers of young people ‘in care for at least one day during that academic year’ within the local authority (National Association of Virtual School Heads, 2019:540; Roberts et al., 2021). This funding, which is to be ‘spent in accordance with the needs stated’ in their Personal Education Plan and stands at £2410 per capita (introduced as £1900 and raised to £2300 at the time of the research) is inspected and reported upon by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skill

(Ofsted) (National Association of Virtual School Heads, 2019:540; Roberts et al., 2021).

Whilst there has been increasing attention within policy and academic literature regarding the Pupil Premium Plus, little is still known ‘about how it is spent and to what effect’ (Sebba and Berridge, 2019:540).

Finally, Personal Education Plans (PEPs), which were brought into effect by the Department for Education and Employment and Department of Health (2000) *Education of Young People in Public Care: Guidance*, unite each of the aforementioned policies as corporate parents, including employees of the Virtual School, come together to assess the needs of a young person including the use of the Pupil Premium Plus. A statutory ‘planning tool to document the educational journey of an individual looked after child’, PEPs act as a ‘means to account for’ the Pupil Premium Plus, stipulate specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timebound (SMART) targets (Read et al., 2020:50), and document interventions and ‘support needed to help the child realise their short and long-term academic achievements and aspirations’ (Department for Education, 2018c:15). Alongside the document itself, regular multi-agency meetings are held to ensure ‘appropriate planning’, ‘tracking and sharing’ is undertaken by the Designated Teacher, Virtual School representative, Social Worker, and any other (external) service providers (Read et al., 2020:58). Many local authorities are now moving to ePEPs (online or electronic PEPs) which have been used to offer a ‘more efficient resource for collating and analysing data’ when working across the ‘fragmented’ educational journeys of young people in local authority care (Read et al., 2020:67). PEP criteria (i.e., what evidence, stipulated by the Virtual School, is to be produced by the school) can differ across local authorities. This is problematic for Designated Teachers who, without a consistent ‘PEP criteria’, can become confused about the requirements for securing Pupil Premium Plus funding (Read et al., 2020:54) for individual young people who are in one

school but placed across different authorities. Ultimately, as an important aspect of the educational lives of young people in local authority care, a small number of researchers have interrogated PEPs, including asking whether they are ‘more than a piece of paper’ (Hayden, 2005) and if the process might offer a space for change (Parker, 2017).

1.1 Unattended Loss and Grief and an Absence of Love and Care: An Intolerable

Research Context

Whilst drawing attention to the care landscape in England, focussing on educational outcomes and policy initiatives designed to ameliorate the attainment gap between young people in local authority care and their peers, is of significant value, this must not act to displace the loss and grief such young people face and the love and care they need and deserve. This is because entry into local authority care necessarily evokes ‘abrupt changes in close relationships and family environments’ for which ‘anticipatory adjustment’ cannot be made (Mitchell and Kuczynski, 2010:427) and places them in a system which is ‘increasingly skewed to crisis intervention’ and attempts to ‘replace organic bonds and relationships with professionals and services’ (MacAlister, 2022:8). Such attempts, however, cannot replace the ambiguous losses that young people face as care orders remove them from their original family, resulting in an ‘uncertainty or lack of information’ about their ‘whereabouts or status’ (Boss, 2007:105). In other words, they are ‘gone but not for sure’ (Boss, 2007:105). This ambiguity co-exists with the powerful psychological presence of the original family (Mitchell, 2016; Knight and Gitterman, 2019) who are preserved within the psyche through the transference from external to internal existence, known as ‘melancholic internalization’, which represents an ‘unfinished process’ of grieving (Freud, 1923; Butler, 1995:166). This melancholic internalization takes place within a social care system already shown to be ‘embedded in chronic and repeated loss events around one’s identity and sense of belonging’

(Samuels, 2009:1229), professionalised, and missing love (MacAlister, 2022). Such experiences and feelings have only, in recent years, been attended to by a small, but growing body of literature (see for example Samuels, 2009; Mitchell, 2016; Mitchell, 2018; Vaswani, 2018b). Therefore, whilst the narrow policy and research focus on ‘improving the attainment and progress of looked-after children’ (National Association of Virtual School Heads, 2019:40) serves to positively address young people’s quantifiable life chances and outcomes, doing so without attending to ambiguous loss and the need for loving relationships is damaging with violent³ consequences.

This is the intolerable context which acts as the starting point for my thesis and one which has, by the Independent Review of Children’s Social Care published in May 2022 (MacAlister, 2022:4), been identified as a system which requires a ‘radical reset’. By intolerable, I refer, drawing on the work of Foucault (1994:175-176), to that which I ‘cease to be accepted’. Failing to acknowledge the experience and symptoms of ambiguous loss and grief and the need for caring and ‘loving relationships and homes that are healing’ (MacAlister, 2022:4) for young people in local authority care, forecloses a whole aspect of subjecthood; a form of destruction and violence (Butler, 2003). In desiring improved educational outcomes for young people in local authority care, I cease to accept the disenfranchising practice (via policy, research, and practice itself) which converts and channels (processes which I define later) the loss and grief which pertain to ‘a past characterised by neglect and adaptation difficulties...a present in which family life is arranged by the public authorities...a future with a danger of new breakups and with an ambiguous time perspective’ (Christiansen et al., 2013:271). Therefore, within my techno-

³ By ‘violent’ I do not refer to the common-sense understanding of violence but the wider concept of ‘acting upon another, to put the other at risk, cause the other damage, to expunge the other’ (Butler, 2003:18).

bureaucratic focus on the Corporate Parenting, the Virtual School, Personal Education Plans, and Pupil Premium Plus policies, I make an active choice to include loss, grief⁴, love, and care as I consider how such feelings are (dis)enfranchised (or benignly neglected (Knight and Gitterman, 2019)) by the ‘factors and forces’ (Youdell, 2015:110) of the neoliberal education machine. A machine predicated on producing ‘value’ via outcomes at the expense of a ‘commitment to dialogue, knowledge, and memory in the face of fear and forgetting’ (Gerson, 2009). This active choice is founded upon my ethic of care, a term originally used by Gilligan (1982), which, in this context, refers to focussing ‘on attentiveness, trust, responsiveness to need, narrative nuance and cultivating caring relationships’ (Held, 2006:15) for young people in local authority care. This focus is drawn out of the ‘intolerable’ and is the way in which I seek to conduct a piece of research which opens the possibility of ‘alleviating some of the ‘othering’ that young people in local authority care face within their educational lives (Holland, 2010:1664).

1.2 The Neoliberal Education Machine

During the last thirty years, neoliberal approaches to policy and service delivery within England have become embedded within government; a neoliberal regime (Youdell, 2011; McGimpsey, 2017). Referring to both economy *and* a ‘modality of government’ which relates ‘truth, power, and the subject through the constitution of a ‘discursive field within which the exercise of power is rationalised’ (Youdell, 2011; Ball, 2013:1688; McGimpsey, 2017), neoliberalism is everywhere and everything (Flew, 2015). That is it is not just “out there’ in politics and the economy’ but “in here’ – in the head, heart and soul’ (Ball, 2016:1047). Globally, the ‘neoliberal reform process’ consists of ‘three interrelated and

⁴ I make a choice not to employ the word ‘trauma’ other than in the context of trauma and attachment theory given that this term has become ‘firmly embedded within clinical usage’ (DeJong, 2010:596) and requires engagement with much wider fields of research, including psychology and psychiatry than is possible within this thesis to fully understand the history and meaning of this term.

interdependent technologies’: Market, Management, and Performance (Ball, 2016:1049).

These technologies have had far-reaching consequences for the education system through the inconspicuous but harmful changes upon the ‘subjective experience of education at all levels’ through the alteration of ‘what we do...who we are, how we think about what we do, how we relate to one another, how we decide what is important and what is acceptable, what is tolerable’ (Ball, 2016:1046&1050).

Given that ‘[e]verything is a machine’, there is a ‘continual whirr’ as one always connects to another in a kind of flow of desire (Deleuze and Guattari, 2018 [1984]:16). A flow which connects neoliberalism and education. Using the work of Deleuze and Guattari (2018 [1984]:12), the ‘machine’ is best understood as the ‘process of production’ which, ‘like a little refrain’, ‘gains its consistency through being repeated over and over again’ (Goodchild, 1996:51). Despite this repetition, the neoliberal education machine is not (re)produced as the ‘same thing, nor variation to identifiable and limited differences’ but as a kind of continuity as the ‘intensity in an idea or sensation’ varies in the space between the virtual and the actual of reality (Williams, 2013). It is in this space the neoliberal education machine simultaneously denotes ‘potential’ (Goodchild, 1996) and enslaves its policy subjects as its ‘constituent parts’ (Ball, 2016; Deleuze and Guattari, 2019 [1987]). I use the term neoliberal education machine, therefore, as a way in which to denote the ‘composition, function, and potential’ (Goodchild, 1996:49) which reaches into the Virtual School ensemble and brings with it a ‘landscape of new dilemmas, challenges and struggles’ (Ball, 2016:1055).

As this machine reaches into the Virtual School ensemble, I am interested in understanding and examining the ‘dilemmas, challenges and struggles’ (Ball, 2016:1055) which occur when considering the flows of loss, grief, love, and care as being in relationship with the techno-

bureaucratic. That is because '[l]ove is fundamental to human existence' and even more so for young people in local authority care who need to be 'facilitated in having life changing experiences...to help them recover and find love again' (Evans, 2020:72). Set against this need, I recognise, however, the 'emergence of neoliberal political and economic ideologies' which, 'over the course of the 1980s and 1990s', 'took care into the marketplace' (Scourfield, 2007; Steckley and Smith, 2011:183). It is already known that this has had significant effects on the practitioners and young people within the care system which now, as a result of systemic changes through policy, delivers a 'service' rather than 'care' per se (Collins, 2018; Brown et al., 2019:221). Such effects include the curation of a 'culture of compliance where work can be monitored and measured, rather than an environment where love can flourish' (Turner and Percy-Smith, 2020). I attempt, therefore, to 'map' the Virtual School ensemble, paying attention to the effects of the neoliberal education machine on loss, grief, love, and care as it relates to policy.

1.3 Mapping the Virtual School Ensemble: Using Policy as an 'Entryway'

To address that which is intolerable through my ethic of care, I present a thesis which seeks to ethnographically 'map' the Virtual School ensemble. This means I attempt to trace the 'material relations' between 'human bodies and other non-human identities' (Zembylas, 2020:63) as I think, simultaneously, about how the techno-bureaucratic (e.g., policy, money, commissioning) interacts with the affective (loss, grief, care, love) *and* the effects of the wider 'factors and forces' (Youdell, 2015:110) of the neoliberal education machine on these relations. This is as practitioners, or corporate parents, within the Virtual School seek to 'improve the attainment and progress of looked-after children' (National Association of Virtual School Heads, 2019:40), specifically through their work with the Pupil Premium Plus. Given that a '[m]ap has multiple entryways' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2019 [1987]:12), I use

this as the rationale for following the Pupil Premium Plus as the route into the Virtual School ensemble. However, by treating everything as though it is ‘relevant and interrelated’ (Zembylas, 2020:64), I am able to look both into and beyond this policy to understand the relationship between performativity and affectivity. In other words, the interaction between a specific ‘technology’ of the neoliberal education machine which forms a ‘culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control and attrition and change’ (Ball, 2003:216) via the techno-bureaucratic *and* loss, grief, love, and care as bodily sensations, ‘individual feelings and emotions’ (Robinson and Kutner, 2019:117) which ‘slide into each other’ (Ahmed, 2010:231). In doing so, I seek to use this process of mapping as a way in which to imagine new possibilities for a Virtual School ensemble which might stand as an affectively-led, political community, centred around love and care, with an ethical responsibility to loss and grief as a critical ‘witness’ (Zembylas, 2006; Gerson, 2009). One way in which to trigger the ‘radical reset of the children’s social care system’ (MacAlister, 2022:4).

I proffer this piece of research as a contribution to the field of (critical) education policy sociology which ‘offers a critical account of the makings and effects of contemporary education policy’ (Youdell, 2015:110). More recently, this field has been occupied by critical scholars including Professor Stephen Ball, Professor Deborah Youdell, and Doctor Ian McGimpsey, all of whom are concerned with viewing policy as ‘one part of a much wider ensemble of factors and forces’ (Youdell, 2015:110). I seek to join these scholars in looking through and beyond policy to offer an account of four of the many techno-bureaucratic and affective elements of the Virtual School ensemble by drawing on the philosophical work of Baruch Spinoza and Giles Deleuze, alongside Judith Butler and Stephen Ball. Each of these theorists help to make sense of the interconnectivity of affectivity and performativity as

forces. In wishing to maintain a degree of sociological recognisability, I also draw upon tools from Actor Network Theory (ANT) as a way in which to untangle the complexities of Deleuzian philosophy. This, alongside the concern for loss, grief, love, and care, is one way in which I offer an original contribution to the field. Because, after all, '[w]hat we need in policy analysis is a toolbox of diverse concepts and theories' (Ball, 1993:10).

Using policy as the 'entryway' into the mapping of the Virtual School ensemble, remaining aware of the 'danger of 'policy as the deep structure'' (Youdell and McGimpsey, 2015:120; Deleuze and Guattari, 2019 [1987]:13-15), means it is important to define policy and policy implementation. Until the 1980s, it was assumed that 'educational policy represented the implementation of solutions to educational problems' (Simons et al., 2009; Webb and Gulson, 2012:87). This techno-rational approach assumes there to be a 'fixed meaning' of policy, and, therefore, 'correct' and 'incorrect' implementations (Webb and Gulson, 2012). Instead of this reductionist approach which excludes discussions of the complexities of policy, I work with an understanding of policy as incomplete, ad hoc, 'always and only a contingent and provisional fixing', refuting any kind of consistency and seamlessness (Ball, 1994; Webb and Gulson, 2012:88). Using the work of Ball (1994) and Webb and Gulson (2012), policy is defined as 'text and action, words and deeds' (i.e., that which 'is enacted as well as what is intended' (Ball, 1994:10)) and indeterminate (Webb and Gulson, 2012). Combining this with the work of Deleuze (1990), policy is to be approached as a kind of 'becoming' as 'educational practices within the spaces of desired, yet not fully developed, policy initiatives and policy implementations' are actualised (Webb and Gulson, 2012:89). This represents a 'politics of becoming-policy' which helps to understand the production of elemental articulations within the Virtual School ensemble as practitioners navigate 'the

interface’ of their ‘sense of policy and their estimations of possible policy outcomes’ ‘through attention to affect’ (Webb and Gulson, 2012:89) and performativity.

1.4 Research Questions

To achieve such a project, I centre my research upon three research questions, drawn from my ethic of care and the concern to understand the role of loss, grief, love, and care within the policy arena of the Virtual School ensemble:

1. *How are loss and grief articulated in the Virtual School ensemble?*

Through this research question, I seek to explore how loss, grief, love, and care are articulated within the Virtual School ensemble as such experiences and feelings interact with the performative force of the neoliberal education machine. I wish to pay particular attention to the role of care as practitioners navigate their caring responsibilities alongside the pressures to produce educational outcomes and the effects this has on the subjectivation of young people.

2. *What is the relationship between the Pupil Premium Plus and educational ‘value’ within the Virtual School ensemble?*

Via this research question, I seek to trace the movement of the Pupil Premium Plus money as it flows from government to the young person via the local authority and external service providers. This includes paying attention to the role of Personal Education Plans in determining its use and ‘value’. In doing so, I focus on the neoliberal education machine’s performative function of ‘value’ and explore the effect this has on the subjectivation of young people and practitioners.

3. *What do love and care as a ‘corporate parent’ look like in the Virtual School ensemble?*

Using this research question, I seek to explore the articulation of corporate parenting within the Virtual School ensemble. As a policy rhetoric, I aim to understand how the neoliberal education machine determines the way in which practitioners make sense of corporate parenting policy, how this informs their practice, and how both practitioners and young people are subsequently formed as policy subjects.

1.5 Thesis Outline

This thesis is divided into eight subsequent chapters: literature review, theoretical foundation, ethics and methodology, four data analysis chapters, and a discussion and conclusion. I summarise, briefly, each of these chapters below:

Chapter 2: Literature Review

When thinking about the three research questions which guide this thesis, alongside the overarching relationship between the affective and the performative, four research problems emerge. These are the disenfranchisement of loss without death within local authority care, the somatic ‘translation’ of trauma and attachment, the commissioning of the corporate parent to care, and the role of ‘value’ in channelling, converting, and even evacuating the affective from education. In this chapter, I explore each of these research problems, concluding that the demand of the performative has significant effects on how affect might flow through the Virtual School ensemble.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Foundation

In this chapter, I lay down the ethico-political commitment of this thesis as I work across a ‘flattened’ ontology which validates the inclusion of the affective dimensions of young people’s lives, including the experience of loss and grief and the need for love and care, alongside the techno-bureaucratic elements which include national and local policy, money, and processes of commissioning. In this chapter, I present the core argument that, in holding

these two aspects together, I can furnish an ethico-political project which makes intolerable the damaging consequences the force of performativity has on the productivity of affectivity within the Virtual School ensemble. One such consequence includes the disenfranchisement of loss, grief, love, and care. It is only through attending to this relationship that I can carry out a project which includes the affective without fear of encountering representational issues. To do so, I ground my work in the philosophy of Baruch Spinoza and Giles Deleuze (and Félix Guattari) whom both present an embodied approach to ethics. Then, using Judith Butler as a guide, I move this ethical approach into a discussion of loss and grief, through which the Virtual School ensemble might represent a kind of political community predicated on an ethical responsibility as a critical ‘witness’ (Gerson, 2009; Zembylas, 2020).

Chapter 4: Methodology and Ethics

In this chapter, I outline the ethical and methodological approach to ethnographically mapping the Virtual School ensemble. An approach which attempts to fulfil the demands of the theoretical framework whilst also being recognisable within the methodological traditions of (critical) education policy sociology. I begin this chapter by further outlining my research questions, describing the employed methods, and providing a rationale for their choice, explaining my approach to data analysis, and, finally, considering the ethical issues, including addressing researcher reflexivity.

Chapters 5-8: Data Analysis

Element 1: Ambiguous (Non-Death) Loss

In the first chapter of my data analysis, I seek to chart the recording and monitoring, or performative, function of the neoliberal education machine and its multiple effects on the articulation of loss and grief within the Virtual School ensemble. I explore three effects which emerge from the data:

1. the machinic disenfranchisement of care which makes it difficult for practitioners to sustain individual acts of enfranchisement before they are shut down again,
2. the discursive (re)assertion of the young person as ‘neurologically damaged’ through which ‘trauma’ is commodified via an exchange between intervention and outcomes, and
3. the ‘translation’ of attachment theory to be made accessible for recording and monitoring.

This first chapter, therefore, focuses on the affective line within the Virtual School ensemble ‘map’ as I explore the channelling and conversion of the affective into that which is measurable.

Element 2: Money

In the second chapter of my data analysis, I attempt to trace the movement of the Pupil Premium Plus money as it flows from government to the young person via the local authority (Virtual School) and schools/(external) service providers. In doing so, I draw attention to the attribution of ‘value’ and the demonstrable effects this has on the subjectivation of practitioners and young people. I present, therefore, the *flow*, *stock*, and *code* (Deleuze, 1971; Smith, 2011) of the Pupil Premium Plus money as the subtext of neoliberalism (Ball, 2012a). I explore the distributional models used by each of the Virtual Schools included in my project, the exchange of ‘value’ between purchased ‘interventions’ and ‘outcomes’ and, finally, the Personal Education Plan meetings as the method through which the distribution of the Pupil Premium Plus is recorded and monitored. In summary, this second chapter focuses on the technological line of the Virtual School ensemble ‘map’ as I explore the techno-bureaucratic elements of policy, money, and commissioning.

Element 3: The Corporate Parent

In this chapter, I trace corporate parenting as a political rhetoric as it is ‘translated from text to action’ (Ball et al., 2012:3) within the Virtual School ensemble. Such a tracing begins with the linguistic tools of policy texts before interpretations are made by practitioners about what it means to be a corporate parent. A process which has effects on the enactment and subject position of both practitioners and young people within the Virtual School ensemble. Seeking to explore the ‘emotional dimensions of performativity’ (Sellar, 2015:134), I identify and trace the frustration that practitioners experience as they wrestle with the expectation to ‘emulate family life’ (Bullock et al., 2006:1349) by doing ‘at least what a good parent would do’ (Department for Education and Employment, 2001:13) *and* the demand to produce outcomes. This exposes the reality of enacting the affective task of parenting as it is shared amongst a ‘wide range of professionals’ (Charter and Le Grand, 2006:10) within a neoliberal policy environment which values the production of ‘positive’ educational ‘outcomes’ (Department for Education, 2018a:7) over the demonstration of love and care. In this third chapter, therefore, I focus on the discursive line of the Virtual School ‘map’ as I seek to critically interrogate the conversion and channelling of corporate parental care.

Element 4: Personal Education Plans

In this final data analysis chapter, I trace the enactment of Personal Education Plans as a ‘funnel neck’ (Parker, 2017:157) through which all elements of the Virtual School ensemble pass. Focussing on the striated and smooth space (Deleuze and Guattari, 2019 [1987]), I draw attention to the role of Personal Education Plans in both constraining meaning and practice *and* opening possibilities for ‘becoming’. By focussing on the technologies of control and the relations of power as forces of subjectivation, I argue that affectivity pertaining to both young people and practitioners is contained (or channelled and converted). However, I also consider

the way in which Personal Education Plans might offer a space of possibility whereby young people can express themselves without being contained by the normative and hierarchical scores of the striated space. In this final chapter, I focus on the situational line of the Virtual School ensemble as I explore Personal Education Plan practice; a point of intersection for all elements and lines of the ‘map’.

Chapter 9: Discussion and Conclusion

Finally, in the concluding chapter of this thesis, I return, again, to my research questions as I explore how they have been answered through the analysis of my ethnographic data. I also seek to consider how the thesis has made an original contribution to the field of (critical) education policy sociology and where further lines of enquiry might be opened as a result. Finally, I take time to consider the implications of my work as I seek not to tell practitioners ‘what to think’ but, instead, to ‘intervene’ in established ways of thinking (Fenwick and Edwards, 2010). I do so as I ‘peer’ into an alternative space arguing for critical conversations which imagine a future affectively-led, political Virtual School community centred around the productive role of loss, grief, love, and care.

Chapter 2: Reviewing the Literature

‘Despite our differences in location and history, my guess is that it is possible to appeal to a “we”, for all of us have some notion of what it is to have lost somebody. Loss has made a tenuous “we” of us all’

(Butler, 2003:10)

2.0 Introduction

In turning to the existing literature as a way in which to open lines of investigation for a mapping of the Virtual School ensemble, there are four pertinent lines which emerge. Each of these lines link together when the subjectivation of young people in local authority care into the position of educational ‘Other’ is problematised. A position carved out by the neoliberal education machine, foreclosing this group of young people from being made intelligible as ‘ideal learners’ (Youdell, 2006; Bradbury, 2013).

These lines are:

1. Losing and grieving: the ambiguous nature of loss and grief without death in local authority care
2. Framing the young person: the ‘somatic’ translation of trauma and attachment
3. Filling the void: commissioning the corporate parent to care
4. Measuring and judging: evacuating affect via performativity and ‘value’

To investigate each of these lines, I draw on the relevant literature, regardless of methodological approach and study design (Arksey and O’Malley, 2015). I do not seek, in doing so, to undertake a ‘quality assessment’ of the identified literature but to critically explore each line using appropriate theoretical concepts (Arksey and O’Malley, 2015) by investigating the ‘salient points’ (Littell et al., 2008; Crisp, 2015). Through the review contained within this chapter, I conclude that the performative demands of the neoliberal education machine have significant effects on how affect flows through the Virtual School

ensemble. This supports my identification of the intolerable and acts as a foundation from which to explore the effects these demands have on the articulation of both affective and techno-bureaucratic elements of the ensemble.

The first line emerges as I consider the universality of loss, a human consequence of being ‘given over’ and ‘implicated in lives’ that are not our own, rendering each of us vulnerable to the exploitation of the ‘primary scene’ (Butler, 2003:10&17). For young people in local authority care, it is the exploitation of this scene, as some are handed over to ‘abandonment or violence or starvation’ and their body ‘given over to nothing, or to brutality, or to no sustenance’ (Butler, 2003:20), that forms part of the wider context of intolerability guiding my research. Speaking into this vulnerability, I draw upon a small body of literature which attends to the non-death, ambiguous loss faced by young people in local authority care (Lee and Whiting, 2007; Samuels, 2009; Mitchell and Kuczynski, 2010; Biehal, 2014; Mitchell, 2016; Vaswani, 2018b; Gitterman and Knight, 2019; Knight and Gitterman, 2019; Romero-Lucero, 2020) as they experience ‘abrupt changes in close relationships and family environments’ (Mitchell and Kuczynski, 2010:437). This literature draws attention to the systemic failure to attend to the non-death loss initiated by entry into care and forms a kind of ‘freezing’ as individuals are unable to move on with their lives, to find closure, clarity, or meaning (Boss, 1999). Instead, the system exacerbates and perpetuates loss and grief through its reliance on ‘professionals and services’ (MacAlister, 2022:8), or ‘multiple adult caregivers’ (Mitchell, 2016:364), and a culture of continuous change and family fragmentation (Biehal, 2014). This is a culture of disenfranchisement (Doka, 1999) by which young people experience ‘benign neglect’ as their loss and grief are ‘not so much ignored’ as ‘misinterpreted and misunderstood’ (Knight and Gitterman, 2019). As an act of *enfranchisement* (Doka, 1999), albeit small, this chapter draws attention to the loss and grief

young people face prior to and within care, the impact this has on their everyday lives, and how systemic disenfranchisement is continuously repeated. Such a task will enable this project to identify the (dis)enfranchising policies and practices within the Virtual School ensemble, a starting point for initiating a conversation about how the undeniable loss and grief faced by young people might be acknowledged and attended to.

A second line, as one way in which disenfranchisement occurs, centres around the ‘translation’ of the concepts of ‘trauma’ and ‘attachment’⁵ into policy and practice. As neuroscience and education are ‘fused’, the resultant ‘translation’ positions young people in local authority care as ‘neurologically damaged’ (McGimpsey et al., 2016:912). Beginning with the trauma and attachment theory of John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth as the theoretical basis for this line, I draw upon McGimpsey et al’s (2016:909) conceptualisation of ‘fusion’ and ‘translation’ to explore the process by which this knowledge enters into the context of education. In doing so, I draw attention to the ‘inevitable implications for the representation’ of young people in local authority care within both policy and practice (McGimpsey et al., 2016:909). Such implications are born out of the ‘renewed attention to the ontology of attachment’ within the academic literature and growing field of neuroscientific research (Duschinsky et al., 2015:175), where the latter has ‘flourished in professional contexts of practice’ including education (McGimpsey et al., 2016:911). This line functions by cutting through practice using the constitution of the ‘neurologically damaged child’ as a ‘policy problem’ at the point where the lines of trauma and attachment and the neoliberal demand for educational outcomes intersect (McGimpsey et al., 2016:912). Ultimately, the consideration of the ‘implications for the representation’ of young people

⁵ The former refers to ‘life-threatening events that cause or threaten injury’ (Hummer et al., 2010:8) including neglect (physical and emotional) and sexual abuse and the latter is the ‘propensity to make strong emotional bonds to particular individuals’ (Yip et al., 2015:185).

(McGimpsey et al., 2016:909) helps in my desire to trace loss and grief by identifying the role of attachment theory within the Virtual School ensemble.

The third line, having considered the loss and grief that results from entry into local authority care, its disenfranchisement, and a process through which this occurs, I am led to a body of literature which asks the question; who cares? As young people in local authority care are introduced to ‘multiple adult caregivers who will assume a “parental role”’ and thus be ‘fed, clothed and nurtured by adults who...are not their original parents’ (Mitchell, 2016:364), this body of literature critically considers the policy rhetoric of the ‘corporate parent’. Covered, are three broad critiques: the exclusionary ‘good’ parent discourse (Garrett, 1999), the inability of the ‘state’ to provide care that might constitute ‘parenting’ (Bullock et al., 2006), and the failure to define ‘care’ (Steckley and Smith, 2011). In presenting these critiques, I draw attention to the problematic effects of shifting ‘parenting’ from an intimate, affective relationship to a ‘corporate’, neoliberal, performative demand. In doing so, I develop an understanding of the problematic nature of corporate parenting as a policy rhetoric, providing an entryway for understanding the articulation of corporate parenting within the Virtual School ensemble.

Finally, the fourth line, drawn out of the body of research which is used as an explanation for the problematic nature of ‘corporate’ parenting, attends to the neoliberal education machine’s force of performativity and the technologies through which it functions. In doing so, I address the nature and effects of these technologies which include the identification of individuals by ‘codes that mark access to information’ (Deleuze, 1992a:5), myriad ‘monitoring mechanisms’ (Tiffany, 2007:416; De St Croix, 2018), measurement, judgement, and the regulation of ‘value’. Specifically focussing on the latter, I use this literature to explore what ‘value’ might

look like within the Virtual School ensemble if young people and practitioners are ‘valued for their productivity alone’ (Ball, 2003:223) or, as McGimpsey (2017:71) argues, their ability to produce a ‘return on investment’. Problematising the ways in which performativity reconstitutes ‘value’, I draw on this literature to understand the effects this has on affectivity. In recognising the neoliberal education machine ‘leaves no room for caring’ (Ball, 2003:224), I attempt to bring together the previous three lines by arguing that enfranchising grief and loss, undoing the somatic translation of the trauma and attachment narrative, and providing love and care via corporate parenting are all framed and limited by their intersection with the technology of performativity. In exploring this final line, I outline a tension between the performative and the affective which acts as a starting point for tracing the ‘process of production’ (Schrift, 2000:181) within the ‘composition of relations between parts’ (Deleuze, 1992 [1968]:218-219), or elements, of the Virtual School ensemble.

2.1 Losing and Grieving: The Ambiguous Nature of Loss Without Death in Foster Care

The first line begins with our vulnerability, as part of the human condition, to loss which, in the very moment a ‘bodily being’ is ‘given over’ and ‘implicated in lives’ that are not its own, makes a ‘tenuous “we” of us all’ (Butler, 2003:10&17). This, a “thrilling and terrifying way to begin” (Butler, 2014), also makes grief – ‘an emotion suffered by a person who suffers loss’ (Fierke, 2004:473) – another layer of the human condition. Both loss and grief are characterised by the ‘moment in which one undergoes something outside of one’s control and finds that one is beside oneself, not at one with oneself’ (Butler, 2003:17). It is this experience, the ‘transformative effect of loss’, which cannot be planned and ‘deconstitutes choice at some level’ (Butler, 2003:12). It is within this context, through which there exists the potentiality for a political community orientated around ‘relational ties’ (Butler, 2003)

within the Virtual School ensemble, that I wish to explore the experiences of loss and grief for young people in local authority care.

Despite loss and grief being an ‘inescapable part of human existence’ (Vaswani, 2018b), there exists a ‘hegemony of death-loss’ whereby *non*-death loss, faced in situations such as divorce, Alzheimer’s, incarceration, and, of course, entry into local authority care, is not ‘valued or deemed significant by society’ (Mitchell, 2018:4). This hegemonic imbalance is evident everywhere; in the normalisation and memorialisation through funerals, wakes, gravesides, and the growing openness to talk about grief in the face of death-loss against the backdrop of a failure to openly acknowledge, publicly mourn, or socially support non-death loss (Vaswani, 2018b:4). Non-death loss, initiated upon entry into the care system, represents a particular form of ambiguity as loved ones remain ‘there but not there’ (Boss, 1999) – a ‘physical absence with psychological presence’ (Boss and Yeats, 2014:64) – which is characterised by confusion and an ‘inability to resolve the situation’ (Boss, 2006:4). Such quantitative losses (the loss of *something*) are also accompanied by other relative, qualitative losses such as those of position, status, or power. Both ‘types’ of losses are experienced by young people in local authority care as they face ‘abrupt changes in close relationships and family environments’ (Mitchell and Kuczynski, 2010:437) that initiate feelings of grief and melancholic internalization as that which is lost is transferred from external to internal existence and preserved within the psyche (Freud, 1923; Butler, 1995:166).

In the overlap between the fields of Family Studies and Social Work, a small body of research (Lee and Whiting, 2007; Samuels, 2009; Mitchell and Kuczynski, 2010; Biehal, 2014; Mitchell, 2016; Mitchell, 2018; Vaswani, 2018b; Gitterman and Knight, 2019; Knight and Gitterman, 2019; Romero-Lucero, 2020) uses Pauline Boss’ (1999; 2001; 2004; 2006;

2007; 2016) theory of ambiguous loss to critically explore the ambiguous nature of non-death loss experienced by young people entering and in local authority care. This literature is also concerned with the way in which such experiences are exacerbated, perpetuated, and added to by a system which relies upon ‘multiple adult caregivers’ (Mitchell, 2016) and is characterised by continuous change and family fragmentation (Biehal, 2014). In the first section of this chapter, therefore, I review this literature as a way in which to acknowledge and ruminate over the existence of ambiguous loss and grief for young people in local authority care. In doing so, I focus on drawing out the ways in which the disenfranchising culture of local authority care might be addressed. Such a task will enable me to identify (dis)enfranchising practices within the Virtual School ensemble as I carry out my fieldwork and turn to analyse the resultant data.

2.1.1 Leaving Without Goodbye

The theory of ambiguous loss is based on the central thesis that an ‘uncertainty or lack of information about the whereabouts or status of a loved one as absent or present, as dead or alive, is traumatizing for most individuals, couples, and families’ (Boss, 2007:105). This theory is born out of Boss’ (1999) collaborative research project with wives of pilots missing in action (MIA) in Cambodia and Vietnam. It was from these women Boss (1999:13) observed the ‘power of ambiguity in complicating loss’. The wives, without verification and information regarding their MIA husbands, continued to keep their husbands psychologically alive despite their continued physical absence (*ibid*). In doing so, the wives experienced symptoms of distress and depression as their mental health was negatively affected (Boss, 1999). This led Boss (1999:14) to argue that ambiguous loss is the ‘most difficult loss people face, and that absence and presence are psychological as well as physical phenomena in families’. This distress and suffering causes a sort of ‘freezing’ in which individuals are

unable to move on with their lives, to find closure, clarity, or meaning (Boss, 1999) and takes two forms: leaving without goodbye ('physical absence with psychological presence') and goodbye without leaving ('psychological absence with physical presence')

(Boss and Yeats, 2014:64):

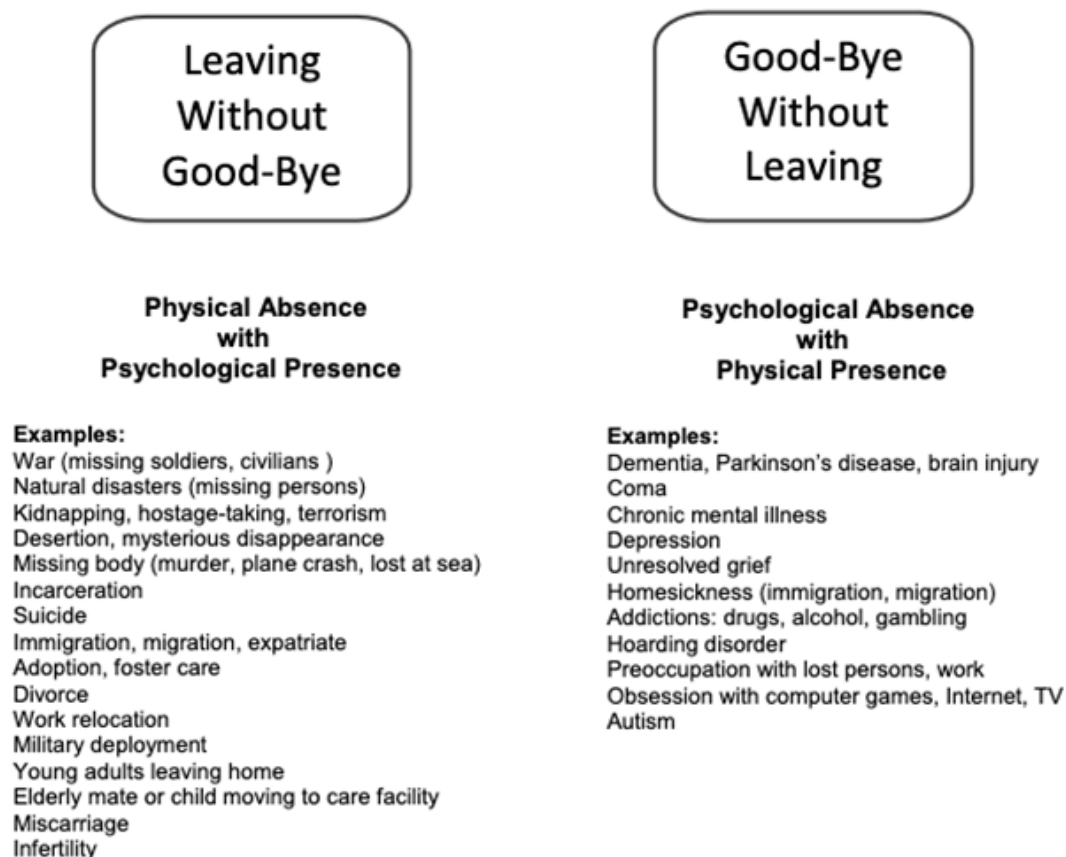


Figure 1 A figure to show two 'types' of ambiguous loss

Source: Boss and Yeats (2014:64)

Understanding the experience of 'leaving without goodbye' (Boss and Yeats, 2014) for young people in local authority care and the simultaneous dimensions of physical absence and psychological presence is aided through the psychoanalytical work of Judith Butler on melancholy. Butler (1995:166) defines melancholy as the 'unfinished process of grieving', a process central to the production of identifications which furnish what Freud (1923) describes

as the ‘ego’ or the ‘self’. Identifications which emerge from the ‘unfinished process of grieving’ are, therefore, the ‘modes in which the lost object is incorporated and phantasmatically preserved in and as the ego’: melancholic internalisation (Freud, 1923; Butler, 1995:166). In other words, there is ‘no final breaking of the attachment; there is rather, the incorporation of the attachment *as* identification, where identification becomes a magical, a psychic form of preserving the object’ (Butler, 1995:167). I draw on this process of incorporation and preservation to critically develop Boss’ theory of ambiguous loss, and the ‘freezing’ in which individuals are found to be unable to find closure, clarity, or meaning (Boss, 1999). Importantly, this exposes that individuals do not ‘choose’ to remain in their grief, instead their identity is reliant upon the psychic preservation of that which is lost, without which the ‘self’ becomes inscrutable (Butler, 2003). It is through this psychosocial perspective that the importance of recognising the ‘frozen’ state of young people in local authority care is identified.

Existing in this state has serious consequences for the manifestation of loss and grief.

According to Boss (2004) (cited in Lee and Whiting, 2007:149), such manifestations include confusion, distress, and ambivalence; blocked coping processes; experience of helplessness; rigidity of family roles and refusal to talk about the situation. Despite this, the ‘symptoms’ of ambiguous, non-death loss are often ‘missed or misdiagnosed’ due to the ‘lack of community verification that anything is lost’ (Boss, 1999:6). In other words, the ‘symptoms’ experienced by young people in local authority care are framed by a medical diagnosis of abnormality which excludes an account of the metamorphosing of grief resulting from non-death loss. This is a consequence of the ‘cultural prejudice’ which forecloses the conscious acknowledgement or mourning of the ‘unspeakable’ loss (McIvor, 2012:412). Drawing on the work of Doka (1999), this is best described as a kind of ‘*disenfranchisement*’ as this form

of grieving fails to fit into society's 'grieving rules'. This means: that the relationship is not recognised, the loss is not recognised, the griever is not recognised, the death is disenfranchising, or the way in which the individual grieves is not validated (Doka, 1999:37). The notion of disenfranchisement is therefore predicated on individualising practices which position grief as a 'personal affront' which attacks the very core of an individual's being but must be contained and dealt with in the body of the individual (Jacobsen et al., 2021). Framing certain types of grief out of recognition and containing it within the body makes grief inherently individualised and, therefore, political. This counteracts what I term *enfranchisement* which is predicated on the social act of recognition by collectively affirming and validating the "difficult practice of letting rage collapse into grief" (Butler, 2014: no pagination).

Given that young people in local authority care are 'constituted politically, in part by virtue of the social vulnerability' of their bodies – 'as a site of desire and physical vulnerability, as a site of publicity at once assertive and exposed' (Butler, 2003:10) – it is the political and social vulnerability to and with loss and grief that requires further consideration. Such vulnerability is implicit within the process of subjectivation by which young people in local authority care are simultaneously 'made' a subject *and* subjected to relations of power through discourse (Foucault, 1991; Youdell, 2006). This is the 'process of being named and made a subject' (Youdell, 2011:27) through which the 'normative criteria of disciplinary power' operate (Foucault, 1991; Youdell, 2011:41). It is these normative criteria which place boundaries upon what and how any individual might grieve their loss. The implicit nature of subjectivation and relations of power within the experience of loss and grief are therefore of particular importance for grounding the following sub-section of this chapter as I draw out the 'salient points' (Littell et al., 2008; Crisp, 2015:284) from the literature which specifically

considers the ambiguity of non-death loss and its (dis)enfranchisement for young people within local authority care.

2.1.2 The Ambiguity of Loss Without Death in Foster Care

Young people often enter local authority care with little or no warning (Mitchell, 2018). Such an act is framed as a positive response, removing young people from a neglectful or abusive environment to protect them from further harm by placing them in a safe one (Mitchell, 2016). What is framed out of this response, however, is the harm done by the ‘unanticipated, or untimely, loss of familial connections’ which result from this ‘transaction’ and the causation of ‘maladaptive responses’ which follow (Mitchell and Kuczynski, 2010:428; Mitchell, 2016). This is because young people are not afforded the opportunity to make anticipatory adjustments to the impending loss and grief (Cowan, 1991; Mitchell and Kuczynski, 2010). In the last fifteen years, however, a small body of literature has emerged, that, translating Boss’ theory of ambiguous loss into the context of local authority care, has begun to acknowledge the non-death loss, and consequential grief, experienced by these young people (Lee and Whiting, 2007; Samuels, 2009; Mitchell and Kuczynski, 2010; Biehal, 2014; Mitchell, 2016; Mitchell, 2018; Vaswani, 2018b; Gitterman and Knight, 2019; Knight and Gitterman, 2019; Romero-Lucero, 2020). The overarching argument of this literature is that the ‘breadth of loss’ experienced by young people in care far exceeds ‘typical’ childhood losses and pervades every area of their lives across their original family, identity, and status (Vaswani, 2018b; Vaswani, 2018a).

Living in local authority care has been described as an experience ‘embedded in chronic and repeated loss events around one’s identity and sense of belonging within a permanent system – an ambiguous loss of home’ (Samuels, 2009:1229) which occur within an echo chamber

(Jasper, Male Participant, Mitchell, 2018). The first of these loss events takes place when a young person is removed from their original family, likely through a Care Order (Heptinstall, 2000; Gov.uk, 2021), and placed into the care system, most often within a foster family.

Whilst this removal creates a physical separation between the young person and the original family, the theory of ambiguous loss and the process of melancholic internalisation helps to recognise the family's continual powerful psychological presence (Mitchell, 2016; Knight and Gitterman, 2019:165). This initial transition, which is 'emotionally painful' (Mitchell, 2018:3), causes change to familial relationships and environments in unanticipated and abrupt ways, foreclosing the opportunity to make 'anticipatory adjustment' (Mitchell and Kuczynski, 2010:437). Understanding the effects of such change is complex given that despite some young people in local authority care having no 'legally permanent family membership', this does not mean they "have no family" (Samuels, 2009:1229), particularly when the 'unfinished process of grieving' and melancholic internalisation is recognised (Freud, 1923; Butler, 1995:166). Instead, familial relationships and memberships become ambiguous (Samuels, 2009) and the loss of the original family becomes unclear and without visible/attainable closure (Vaswani, 2018b).

After this initial loss event, young people find themselves embedded within a system characterised by 'chronic and repeated loss events' (Samuels, 2009:1229), with 1 in 11 young people experiencing three or more placements in a year (Gov.uk, 2021) and the presence of other contextual factors including 'poor workforce retention' of Social Workers (Turley et al., 2022:281). Moreover, such instability produces the secondary, perhaps better described as the subsequent, material loss of school, opportunities, and time (Gitterman and Knight, 2019) and symbolic losses of moments, identity, and anchors of subject-hood (Rando, 1984; Unrau et al., 2008; Mitchell, 2016; Mitchell, 2018). This leads young people into a kind of

choreographed “dance” as the care system confronts the cultural belief that ‘family’ consists of ‘one or two parental figures’ with the reality of ‘multiple adult caregivers’ who are charged with taking on this ‘parenting role’ (Mitchell, 2016:364):

‘One finds oneself fallen. One is exhausted but does not know why. Something is larger than one’s own deliberate plan, one’s own project, one’s own knowing and choosing’ (Butler, 2003:11).

The lived experience of this reality is powerfully articulated by Trey, a male participant in Samuels’ (2009:1232) article:

“In the beginning...your family...is your mother, your father, and all your biologicals...You don’t expect for your biological mom or...dad to turn their backs on you and give up on you. So that kind of throws you off and so you are going from foster home to foster home. And people telling you...“I’m going to be your mom and so you are going to be here.” And then a couple of weeks or a month later, you are going on to the next person talking about how *they* are going to be your home...So that kind of screws with your mind a little because you lose the [pause] you get desensitized to the word *family*”

It is within this short account that Trey draws attention to all the identified themes of this body of literature: the unanticipated loss – “you don’t expect for your biological mom or...dad to turn their backs on you” – the lack of stability that follows once in the care system – “you are going from foster home to foster home” – and the effects of this instability and loss experiences – “that kind of screws with your mind...you get desensitized to the word *family*”.

2.1.3 The (Dis)Enfranchisement of Loss and Grief: The Need for Love and Care

Being “desensitized to the word *family*” (Trey, Male Participant, Samuels, 2009) is symptomatic of the loss and grief young people face whilst in local authority care. Other ‘symptoms’ include stress, confusion (Vaswani, 2018b), “acting out” behaviours (Mitchell, 2018), and anxiety (Lee and Whiting, 2007). As already noted, such symptoms are typically ‘missed or misdiagnosed’ due to the lack of ‘community verification that anything is lost’ (Boss, 1999:6). As a result, young people in local authority care displaying such ‘symptoms’ are typically viewed as demonstrating ‘indicators of stress and depression’ (Gitterman and Knight, 2019:147) rather than non-death loss and grief which results from entry into and an existence within a system of ‘chronic and repeated loss events’ (Samuels, 2009:1229). Whilst this is not to undermine the reality of such mental health diagnoses it is to suggest that this might simultaneously lead to *disenfranchisement* (Doka, 1999:37) or *foreclosure* (Butler, 1995). This is the ‘act of negation’, the foreclosure of possibility (Butler, 1995:168) as young people’s loss and grief, obscured by their diagnosis, is ‘unacknowledged by others’ and they experience ‘benign neglect’ through the misinterpretation and misunderstanding (Knight and Gitterman, 2019:168) of their experiences. This means young people are left to “dance” alone (Mitchell, 2016; Mitchell, 2018; Gitterman and Knight, 2019). Knight and Gitterman (2019) argue this is exacerbated by the lack of attention given to non-death, ambiguous loss in Social Work literature, limiting levels of awareness within the profession. This leads to the failure to recognise the ways in which the bonds between young people and their original family (un)does them in an act of violence. This is despite young people’s ‘right to grieve the losses of whom they love, regardless of the reasons for their loss’ (Mitchell, 2018:5).

As deserving of the right to grieve their losses, young people are also deserving of the right to have their losses enfranchised – which, as noted above, looks like affirming and validating the “difficult practice of letting rage collapse into grief” (Butler, 2014:no pagination) and being loved and cared for as they do so (MacAlister, 2022). This affirmation and validation, which stands in opposition to the individualising practices of disenfranchisement, is contingent upon the “unexpected political community” as a source of “non-violence” (Butler, 2014:no pagination). Such a discussion has been (re)set in motion by The Independent Review of Children’s Social Care (MacAlister, 2022:5): ‘Government cannot provide love and relationships as a service but it can take the lead in creating the environment for families, communities, public services and businesses to step forward and do much more for care experienced people. We all have a part to play and it starts with love’. Practically speaking, the ambiguous loss literature suggests there are several steps for the Social Work community, which, I argue, extends to the Virtual School, for developing enfranchising practice. First, Lee and Whiting (2007:426-427) suggest that practitioners display active listening with the absence of judgement, psychoeducation, and permitting young people to show anger. Similarly, Mitchell (2016; 2018) suggests that young people need reassurance, communication, affirmation, recognition of experience (C.A.R.E), and positive relationships. Finally, Vaswani (2018b) argues enfranchising via caring practice looks like: allowing young people to tell their story *and* have it listened to. Whilst such strategies are important as practical ways in which space might be provided for young people to be acknowledged, respected, and validated (Mitchell, 2016), it has already been noted that the uniqueness of non-death, ambiguous loss centres around the ‘inability to resolve the situation’ (Boss, 2006:4), as an always ‘unfinished process of grieving’ (Butler, 1995:166). Therefore, alongside positive actions to inform enfranchising practice, the literature also identifies the

need for young people to build tolerance and resilience in existing within the reality of ambiguous loss and grief (Boss, 2006; Vaswani, 2018b; Knight and Gitterman, 2019).

In looking to practitioners to curate such an environment, the underlying assumption is that these individuals are ‘uniquely positioned’ to enfranchise young people’s loss and grief at the ‘micro-, mezzo-, and macro level’ (Knight and Gitterman, 2019:165). For example, Knight and Gitterman (2019:171) powerfully challenge Social Workers by suggesting that those who are committed to social justice have an ‘obligation to develop the same expertise in helping clients with ambiguous loss’ that guides them in their work with ‘clients faced with death loss’. This begins to open a conversation about the role of the Virtual School ensemble in standing as an affectively-led, political community with an ethical responsibility to attend to loss and grief as a corporate critical ‘witness’ (an ‘enduring presence’) (Zembylas, 2006; Gerson, 2009). This is something young people have identified as needing in the face of “emotional deaths...emotional burials” (Bobby, Male Participant, Mitchell, 2018:3).

“I felt like nobody acknowledged, you know, that, that loss I had. They didn’t care. Everybody’s getting money to keep us, you know. DSS [Department of Social Services] workers, they’re getting paid, they don’t give a freak man, they go home, they eat a hot meal, you know relaxing. And I’m chilling in foster care, away from my family, so nobody to me. I felt like no one acknowledged my loss and hurt during that period. I felt like nobody wanted to hear you know, you’re too young, and, and nobody took great concern to understand what I was going through, or honestly what any kid in foster care was going through to be honest with you” (Jasper, Male Participant, Mitchell, 2018:4).

What this literature fails to acknowledge, however, is the wider forces drawn from the neoliberal education machine which limits and channels, perhaps even converts, efforts to

enact enfranchising practices. By this I mean the ways in which practice pertaining to the affective is not lost but made productive by being changed or directed elsewhere. This is exemplified as practitioners attempt to acknowledge and “hear” the “loss and hurt” (Jasper, Male Participant, Mitchell, 2018:4) experienced by young people but find themselves unable to sustain such efforts. This is a line that will be explored in greater depth later in this chapter and throughout the thesis.

In drawing out the ‘salient points’ (Littell et al., 2008; Crisp, 2015:284) from the ambiguous loss literature and applying a psychosocial lens, I have sought to pursue an understanding of non-death, ambiguous loss. An understanding which is not just framed by the ‘uncertainty or lack of information about the whereabouts or status’ of loved ones (Boss, 2007:105) but also by the psychic process of melancholic internalisation which relates directly to identity (Freud, 1923; Butler, 1995). In doing so, I have considered the damaging consequences of disenfranchising, or foreclosing, such experiences for young people in local authority care who find themselves within a system ‘embedded in chronic and repeated loss events around one’s identity and sense of belonging within a permanent system’ (Samuels, 2009:1229). I have also contemplated the suggestions for enfranchising practice which include active listening and reassurance. Such acts, however, must exist within a wider context of “political community” which functions as a “source of non-violence” (Butler, 2014). This raises questions, therefore, about how the Virtual School ensemble might position itself as an affectively-led, political community which acknowledges non-death, ambiguous loss. To explore this, I seek to design a project through which I might observe and discuss areas of (dis)enfranchising policy and practice as loss and grief are channelled and converted by the neoliberal education machine. This begins with tracing non-death, ambiguous loss as a

trajectory (Youdell and McGimpsey, 2015), or articulation, of the Virtual School ensemble; a way to address the first research question.

2.2 Framing the Young Person: The Somatic ‘Translation’ of Trauma and Attachment

As already identified, most young people who find themselves within the care system have faced deprivation and/or maltreatment (van Rosmalen et al., 2014; Selwyn, 2017); exploitation of the ‘primary scene’ (Butler, 2003:10&17). In fact, ‘Abuse or Neglect’ accounts for the ‘Primary Need’ of 66% of young people in local authority care (Gov.uk, 2021). It is the identification of such situations which trigger Social Work involvement and entry into local authority care and, as explored in the section above, results in symptoms which are often ‘missed or misdiagnosed’ due to the lack of ‘community verification that anything is lost’ (Boss, 1999:6). Whilst this argument is helpful, particularly in the case of understanding the psychic processes which occur in the face of loss and opening conversations about the role of the Virtual School in (dis)enfranchising such experiences, there is something deeper at work that must also be explored. That is the origins and effects of the psych-lens through which this missing and misdiagnosis takes place. This lens derives from the work of John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth which is labelled as Attachment Theory (AT). AT has been heralded as ‘perhaps the most important developmental construct ever investigated’ (Sroufe, 2005:51). Used predominantly in social work practice, AT has permeated and shaped ideas of child development and parenting ‘across and beyond Anglophone countries’ (Duschinsky et al., 2015:174). Such ideas have perfused or, as I go on to argue within this section, ‘translated’ into neuroscientific, social, and educational interventions for ‘deprived, neglected and/or maltreated children’ (van Rosmalen et al., 2014:24) who are considered to have less than adequate – atypical – attachment relationships. In short, this culminates in an understanding of AT and young people in local authority care

as being in a *chain of significance*⁶ whereby the label ‘looked-after’ signifies disorder and the need for regulatory intervention. This functions via processes of subjectivation. I use this section, therefore, to review the literature to explore AT and the existing critiques, taking time to focus on the biologising effects of AT as it is ‘fused’ with neuroscience and ‘translated’ into education policy and practice.

2.2.1 Attachment Theory: Origins and Critiques

AT research is concerned with the relationships between an infant and their primary caregiver, particularly in the early stages of infant dependency, and the ‘successful adaptation of the young child’ (Pearce, 2016:18). This derives from the work of John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth (Atwool, 2006). Bowlby (1944), who began his work looking at *Forty-Four Juvenile Thieves*, was invited by the World Health Organisation (WHO) to produce a report exploring the psychiatric effects on young people who had been orphaned as a result of the Second World War (Bowlby and King, 2004). It was in this report he concluded:

‘essential for mental health is that the infant and young child should experience a warm, intimate, and continuous relationship with his mother (or permanent mother-substitute) in which both find satisfaction and enjoyment’ (Bowlby, 1952:11).

By this time, Bowlby (1952:46) had become convinced that:

‘[T]he evidence is now such that it leaves no room for doubt...that the prolonged deprivation of a young child of maternal care may have grave and far reaching effects on his character and so on the whole of his future life’.

It was not until many years later, however, that Bowlby (1988:3) defined attachment, a word now commonly used in research, policy, and practice surrounding young people in local

⁶ ‘signifying chains...interlink social, psychic and linguistic means of representation’ (Lapping, 2008:69).

authority care, as: the ‘propensity to make strong emotional bonds to particular individuals’ which is a basic component of human nature’. Thought of as an innate ‘cognitive process’ (Yip et al., 2015:185), attachment acts as a childhood survival technique whereby the evolution of a strong, emotionally-led bond with the child’s primary caregiver forces the child to ‘seek proximity to an adult attachment figure’ (Duschinsky et al., 2015:176) when faced with physical or psychological threat (Duschinsky et al., 2015; Finkel and Simpson, 2015). It is the absence of such bonds which took up much of Bowlby’s work and has been the focus of most subsequential conversations within the wider field of AT.

The absence of a strong bond with the primary caregiver is described by Bowlby (1952:12) as ‘maternal deprivation’, the ill-effects of which vary with its degree – ‘partial deprivation’ brings anxiety, guilt, and depression whilst ‘complete deprivation’ has ‘far-reaching effects on character development and may entirely cripple the capacity to make relationships’. It was Mary Ainsworth, Bowlby’s research assistant, who was concerned with the spectrum of strength along which attachment bonds function (Mikulincer and Shaver, 2007; Finkel and Simpson, 2015). Developing what became known as the ‘Strange Situation Procedure’⁷ as a way in which to assess the quality of attachment (Harlow, 2021), Ainsworth (1970; 1978) believed the use of ‘cues of novelty of separation’ would activate distress and thus cause the child to seek proximity with the caregiver, a way to evidence a typical attachment relationship (Duschinsky et al., 2015:177). From this experiment, Ainsworth (1970; 1978) concluded there to be ‘three classifications of ‘infant behaviour’ in relation to the attachment bond to the mother (Duschinsky et al., 2015:178), later added to by Main and Solomon (1990) to produce the ABC+D model of attachment (see Table 1 below). Her conclusion was

⁷ A structured observational experiment designed to ‘refine and structure’ the child’s environment so the child’s awareness of the proximity and availability of the primary caregiver is brought to the fore (Duschinsky et al., 2015; Crittenden, 2017).

that attachment bonds work along a spectrum of strength, indexed by a child’s distress levels upon separation, attempts to pursue proximity, emotional response upon reunion, and the change seen after sustained support (Ainsworth and Bell, 1970; Ainsworth et al., 1978; Finkel and Simpson, 2015).

A Insecure Avoidant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Minimal greeting/proximity sought in reunion phase · Gaze averted/ignores parent/carer’s (PC) call · Flashes of anger shown
B Secure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Explores comfortably when PC present · Exploration reduced when PC not present · Comforted through physical contact if required · Levels of exploration returned when comforted
C Insecure Ambivalent/Resistant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Separation causes distress · Approach behaviour weak/absent in reunion phase · Physical contact from PC does not provide comfort · Exploration levels rarely recover
+D Disorganised	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Contradictory attachment behaviours · Jerky movements · Stilling/freezing

Table 1 A table to show the ABC+D model of attachment

Sources: (Ainsworth and Bell, 1970; Ainsworth et al., 1978; Main and Hesse, 1990; Main and Solomon, 1990; Waters and Valenzuela, 1999; van Rosmalen et al., 2014; Duschinsky et al., 2015)

Stemming from the work of Bowlby and Ainsworth, AT has developed over several decades to create an ‘increasingly elegant and encompassing theory’ (Crittenden, 2017:439). Not only this, AT has become integral to a plethora of interventions for ‘deprived, neglected and/or maltreated children’ (van Rosmalen et al., 2014:24), a category under which young people in local authority care are labelled, not only in social care practice but in wider fields including education (Duschinsky et al., 2015). Contributors within the field of AT and education generally agree that ‘implementation of attachment principles in school can improve the

wellbeing of students and, consequently, their performance (see Bergin and Bergin, 2009)' (Harlow, 2021:87). Such ideas, for example, have led to the Attachment Aware Schools (AAS) project which promotes 'Emotion Coaching as a universal, relational-based practice approach' and within which the training includes the dissemination of knowledge about 'maturational neuroscientific and psychological processes, and attachment theory, strategies and interventions' (Rose et al., 2019:162&166). With that being said, the 'popularity' of AT has 'fluctuated' and despite its recent reinvigoration, has always been encircled by a significant body of academic work which has 'given rise to critiques, departures and altered emphases' (Harlow, 2021:80-81).

This significant body encompasses a wide range of critiques (Harlow, 2021) which cannot be explored in full within this thesis (see for example Fonagy, 1999; Contratto, 2002; Duschinsky et al., 2015; Rose and Rose, 2016; Smith et al., 2017) but include:

- AT is 'profoundly conservative', producing 'familiar mother-blaming scenarios' (Contratto, 2002:29&34; Duschinsky et al., 2015)
- AT is 'mechanistic, nondynamic in quality' (Freud, 1960; Schur, 1960; Spitz, 1960; Fonagy, 1999:448)
- AT has been a contributor toward the biologisation of how we bring up children to the detriment of socio-cultural perspectives (Smith et al., 2017:1606)

and

- AT has been uncritical of its 'fusion' (McGimpsey et al., 2016) with neuroscience which still does not offer one single theory of the brain (Glassman and Hadad, 2013; Plafky, 2016; Rose and Rose, 2016)

For the purpose of this thesis, I choose to focus on the 'fusion' of AT and neuroscience – and its subsequent 'translation' into social work and education policy and practice as a way to

develop an understanding of the subject positions made available to young people within the Virtual School ensemble.

2.2.2 'Fusing' and 'Translating' Attachment Theory

McGimpsey et al. (2016:909) identify that the process of 'fusion', referring to the coming together of 'emerging scientific knowledges and policy production', followed by 'translation', has the cumulative effect of 'qualitative change to the subject as a site of regulatory intervention' via both policy and practice. It is this process which can be used to explore the 'fusion' of neuroscience and attachment theory which, as a kind of 'hybrid' knowledge, is subsequently translated into educational policy and practice. This is known as *attachment neuroscience* (Gillath, 2015). The fusion of neuroscience and attachment theory is a 'young domain' seen as a way in which to accelerate attachment research by scientifically 'proving' the correlation between 'brain regions and mechanisms' and 'bonding and attachment processes' (Gillath, 2015:47-60). This is said to provide researchers with a 'preview of the micro level of attachment' which Bowlby was unable to 'reach' at the time of his research (Gillath, 2015:47-60). Such tasks have only been made possible through scientific techniques including brain imaging and electrophysiological monitoring which includes functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) and electroencephalography (EEG) (Gillath, 2015). Neuroscientific advances have thus been used to support Bowlby's hypotheses that 'attachment is instinctive behaviour with a biological function, that emotional processes lie at the foundation of a model of instinctive behavior, and that a biological control system in the brain regulates affectively driven instinctive behavior' (Schore, 2000:23). The overall result is a kind of 'brain science' which brings together a distinct set of research fields and, in doing so, asserts the 'provability' of attachment relationships and, therefore, attachment disorders. This works to form a kind of 'biologisation' (Smith et al., 2017) or

somatic understanding of young people within local authority care who have undergone trauma. As just one example, a belief exists, at one end of this spectrum that, '[i]n the most extreme and tragic cases of profound neglect, such as when children are raised by animals, the damage to the developing brain – and child – is severe, chronic, and resistant to interventions in later life' (Perry, 2004:1). Certain branches of this 'fusion' enable, therefore, such ideas to be asserted with authority as they get 'translated; into the policy context, including education, even if this was not the context for which they were designed. This leads to an open space for the circulation of 'neuromyths' as the 'uninformed interpretations of genuine scientific facts' (Howard-Jones, 2014:2). Using the work of Youdell (2017:1281), I do not wish to overstate this risk, however, as I remain aware of the productivity this space might represent for (re)thinking the parent-child attachment within the 'intra-action of the social and biological'.

However, following on from the process of 'fusion', is that of 'translation' which refers to the processes in which 'knowledge from emerging...fields' moves from one field of context to another, effecting 'qualitative change to the subject as a site of regulatory intervention' (McGimpsey et al., 2016:908). The translation of attachment neuroscience, which takes place in conjunction with the 'policy cycle' through contexts of influence, policy, and practice (Bowe et al., 1992), has had demonstrable effects on education. In sum, these effects have, through policy, *reasserted* the position of young people in local authority care as in possession of 'abnormal' brains (Perry, 2004), as costly public expenditure (Allen, 2011), and, therefore, as bodily sites in need of 'regulatory intervention' (McGimpsey et al., 2016). This position is a consequence of the 'translation' of 'abstract concepts' from attachment neuroscience into a 'knowledge that can be readily applied' (Plafky, 2016:1503) by practitioners working with young people in local authority care. This can be seen in materials

designed for educational practitioners including *The Social Neuroscience of Education: Optimizing and Learning in the Classroom* (Conzolino, 2013) and *Attachment-Based Teaching: Creating a Tribal Classroom* (Conzolino, 2014).

These books, ‘networked think tank researchers and academic gurus, and highly consumable reports...speeches, and so on’ play an important role in enabling knowledge to be readily applied by circulation within ‘contexts of policy influence and policy production’ (Bowe et al., 1992; Ball, 1993; McGimpsey et al., 2016:909). Plafky (2016:1508), who ‘investigated the influence of neuroscientific knowledge findings on juvenile justice practice’, extends this argument, by identifying what she calls ‘knowledge entrepreneurs’. Such entrepreneurs include training providers who, whilst choosing ‘themselves which knowledge is relevant’, act as a ‘main source of (neuroscientific) knowledge’ for practitioners (Plafky, 2016:1508). This extends to the Virtual School who, via policy, are encouraged to pool a proportion of the Pupil Premium Plus funding centrally ‘to provide support best delivered at local authority level – e.g., training on attachment for all designated teachers in the authority area’ (Department for Education, 2018a:9). Using individuals who deliver attachment training (which, as noted, is to include reference to ‘maturational neuroscientific and psychological processes’ (Rose et al., 2019:162&166)) as an example, the knowledge delivered undergoes a kind of recontextualization and rearticulation (McGimpsey, 2017). In other words, it is removed from its original academic context and made consumable to practitioners who are neither attachment nor neuroscience experts. Whilst not only concealing the ‘productive, subjectivating force of policy’ (McGimpsey, 2017:920), this translation allows for the emergence of ‘myths’ whereby the growing interest in the attachment-brain relationship ‘does not match the proper use of research findings’ (Torrijos-Muelas et al., 2021:1). This is why it is imperative to be simultaneously ‘mindful’ of the possibility of the translation of

biosocial research into ‘more determinism’ *and* open to engaging with ‘biosocial education because we are biosocial’ (Youdell, 2017:1284).

Nevertheless, ‘[d]espite much scientific caution about the oversimplification and obfuscation of neuroscientific findings’ (Wall, 2018:397), many ‘myths about the brain have persisted in schools and colleges’ for many years, ‘often being used to justify ineffective approaches to teaching’ (Howard-Jones, 2014:1). Howard-Jones (2014:1) terms these *neuromyths* which, entering the policy making process through ‘translation’, often have a ‘remaining trace’ of scientific origin resulting from ‘uninformed interpretations of genuine scientific facts’. This functions to validate their persistence. One such example includes the idea that ‘[l]earning problems associated with developmental differences in brain functions cannot be remediated by education’ (Howard-Jones, 2014:2). The resulting ‘neuroculture’ has had a detrimental effect on the positionality of young people in local authority care within education, further furnishing the belief they have a brain-based lack (Lowe et al., 2015). Moreover, the emphasis on intervention as a remedy has produced a ‘specific idea of children ‘at risk’ which works to justify a ‘culture of surveillance and monitoring’ (Lowe et al., 2015:198). The overall argument, then, is that the concepts of ‘fusion’ and ‘translation’ in reference to AT and neuroscience act as a way in which to understand the somatic view of young people in local authority care. Although this has ‘brought about better understandings of children...and their needs for meaningful relationships that offer attention, care and love’ (deMause, 1998:5; Smith et al., 2017), the ‘original crude theory that has stuck in the public mind’ (Tizard, 2009:903) and been fused with neuroscience, has made its way into policy and practice surrounding young people in local authority care. This takes place, as already noted, through the process of subjectivation (Foucault, 1991; Youdell, 2006), the implications of which for the Virtual School will be explored throughout this thesis.

In the second section of this chapter, I have sought to attend to the literature relating to AT. In doing so, I have explored the origins of AT and the existing critiques which emerge from the contemporary literature. Taking one such critique forward, I further explored the biologising effects of AT as this theory is ‘fused’ with neuroscience. I have also explored the ways in which such hybrid knowledge has undergone ‘translation’ into policy and practice. Engaging, critically, with attachment neuroscience, I then began to explore the role of subjectivating processes within the Virtual School ensemble. Specifically, I paid attention to the role of ‘brain science’ in further embedding the idea of ‘lack’; a position into which young people in local authority care are already subjectivated within educational policy and practice. In the remainder of this thesis, I aim to explore this area further by considering the impact this biologisation has on the Virtual School ensemble, specifically tracing the way in which the trajectory of trauma and attachment is articulated. I now turn my attention to the practitioners, known as corporate parents, who are vessels for this process.

2.3 Corporate Parenting: Commissioning Care

As has already been identified within the previous sections of this chapter, entry into foster care brings with it the introduction of ‘multiple adult caregivers who will assume a “parental role”’ (Mitchell, 2016:364). This means they will be ‘fed, clothed and nurtured by adults who serve in the role of parents but are not their original parents’ (Mitchell, 2016:364). Including foster carers, social workers, Virtual School Heads (and Virtual School staff), these individuals are uniquely positioned to ‘assist those experiencing grief in relation to non-death loss at the micro-, mezzo-, and macro level’ (Knight and Gitterman, 2019:165) by nature of their physical and (potential) psychological proximity to young people in local authority care. Maintaining the psychological perspective introduced in this chapter, these ‘live thirds’ or

‘witnesses’ have the opportunity to act as an ‘enduring presence’ through commitment to ‘dialogue, knowledge and memory in the fear of face and forgetting’ (Gerson, 2009:1355).

The reality is, however, that the neoliberal education machine produces a performative environment in which such caregivers have limits placed on their caring relationships in order that they might be ‘monitored and measured’ (Turner and Percy-Smith, 2020:1). This prevents such relationships occurring naturally within an ‘environment where love can flourish’ (Turner and Percy-Smith, 2020:1). One such consequence is that caring relationships between young people in local authority care and their caregivers are formalised within the government policy under the title of *corporate parent*. Such a phrase, I argue, acts as a signifier of love and care whilst also obscuring the performative underneath which operates via technologies of ‘surveillance, control, and protection’ (Collins, 2018:7). Attending to these technologies also sheds further light on the processes of subjectivation in which both young people *and* practitioners are simultaneously ‘made’ a subject *and* subjected to relations of power through discourse (Foucault, 1991; Youdell, 2006).

Described as the process by which the state undertakes the ‘parental role on a day to day basis’, demanding ‘no less for each child in their care than they would for their own’ (Rt Hon Johnson, 2007:31), the corporate parenting role is devolved to the state’s ‘partner agencies’ who are to act as ‘powerful advocates’ (Department for Education and Skills, 2006:31) and be guided by the question (Department for Education, 2018a:6):

“Would this be good enough for my child?”

Mandated by the *Children and Social Work Act 2017* and further outlined within the *Applying Corporate Parenting Principles to Looked-After Children and Care Leavers: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities* document, the Virtual School is identified as one of the ‘partner agencies’ who play a ‘vital role in ensuring the local authority embeds promoting

high aspirations and best outcomes as part of the corporate parenting culture’ (Department for Education, 2018a:28). This means the articulation of corporate parenting within the Virtual School ensemble is of central significance to this thesis. However, before I can explore this articulation via my fieldwork, I use this section to review the small body of critical corporate parenting literature. Through the ‘salient points’ (Littell et al., 2008; Crisp, 2015) of this literature, I argue the ‘emergent capacities to affect and be affected’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 2018 [1984]; Gordon et al., 2021:537) of parenting are shifted out of view when caregivers are ‘commissioned’ to ‘corporately’ care for young people in a way that is expected by relevant policies. ‘Corporate’ parenting thus becomes bureaucratic, controlled, and measured – characteristics which are not conducive to the call for ‘lifelong loving relationships’ to be put ‘at the heart of the care system’ (MacAlister, 2022:8).

2.3.1 Corporate Parenting: A policy Rhetoric

‘A strong ethos of corporate parenting means that sense of vision and responsibility towards the children they look after and their care leavers is a priority for everyone...looked-after children have the same needs – to be loved, cared for and feel safe – as other children’

‘All children need love and stability in order to thrive. A strong corporate parenting ethos means that everyone from the Chief Executive down to front line staff, as well as elected council members, are concerned about those children and care leavers as if they were their own. This is evidenced by an embedded culture where council officers do all that is reasonably possible to ensure the council is the best ‘parent’ it can be to the child or young person’

(Department for Education, 2018a:6&7)

First identified in the Utting Report (1997), the corporate parenting rhetoric originates from the description of young people in local authority care as ‘children for whom the state has assumed the role of parent’, where the notion of ‘good parenting’ and its desired outcomes are defined by doing ‘everything from keeping an eye on their progress at school, to looking after their health and wellbeing, to preparing them for life as independent adults – and supporting them when they get there’ (Blake, 2019:2). In 2000 Frank Dobson MP posed a question to the House of Commons – “Would this be good enough for my children?” (House of Commons, 2000) – which has since become embedded in the cross-party political narrative surrounding the expectations of the state in caring for young people in local authority care (Department for Education and Skills, 2003; National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, 2013; Department for Education, 2015; Children and Social Work Act, 2017). This question led to the development of the Children (Leaving Care) Act (2000), an Act which formally introduced the phrases ‘corporate parent’ and ‘corporate parenting’ (Grover et al., 2004), setting out to:

‘make society, as corporate parents, do what might be described as what normal parents do’ (Dobson MP House of Commons, 2000:cols.377-378).

As this phrase became part of the policy rhetoric, support for the concept of corporate parenting increasingly grew, significantly pushed by the then Children and Families Minister, Edward Timpson MP (2013:no pagination), who was open about his personal commitment to the issue having shared his “home and...family with more than 80 foster children”. Following this, in 2016, the Department for Education (2016:12) promised to ‘introduce a set of **corporate parenting principles** that will require all departments within a local authority to recognise their role as corporate parent, encouraging them to look at the services and support that they would through the lens of what a reasonable parent would do to support their own children’. These principles came to fruition under the Children and Social Work Act

(2017:1a-g) which made corporate parenting a legal requirement through the imposition of seven ‘Corporate Parenting Principles’:

‘(a) to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being of those children and young people;

(b) to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;

(c) to take into account the views, wishes, and feelings of those children and young people;

(d) to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners;

(e) to promote high aspirations, and seek to ensure the best outcomes for those children and young people;

(f) for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work;

(g) to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living’.

The definition of corporate parenting has not changed significantly since its inception in the 1990s despite changes in party political leadership. Instead, it has consistently rested upon a signification of the government’s commitment to providing ‘good parenting’ – care, support, advocacy, and so on – for young people in local authority care. Drawn from a series of the governmental policy documents from 2001 to 2018, corporate parenting and its associated responsibilities have been described in the following ways:

1. Doing ‘at least what a good parent would do’ (Department for Education and Employment, 2001:13)
2. Demanding ‘no less than each parent would have for their own child’ (Rt Hon Johnson, 2007:3)

3. Providing the emulation of family life (House of Commons, 2009:no pagination)
4. Giving “[s]upport that puts their needs first – the need for protection, the need for stability and – where necessary – timely intervention” (Timpson and Department for Education, 2013:no pagination)
5. Making sure, like ‘[a]ny good parent’, ‘children enjoy good emotional and physical health, an excellent education and a wide range of opportunities to enjoy their childhood so they have every chance to grow up in successful, well rounded and mature adults’ (Department for Education, 2013:7)
6. Recognising that ‘looked-after children have the same needs – to be loved, care for and feel safe – as other children’ (Department for Education, 2018a:6)
7. ‘[K]eeping children safe’ (Department for Education, 2018a:6)
8. Promoting ‘recovery, resilience and well-being’ (Department for Education, 2018a:6).

Such expectations have come under criticism within an identified small body of academic literature which will now be explored.

2.3.2 Academic Literature: The Key Corporate Parenting Critiques

What is first made clear in government policy is the assumed linearity between ‘good parenting’ and ‘corporate parenting’. Problematic, this assumption implies corporate parents can, at once, be contractually obligated to care for young people in local authority care *and* parent them as if they were their own, being in tune with the affective demands of parenting including love and care. A small body of literature has critically explored this problem, presenting three critiques which will be outlined below: the valued-laden notion of the ‘good’ parent from which corporate parenting is defined and judged, the parenting (in)capabilities of the state and local authority, and the performative restrictions and

professional boundaries which evacuate affect by preventing or limiting the culture of love and care.

Good Parenting

The linearity, or synonymity, between ‘good’ and ‘corporate’ parenting is a political rhetoric (Morrell and Hewison, 2013) that rests upon the desire to produce ‘socially included and morally competent care leavers’ (Grover et al., 2004:13). This is because the ‘good’ parent is one that displays characteristics including: ensuring care of high quality (Bullock et al., 2006), which includes safety, health, education, leisure interests, friendships, and futures, having continuous knowledge about the young person (Department for Education and Employment, 2001), providing unconditional love and care (Bluff et al., 2012), and expressing commitment (Department for Education, 2013), including through financial support (Department for Education, 2016). Such characteristics are drawn, as identified within the previous sub-section of this chapter, from the work of Bowlby who concluded that: ‘essential for mental health is that the infant and young child should experience a warm, intimate, and continuous relationship with his mother (or permanent mother-substitute) in which both find satisfaction and enjoyment’ (Bowlby, 1952:11). It is upon these characteristics the foundational assumptions of corporate parenting are built. Whilst this assumed linearity is problematic in and of itself, of greater importance is the ‘contentious ideological position’ that there exists a set of ‘parenting standards’ which are ‘context and value free’ (Turner and Percy-Smith, 2020:5). Instead, parenting is more aptly thought of as a social construct liable to ‘shift in meaning, both historically and culturally’ over time (Garrett, 1999:56) which works to govern parents by reaching into the smallest moments without needing to be exerted (Youdell, 2011).

Evidence of this is provided by Garrett (2002) and Grover et al. (2004) who recognise the government's definition of 'good' parenting which, although presented as objective, is drawn from the disqualification of 'some parents and their understanding of the parenting task' (Garrett, 2002:836). In other words, the government's idea of a 'good' parent is drawn from a Western, white, middle-class view which subjugates⁸ the significant body of academic knowledge which evidences the culturally imbued nature of parenting and differences according to class, race, religion, and other structural forces (see for example Bornstein, 2012; Petro et al., 2017; Wheeler, 2017; McCarthy and Adams, 2019). 'Good' parenting, it is argued, is better understood as the articulation of the 'state machinery' which produces a normative construction of parenting within a striated space⁹ from which the binary measures of 'normal' and 'deficient' can be measured (Osgood et al., 2013; Deleuze and Guattari, 2019 [1987]). This binary is sustained through 'efforts that have been made to discursively define' 'hard-to-reach' families who are subsequently positioned as Other or 'marginal because of their non- or dis-engagement with services' (Osgood et al., 2013:210). Just as is the case with 'good' parenting, this marginalisation takes place through 'spurious assumptions' but, this time, 'about their minority, marginality or excluded position' (Osgood et al., 2013:210). Opposing the 'good' or 'normal' with the 'hard to reach' or 'deficient' parent thus functions as a way in which the state's 'partner agencies' (Department for Education and Skills, 2006:31) can be seen as 'good' parents whilst simultaneously justifying young people's removal from their biological families.

⁸ Blocked or disqualified knowledge 'deemed not to meet the criteria for recognised knowledge because they are inadequate to their task' (Foucault, 1980; Harwood, 2003:49)

⁹ '[D]eep scores or grooves cut by the rigid lines' which are 'binary, hierarchical and normative' and 'bound up and shot through with meaning' (Youdell and Armstrong, 2011:145). A space which will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 8.

Is it Possible to ‘Corporately’ Parent?

Despite efforts to position the state as a ‘good’ parent, Bullock et al. (2006:1349) argue the ‘state’ as an ‘impersonal entity’ ‘clearly cannot provide the day-to-day care that would normally be taken to constitute parenting’. This is because there are four ways in which a young person’s parenting circumstances are necessarily changed from ‘ordinary family life’ upon entry into local authority care (Bullock et al., 2006:1349):

1. ‘certain rights and duties become invested in corporate organisations rather than private individuals’
2. responsibilities are divided and discharged across several groups of people
3. the process of devolved responsibility is complex and can never be precise
4. new attachments made within the care system may ‘supersede, erode or conflict’ with earlier ones.

Across these changes, the ‘corporate’ or ‘collective’ aspect, which sits in tension with the assumed characteristics of ‘good’ parenting, is a common theme. In a footnote, Bullock et al. (2006:1345) explain that:

‘In 1980, some children in care in the UK were the responsibility of non-governmental organisations, such as large children’s charities. The word corporate was used to include them...Since then, however, the use of the word has come to imply a whole community or society in the sense that child welfare should be every citizen’s concern (Laming, 2003) which, of course, clouds the issue’.

Even decades on, the reality for young people in local authority care is that they are left ‘without a parent who can own responsibility for or have willingness to understand’ their ‘emotional turmoil and pain’ (Rocco-Briggs, 2008:195), a root cause of disenfranchisement as explored in the first section of this chapter. Instead, they have a ‘wide range of professionals’ whose roles can become confused and bringing the inherent risk that ‘key

duties fall between agencies and are unfulfilled' (Charter and Le Grand, 2006:10). And whilst social workers, Virtual School staff, teachers, and so on, can be informed, via policy, about the collective role of parenting and caring for young people in practice, their roles are ultimately 'employment rather than family' (Hollin and Larkin, 2011:2203). This means young people find themselves within a fragmented network (Rocco-Briggs, 2008) of individuals with 'disparate areas of expertise and interests' (Charter and Le Grand, 2006:11) making *corporate* parenting, at the very least, problematic.

Love and Care

Although corporate parenting is foregrounded in love – '[a]ll children need love and stability in order to thrive' (Department for Education, 2018a:6) – the seven Corporate Parenting Principles evacuate this love (and care) in favour of conceptualising young people as 'needs-driven service users' and 'professionals as service providers' (Turner and Percy-Smith, 2020:6). This, Turner and Percy-Smith (2020:1) argue, is the result of the neoliberal demand for a 'culture of compliance where work can be monitored and measured' rather than where 'love can flourish'. Consequently, corporate parenting policy, which sets out where care is to be offered and whose duty is it to provide, singularly fails to define care (Steckley and Smith, 2011). This failure is symptomatic of the devaluation of 'association of love and emotions' (Ailwood, 2007; Osgood et al., 2013; Warren, 2021:565) due to their inability to demonstrate 'immediate measurable performative value' (Ball, 2012a:30). Instead, policy channels and converts the affective – love, care, value, relationship, and so on – in more quantifiable language such as 'positive relationship' (Page, 2018). Such relationships are to be curated within 'resource limited, bureaucratic, statutory organisational contexts' which aim to enact 'surveillance, control and protection of service users from risk and harm to themselves and other people' rather than developing loving relationships (Collins, 2018:7&16; Page, 2018;

Turner and Percy-Smith, 2020). This means love and care are ‘significant, complex and problematic’ in the context of corporate parenting as they become ‘simultaneously valued, undervalued, feared, and overlooked’ (Warren, 2021:565).

In the third section of this chapter, I have sought to critically explore the presentation of corporate parenting within policy text by drawing on three critiques from the relevant academic literature. These are the valued-laden notion of the ‘good’ parent from which corporate parenting is defined and judged, the parenting (in)capabilities of the state and local authority, and the performative restrictions and professional boundaries which channel and convert affect by preventing or limiting the culture of love and care. In doing so, I have attempted to demonstrate the problematic nature of the corporate parenting policy rhetoric as it is held in relationship with the affective, notably love and care. By troubling the assumed linearity between ‘corporate’ and ‘good’ parenting, the desire for ‘outcomes’, and the bureaucratic environment within which the corporate parent operates, is exposed as diminishing and repressing the ‘human compassion and care’ (Collins, 2018:16) associated with ‘family life, parenting, care and making home’ as ‘emergent capacities to affect and be affected’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 2019 [1987]; Gordon et al., 2021:537). Despite this, it is only Turner and Percy-Smith (2020) who address the nature and demands of the processes and technologies of the wider neoliberal education machine. It is from this machine, I argue, that the performative is derived and through which the limits of corporate parenting are determined. This will be addressed in the final section of this chapter as I turn to the wider neoliberal context which, via measurement and judgement, explains the channelling and conversion (and sometimes evacuation) of the affective to which I have already alluded.

2.4 Measuring and Judging: Channelling and Converting Affect Via Performativity and ‘Value’

The wider neoliberal context has well-known consequences for education and the performance of ‘value’ through measurement, judgement, and regulation. This performance, also known as ‘performativity’, is a policy technology which, on the surface, demands efficiency, effectiveness, competition, and individual responsibility (Youdell, 2011) but, underneath, is an articulation of the ‘modality of government’ which constitutes a ‘discursive field within which the exercise of power is ‘rationalised’ (Ball, 2013:1688; McGimpsey, 2017). It is within this rationalisation of power that policy technologies work to produce ‘subjects capable of adapting to the neoliberal mechanisms of production, exploitation, accumulation and dispossession’ (Dean, 2014:490). This is the process of subjectivation which has been explored, in brief, across each of the prior sections of this chapter. As part of this process of production, the channelling, conversion, and sometimes evacuation of affect begins to take place; a result of the reconstitution of value to mean a ‘return on investment’ (McGimpsey, 2017:71) within which there is ‘no room for caring’ (Ball, 2003:224). The first part of this section will introduce the idea of performativity as it is presented across the work of Stephen Ball and how this concept has been used within the wider education literature. It will then focus in on a small number of these pieces which introduce a critical discussion, first in relation to performativity and educational ‘value’ and, second, the ways in which performativity mobilises the channelling, conversion, and evacuation of affect.

2.4.1 What is Performativity?

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

According to the work of Stephen Ball (2016:1129), performativity is a ‘particularly contemporary mode of power relations’ of neoliberal governmentality (De St Croix, 2018). Policy technologies of governmentality are those which involve ‘calculated deployment of techniques and artefacts to organize human forces and capabilities into functioning networks of power’ (Ball, 2003:216). As such, performativity is a ‘mode of regulation’ which demands a set of performances, serving as measures of ‘productivity or output’, ‘displays of ‘quality’, or ‘moments’ of promotion or inspection’ (Ball, 2003:216). This means such measures ‘stand for, encapsulate or represent the worth, quality or value of an individual or organization within a field of judgement’ (Ball, 2003:216). Seen as objective and rational, performativity is a ‘force’ and ‘logic’ which works best ‘when it is inside our heads and souls’ (Ball, 2003; Ball, 2008:52). It does so by translating ‘complex social processes’ (Ball, 2003:217) into ‘codes’ which ‘mark access to information’ (Deleuze, 1992a:5), represent categories of judgement, and require ‘controlled de-control’ (du Gay, 1996). This is what Perryman (2006) calls ‘panoptic performativity’. This has led to a ‘data-obsessed’ (Bradbury and Roberts-Holmes, 2017:3) education system which, through ‘datafication’ (Roberts-Holmes, 2015), ‘does’ and ‘reaches’ numbers as they are ‘made tangible and visible on software systems’ (De St Croix, 2018:427). This is mechanised in education through practices which include appraisal meetings, annual reviews, termly reports, Ofsted inspections, and, within the Virtual School ensemble specifically, Personal Education Plan review meetings.

Professionals working within education, including the Virtual School, find themselves subject to technologies of performativity - ‘judgements, measures, comparisons, and targets’ - which are made productive through an ‘emotional status dimension’ by engendering feelings of ‘pride, guilt, shame, and envy’ (Ball, 2003:220-221). These are the ‘terrors of performativity’

(Ball, 2003) which take possession of professionals' 'cognitive soul', becoming 'obsessively focused on fixed goals' (Chau So Meng, 2009) and encapsulating or representing worth and value (Ball, 2003). It is within this possession that 'caring relationships' (that is the love and care expected of corporate parents) find they are converted and channelled, meaning changed and redirected but not lost, into the primary expectation to 'care' about (Ball, 2003:224):

'performances and the performances of the team and the organization and to make our contribution to the construction of convincing institutional spectacles and 'outputs'.

We are expected to be passionate about excellence. Our performances and those of the organization cannot be constructed without 'care'.

This, the 'emotional dimensions of performativity' (Sellar, 2015:134), results in disenfranchisement as the care for ambiguous loss and its effects become a secondary concern within the context of performativity. The final section of this literature review will focus, therefore, on the wealth of research pertaining to the effects of the technologies of performativity on the teaching profession (Ball, 2003; Brancaleone and O'Brien, 2011; Courtney, 2016; Moore and Clarke, 2016; Hardy and Stephen, 2017; Braun and Maguire, 2020; Erlandson et al., 2020; Forgasz et al., 2021). Whilst this research does not extend into the Virtual School, much of this research is transferable given the Virtual School mirrors many of the organisational and professional aspects of 'any other school, with a head teacher, a Board of Governors, staff with specialisms and responsibilities for different age groups, its own budget and ability to commission services from outside bodies' (Jackson, 2015:237). This means practitioners who work within the Virtual School ensemble also work within the context of 'neoliberal policies which emphasise accountability and measurable performance standards' (Braun and Maguire, 2020:433).

Working within this context has several consequences as it embeds itself within practitioners' identity (De St Croix, 2018). First, it means experiencing the 'tyranny of numbers' (Ball, 2015:299) which places 'performative demands' on staff who are required to 'produce appropriate data' (Roberts-Holmes, 2015:302) from students, including young people in local authority care. The production of such data is normalised through 'discourses that circulate in both policy texts and practice settings', which elide quality with 'proven' impact (De St Croix, 2018:426) through an "'algorithmic authority'" (Bradbury and Roberts-Holmes, 2017:89). This is evident within the Virtual School Handbook (National Association of Virtual School Heads, 2019:21):

'The most effective Virtual Schools collect in-year attainment on every child...use this data to assess whether a child is making expected progress' which, 'when combined with attendance and exclusion data', builds a 'rich picture of the child's current educational context'. 'Without such systems a VSH [Virtual School Head] faces significant challenges during inspection'.

Practitioners are thus seen as 'good' or 'effective' if they are 'keen to demonstrate impact' (De St Croix, 2018:426). Again, this can be identified within two of the six operational areas for Virtual School Heads (National Association of Virtual School Heads, 2019:11):

- 'evaluate the impact of actions taken to improve attainment and progress', and
- 'understand their accountabilities and how the Virtual School will be inspected and its impact'.

Second, to fulfil such demands, practitioners are encouraged to 'perform "the normal"' to avoid the inspectors' gaze (Perryman, 2006; Courtney, 2016:627). This is because Ofsted 'control the field of judgement' (Keddie, 2017:1250), hence why the Virtual School is encouraged to be 'Ofsted ready' (National Association of Virtual School Heads, 2019:63).

Third, this creates a 'shift toward documentation, predictability and performances',

increasing ‘tasks related to monitoring systems’ (De St Croix, 2018:416). Overall, such performative mechanisms ‘carefully construct and steer’ practitioners within education, including the Virtual School, ‘in implicit and particular ways’ (Kilderry, 2015:635).

This construction and steering are not only part of the culture for educational practitioners, but for students too, including young people in local authority care. This is because performativity and its mechanisms measure “success’ in terms of how well they perform’ (Hyde, 2021:10). This embeds itself in their identity (De St Croix, 2018) as they are told that a ‘successful student is one who is good at doing what examination requires, and who can effectively apply her or himself to whatever is required to succeed, so as to acquire a ‘good score’, a ‘good job’ and rewarding lifestyle’ (Hyde, 2021:5). What is already known, however, is that young people in local authority care are one group of students who are excluded from such success given their ‘looked-after’ subject position is ‘imbued with negative connotations...often synonymous with the notions of ‘troubled’, ‘scroungers’ and ‘of concern’ (Mannay et al., 2017:689). In other words, they are positioned as educational Other (those who do not occupy positions associated with ‘recognised norms’ (Hill, 2015:667)). This is supported by the research conducted by Mannay et al. (2017:689) who found that ‘[e]ven where participants expressed hope and optimism for their future, they remained aware of their identity that society had inscribed for them, and were continually struggling with the assumption that they were failures and problems in the making’. It is not surprising, therefore, that performative mechanisms negatively impact young people’s wellbeing as their ‘worth and value as individuals become tied to how well they perform and achieve on an external set of standards’ (Hyde, 2021:10). This negative impact is further exacerbated for young people in local authority care who find themselves as being positioned ‘outside the dominant discourses of success’ (Mannay et al., 2017:694):

“Some teachers were like openly against us, you know, they were like ‘oh there’s no point in trying with them’ sort of thing” (Female Participant, Mannay et al., 2017:691).

For young people who are not the ‘most compliant in relation to fulfilling the requirements of audit’, ‘[i]nappropriate monitoring mechanisms can obstruct the building of mutual and trusting relationships’ (Tiffany, 2007:416; De St Croix, 2018) that will allow young people in local authority care to resist the positioning of educational failure. As already alluded to within this chapter, this resistance might be made possible by creating space for professionals to enfranchise their loss, grief, and reject the associated stigma of being ‘looked-after’ (Boss, 1999; Mannay et al., 2017). A possibility channelled and converted in and by the current system.

2.4.2 Exchange and ‘Value’: Mobilising the Evacuation of Affect

As already identified, practitioners and young people within a performative environment or culture like the education system are ‘valued for their productivity alone’ (Ball, 2003:223). It is for this reason it is important to consider what ‘value’ means given that ‘a commodity’s ‘value’ is realised in *exchange*’ (Brancaleone and O’Brien, 2011:505). Within such an environment, ‘value’ is signified via quantifiable outcomes (Brancaleone and O’Brien, 2011) which have, in the *late* neoliberal era, been re-articulated as ‘return on investment’ (McGimpsey, 2017:73). Within education, the ‘ultimate expressions of concreteness’ (Brancaleone and O’Brien, 2011:504) occurs in the exchange between learning outcomes and exam grades and ‘productive’ pupils with ‘long-term economic activity’; bodies with ‘skills and experience and knowledge’ which develops their ‘human capital’ (Hall and Pulsford, 2019). Such an exchange is evident within the Pupil Premium Plus which ‘invests’ £2410 per capita in exchange for ‘raising the attainment of disadvantaged pupils of all abilities’

(Education Skills and Funding Agency, 2021). This is where data can quantify the ‘value’ between investment and outcomes. Such data-driven practices are a logic which allow students and teachers to be ‘known and valued’ (Lewis and Holloway, 2019:35) which has the effect of inducing a kind of ‘values schizophrenia’ in which ‘commitment, judgement and authenticity within practice are sacrificed for impression and performance’ and the ‘heart of the educational project is gouged out and left empty’ (Ball, 2003:221&225). ‘The organization becomes an ‘auditable commodity’ (Ball, 2003:221&225). This understanding of the Pupil Premium Plus is taken forward as this thesis considers the role of this financial policy measure in determining value within the Virtual School ensemble.

One real consequence of the sacrifice of ‘commitment, judgement and authenticity...for impression and performance’, is, as already explored, the lack of room it leaves for love and care (Ball, 2003:221). This education terrain, once characterised by nurturing pupils in an holistic sense and not focused upon ‘productive, long-term economic activity’ (Hall and Pulsford, 2019:242), requires educational practitioners, which includes Virtual School staff, to ‘care *about* performances’ (Ball, 2003:224). This leads to the important distinction between caring *about* young people (a ‘predisposition to see that children are well treated’) and caring *for* them (‘the actual practices of care’) (Noddings, 2003; Steckley and Smith, 2011:185). As a result, social relationships, which includes those between young people in local authority care and practitioners (including Virtual School Heads and Social Workers) have been emptied out and left ‘flat’ and ‘deficient in affect’ (Lash and Urry, 1994:15; Ball, 2003:224). In other words, practitioners’ capacity to care has been redefined (or converted and channelled) as ‘ensuring that children achieve academically’ (Braun and Maguire, 2020:436). In doing so, ‘inappropriate monitoring mechanisms’ work to ‘obstruct the building of mutual and trusting relationships’ (Tiffany, 2007:416; De St Croix, 2018). This

obstruction is damaging for young people in local authority care who live with ambiguous loss and grief, the symptoms of which are enfranchised through the development of trusting, mutual relationships. In the absence of such relationships, young people's ability to 'actively resist' their assigned position of 'failure', as Other, is made more difficult, if not impossible, to 'successfully negotiate' (Mannay et al., 2017:692). Overall, the technologies of performativity derived from the neoliberal education machine also work to mobilise the conversion and channelling (and possibly evacuation) of affect within education. This has significant effects for the Virtual School ensemble which must be attended to within this thesis.

In this final section of the literature review, I have sought to consider the literature pertaining to the technologies of performativity which are insidious within the education system and its effects, or 'terrors', on practitioners and young people. It has defined performativity using the work of Stephen Ball, considered how this concept has been described and used within the wider literature, and critically explored two effects – the exchange of 'value' and the channelling and conversion (possibly evacuation) of affect. Considered to be a policy technology, performativity works through mechanisms which include monitoring, data collection, and assessment. Such mechanisms have damaging consequences for the education system which necessarily extend into the Virtual School ensemble. The problematic nature of performativity has important implications for this thesis which seeks to investigate and understand its impacts on the Virtual School ensemble, specifically considering its effects on the everyday practice of the practitioners and lived experiences of young people in relation to affectivity.

2.5 Summary

This chapter has sought to review the literature surrounding four research problems which derive from the core research questions of this thesis. These are: the ambiguous nature of non-death loss and its disenfranchisement, the somatic ‘translation’ of trauma and attachment training, the commissioning of the corporate parent to care, and the conversion and channelling (and possibly evacuation) of affect via performativity and ‘value’. Held together by the interaction between the performative and the affective, the overall argument of this chapter is that the performative demands of the neoliberal education machine have significant effects on the ways in which affect might flow through the Virtual School ensemble. The first problem contained within this chapter explored the ambiguous loss faced by young people in local authority care. Through a critical reading of the relevant literature, it identified a persistent disenfranchisement of the symptoms of loss and grief faced by a group of young people forced to live with the presence of absence and the absence of presence of their original parent(s). The failure to enfranchise such experiences means a whole aspect of their subjecthood or identity is repressed. This is a form of destruction and violence. It is argued that it is possible to address such violence through acts of enfranchisement, examples of which are explored in this chapter. This thesis attempts to act as a form of enfranchising research as it makes efforts to move beyond a basic acknowledgement of ambiguous loss and grief into making it productive. Second, is the somatic ‘translation’ of attachment theory. Exploring attachment theory and the existing critiques, this second section focused on the ‘fusion’ of neuroscience and attachment theory and the subsequent ‘translation’ of this hybrid knowledge. The overall argument from the exploration of the relevant literature is that ‘brain science’ applied to young people in local authority care and their attachment relationships has further embedded the idea of ‘lack’ and reasserted their identity as sites of regulation. This chapter also reviewed the literature surrounding the commissioning of the corporate parent.

Through a review of the corporate parenting policy and critiques contained within the academic literature, this third section argued that the concept of corporate parenting is problematised when brought into relationship with the affective. The desire for ‘outcomes’ and the bureaucratic environment within which the corporate parent operates, diminishes, represses, and/or prevents ‘human compassion and care’ (Collins, 2018:16). Finally, the final research problem to be addressed was the channelling and conversion of affect via performativity and ‘value’. Using the work of Stephen Ball, this section considered what performativity means within the context of education before critically exploring both the exchange of ‘value’ and the channelling and conversion of affect. In doing so it identified the damaging consequences for the education system which necessarily extend into the Virtual School ensemble. I now turn to outline the theoretical framework which underpins this thesis as it seeks to address some of these problems and gaps identified within the literature.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

3.0 Introduction

This thesis builds itself upon a foundational ethico-political commitment to the inclusion and productivity of the affective – namely loss and grief, love and care – alongside the well-researched techno-bureaucratic elements of (critical) education policy sociology (policy, commissioning, money, and so on) in mapping the Virtual School as a ‘whole’. I have placed ‘whole’ in inverted commas given that I view this not as a discrete concept defined by its interior relations but a ‘virtual entity with actual effects’ which is ‘structured and structuring’, striving to persist in its being as both processual and operational (Buchanan, 2017:463&473). It is the latter characteristics which make it possible to ‘map’ (Buchanan, 2017). I take the term ‘mapping’ to mean a kind of abstract task which involves attending to the ‘action of specific productive forces, charting the changing articulations of components and flows’ of the Virtual School (McGimpsey and Youdell, 2018:no pagination). As I aim to identify some (given that it would not be possible to identify them all within this thesis) of the comprising elements of the Virtual School ‘whole’, I trace the ways in these are articulated and seen to work and relate to one another in practice. This commitment and resultant task of mapping are both inspired by the work of Baruch Spinoza, who reconsiders the basic assumptions about the relationship between ‘rationalist and embodiment, ethics, ontology and politics’ (Thanem and Wallenberg, 2015:236), and Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari who provide a ‘reading of the affective philosophy of Spinoza’ (Sage et al., 2020:345) and offer a fuller ‘mode of production’ (Grosz, 2003:78) through which to theorise about what the ‘body...can do’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 2019 [1987]:284). Here, and throughout this thesis, the ‘body’ does not just refer to the physical human body but also to the ‘composition of relations between parts’, that is a body without organs (Deleuze, 1992 [1968]:218-219). This, I argue, allows this thesis to include, across a ‘flattened’ ontology, the affective lives of the young

people and practitioners by attending to non-death loss and its effects, the desire to care, and the need to be loved, alongside the well-researched techno-bureaucratic elements which include national and local policy, money, and processes of commissioning.

The core argument of this chapter, through which I outline the theoretical framework of my research, is that by holding affective and techno-bureaucratic elements together, I can furnish an ethical *and* political project which actively rejects the individualising disenfranchisement of affect as it pertains to both young people and practitioners within the Virtual School ensemble. It is in and through this relationship that this research project leaves behind the exclusion of affect (loss, grief, love, and care) for fear of encountering representational issues, using it to imagine future possibilities for the Virtual School ‘whole’. To substantiate such a project, I use this chapter to first consider the ethical grounding of this thesis, drawing on the work of Spinoza and Deleuze to reject the traditional, disembodied approach to ethics. Described as an affective philosophy, I then move to develop a working definition of affect. In doing so, I choose to move beyond the work of Spinoza and Deleuze, looking to the work of Sara Ahmed who situates affect in the human context. This represents a shift from the Spinozian/Deleuzian metaphysical affect which some might take issue with but is done pragmatically to locate a language through which I can traverse the relationship between affect and emotion, bringing loss and grief, love and care into the human rather than abstracted context. Following this, I then situate this ethics and affectivity within the political work of Judith Butler who provides a discussion of loss and grief (leading to the need for love and care) through which I find a contextualised, theoretical space within which I can position a future Virtual School as an affectively-led, ‘political community’. Finally, I seek to bring the discussions of ethics and affect (focussing on loss, grief, love, and care) together as I investigate and furnish a ‘fertile space’ (Müller and Schurr, 2016) in which the ‘whole’

Virtual School might be represented in a way which is both ethical *and* able to attend to the comprising affective and the techno-bureaucratic elements. This space, I argue, exists between assemblage theory and Actor Network Theory (ANT) which, together, corresponds to Sage et al.'s (2020) presentation of 'affective ANT'. Overall, this chapter seeks to locate the ethico-political commitment of this thesis within a theoretical space which will act as a foundation upon which a critical mapping of the Virtual School 'whole' can be undertaken.

3.1 An Embodied Approach to Ethics Within the Virtual School

Traditional, rationalist formulations of ethics are disembodied. This disembodiment results from the pervasive assumption that ethics is synonymous with the control of 'passions, emotions and bodies' and ethical issues are resolved by 'following rules, maximizing utility or acting virtuously' (Thanem and Wallenberg, 2015:235). What follows is an operationalisation of ethics into moral rules which aim to 'define and govern good and evil', positioning the body, along with 'desires, passions, and emotions' as irrational and untrustworthy (Deleuze, 1992 [1968]; Thanem and Wallenberg, 2015:238&240). This produces a mind-body dualism – '[i]t was said that when the body acted, the mind was acted upon, and the mind did not act without the body being acted upon' (Deleuze, 1988 [1970]:18) – which continues to penetrate the common sense understanding of ethics today. It seems undeniable that the disenfranchisement of non-death loss, the somatic 'translation' of trauma and attachment, the incompatibility of 'corporate' and parenting, and the evacuation of affect via performativity as explored in the previous chapter are unified, or at least collectively substantiated, by a rationalist approach to ethics through the qualification of a mind-body dualism. If the 'desires, passions, and emotions' of young people and practitioners are positioned as irrational and untrustworthy (Thanem and Wallenberg, 2015:238) then it comes as no surprise that ambiguous, non-death loss is disenfranchised, trauma is viewed as

belonging to the body (Zembylas, 2020), love and care are channelled and converted, and affectivity exchanged for performative ‘value’. If I were to take this traditional approach to ethics, my project would be rendered unable to recognise or ‘do justice’ (Thanem and Wallenberg, 2015:238) to the young people and practitioners as subjects of the Virtual School ensemble.

As a way in which to reject this position and attempt to re-imagine the subject as ‘always entangled with others’ (Bignall and Patton, 2010:2), the body as ‘affective, material, and political’ (Zembylas, 2020:63), this thesis draws upon the work of Spinoza, who presents a corporeal ethics, and Deleuze who provides a ‘reading of the affective philosophy of Spinoza’ (Sage et al., 2020:345). Together, these theorists offer an ontologically driven, politically engaged ethical position which centres around the social entanglement of the subject, the affective capacity of the body, and the multiplicitous nature of the ‘whole’. By rejecting the traditional formulation of ethics and beginning, instead, with this alternate position, I engage with the ethics and politics of materiality (that is ‘bodies in the broadest possible sense’ (Buchanan, 2017:473)), of the Virtual School ensemble so that each element upon which this thesis focuses can be treated as though it is ‘relevant and interrelated’ (Zembylas, 2020:64). This position must begin with Spinoza’s (1996 [1677]) *Ethics*, where the origins of a corporeal ethics can be located. Focussed on reconsidering the basic assumptions pertaining to the relationship between ‘rationalist, embodiment, ethics, ontology and politics’ (Thanem and Wallenberg, 2015:236), Spinoza sought to move ‘from the eternal order to humanity’s place within the natural order and to the consequences for a true conception of human freedom and attainable happiness’ (Hampshire, 1996:vii). This included considering ‘how to cultivate joyful passions and a harmonious society’ (Balibar, 1997:92).

There are two aspects of *Ethics* which are pertinent for the initial theoretical grounding of this thesis:

1. The rejection of the mind-body dualism by raising the ‘status of the body to that of the mind’ (Robinson and Kutner, 2019:116) – known as *parallelism* – disallowing ‘primacy of one over the other’ (Deleuze, 1988 [1970]:18).

This is the theoretical grounding needed for thinking about the relationship between ‘human bodies and other non-human entities’ (Zembylas, 2020:63) within the Virtual School, enabling the affective *and* techno-bureaucratic to be considered simultaneously.

2. The concept and role of affect; a productive force which is the mind and body’s ‘ability to affect and be affected’ (Massumi, 2012 [1987]:xv) enhancing a human’s (and, for this thesis, techno-bureaucratic) ‘*potentia*, their power to act’ (Ruddick, 2010:24).

This is the *raison d’être* for presenting all elements of the Virtual School ensemble (a working definition of which will be provided in the following section) as ‘affective, material and political’ (Zembylas, 2020:63).

Spinoza’s reconsideration of rationalist *Ethics* has informed a whole (radical) tradition of philosophical thinking which views ethics as a ‘theory of power’ (Deleuze, 1988 [1970]:104); an affective question about ‘what the body can do’ (Deleuze, 1988 [1970]:17-29; Deleuze, 1992 [1968]:217-234). It is within this tradition that the work of Deleuze (and Guattari) can be located. This work has been described as an ‘expressive’ re-reading of Spinoza (Thanem and Wallenberg, 2015:327) which has ‘invigorated an ethico-politics of ontology across the human/non-human divide’ (Ruddick, 2010:24) and informed a growing body of critical education-focussed sociological scholarship (see for example Youdell, 2015; Youdell and McGimpsey, 2015; Allan and Youdell, 2017; McGimpsey, 2018). Taking forward much of

Spinoza's philosophy, Deleuze and Guattari offer a fuller 'mode of production' (Grosz, 2003:78) through which to theorise about what the

'body...can do, in other words, what its affects are, how they can or cannot enter into composition with other affects, with the affects of another body, either to destroy that body or be destroyed by it, either to exchange actions and passions with it or join with it in composing a more powerful body' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2019 [1987]:284).

Developing Spinozian thought, Deleuze and Guattari (2018 [1984]:39) argue that the body's capacity to 'affect and be affected' (Massumi, 2012 [1987]:xv) and the relationship between elements of a multiplicitous 'whole' (assemblages) are driven by *desire*. This replaces the Freudian concept of desire as 'lack' with the 'process of production itself' (Schrift, 2000:181) which naturally seeks 'multiplicity and creation' (Goodchild, 1996:5) through the 'plane of production' (Ruddick, 2010:35). It is along this plane that the 'composition of relations between parts' (Deleuze, 1992 [1968]:218-219) takes place and results in bodily affections (Bignall, 2010). Building upon Spinoza's ethics, Deleuze's philosophy provides a framework through which simultaneously researching the affective *and* techno-bureaucratic elements of the Virtual School is further validated. Taking, broadly speaking, a Deleuzo-Spinozian approach to ethics begins to build the foundations for exploring the Virtual School as a recognisable 'whole' within the field of education made up of a multiplicity of affective and techno-bureaucratic elements and articulations which produce real effects. Overall, this represents my 'ontology via ethics', shifting the ground on which a 'contemporary subjectivity might be constituted' (Ruddick, 2010:23) within the Virtual School.

3.1 Loss, Grief, Love, and Care as Affectivity

Integral to both Spinoza's and Deleuze's re-imagination of ethics is *affect*. Affect, or affectivity, is, for Spinoza, 'passions' (fear and joy), and for Deleuze, 'what the body can do'

(Deleuze, 1988 [1970]:17-29; Deleuze, 1992 [1968]:217-234). A mobilisation ‘of the affective dimensions of Spinoza’s work’, Deleuze’s reading exists within an ‘affective turn...fueled by a growing interest’ in Spinozian philosophy which provides an abundance of ‘varied and antipodal readings’ which depend upon the ‘interpretation, inflection and amplification given to various statements’ (Ruddick, 2010:24). One point of commonality amongst such mobilisations, however, is the foregoing of a simplistic and ‘linear understanding of emotions whereby they are seen as triggers to an event or situation’ (Scheer, 2012 cited in; D’Aoust, 2014:270). Whilst it would be possible (and probably the most logical choice) for me to ‘ally’ (Ruddick, 2010) with Deleuze’s abstract, metaphysical reading in this thesis, it is Sara Ahmed’s reading of affect which situates this concept in a human context. This renders affect, I argue, readily applicable to the lives of young people and practitioners within the Virtual School. For Ahmed (2004:39), ‘departing from the recent tendency to separate’, affect and emotions ‘are contiguous; they slide into each other; they stick, and cohere, even when they are separated’ (Ahmed, 2010:231). The separation to which she refers, demonstrated by Massumi (2002) who argues that ‘affects are pre-personal and non-intentional, emotions are personal and intentional’ (Ahmed, 2014:207), ‘risks cutting emotions off from the lived experiences of being and having a body’ (Ahmed, 2004:39). This risk is one that I am not willing to take given this has the potential to further disenfranchise the ambiguous loss and grief experiences of young people in local authority care *and* place limits on the practitioners who are positioned to love and care as critical witnesses (Gerson, 2009). Therefore, seeking not to reduce affect to either ‘individual feelings and emotions or dismissing it as a free-floating signification’ (Robinson and Kutner, 2019:117), I take emotion and affect to be in a relational process of materialisation in which affect is ‘mediated’ by the ‘readings of the bodies of others’ (Ahmed, 2004:30). This means I employ the term affect (and affectivity) to refer to the bodily ‘impulses, desires, and feelings’

(Cvetkovich, 2012:4) which intersect, productively, ‘language, desire, power, bodies, social structures, subjectivity, materiality’ (Zembylas, 2014:390).

Thinking with an affective ‘ontology via ethics’ (Ruddick, 2010:23) enables this thesis to take seriously the affective lives of the young people and practitioners of the Virtual School, attending to the loss and grief experienced and the love and care needed as a result. In recent decades, there has been a wider sociological rejection of representation for marginalised subjects as part of the ‘affective turn’ (Clough, 2008). Although this ‘turn’ is comprised of ‘varied and antipodal readings’ (Ruddick, 2010:24) this is, broadly speaking, the space within which I situate my work given its indebtedness to the philosophical and theoretical work of Spinoza and Deleuze (Clough, 2008). This is because this turn represents a space in which I can oppose the marginalisation of young people by rejecting the representational history of the social sciences. This history, bound up in power, is synonymous with a hegemonically overdetermined, naturalised, unquestioned, and universalised rhetoric which serves to ‘see’ and know these young people as ‘Other’ by positioning them against the rational self (Wahab, 2005). As already discussed, this history is born out of the traditional approach to ethics which assumes that with the control of ‘passions, emotions and bodies’, ethical issues are resolved by ‘following rules, maximizing utility or acting virtuously’ (Thanem and Wallenberg, 2015:235). ‘Knowing’ in this way has continuously (re)embedded the Same/Other binary through which ‘traumatised’ and grieving young people in local authority care are constituted as one of schooling’s ‘impossible bodies’ (Youdell, 2006; Youdell, 2011). Positioned outside of schooling’s ‘dominant discourse of success’, through, for example, being named “looked-after”, the educational disadvantage of young people in local authority care is continuously and systematically repeated (Mannay et al., 2017:694). As a result, rejecting this history via the ‘affective turn’ invites researchers, including myself, to

focus on the ‘implications of emotions, affects, and trauma for the body and politics’, challenging, in doing so, the ‘representational genre’ and attending to the ‘political potentials of affect and emotions’ (Zembylas, 2020:59&65). One such potential is the realisation of a future Virtual School ensemble as an affectively-led, political community.

3.2 The Virtual School as an Affectively-Led, Political Community

The productivity of imagining the Virtual School as an affectively-led political community is further elaborated through the work of Judith Butler whose account of what it is to be human begins with ‘the start’ as ‘we are...even prior to individuation itself, and by virtue of bodily requirements, given over to some set of primary others’ (Butler, 2004:31). This, a kind of social entanglement of the subject, presents being human as an existence meaningful in the presence of others. For the majority of children, they will be born into an entanglement of love and care whilst, for a minority of others, including young people in local authority care whose ‘Primary Need’¹⁰ is ‘Abuse or Neglect’, they will be born into an entanglement of ‘abandonment or violence or starvation’ as their bodies are ‘given over to nothing, or to brutality, or to no sustenance (Butler, 2004:31). As a result, their existence is made meaningful in radically different ways. This, the context within which a map of the Virtual School ensemble must be situated, refers to a ‘common human vulnerability’ as each one of us faces the reality of having the ‘primary scene’ exploited by violence and loss from the very moment we are handed over to those who we are ‘too young to know and judge’ (Butler, 2004:31). Such exploitation results in that which is ‘too horrible to be remembered, to be integrated’ into the ‘symbolic universe’ (Žižek, 1991:272-273) and in hauntings of ‘traces of events’ that can neither be fully remembered nor entirely forgotten (Gerson, 2009). It is these

¹⁰ See Chapter 1 for the definition of this term.

traces which young people carry with them as they enter the social care system, in addition to ambiguously losing their original parent(s), home, time, school, friends, and more as they ‘survive in the sense of continuing to live’ but are irrevocably changed in relation to the meaning of their existence (Edkins, 2003:4).

This irrevocable change necessarily triggers an affective response as young people ‘need to grieve for their loss and establish a coherent narrative about themselves’ (Walker, 2015:88); a process best described as the ‘transformative effect’ of loss, an effect which ‘cannot be chartered or planned’ (Butler, 2003:9):

‘I don’t think, for instance, you can invoke a protestant ethic when it comes to loss. You can’t say, oh, I’ll go through this loss this way, and that will be the result, and I’ll apply myself to the task, and I’ll endeavour to achieve the resolution of grief that is before me. I think you get hit by waves, and that you start out the day, with an aim, a project, a plan, and you find yourself foiled. You find yourself fallen. You’re exhausted and you don’t know why’.

Although ‘[m]any people think that grief is privatizing’ (Butler, 2003:9), grieving that which is lost (dead or alive) actually inhabits a psychological, social, *and* political space given that it is necessarily experienced ‘in relation to others’ (Zembylas, 2007:213). Losing and grieving, as affective experiences, are therefore ‘integral to the construction of a political community’ which is affectively-led (Hutchison, 2016; Zembylas, 2020:65). This is because individuals are ‘always already embedded in social and political settings’ (Hutchison, 2016; Zembylas, 2020:65) which is particularly true for young people within the Virtual School. Therefore, the Virtual School ‘whole’, I argue, has the potentiality to bring to ‘the fore the relational ties that have implications for theorizing dependency and ethical responsibility’ (Butler, 2004:22). These ties should be predicated on love and care as an ethical and affective

response to losing and grieving. Such a response is '[t]he most effective remedy for the lack of sense of belonging' given 'the experience of being loved, nurtured, and understood by an empathetic and attuned other' is the very key to enfranchising that which is lost (Walker, 2015:102). This enfranchisement refers to imagining the appearance and active role of ambiguous loss and grief within the Virtual School. Such a role demands witnessing via love and care.

I use this opportunity to map the Virtual School ensemble as way in which to trace the relations between the multiplicity of affective and techno-bureaucratic elements as they come together to (re)construct, perpetuate, and/or heal (non-death) loss and grief and channel, convert, or foreclose love and care as an affective response. This is, of course, accompanied by the acknowledgement that this (re)construction and perpetuation, channelling, conversion, and foreclosure is already known to take place through the disenfranchisement (Doka, 1999) of ambiguous loss. It is through these processes that the realisation of the corporeal vulnerability to loss, as 'one of the most important resources' for community and from which young people 'take their bearings and are able to find their way' (Butler, 2003:19), is extracted and made 'valuable' by the technologies of the performative functioning of the neoliberal education machine. An integral aspect of my ethico-political commitment is, therefore, to imagine a future 'fundamental reconstruction' (Allen, 2015:12) of the Virtual School ensemble which might be predicated on non-violence as an affectively-led political community with an ethical responsibility to the enfranchisement of loss and grief as a critical 'witness' (Zembylas, 2006; Gerson, 2009). This witnessing is not to be driven by the individual, as might be interpreted from the discussion of the corporate parent in Chapter 2, but by the 'whole' which, beginning with policy, might act as an 'enduring presence' through

a systemic commitment to ‘dialogue, knowledge and memory in the face of fear and forgetting’ (Gerson, 2009:1355) as a form of love and care within the educational context.

3.3 The Virtual School ‘Ensemble’

Before this imagination can be explored through my own research, I must provide a definition of the Virtual School ‘ensemble’, which briefly explored earlier in this chapter, is presented as a ‘virtual entity with actual effects’ which is ‘structured and structuring’, striving to persist in its being as both processual and operational (Buchanan, 2017:463&473). This begins with the concept of assemblage, drawn from the work of Deleuze and Guattari, which is understood as a ‘heterogeneous collective of elements, both material and non-material’ arranged along a ‘plane of production’ (Strom, 2015:322). It is along this plane that these elements can, at any point, ‘come into composition with one another in different ways at different times’ (Strom, 2015:322) and be ‘connected to anything other, and must be’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 2019 [1987]:7). This represents a radical re-imagination of the ‘whole’ which has traditionally been thought of as a ‘seamless totality’ or ‘organic unity’ (DeLanda, 2017:9). As multiplicitous, assemblages are characterised by the exercise of its components’ capacities (stabilising and breaking down or re- and de- territorialisation) (Patton, 2012; DeLanda, 2017; Deleuze and Guattari, 2019 [1987]). These components might include bodies, anxieties, money, discourse, affectivities, policy, legislation, knowledges, and subjectivities (Blaise, 2013; Youdell, 2015; McGimpsey, 2018). Through *desire*, already defined as the ‘process of production itself’ (Schrift, 2000:181), assemblage accounts for the ways in which these components might become held together and/or broken down (Deleuze and Guattari, 2019 [1987]:399):

‘Assemblages are passionate, they are compositions of desire. Desire has nothing to do with natural or spontaneous determination; there is not desire but assembling,

assembled, desire. The rationality, the efficiency, of an assemblage does not exist without the passions the assemblage brings into play, without the desires that constitute it as much as it constitutes them’.

It is desire, therefore, that makes ‘affect flow in assemblages’ (Fox and Alldred, 2013:773) in ‘speeds and slowness’ (Deleuze, 1988 [1970]:123) which initiates ‘becoming’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 2019 [1987]:256); a ‘change of state of an entity and its capacities’ which might be ‘physical, psychological, emotional or social’ (Massumi, 2012 [1987]; Fox and Alldred, 2013:772).

Assemblage thinking offers a helpful starting point, in line with theoretical work which grounds this thesis in ethics, for imagining the ‘whole’ Virtual School as comprised of both affective *and* techno-bureaucratic elements. Furthermore, it enables me to make connections between elements of the Virtual School which also belong to other ‘wholes’ which might include, but are not limited to, neoliberalism, education, and social work. Moreover, the concept of desire provides a lens through which to explain how and why disparate elements across the Virtual School scene, including policy, staff, young people, commissioning, loss, grief, attachment theory, money, love, and care come together to be seen as a ‘whole’ within the education system. Focussed on the characteristic of constant change, of rupture, because of the ‘surplus’ that enables elements to ‘plug into other assemblages’ (DeLanda, 2006:220; Müller and Schurr, 2016), assemblage thinking enables this thesis to take seriously the changes, the singular ‘moments’, and inconsistencies of the Virtual School ensemble. Despite these strengths, assemblage thinking has been described as more of an analytical tool than a grand theory (Müller, 2015), rendering it more abstract than ready for empirical application. This means it has the potential to lead into a kind of Deleuzian purism; a trap which is led by thinking *with* ‘what Deleuze and Guattari mean’ (Buchanan, 2021:56) rather than with *how*

Deleuze and Guattari might help. This is something Deleuze (2007:327) himself warns against when he says to be aware of the ‘dreams of others, because if you are caught in their dream, you are done for’. To be caught in this way would not only distract from the task of this thesis but run the risk of reducing its practical value for the fields of practice into which it aims to speak. For this reason, I choose to use assemblage theory as part of my ‘methodological-analytical framework’ (Baker and McGuirk, 2017:433) which will be explored in greater detail in the following chapter.

Further adding to this, Robinson and Kutner (2019:116) warn that ‘research with a posthuman inflection’, which Deleuzian research encourages, ‘often leaves behind the individual student-subject or teacher-subject to investigate the school or classroom in terms of rhizomatic assemblages, or bodies without organs’. To leave behind the subject within this project would be as ethically damaging as continuing in the tradition of affective evacuation through the representational theory of the social sciences. It would include leaving behind the subject-young person in local authority care who has, and would continue to be, historically and systematically left behind. Maintaining a focus on the subject, though, sits in tension with the ‘flat’, parallelistic approach offered by assemblage thinking. Here, then, the pragmatism of Deleuze and Guattari (2019 [1987]:186) is welcomed:

‘You have to keep enough of the organism for it to reform each dawn; and you have to keep small supplies of significance and subjectification, if only to turn them against their own systems when the circumstances demand it, when things, persons, even situations, force you to; and you have to keep small rations of subjectivity in sufficient quantity to enable you to respond to the dominant reality’.

It is the idea of ‘responding to the dominant reality’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 2019 [1987]:186) that goes hand in hand with the recognition that a piece of ‘pure’ Deleuzian research will not

speak, accessibly into the lived experiences of the young people or practitioners who, as subjects, form an integral part of the Virtual School ensemble and for whom conversations of new futures are to be imagined and discussed. What is required, instead, is an ‘integration’ of another theoretical framework which is more ‘wieldier for empirical application’ with its ‘theoretical homeland’ within the social sciences and does not compromise the ethically-driven view that both the affective and techno-bureaucratic have ‘equal ontological footing’ (Müller, 2015:20&31).

This is offered by Actor Network Theory (ANT) which, when ‘cross-fertilised’ with assemblage, offers a productive and ‘fertile space’ for thinking about the ‘more-than-representation and more-than-human aspects of the socio-material world’ in a sociologically recognisable way (Müller and Schurr, 2016:217). Such an approach is proffered by Müller and Schurr (2016) and extended by Sage et al. (2020) who develop this cross-fertilisation into an account of an ‘affective Actor-Network Theory’. For ANT, the ‘whole’ is a *network* of potential – the potential for objects to come together as ‘established and rendered durable’ (Michael, 2016:11) or to ‘break down...dissolve, or become abandoned’ (Fenwick and Edwards, 2012:x). This, the ‘sociology of associations’ (Latour, 1984), draws focus on how ‘flat’ associations (Michael, 2016:11), of symmetry (Latour, 1987), are made and the effects they produce including identities, policies, and routines (Fenwick and Edwards, 2012). These are the exact kinds of effects which are recognisable within critical policy sociology and form an important part of this thesis. Specifically, it is the ‘minute negotiations’, or the coercion, seduction, resistance, and compromise at the point at which connections are made (Fenwick and Edwards, 2012), the ‘translation’ (Latour, 1987) that ANT is concerned with. This concern compliments assemblage thinking in opening a sociologically-driven conversation about the association between the affective and techno-bureaucratic within the ‘whole’

Virtual School which is in line with the rejection of representation and the consequential ‘turn’ to the affective. Described as an ‘empirical toolbox’ (Müller and Schurr, 2016), ANT, unlike assemblage, provides a large selection of tools and terms through which to research and describe the ‘particular’ (Fenwick, 2010). For example: *translation* as the way through which ‘micro-negotiations’ between elements become shaped or changed and link together in ‘extended chains of interconnected activity’; *enrolment* and *mobilization* as the processes through which elements are included or excluded from these chains, performing the network into existence; *stabilization* as occurring when the network appears as ‘complete and durable’ which works to conceal the translation; and, finally, *fluid objects* as those that appear stable but are, in fact, ‘highly precarious’ (Mol and Law, 1994; Fenwick, 2010:121) and *fire objects* as those which live ‘in and through the juxtaposition of uncontrollable and generative otherness’ (Law and Singleton, 2005:347). It is through these concepts that ANT’s explicit sensitivity to the spatiality of relations can be seen, offering a clear understanding of the stabilisation of relationships between elements (Müller and Schurr, 2016:220-221), something which remains ‘frustratingly abstract’ within assemblage thinking (Allen, 2003:85). ANT therefore offers a way through which to trace and understand some of the relationships within the Virtual School ensemble which are already known to be systematically repeated including the disenfranchisement of ambiguous loss and the pathologisation of the young person who has experienced ‘trauma’ and attachment breakdown. Overall, ANT helps to form a more sociologically recognisable ‘passageway’ between the ethico-political commitments of this thesis and the field of (critical) education policy sociology than would be possible using assemblage thinking alone.

However, the ‘cross-fertilisation’ with assemblage thinking is essential given that ANT does not offer a convincing account of rupture, only fluid change, ‘stops short of conceptualising

the capacities of bodies...to affect and be affected’, and does not engage with the concept of desire (or other equivalent) to explain the ways in which elements are held together or broken down within the ‘whole’ (Müller and Schurr, 2016:224). With these strengths and weaknesses of each in mind, and that ANT continually moves, shrinks, stretches, and dissolves ‘in any attempt to grasp it firmly’, making it less of a ‘theory’ and more of a ‘constellation of ideas’ (Fenwick and Edwards, 2012:ix and xiii), both approaches are open, or accessible, to the ‘cross-fertilisation’ proposed by Müller and Schurr (2016). It is this proposal which is developed in this thesis. In a practical sense, this means several things for the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of this thesis. Taking inspiration from the work of Müller and Schurr (2016) and Sage et al. (2020:345), I ‘propose and elaborate’ a cross-fertilised theoretical toolkit (briefly presented below and methodologically contextualised in the following chapter) which allows me to map the Virtual School as a ‘whole’ comprised of:

1. Human and non-human elements (affective and techno-bureaucratic) including human subjects (young people and practitioners) who have affective dimensions; ‘emotions...passions’ (Latour, 1999:27) (loss, grief, love, and care) and exist within a socially entangled, ‘relational ontology’ (Sage et al., 2020:348)
2. Young people and practitioners who are made subjects by desire which creates and tears down relationships between elements, changing their ‘thresholds of potentials to act and be acted upon’ (Sage et al., 2020:351)

and

3. Present and future capacities which are not just about the present functioning of the Virtual School but also about what it ‘*can become*’ and what it ‘*can do*’ (Sage et al., 2020:351).

As a result, I have made choices about the terms employed to describe these elements and processes. First, I have made the choice to use the term *ensemble*. This is instead of using either *assemblage* or *network* to describe the ‘whole’ Virtual School, its composition, and effects, which will be considered ontologically ‘flat’ (keeping ‘small supplies’ of the subject and subjectivation (Deleuze and Guattari, 2019 [1987]:186)). By using the phrase *ensemble*, I intentionally do not signify a ‘pure’ commitment to either theoretical approach but a kind of pragmatic space between the two. By drawing directly on the work of Deleuze and Guattari, I seek to avoid the criticism that sociological-assemblage-work cannot lay claim to being authentic if it is not ‘anchored’ in the original Deleuzian works, rendering it, instead, an ‘illusory synthetic version’ of assemblage (Buchanan, 2017:457). However, in defining the ‘whole’ as a composition of ‘parts’, I am pragmatic in drawing upon both assemblage and ANT to describe each part as an *element* which, in relationship with one another (connecting, competing, colliding, channelling, converting via *lines*), produce effects which I refer to as *articulations*. These articulations look like both repeated events and singular moments of disruption which both theories, together, allow to be considered simultaneously by drawing on assemblage’s greater focus on rupture and ANT’s primary focus on stability. Moreover, the concepts of *desire* and *affect* are drawn from assemblage to consider how these events and moments come to be and the ‘impulses, desires, and feelings’ (Cvetkovich, 2012:4) that they produce in and around the young people and practitioners. Finally, the focus on the production of association *effects*, which include identities, policies, and routines (Fenwick and Edwards, 2012), that ANT provides will be used as a way in which to maintain a sociological recognisability when mapping the Virtual School ensemble.

3.4 Concluding Thoughts

This chapter has outlined a corporeal approach to ethics which rejects the traditional mind-body dualism and, instead, works with an embodied ethics which allows the body to be seen as social, as always entangled with others. Drawing on the work of Spinoza and Deleuze and Guattari, I have investigated what such an approach looks like within the context of the Virtual School. Moving forward with this theoretical foundation, I draw upon Sara Ahmed's reading of affect which is situated in a human context, making this concept, I argue, readily applicable to the affective lives of young people and practitioners within the Virtual School. This is an aspect integral to the ethico-political commitments of this thesis and to the enfranchisement of the ambiguous loss and grief through the rejection of the somatic understanding of trauma and attachment, the encouragement of caring relationships between young people and corporate parents as a means unto themselves, and, of course, the inclusion of the affective when considering what is of educational 'value'. Using the work of Butler, this chapter has also explored how the impact of exploitation of the primary scene results in entry into local authority care, a system which initiates further loss and grief. By thinking with a universal vulnerability, I have sought to consider how the politics of ambiguous loss and grief might be made productive in thinking about the formation of an affectively-led, political community which brings attention to the unification possible within and by the Virtual School. Finally, this chapter has explored what is meant by the Virtual School *ensemble*, working to find a 'fertile space' between assemblage thinking and ANT as a way in which to ground an ethico-political mapping of the Virtual School ensemble. Together, these sub-sections bring together a theoretical framework which allows me to consider, in line with my research questions, the role of loss and grief, the relationships between the Pupil Premium Plus and 'value', and how corporate parenting and love and care are articulated within the ensemble.

Chapter 4: Methodology and Ethics

4.0 Introduction

Social science research has traditionally been directed by a ‘limited repertoire of responses’ including through the ‘iconography’ of the qualitative/quantitative dualism (Law, 2004:3). This direction derives from the hegemonic ordering of ‘standard’ methods (Law, 2004) and results in the ‘conventional, reductionist, hegemonic, and sometimes oppressive’ practice of much qualitative social science research (St. Pierre, 2011:613). This is not to say these methodological approaches and resultant methods are not useful. In fact, ‘standard’ methods are ‘incredibly powerful tools’ (Law, 2004:4&6) which have been used across a steep history of influential social science work. However, it can be said that, oftentimes, the rationale for their choice and use have had more to do, consciously or not, with ‘obtaining standards set by currently accepted (i.e., publishable) theories, methods, and epistemologies...than with expansion, creativity and experimentation’ (Hendricks and Koro-Ljungberg, 2015:266). In wishing to achieve the latter through a critical mapping of the Virtual School ensemble which does not evacuate the messy and ‘immeasurable’ but works with a flattened ‘ontology via ethics’ (Ruddick, 2010:23) to include both the affective and techno-bureaucratic, the methodological approach and employed methods were not chosen ‘glibly and unreflexively’ (Honan, 2014:1) but out of thinking critically about ‘methodological habits’ (Law, 2004:10).

The focus of this chapter, therefore, is outlining the methodological and ethical approach to the task of mapping the Virtual School ensemble which is both in line with the ethico-political theoretical framework and recognisable within the methodological tradition of (critical) education policy sociology. Such a task requires a ‘balancing act’; a harmonisation of ‘*planned possibilities with workable, coherent practice*’ (Cohen et al., 2003:73). After all,

if this project is to take seriously the messiness of the Virtual School ensemble, it must be open to thinking, practising, relating, and knowing in new ways (Law, 2004). In seeking to do so, this chapter will first outline the three research questions, briefly introduced in Chapter 1, which guide this thesis. As I explore each question in turn, I demonstrate their links to the literature discussed in Chapter 2 and how I attempt to compliment and extend the identified arguments. Following this, I discuss and explore my methodological approach to an ethnographic mapping as I outline what I mean by ethnography and then detail the context for each of the four Virtual School ‘sites’ along with a short profile for each participant. I then move to explore my chosen methods – (semi-structured) interviews and observations – detailing the rationale for their choice and how I employed them in practice. In the final two sections of this chapter, I describe my approach to data analysis, outline the four elements of the ensemble upon which this thesis will focus, and detail my ethical position which includes my overarching approach to ethics, my researcher positionality, discussions of power, and ethics in practice. To provide clarity, I begin with a summary of the project.

4.1 Summary of the Research: Phases 1-3

Below I provide a short summary of the research which took place across three phases of ethnographic field work. I describe these as ‘phases’ given they are distinct areas of data collection. Despite this, they were not carried out linearly (i.e., phase one was not ‘completed’ when phase two began) but concurrently as connections were made and lines within the ensemble followed. This is because research is ‘messy, and not ordered’ (Honan, 2014:3). In each of these three phases, primary data was collected through a combination of semi-structured interviews and observations (some formally agreed observations of particular activities and others during ‘in-between’ times). A stand-alone pilot was not carried out prior to the beginning of the project due to wishing to follow the elements and articulations as they

emerged. However, to ensure the interview and observation schedules were fit for purpose, each one was assessed for suitability after they were used for the first time with each participant group. In total, over a period of eight months between October 2018 and May 2019, fourteen interviews and twenty-eight observations were carried out [see appendix 1a-b].

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
<p>Connect with 1-2 Virtual Schools to spend up to six months in each interviewing, observing, and shadowing.</p> <p>Secure ethical permission and DBS certification to begin research in South Traley (second Virtual School ‘blocked’ by Research Manager).</p> <p>Carry out semi-structured interviews with each member of staff within South Traley Virtual School.</p> <p>Carry out semi-structured observations of internal South Traley activity (e.g., Council offices, Virtual School offices, staff training).</p> <p>Carry out semi-structured observations of external Virtual School activity (e.g., Designated Teacher Forums, Attachment Training, Personal Education Plan meetings).</p>	<p>Connect, using relationships built in phase 1, with local and national service providers who are commissioned by South Traley using Pupil Premium Plus funding.</p> <p>Carry out semi-structured interviews with a representative from each service provider.</p> <p>Conduct semi-structured observations of the service and its provision for the young people of South Traley.</p>	<p>Connect, using relationships built in phases 1 and 2, with other Virtual Schools in other local authorities.</p> <p>Conduct semi-structured interviews with other Virtual School Head Teachers or staff members from the Virtual School.</p>

Table 2 A table to show the three phases of the research

4.2 Research Questions

To guide the mapping of the Virtual School ensemble, this thesis is centred around three research questions:

Research Question 1

How are loss and grief articulated in the Virtual School ensemble?

This first question, which sets out my intention to explore the articulation of loss and grief within the Virtual School ensemble, is integral to my ethico-political commitment to the inclusion of affect in an ethnographic mapping of the ensemble. It is also an important response to the intolerable context of the disenfranchisement of ambiguous, non-death loss and grief. Given that loss and grief are universal aspects of the human condition (Butler, 2003), further evoked by entry into foster care which elicits ‘abrupt changes in close relationships and family environments’ (Mitchell and Kuczynski, 2010:40), understanding the way in which loss and grief are subject to channelling and conversion (and perhaps foreclosure) is indispensable to my thesis. In relationship with the critical literature explored in Chapter 2, which problematises the lack of awareness of non-death, ambiguous loss within the Social Work profession, I seek to begin this conversation within the context of the Virtual School. In doing so, I attempt to explore how loss and grief are articulated within the day-to-day practice within the Virtual School ensemble. Drawing on my ethnographic data, this question is addressed across all the data analysis chapters but most prominently in Chapter 5 in which I focus, specifically, on tracing loss and grief as an element of the Virtual School ensemble.

Research Question 2

What do love and care as a ‘corporate parent’ look like in the Virtual School ensemble?

The second research question is borne out of the corporate parenting policy rhetoric which is predicated on discussions of love and care given that corporate parents are commissioned to

do ‘no less than each parent would have for their own child’ (Rt Hon Johnson, 2007:3). This question derives from the critical literature which problematises this rhetoric and the possibility of a corporate parent as questions such as ‘Can the Corporate State Parent?’ (Bullock et al., 2006) are asked. Through this second research question, I seek to further explore such criticisms by investigating what corporate parenting looks like in practice within the context of the Virtual School. I directly answer this question in Chapter 7 as I trace the element of corporate parenting, thinking critically about this policy rhetoric and using my data to explore its translation from ‘text to action’ (Ball et al., 2012:3).

Research Question 3

What is the relationship between the Pupil Premium Plus and educational ‘value’ within the Virtual School ensemble?

The third research question emerges from the neoliberal education machine which is predicated on producing ‘value’ via outcomes. Within the context of the Virtual School, this is best represented by the Pupil Premium Plus, identified as a key responsibility of the Virtual School Head. This question is supported by the literature which critically explores the performative context of the education system and its ‘terrors’ on practitioners and young people. Whilst there is growing attention in the academic literature around the ‘impact’ of the Pupil Premium Plus, this does not extend to consider its relationship to performative ‘value’. Again, this question is addressed across all three data analysis chapters but, most specifically, in Chapter 6 as I seek to trace the Pupil Premium Plus as an element of the Virtual School ensemble.

4.3 Mapping: An Ethnographic Investigation

Mapping the Virtual School ensemble is best described, methodologically, as an ethnographic task. This is because ethnography, derived from anthropology (Nadai and Maeder, 2005), is

the ‘disciplined and deliberate witness-cum-recording of human events’ (Willis and Trondman, 2000:5) in which, conventionally speaking, the ethnographic researcher is expected to situate themselves within an identified site within which the practices and interactions of interest can be investigated (Nadai and Maeder, 2005; Falzon, 2009). In recent years, however, there has been a greater willingness to accept the ‘fuzzy’, that is without boundaries, nature of research sites and the need to move through spatially dispersed sites to best understand the fragmentation and multiplicity of interactions; an approach which has been named multi-sited ethnography (Nadai and Maeder, 2005). This methodologically validates the theoretical understanding of the Virtual School as an ensemble made up of a diverse set of elements and the usefulness of mapping the power-knowledge relations across and between such elements (Ball, 1994; Marcus, 1998). Such a methodological approach has been developed within the field of (critical) education policy sociology, most notably by Youdell and McGimpsey (2015). Together, these scholars coined the phrase ‘assemblage ethnography’ to describe a Deleuzian-inspired methodological approach to researching, or mapping, how ‘diverse elements come together in productive relations to form apparently whole but mobile social entities’ as the researcher ‘plugs’ into ‘intersubjective processes of being and becoming’ (Youdell and McGimpsey, 2015:119).

Drawing inspiration from this approach, the aim of this thesis becomes less about what might be associated with a traditional ethnography – e.g., studying the ‘accumulations of a group’s common experiences’ or the ‘transmitted patterns of organization...over a long period of time’ (Fei, 1992:42&55) – and more about studying and locating ‘complex social phenomena within the discernible configurations’ (Wahlberg, 2022:139) that organise the Virtual School ensemble. As a result, ethnographically mapping the Virtual School ensemble is a way in which I might ‘contribute to an understanding of the complex ways in which the lived

experiences' of young people and practitioners 'come to be profoundly shaped by the socio-historical processes of which they are unavoidably a part' (Wahlberg, 2022:139). This serves to demonstrate the 'contingency of these processes and hence the possibility that lives could be otherwise' within the ensemble (Wahlberg, 2022:140). Practically, this means tracing the articulations – 'trajectories of components as they change in state' (Deleuze, 1992b cited in; Youdell and McGimpsey, 2015:120) – of the elements of the Virtual School ensemble, including monetary flows, policy, organisations, affectivities, subjectivities, and so on.

Given '[a] map has multiple entryways' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2019 [1987]:12), whilst I choose to explore specific areas of the ensemble, using policy as the entryway, this is certainly not an exhaustive list, nor the only entry point. Instead, it was the route chosen for this particular research project. Leading with the Pupil Premium Plus, therefore, I sought to investigate how the articulations of the emerging elements 'play out at macro, meso and micro scales' (Youdell and McGimpsey, 2015:120). This acted as a way in which to see 'what happens, what changes, what hits a dead end, and what sense of the assemblage [ensemble] emerges not from a centre but from multiple positions' (Youdell and McGimpsey, 2015:120). Doing so within the context of one main ethnographic site, South Traley, and three other additional sites (Fordhill, East Withstell, and Wamslow¹¹), I attempted to establish 'trans local linkages and interconnections' (Hannerz, 2003:206; Falzon, 2009) through which to map the elements and their articulations as they emerged. Such an approach enabled me to spend an extended period in South Traley Virtual School. As a result, I was able to interview and observe the day-to-day practice of the practitioners within and connected to the Virtual School, shadow a member of staff through which I was able to observe several PEP meetings, interview and observe the work of external service providers, and interview additional Virtual

¹¹ All locations, services, and participants have been provided with a pseudonym.

Mapping the Virtual School Ensemble: The Role of Loss, Grief, Love, and Care

School staff across three other sites. In doing so, my initial ‘entryway’ of the Pupil Premium Plus led me to explore and understand in greater detail other elements of the ensemble, developing an interest in tracing, as a ‘thread’, the role of loss, grief, love, and care. In the remaining part of this section, therefore, I provide context for each of the sites, referring mainly to the demography of the local authority, the structure of the Virtual School, and how connections were established with and within each site. Following this, I provide a short participant profile for each of the participants who were included in this ethnographic mapping. Importantly, all names of participants, service providers, and locations are pseudonyms and any identifying information has been removed or altered for the purposes of maintaining confidentiality and pseudonymity.

Ethnographic Sites: Local Authority and Virtual School Context

Main Site: South Traley

South Traley is an urban unitary authority in the East of England with a population of over 200,000 (Office for National Statistics, 2011). Although an economically prosperous authority, home to several (inter)national companies, an active service industry, and areas of historical prominence, with a lower-than-average Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) score¹², there is a notable disparity between areas of significant deprivation and of affluence. According to the Office of National Statistics (2021), there are several Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOA) located within South Traley, some of which rank within the 20% *most* deprived whilst others in the 20% *least* deprived areas of England (ranked according to the IMD). This context is important given that research has shown ‘[c]hildren in the most deprived 10% of small neighbourhoods in the UK are over 10 times more likely to be in

¹² See https://lginform.local.gov.uk/reports/view/lga-research/lga-research-report-indices-of-deprivation-2019?mod-area=E06000047&mod-group=AllSingleTierInCountry_England&mod-type=namedComparisonGroup for further information.

foster care or residential care or on protection plans than children in the least deprived 10%' (Bywaters and The Child Welfare Inequalities Project Team, 2020). This is because large scale, structural inequalities mean that a young person's postcode has a profound impact on their chances of entering care (Bywaters and The Child Welfare Inequalities Project Team, 2020). For South Traley, which is relatively affluent with pockets of high levels of deprivation, research suggests that levels of shame and stigma attached to families surrounded by affluence might be higher than areas of greater equality, whether that be of affluence or deprivation (Featherstone et al., 2019; Bywaters and The Child Welfare Inequalities Project Team, 2020). In practice, this means disadvantaged families become more 'visible' to social services (Bywaters and The Child Welfare Inequalities Project Team, 2020) which is important for contextualising the potential relationship between young people in local authority care, their families, and children's services in South Traley which are to be explored within this thesis.

South Traley has, like all local authorities, faced financial pressure since 2010 as local authority 'spending power' has fallen by 16% (Institute for Government, 2022). Although cuts responsible for such a fall have been felt unequally, with financial pressure disproportionately falling upon local authorities in areas of greater deprivation than South Traley where higher spending is required to meet greater/more complex needs within their demographic, these cuts have had very real effects across all local authorities (Hastings et al., 2015; Webb and Bywaters, 2018). Importantly, a fall in spending power has also been accompanied by a 'fiscal policy shift away from family support and towards a focus on children protection and permanent alternative placements' (Featherstone et al., 2014; Hood et al., 2016; Webb and Bywaters, 2018:404). As a result, like all local authorities, children's

service provision has been negatively affected in South Traley since 2010 and this is likely to have been exacerbated further by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The 2011 census¹³ showed that over 25% of South Traley's population were from a black or minority ethnic (BME) background, a rise of over 12% since the 2001 census and more than 6% higher than England overall (18.9%) (Office for National Statistics, 2011). After White British, the largest ethnic groups were Black African (5.2%) and White Other (5.1%) (Office for National Statistics, 2011). The relationship between ethnicity and the social care system is a severely under-researched area but of what little research has been done, it is known that ethnic inequalities exist within the system including an over-representation of Black and mixed-ethnicity and under-representation of Asian young people (Frazer and Selwyn, 2005). Despite this, such over/under representation is 'poorly understood' and has been almost entirely absent from policy and practice discussions (Bywaters and The Child Welfare Inequalities Project Team, 2020). A significant reason for this poor understanding is that data collected in England is currently incompatible with a 'true' in-depth analysis of the ethnic inequality (Bywaters and The Child Welfare Inequalities Project Team, 2020). This further adds to the failure of research to 'interrogate how intersecting identities impact on...experiences and trajectories' (Bhopal, 2020:807).

What is known, however, is that young people from most minority ethnic groups are more likely to live in deprived neighbourhoods than their White British counterparts (Bywaters and The Child Welfare Inequalities Project Team, 2020). When disadvantage is controlled for, Bywaters and The Child Welfare Inequalities Project Team (2020) found, Black young

¹³ I am using the 2011 census data because the 2021 census data is yet to be analysed at the time of writing this thesis. Only the raw data is currently accessible here: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/populationandhouseholdestimatesenglandandwalescensus2021>

people are far more likely (and young people of Asian heritage much less likely) than White young people to be on a protection plan. Although this context is not the focus of this thesis, it is an important area to identify as in need of further research and also provides context for understanding the demography of South Traley which mirrors national patterns of over/under representation (South Traley Local Authority, 2020).

In recent years, South Traley has seen a reduction in the number of young people from a White British background, something it partially attributes to the relative increase in numbers of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC), increasing by more than 25 since 2013, but is not a sufficient explanation alone (South Traley Local Authority, 2020). As a fast-growing local authority, South Traley saw a 17% increase in its population between 2001 and 2011 and it has been projected that between 2012 and 2026 there will be more than a 30% increase in young people aged between 5 and 16, compared with the national projection of 13.8% (South Traley Local Authority, 2020). With this, the number of young people in care has been rising year on year, with recent figures suggesting there has been a 28% increase in the last ten years alone (Local Government Association, 2020). In South Traley, this trend has been mirrored, with around 400 young people in the care of the authority; a marked increase since 2013 (Gov.uk, 2020; South Traley Local Authority, 2020). However, it is interesting to note a reduction in numbers across all groups in the year March 2017-2018 (South Traley Local Authority, 2020), rising again from 2018. Although it is not clear the cause for this rise, it is possible that it is connected to the changes to local safeguarding arrangements made by The Children and Social Work Act (2017) or specific changes made within South Traley. Despite this fluctuation, the proportion of young people within a foster care placement, for example, has remained relatively stable year on year, with the percentage sitting between 74% and 79% of all young people in local authority care in South Traley

(South Traley Local Authority, 2020). Although South Traley has ‘extensive links’ with neighbouring communities and an ‘in-house’ fostering service that provides local, approved foster carers, 16% of young people are placed beyond a 20-mile radius of South Traley’s borough boundaries (South Traley Local Authority, 2020). South Traley is also in line with the national percentage of young people with three or more annual placements (~10%) (South Traley Local Authority, 2020).

The Virtual School in South Traley has a cohort of ~400¹⁴ young people, making it an average-sized Virtual School, with 610 young people being the highest rate of young people in local authority care per 10,000 children in one specific local authority (Gov.uk, 2021). Providing an offer for children and young people aged between 2 and 18, 25% of the population is recognised as having a Special Education Need or Disability (SEND) via an Education and Healthcare Plan (EHCP) or Statement of Educational Need (which was replaced by the EHCP in 2014) (South Traley Local Authority, 2020). South Traley Virtual School sets out seven key, overarching aims (South Traley Local Authority, 2020):

1. Raise attainment
2. Offer advice and guidance for children who were previously looked after by South Traley
3. Offer advice and guidance to the emergency Looked-After Children (LAC) panel
4. Develop interventions to narrow the attainment gap between young people in local authority care and their peers
5. Ensure efficiency and effectiveness to meet the needs of all young people in care between the ages of 12 and 18

¹⁴ Exact number not stated to protect pseudonymity of South Traley.

6. Facilitate training key stakeholders (e.g., foster carers and social workers) to improve educational opportunities
7. Champion the needs of Children in Need (CiN), children in care, and children previously in care with the external partners with whom they work

The Virtual School's physical offices are situated within the central council building which is the main hub for all council services. The building is located next to the central library and is in the heart of South Traley's main town centre. Next to the building is a housing estate which is part of a Lower Layer Super Output Area (LSOA) ranked within the 20% *most* deprived areas of England (ranked according to the IMD) (Office for National Statistics, 2021) and is a short distance from a large shopping complex. Rachel, the Virtual School Head Teacher, works alongside five other Virtual School Staff: PEP Improvement Officer, PEP Quality and Compliance Officer, Primary PEP Officer, Secondary School Improvement Officer, and Virtual School Specialist Support Officer. As the research began, the Primary School Improvement Officer, the sixth staff member of the Virtual School, went onto long-term sick leave and identified her intention to move onto another role. Her case load was subsumed into the caseloads of other staff, largely the PEP Quality and Compliance Officer¹⁵.

In July 2018, I met with Rachel. Immediately positive about the Virtual School's involvement, Rachel openly expressed an interest in learning about the "*impact*" of the Pupil Premium Plus and how she might be able to improve her/the Virtual School's practice. Although she agreed as an individual, we discussed the need to gain ethical approval from South Traley's Director of Children's Services. I met again with Rachel and Jane (who is the

¹⁵ In August 2020, a year since the ethnographic field work was undertaken, Rachel retired from her role and a new Virtual School Head was appointed. The new Virtual School Head has since changed the PEP Officers to have the same job title (no distinction between Primary/Secondary/Improvement as in 2018-2019). Furthermore, an additional role, School Improvement Officer, was formed and advertised under Rachel's direction in February 2019 but this role was not filled until after the completion of the research period.

Secondary School Improvement Officer for South Traley) in August 2018, once the University of Birmingham had granted full ethical permission (in addition to the Director of Children's Services in South Traley), to discuss the logistics of the project and begin the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certification process. Following this meeting, communication became difficult, and I had to engage in several Email exchanges before I was able to enter as a researcher. This initial process was evidence of ethnography being more than just 'physical presence or absence', that is involving greater levels of complexity than 'granting or withholding of permission for research' to take place (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995:55). As a result, the research did not commence until October 2018. However, I was 'immersed' in South Traley Virtual School until May 2019.

There were, of course, ebbs and flows in the quantity of data collection over the eight months, dependent upon the channels of communication between myself and, Rachel, and Jane (there were periods in which Email conversations were paused as I waited upon confirmation of dates), the availability of staff, and the time taken to build connections and relationships with external stakeholders. The research began with a series of interviews with the Virtual School staff, followed by observations of the day-to-day activities of the Virtual School, and then a series of days 'shadowing' Jane. Increasing the time spent and 'invasiveness' of the methods over time allowed me to become 'accepted' into the Virtual School team. I became consciously aware of this outcome when I was invited to the team's Christmas lunch and was included within their 'Secret Santa'. I worked closely with Rachel and Jane over the eight months of field work and built a good rapport with them, allowing me to gain an 'insider' view of the Virtual School in South Traley. In a sense, this meant they became 'informal sponsors' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995) of my research, 'vouching' for me and connecting me to other aspects of the Virtual School ensemble.

The first of these was the external service providers who are paid/commissioned by South Traley (using the Pupil Premium Plus funding) to deliver a service or activity for the young people in local authority care. This connection was made via Dianne (PEP Improvement Officer) who, in her interview, referred to an online tutoring company and, upon my request, placed me in contact with Stuart, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the company (The Learning Web). Although I had wished to explore these external providers, having not yet finished interviewing the Virtual School staff, I assumed this next phase would take place at a later stage. However, as is necessary for ethnographic research situated within my chosen theoretical framework which takes emergence and messiness seriously, I followed the lines of enquiry as they emerged. After meeting with Stuart, I arranged a subsequent conversation with Rachel to discuss South Traley's commissioning processes and gain further insight into the articulation of commissioning via the Pupil Premium Plus funding. Having this discussion enabled access to three other providers: an alternative education provider (AEP), an equestrian therapy centre, and a careers company¹⁶.

The second was other key 'stakeholders': foster carers, Social Workers, and Designated Teachers. Unfortunately, despite Rachel's best efforts, access to this part of the ensemble remained elusive. After a series of informative Emails, sent by Jane and Rachel on my behalf, I was only able to gain access to one Social Worker and one Designated Teacher¹⁷.

Recognising our method of including the wider stakeholders was not working in the way we had anticipated, Rachel, Jane, and I agreed to change direction. As a result, I arranged to

¹⁶ I also attempted to contact two other national companies but was denied access.

¹⁷ Due to personal, unforeseen circumstances of a medical nature, I took a twelve month leave of absence from my doctorate which forced my data collection to come to a premature end. Unable to return after this absence due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I was prevented from accessing further Social Workers, Designated Teachers, Foster Carers, and, most importantly, young people, as planned.

‘shadow’ Jane, observing a series of Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings which, alongside being able to observe another aspect of the ensemble, presented the opportunity for me to have more natural interactions with Designated Teachers, Social Workers, Foster Carers, and young people. Primarily, this enabled me to collect data on the process of the PEP meetings, interaction between various ‘stakeholders’, the inclusion/exclusion of young people, and the schooling environment in which the young person was placed. However, what I also gained as a result of this shadowing, was time spent in the ‘in-between’ as Jane travelled both within South Traley and to out-of-borough placements, providing hours of time in her car. This developed my relationship with her and enabled me to gain a greater understanding of the nature of her role beyond the Virtual School offices.

Additional Sites: Fordhill, East Withstell, and Wamslow

In planning my ethnographic research, I had envisaged spending six-months in two separate local authorities (twelve-months in total). After spending a considerable amount of time communicating with a Virtual School in a bigger and more diverse local authority than South Traley, even meeting with the Virtual School Head to explain my project, I was eventually ‘blocked’ by the Research Manager who asked me to “*approach an alternative children’s services to access participants*” (quotation lifted from the Email exchange with the Research Manager, 2019). Due to the time lost in this communication, which spanned several months, I made the decision to rely on connections made within South Traley to access other Virtual Schools. Despite Rachel’s best efforts to use her role as Regional Manager of the Virtual School’s consortium to engage her colleagues, I was only able to secure a joint interview with the Virtual School Head Teachers from Fordhill and East Withstell. To compliment this interview, however, I also used a connection made via a Designated Teacher from South Traley to interview a staff member of Wamslow Virtual School. It was in the time spent

seeking to secure additional research across other Virtual School sites that I realised the complexities involved in the ‘balancing act’ (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995) of continually negotiating ‘systems and processes’, ‘reluctant gatekeepers’, and seeking to develop ‘better strategies’ (Leigh et al., 2021:1079). Therefore, it was only in South Traley that I was able to pick ‘up on the rhythm of the people and the place’ (Goffman, 1989 cited in; Leigh et al., 2021:1088). Nevertheless, it was through interviewing three additional Virtual School staff members that I was able to gain a greater insight into the functioning of the ensemble and the commonalities and differences that exist within the intersection of lines and the articulation of various elements. I provide a short context for each of these local authorities and their Virtual Schools below.

East Withstell

East Withstell, part of the South East of England, is a local authority considered part of the same region¹⁸ as South Traley. A generally affluent area, East Withstell has lower-than-average levels of unemployment with over three-quarters of its population (120,000) aged between 17 and 74 considered economically active, and almost 90% of its residents White (Office for National Statistics, 2011). The authority has a cohort of around 140 young people in local authority care (Gov.uk, 2021), over 50% of whom are identified as having an SEND (East Withstell Local Authority, 2019). 30% of this cohort have an EHCP plan and the remainder are supported with SEND-specific support (East Withstell Local Authority, 2019). Each year, ~fifteen young people sit their GCSE (or equivalent) exams with over 40% achieving grades 4-9 (East Withstell Local Authority, 2019), making it much higher than the national average. In the academic year 2020-2021, 100% of the Key Stage 4 pupils achieved

¹⁸ Regions grouped according to the annual SSDA903 data collection from local authorities in England.

at least one GCSE pass and over 60% of the cohort four or more passes at GCSE including English and Maths (East Withstell Local Authority, 2021). The Virtual School is comprised of a Virtual School Head Teacher, Saleem, and three Education Support Officers who are each responsible for either the early years and primary, secondary, or post-16. This has been designed by East Withstell to allow the support to be transitioned to the next Officer in line with the education system, reducing unnecessary change for the young people (East Withstell Local Authority, 2021).

Fordhill

Fordhill, also considered part of the same region as South Traley, is geographically close to East Withstell which, despite having a higher population (~160,000), covers a smaller geographic area. Fordhill is an extremely ethnically diverse authority, with less than half the population White and around 40% Asian (Office for National Statistics, 2011). The town centre has undergone significant redevelopment in the last two decades and the area is now home to a significant number of major international companies. The Virtual School, whose Head Teacher is Mary¹⁹, has around 220 children and young people within its care (Gov.uk, 2021) 30 of whom have an EHCP (Fordhill Local Authority, 2021). With ten members of staff who are all qualified teachers (Fordhill Local Authority, 2019), the Virtual School is larger than that of South Traley and East Withstell. A few years prior to the beginning of the research, Mary was commissioned to improve Fordhill Virtual School which had been rated *Inadequate* by Ofsted. Under her direction, the Virtual School is said to have been “*transformed*” and now prides itself on improved statistics which include having 90% of

¹⁹ Mary is no longer the Head Teacher of Fordhill, having moved to another local authority in 2021 after her work significantly improved the Ofsted rating of Fordhill.

young people placed within an Ofsted rated *Good* or *Outstanding* school (Fordhill Local Authority, 2019)

Wamslow

Wamslow is a large local authority with a population over 800,000 which, similarly to East Withstell, lacks any significant ethnic diversity with over 85% of its population being White and only 9% Asian and 2% Black (Wamslow Local Authority, 2021b). Although Wamslow geographically neighbours South Traley, it is part of a different Virtual School ‘region’. In line with its comparatively large population, there are over 500 young people in local authority care of which 71% are in foster care (Wamslow Local Authority, 2021a). To match this need, the Virtual School is comprised of twenty staff members which is the largest Virtual School included within this research. This includes Helen, the School Liaison Teacher who I was able to interview as a result of my interview with a Designated Teacher (Elizabeth) in South Traley.

Participants

‘Gatekeepers’, those ‘charged with the responsibility for making decisions on behalf of children and young people...including whether or not to grant access’ (Heath et al., 2007:405), closely guard the perimeter of children’s services and educational settings within England. For this reason, a convenience sample (“convenient’ sources of data for researchers (Lavrakas, 2008:148)) was used. As detailed above, the first of these was Rachel, the Virtual School Head Teacher for South Traley, whom I had met as part of previous research project. It was through Rachel and other practitioners in South Traley, that connections were made with the other participants. The project largely centres around sixteen participants with whom

interviews, and observations were conducted and, therefore, to whom most of the data pertains. To introduce each of these participants, I provide a short profile below:

Pseudonym	Profile
	<i>South Traley</i>
Rachel	Rachel is the Virtual School Head Teacher for the Virtual School in South Traley. She has been working in schools since 1985 and has a background in leadership and special needs, with two Special Needs degrees and experience in two primary school headship roles. She has been in the post, full-time since 2015 (beginning as part-time in 2014). She defines her role as the responsibility to “ <i>promote the education of the children who are looked-after</i> ” within the local authority. (Rachel retired in August 2020).
Diane	Diane is the PEP Improvement Officer for the Virtual School in South Traley. She identifies her main role as looking after year 11 and post-16 students. At the time of her interview, she was undertaking a Level 6 Diploma in Career and Advice Management.
Wendy	Wendy is the PEP Quality and Compliance Officer for the Virtual School in South Traley. She conducts PEP meetings in secondary schools and defines her role as being one of “ <i>monitoring and reviewing</i> ”, “ <i>evaluating what schools are putting in place for looked-after children, how they’re spending the Pupil Premium and really working with them to sort of identify what works and what doesn’t</i> ”.
Alex	Alex is the Primary PEP Officer for the Virtual School in South Traley. She started working for the Virtual School in October 2018, two months prior to the interview. Prior to starting the role, she had been a “ <i>Safeguarding Officer and SEN Facilitator</i> ” in a primary school. Through this role, she had prior experiences of PEP meetings.
Jane	Jane is the Secondary School Improvement Officer for the Virtual School in South Traley. She has been working for the Virtual School for over five years after she started doing work part-time for the Virtual School “ <i>doing some admin work and it’s kind of changed and changed into what it is now</i> ”. Prior to that, she had worked for the local college for over eleven years with a focus on “ <i>information, advice, and guidance</i> ”. The main part of her role is to attend PEP meetings. (After the project ended, Jane became the Deputy Virtual School Head Teacher).
Richard	Richard is the Virtual School Specialist Support for the Virtual School in South Traley. He has a background in the Police force, where he worked for eleven years. After being made redundant from that role, he began working for a local authority in the Youth Offending Service/Joint Commissioning Unit/SEND before applying for his current role in South Traley. He started the role in December 2018.
Elizabeth	Elizabeth is the Designated Teacher for a Catholic secondary school in South Traley. She leads the Pastoral Team and has various responsibilities which include safeguarding within the school. She attends the PEP meetings for all the young people in local authority care.
Stuart & Alesha	Stuart is the founder and CEO of a national, online tutoring company (Working Together) and works alongside his wife, Alesha, who is responsible for the day-to-day running of the company. The company began working in fixed locations before transitioning to solely online provision.

	Stuart and the company connected with South Traley Virtual School at the National Association of Virtual School Heads annual conference in 2016. South Traley have since begun commissioning the company to provide online tutoring for some of their young people.
Suzie	Suzie is the Business Development Manager of an equestrian charity (Sky Riding) which provides equestrian therapy to disadvantaged children. The charity was established in 2008 and Suzie’s role includes speaking “ <i>to the referring agency to see whether there’s any funding to support</i> ” the young person’s place.
Sophie	Sophie is a Social Worker in the Corporate Parenting Team of South Traley. She has previous experience of working in an “ <i>adult’s personal care home</i> ” and has personal, childhood experience of Social Worker involvement. She has worked in myriad other roles prior to training as a Social Worker, a choice inspired by her own experiences.
Jack	Jack is an Employability Consultant for a careers company (Working Together) which was founded in 1997. He has prior experience as a secondary school teacher and in setting up a business mentoring scheme within his school. His role is to deliver employability activities/training and facilitate careers conversations.
Jodie	Jodie is the Client Services Manager for a charity which provides alternative education provision (AEP) in South Traley (South Traley Faith Works). The charity, which has a Christian history and ethos, is commissioned by South Traley Virtual School to provide AEP for children and young people who need additional educational support outside of their mainstream provision. Prior to working for the charity, Jodie worked in a corporate company and loves it enough not to regret giving up the huge pay packets for “ <i>little money and sleepless nights</i> ”. (Jodie retired from her role at the end of 2019).
	<i>East Withstell</i>
Saleem	Saleem is the Virtual School Head Teacher for East Withstell, a role he has had for six years. He also has a broader role as Head of Children Support Services. He has worked within the local authority for twelve years. He “ <i>started off as a qualified Maths teachers, through primary, secondary, college</i> ” and then qualified as a Head Teacher. He describes his role as “ <i>ensuring that the services are delivering what they should be delivering against expectations</i> ” and “ <i>mapping out</i> ” the development of the services “ <i>moving forward</i> ”.
	<i>Fordhill</i>
Mary	Mary is the Virtual School Head Teacher of Fordhill and has been there for three years. She has been a Virtual School Head Teacher for eight years but was offered the role in Fordhill after it had been rated <i>Inadequate</i> by Ofsted for several consecutive years. She has been told that she has “ <i>transformed</i> ” the school since taking up the post.
	<i>Wamslow</i>
Helen	Helen is the School Liaison Teacher for Wamslow Virtual School. She started her career as a Physical Education (PE) and English teacher but started her work outside of schools in 2002. She has previously worked as a Post-16 Lead for another local authority. Her current role involves travelling to carry out “ <i>PEP meetings, talk about Pupil Premium and how it’s being spent, and agree any allocations</i> ”.

Table 3 A profile table of the adult participants

In addition to these adult participants, there were also several young people who were included via observations of their PEP meetings within South Traley. I was granted permission to access these PEP meetings by South Traley's Director of Children's Services and Rachel as Virtual School Head. This included the provision of general information and context about the young people which included information such as their school placement and interventions funded by the Pupil Premium Plus but did not extend into their history and chronology or other personal information and experiences. It is this information which has been used to create a short profile for each young person whose PEP I was able to observe²⁰. This is presented in Table 4 below. For the young people who attended their PEP meeting, permission was also gained from them to remain in the room and to include them in my observations. This was always in addition to permission from the adult holding PR. For the young people who did not attend their PEP meetings, I excluded from my field notes any personal information discussed. At every PEP meeting, I gained permission from every adult present in the room to include them in my observations. I have not created a profile for each of these individuals given I did not gain any other information other than their name and role in the young person's life. Some of these young people are included in the accounts of the PEP meetings and include Social Workers, Designated Teachers, and Foster Carers.

Pseudonym	Profile
Martin	Martin is a White, male student in Year 10 at a secondary school in South Traley. He currently receives Play Therapy which is funded by his Pupil Premium Plus funding. He really enjoys these sessions and gets a lot out of them. His favourite subject is Statistics.
Eno	Eno is a Black, female student in Year 10. She lives with her foster carer, Jo, and is passionate about fashion and textiles. She is excited to think about what she might study at Sixth Form or college after her GCSEs.

²⁰ I have excluded a PEP meeting which was conducted over the telephone and, as a result, was difficult to understand given the weakness of the signal between Jane's phone and the conference phone in the school.

Asad	Asad is an Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking (UASC), male student in Year 11 at the same school as Martin. As an Arabic Speaker, Asad is learning English but still requires a translator in meetings. He loves football and plays for a local team in South Traley for individuals with English as a second language.
William	William is a White, male student in Year 7. William has recently moved to the same foster placement as his brother, Aaron. As a result, he now lives and attends a school outside the borough of South Traley.
Aaron	Aaron, a White, male student in Year 10, is William's older brother. He has an EHCP and attends a Special School outside of South Traley.
Amy	Amy is at secondary school outside of South Traley, she has very complex SEND, including physical disabilities. She lives with her foster carer, Naomi, and her biological brother.
Lewis	Lewis is a fictional young person in local authority care whose characteristics, experiences, and circumstances are an amalgamation of the young people and their PEPs observed during the field work.

Table 4 A profile table of the young adult participants

4.4 Methods

It is argued by Bhopal (2010:189) and Hutchinson et al. (2000) that qualitative methods, when used flexibly and fluidly, are 'better suited' to understanding the 'meanings, interpretations and subjective experiences of those groups who may be marginalised, 'hard to reach' or 'remain silenced'. It is for this reason I chose to employ semi-structured interviews and observations for their ability to understand the 'lived experiences' of young people and practitioners who 'come to be profoundly shaped by the socio-historical processes of which they are unavoidably a part' (Wahlberg, 2022:139) within the Virtual School ensemble. Seeking to apply such methods flexibly and fluidly, I formed interview and observation guides [see appendix 2 and 3a-b] which provided a 'more open format', listing 'primary areas for exploration' (Mears, 2012:172) rather than a fixed set of standardised questions. In doing so, I was able to use the Pupil Premium Plus as an 'entryway' into the interviews and observations. This 'entryway' allowed me to connect to other elements of the Virtual School ensemble and trace the role of loss, grief, love, and care as these affects emerged whilst present in the field. First, this was made possible by the semi-structured nature of the

interviews which enabled me to explain to the participants what I was interested in and invite them to tell me more (Mears, 2012). Second, by providing an initial guide for ‘going out and getting close’ via physical and social proximity to the activities and daily lives of those within the ensemble (Emerson et al., 1995:1), I was not limited by a fixed set of observational requirements. In the following sub-sections, I outline, in further detail, my use of interviews and observations as methods for ethnographically mapping the Virtual School ensemble.

4.4.0 Interviews

Interviews are one of the ‘most frequently used research tools in the social sciences’ (Powney and Watts, 2018:ii) and can be “artificially’ separated into two parts; conducting and interpreting’ (Scheurich, 1997). The conventional definition of an interview is a ‘purposeful’ exchange between an interviewer, who asks questions, and an interviewee who provides the answers (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982; Scheurich, 1997; Cohen et al., 2018). The answers are typically recorded, often using an audio-recorder, transcribed, and then treated as text which can subsequently be coded (Scheurich, 1997; Cohen et al., 2003; Powney and Watts, 2018). Somewhere in the middle of a set of pre-determined questions and undirected conversation about a given topic (Newby, 2010; Atkins and Wallace, 2012) sits the semi-structured interview. Although an over-coded phrase, this form of interview generally refers to an format which requires the researcher to have a guide of topics/questions which can be used in any sequence, developed, and explored as organically as possible by the participant (Honan and Bright, 2016). To ensure I could collect data focussed upon my research questions without limiting the freedom of participants to direct the conversation into new lines of enquiry, I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews. This ‘style’ of interview allowed the process of data collection to be ‘cyclic and interactive’ (Powney and Watts, 2018:1). To provide the general shape and boundaries for the interviews without limiting their direction, I

produced an interview guide [see appendix 2] which was structured around: introductions and delivery of information about the interview, initial rapport building questions, and then a series of areas to explore including their own day-to-day working practice, interaction with the Pupil Premium Plus, and their relationship with the young people with whom they work. Each interview, of which there were fourteen undertaken between December 2018 and March 2019, was, with permission, audio-recorded, transcribed in full, and then accompanied with notes of reflection. Aware of the busyness and institutional pressures on each of the practitioners, each interview was kept to under an hour, with the average length being forty minutes.

Before starting the audio-recorder, a brief verbal explanation was provided for the participation, outlining the aims of the project and the interview structure. Overall, this information was brief given that each participant had received an information and consent form prior to their participation. If not already completed, each participant was asked to sign a consent form and reminded of their participant rights and protection (to withdrawal and pseudonymity). Once the audio-recorder was started, each interview was opened with a question about their current role and employment history as a way in which to build rapport and curate a more relaxed environment conducive to participant-led lines of enquiry. Oftentimes, it was found that participants spoke openly and confidently, sharing their thoughts and reflections without needing to refer to the guide. This was integral to the development of a mapping of elements and their articulations beyond the Pupil Premium Plus. After each interview, I reflected upon the interview guide and made minor revisions as new areas of interest emerged and my understanding of the Virtual School ensemble grew. At the end of each interview, allowing it to draw to a natural close, the participant was asked if there was anything further to add before the audio-recorder was switched off. To compliment

the audio-recording, I made brief notes during the interview and more detailed reflective notes, including observations of the surroundings, behaviour, and interactions, afterwards.

4.4.1 Observations

Observations, defined as the use of the researcher's five senses to orient them to the social environment (Angrosino, 2012), was the second method chosen for employment within this ethnographic mapping. A well-established research method within educational research, most frequently used within the classroom in an educational context (Angrosino, 2012), observations were used both formally and informally to collect data about the day-to-day functioning of the Virtual School ensemble, including the Virtual School offices, practice of Virtual School practitioners, car journeys, PEP meetings, and external activities. As far as was made possible, these observations were 'naturalistic' in that no effort was made to control what was being observed (Angrosino, 2012). However, it must be acknowledged that any researcher 'must necessarily interact with and hence have some impact on those studied' (Emerson et al., 1995:3). This kind of observation was chosen because it enables the 'going out and getting close to the activities and everyday experience' via 'physical and social proximity to the daily lives' (Emerson et al., 1995:1) of the practitioners and young people who operate within the Virtual School ensemble. If not already completed, each participant was asked to read the information sheet and sign the consent form, which was accompanied by a brief verbal explanation of the project and participant rights, before any observation began. This verbal explanation was sometimes provided by Jane during my shadowing prior to the formal commencement of the PEP meeting. This was a way in which to provide further context of my presence and reduce disruption of the 'normal' environment.

During all observations, of which there were twenty-eight, field notes were made as a way in which to record the observational data by documenting experiences, feelings, smells, sights, and so on (Emerson et al., 1995; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). Notes were made, as far as possible, intuitively, and reflective of the developing and changing sense of important lines of enquiry as a wider and more detailed map of the ensemble emerged. However, this was initially led by an observational guide [see appendix 3a-b] as I sought to orient myself to the Virtual School environment. Many such notes were jottings, scribbles, drawings ‘snatched in the course of observed action’ which became ‘valuable aids in the construction of a more detailed account’ in partnership with the interview data (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995:178). The hand-written notes were typed up after the day spent in the field because ‘[w]ithout the discipline of daily writing, the observations will fade from memory, and the ethnography will all too easily become incoherent and muddled’ (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995:179).

4.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis is an ‘ongoing process that takes place during the research as well as at the end of it’ (Cohen et al., 2018:644), making it iterative rather than linear. To maintain a sense of recognisability within the field of (critical) education policy sociology, I use Wellington’s (2015:267) seven-stage model to structure my approach to and description of data analysis which is broadly modelled on a thematic approach:

1. ‘Immersion to the data’
2. ‘Reflecting, standing back’
3. ‘Analysis’ (‘dividing up, taking part, selecting and filtering, classifying, and categorizing’)
4. ‘Synthesizing, re-combining’ data

5. 'Relating to other work, locating data'
6. 'Reflecting back'
7. 'Presenting, disseminating, sharing'

Prior to 'immersion in the data', I transcribed, in full, the interview and typed my field notes into Microsoft Word documents so they were in a 'format that lends itself to analysis' (Cohen et al., 2018:645), pseudonymising them as I went. To approach the data via immersion, I read and re-read each transcript and set of field notes, highlighting notable moments on hard copies, and making notes and reflections in the process. These 'highlights', notes, and reflections served as a way in which the changes, the singular 'moments', the consistencies and inconsistencies of the Virtual School ensemble could be traced and mapped. Allowing all such aspects to reach 'out from the inert corpus (corpse) of the data' and arrest my attention from the 'surface of the...page that holds' it (MacLure, 2013:228), I was able to move away from the restriction of 'generalisation, abstraction or the condensation of complexity into the categories of themes', in favour of said complexity (MacLure, 2013:229). This acted as a way in which, as the role of researcher, I could be in tune with 'the capacity to affect and be affected' (MacLure, 2013:229). This is of key importance in relation to my ethico-political commitment to the mapping of the Virtual School ensemble for myself, the field work, and the process of (re)reading and analysing the data.

Following the identification of these events and moments, I allowed myself space to stand back, reflect, and 'wonder' on the data, to simultaneously 'burrow inside it, mining for meaning' and watch 'connections start to fire up' (MacLure, 2013:282). This acted as a method of 'dividing up, taking part, selecting and filtering, classifying, and categorizing' (Wellington, 2015) and, in doing so, outlined the initial tracings of the map. As a way in which to make sense of this emerging map, I synthesised the data, using both NVivo and

manual analysis methods, into what might be traditionally recognised as *themes* within the social sciences but, within this thesis, are referred to as *elements* of the Virtual School ensemble. It is the articulations of which I am interested in. These elements, which are not the totality of the Virtual School ensemble, relate to the research questions and my attempts to trace the ‘material relations’ between ‘human bodies and other non-human identities’ (Zembylas, 2020:63) as I think about how the techno-bureaucratic interacts with the affective all within the context of the performative culture of the neoliberal education machine. Being in favour of complexity (MacLure, 2013:229), I continued to synthesise and re-combine the data as the sub-themes or, as referred to in this thesis, *articulations* began to emerge. These are the ‘tangled trajectories, connections, and disjunctures’ (Stewart, 2007:5), the ‘series of arrested moments constituted as living present’ (Mazzei, 2016:683), the lines of the map. Each of these articulations are explored in the following three chapters, critically discussed, and reflected upon. The elements and their articulations are as follows:

Element 1: Ambiguous (Non-Death) Loss

Tracing the Confrontation Between an Individual Ethic of Care and the Performative

Demands of the Neoliberal Education Machine

- a. “He Reminds Me of My Dad”: The Ephemerality of Enfranchising Practice
- b. The ‘Neurologically Damaged’ Young Person: Processes of Subjectivation
- c. “What Brain Research Tells Us”: The Somatic ‘Translation’ of Attachment Theory

Element 2: Money

Tracing the Flow, Stock, and Code of Money as the Unexamined Subtext of Neoliberalism

- d. Flow: Money
- e. Stock: Value

- f. Code: PEPs

Element 3: The Corporate Parent

Tracing corporate parenting policy as it is translated from 'text to action' by practitioners within the Virtual School ensemble

- g. Affective Signification: A Linguistic and Discursive 'Tool'
- h. How Practitioners 'Make Sense' of What it Means to be a Corporate Parent
- i. The Two 'Modes' of Corporate Parenting in Tension: A Source of Frustration
- j. 'Writing' Corporate Parenting onto the Bodies of the Ensemble

Element 4: Personal Education Plans

Examining the Striated and Smooth Space of Personal Education Plans

- k. PEPs: An Obligatory Passage Point
- l. A Vignette
- m. Constraining and Channelling Affectivity: The Striated Space of PEPs
- n. Affective Eruption: The Smooth Space of PEPs

4.6 Ethics

4.6.0 Ethical Approach

Ethics, in the social sciences, is often narrowly applied to the researcher's responsibility to 'protect all persons concerned with or involved in a piece of research' (Black, 2001:64). This narrow application, driven by the Kantian view that ethics pertains to individual responsibility and rationality (Banks, 2001; Clifford, 2002), often means ethics sections of social science research provide only short accounts of adherence to accepted ethical principles (such as those outlined by the British Educational Research Association (BERA)). These include, but are not limited to, '[n]eutrality, impartiality, rationality, abstraction and objectivity' (Parton, 2003:10) and transparency, consent, participant rights, and data storage

(British Educational Research Association, 2018). Whilst these principles are integral to formulating ‘good’ research, and will be discussed further in this section, they must first be recognised as a by-product of a wider ethical approach which pertains to ontology and epistemology. As explored in the previous chapter, the wider ontological and epistemological (that is, theoretical) framework of this thesis is derived from the work of Spinoza, Deleuze, and Butler. These theorists help to reimagine, through the ontological concept of parallelism, the ‘key ethical concepts of freedom, responsibility, difference and affectivity’ (Thanem and Wallenberg, 2015:236), initiating a wrestling with affects such as grief, loss, love, and care (Fineman, 1996; Boss and Willmott, 2001; Bignall, 2010). This is used by this thesis to validate a shift in the traditional education policy sociology conversations about the techno-bureaucratic elements of the education ensemble such as money, commissioning, and policy to include the affective dimensions of young people in local authority care, namely loss and grief and the resultant ethical responsibility to enfranchise via love and care.

Imagining new possibilities for a Virtual School ensemble which might stand as an affectively-led, political community, means these affects are not just ‘practical’ activities but an ‘ethical framework’ too (Sevenhuijsen, 2000; Holland, 2010:1655). As the Virtual School ensemble is one example of the many ‘large, complex networks of care’ in which young people in local authority care find themselves (Holland, 2010:1671), the ethical principles of this thesis are to be derived from care as an ethical framework. Since the 1980s, the ethical framework of care has been positioned in tension with the ethic of justice which, from a feminist perspective, mirrors ‘spheres of activity... associated with socially advantaged men’ (Walker, 1998:20) and results in the ‘neglect of caring in the discourse of conventional moral philosophy’ (Bowden, 1997:185). In many ways, this is one of the many debates drawn from the criticism of disembodied, rational ethics. In 1982, Gilligan (1982) articulated an ethic of

care as a way in which to ‘challenge the assumptions about deficiencies in women’s moral reasoning’ (Orme, 2002:801) by recognising that care relationships ‘are often hidden or marginalised in public life’ (Holland, 2010:1665). In doing so, she sought to de-stigmatise and normalise care, ‘attempting to restore it to the centre of public life, rather than see it as a private act for the vulnerable and needy’ (Holland, 2010:1665). Imagining ways in which to work against the privatisation (or individualisation) of care has an affinity with the discussion had by Butler (2003:12) about the ways in which loss and grief might ‘furnish a sense of political community’ by first ‘bringing to the fore the relational ties that have implications for theorizing fundamental dependency and ethical responsibility’. The concept of an ethic of care is radically important, then, for this thesis, reminding me of the ‘interdependency’ of care and the necessity of conducting research in a way that opens the possibility of ‘alleviating some of the ‘othering’’ of young people in local authority care (Holland, 2010:1664).

4.6.1 Researcher Positionality and Power

For this thesis, an ethic of care framework is a practical and recognised way through which loss and grief, love and care can be made productive within a mapping of the Virtual School ensemble and from which ethical principles can be drawn. Before moving into detailing such ethics in practice, however, my positionality as a researcher must be acknowledged because ‘the status and role of the researcher’ are crucial issues to explore (Bhopal and Deuchar, 2016:5). Gerson (2009:1343), who, taking a psychosocial approach, argues that in between the ‘scream and the silence’ must be an ‘active and attuned’ affective response. Although as a researcher I can never be what he terms a ‘live third’ to loss and grief nor provide love and care given the temporality that I represent, my position does afford me the privilege of being able to act as an ‘engaged witness’ in the research context. This might be done by attending

to the systemic failures which result in disenfranchisement by mapping the Virtual School ensemble. Choosing to be an ‘engaged witness’ in this way is a privilege afforded to me as a White, Middle-Class, Heterosexual, Cis Woman. This is because positionality is determined by structural aspects of identity including ‘gender, sexuality, historical and geographical location, ethnicity, race, social class...(dis)abilities and so on’ (Sikes, 2004; Wellington, 2015; Marsh and Furlong, 2017; Holmes, 2020:2). These factors come together to form a kind of ‘ethnographic toolkit’ which ‘shapes field access, field dynamics, and data analysis’ and ‘are used to gain access and understand the field’ (Reyes, 2020:221&225). Not static or passive, but relational, this toolkit changes ‘across space, in interactions with different people, and across interactions with the same people’ (Reyes, 2020:221). Thinking of ethnographic positionality as a ‘toolkit’, Reyes (2020:225-226) argues that such a view recognises the plurality of ‘tools’ used by ethnographers in the field, acknowledges the symbiotic relationship between how ‘we view the world and the ways in which the world views us’, the dynamism of fieldwork, analysis, and writing, and provides a language (theoretical and methodological) for explaining both ‘invisible’ and ‘visible’ researcher traits. However, it must be noted that this kind of approach to positionality is particularly complex and difficult to practice (Reyes, 2020:221).

As a way in which to address this complexity, become aware of my social identity, and acknowledge the ways this might impact my research, I completed Jacobson and Mustafa’s (2019) ‘Social Identity Map’. This acted as an opportunity to ‘explicitly identify and reflect on’ my social identity and ‘address the difficulty that many...critical qualitative researchers experience when trying to conceptualize their social identities and positionality’ (Jacobson and Mustafa, 2019:1). The map is presented below:

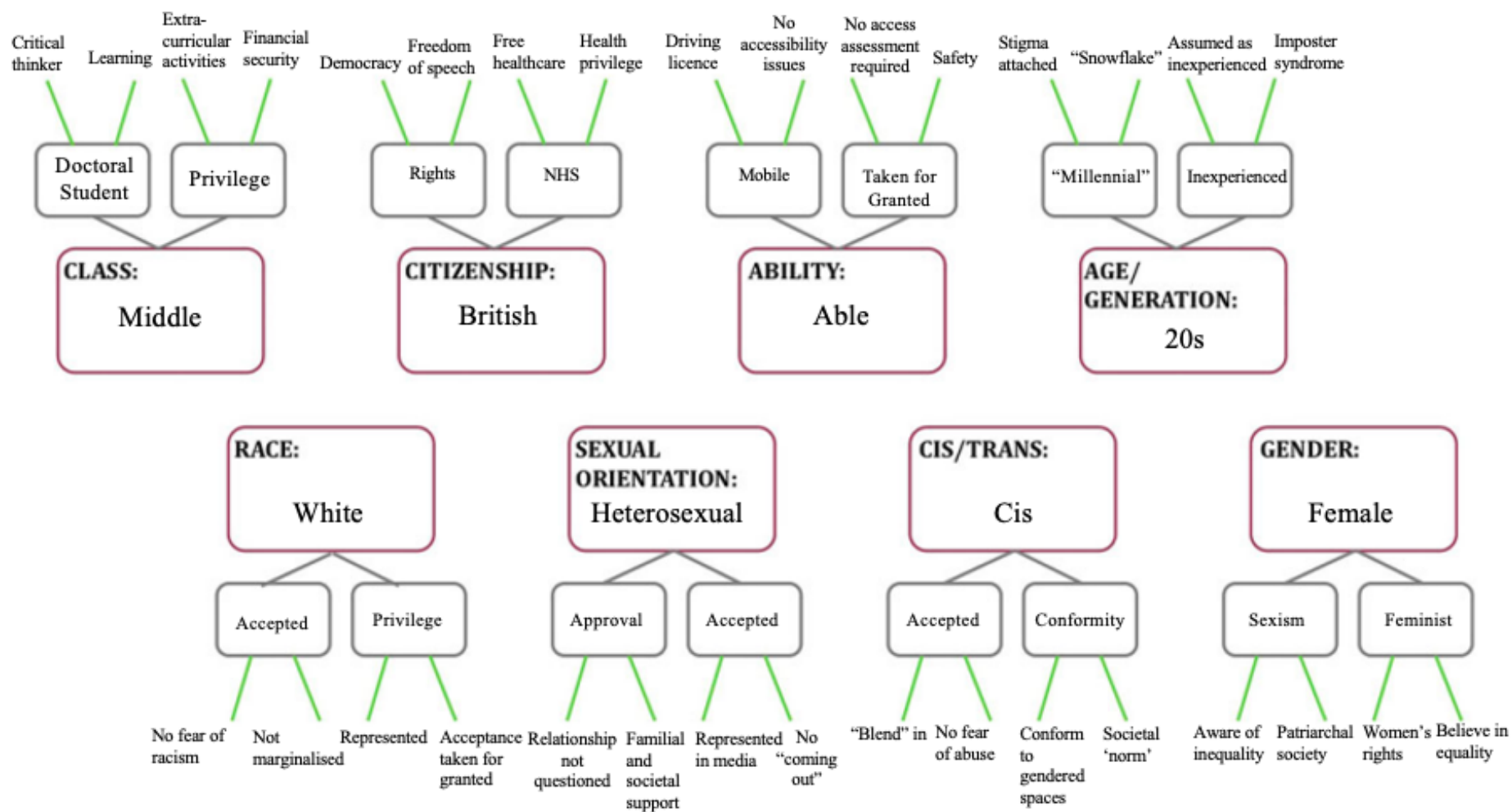


Figure 2 A social identity map

Given that ‘differences such as age, gender, education and nationality’, as detailed in the map above, ‘can impact on the research; and in turn influence power relations’, it is integral to consider the effect such identities have on the ‘research process’ in reference to power (Bhopal and Deuchar, 2016:1&4). This is particularly the case within my research given that it pertains to young people who are considered ‘marginalised’ and therefore have ‘less power and voice’ than me as a researcher (Bhopal and Deuchar, 2016:1). As a result, I acknowledge the asymmetrical relations of power (Bhopal and Deuchar, 2016) which exist between myself and the young people whose PEP meetings I observed. This is particularly the case when observing the PEP meetings for Eno, a Black female, and Asad, a brown UASC, with whom, as a White woman, I do not have shared experiences of structural inequalities including racism. This prevents access to a certain level of ‘shared empathy between myself and the respondents’ (Bhopal, 2010:190). Despite this, I made attempts to mitigate such power differentials through small, practical acts such as introducing myself directly to the young person (in the case of Asad, I made a conscious effort to speak directly to him, making eye contact, instead of looking to the translator), requesting consent in direct communication during the PEP meeting, and providing reassuring facial expressions throughout to reduce my position as ‘stranger’.

Furthermore, in seeking to produce a critical piece of research, I placed emphasis on self-reflection, continually reflecting on my presence within the PEP meetings, as a way in which to ‘decrease the power differentials between the research and the researched’ (Bhopal, 2010:193). In relation to the interviews with practitioners, I was aware that ‘respondents can have power by withholding information and controlling what they disclose’ (Bhopal, 2010:193) which was a very real risk given the interviews included questions pertaining to

uses of money and enactment of policy within the local authority. Although there is ‘always the assumption that that [sic] researcher is in control of the research process and is the one who holds the balance...power relations are more complicated than this implies’, given they are ‘based on a continuum’ (Bhopal, 2010:193). This was particularly evident in cases where I interviewed men, a situation in which I consciously battled against the ‘passivity, subordination and silencing of women’ (Maynard, 1994:23) which led me to feel a power imbalance in the opposite direction.

4.6.2 Ethics in Practice

For this thesis, ethics as a ‘practical activity’ (Sevenhuijsen, 2000; Holland, 2010:1665) was guided by the ethical principles of the Economic and Social Research Council, British Educational Research Association, and formalised in the ethical process required by the University of Birmingham. There are five clear areas of ethical responsibility which are to: participants, sponsors/clients, the community, publication, and researcher wellbeing (British Educational Research Association, 2018). The first responsibility, to participants, is the most comprehensive and is to include consideration of: consent, transparency, right to withdraw, incentives, protection from harm, privacy, data and data storage, and disclosure (British Educational Research Association, 2018). These considerations are even more integral for a project which is focused on a complex network of care (Holland, 2010) pertaining to young people within the social care system. Research which is about or includes young people in care is an ongoing conversation within social (work) research given there is a broad adult-centric tendency to protect young people who are ‘perceived...as particularly vulnerable...because of their previous adverse experiences’ and ‘therefore in need of protection’ ‘from the perceived adverse effects participation in research may cause’ (Heptinstall, 2000:868). This means such young people, surrounded by ‘gatekeepers’, may

well be 'prevented from taking part in research despite having expressed a personal wish to do so', a separate ethical issue, which cannot be explored in depth in this thesis in depth but is helpfully considered by scholars including Heptinstall (2000:868).

All participants included within the research were given an information sheet and consent form prior to their participation, of which there were multiple iterations to make them accessible and relevant for each participant group [see appendix 3a-n]. These forms, alongside explaining the study and their required participation, were the way in which 'voluntary informed consent' was obtained by detailing their right to withdraw, researcher contact details, and the final date at which this was to be made possible (British Educational Research Association, 2018:9). Consent was directly obtained from each participant with additional written consent from the adult holding PR and, upon request of South Traley, verbal consent from the carer(s) of the young people included within the project. By providing information sheets and further verbal clarification of the aim of the research prior to their participation, I was able to be 'open and honest with participants and other stakeholders' to ensure transparency and clarify there were no incentives which would 'impinge on their free decision to participate' (British Educational Research Association, 2018:16&19). After making the decision to participate, it was my 'aim to both put participants at their ease and avoid making excessive demands on them' (British Educational Research Association, 2018:19). To do so, I reduced the stress associated with observations by making a conscious effort to build a rapport. Furthermore, to reduce disruption on daily working practices, I kept the interview time to a minimum and enabled each participant to schedule the time and location at their own convenience.

Due to the diagnosis of a life-threatening illness, I was required to draw my fieldwork to a premature close. Consequently, young people were only included in observations of PEP meetings given it took months to begin negotiating access to what lay behind the ‘gates’. Aware of the need to mitigate any risk of harm, however, I entered the field acutely mindful that each young person would respond differently to being observed by a ‘stranger’. Such observation posed the risk of acting as a trigger and causing distress. To mitigate this risk, I continually checked throughout the meetings for any visible sign of distress and prepared to remind them of their right to withdraw without ‘penalty’. To further reduce the risk of harm, each method was piloted in action. In other words, after each method was used within the field for the first time, I took time to reflect and consider if any changes were necessary before continuing with the remaining field work. To protect the confidentiality of all, each participant, local authority, and service provider was assigned a pseudonym, hardcopies of data were stored under lock and key in a filing cabinet to which only I had access, and all other data were stored on password protected devices to which only myself and my supervisors had access²¹. Finally, the project itself is sponsored by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) which is openly noted at the beginning of this thesis. This sponsorship placed even greater emphasis on my need to ‘protect the integrity and reputation of educational research by ensuring’ I conducted my ethnographic fieldwork ‘to the highest standards’ as a way in which to produce a novel contribution to the body of (critical) education policy sociology knowledge (British Educational Research Association, 2018:29).

4.7 Concluding Thoughts

In this chapter, I have outlined the methodological and ethical approach to the mapping of the Virtual School ensemble. Beginning with a short summary of the three phases of research, I

²¹ This will continue to be stored for ten years, in line with the University of Birmingham’s data policy.

detailed the concurrent phases through which I was able to carry out fourteen interviews and twenty-eight observations. Following this, I explored each of my three research questions as I sought to position these within the existing literature of Chapter 2. To answer these questions, I then outlined my ethnographic approach to mapping the Virtual School ensemble before providing context for each of the four Virtual School sites and a short, descriptive profile for each of the participants. I then explored my chosen methods – interviews and observations – attending to the rationale for their choice and how they were employed in practice. Finally, I moved onto detail my approach to data analysis and my ethical approach which included discussions of wider ethics, researcher positionality, relations of power, and ethics in practice. In the chapters which follow, this methodological and ethical approach to the mapping is implemented as I trace the articulation of four elements of the Virtual School ensemble. Beginning with the element of ambiguous (non-death) loss and grief, I first turn to the effects of the neoliberal education machine on its articulation.

Chapter 5: Element 1 – Ambiguous (Non-Death) Loss

Tracing the Confrontation Between an Individual Ethic of Care and the Performative Demands of the Neoliberal Education Machine

*“I think sometimes, you’re trying to ram a round peg in a square hole and we are just
banging, and we are doing damage while we are doing that”*

~ Jane ~

5.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I seek to chart the recording and monitoring, or performative, function of the neoliberal education machine and its multiple effects on the articulation of loss and grief within the Virtual School ensemble. This is an affective line of the map. Three such effects, upon which this chapter will focus, reached ‘out from the inert corpus...of data’, arresting my attention as they jumped from the ‘surface of the screen’ (MacLure, 2013:228) during my data analysis phase. The first of these effects concerns the machinic disenfranchisement of love and care which makes it difficult, if not impossible, for the practitioners of the ensemble to sustain individual acts of enfranchisement before the bubbling of affectivity, which I both heard about and observed, is shut down again, and its potentiality for imagining future possibilities foreclosed. In tracing this articulation, I draw particular attention to the momentary production of enfranchisement which forces practitioners to face the tension between their individual ethic of care and the ‘terrors’ of the performative, which leaves ‘no room for caring’ (Ball, 2003:224). It is the performative demands of the neoliberal education machine that always win given they reach into the ‘choices, beliefs, bodies and desires’ of the practitioners (Cole and Gannon, 2017:81). The second effect refers to the discursive (re)assertion of the young person as ‘neurologically damaged’ which I heard repeatedly in the

interviews across the four local authorities. It is within this process that the young people's ambiguous (non-death) loss and grief is commodified through an exchange between (therapeutic) intervention and educational outcomes. It is within this 'value' exchange that another tension emerges in reference to the practitioners' ethic of care and the machinic conversion of this into the biologised 'abnormal brain' (Perry, 2004; Smith et al., 2017). Finally, the third concerns the channelling and conversion, or 'translation' (McGimpsey et al., 2016), of attachment theory for use within the neoliberal education machine which demands trauma and attachment be made accessible for recording and monitoring. As 'abstract concepts' are made readily applicable (Plafky, 2016) by the practitioners of the Virtual School, young people are subjectivated into the position of 'neurologically damaged' educational problem (McGimpsey et al., 2016). This produces them as 'impossible learners' – those who exist outside the discursive framework of meaning – foreclosing them from being made intelligible as 'ideal learners' (Youdell, 2006; Bradbury, 2013). Another process through which disenfranchisement of loss and grief occurs.

I will demonstrate these effects in three ways, drawing upon both my interview and observational data. First, I will draw on an excerpt from my interview with Diane, the PEP Improvement Officer in South Traley, which I have titled, "He Reminds Me of My Dad". This first section will be written in a qualitative register as I look to consider this discursive moment lifted directly from an interview. I will use this excerpt to demonstrate the caring nature of the practitioners I encountered within the ensemble and their individual efforts to enfranchise affectivity relating to loss and grief. However, I will also use it as a means through which to expose the ephemerality of this kind of practice as the recording and monitoring function of the neoliberal education machine forecloses any sustained efforts of enfranchisement. The transient nature of enfranchising practice which I observed within the

ensemble places the practitioners in a tension between their individual ethic of care and the machine which leaves ‘no room for caring’ (Ball, 2003:224). Whilst providing a critique, I simultaneously wish to emphasise the caring nature of every practitioner that I encountered during my time in the field. I do not seek, within this chapter, to assert any kind of criticism of the practitioners themselves or place into question their genuine care for the young people which I both heard about and observed time and time again. Rather, I wish to highlight the conversion and channelling of affectivity by the recording and monitoring (performative) function of the neoliberal education machine which means the enfranchisement of loss and grief within the Virtual School ensemble can only be sustained momentarily before it is shut down again.

The second effect comes from a series of quotations drawn from my interviews across the four local authorities. These quotations are used to demonstrate the way in which the ‘neurologically damaged’ young person is *reasserted* through speech. I argue, using the work of Youdell (2006:512) who simultaneously draws on the work of Butler (1997), that the ‘discursive terrain on and through which’ young people in local authority care are produced serves to differentiate and exclude, an ‘intolerability’ (Foucault, 1994) I wish to address within this chapter. At the same time, these quotations support the discussion of the previous effect by identifying another example of the performative-affective tension. This time, this exists between caring about the traumatic pasts of the young people and the neoliberal education machine which converts and channels such experiences into the framework of the biologised ‘abnormal brain’ (Perry, 2004; Smith et al., 2017).

The third comes from my observational field notes of a trauma and attachment training session delivered by Rachel and Jane for the staff in a secondary school in South Traley. I use

my observations and reflections of this training session to explore the ways in which trauma and attachment theory is converted by the monitoring and recording functions of the neoliberal education machine for ‘use’ within the Virtual School ensemble. To do so, I shift my writing into an ethnographic mode as I seek to describe and reflect upon this training session including the activities used, the responses of the school staff, and my own affectivity. Not wishing to assert any kind of critique to the actual science behind attachment theory, however, I use the concept of ‘translation’ (McGimpsey et al., 2016) to argue that by making the ‘abstract concepts’ of this theoretical field ‘useful’, or readily applicable (Plafky, 2016), I encounter the process of subjectivation as the Virtual School ensemble brings into being the ‘neurologically damaged’ young person (McGimpsey et al., 2016). This position constitutes the young person as an educational ‘problem’ in need of intervention (McGimpsey et al., 2016). The ultimate consequence, is the production of a group of ‘impossible learners’ who are foreclosed from the position of ‘ideal learner’ by forcing them to exist outside the discursive framework of meaning (educational success) (Youdell, 2006; Bradbury, 2013), disallowing their experiences of loss and grief to exist ‘out there’ by containing them within the body.

5.1 “He Reminds Me of My Dad”: The Ephemerality of Enfranchising Practice

During my data analysis phase, I was continually drawn back to the moment which I present below. This moment demonstrates the ephemerality of enfranchising practice and highlights the tension in which the practitioners of the ensemble are forced to exist. This tension, which I experienced repeatedly, refers to the confrontation between the individual practitioners’ ethic of care and the recording and monitoring demands of the neoliberal education machine. Whilst the excerpt from Diane, upon which this section focuses, was not the only one of its kind, as I read and re-read my interviews this excerpt continually jumped from the ‘surface of

the screen' demanding that I 'burrow inside it, mining for meaning' (MacLure, 2013:228). My attention was grabbed by the girl who Diane describes and her own caring response to the situation. Whilst I never learned who this girl was – her age, name, and location remain unknown – for me, it was a moment of becoming as a researcher, a moment for self-reflection (Bhopal, 2010). I was changed psychologically and emotionally (Massumi, 2012 [1987]; Fox and Alldred, 2013) as I experienced a sense of pain for a girl whose name I did not even know. Despite her anonymity, this becoming began during the interview with Diane and continued into my data analysis. It was in the latter phase that I was able to reflect on the importance of enfranchising practice alongside the damaging consequences of the neoliberal education machine as it forecloses such practice, converting and channelling it into recordable and monitorable data. It is for this reason I have chosen not to give the girl a pseudonym, as her story speaks for itself:

“I had, this is going back a few years now, but I had a young lady, I know she’s around now, she’s doing very well for herself. Myself and another colleague struggled, and I mean struggled, to get her through college. She got ex-, no, she didn’t get permanently excluded from a school, we moved her to another school so this school could work with her and keep her. And she actually did really, really well. She had good carers and she did really well. But she had a real problem with her science teacher. And, I kid you not, myself and this other colleague were in this school once a week. At least. And then one day she said to me, “I don’t like Mr so and so, he reminds me of my Dad”. And I just went to school and said, “Have you got another science class that runs at the same time? Yes? Good. Move her”. And then, when I actually met the science teacher, I could actually see it. And I said, “It’s that straightforward”. All that time he’s up at the front of the class and walking up and down, she’s just seeing her Dad. And that’s opening up a whole can of worms...It’s about having

the awareness to jump on that and go, “That’s a problem, that is why this young person is not succeeding” and then looking at what can happen and where the Pupil Premium can be used to fund something that makes a difference. And, in the past, sometimes, that means putting a halt on one thing and then saying, “Actually, we are going to divert the money and do this instead”. Then again, it all needs monitoring”.

[Diane, PEP Improvement Officer, South Traley]

In this excerpt, Diane recounts a real, lived example of the affective outpourings displayed by a young person whose ‘emotional wounds’ are re-opened (Rocco-Briggs, 2008). Whether her wounds are sourced from suffering abuse and/or neglect at the hands of her father or from being removed from her father’s care (or both), this re-opening is triggered by another body – her science teacher – which threatens her ‘fragile coherence’ (Deleuze, 1988 [1970]:19). Her “*problem with her science teacher*” produces ‘bodily expressed intensities...that are not classified as specific feelings but can become anything’ (Staunæs, 2011:223) as she is undone by the presence of another. Unable to express her emotional wounds through word, the neoliberal education machine positions her ‘bodily expressed intensities’ (Staunæs, 2011:223) as problematic; what they become within the classroom exists outside of the ‘dominant discourse of educational achievement’ (Mannay et al., 2017:694) and in opposition with the ‘ideal learner’ (Bradbury, 2013). These expressions are recorded and monitored by the neoliberal education machine, triggering Diane and her colleagues to be “*in this school once a week. At least*” as they seek to address “*why this person is not succeeding*” (Diane). This process of conversion – affective expression of loss and grief into recorded and monitored ‘bad’ behaviour – shifts out of view the ‘choreography of bodies’ which this girl enters, without consent, creating and reconfiguring meaning each time she has a science lesson (Youdell and Armstrong, 2011).

The meaning created and reconfigured in the relationship, or choreography, between her and her science teacher, represents a kind of ‘haunting’ as her father appears as ‘the figure of a ghost’ who is ‘neither present nor absent, neither dead or alive’ (Derrida, 1993; Davis, 2005:373). Her visual image, which has an ‘undecidable, ‘in-between’ status, haunting between material and immaterial, real and virtual’, represents and presents as a ‘deadened, flattened’ copy of reality (Roberts, 2012:386). It is this haunting which brings to the surface, once again, her “[f]rozen” unresolved grief’ (Boss, 2004 cited in; Lee and Whiting, 2007:270). Rejecting the machinic production of the girl as an ‘impossible learner’ (Youdell, 2006), the lens of ambiguous loss can be used to understand the way in which the status of her father is placed into question. Previously ‘there but not there’ (Boss, 1999), or physically absent but psychologically present (Boss and Yeats, 2014), the science teacher’s haunting reveals the reality that her father is ‘gone but not for sure’ (Boss, 2016:270). Ultimately, she is reminded of her ‘melancholic identification’ as her father is ‘incorporated and phantasmatically preserved in and as the ego’ (Freud, 1923; Butler, 1995:166). This phantasmic preservation is not unique to this girl but a common experience for young people in local authority care who, once removed physically from their biological families, continue to experience their ‘aliveness’ psychologically. Whether such presence serves as a source of comfort or, for like for this girl, distress, must be understood before caring practice can take place within the Virtual School ensemble.

Although this melancholic identification, or ambiguous loss, is oftentimes disenfranchised due to its failure to fit into society’s ‘grieving rules’ (Doka, 1999), it is important to recognise the care Diane shows by recognising the distress caused by the haunting which reminds this girl of her Dad’s phantasmic preservation. Employing ‘active listening, without judgement’

(Lee and Whiting, 2007:426-427) - “*And then one day she said to me, “I don’t like Mr so and so, he reminds me of my Dad”. And I just went to the school and said, “Have you got another science class that runs at the same time? Yes? Good. Move her”*” – Diane shows her C.A.R.E (communication, affirmation, recognition of experiences) (Mitchell, 2016; Mitchell, 2018). First, assuming Diane had curated, having been “*in this school once a week*”, a trusting, openly communicative relationship, this girl appears to have identified Diane as an ‘engaged witness’ who she trusts to act as an ‘enduring presence’ through her commitment to ‘dialogue, knowledge and memory in the face of fear and forgetting’ (Gerson, 2009:1355). Proving exactly this, Diane, without hesitation, affirmed and recognised her experiences by immediately speaking to the school and demanding she be moved into another class. This was before she “*actually met the science teacher*” and “*could actually see it*” (Diane). Continuing to show her commitment and representing her ‘ethical framework’ (Holland, 2010:1665), Diane shared with me that she knows “*she’s around, she’s doing well for herself*”. This ethic of care is representative of almost every practitioner I encountered within the ensemble, each of whom sought, through their practice, to alleviate ‘some of the ‘othering’ experienced by the young people (Holland, 2010:1664). Given that enfranchising practice of this kind is contingent on the development of trusting, mutual relationships, this moment of individual resistance against the machine which ‘leaves no room for caring’ (Ball, 2003:224) identifies the importance of witnessing (Gerson, 2009) as a loving and caring response to the manifestation of loss and grief.

Despite the importance of such witnessing, this excerpt also draws attention to the difficulty (or perhaps impossibility) practitioners face in sustaining their enfranchising practice whilst the terrorising (Ball, 2003) grip of the neoliberal education machine coils around them like a serpent (Deleuze, 1992a), reaching into their ‘choices, beliefs, bodies and desires’ (Cole and

Gannon, 2017:81). This grip becomes almost palpable as Diane begins to explain that identifying the “*problem*” requires her, as a practitioner, to look at ““*why this young person is not succeeding*” and then looking at what can happen and where the Pupil Premium can be used to fund something that makes a difference”. “*Sometimes*”, she continued, “*that means putting a halt on one thing and then saying, “Actually, we are going to divert the money and do this instead*”. Then again, it all needs monitoring”. This noticeable shift from her language of care to a language of recording and monitoring, using words such as “*problem*” and “*succeeding*”, is an example of the performative discourse of the neoliberal education machine being *reasserted* through speech. Here I am not arguing that Diane stops caring or even that it is lost. Instead, I argue the ephemerality of caring moments is symptomatic of the tension between Diane’s individual ethic of care and the recording and monitoring function of the neoliberal education machine which channels and converts moments of her affectivity relating to loss and grief.

Another example of this symptomatic tension occurred during a PEP meeting for Martin, a young person in Year 10 in South Traley, during a conversation between Jane (Virtual School), Janet (SenCo), and Jess (Social Worker) about Martin’s play therapy. I have included an excerpt from my field notes below in which Janet, explaining that Martin enjoys his play therapy sessions, shared with those around the table that the school had not received a report from the therapist since December 2018 (this meeting was taking place in May 2019) and had not had any responses to follow up emails, either:

This, Janet continued, leaves the school in a position where they are unable to record and monitor Martin’s progress from these sessions. Agreeing out loud, Jess shared that she had spoken to her manager about the issue and they both feel Martin is too old for play therapy.

Looking up from her iPad, Jane, who I was sat next to, began to defend the use of play therapy explaining they had tried art therapy, but he had just wanted to play. Immediately following this defensive stance in which she showed her ethic of care to Martin and the use of the Pupil Premium Plus to fund an intervention which they know Martin finds helpful and allows him to safely express his loss and grief, Jane's position shifted. Perhaps, Jane shared, they could consider "transferring" the use of the Pupil Premium Plus to support Martin academically as he moves closer to his GCSEs. This shift caused an affective response as I sat further upright in my chair and my heart dropped knowing this conversation would likely end in the discontinuation of play therapy which the practitioners, aside from Jess, agreed was both enjoyable and positive for Martin. However, due to the lack of reporting the outcomes of this therapy were no longer recorded and, therefore, could not be monitored by the school and Virtual School.

I draw on this moment from my ethnographic field notes to reassert my argument that the ephemeral nature of care shown in the Virtual School ensemble is not a result of practitioners who do not have an individual framework of care. Instead, it is a consequence of the machinic functions which convert and channel care and consequently foreclose the sustainment of such practice. These functions produce a tension between the affective and the performative within which the practitioners work. In between this tension exists fleeting opportunities for loss and grief to escape before it is either converted and channelled into something recordable or made 'unspeakable' again (McIvor, 2012:412). The transient nature of enfranchising practice, two examples of which are provided in this section, is one of the multiple effects of the recording and monitoring neoliberal education machine on the articulation of loss and grief within the Virtual School ensemble. Overall, I have used this section to demonstrate this effect, providing the first tracing of elemental articulation through

which I have sought to draw attention to the process of conversion and channelling as care is diverted and made into something recordable and/or monitorable.

5.2 The ‘Neurologically Damaged’ Young Person: Processes of Subjectivation

It is widely believed across educational policy and practice, to which the Virtual School ensemble is connected, that trauma and attachment awareness training should be delivered to teachers who, as a profession, ‘report being insufficiently prepared in attachment and social learning theories to work effectively with young people who experience trauma and unmet attachment needs’ (Dingwall and Sebba, 2018:3). This is supported by specific policy measures which suggest the Virtual School, using the Pupil Premium Plus, should provide ‘support best delivered at local authority level – e.g., training on attachment for all designated teachers in the authority area’ (Department for Education, 2018a:19). Importantly, this has led to a growing awareness of trauma and attachment within schools, championed by individuals such as Louise Bombèr and wider developments such as that of the Attachment Aware Schools (AAS) programme (Dingwall and Sebba, 2018). However, whilst this awareness and training helps to equip educational practitioners to understand and meet the needs of young people who have ‘experienced trauma or neglect’ (with the potential to incite systemic change through, for example, Initial Teacher Training (ITT)) it remains driven by a ‘scientific understanding of neuroscience’ which is said to provide ‘evidence of a direct link between the impact on brain...and emotional development’ (Dingwall and Sebba, 2018:3&13). This compounds the concern identified within the review of the literature in Chapter 2 which draws attention to the subjectivating consequences of ‘translating’ attachment neuroscience into educational policy and practice. In other words, the trauma and attachment knowledge that circulates within the contexts of influence, policy text production, and practice (Bowe et al., 1992; Ball, 1993) is an oversimplification and obfuscation of the

original neuroscientific findings relating to trauma and attachment (Wall, 2018) which results in the production of the neurologically damaged young person ‘as a site of regulatory intervention’ (McGimpsey et al., 2016:909).

By drawing on a series of quotations from my interviews with the practitioners across the four local authorities (South Traley, Fordhill, East Withstell, and Wamslow), I demonstrate the ways in which this translation is used by the neoliberal education machine to oppose the practitioners’ individual desire to ‘assist those experiencing grief in relation to non-death loss’ (Knight and Gitterman, 2019:165). Every practitioner, without prompting, referred, in some way, to the “*early life trauma*” (Mary) young people face before entering care - “[q]uite a few kids, their parents are deceased. You know, there has been mental health issues, DV [*Domestic Violence*], substance misuse” (Sophie). However, beyond this surface-level recognition of experience, I identified a clear tension between their individual framework of care and the recording and monitoring function of the neoliberal education machine which, once again, makes such practice difficult to sustain:

“I think, sometimes, you’re trying to ram a round peg in a square hole and we are just banging, and we are doing damage while we are doing that and I think, sometimes, we do need to take a step back and think, “What are we achieving?”. But then, there is that constant drive to get the result and I think at an individual level we need to think differently at points” (Jane).

Here, I was particularly interested in Jane’s awareness of the performative demands – “*the constant drive to get results*” – which derive from the neoliberal education machine and reach into her ‘choices, beliefs, bodies and desires’ (Cole and Gannon, 2017:81) by converting her desire to care – “*What are we achieving?*” – and channelling it into an act of individualised resistance – “*I think at an individual level we need to think differently*” –

rather than normalised, corporate practice. Sophie also drew attention to this same issue as she told me about her views of Social Work whilst training compared to her views now in the role: *“I started all wide-eyed... it’s going to be loads of direct work with kids, you’re going to have these great relationships and it is just a lot of paperwork and assessment after assessment. You don’t see kids as much as you think you will”*.

As addressed in the previous section, the discussions I had with the practitioners about their relation to - and desire for - caring practice when responding to trauma and attachment were only fleeting, soon converted into a biologised (Smith et al., 2017) language which served to connect biological processes with learning and outcomes. *“One of the barriers to learning”*, Rachel explained, *“can be your ability to regulate your emotions”* because, as Alex added separately, *“children that have missed developmental stages are not, you know, it’s a generalisation, but are often not ready to learn”*. There is a lot *“going on inside an adolescent brain”*, Jane shared, which, triggered by *“hormones”* (Diane) might manifest in *“emotional trauma-type behaviours”* (Helen) and *“dysregulated time”* (Mary). These repeated references to the ‘brain’, ‘hormones’, ‘developmental stages’, and ‘dysregulation’ derive from the translation of attachment neuroscience research into the educational context via policy and practice. This translation, which has been used to connect a young person’s ability to *“engage in their lessons”* (Diane) or ‘readiness to learn’ (Janus and Duku, 2007) with experiences of trauma and attachment challenges, is demonstrated by the AAS programme. This programme bases itself ‘on the assumption that all children in school need to be ready to learn and achieve and that children who have experienced trauma and neglect are often not ready to do so’ (Dingwall and Sebba, 2018:3). I found this assumption to be deeply embedded within the Virtual School ensemble: *“one of the barriers to learning in a classroom can be your ability to regulate your emotions. So, if you are learning to regulate*

your emotions through equine therapy you can transfer that skill of regulation to the classroom” (Rachel).

I use this assumption to further illustrate the monitoring and recording function of the neoliberal education machine which demands a kind of value exchange²². In other words, the monetary investment of the Pupil Premium Plus into (therapeutic) interventions which address ‘regulation’ are not done to attend to the root cause of such emotional (dys)regulation but only to ameliorate this ‘barrier’. This amelioration is exchanged for ‘raising the attainment of disadvantaged pupils’ (Education Skills and Funding Agency, 2021:no pagination). It is in this exchange process that a kind of ‘values schizophrenia’ emerges whereby the ‘commitment, judgement and authenticity’ at an individual level is ‘sacrificed for impression and performance’ (Ball, 2003:221). In other words, there is a sacrificial relationship between practitioners’ ‘commitment to compassion, honesty, and responsibility’ (Gerson, 2009:1353) and their engagement with therapeutic intervention as a way through which trauma and attachment might be converted and channelled into quantifiable outcomes by getting the young people ‘ready to learn’. Consequentially, the sustainment of ‘the most basic necessity for psychic alive-ness in the aftermath of atrocity’; ‘the active witnessing presence of an other’ is foreclosed (Gerson, 2009:1353). This is further evidence for Ball’s (2003:225) argument that the ‘heart of the educational project is gouged out and left empty...authenticity is replaced entirely by plasticity’ and will be explored in greater depth in Chapter 6 which follows.

²² This exchange will be explored in greater depth in the following chapter.

The foreclosure of active witnessing (Gerson, 2009) also draws attention to the systemic repudiation of the social and political constitution of the body which makes vulnerability to loss part of the human condition (Butler, 2003:10):

‘each one of us is constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies – as a site of desire and physical vulnerability, as a site of a publicity at once assertive and exposed’.

This evacuates any acknowledgement of the intrinsic value (without particular outcomes attached in expectation) of therapeutic interventions as a way in which to attend to the ‘unanticipated, or untimely, loss of familial connections’ (Mitchell and Kuczynski, 2010; Mitchell, 2016) that young people face upon entry into care. This foreclosure becomes understood as a form of violence (Butler, 2003), or disenfranchisement (Doka, 1999), which validates Jane’s concern that “*banging*” the “*round peg in a square hole*” does “*damage*”. This draws attention to the ‘echo chamber’ (Jasper cited in Mitchell, 2018) within which the loss and grief of young people exists within the Virtual School ensemble. Without sustained enfranchisement, local authority care continues to be an ‘experience embedded in chronic and repeated loss events around one’s identity and sense of belonging within a permanent system – an ambiguous loss of home’ (Samuels, 2009:1229).

In this second section, I considered another performative-affective tension produced by the recording and monitoring function of the neoliberal education machine. Using a series of quotations, I have highlighted the powers of subjectivation which work through the biologically driven discourse of trauma and attachment imposed upon the practitioners and identified the violence imbued in the sacrificial value ‘exchange’ between trauma and outcomes. I now turn to consider a third effect. I do so by drawing on my ethnographic observation of an all-staff trauma and attachment training session facilitated by Jane and

Rachel in South Traley, which, according to Rachel, is designed to enable staff to understand that “*actually, if you had early life disruption or you have had poor attachments, those can make a difference today, they might not have happened for a long time, but today can be one of those days*”. As I shift my writing into an ethnographic mode, I use this observation to demonstrate the conversion, or ‘translation’, of attachment neuroscience delivered by the practitioners, as ‘knowledge entrepreneurs’ (Plafky, 2016:1508) of the Virtual School ensemble. These entrepreneurs are used to make this body of knowledge readily applicable for use within the neoliberal education machine (Gillath, 2015; McGimpsey et al., 2016; Plafky, 2016). By paying attention to this process, I wish to highlight the ‘qualitative change’ to the young people as they are produced as ‘neurologically damaged’ educational problem (McGimpsey et al., 2016) via the recontextualization of knowledge into that which is ‘consumable’ (McGimpsey, 2017). Not only does this process of subjectivation produce them as sites of ‘regulatory intervention’ (McGimpsey et al., 2016) but also further embeds their position as ‘impossible learners’ and their foreclosure from the position of ‘ideal learner’ (Youdell, 2006; Bradbury, 2013). Overall, by describing and reflecting upon this session, including the activities, staff responses, and my own affectivity, I pay particular attention to another fleeting moment of enfranchising practice, the use of ‘brain research’ and its effects on the channelling and conversion of loss and grief, and the importance of standing as an ‘enduring presence’ (Gerson, 2009:1355) in the face of traumatic experiences and difficulties in relation to attachment.

5.3 “What Brain Research Tells Us”: The Somatic ‘Translation’ of Attachment Theory

I arrived at the school fifteen minutes prior to the training session and, walking into the reception area of the secondary school, I introduced myself to the lady sitting behind the desk, telling her my name and that I was with South Traley Virtual School for the trauma and

attachment training session. Immediately, the receptionist, along with another member of staff leaning against the desk, lit up, “*We have been waiting for you!*” one of them remarked. My heart skipped a beat as it dawned on me that they believed I was there to lead the session. Immediately explaining I was a Doctoral student carrying out an observation, not to facilitate the session, they explained that they had moved the training from the main hall to the Sixth Form centre and were waiting to be able to escort Jane and Rachel to the new venue. It was only a few minutes later, after I had checked in on the electronic system, that Rachel arrived, and we were escorted to the Sixth Form building. Rachel had already told me the session would be for around one hundred staff members – I am not sure how many there were, but I was certainly surprised by the sheer sea of heads as we entered the reasonably large, bright hall made darker by the lowered blinds over every window:

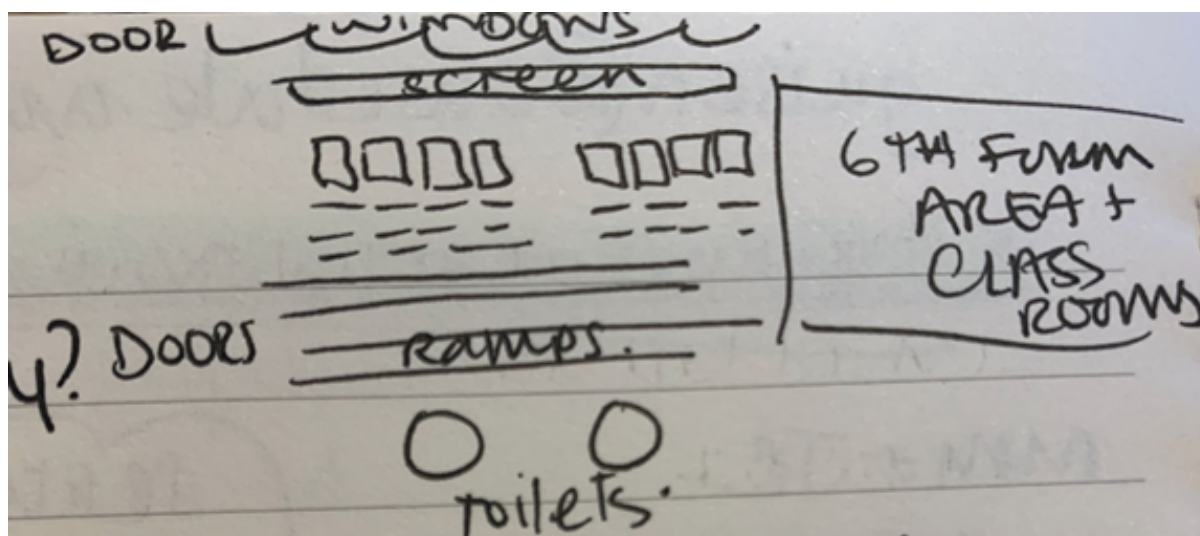


Figure 3 An image of fieldnote drawings

Having decided to begin the session without Jane, who was running late, the Head of Sixth Form asked myself and Rachel to introduce ourselves to the staff. Sat in the front row, I stood up, turned around and introduced myself to rows and rows of expectant faces. As I finished and took my seat, Rachel then introduced herself and her role as Virtual School Head of South Traley, explaining that her focus is on “*monitoring*” and closing the achievement gap

– “*I am about outcomes*”. I was surprised at her public, narrow focus on the recording and monitoring of outcomes with no mention of the affective dimensions of her role as a corporate parent who, according to policy, should undertake the ‘parental role on a day to day basis’, demanding ‘no less for each child in their care than they would for their own’ (Rt Hon Johnson, 2007:31; Department for Education, 2018a) (to be explored in Chapter 7). Instead, in front of a large crowd of teachers and other educational staff, she focused exclusively on the technologies of ‘surveillance, control and protection’ (Collins, 2018:7) and shifted entirely out of view the emergent capacities of parenting as an affective relationship which is, I argue, integral to attending to trauma and attachment needs, and, therefore, loss and grief. This is how the training began.

Rachel began the session with the ‘Blob Activity’; upon the wall she projected an image of different ‘blob’ characters in a tree, each with a different facial expression or motion. She asked each member of staff to look at the image and think about which blob character represented them best in that moment. Invited to consider their answers in small groups, a loud murmuring began as the lady behind me tapped me on the shoulder and introduced herself as the Pupil Premium Lead. She explained that she would love to be in touch with me to talk about the Pupil Premium Plus and glean some advice. Whilst I welcomed this conversation – after all, this was what I wanted to experience as I mapped out the ensemble, tracing the elements and articulations as they emerged – I was simultaneously taken aback that she instantly saw me as a source of ‘expert’ knowledge, an aspect of my researcher positionality I had not considered prior to entering the field. In the middle of our conversation, Rachel drew the blob activity to a close as Jane arrived, looking flustered. Despite this, Jane walked straight to the front of the hall, put down her coat and bag, briefly introduced herself, and then introduced the next activity: the ‘Bubble’ activity. This time,

Jane handed out a sheet which had several bubbles each with a title which included, 'Clubs, groups, teams I belong to...' and 'My closes friendships are...'.

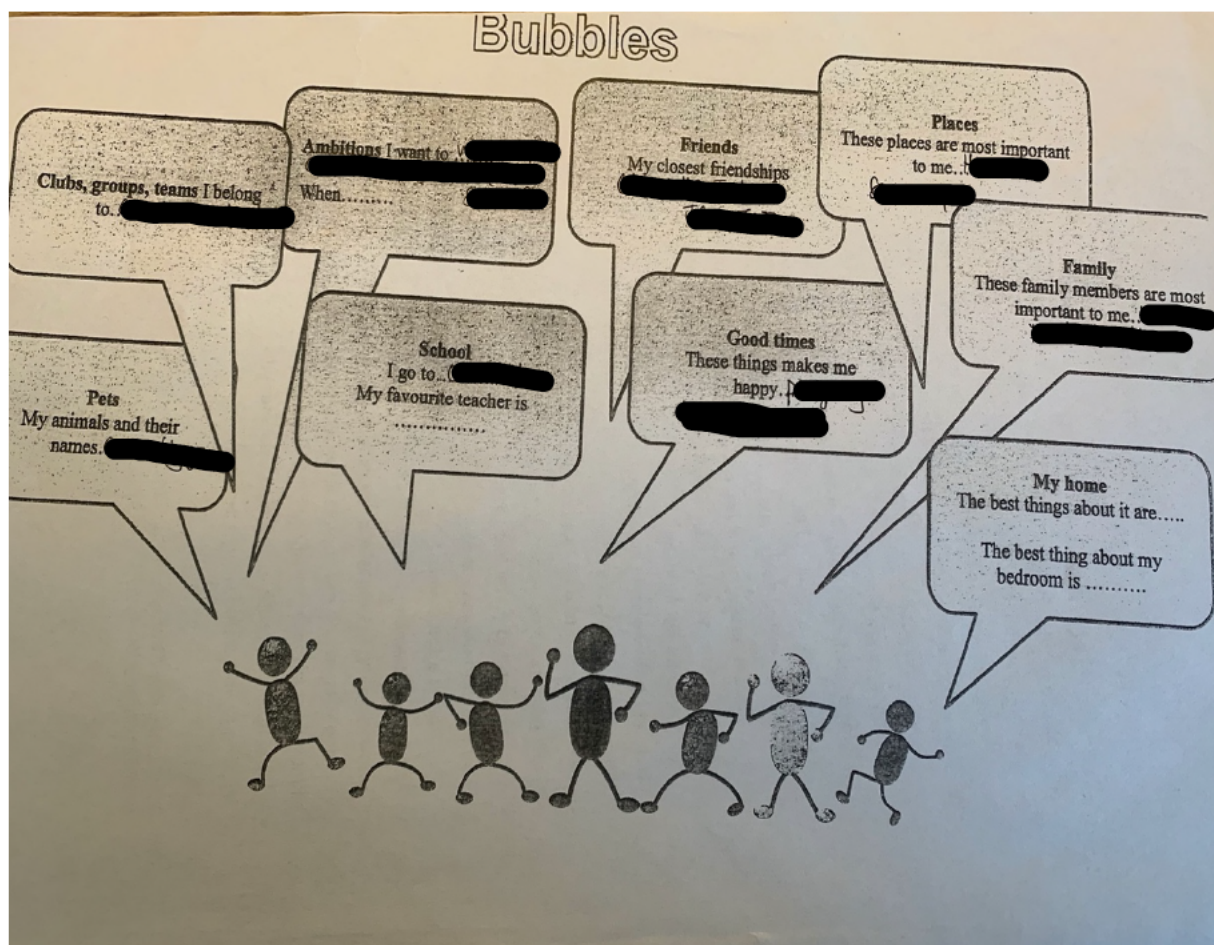


Figure 4 An image of the 'Bubble Activity'

Once handed out, Jane asked each member of staff to complete the sheet shown above in Figure 4, providing relevant answers according to a particular age of their choosing. Having given them about five minutes, it was Rachel who proceeded to bring the room back together, "Now you have completed the sheet", she said, "imagine something has happened to you which means the local authority needs to intervene and take you into care". "This means your home is taken away", she continued, "there are new rules, your bedroom is taken away, this might have been your safe-haven away from domestic abuse. You can't see your pet

anymore. Everything has changed". This triggered an affective response in me and, judging by the deafening silence of the room, triggered something in many others too. My heart felt as though it sank into my shoes, my breath started to quicken, and my thoughts began to wander as I had a renewed sense of the reality of ambiguous loss and grief and the ethic of care which drives my project. This framing of loss placed new meaning on the 'institutionally caused loss and trauma' (Samuels, 2009:1237) which one young person in the literature, Bobby, describes as "emotional deaths...emotional burials" (Mitchell, 2018:2).

Without much time for this explanation of loss to sink in, Jane and Rachel moved into a PowerPoint which began with a summary of the "*types*" of care that school should be aware of – foster care, private foster care, special guardianship order, and adoption. Following this, they began to focus on trauma, defining it as a "*deeply distressing or disturbing experience*", Jane shared, "*which, in Greek, means 'wound'. A helpful way of understanding trauma given that deep wounds can take a very long time to heal, and, sometimes, will never heal completely*". To compliment this definition, they then shared the 'Trauma Continuum', as taken from the work of psychotherapist Betsy de Thierry (2015), to argue that 'normal' must be disrupted – through which they put onerous on the school's staff – if 'normal' is not good enough. With this picture remaining projected on the screen, explaining, first, what "*unhealthy attachments*" and trauma-induced behaviour might look like, Rachel invited the staff to chat again in small groups to consider what "*healthy attachments look like*". I could hear various conversations happening around me, but I was soon drawn to one taking place in the row immediately behind. Talking to the other staff members around her, one teacher shared her concerns that she might have traumatised her own children given that she felt they displayed some of the trauma-induced behaviours that Rachel and Jane had shared with them. I began to wonder whether the training was too generalised and, from the conversation I had

just heard, incited fear in staff rather than equipping them to recognise and respond to trauma behaviours and attachment challenges.

Seemingly unaware of the bubbling concerns that I could hear, Jane and Rachel continued with the training, moving from sharing a video about the ‘Still Face Experiment’ (Tronick et al., 1978), into a slide entitled *What Brain Research Tells Us*. Explaining this research to the staff, an obvious linguistic shift occurred as they began to employ terms such as “*neuropathways*”, the “*flight-fight-freeze*” response, and the “*prolonged threat experience*” to explain brain processes and terms such as “*hypervigilance*”, “*attachment needing behaviour*”, and “*regulation*” to explain resultant behaviour. Following the core training structure of the AAS programme (which is to cover ‘an understanding of attachment and the evidence base to support it, the impact of trauma on the developing brain, and subsequent behaviour’ (Dingwall and Sebba, 2018:7)), this section was further evidence of the damaging impact the conversion, or ‘translation’ of attachment neuroscience has on practitioners’ understanding of young people in local authority care as ‘neurologically damaged’ educational problem. Taking ‘abstract concepts’ and translating them into knowledge that can be ‘readily applied’ (Plafky, 2016:1503), there was a clear reframing of the young person from an individual facing pervasive and all-encompassing loss, as presented in the Bubble activity, to an individual with a brain-based lack (Lowe et al., 2015) who is a ‘victim’ ‘of their past’ (Smith et al., 2017:1613) and requires ‘regulatory intervention’ (McGimpsey et al., 2016:909) such as therapy. This is result of the channelling and converting processes of the neoliberal education machine which functions through an ‘essentialising and deterministic discourse’ (Smith et al., 2017:1613).

Moving into the final section of the training, led by the reverse side of the Bubble activity sheet which read, ‘Why is learning sometimes a challenge for children/young people in care?’, Rachel and Jane turned to the topic of rejection. Speaking directly to the staff, Rachel explained that young people face constant rejection which schools are able to “control”. Expanding on this, Rachel told the staff that they should be saying, “*it is your behaviour I am not accepting, not you*” which will act as a way in which to engender acceptance and safety to “*stop their bucket tipping over*”. To provide a practical example of this, Jane (as student in local authority care) and Rachel (as teacher) acted out a short sketch:

Walking over to the water machine, the teacher leant over the student, who was already there, to get a glass of water. Getting in the student’s personal space, the student flinched as the teacher came closer. Noticing this flinch, the teacher responded by saying, “*Did you think I was going to hit you? Hitting does not happen in this school, this school is safe*”.

As the sketch ended, there was a palpable wincing around the room as Rachel and Jane explained that responding to the physical manifestations of trauma in this way will serve the purpose of reminding the young person they are safe in school. Whilst their intentions were well-meaning and driven, I felt, by their ethical desire to help schools respond to trauma and attachment needs within the boundaries of the educational setting, it was a crude, generalised example. An example which failed to consider the ways in which such communication might be triggering to young people who have experienced physical abuse and who need ‘live thirds’, which includes school staff, to be sensitive to the diverse experiences and responses to loss and grief by acting as an ‘enduring presence’ (Gerson, 2009:1355). Jane and Rachel did not demonstrate, therefore, the way in which ‘live thirds’ are to use their judgement to understand when and where such statements might be appropriate – for example in the safe,

private space of a therapy setting – and where they might be inappropriate – for example in the public space of a school water machine.

Rachel and Jane drew the training session to a close by providing space for questions and answers. The room fell silent; no one had any questions. It was in that moment I began to wonder why the training was made void of any conversational interaction between Jane and Rachel and the staff. Despite my immediate reservations about the nature of the content, it was a comprehensive overview which I struggled to believe had not prompted any questions in at least one member of staff. Resigning to the fact that there would be no questions, Rachel and Jane handed out a feedback form to the staff, inviting them to complete it before they left. Once everyone had done so, and quickly left the hall, I overheard Rachel speaking to the Designated Teacher of the school, telling her that their immediate sense of the overall feedback was that the staff felt the session was too long. I later learned that the feedback had not been at all positive which Jane felt was due to the staff – *“we had some people who didn’t want to be there, didn’t we! And it was quite hard because there were so many of them”*. In contrast, Rachel sought to re-frame the purpose of the training to provide a rationale for the feedback – *“[t]hat particular one you joined was specifically to do with creating the questions really, in terms of thinking about the specific context of the young person and the complexities the young person might be experiencing”*. After briefly talking to Rachel, Jane, and the Designated Teacher, I said goodbye and exited the hall.

Overall, I use these observations and reflections, first, to reassert my argument that enfranchising practice cannot be sustained, second, to identify the ways in which the ‘neurologically damaged’ child is produced in practice and, third, demonstrate the importance of considered and situationally appropriate ‘witnessing’ as a caring and loving response in the

face of loss and grief. The trauma and attachment session, the activities used, the practitioners' language and behaviour, the staff responses, and my own affectivity serve as a way in which to understand the 'translation', or conversion, of attachment neuroscience in practice. This 'translation' further embeds the process of subjectivation which exists within the Virtual School ensemble. Finally, by producing young people in local authority care as 'impossible learners' (Youdell, 2006), as sites for 'regulatory intervention' (McGimpsey et al., 2016), loss and grief within the Virtual School ensemble is converted, channelled, or even evacuated. This conversion has violent consequences, including the continuation of exclusionary discourses and practices, which negate individual efforts to care.

5.4 Concluding Thoughts

In this chapter, I have sought to chart the recording and monitoring function of the neoliberal education machine and its multiple effects on the articulation of loss and grief within the Virtual School ensemble. By paying particular attention to quotations and moments which emerged 'from the inert corpus...of data', capturing my attention as they jumped out from 'the surface of the screen' (MacLure, 2013:228), three effects of this affective line emerged: the machinic disenfranchisement of care and the impossibility of sustained enfranchising practice, the discursive production of the 'neurologically damaged' young person through processes of subjectivation, and the conversion or 'translation' of neuroscientific attachment theory in practice which further demonstrates the previous effects. In tracing these effects, I have sought to demonstrate, primarily, the confrontation between the individual ethic of care that drives the practitioners' desire to act as 'engaged witnesses' (Gerson, 2009) and the monitoring and recording demands of the neoliberal education machine which makes such practice impossible to sustain. These functions of the neoliberal education machine, I argue, leave 'no room for caring' (Ball, 2003:224) within the Virtual School ensemble. This forces

the practitioners to work within a constant tension between their own ethical desire to demonstrate caring practice and the machinic demands which are embedded so deeply within their ‘choices, beliefs, bodies and desires’ (Cole and Gannon, 2017:81). To imagine future possibilities within the ensemble which enfranchises the loss and grief faced by young people in local authority care, the acts of resistance which I heard about and observed must be taken forward into a critical conversation born out of a recognition of the violent effects of the neoliberal education machine.

Chapter 6: Element 2 – Money

Tracing the Flow, Stock, and Code of Money as the Unexamined

Subtext of Neoliberalism

“It is sometimes challenging to get the Pupil Premium spend and targets to link, but I was at a meeting the other week and we said, “Right, we are going to do some tutoring, we want to see a grade increase by the next time, so we can see that it’s having an impact””.

~ Jane ~

6.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I attempt to trace the movement of Pupil Premium Plus money as it flows from government to the young person through the local authority (Virtual School) and schools/(external) service providers. In doing so, I also wish to draw attention to the attribution of ‘value’ and the demonstrable effects this has on the subjectivation of young people for whom this money is demanded. By using this chapter to conduct a tracing of the money, the ‘unstated and usually unexamined subtext of neoliberalism’ (Ball, 2012b:23) and technological line of the map, I draw on the work of Deleuze (1971) and Smith (2011) to present the *flow*, *stock*, and *code* of the Pupil Premium Plus. I use these concepts to refer to (Deleuze, 1971; Smith, 2011):

1. Flow

The ‘form of payment’ which occurs as the money moves from government to local authority, the local authority to Virtual School, and the Virtual School to schools/service providers. A form of movement that takes place because of the ‘exchange value’ it represents.

2. Stock

The value exchanged between the payment and the purchased educational interventions which subsequently attribute ‘value’ to the Pupil Premium Plus money and its ‘investments’.

3. Code

The recording and monitoring of the flow and stock in the Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings which transcribe and reproduce value which is, in this case, measurable educational outcomes.

Working through these three coexistent concepts (Deleuze, 1971) - a Deleuzian extraction of Keynesian economics (Smith, 2011) - I draw upon my observational and interview data to trace the way in which the neoliberal education machine converts money into educational ‘value’ via investment which gets recorded and monitored in multiple ways.

Tracing the first of these, the flow of money, I begin by positioning the Pupil Premium Plus as a form of finance capital which is to be used flexibly by Virtual School Heads ‘including how they decide the level and use of top-sliced funding’²³ (Department for Education, 2018a:19). It is from this position I seek to respond to Ball (2012b) by both stating and examining the ‘subtext of neoliberalism’ through a tracing of the distributional models used by each of the four local authorities included within my project. I do this by drawing almost exclusively on my interview data as I pay attention to the answers given when I asked each practitioner, most pertinently the Virtual School Heads, to explain their approach to the distribution of the Pupil Premium Plus money. Although such a task might appear largely

²³ ‘10 The proportion of PP+ funding centrally pooled by the VSH and used to provide support best delivered at a local authority-wide level – e.g. training on attachment for all designated teachers in the authority area’ (Department for Education, 2018a:19).

descriptive, I use these models to demonstrate the ‘means of payment’, the ‘quantum flow’ (Goodchild, 2010:32) of the money which brings into being the Pupil Premium Plus as policy. Designed to ‘help improve the attainment of looked-after children and close the attainment gap between them and their peers’ (Department for Education, 2018a:19) this policy forms an element of the Virtual School ensemble. By tracing the money as flow, I pay attention to the interruptions or blockages of the ‘incoming and outgoing flow’ in the ‘transmission...of money’ between the Virtual School and schools as various ‘interceptors’ affect its passage (Deleuze, 1971; Smith, 2011:43).

In the second section, I turn to consider the concept of stock, the ‘integral flow’ (Smith, 2011:51), which attributes educational ‘value’ through ‘investment’ into educational interventions. This is important given that the Pupil Premium Plus money is ‘not value itself’ but ‘as capital investment’ is value in ‘motion attributed to the modes of investment, and only to the modes of investment’ (Goodchild, 2010:33). Caught up in the ‘social investment machine’, the Pupil Premium Plus policy redistributes finance capital to services (De St Croix et al., 2020:454) provided by the Virtual School, individual schools, and commissioned (external) service providers. These services, or educational interventions, are to be ‘evidence-based and in the best interests of the child’ (Department for Education, 2018a:19). Instead of money, ‘data becomes the currency of investment’, acting as a ‘functional modality’ and forging a perceived linearity between provision costs, outputs, ‘impact’ (measurable outcomes), and monetary ‘value’ of such outcomes (De St Croix et al., 2020:450-457). This perceived linearity has demonstrable consequences for the subjectivities of young people in local authority care who are *repositioned* as ‘sites of regulation’ (McGimpsey, 2017:78). To trace the stock, therefore, I first present the range of ‘interventions’ – service, resources, activities – I observed or heard about whilst conducting my research. I will then present three

‘case studies’ of the four commissioned service providers²⁴ included within my research.

Through these case studies I will pay attention to the ways in which ‘value’ is brought into being through investment.

Finally, tracing the code of the Pupil Premium Plus money, I attempt to draw attention to the recording and monitoring of the flow and stock which takes place, I observed, through the PEP meetings. The young person’s PEP, as an ‘evolving record’ that is the ‘joint responsibility of the local authority that looks after the child and the school’ (Department for Education, 2018a:14), enables the information relating to measurable educational outcomes to be transcribed and reproduced (Smith, 2011). I first draw upon an excerpt from my interview with Wendy, the PEP Quality and Compliance Officer in South Traley, to explore the “*monitoring and reviewing role*” and content of the PEP documents and meetings as schools are asked to “*review...the targets*”, “*rate those interventions*”, and record “*outcomes*”. Following this, I draw upon four moments from my observations of seven PEP meetings whilst in South Traley to identify their various coding functions. Overall, I use this final section to highlight the ‘terrors of performativity’ which leave ‘no room for caring’ only for caring ‘*about performances*’ (Ball, 2003:224).

6.1 Flow: Money

In his article, *Show Me the Money!*, Stephen Ball (2012b:23) claims the ‘unstated and usually unexamined subtext of neoliberalism is not doctrine but money’. This is particularly surprising given that ‘[p]olicies cost money, and that money must come from somewhere’ (Ball, 2012b:23). It is my aim within this section, therefore, to both examine and state the role of money within the Pupil Premium Plus policy which forms part of the ~£95-billion of

²⁴ I have omitted the fourth service provider due to limited data.

education spending each year (Britton et al., 2020). The Pupil Premium Plus money, of which £2300 (now £2410) is allocated per pupil, is released by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) to the finance department of each local authority according to the authority's children looked-after data return (SSDA903); a record of the number of young people in local authority care for at least one day (up to March of any given year) (Education Skills and Funding Agency, 2021). Once allocated to the local authority, the finance team is to work with the Virtual School Head who is commissioned to use and distribute the money in a way which maximises 'impact for individual looked-after children as well as the whole looked-after cohort' (Department for Education, 2018a:19). In relationship with the Finance Officer, the Virtual School Head can form their own model of financial management with 'considerable flexibility' (Department for Education, 2018a:19; National Association of Virtual School Heads, 2019). To understand this 'quantum flow', the 'means of payment' (Goodchild, 2010:32), I asked each of the Virtual School Heads – Rachel (South Traley), Saleem (East Withstell), Mary (Fordhill) – and the School Liaison Teacher – Helen (Wamslow) – to tell me about their distributional model. I present each of these models below, drawing on quotations from each of the four interviews. I use these models to demonstrate the way in which the Pupil Premium Plus, as money or 'financial practices', brings into existence the consequential 'financial...exchanges' and thus 'value' via investment (Ball, 2012b:23).

6.1.1 South Traley

Having spent over six months in South Traley Virtual School, I was able to gain an in depth understanding of the distributional model used by Rachel and the local authority finance team: a "*split system; it's divided into two...that is £700 for the Summer and Autumn term, so schools receive £1400 of the £2300. With the rest, the money is able to be bid for by the*

schools” or “*top-sliced*”. Despite “*historically*” giving out “*£400 a term*”, all the staff within South Traley Virtual School were aware of the distributional model used, even with the changes having been made only shortly before my field work began. As I spent time in the South Traley Virtual School offices, I repeatedly heard Rachel mention the recent “*challenges this year...in terms of paying finance due to systems in the local authority that are new*”. Despite this, Rachel never divulged what she meant by this, and it was not until my interview with Richard, the Virtual School Specialist Support, that I found the opportunity to ask for clarification:

“it was probably end of February into March time and I had finally got everything done...then it was about 3 or 4 days later...in-Borough schools, you set up the spreadsheet, that’s what you need to pay them, you send it off to finance, and finance will pay it....The out of borough ones, they need to be set up differently because...you have to set them up as an invoice-less payment because you will never receive an invoice from them, they are just expecting money from us...some of these schools were set up on the system...some of them weren’t set up at all, some of them were set up to be paid like other schools, and it was a complete mixture. So, me, just charging along like, “paid, paid, paid”, and then all these errors were coming back. So, I then spent another month trying to rectify these issues”.

Richard’s clarification of these “*challenges*”, draws attention to the payment systems used by South Traley Virtual School and the way in which these function as a ‘point of departure for the production of a flow’ (Deleuze, 1971:no pagination). As the money flows from ‘one pole to another’ (Deleuze, 1971:no pagination) the ‘incoming and outgoing flow’ (Smith, 2011:43) is intercepted and the momentum of the money interrupted. This interruption has real consequences for the day-to-day functioning of the Virtual School ensemble and the speed at which the money can reach the young people.

Drawing attention to the Virtual School's role in the momentum of the Pupil Premium Plus money and its 'incoming and outgoing' flow (Deleuze, 1971:no pagination), Rachel explained in greater detail why and how South Traley chose their distributional model. "Virtual Schools have developed their processes", she shared, "as an interpretation of the statutory guidance...the statutory guidance is very clear, the local authority should charge the Virtual School Head". Continuing further, "some have panels", "[t]he Directorate were very keen for us not to have a panel because...we don't want to slow it down...there are only so many children you can talk about at each panel". Instead, "we have decided that a sensible way to do it was to have the Virtual School Head make the decisions, have a mixed economy". Having a "mixed economy", Rachel argued, allows the Virtual School to retain some funds (referred to in policy as top-slicing) which means when they need to do something "quickly", they "have that capacity", whether that be a "school in crisis" or a young person "in transition due to placement change". Furthermore, they can also have a "pool of funding" which can fund service/resource provision at the local authority level when required. Here, Rachel's concern about speed – "we don't want to slow it down" but do things "quickly" – draws attention to the unpredictability of the flow of Pupil Premium Plus money given that a 'person is always a point of departure for the production of a flow, a point of destination for the reception of a flow, a flow of any kind; or, better yet, an interception of many flows' (Deleuze, 1971:no pagination). These departures or 'breaks in and fluctuations of flow' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2019 [1987]:105) were, I found, commonplace within the Virtual School ensemble as the money flowed from one point to the next. This, in many ways, is reflective of the way in which the ensemble must function given that it must flow into the 'challenging and often chaotic life circumstances' (Mannay et al., 2017:694) that exist in and around the lives of the young people.

Shifting away from the momentum of the flow, it feels important to note the unprompted clarification Rachel provided during her interview – “*every penny...is spent during the financial year, we don’t send any money back to the DfE [Department for Education]. What we will do in January is we will divide it by the number of children in care at that point*” this is because it is “*money for the children of South Traley*”. This point was further confirmed, again unprompted, by Richard who said, “*there might be money left over at the end of the year*” leaving him the job of trying to “*equal that between children*”. It was in these statements that Rachel and Richard were seeking to provide evidence of South Traley’s ‘strategy for distributing any surplus Pupil Premium Plus’ money before it is taken back by the Department for Education (National Association of Virtual School Heads, 2019:41). This is because policy already asserts value to the flow as it moves between government (Education and Skills Funding Agency, ESFA) and the Virtual School and, sometimes, back again: ‘Ministers will take a dim view of the VSH [Virtual School Head] community if they fail to spend the large fund they have been entrusted with’ (National Association of Virtual School Heads, 2019:41). In 2016, a Freedom of Information Request for the 2014/15 financial year found that 41 of the 150 local authorities failed to spend up to a third of the overall Pupil Premium Plus funding, an equivalent of £2.5 million back to the government (ESFA) (Santry, 2016). The Pupil Premium Plus money is thus an incoming and outgoing flow of the Virtual School ensemble in both directions.

6.1.2 East Withstell

I connected with Saleem, the Virtual School Head of East Withstell, after telling Rachel, who also acts as the Regional Chair of Virtual School Heads, about my interest in understanding the different distributional models of other Virtual Schools. Saleem and I met, along with

Mary, the Virtual School of Fordhill (who Saleem had invited himself), at East Withstell council offices. It was in this interview that I learned of the similarities between the distributional model adopted by South Traley and East Withstell. In short, they “*top-slice the first £400 so schools have the remaining £1900 available*” (Saleem). This £1900 is given to schools in “*termly allocations*” and they then “*make the remaining £400 available for schools to apply for. So, in theory, they could access 100% of the grant*” (Saleem). Given that Rachel made me aware of the ‘transmission’ of Pupil Premium Plus money as both an ‘incoming and outgoing’ flow (Smith, 2011:43) in both directions between the government (ESFA) and Virtual School, I was particularly interested to learn that in two separate financial years East Withstell had made a “*return to the DfE*” (Saleem). When this happened, Saleem shared, he had been “*questioned by the DfE on the return*” – “*Why are you making this return?*”, they asked, “*Are you absolutely confident that the needs for those children are being met through your systems?*”. So, Saleem continued, “*that was a challenge that was given back to us by the DfE*” and “*rightly so*”. Not wishing to finish on this point, however, Saleem went on to share that he had learned from these two occasions and insisted he did not want to be “*having to return anything to the DfE*” again. Saleem seemed right to be protective about this by-product of his distributional approach given that Mary responded to his admission by saying “*hell will freeze over before I ever give back a penny. Ever. I mean it’s just never going to happen*”. It was in this exchange my attention was drawn to the value attributed to the Pupil Premium Plus monetary flow which places Virtual School Heads at risk of a ‘dim view’ (National Association of Virtual School Heads, 2019:41), not just from Ministers but from inside the Virtual School community too.

6.1.3 Fordhill

Although I had originally planned to conduct a regional focus group, the dynamic between Mary, the Virtual School Head for Fordhill, and Saleem elicited a wealth of information. The respect that Mary and Saleem appeared to have for one another enabled the pair to agree, learn, and respectfully disagree with one another with very little researcher input. The disagreement which I heard and observed was largely drawn from Mary's direct style of communication which meant she often dominated the interview and initially presented as intimidating. Whilst feeling this way, I was often thankful for Saleem's presence who directed the interview back to my question when she began to steer it in her own direction. Despite this, by the end of the interview, I had gained great levels of respect for Mary whose approach had seemingly played an integral role in her being able to significantly improve the Ofsted rating of Fordhill after it had been rated 'Inadequate' over successive years. Before Mary had taken the role as Virtual School Head, Fordhill Virtual School had been almost non-existent; "*[t]he stat I give people is that, with the amount of turbulence there was in cases, there should have been about 750 PEPs on the system, you know Personal Education Plans, on the system. Ofsted found 2*". Since her appointment, Ofsted has since reported the "*Virtual School has been transformed*".

Part of this transformation, Mary argued, is a result of her distributional approach through which all Pupil Premium Plus money must be applied for. By adopting this distributional model, Mary purposefully cuts off the flow of Pupil Premium Plus money, 'preventing something of this flow from passing through' (Deleuze, 1971:no pagination) by blocking its outgoing movement from the Virtual School to the schools:

“I do not give the schools any choice. I say to them. “I wouldn’t spend your money. This is mine and I will decide how it is spent. In your PEP write your SMART²⁵ targets and the only money I am going to give you is to deliver those SMART targets”. No negotiation, that’s how I run my finances”.

Responding to this, Saleem appeared to read my mind as he asked, *“how much of that approach is down to where Fordhill was as an LA and with a Trust standing and, as a result of that, the relationship with schools?”*. In answer to his question, Mary shared: *“So, I did it in a prior local authority as well, but I think it was useful that a lot of Fordhill Heads knew me from being in the local area. We also had an appalling view of how Fordhill was doing, who, with huge justification, saw me as the cavalry coming over the hill because they knew that they weren’t getting support for their children looked-after that they needed to have”.*

Whilst a different approach, shaped by the unique context of Fordhill, the flow of money is, again, clearly coexistent with the value exchange of measurable outcomes: *“the only money I am going to give you is to deliver those SMART targets”.*

6.1.4 Wamslow

Unlike the other Virtual School models, Wamslow’s distributional approach was brought to my attention by Elizabeth, a Designated Teacher at a secondary school in South Traley. During my interview with her, which was designed to gain an insight into her role as a Designated Teacher and relationship with South Traley Virtual School, Elizabeth spent a significant amount of time telling me about the practice of other Virtual Schools with whom she worked. This discussion was driven by her frustration over the lack of *“consistency in*

²⁵ ⁴⁸ SMART means **specific**, significant, stretching, **measurable**, meaningful, motivational, agreed, **achievable**, action-orientated, realistic, **relevant**, result-orientated, **time bound**’ (Department for Education, 2018c:17).

approach, nationally” which is one of her “*biggest bug bears*” (Elizabeth). It was in this moment she began to discuss her relationship with Wamslow Virtual School, describing their practice as the “*Rolls Royce*”. When I probed her further, asking her to tell me what she meant by this, she said, “*they manage the Pupil Premium Plus much more...there’s none of this to-ing and fro-ing, money going around in circles*” and if a need is identified in a PEP “*they’re already on it and before you have even got back upstairs, a tutor will have been booked*” (Elizabeth). She measured this practice against other local authorities who say to her, “*You need to go and find a tutor, you need to source that, then you need to bill us, and then we will send an invoice across, we’ll send the bill back, then the finance office...*” and so it continues (Elizabeth). It was this conversation with Elizabeth which helped me to better understand ‘how the whole system works’, confirming Read et al.’s (2020) finding that there is not a consistent ‘PEP criteria’ which can confuse Designated Teachers, and the way in which ‘we begin with money and we end with money’ (Deleuze, 1971:no pagination).

Interested to learn more about this “*Rolls Royce*” practice, I took Elizabeth up on her offer to put me in touch with her contact from Wamslow. This was Helen, a School Liaison Teacher from the Virtual School. It was in conversation with Helen I learned that Wamslow is both a ‘point of destination for the reception’ and the ‘point of departure for the production’ of Pupil Premium Plus money flow (Deleuze, 1971:no pagination). This is because the Virtual School staff:

“arrange for the transfer of the Pupil Premium funds to the school or to outside agencies or to whoever it is, depending on the need that has been identified in the meetings. In Wamslow it is very much about needs-basis. We wouldn’t automatically give every child the full allocation. Some will have less, significantly less, and others

will have significantly more. It just depends on what's needed at the time for the young person" (Helen).

Unlike South Traley and East Withstell, but similarly to Fordhill, the Pupil Premium Plus money is thus blocked from flowing into schools and external service providers. For other interceptors of the flow within the Virtual School ensemble, including Designated Teachers such as Elizabeth, this prevents the *"to-ing and fro-ing, money going around in circles"* (Elizabeth) that is experienced in relationship with other Virtual Schools with different distributional models. Helen did acknowledge, however, the way in which Wamslow's model slows the momentum of the flow of money given that in order to *"work out what the need is and the best use of money"* it is important to have *"input from the CAMHS team...SEN team...Virtual School, Social Care, Youth Offending, or whoever it is"* but this is reliant upon *"many people's diaries and getting them round a table and that takes time and then that delays the action"*.

In this first section of this chapter, I sought to state and examine the monetary flow of the Pupil Premium Plus policy. By asking each of the Virtual School Heads and the Virtual School Liaison Teacher about their distributional model, I have attempted to trace the flow of money as it moves from the ESFA to the Virtual School and how it then flows to schools and external service providers where it becomes stock; the value exchanged between the payment and the purchased educational intervention as 'investment' for measurable outcomes. In doing so, I have identified several similarities across the local authorities including the way in which the Virtual School acts as a 'pole' by intercepting the 'incoming and outgoing flow' (Smith, 2011:43) of the Pupil Premium Plus money, altering its momentum. Whilst this change in momentum is a natural part of the 'quantum flow' (Goodchild, 2010:32) as 'interceptors' affect the passage of money (Deleuze, 1971), this is exacerbated by the

ensemble which exists to serve a group of young people whose life circumstances are often ‘challenging and chaotic’ (Mannay et al., 2017:694) constantly requiring the flow to change direction or speed. Designed to ‘help improve the attainment of looked-after children and close the attainment gap between them and their peers’ (Department for Education, 2018a:19), the Pupil Premium Plus money as flow is thus characterised by interruptions or blockages some of which prevent the desired practice, as seen in the systems of South Traley, whilst others are designed to improve the flow.

6.2 Stock: Value

In this second section, I turn to consider the stock, the ‘integral flow’ (Smith, 2011:51), as the Pupil Premium Plus money is attributed ‘value’. This attribution takes place via ‘investment’ into educational interventions through which the money, which is ‘not value itself’, becomes a form of ‘capital investment’, a ‘value in motion attributed to the modes of investment, and only to the modes of investment’ (Goodchild, 2010:33). For the Pupil Premium Plus, which exists within the ‘social investment machine’ (De St Croix et al., 2020:454), these modes of investment are a process of exchange between finance capital and ‘evidence-based’ interventions. These are to be, according to policy, ‘in the best interests of the child’ (Department for Education, 2018a:19) and ‘improve education outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in schools in England’ (Department for Education, 2022:no pagination). In redistributing the money to schools and (external) service providers, ‘data becomes the currency of investment’ as it serves as a ‘functional modality’ by forging a perceived linearity between provision costs, outputs, ‘impact’ (measurable educational outcomes), and monetary ‘value’ of such outcomes (De St Croix et al., 2020:450-457). This linearity is subsequently converted, or quantified, into data which can be channelled to represent value

(Dewson et al., 2000). This conversion, I argue, flattens ‘the psychosocial complexity’ of the young people in favour of an ‘impact indicator’ (De St Croix et al., 2020:465).

First, I present below a table of the twenty-six ways I found the Pupil Premium Plus to be ‘invested’, a list I have collated from across the interviews, observations, and informal conversations whilst in the field:

1.	Art therapy	14.	Virtual School events
2.	Play therapy	15.	Train fares to events
3.	Equestrian therapy	16.	Careers speed networking
4.	Drama therapy	17.	Summer school for UASC ²⁶
5.	Animal therapy	18.	Sports Camps
6.	Speech and Language Therapy (SALT)	19.	Summer schools
7.	Physiotherapy	20.	Trauma and Attachment training
8.	Maths resources (e.g., Numicon)	21.	Letterbox
9.	IT equipment	22.	Alternative Education Provision (AEP)
10.	Tutoring (face-to-face and online)	23.	SEMH ²⁷ well-being programmes
11.	Educational Psychologist assessment	24.	Training for Designated Teachers
12.	Physical resources (e.g., books)	25.	Teaching Assistant support
13.	Virtual School staff	26.	Dyslexia screening

Table 5 A table of the identified areas of Pupil Premium Plus 'investment' within the ensemble

²⁶ Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children

²⁷ Social and Emotional Health

In addition to this table, I present an email from Mary in which she lists the areas of spending specifically for Fordhill:

- Policy is to use SMART targets in PEPs to release funds. All children have their needs met. Fluidity led by need allows us to respond immediately when a child needs something urgently.
- PP+ is used to match bespoke interventions to needs of the child
 - Learning mentors
 - Parcel in the Post including specific books on adoption, SGO and dual language. Bespoke to child interests or needs. Even fairies need glasses; Emotional support Huge Bag of Worries; All kinds of families; Following their interests eg ballet, football dinosaurs etc; favourite author. Children and carers feedback the impact
 - SLA with Ed Psychs
 - Extra support at key points for example transition
 - Revision tablets
 - Alternate communication devices for those with special needs
 - Books to help understand appropriate relationships for a SEND child
 - Social skills groups
 - Ear defender, pressure vests, sand timers to meet learning needs of traumatised children
 - Computer tech matched to the school use eg Scratch , mathletics
 - Time to talk, Haines engine to allow development of communication through diversion for able child with communication challenges
 - Specific residential trips eg Year 7 bonding; Language visits
 - OT training for school with Year 5 handwriting difficulties
 - Attachment training for whole school staff
 - Training for schools, DTs, foster carers to build the service
 - Paying for an alternative provision for 1 term to separate two brothers in same year group needing alternative education, until EHCP issued
 - Child who had multiple exclusions supported to go on normalising school trip through funding extra support person (covertly)
 - Follow interests and aspirations of child Raspberry Pi and tutoring
 - Backfilling TA time to allow direct support where there is a good relationship across a transition
 - Under clinician advice short term emotional Literacy input such as , working in ELSA groups and bear cards
 - Home Learning packs for day nursery EYPP+
 - SALT assessments
 - Dyslexia screening
 - Zippy
 - Tutoring using specified tutors and tailored pathways
- 3 days a week of PEP Champion role
- 2 days a week developing the employment offer and career enhancement, to increase aspiration
- 17 days in total of a Project Manager to run 6 school action research projects
- SLA for 2 days a week from Ed Psychs
- Training for VS staff
- There is a bursary for Post 16s in FE and HE. This too is always spent. For example suitable equipment to do a vocational course

Figure 5 A screenshot image of an email listing areas of Pupil Premium Plus 'investment' in Fordhill

Other than a few exceptions related to unique needs, most of these twenty-six interventions were investments made across all four local authority contexts which are best grouped into eight broad categories:

1. Therapeutic
2. Educational support
3. Staffing
4. Extra-curricular
5. Virtual School events

6. Training
7. Alternative educational provision
8. Physical and emotional well-being

This continuity across the four contexts is a consequence of the demand placed on the practitioners to “*promote the education of children who are looked-after*” (Rachel) and “*demonstrate impact*” about which they will be “*asked questions*” (Saleem). It is these twenty-six interventions (or variations of) which are identified within the Virtual School community as being measurable and impactful, and, therefore, of value within the exchange between finance capital and outcomes. This finding is helpfully summarised by Jane who said:

“[I]deally, you’d be looking at improving their outcomes, so you’d look at where they are in terms of their levels and the data drop a school have produced, and actually that it’s improving and they’re going in the right direction, whereas maybe they weren’t before. It is sometimes challenging to get the Pupil Premium spend and targets to link, but I was at a meeting the other week and we said, “Right, we are going to do some tutoring, we want to see a grade increase by the next time, so we can see that it’s having an impact””.

It is from this quotation I can clearly demonstrate the Pupil Premium Plus money as stock; as a process of exchange between “*Pupil Premium spend*” (the interventions purchased) and improved “*outcomes*” as demonstrated through data forms such as “*the data drop a school have produced*” (Jane).

This process of exchange is simultaneously demonstrated through the areas in which the Virtual Schools, as poles, intercepted the flow of money. This was done by blocking it from flowing to certain forms of investment due to a perceived inability for these to be exchanged for data as ‘the currency of investment’ (De St Croix et al., 2020:450). In South Traley, for

example, there was a continual insistence, emphasised to me on several occasions, that laptops would not be purchased for young people. In their interviews, Diane was clear that South Traley do not “*buy laptops across the board*” and Rachel adamant that she would not take responsibility for purchasing laptops because she does not want “*children unsafe on IT*”. However, during these interviews, and those with others in South Traley, I noted an underlying ambivalence about the ability for laptops to have measurable impact. This was confirmed by Jane who said, “*I mean, laptops, it’s so hard to measure, some of them will use them, some of them will be shoved in a bedroom and not used at all, some of them, you know, might do their homework on it, some of them we still get reports saying their homework is inconsistent*”. Although this was the only occasion on which this was made explicitly clear through spoken language, it became increasingly evident, as I spent more time in South Traley Virtual School, that the attribution of value to the money takes place when it can be seen, through data, “*that it’s having an impact*” (Jane).

To further demonstrate this exchange process, I turn to the external service providers commissioned by South Traley Virtual School. I observed four of these services and interviewed a representative after conducting a second interview with Rachel to ask further questions about South Traley’s commissioning of service providers using the Pupil Premium Plus money. In this interview, Rachel shared that they “*commission with location in mind. So, location is a key factor. If we are looking for tuition out of authority, we will ask the Virtual School who they use and will take their advice regarding commissioning*”. South Traley’s commissioning, she continued however, is “*relatively small because we are a small authority...I prefer the commissioning to be done through the school. We would prefer to give school the money and they commission what they need because they have their local context, they understand their local context even better than the Virtual School might*”. Despite this, I

was able to collate a list of external service providers and gained permission from Rachel to make contact. From this list, only four agreed to participate of which a summary is provided below:

1. Sky Riding²⁸

Sky Riding is an equestrian centre located in the middle of a housing estate in South Traley but home to 38-acres of land. Set up in 2008 by a professional horse-rider, the centre is both a business and charity, with the charity's mission to provide life-changing experiences for vulnerable and disadvantaged young people in South Traley. The charity runs a 6-12-week programme which includes learning to ride and care for horses alongside other 'clubroom' projects. This is made available for young people aged 8-17 years old upon referral. The weekly cost is £50, which can be provided in full or part, or not at all, by the referring agency. The charity uses the 'Outcome Star' to measure the young person's starting point and their termly progress to provide evidence for the referring agency that the programme has made a positive impact on their aspirations, confidence, contributions, learning, and support.

2. The Learning Web

A national online tutoring company founded by Stuart and Sharon in 2001, The Learning Web began as a fixed location before transitioning to solely online provision in 2011. The company charge £19 per hour and the tutoring is delivered through an online classroom which is comprised of three breakout rooms (they can tutor up to three young people at once who each have their own 'room', unaware of the simultaneous tutoring sessions being conducted). The tutoring is provided by 90

²⁸ All external service providers have been given a pseudonym and the information below is taken from the interviews and from the websites which have been redacted to maintain pseudonymity.

qualified teachers and is monitored from the Head Office. The young person is monitored by the tutor at the end of each session and through a monthly summary report which is sent to schools as a way in which they can present justification to Ofsted for investing in external tutoring.

3. Working Together

Founded in 1992 (under a different name), Working Together initially provided work experience for young people but in 2014 re-branded to reflect its changing focus on providing careers ‘speed networking’ events in schools. These events are designed to develop the employability of young people in South Traley. At each event, young people have a short time with a series of volunteers to whom they are encouraged to ask questions about their career. With six paid members of staff and 1,500 volunteers, Working Together currently works at a ratio of 1:4 with a long-term aim of 1:1. Working Together is funded by schools (50%), sponsors (20%), donations, and grants.

4. South Traley Faith Works²⁹

Founded in the 1980s by a local group of Christian Ministers, South Traley Faith Works is a Christian charity which provides alternative educational provision, which is rated ‘Good’ by Ofsted, for young people in South Traley. The charity now operates eight social enterprises through which young people can learn vocational and functional skills, including childcare, catering, beekeeping, and textiles. These social enterprises are also designed to serve the local community, providing a café space, childcare, and purchasable products. To be eligible, the young person must be

²⁹ As noted above, this service provider has been omitted from the case studies due to a lack of data.

enrolled in a local authority school and aged between 15 and 19 (or 15 and 25 if they have an EHCP) as South Traley Faith Works becomes part of their school timetable to ensure they have full-time education.

I will bring together my interview and observational data to present an ethnographically led account of three of these service providers³⁰. In doing so, I draw attention, to the way in which the affective (that which is ‘less easily quantified and monetised’) is converted through its quantification into data as the ‘currency of investment’ (De St Croix et al., 2020:450-457) and channelled into that which is representational of value (Dewson et al., 2000). This conversion, I argue, flattens ‘the psychosocial complexity’ of the young people in favour of an ‘impact indicator’ (De St Croix et al., 2020:465).

6.2.1 Case Study 1: Sky Riding

Following my car sat-nav, set to take me to Sky Riding, I suddenly found myself in the middle of a housing estate in South Traley yet only one minute from the destination. Beginning to feel confused, I continued to drive through the relatively affluent area wondering whether I had entered the wrong address. Just at that moment, I turned a corner and my eyes were drawn to the brown tourist information sign which read ‘Sky Riding Equestrian Centre’. I then noticed a long, gravel track and a barrier demarcating the entrance to the centre which was surrounded by green space as far as the eye could see upon which there were grazing horses. I parked my car across the road and began to walk across as cars came in and out, kicking up dust and wafting the smell of horse manure. It was then I knew I had made a mistake with my clothing and the nerves began to set in. Dressed as what I perceived ‘Researcher’ to be, with black trousers, white blouse, smart coat, and brown leather

³⁰ I have excluded South Traley Faith Works from the subsequent detailed case studies because I was only able to make one short visit to the learning space, limiting my ability to provide a detailed account in line with the other providers.

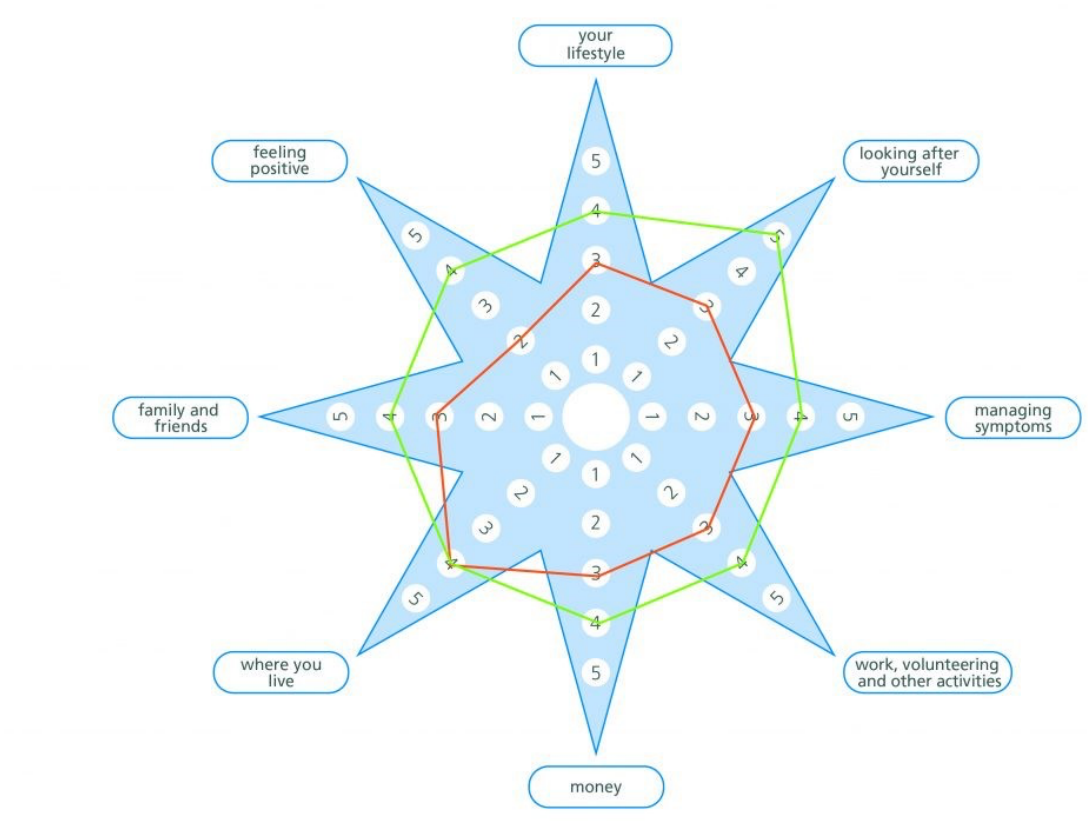
boots, the clothes that had once given me confidence in my positionality were now doing just the opposite as I realised, I was 'Other'. Trying to ignore the internal self-criticism, I continued to walk down the gravel track toward the reception area which was located within one of the many out-buildings which were, I assumed, once part of a working farm. I entered and signed in in a leather-bound book and sat down at a large, wooden farmhouse table, looking at leaflets about Sky Riding as I waited to meet Suzie, the Business Development Manager. Suzie soon arrived and we made our introductions. Unsurprisingly, the next thing she did was look me up and down, making an assessment, I assumed, of the suitability of my clothes and shoes. As I waited, possibly failing to breathe, she decided I did have suitable shoes to go out to the horse yard as I, internally, let out a huge sigh of relief. "Yes", I lied, "*I put shoes on that I could wipe clean when I got home*", hoping that both of us would believe I was comfortable and well-prepared. With this exchange over, she led me outside and took me on a tour of Sky Riding's facilities.

The tour began in a square stable which had a series of small stalls for each horse. Beyond this was an undercover arena, both for riding and for learning horsemanship, Suzie explained. Behind this arena lay fields of grass where the horses were left to roam. Turning back, we went past the reception area again and reached a little garden with a huge horse statue in the middle. It was as I looked at this statue, I realised the calming impact of the centre and why the practitioners in South Traley had been so positive about it – "*it has a major impact on your ability to regulate as horses will only stay calm if you do. And, for some young people, ...physically it is a great thing to do for developing strength and core*" (Rachel). Although you could hear the noise of the main road if you tried, the peacefulness drowned out the sound. If the centre had formed an affective response in me in such a short space of time, I could only assume this would be even greater for the young people who had been

referred for equestrian therapy. Once through this garden, we reached an old, grand building inside of which was a boot room, office space, classroom space, and changing rooms. Suzie then led me back to the office space attached to which was a small room filled with a variety of furniture, books, toys, and bean bags. Suzie and I sat down in this room together, both in child-sized chairs, and after some encouragement via additional information about the project, the interview began. It did not take long for Suzie to begin speaking freely, often only pausing momentarily for breath not leaving me enough time to ask any questions. She showed great enthusiasm for her role and for the charity which translated into her desire to share everything she could with me.

After conducting analysis of this interview, the moment which caused me to wonder as it reached ‘out from the inert corpus...of data’, jumping from the ‘surface of the screen’ (MacLure, 2013:228) was Suzie’s unprompted description of the “*Outcome Star*”. This star is used, alongside the Sky Riding Award, to assess and measure “*children’s starting points and then their achievements*” (Suzie). Without prompting from me, Suzie, after describing the charity’s aims and general structure, began to tell me about the young people’s outcomes and how these are measured and reported for the purposes of the funding agency. “*In terms of outcomes*”, she said, “*what is really important for any agency funding sessions is, “What difference does it make to children and young people?”*”. To be able to answer this question, Sky Riding use the ‘Outcome Star’ as an “*assessment tool*” to measure “*aspirations, confidence, contribution, learning, people, and support*”. The charity repeats this measure on a “*termly basis*” as a way in which to give a “*good indication, along with their riding and their confidence in the club room sessions to see whether maybe now is the right time for them to go on to do something else because we have waiting lists*” (Suzie). Alongside this, they “*do something called the Sky Riding Award which measures their participation and*

progress in the club room sessions” (Suzie). Together, these measures ensure the charity can provide “*constant feedback*”. I provide below an example image of the ‘Outcome Star’ which has been adapted by the charity:



Well-being Star™ (2nd Edition) © Triangle Consulting Social Enterprise Ltd
Authors: Sara Burns and Joy Mackeith
www.outcomesstar.org.uk

Figure 6 An image of the 'Outcome Star'

Source: www.outcomestar.org.uk

Sky Riding’s use of the Outcome Star is a good demonstration of the exchange of value between the Pupil Premium Plus payment and the purchased educational intervention, in this case equestrian therapy. This is the Pupil Premium Plus money as stock. Within this process of exchange, the ‘currency of investment’ (e.g., aspirations and confidence) is the

quantification of the affective into data – or numbers – produced by the ‘Outcome Star’ (de St Croix, 2020). For the funding agencies who ask the charity “*What difference does it make to children and young people?*” (Suzie), the star offers a way in which numbers can be ‘done’ and ‘reached’, ‘made tangible and visible on software and systems’ (De St Croix, 2018:427). From these numbers, the charity can evidence ‘impact’ and, therefore, the ‘value’ of the Pupil Premium Plus money as it flows from the Virtual School (or school) into their therapeutic provision. The commodification of affectivity in this way, however, requires the charity’s employees to ‘care *about* performances’ (Ball, 2003:224), channelling care away from for the enfranchisement of loss and grief. This is done by redefining therapeutic ‘success’ as the production of particular numbers associated with its ‘monitoring mechanisms’ (the ‘Outcome Star’) (Tiffany, 2007; De St Croix, 2018:416) by performatively underwriting them with technologies of ‘surveillance, control and protection’ (Collins, 2018:7). The affective dimensions, or ‘psychosocial’ complexities, of the young people, which I argue are of key importance to the Virtual School ensemble as an affectively-led, political community, thus become ‘flattened’ as they are converted into ‘value’ - ‘impact’ indicators - by the ‘Outcome Star’ (De St Croix et al., 2020:465).

6.2.2 Case Study 2: The Learning Web

I parked my car five minutes from the Learning Web’s Head Offices which, following my phone navigation, I found on a busy road in a reasonably affluent, large town. As I continued to follow the directions, I walked through an archway into a carpark around which there was a row of town houses which had been converted into a ‘Business Park’. Looking at the large sign, the Business Park contained eight units with The Learning Web located in Unit 2. From there, I quickly identified the door and buzzer for the correct unit and after a short time waiting, Stuart, the founder of The Learning Web, answered the door, welcomed me in, and

shook my hand. Leading me through two rooms, both with desks and desktop computers, talking as we walked, we reached a small room with a kitchen area and three chairs positioned around a laptop placed upon some wooden drawers. Armed with a cup of tea, Stuart invited me to sit down and left me in there so his wife, Sharon, the other founder, could remotely provide a virtual tour of The Learning Web's online learning platform (Sharon, who was at home unwell, conducted the virtual tour by sharing her screen on a Skype call). I thought this experience would be stilted and awkward however I was surprised to find Sharon had structured the virtual tour such that I was able to gain a good initial understanding of the online classroom and its various functions. It was through this it became clear why South Traley valued this provision given the evident adaptability of its content and the vast functions available to the student and tutor alike. As the virtual tour came to an end, I signalled to Stuart, who I could see through the glass wall, that we were done. He re-entered the room and sat down in front of me and we began our face-to-face interview. Despite showing some initial signs of nerves, Stuart soon relaxed, and our conversation flowed.

Both Sharon and Stuart repeatedly noted the ways in which the 'impact' of the tutoring delivered by The Learning Web is measured and monitored. In his interview, Stuart explained that the demonstration of such impact is integral for the company which he sees as a "*beneficiary of the Pupil Premium*". Without this demonstration, it is "*wasting our money...too many people think government has money, it doesn't, it's the people's money. It's taxpayers' money and that's what we have to be aware of all the time*" (Stuart). This awareness, Stuart felt, means young people in local authority care must not solely be monitored and measured in relation to "*the raw data of going from this grade to this grade*" but the "*soft-positives, if you like*", for example "*if they're going from not speaking to speaking that is a massive, massive positive*". According to a report published by the Institute

of Employment Studies (Dewson et al., 2000:2) for the then Department of Education and Employment, ‘soft outcomes’ are ‘outcomes from training, support or guidance interventions, which unlike hard outcomes, such as qualifications and jobs, cannot be measured directly or tangibly’. Such outcomes include interpersonal, organisational, analytical, and personal skills (Dewson et al., 2000). Whilst Stuart felt this offered a way in which to “*look at those different outcomes*” given that “*some of these people will not make an academic change...but what they will do...is make a change in their confidence and their abilities to talk to people*” which “*one mustn’t ever underestimate*”, this still represents the ‘extensive measurement and monetisation’ (De St Croix et al., 2020:463) of feelings and behaviours. In doing so an ‘exchange rate for each unit of impact’ (De St Croix et al., 2020:463) is produced from the Pupil Premium Plus as stock. After all, what matters for the company is that in a process of exchange, the monetary flow that funds the online tutoring produces “*the results*” (Stuart) desired by the Virtual School.

6.2.3 Case Study 3: Working Together

I was able to observe Working Together’s careers speed networking on two separate occasions. The first took place in a secondary school in South Traley. As I arrived at the school, I called through two intercom systems before I was able to enter the reception area. Once in the reception, I signed in through a computer system and the receptionist passed me a visitor’s badge. As I was shown to the seating, I noted the strangeness of the reception area. It was clear they had tried to make it feel like a living room – there was a coffee table, flowers, armchairs, a chez-longue, and beyond that, several old wooden desks wardrobes. After taking this all in, the other volunteers arrived, and we were soon guided through the campus and into the sports hall where Working Together had set up multiple ‘stations’ with one seat for the volunteer facing four seats for the students. As I waited to introduce myself to Jack, the

Employability Consultant and Community Organiser for Working Together, I noticed that another speed networking session had only just finished. Students for the next session immediately began to arrive, meaning I was only able to find a few seconds to talk to Jack. I was very thankful, therefore, for an elderly gentleman volunteer who offered for me to sit next to him and observe. After one transition, where the students moved to the next volunteer, Chhaya, another Working Together employee, came over and asked if I could move to have my own group of students. Explaining to her I was the Doctoral Researcher who had been emailing her in the weeks leading up the event to arrange the observation, she nodded and walked away as the next rotation continued. However, after this rotation Jack came toward me and, as my heart sank, asked me to move to a separate group. For a few seconds, I had an internal debate, wondering whether I could, should, or wanted to say yes. Before I had a chance to conclude this debate, Jack ushered me into a chair and suddenly a group of students were looking at me in anticipation as I found myself as Volunteer *and* Researcher.

Having no choice but to act as Volunteer, this first observation provided an unexpected depth in terms of understanding the nature, structure, and speed of the networking events run by Working Together. However, I wanted to learn more about Working Together's provision specifically for South Traley Virtual School. It is for this reason I arranged to observe another speed networking event which was commissioned by South Traley specifically for young people in local authority care. This time, the event was run in a community room within a department store in South Traley. As I arrived, I noticed how small the room was and how many people were crammed in. I immediately saw Rachel, Jane, and Diane and walked over to say hello. Setting my bags down, I learned the session had started earlier than the time Rachel had provided as I noticed the eight young people were already deep into a game of

Top Trumps. Rachel later explained Top Trumps was used as a warmup activity as the young people are “*not comfortable immediately talking to strangers*” (Rachel). Lasting an hour, the session seemed to initiate good conversations between the young people and the volunteers at every rotation. Unlike the previous event, Jack had arranged enough volunteers so there would be a 1:1 ratio. Following the same structure as the previous session, Jack took a few minutes between each rotation to think about a given aspect of interview/workplace communication, such as making eye contact or shaking hands. Over the course of the session, the young people grew in confidence as they slowly became more animated and involved in discussions with the volunteer opposite them. One of the most considerable differences was seen in a young man who started the session slumped in his chair, cap on, and bum-bag strapped over his shoulder and around his chest, appearing demonstrably disinterested. However, as I looked over at the end of the session and he was speaking to the last volunteer, I noted his body language had completely changed. He was now sat up-right in his chair, smiling, asking questions, and really engaging with the volunteer. This change was further evidenced when he was asked to provide verbal feedback for the group and, trying to respond in a monotone and nonchalant way, soon transitioned into an enthusiastic explanation of his experiences of the session.

To better understand Working Together, having only had ten minutes to interview Jack before he rushed away after the Virtual School’s session³¹, I took some time to explore their website. To further demonstrate the quantification of that which is ‘less easily quantified and monetised’ (De St Croix et al., 2020:465), I focus on the model of change which Working Together present as the measure of their ‘impact’. Most notably, the website includes a

³¹ This was the second time I had tried to arrange an interview with Jack.

section which outlines their model of change which I have pseudonymised and summarised below:

Inputs	Number of young people and guests attending each event
Outputs	Number of sessions attended by young people and guests and number of evaluation forms completed
Outcomes	<i>Students:</i> increased awareness of careers, raised aspirations, greater levels of confidence <i>Guests:</i> high levels of enjoyment and a feeling of being valued
Impact	Reduction in the individual and wider costs of unemployment and underemployment

Table 6 A table of Working Together's Model of Change

This model of change, which Jack claims has “*proven very robust*”, is another clear example of the quantification and monetisation of the affective – ‘aspirations’, ‘confidence’, and ‘well-being’ – as the Pupil Premium Plus payment made to Working Together for a careers event is exchanged for measurable change according to inputs, outputs, outcomes, and impact. It is this measurable change which attributes value to the investment of money. The ‘change’ that Working Together is able to measure and monitor is thus ‘rendered calculable as a rate of financial return, the cost of an intervention in relation to the value of its outcomes’ (De St Croix et al., 2020:465). This model is an example of the forged linearity between inputs and outcomes (De St Croix et al., 2020) which alters the flow of money:

“With organisations who we know well, the price is less because there is less risk for us...some schools do it for all their kids. [School name redacted] does it for every kid, that’s about 1,500 kids, so we have got a weekly working relationship with them.

When it’s an organisation we work with infrequently, we charge more because there is a bit more risk and also, when we don’t know the kids so well, so when you’ve got a special group of kids. Like, so we are working in a prison, and we charge more

because there is less certainty about how things are going to work out. Once we get to know things, we bring the cost down” (Jack).

The Pupil Premium Plus as stock, or the production of monetary ‘value’, is therefore not only dependent on the outcomes produced by the service provider but by the ‘inputs’ of the Virtual School which, in this case, refers to the perceived level of ‘risk’.

In this section, I have sought to trace the stock of the Pupil Premium Plus money as value is attributed to the flow via ‘investment’. This process, in which the money is redistributed to schools and (external) service providers, ‘data becomes the currency of investment’ or a ‘functional modality’ which serves to forge a perceived linearity between provision costs, outputs, ‘impact’ (measurable educational outcomes), and monetary ‘value’ of such outcomes (De St Croix et al., 2020:450-457). To explore this process further and demonstrate the attribution of ‘value’, I first presented a list of ‘interventions’ in which the four local authorities ‘invested’. This means the services, resources, and activities funded by the Pupil Premium Plus flow. By doing so, I was able to highlight the performative demand placed on practitioners to “*demonstrate impact*” (Mary), a demand which acts as another interceptor of flow. This is because ‘impact’ and ‘value’ are placed into a linear relationship with one another. Second, I presented three ‘case studies’ from the four external service providers included in this research. Across these ‘case studies’, I sought to draw attention to the way in which that which is ‘less easily quantified and monetised’ (De St Croix et al., 2020:457) – the affective – is converted by these service providers into data which has ‘value’ for both the provider and the Virtual School. For example, the ‘Outcome Star’ used by Sky Riding acts as a way in which the funding agencies who ask, “*What difference does it make to children and young people?*” (Suzie) can be provided with ‘outcomes’ ‘made tangible and visible’ (De St Croix, 2018:427). Ultimately, this represents one way in which the Virtual School ensemble

further flattens ‘the psychosocial complexity’ (De St Croix et al., 2020:465) of the young people.

6.3 Code: PEPs

In the third, and final, section of this chapter, I seek to trace the ‘coding’ of the Pupil Premium Plus money. This is the inscription and recording of the flow and stock and is integral to tracing the Pupil Premium Plus money given that ‘[f]low and code are reciprocally determined: it is impossible to grasp a flow other than by and through the operations that code it’ (Smith, 2011:49). The operation that codes the Pupil Premium Plus is, I argue, the Personal Education Plan (PEP) which refers both to a document and associated meetings. According to policy, the PEP document is ‘living’ and used both to ‘capture a series of snapshots’ of the young person’s educational progress (National Association of Virtual School Heads, 2019:43) and produce SMART targets which includes ‘progress monitoring of each of these areas identified against developmental and educational needs’ (Department for Education, 2018c:17). For the Virtual School, this refers to reviewing the ‘impact of interventions deployed by the school and the use of the Pupil Premium Plus, devolved to them’ (National Association of Virtual School Heads, 2019:43). In this way, the PEP document and meeting ‘function in the determination’ (Smith, 2011:49) of the flow of the Pupil Premium Plus money which I seek to demonstrate through the final section of this chapter. To do so, I begin by drawing upon a short excerpt taken from my interview with Wendy, the PEP Quality and Compliance Officer for South Traley. This excerpt provides a summary of the role of the PEP document and supporting meetings (both of which will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 8) within South Traley and draws attention to their overall role in transcribing and reproducing ‘value’ (Deleuze, 1971; Smith, 2011) or ‘return on investment’ (McGimpsey, 2017) within the Virtual School ensemble. This takes place by

rating “*those interventions in terms of how effective they were in achieving the outcomes*” (Wendy). Following this, I draw upon my observational field notes of seven PEP meetings to draw attention to the various coding functions of the PEP document and meeting. This further demarcates the ‘terrors of performativity’ which I drew attention to in the previous chapter, leaving ‘no room for caring’ only for caring ‘*about performances*’ (Ball, 2003:224).

Ultimately, I attempt to draw attention to the PEP as an ‘investment-focused monitoring and evaluation’ technology (De St Croix et al., 2020:455).

6.3.1 The Coding of PEPs: Monitoring and Reviewing

It was in my interview with Wendy that I learned more about the role of PEPs within South Traley and, therefore, the Virtual School ensemble. Through this, my attention was drawn to the coding function of these documents and meetings as ‘value’, or stock, from the interventions desires to be reproduced (that is outcomes). This functions to determine the flow of the Pupil Premium Plus money in and out of the Virtual School (Deleuze, 1971; Smith, 2011). Even before Wendy began to summarise the PEPs, it was the title of her role which appeared to function as a form of coding by identifying the need for quality control and procedural compliance in recording and monitoring the PEPS within South Traley: “*my name is Wendy, I’m the PEP Quality and Compliance Officer at South Traley council and my job mainly consists of going out and conducting the PEP meetings in secondary schools*”. Continuing, Wendy began to explain what her role looks like on a day-to-day basis and then provided further detail after asking her to explain “*what the PEP meetings look like*”. Below, I present two excerpts from the interview (Wendy):

“So, my role is very much a sort of monitoring and reviewing role really. Um, evaluating what schools are putting in place for looked-after children, how they’re

spending the Pupil Premium and really working with them to sort of identify what works and what doesn't

“as part of the preparation for the PEP meetings, schools are asked to complete a PEP form and part of that form contains an area where they're asked to explain what they've spent their PEP [sic – Pupil Premium Plus] funding on to date and what plans they have for it in the future. We've just amended the form quite recently to include a little bit more of a review section on the targets that are set in the PEP and how that links to the interventions that are set and then asking schools to actually rate those interventions in terms of how effective they were in achieving the outcomes. And we've just started to include an area on how the young person rates that intervention...A scale, a 1 to 5 for secondary schools”.

Here, Wendy refers to the “*monitoring*”, “*reviewing*”, and “*evaluating*” role of the PEP document and supporting meetings at the very beginning of her interview, without any prompting. In this way, the technology of performativity is evidently coiling itself around the Virtual School and its practitioners with demonstrable effects on the ‘pragmatics of language’ (Ball, 1998:191). This monitoring and reviewing, the process of coding the Pupil Premium Plus money, is further explained as Wendy shared that the PEP documentation includes sections in which schools are “*asked to explain what they've spent*” the Pupil Premium Plus funding on, review “*the targets*”, and “*rate those interventions in terms of how effective they were in achieving the outcomes*”. It is within the PEPs, therefore, that data truly becomes the ‘currency of investment’ as a perceived linearity, which Wendy describes in South Traley’s “*PEP form*”, is forged between provision costs, outputs, ‘impact’ (measurable outcomes), and monetary ‘value’ of such outcomes (De St Croix et al., 2020:450-457).

As also identified within the previous chapter, it is within this linearity that the ‘terrors of performativity’ leave practitioners with ‘no room for caring’ only for caring *about* performances’ (Ball, 2003:224):

“I did an initial PEP for a young person a couple of weeks ago and she has just come into care and she’s in year 9. And one of the reasons she has come into care is she has had extremely poor school attendance since the beginning of her school life really...and suddenly there’s lots of us saying how are we going to get this young lady some qualifications. So, it’s a balance isn’t it because you don’t want to just throw everything at a young person when they’ve just come into care and they’re just kind of processing what’s happened to them, and have had a life of receiving that message that school isn’t that important and, you know, you don’t really need to go if you’re not feeling 100% and...schools feel like they’ve got to try and completely turn that around and they’ve got two and a half years to do it” (Wendy).

This is yet another example of the tension which exists within the Virtual School ensemble, as practitioners are pulled between their individual ethic of care and the performative demands of the neoliberal education machine. In this case, this is between their ethic of care and the coding processes of the Pupil Premium Plus money which occurs through the PEPs.

6.3.2 Coding in Practice

Having observed seven PEP meetings whilst in South Traley, I present below a table (Table 7) which identifies four moments, each of which demonstrate the various coding functions of the PEP document and meeting. I have given each moment a name, drawn out a short excerpt from my field notes, and provided a short critical reflection:

Coding Moment	Excerpt	Critical Reflection
Using technology to record data	Jane normally records the PEP using her iPad but inside the school she was only able to get 3G signal which prevented the PEP form from being accessible. Instead, Jane wrote an email to herself with the notes. After introductions, the meeting began as Jane asked about William’s progress. The Designated Teacher raced through every subject with his predicted and current working level...By the end of this list, Jane had noted there was a pattern – William was static in progress for subjects with a large written element (e.g., History and English). In response, Jane asked the Designated Teacher what was being done to help William out.	It was in this first PEP meeting that I was able to observe the use of iPads as a means of recording data. The use of technology to produce data as a form of currency is commonplace given that it makes possible the tracking of ‘each [young] person’s position’ (Deleuze, 1992:7). This includes, as seen here, the increase or decrease of grades. The PEP meetings are, therefore, used as a way in which to record data about young people which is aided through technology – a machine; a ‘mutation of capitalism’ (Deleuze, 1992:6).
Data as the ‘currency of investment’	Following the PEP form’s structure on her iPad, Jane moved the discussion to Aaron’s levels. The Teaching Assistant, however, was unable to provide an update on Aaron’s levels because they were “ <i>collating the data</i> ” and it would be a couple of weeks before the “ <i>data drop</i> ”. Whilst Jane said that it was not a problem, she did add that “ <i>last time the meeting was organised before the data drop and Bradley</i> ” (who I later found out was the SENCo and Designated Teacher) “ <i>would send the information over when he had it</i> ”.	Here, the importance of data as the ‘currency of investment’ (de St Croix et al, 2020:450) for the Virtual School (and the school) is identified. As another coding function of the PEP meeting, Jane’s frustration at the absence of two ‘data drops’ acted to prevent her from populating the PEP form. Her frustration results from the ‘terrors of performativity’ (Ball, 2003) which place certain demands on her practice and provision of evidence if she is to avoid criticism or penalty.
Reviewing the ‘impact’ of interventions	The Pupil Premium Plus, they discussed, is being used for a music therapist for Amy and she has a weekly 40-minute session. This uses the £1400 plus more, for which Jane has to make an additional application. Collectively, those present at the PEP were all positive about the “ <i>impact</i> ” that music therapy continues to have for Amy...They all agreed that the music therapy continued to be beneficial and that, although for some young people, therapy soon runs its course, it continues to reap benefits for her. Jane, talking to the room, said that this enabled her to record the therapy as “ <i>continuing to show impact</i> ” on the PEP form which is integral if she is to put a	In this moment, drawn from my third PEP observation, the coding function of the PEP document and meeting in relation to reviewing the ‘impact’ of interventions was identified. Jane is unable to request (or at least request with confidence) the additional funding that is required for Amy’s music therapy without being able to populate the PEP form with “ <i>continuing to show impact</i> ”. This functions to show the contingency of the three aspects of the Pupil Premium Plus money: for the money to flow, it must be coded as stock (as value).

	case together for Rachel to authorise the additional funding again.	
Damaging consequences for young people	They spoke to Martin about his post-16 options, missing his Statistics lessons for further homework time, and his speech. Although he was only in the room for a short period of time, most of the remaining discussions took place about him, between the adults, without addressing him directly. I had expected that because the practitioners had had over an hour to discuss things without his presence, he would be encouraged to ‘lead’ the remaining PEP time.	This was not the only occasion in which the young person’s voice was not heard. In fact, most PEP meetings were adult-focussed. The young person was oftentimes invited into the room for a short period of time during which they were asked questions or given the opportunity to speak. The coding of the Pupil Premium Plus money, therefore, which takes precedence over the young person’s affectivity, has demonstrable consequences for their experience of ambiguous loss within the care system.

Table 7 A table of coding in practice – moment, excerpt, and reflection

In the final section of this chapter, I have sought to trace the ‘coding’ of the Pupil Premium Plus which, together with the flow, is ‘reciprocally determined: it is impossible to grasp a flow other than by and through the operations that code it’ (Smith, 2011:49). Drawing on an excerpt taken from my interview with Wendy, I argue that the PEP document and its associated meetings are used to code the Pupil Premium Plus flow by monitoring and recording its ‘investment’ and ‘value’ (stock). In this way, the PEP functions to determine the flow of money. Following this, I drew upon four moments from my PEP observations to demonstrate its various coding functions which include: technology as a way in which to record data, data as the currency of investment, reviewing ‘impact’, and the damaging consequences this coding process has on the voice of the young person and the disenfranchisement of their loss and grief. This, again, works to flatten ‘the psychosocial complexity’ (De St Croix et al., 2020:465) of the young people in favour of a process which ‘allows for the transcription and reproduction’ of value which are, in this case, measurable educational outcomes (Smith, 2011:49).

6.4 Concluding Thoughts

In this chapter I have traced the movement of the Pupil Premium Plus money from the ESFA, to the local authority, from the local authority to the Virtual School, and then, to schools and external service providers before finally reaching the young person. Using the work of Deleuze (1971) and Smith (2011) I have used the concepts of monetary flow, stock, and code to attempt to state and examine money as the subtext of neoliberalism (Ball, 2012b:23). To do so, I started by tracing the flow of money – the form of ‘payment’ between ESFA and the young person via other institutions including the Virtual School – by exploring the distributional models used by each of the Virtual Schools included within my project. By working across these models, I identified several similarities across the four local authorities including the Virtual School as a ‘pole’ which intercepts the ‘incoming and outgoing flow’ (Smith, 2011:43) of money. The Virtual School as ‘interceptor’ drew attention to the effects on the passage of money (Deleuze, 1971), particularly the speed and direction of the flow, as it is either blocked or given ‘permission’ to move.

Next, I turned my attention to the stock, by which I mean the exchange of ‘value’ between the purchased ‘intervention’ and the ‘outcomes’. By looking at the variety of ‘interventions’ used by the four local authorities and presenting three ‘case studies’ of the external service providers commissioned by South Traley, I sought to better understand the perceived linearity between provision costs, outputs, ‘impact’ (measurable educational outcomes), and monetary ‘value’ of such outcomes (De St Croix et al., 2020:450-457). In doing so, I found that every intervention used by the Virtual Schools across all four local authorities was deemed to “*demonstrate impact*” (Mary) and in cases where this ceased or did not happen, the flow of money was intercepted given that it could no longer be converted into stock, or

‘value’. Extending this by exploring three case studies of external service providers commissioned by South Traley, I was able to understand the consequences of such conversion as that which is ‘less easily quantified and monetised’ (De St Croix et al., 2020:457) – the affective which includes ambiguous loss and grief – is converted via quantification into data in order that it might represent ‘value’ (Dewson et al., 2000). This process has consequences for young people’s subjectivity within the Virtual School ensemble as their ‘psychosocial complexity’ (De St Croix et al., 2020:465) is flattened and exchanged for an ‘impact indicator’ (De St Croix et al., 2020).

Finally, I traced the coding of the money. I used this section to argue that the PEP document and meetings, serve to record and monitor the flow and stock of the Pupil Premium Plus. I drew attention to this using an excerpt from my interview with Wendy and using ‘moments’ from the seven observations of PEP meetings. Overall, this chapter has attempted to trace the Pupil Premium Plus money and address the research question pertaining to the relationship between the Pupil Premium Plus and educational ‘value’ within the Virtual School ensemble. I now turn to the penultimate element of the ensemble to be explored within this thesis: the corporate parent. In doing so, I seek to trace the articulation of this techno-bureaucratic element – policy – as it is translated from ‘text to action’ (Ball et al., 2012:3) by the practitioners.

Chapter 7 – Element 3: The Corporate Parent

Tracing corporate parenting policy as it is translated from ‘text to action’ by practitioners within the Virtual School ensemble

“Everybody is lovely, don’t get me wrong, everybody is lovely” but “I guess, at the end of the day, the carers aren’t their parents, are they?”

~ Elizabeth ~

7.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I seek to trace the articulation of corporate parenting policy as this element is ‘translated from text to action’ (Ball et al., 2012:3) within the Virtual School ensemble. Such a tracing along this discursive line begins with the linguistic tools of policy texts before interpretations are made by practitioners about what it means to be a corporate parent, a process which has effects on the subject position of both practitioners and young people within the Virtual School ensemble. In text, corporate parenting is defined as the ‘sense of vision and responsibility’ toward young people in local authority care as if they are ‘their own’ (Department for Education, 2018a:6&7). This rhetoric has already been problematised as part of the literature review contained in Chapter 2 as attention was drawn to the failure to address the processes and technologies of the neoliberal educational environment within which the corporate parent is expected to deliver care. It is this environment, I contend, which diminishes, represses, channels, and converts ‘human compassion and care’ (Collins, 2018:16) into a desire for quantifiable ‘outcomes’ which might be cost-effective within a system which costs ‘£15 billion per year’ (MacAlister, 2022:8). This furthers an understanding of the role of loss, grief, love, and care within the ensemble. Wishing to attend

to this gap, I draw upon my ethnographic field work within this chapter to interrogate corporate parenting policy and its consequences within the Virtual School ensemble. In summary, I argue that corporate parents of the Virtual School – Virtual School Heads and their staff – are forced to walk a “*fine line between being that [an advocate for the child] and being so rigid with the framework that you can’t see the child*” (Saleem). In following this line, practitioners experience frustration as they recognise, also explored earlier in this thesis, the “*damage*” they are doing whilst “*banging*” a “*round peg in a square hole*” unable to escape from the “*constant drive to get the result*” (Jane).

This constant drive and pressure to “*demonstrate impact*” (Mary), identified by the practitioners involved within this project, is, I argue, symptomatic of the performative demands of the neoliberal education machine. These demands, which have been consistently privileged within (education) policy, have led to the devaluation of what Page (2018:132&137) terms ‘Professional Love’, defined as the ‘compulsion to care, together with the capacity to de-centre and invest a level of emotional intimacy in the relationship’. The concept of Professional Love offers a ‘legitimate discursive interlocutor which recognises and affirms the existence and importance of loving relationship between professionals and young people, distinguishable from models of familial love’. I argue, through this chapter, that whilst policy texts of corporate parenting use the ‘affective tones’ (Deleuze, 1994:139) of love and care, these function to foreclose corporate parenting from being ‘furnished’ by love and emotional intimacy (Page, 2018:126) by converting and channelling care into other areas of the ensemble. Furnishing professional relationships with love and care is only possible when practitioners who ‘have a role to play’ in the lives of young people, are encouraged and enabled to ‘tackle to the emotional complexities’ (Page, 2018:126), as ‘witnesses’ or ‘thirds’ (Gerson, 2009), associated with experiences of loss and grief as

explored in Chapter 6. As a psychosocial concept, witnessing refers to a ‘live third’ who, through ‘engaged recognition and concerned responsiveness’ to the ambiguous loss and grief faced by young people in local authority care, creates ‘liveable meaning’ (Gerson, 2009:1343). In practice, this is demonstrated through a commitment to ‘dialogue, knowledge and memory in the face of fear and forgetting’ (Gerson, 2009:1355). To be clear, the issue here is not practitioners’ ‘compulsion to care’ (Page, 2018:138). Instead, I wish to draw attention to the channelling of the ‘relational aspects’ of corporate parenting and a conversion of care to a concern for the application of a ‘universalised system of assessment, monitoring and review’ (Holland, 2010:1677) so as to fulfil the performative demands of the neoliberal education machine. Tracing the function of the channelling and conversion of love and care offers a deepened understanding of (dis)enfranchising practice by drawing attention to the ways in which practitioners are forced to care *about* young people before caring *for* them (Noddings, 2003; Steckley and Smith, 2011).

Drawing on both the concept of Professional Love (Page, 2018) and the differentiation between caring *about* – a ‘general predisposition to see that children are treated well’ without the requirement for the ‘provision of direct care’ – and caring *for* – involvement in the ‘actual practice of care’ (Noddings, 2003; Steckley and Smith, 2011:185), I work within the refrain of Ball (1994) and Webb and Gulson (2012). Combining their contribution to the field of (critical) education policy sociology, I start with the understanding of educational policy as ‘text and action, words, and deeds’ (Ball, 1994:10), an ‘ontological activity representing a myriad of policy outcomes through the management of semiotic desires and actors’ inferences about these persuasive signs’ (Webb and Gulson, 2012:87). Developing my argument from this initial critical understanding of policy, I seek to conduct a version of policy analysis that traces the ‘complexities, ambiguities and ambivalences’ (Webb and

Gulson, 2012:88) of the translation of corporate parenting policy from ‘text to action’ (Ball et al., 2012:3) within the Virtual School ensemble. This enables me to further attend to the relationship between the affective and performative by focussing on the channelling and conversion of care through the policy rhetoric of the corporate parent. Particularly interested in the ‘emotional dimensions of performativity’ (Sellar, 2015:134), I seek to understand the practitioners’ frustrations as an affective response to the ‘flow of performance information’ produced by the discursive policy texts of corporate parenting (Ball, 2003; Sellar, 2015:134). Beginning with *policy text*, the textual encoding of ‘interventions into practice’, I address the discursive power of policy through a critical exploration of the ‘*production* of ‘truth’ and ‘knowledge’ about what it means to be a corporate parent within the Virtual School ensemble (Ball, 1993:12&14). Following this, I move to consider the *interpretations* made by practitioners; the result of a ‘politics of controlling affective registers of meaning, if not, attempts to control affects themselves’ (Webb and Gulson, 2012:92). Finally, this leads into a consideration of *enactment* and its *effects* as corporate parenting policy constrains and influences ‘institutional practice’ and the ways in which subject positions can be occupied and relations among subjects attended to (Ball, 1994:10).

In the first section of this chapter, I focus on the *Children and Social Work Act (2017)* and the *Applying Corporate Parenting Principles to Looked-After Children and Care Leavers (2018a)*. As I do so, I seek to demonstrate the ‘tactical’ use of language (Fulcher, 1989) as ‘affective tones’ (Deleuze, 1994:139) are employed to obscure the performative underneath through the ‘management of semiotic desires and actors’ inferences about these persuasive signs’ (Webb and Gulson, 2012:87). Arguing this obscuration serves as a form of manipulation of corporate parenting’s ‘ontological activity’ (Webb and Gulson, 2012:87), I then turn to my interview data to explore how practitioners ‘make sense’ (Ball et al., 2012:3;

Webb and Gulson, 2012) of what it means to be a corporate parent. Through this, I identify a clear ‘compulsion to care’ on the part of the practitioners (Page, 2018:134), a compulsion which is subsequently converted and channelled into a focus on ensuring the “*vulnerable get what they need*” (Mary) (i.e., resource provision) rather than developing an ‘emotional intimacy’ (Page, 2018:134). This conversion results in a sense of frustration as the two ‘modes’ of corporate parenting - the compulsion to care and the demand to monitor – exist in tension with one another, reflecting the distinction made between caring *about* and caring *for* (Noddings, 2003; Steckley and Smith, 2011:185). Finally, after presenting a short excerpt drawn from my observational field notes of a Designated Teacher Forum in South Traley, I explore the ways in which corporate parenting policy is enacted and, in doing so, is ‘written onto bodies’ (Ball et al., 2012:3), producing the practitioners and young people as policy subjects: ‘service provider’ and ‘service user’ (Turner and Percy-Smith, 2020).

7.1 Affective Signification: A Linguistic and Discursive ‘Tool’

‘[L]inking and tracing the discursive origins and possibilities’ of corporate parenting policy begins with the texts which act as ‘textual interventions’ (Gale, 1999:394) into the practice of corporate parenting. As the ‘central points of interaction between the politics of policy production and the politics of interpretation’ (Gale, 1999:394), these texts produce ‘truth’ and ‘knowledge’ (that is, discourse) (Ball, 1993) about practitioners and young people within the ensemble. In relation to corporate parenting, the two key policy texts, upon which this first section focuses, are the *Children and Social Work Act (2017)* and *Applying Corporate Parenting Principles to Looked-After Children and Care Leavers* (Department for Education, 2018c). The first of these texts mandates the seven Corporate Parenting Principles whilst the latter provides the accompanying statutory guidance for those commissioned as corporate parents. Contained within any policy text, from which these two are not exempt, is a kind of

‘code’³² as words and phrases capture ‘meaning’ by carrying ‘possibilities and constraints, contradictions and spaces’ (Bowe et al., 1992:15; see also Ball, 1993; Gale, 1999). For corporate parenting, this ‘code’ makes use of particular words and phrases, presenting signifiers of affect, or ‘affective tones’ (Deleuze, 1994) as the state and its ‘partner agencies’ (Department for Education, 2015) are positioned and commissioned to demonstrate love and care. Done so tactically, this ‘management of semiotic desires’ (Webb and Gulson, 2012:87), through the ‘abstraction’ of the ‘good’ parent (Noddings, 2003:22), functions to obscure the performative underneath which conceptualises young people as ‘needs-driven service user’ (Turner and Percy-Smith, 2020:5) and practitioners as ‘producers/providers’ (Ball, 2003:218). In short, and echoing Turner and Percy-Smith (2020:5), this ‘rhetorical device’ thus functions to ‘shore up the metaphor of Corporate Parenting rather than a true commitment to its powers in transformational practice’ by diverting attention away from the processes of channelling and conversion.

Since the concept of the corporate parent and the act of corporate parenting was first written into existence in the Utting Report (1997), many policy texts have been published to (re)define it. These include; doing ‘at least what a good parent would do’ (Department for Education and Employment, 2001:13), demanding ‘no less than each parent would have for their own child’ (Rt Hon Johnson, 2007:3), giving support that “puts their needs first” (Timpson and Department for Education, 2013:no paignation), and recognising that ‘looked-after children have the same needs – to be loved, cared for and feel safe – as other children’ (Department for Education, 2018a:6). These ideas have now been mandated by the Corporate Parenting Principles of the Children and Social Work Act (2017) which require local authorities to:

³² Distinct from the process of coding explored in the previous chapter.

1. ‘act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and **well-being**, of those children and young people’
2. ‘encourage those children and young people to express their **views, wishes and feelings**’
3. ‘take into account the **views, wishes and feelings** of those children and young people’
4. ‘help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners’
5. ‘promote **high aspirations**, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people’
6. ‘for those children and young people to be **safe, and for stability** in their home lives, relationships and education or work’
7. ‘prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living’.

The terms ‘well-being’, ‘feelings’, ‘wishes’, ‘aspirations’, ‘safe’, ‘recovery’, and ‘resilience’ [emboldened above – emphasis my own] function as linguistic tools (Fulcher, 1989) to ‘code’ the ‘meaning’ of corporate parenting. Acting as a ‘rhetorical device’ (Turner and Percy-Smith, 2020:5) of ‘love’ (Department for Education, 2018a), this code is demonstrated through the division of ‘need’ into discrete principles (Turner and Percy-Smith, 2020) which can be subsequently monitored and measured. Given that love and the ‘embodied world of care’ cannot be ‘grasped or restrained...via pre-defined categories’, such categories necessarily ‘serve other purposes’ (Pithouse and Rees, 2011:197). In other words, the coding which I draw attention to above, is the method through which the process of channelling and converting love and care into ‘accountability and control’ begins (Pithouse and Rees, 2011:197).

Centring around the manipulative force of the ‘semiotic monster’ (Webb and Gulson, 2012), the coding of corporate parenting policy grasps onto the individual ethic of care, that is the ‘compulsion on behalf of one person to care for the other’ (Page, 2018:134) and converts it into a position in policy for practitioners and young people as ‘service providers’ and ‘service users’ respectively (Turner and Percy-Smith, 2020). In this process of conversion, care is not ‘lost’ or evacuated from the ensemble, but instead channelled, using a knowledge of outcomes, into a desire to occupy a subject position of ‘investor’ in such educational outcomes. This, a re-coding of Professional Love (Page, 2018), takes place through the ‘affective tones’ (Deleuze, 1994:139) of love, care, and compassion to ‘get into’ the ethics and values of the ‘corporate parent’. By re-coding in this way, the ‘desired, yet ostensibly unformed’ (Webb and Gulson, 2012:90) policy outcome of the corporate parent who can be assessed and measured against ‘what a good parent would do’ (Department for Education and Employment, 2001:13) is produced. This assessment and measurement is made possible by the ‘chain of equivalence’ (Laclau, 1994; Walton and Boon, 2014), or ‘extended chains of interconnected activity’ (Mol and Law, 1994; Fenwick, 2010:121), formed between corporate parenting and love/care via the tones which undergird the choices of words within the policy texts (‘well-being’, ‘feelings’, ‘wishes’, ‘aspirations’, ‘safe’, ‘recovery’, and ‘resilience’).

This ‘equivalence making’ (Walton and Boon, 2014:355) binds ‘together a particular system of meaning’ (Howarth and Stravrakakis, 2000:8) of love and care which enables its separation into seven monitorable principles which might then be connected back into the field of practice of corporate parenting. Within the policy texts, this chain of equivalence is ‘written onto bodies’ meaning corporate parenting is both ‘done to and done by’ practitioners of the Virtual School ensemble and produces, as already demonstrated, ‘particular subject positions’ (Ball et al., 2012:3). Through this process of subjectivation, an expectation is

‘written onto’ (Ball et al., 2012:3) the practitioners as they are expected to demonstrate a kind of altruistic love and care – ‘everyone from the Chief Executive down to front line staff, as well as elected council members, are concerned about those children and care leavers as if they were their own’ – in a way that can be recorded and monitored – ‘[c]orporate parenting is an important part of the Ofsted framework and the corporate parenting Principles are referenced in Ofsted’s Inspecting Local Authority Children’s Services (ILACS) framework’ (Department for Education, 2018a:6). Operating at the ontological level of corporate parenting, this ‘chain of equivalence’ (Laclau, 1994; Walton and Boon, 2014) is used to manipulate practitioners’ interpretations of policy (Webb and Gulson, 2012). In other words, the ‘affective tones’ of love and care are, as noted above, used ‘strategically’ (Webb and Gulson, 2012) in the production of ‘parents’ for young people in local authority care. These parents are modelled against the ‘good’ parent, that is the one who displays the characteristics explored in Chapter 2 (which includes continuous knowledge about the young people, care of high quality, and unconditional love), but delivered by a ‘wide range of professionals’ (Charter and Le Grand, 2006:10) in a way that is operationalised and, therefore, measurable. This is incompatible with the ‘aspects of love, intimacy and care’ (Page, 2018:126) which young people require in order for their ambiguous loss and grief to be enfranchised.

To further explore this ‘equivalence making’ (Walton and Boon, 2014:355) and manipulation, I now turn to my interview data to explore practitioners’ interpretations of corporate parenting policy texts. Using the term interpretation, I refer to the process of ‘filtering out and selective focusing’ (Ball et al., 2011:626), which takes places in the ‘space’ between the tones of texts (Webb and Gulson, 2012), and ‘what must be done, what can be done, and what cannot’ in practice (Ball et al., 2011:626) as part of the wider policy context and its ‘interpretational and representational history’ (Ball, 1993:11). By paying attention to

this aspect of corporate parenting policy, I begin to expose the administrative lens through which the practitioners interpret their role as ‘corporate parent’. This is an effect of the semiotic management of desires. Furthermore, this provides additional evidence of the channelling and conversion of care already explored in relation to loss and grief in Chapter 6.

7.2 How Practitioners ‘Make Sense’ of What it Means to be a Corporate Parent

It was during my interview with Sophie, a Social Worker in South Traley, that I began to gain an initial insight into the way in which practitioners make sense of corporate parenting policy. As Sophie led me to a meeting room, made entirely of glass, in the middle of South Traley’s Council offices and surrounded by individuals waiting to be seen by various services, I was eager to make good use of this interview. This was because it had proven particularly challenging, even with the help of Rachel, to find Social Workers willing to participate in the research. As a result, Sophie (along with another Social Worker who failed to meet me at the agreed time, and, who I later learned was on long-term sick leave) was the only Social Worker I was able to speak to during the eight months spent in South Traley. As we sat down, I began by thanking Sophie for her time and, after some casual conversation, I opened the interview, as I always did, by asking, *“If we could just start with you telling me about your job role here and what that looks like on a day-to-day basis?”*. *“I am a Social Worker in the Corporate Parenting Team”*, Sophie replied. Not yet confident enough to elaborate on her answers, I probed further, *“You say “Corporate Parenting Team”, do you have a definition of that as a team? What do you mean by that?”*. It was in this moment that Sophie began to speak more freely:

“So, it is literally what it says on the tin, we are the corporate parent. So, Family Support will go to court and get the Care Order, which means we share parental responsibility with parents. The only way a parent will lose parental responsibility is

through adoption. So, they will always share it, but we have the overriding parental responsibility...So, sometimes, we have got a duty to update the parents on the care plan and a duty to involve them in the care plan because they share PR. For a lot of my kids, the parents aren't there so you are literally the corporate parent. So, it's very different from Family Support, they're trying to keep families together and parents still have PR, and we are just there to say things need to improve or this is where we're going. Whereas we are, you know, it's down to the little things like signing consent forms for holidays and school trips and stuff like that, so it is literally like a parenting role almost".

It was Sophie's response to my further questioning, as I sought to develop an understanding of her interpretation of corporate parenting, which drew attention to her differentiation between legal "*parental responsibility*" and the more informal "*parenting role*" (Sophie). This differentiation, a result of her 'filtering out and selective focusing' (Ball et al., 2011:626), highlighted her tendency toward an interpretation of corporate parenting as pertaining to the "*little things*" such as "*signing consent forms for holidays and school trips*" (Sophie). Describing, exclusively, examples of administrative tasks, there was an absence of any reference to the 'furniture of love' (Page, 2018:126), that is being committed to 'engaged recognition and concerned responsiveness' to the ambiguous loss and grief faced by young people in local authority care' (Gerson, 2009:1343). In part, this is symptomatic of social work practice which, whilst orientated around 'notions of care and compassion', now delivers a "service' rather than 'care' per se' (Collins, 2018; Brown et al., 2019:221); the result of a system which 'too often tries to replace organic bonds with professionals and services' (MacAlister, 2022:8). This was confirmed by Sophie who, as noted earlier in this thesis, explained, "*I started uni all wide-eyed, you know, it's going to be loads of direct work with*

kids, you're going to have these great relationships and it is just a lot of paperwork and assessment after assessment. You don't see the kids as much as you think you will". This is initial evidence of the frustration the practitioners both shared with me and demonstrated as the fulfilment of the bureaucratic and performative aspects of their role stands in opposition with their reasons for entering the service. It must be acknowledged, therefore, that whilst Sophie's approach to care, by attending to the "*little things*", is removed from an obvious 'emotional engagement' (Houston and Dolan, 2008; Ridley et al., 2016) with the young people, there is a clear sense of a 'practical and emotional application of concern and affect, expressed in mundane everyday ways' (Pithouse and Rees, 2011:207). This is a result of Sophie's 'compulsion to care' (Page, 2018:134) which was born, she explained, out of the "*social work involvement*" experienced by "*me and my sisters*" and demonstrative of her efforts to care *for* within the performative environment in which she is consistently required to care *about* particular outcomes and measures.

This 'practical and emotional application of concern and affect' (Pithouse and Rees, 2011:207) was also evident during my interview with Mary and Saleem when Mary, Virtual School Head of Fordhill, recounted an exchange with an external service provider:

"God, I mean, the number of meetings...where I have hit my fist on the table and said, "What don't you understand? We are the parents! This is the most vulnerable group of the vulnerable, and you're telling me you won't work outside the boundaries of Fordhill?"

Mary's act of hitting her "*fist on the table*" is a clear demonstration of her 'compulsion to care' (Page, 2018:134) for the young people for whom she is advocating. More than this, it is a physical response to the frustration she experiences as this compulsion is converted by the geographical bureaucracy imbued in external service provision for young people in local

authority care. This rigidity and linearity (MacAlister, 2022) results in a tension between her care for the “*vulnerable group of the most vulnerable*” (Mary) and her requirement to care *about* refuting service disruption which may impede her ability to be an ‘effective corporate parent’ (Department for Education, 2018a:6). As a consequence, Mary’s ‘compulsion to care’ (Page, 2018:134) is converted into ‘an additional extra’ (Barclay et al., 2016:187) and her capacity as a professional to ‘de-centre and invest a level of emotional intimacy’ (Page, 2018:134) channelled into ‘assessing, referring and convening meetings of professionals to talk about children without enough attention on the people around the children who love them’ (MacAlister, 2022:19).

For Mary, her ‘filtering out and selective focusing’ (Ball et al., 2011:626), or interpretation, of corporate parenting policy is articulated, in short, as “*making sure the vulnerable get what they need*”. Such an interpretation aligns with that of the other Virtual School Heads included in this research who, when asked to define their job role and “*what that looks like on a day-to-day basis?*”, replied:

1. To “*promote education of the children who are looked-after*” (Rachel) and
2. “[E]nsuring that the services are delivering what they should be delivering against expectations and also mapping out how we want to develop those services moving forward” (Saleem).

Uniting each of the Virtual School Heads, therefore, is their interpretation of corporate parenting policy through ‘administrative terms’ (Steckley and Smith, 2011:186) as they define their role in relation to the distribution of resources and the production of educational outcomes. This reflects a position of caring *about* as Virtual School Heads demonstrate a ‘general predisposition to see that children are well treated’ (Noddings, 2003; Steckley and

Smith, 2011:186) which does not extend into the ‘provision of direct care’ (Noddings, 2003; Steckley and Smith, 2011:186), an essential aspect of the ‘furniture of love’ (Page, 2018:126). To reiterate, this is not because they do not care *for* (Noddings, 2003) the young people but because corporate parenting policy privileges caring *about* which manipulates the ‘semiotic desires’ and ‘inferences’ (Webb and Gulson, 2012:89) of practitioners, leading them to, in frustration, tread the “*very fine line between being that [an advocate] and being so rigid with the framework that you can’t see the child and it becomes something quite personal for you then*” (Saleem).

In short, this “*fine line*”, exists within the ‘space’ of corporate parenting policy which is characterised by a tension between two ‘modes’ of its potential practice; its ‘becoming’ (Webb and Gulson, 2012:94). The first is the mode of ‘caring’, which is symbolised by the ‘compulsion to care’ (Page, 2018:138) and already identified within the practitioners of the Virtual School ensemble by attending to the way in which they interpret policy and what this means for their subsequent role. The second is the mode of ‘monitoring’ which, preferential for the neoliberal education machine, is privileged within this space and is, therefore, able to mute and control the caring and loving compulsions of the Virtual School practitioners. To further explore this tension and the nature of each of these modes, I seek, in the following section, to draw attention to moments in which these two modes collide and disrupt one another as practitioners find themselves unable to traverse both simultaneously: a source of frustration for the practitioners. I use both my interview and observational data to trace this collision and disruption to interrogate the live tension between practitioners’ ethic of care and the demands of the wider neoliberal education machine. The effects of this tension results in the (dis)enfranchising practices of the Virtual School ensemble which, already discussed elsewhere in this thesis, reflects aspects of the loss and grief experiences of the young people

(Sprince, 2000; Rocco-Briggs, 2008) and leaves the practitioners to question, “[w]hat are we achieving?” (Jane).

7.3 The Two ‘Modes’ of Corporate Parenting in Tension: A Source of Frustration

During my interview with Mary and Saleem, I was able to gain a greater insight into the tension between the two modes of corporate parenting as these two Virtual School Heads compared views, experiences, and approaches to their work within the ensemble. Convinced of a ‘compulsion to care’ (Page, 2018:138) as the driver for the practitioners’ contextualisation, or enactment, of corporate parenting policy in practice, Mary and Saleem validated my belief through their consistent demonstration of their genuine care for the young with whom they work:

“That strap line – “Is it good enough for my child?””, Mary explained, “that’s how I sleep at night. I think about, “Is what we did today good enough for a child of mine? If it is, that’s great. If not, how can we get it better?” and “[i]t’s about making the system work for the child”, Saleem added as he nodded in agreement.

In this short but important exchange, the two Virtual School Heads drew attention to their ethic of care as the source of their desire to stand as engaged witnesses (Gerson, 2009), critically reflecting and adapting their practice (Page, 2018:136) to meet the needs of the young people with whom they work. Such reflection and adaptation were further evident as Saleem explained there is a *“fine line between being that [an advocate for the young person] and being so rigid with the framework that you can’t see the child”* and Jane, in a separate interview, shared that she sometimes needed to *“take a step back and think, “What are we achieving?”*. An integral aspect of enfranchising practice, these quotations identify the practitioners’ awareness that a system which ‘expects the child to change without questioning how the system works’ is unable to sufficiently help (Rocco-Briggs, 2008:203).

In spite of a clear desire to evaluate their practice, the relationship between the practitioners of the Virtual School and young people in local authority care, from what I observed, stopped short of any kind of ‘emotional intimacy’ (Page, 2018:126). This was emphasised by the relationships observed between the young people and their foster carers which were oftentimes clearly furnished with love and care *for* the young people. In this vein, there were three notable moments within PEP meetings in which care and love were clearly demonstrated by the young people’s foster carers; a kind of intimacy which I did not find to be present between the young people and the Virtual School practitioners:

1. The first of these took place during a Child Case Review (CCR) (which preceded the PEP) for Eno; a Black girl in year 10 who is passionate about textiles and lives with her foster carer, Jo. As part of the CCR, Jo and Eno were asked about Eno’s financial savings. It was in response to this that Jo shared she has been saving her own money to provide savings for Eno’s future. I could see Eno’s body language change as she became shy, trying to avoid displaying the affective response to feeling cared for and loved in this way. As a small, but significant demonstration of long-term commitment to Eno, Jo exposed her ‘emotional intimacy’ (Page, 2018:137) in a way which is ‘nuanced and subtle’ but cannot be ‘legislated and somehow encoded in procedures and guidance’ (Pithouse and Rees, 2011:207). It seemed clear to me, in this fleeting moment of the CCR, that Jo was doing ‘everything from keeping an eye’ on Eno’s school progress, looking after her ‘health and wellbeing’ to seeking to prepare her for life as an independent adult (Blake, 2019:2).
2. The second took place during a PEP for Aaron, a young man with SEND and additional health needs. As his foster carer, Andrea, began to talk about these health concerns, she shared with those around the tables, pushed together in a square in a

small but light room, that she had been informed that other professionals had been moaning about her being “*pushy*” about his health needs. Clearly upset by the situation, Andrea continued as she captivated the room, “*I am going to be pushy! I am going to treat him like he’s my own!*”. This felt like yet another example of the provision of a ‘sense of belonging’ as his foster family offered the possibility of ‘security, improved development conditions and belongingness in a family setting’ (Christiansen et al., 2013:736) through the clear demonstration of caring *for* Aaron’s needs, experiences, and future.

3. The third took place during Amy’s PEP meeting as Naomi, her foster carer, shared she has been trying to find some friends for Amy, who has very complex SEND, including physical disabilities. This means making friends is much more difficult for her than other young people. Having had one girl round from school which did not go very well because they did not want to play with the same things, Naomi explained that she had identified a possible friend for her at swimming and had invited her and her mother around for a play date in the Easter holidays. It was clear, through the initiative taken by Naomi, that as her foster carer she loves and cares deeply *for* Amy’s wider network of relationships.

Although the relationships between the practitioners and young people did not extend into ‘emotional intimacy’ every practitioner included within the research demonstrated their ethic of care as the source of their motivation for their work. This, however, as already seen within this chapter, renders them vulnerable to the channelling and conversion of their care *for* the young people. This is because such affects are ‘simultaneously valued, undervalued, feared, and overlooked’ by the performative demands of the neoliberal education machine (Warren, 2021:565). Produced and functioning via the technologies of ‘judgements, measures,

comparisons, and targets’ (Ball, 2003:220-221), this (under)valuing results in a live tension between practitioners’ individual ethic of care and the demands of the wider machine(s). Functioning via these technologies, the performative underneath of corporate parenting engenders feelings of frustration as the practitioners are required to ask themselves “[w]ould this be good enough for my children?” (Dobson MP, House of Commons, 2000:cols.377-378) *and* fulfil the requirements of the Ofsted inspection framework which controls the ‘field of judgement’ (Keddie, 2017:1250). These requirements centre around the demand for the responsibilities *of* and the outcomes produced *by* the corporate parent to be ‘divided, recorded, monitored, and measured’ as part of both the ‘quality assurance inspection for Children’s Services’ (Turner and Percy-Smith, 2020:5) and Ofsted inspection of local authorities (Department for Education, 2018a):

‘The most effective Virtual Schools collect in-year attainment on every child...use this data to assess whether a child is making expected progress’ which, ‘when combined with attendance and exclusion data’, builds a ‘rich picture of the child’s current educational context’. Without such systems a VSH [Virtual School Head] faces significant challenges during an inspection’ (National Association of Virtual School Heads, 2019:21).

As a result, the ‘inappropriate monitoring mechanisms’ placed upon the corporate parents function to ‘obstruct the building of mutual and trusting relationships’ (Tiffany, 2007:416; De St Croix, 2018) between the young people and practitioners.

“I think sometimes you’re trying to ram a round peg in a square hole”, Jane shared with me as she began to critically reflect, in her interview, on the tension which characterises her role within the Virtual School. *“And we are just banging”*, she continued, *“and we are doing damage while we are doing that and I think, sometimes, we do need to take a step back and*

think, "What are we achieving?". Because there is that constant drive to get the result and I think that, at an individual level, we need to think differently at points". As I have already explored briefly in an earlier chapter, I was interested to hear Jane recognise the tension to which I have already drawn attention. However, in thinking about corporate parenting I specifically focus on her individualised resolution which relies upon the policing of her own practice as she reflects upon what she, as a one of the "*individuals*", might do rather than how the system might change. It is the technologies of performativity which displace Jane's ethic of care and (re)forms the embedded belief that the "*damage*" from "*banging*" in the "*constant drive to get the result*" is 'highly individualized' (Ball, 2003:216). As a result of this individualisation, Jane, and other practitioners of the Virtual School ensemble, are encouraged to act alone as they are 'simultaneously required...to recognize and take responsibility for the relationship between the security of their employment and their contribution to the competitiveness of the goods and services they produce' (Willmott, 1993:552). This is symptomatic of the individualising nature of the neoliberal education machine which acts to obscure the systematic disenfranchisement of the ambiguous loss and grief that young people experience and need to express (Sprince, 2000; Rocco-Briggs, 2008). Functioning through the process of individualisation, therefore, this aspect of disenfranchisement stands in contrast with the sense of community required for enfranchising practice.

The affective response of frustration subsequently experienced in the practice of corporate parenting draws attention to the way in which practitioners of the Virtual School ensemble are consistently held in a tension between the 'modes' of this policy. These are caring and monitoring, both of which cause friction between "*[i]s what we did today good enough for a child of mine?*" (Mary) and "*that constant drive to get the result*" (Jane). This begins to

demonstrate the ways in which subject positions are taken up in an ‘iterative process of making institutional texts and putting those into action’ (Ball et al., 2012:45). That is enactment. Occurring within an ‘enlivened space’ within which policy and subjectivity are linked in a kind of ‘becoming’ before being actualised within the ensemble (Webb and Gulson, 2012:89), corporate parenting policy is ‘written onto’ the bodies of the Virtual School ensemble (Ball et al., 2012:3), producing young people as ‘service user’ and practitioners as ‘service provider’ (Turner and Percy-Smith, 2020:5), making it difficult, if not impossible, as explored in Chapter 6, for practitioners to sustain their caring practice. This process, referred to as subjectivation, is ‘central to understanding both how policy is a spatial phenomenon that is enacted and performed’ (Webb and Gulson, 2013:54&62) and the process by which love and care are converted and channelled from one ‘mode’ of corporate parenting to another. Not ‘lost’ from the ensemble, the practitioners’ ‘compulsion to care’ (Page, 2018:138) as the driver for their enactment of corporate parenting is, instead, directed and ‘invested’ elsewhere within the ensemble. In the final section of this chapter, therefore, I draw on both my interview and observational data to examine how the ‘dense network of vigilant and multi-directional gazes’ (Hoffman, 2010:31) forms and re-forms practitioners and young people as they are invited to ‘speak, listen, act, read, work, think, feel, behave, and value’ (Gee et al., 1996:10) in particular ways. To do so, I first present a short excerpt from my field notes taken during an observation of a Designated Teacher Forum held in a secondary school in South Traley. I do so as a way in which to foreground the argument which follows.

7.4 ‘Writing’ Corporate Parenting onto the Bodies of the Ensemble

Rachel then turned over the agenda sheet which detailed the provisional results and outcomes for 2018 (provisional given that the statistical release had not yet been published)

and she shared that her department want her to work hard on statistics and analysing what is going on with these results and outcomes. Highlighting the 'Entered and Achieved' category, Rachel drew attention to the importance of understanding this category given that some students are entered for exams but do not sit them. 'Achieved' means they could have sat Maths papers 1 and 2 or just 1, so this "skews the results". After some further discussion of the 'Entered and Achieved' category, the conversation then turned to the tension between local level targets (i.e., the Designated Teachers' are concerned with improvement and progression e.g., achieving an E instead of a U in Maths) and local authority pressures for outcomes. Rachel recognised the need to listen to the stories of individuals rather than being focused solely on outcomes and numbers. Both Rachel and Diane identified that for some young people, collecting the paper of exam results is not appropriate nor what they want, some want to gain Mechanics Levels 1, 2, and 3 and so on. "Not getting GCSEs isn't a failure, it's a step" said Diane as Rachel nodded in agreement...Turning to the training needs of the Designated Teachers and their schools, Rachel explained that South Traley Virtual School wish for all schools to be "attachment aware". "We're pretty good at attachment", Rachel continued, now that "most schools have someone who has had attachment training through the core offer of the Virtual School" but "I think it is important that we start to think about training for loss and the impact of loss and for the Virtual School to commission some bereavement training. We need to look at something broader than the basics of attachment". Looking around the room, Rachel then invited the Designated Teachers to think about what areas they would like training to be provided on. After a short discussion about training areas and locations, the meeting was closed which prevented those in the room being able to share examples of "good practice" which Rachel promised she would place much higher up in the agenda for the next Forum.

Producers/Providers

As ‘*the conversation then turned to the tension between local levels targets...and local authority pressure for outcomes*’, I began to trace the (re)formation of practitioners as ‘producers/providers, educational entrepreneurs and managers’ who are ‘subject to regular appraisal and review and performance comparisons’ (Ball, 2003:218). Clearly concerned about the ‘*pressure for outcomes*’, the Designated Teachers and Virtual School staff present at the Forum spent a considerable amount of time discussing the tension they face as their focus on ‘*improvement and progression*’ is not valued. This is because the education system measures in discrete categories against a baseline of ‘normal’ achievement using data as a ‘socially created set of information or knowledge’ which has influences on both ‘practices and subjectivities’ (Bradbury and Roberts-Holmes, 2017:6). Whilst it was recognised that it is important to ‘*listen to the stories of individuals rather than being focused solely on outcomes and numbers*’, it was clear that the staff felt dejected as their best efforts to maintain a care-led focus on “[*n*]ot getting GCSEs” as “*not a failure*” but “*a step*” (Diane), this was converted and channelled into ‘*statistics and analysing what is going on with these results and outcomes*’. This was not a unique scenario during my time in the field. For example, in my interview with Saleem and Mary, Saleem explained in exasperation as I asked further questions about the Pupil Premium Plus, “[*w*]e are accountable. We are asked questions. We have to demonstrate impact. We have to demonstrate creative uses for it as well. And, also, link it back to the individual child”. “*As dull as it is*”, Mary added, “*that’s what we’re there for. To close the gap*”. These repeated moments and discussions are evidence of the way in which corporate parenting policy is written onto the Virtual School Heads and other practitioners within the ensemble as they are left with no choice but to resign to the primary role of ‘service provider’ (Turner and Percy-Smith, 2020) designed to address and improve educational outcomes. This side-lines any ‘emotional intimacy’ which the

practitioners might feel or wish to show because, despite the resultant practice being “*dull*”, it is the only way in which their ‘compulsion to care’ (Page, 2018:134) is productively channelled within the ensemble.

The accountability, questioning, and demonstration of impact referred to by Saleem is demanded by the Department for Education and Ofsted. All the practitioners involved within the research were consistently aware that their practice was assessed and answerable to these organisations and institutions. This is succinctly articulated by Diane who shared, “*we have to be able to justify it [the Pupil Premium Plus] to the DfE that actually we are not misappropriating funds*”. This relationship between the Department for Education, Ofsted, and the Virtual School ensemble functions to police the work of the practitioners by placing limits on how they can ‘speak, listen, act, read, work, think, feel, behave, and value’ (Gee et al., 1996:10). On the one hand, therefore, the practitioners are ‘concerned that what they will do will not be captured by or valued within the metrics of accountability and, on the other, that these metrics will distort their practice’ (Ball, 2003:223). This is the “*tension*” to which the Designated Teachers referred in the excerpt presented above. By existing within this tension, the room for caring *for* is converted and channelled into the demand to demonstrate impact and outcomes. As a result, limits are placed upon the practitioners’ capacity to care via ‘emotional intimacy’ (Page, 2018:126) as discursive subjects within the Virtual School ensemble.

Service User

Following this tracing, my attention was soon drawn to the (re)formation of young people as traumatised ‘needs-driven service user’ (Turner and Percy-Smith, 2020:5) both as a consequence of the neoliberal education machine and symptomatic of the practitioners’

requirement to provide a ‘service’ based upon the production of outcomes. Whilst within the Forum it was identified that practitioners need to *‘listen to the stories of individuals rather than being focused solely on outcomes and numbers’*, this desire, as evident across much of the data presented within this thesis, is repeatedly converted and channelled into the professionalised space which requires service delivery for young people as ‘needs-driven service user’ (Turner and Percy-Smith, 2020:5). By creating a space for young people to exist as service ‘users’ within the Virtual School ensemble, corporate parenting policy forces them to become part of a *“club that probably none of them want to be in”* (Diane). In doing so, *“emotional trauma-type behaviours”* can be readily identified and addressed by paying for *“play therapy or drama therapy or something along those lines”* (Helen). By professionalising the practitioners’ responses to young people’s ambiguous loss and grief, they are forced to reflect on the ‘mistake’ and frustration of getting *“caught up in the story”* and channelling this into drilling *“down into what’s happening now and the data”* (Jane). As a result, young people’s ambiguous loss and grief experiences are not met with ‘engaged recognition and concerned responsiveness’ as way to create ‘liveable meaning’ (Gerson, 2009:1343) but with concern for providing *“interventions...which can help remove the barriers to learning”* (Alex).

This conversion and channelling, which oftentimes leads to frustration, provides evidence of the practitioners existing *‘in-tension’* with the contradictions and incompleteness (Webb and Gulson, 2013:57) of corporate parenting policy as the distance between the imagined practice of corporate parenting and the reality of ‘loving relationships’ come to the surface (Turner and Percy-Smith, 2020). Encouraged to focus on ‘what works’ (Ball, 2003:222), the ensemble further embeds young people’s position ‘outside dominant discourses of success’ (Mannay et al., 2017:694) as emphasis on impact and outcomes for the ‘user’ produces the

‘knowledge’ and ‘truth’ which circulates within the ensemble. This is demonstrable of the disenfranchising practice of the Virtual School ensemble as love and care (affectivities which need to be made productive in order to enfranchise loss and grief as explored in Chapter 6) associated with the corporate parent are converted and channelled into and by a ‘universalised system of assessment, monitoring and review’ (Holland, 2010:1677). In this way, corporate parenting policy, by positioning young people as ‘users’ and practitioners as ‘providers’, results in the ‘heart of the educational project’ being ‘gouged out and left empty’ as love and care are only made valuable in relation to ‘what works’ (Ball, 2003:222&225).

7.5 Concluding Thoughts

In this chapter, I have explored corporate parenting through a critical policy analysis lens, tracing this discursive line from ‘text to action’ (Ball et al., 2012:3). To achieve this tracing, I began by critically exploring the affective ‘tones’ of the *Children and Social Work Act (2017)* and the *Applying Corporate Parenting Principles to Looked-After Children and Care Leavers* (Department for Education, 2018c) statutory guidance. In doing so, I drew attention to the manipulative force of the ‘semiotic monster’ (Webb and Gulson, 2012) as the ‘good’ parent is abstracted and used to form a ‘chain of equivalence’ (Laclau, 1994; Walton and Boon, 2014) between corporate parenting and love/care. This ‘equivalence making’ (Walton and Boon, 2014:355) binds ‘together a particular system of meaning’ (Howarth and Stravrakakis, 2000:8) through a ‘code’ which diverts attention away from the processes of channelling and conversion of care. Processes which form practitioners as ‘producers/providers’ (Ball, 2003:218) and young people as ‘needs-driven service user’ (Turner and Percy-Smith, 2020:5). This is a re-coding of Professional Love (Page, 2018). Following this, I explored the effects of this semiotic ‘management’ as I presented the practitioners’ interpretations of what it means to be a corporate parent. In doing so, I demonstrated the distinction made between

caring *for* and caring *about* (Noddings, 2003; Steckley and Smith, 2011). Aligning with current social work practice which ‘now delivers a ‘service’ rather than ‘care’ per se’ (Collins, 2018; Brown et al., 2019:221), I argued that practitioners’ care is channelled and converted, leading to a sense of frustration. This occurs at the ‘momentary point’ of policy as the two ‘lines’ or ‘modes’ of corporate parenting in practice – caring and monitoring – collide and disrupt one another. As these ‘corporate parents’ find themselves unable to traverse both simultaneously, the practitioners are held within a constant tension. Finally, through an examination of ‘emerging...links between policy and subjectivity’ (Webb and Gulson, 2012:57), exploring the policy subject positions of ‘service user’ and ‘service provider’ (Turner and Percy-Smith, 2020), I attended to the effects of the ‘dense network of vigilant and multi-directional gazes’ (Hoffman, 2010:31). These gazes function to (re)form young people and practitioners as they are invited to ‘speak, listen, act, read, work, think, feel, behave, and value’ (Gee et al., 1996:10) in particular ways. Overall, in this chapter, I have sought to critically explore corporate parenting policy from ‘text to action’ (Ball et al., 2012:3) to argue that this policy space has the (un)intentional consequence of converting and channelling the furniture of love and care as it pertains to ‘emotional intimacy’ (Page, 2018:126) making the presentation of a loving corporate parent a policy ‘abstraction’ which is ‘unworkable in practice’ (Noddings, 2003:22). As the final element to be explored within this mapping, I now turn to critically examine the smooth and striated space of Personal Education Plan meetings which act as a ‘hub’ through which all elements intersect.

Chapter 8: Personal Education Plans

Examining the Striated and Smooth Space of Personal Education Plans

“PEPs are about evaluating what schools are putting in place for looked-after children”

~Wendy~

8.0 Introduction

In this final data analysis chapter, I seek to trace the enactment of Personal Education Plans (PEPs) within the Virtual School ensemble via the situational line of the map. As the mandated education arm of a young person’s wider care plan (Department for Education, 2021), PEPs are both an ‘evolving record’ (Department for Education, 2018c:14) (hardcopy or electronic) *and* ‘review meeting’ (Read et al., 2020:57) which bring together ‘relevant professionals’ (Department for Education, 2018c) to ‘meet and co-operate in the planning of the education’ of young people in local authority care (Hayden, 2005:351). This “coming together”...combines the cumulative knowledge’ from other ‘surveillance systems’ (e.g., school grades, attendance and behaviour records, professional reports, and so on) ‘particular to these institutions’ (Haggerty and Ericson, 2000:616). This is used to determine the ‘value’ of interventions funded by the Pupil Premium Plus by creating a ‘data double’, the PEP document, which functions as a kind of ‘consumer profile’, a code³³, used to ‘refine service delivery’ (Haggerty and Ericson, 2000:616). This is then used to respond to individual needs including those resulting from ambiguous loss and grief. In doing so, PEPs function as an ‘obligatory passage point’ (Callon, 1986; Latour, 1987) or ‘funnel neck’ (Parker, 2017:157) through which the elements of the Virtual School ensemble pass. In this passing, the elements of the ensemble move through the overcoded scores of ‘deep ‘striations” which constrain

³³ Refer back to Chapter 6 (Section 6.3).

meaning and practice and/or the smooth space of distribution, potentiality, and ‘becoming’ (Youdell and Armstrong, 2011:145). I use this chapter to explore these spaces, seeking to illuminate and trace the subjects of the PEP, the processes through which their ‘identifications are created and challenged’, and the ‘flows of affectivities, bodies and meanings’ within this particular education space of the Virtual School ensemble (Youdell and Armstrong, 2011:145).

Having spent a considerable amount of time shadowing Jane, the Secondary School Improvement Officer for Looked-After Children in South Traley, and, as a result, observing several PEP meetings, I draw almost exclusively on my observations of such meetings to provide an ethnographically-led account of this element of the ensemble. After a short policy-focused summary of PEPs and exploration of their position as an ‘obligatory passage point’ (Callon, 1986; Latour, 1987), I begin this chapter by seeking to tell the ‘story’ of a PEP review meeting. This story, or ‘vignette’, is an amalgamation of my observations which might be defined as a ‘focused description of a series of events taken to be representative, typical, or emblematic’ with ‘a narrative story-like structure that preserves the chronological flow’ (Miles and Huberman, 1994:81; Jacobson, 2014). I use this vignette to draw attention to PEPs as an element comprised of coexisting striated and smooth space, of constraint and of possibility. Following this, therefore, I seek to critically explore the circulation of the relations of power within this space, ‘how practices of naming, framing and placing subjectivate subjects, and how these subjectivations are resisted, ruptured and exceeded’ (Youdell and Armstrong, 2011:146). Overall, I use this chapter to demonstrate PEPs as a system, the ‘hub of the action’ (Parker, 2017:157), through which affect can be simultaneously channeled and contained *and* represent possibility for eruption as affect ‘seeks expression, makes itself known’ (Mountz, 2017:77).

8.1 PEPs: An Obligatory Passage Point of the Ensemble

The promotion of educational achievement is an integral aspect of the statutory requirement placed on local authorities to ‘safeguard and promote the welfare’ of young people in local authority care (Department for Education, 2021:34). In discharging this duty, each local authority is to ensure every young person has the ‘opportunities to achieve educational outcomes comparable to his/her peers’ via ‘strategic planning’ which demonstrates ‘robust procedures to monitor educational progress’ (Department for Education, 2021:35) and evaluates “*what schools are putting in place for looked-after children*” (Wendy). This is to be achieved through the PEP, the ‘education component’ of a young person’s wider Care Plan (Department for Education, 2021:35) which is a statutory requirement for all young people in local authority care until they turn 18 (Read et al., 2020). Together with the relevant school, the local authority is responsible for initiating this ‘evolving record of what needs to happen for looked-after children to enable them to make at least expected progress and fulfil their potential’ (Department for Education, 2018c:14). This means the PEP acts as a ‘core document’ which follows the young person even in cases of placement breakdown (Department for Education, 2021:36) and is to include ‘practical actions’ including objectives and targets, an education pathway, details of interventions and additional support, a ‘clear line of accountability’, and an ‘account’ of the Pupil Premium Plus (Department for Education, 2018c:16; Read et al., 2020; Department for Education, 2021:37).

Designed to be a ‘living document’, the ‘snap-shot’ information contained within the PEP document is to be ‘reviewed in partnership with the child’s school, carers and the child’ every term ‘as part of the statutory review of the wider care plan with any updated information added by the child’s school feeding into that process’ (Department for Education, 2018c; National Association of Virtual School Heads, 2019; Department for Education, 2021:37).

This is to be led by the Virtual School Head who has a ‘quality assurance role’ (Department for Education, 2018c:16), with the support of other corporate parents (Social Workers, Foster Carers, Admission Officers, staff in education settings, including the Designated Teacher (DT), and Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO)) (Read et al., 2020; Department for Education, 2021). In addition, the Virtual School Head is responsible for promoting a ‘culture’ which considers the young person’s views and helps other corporate parents to understand the importance of listening to and understanding the young person (Department for Education, 2018c:11). This content is summarised below (Department for Education, 2018c:16):

Living and Evolving Information	‘comprehensive and enduring record of the child’s experience, progress and achievement (academic and otherwise), and inform any discussion about education during statutory reviews of the child’s wider care plan’
Link to Other Plans	‘be linked to, but not duplicate or conflict with, information in any other plans held by the child’s education setting or responsibility authority – e.g. their care plan or Education, Health and Care Plan’
Identify Needs	‘identify developmental (including any related to attachment and past trauma) and educational needs (short and longer term) in relation to skills, knowledge, subject areas and experiences’
Mental Health	‘say what will happen or is already happening to identify and support any mental health needs, including detailing any support that is required or ongoing from mental health specialist support services’
SMART Targets	Include ‘short-term targets, including progress monitoring of each of the areas identified against developmental and educational needs’ and ‘longer-term plans for educational targets and aspirations’
Actions	‘identify actions, with times scales, for specific individuals intention to support the achievement of agreed targets and use of any additional resources (e.g. the pupil premium plus) specifically designated to support the attainment of looked-after children’
Behaviour	‘include behaviour management strategies agreed between the VSH and school to help ensure challenging behaviour is managed in the most effective way for that child’
Interventions	‘highlight access to effective intervention strategies and how this will make/has made a difference to achievement levels’

Table 8 A table summary of PEP requirements

As a statutory aspect of a young person's Care Plan, PEPs become, using language drawn from ANT, an 'obligatory passage point' (Callon, 1986; Latour, 1987) of the Virtual School ensemble. Acting as a kind of 'funnel neck' (Parker, 2017:157), 'all relations' within the ensemble, including corporate parenting, the Pupil Premium Plus, and experiences of loss and grief, love and care 'must flow' through the PEP 'at some point' (Fenwick and Edwards, 2011:9). It is within this passage that the practitioners and young people as subjects of the ensemble are required to converge 'around the dominant framing and then engage in specific negotiations' (Rydin, 2012:26), for example in creating and reviewing SMART targets (Department for Education, 2018c). This makes a critical exploration of PEPs and their effects integral to understanding the power relations which circumscribe the Virtual School ensemble (Fenwick and Edwards, 2011). By bringing together all subjects of the ensemble, PEPs function to 'choreograph' (Eggermont, 2001) the bodies of the ensemble within a space that simultaneously constrains meaning and practice *and* opens possibilities for 'becoming' (Youdell and Armstrong, 2011).

This is helpfully theorised by the Deleuzian concept of smooth and striated space (Deleuze and Guattari, 2019 [1987]) which has been translated into the education context by Youdell and Armstrong (2011:145). First, striated space, or space with 'deep scores or grooves cut by the rigid lines' of the ensemble or wider neoliberal education machine, is 'binary, hierarchical and normative' and 'bound up and shot through with meaning' (Youdell and Armstrong, 2011:145). It is within this space that meaning and practice within the Virtual School ensemble is defined and constrained, and subjects are (re)made into that which is 'recognizable'³⁴ (Butler, 2004:5; Youdell and Armstrong, 2011). Second, in contrast but not

³⁴ See, for example, earlier discussions about the 'ideal learner'.

distinct, smooth space is represented by ‘moments and sites of possibility’ where the deep scores might be ‘disrupted or deterritorialized’ and new ‘becomings’ offered as a kind of ‘anti-subjectivation’ (Youdell and Armstrong, 2011:145). It is within these ‘lines of flight’ (movement away from the constraints of subjectivities) that an understanding of affectivity is critical in proffering a way in which to consider and discuss the ‘eruptions’, ‘flows’, and ‘encounters’ of bodily sensations (Youdell and Armstrong, 2011:145; Deleuze and Guattari, 2019 [1987]) which emerge from the ensemble:

‘The space of nomad thought is qualitatively different from State space. Air against earth. State space is ‘striated’, or gridded. Movement in it is confined as by gravity to a horizontal plane, and limited by the order of that plane to preset paths between fixed and identifiable points. Nomad space is ‘smooth’, or open-ended. One can rise up at any point and move to any other. Its mode of distribution is the nomos: arraying oneself in an open space (hold the street), as opposed to the logos of entrenching oneself in a closed space (hold the fort)’ (Massumi, 2012 [1987]:xiii).

I now present a ‘vignette’ of a PEP meeting which, as a ‘focused description of a series of events taken to be ‘representative, typical, or emblematic’ (Miles and Huberman, 1994:81) acts to foreground the critical discussion of the smooth and striated space of PEPs which follows.

8.2 A Vignette

Arriving

I arrived at South Traley council offices at 9:40am, twenty minutes before I was due to meet Jane and I soon located a parking space in the huge public car park that surrounded the building. Having found the correct change in the centre console of my car, I walked over to the nearest paying machine, paid for a day of parking, and returned to place the ticket on the

dashboard before picking up my bag, smartening myself up in the reflection of the car window, and then making my way toward the correct building. Given that it was early in the morning, the area was very quiet and, as I made my way down the road with the council buildings on my right and a block of flats to my left, a path I had walked several times, I, for the first time, consciously recognised the deprivation by which I was surrounded. No sooner had I internally acknowledged the rows of off-white net curtains, which, to my class-based bias, signalled a kind of deprivation given this was not a usual sight within the middle-class town in which I had been raised, the sound of wolf-whistling rang in my ears. Reverberating within the silence, I knew the wolf whistle was directed at me as I could feel the uneasy effects of my external presentation of gender impinging upon my body (Lloyd, 1999:195) and this empty signifier (Barthes, 1973), drawing its ‘connotations from the discourses’ of gender and sexualisation within which it is embedded, formed me into ‘sex object’ (Kottler and Swartz, 1995). I focused my gaze on the road ahead of me as a point of safety.

Quickly reaching the end of the road, my attention was soon drawn to a lady who appeared to be asking some council groundsmen (two men in orange high-visibility jackets with traffic cones loaded into a pick-up truck) a question. Whilst I was unable to discern what it was that she was asking, I could vaguely hear the two men responding as they explained they did not have what she wanted. Suddenly, and without warning, she began to shout expletives at them, chasing them around the pick-up truck. As the men laughed nervously, trying to hide the fear I was now close enough to see in their eyes, the lady continued to shout as they became involved in a kind of pursuit. Losing pace, the woman quickly ceased to follow them as she turned and walked away as if nothing had happened, leaving the men to catch their breath and debrief on the sudden turn of events. Watching this scene unfold had now only added to my sense of vulnerability as the distant area that had only moments ago provided a sense of

safety was now equally intimidating and uncertain. Automatically picking up my pace yet again, I turned right and finally reached the familiar sliding doors leading into South Traley's council building. Having arranged to meet Jane at 10am, I was now 15-minutes early and, checking my phone for any last-minute emails from Jane or Rachel which might contain further information for the day, I took a deep breath as I approached the doors and braced myself for my first day of PEP observations.

Entering through the sliding doors, I felt less vulnerable as the familiarity of the building, with its modern and very blue design, allowed me to regain a sense of composure which had been undone by the events of my short walk between the car and the building. Following the usual process, I walked past the security guards, made my way to the check-in desk, told the receptionist my name and who I was there to meet, before receiving my visitor's badge and being directed to wait on the blue office furniture underneath the stairs. As I waited for Jane, I was reminded of the peculiarity of the council building. Despite having waited on the blue, foam, office chairs time and time again, I was already aware that this peculiarity was 'trapped' within my bodily sensations (Ahmed, 2010), escaping articulation through recognisable 'feelings and emotions' (Robinson and Kutner, 2019:117). I began my time waiting, trying to locate a credible articulation which might explain why my body continues to be moved by this 'world' (council offices in South Traley) which I inhabit time and time again (Ahmed, 2004; Ahmed, 2010). A few options raced through my mind: *Is it the sheer number of staff in the entrance of the building (security guards and receptionists) who, together, act as a kind of barrier to that which lies behind the reception and beyond the restricted access doors? Is it the constant shout of "Will number [insert number] please go to desk [insert number]"? Or the staff who come in and out of the lifts who avoid making eye*

contact with the 'public' as they enter and leave the building? Or perhaps the seemingly automated defensiveness of the reception staff?

Just at that moment, I noted an older woman hesitantly make her way over to one of the reception desks, “*My number has dropped off the screen and I have been waiting for two hours*” she explained to the man at the desk, in exhaustion. Recognising there was an issue, another receptionist made her way over, “*Is everything okay?*” she asked, as the older lady explained her problem again. Immediately adopting an assertive, almost aggressive, stance and tone, the receptionist explained there was nothing that could be done; she had missed her number, which would have been called three times, and she would need to be booked in again. The distinct lack of empathy or any concern for the elderly lady’s welfare who had been sat waiting for two hours felt jarring. This was not the first time I had witnessed a similar exchange and I felt uncomfortable at the recurring power play between the ‘powerful’ receptionist and the ‘subordinate’ customer (Lee, 2010:1113). This, a recognisable power play born out of the ‘idea that public services should seek to treat the users of their services more like customers of private services’, has become ‘increasingly central to public service reform’ (Richter and Cornford, 2008:211) and had, I observed, evidently shaped the approach of South Traley council in forming an unequal, formalised distance between the ‘customer’ and its staff. Before I was able to hear the lady’s response, Jane appeared from the lift ahead of me and the day of ‘shadowing’ began.

Travelling

After a friendly exchange, Jane led me to her car which was not far from my own, and we began the one-hour journey to the location of the first PEP review meeting which was being held at a school outside the boundaries of South Traley. Initially concerned about how this

journey would be, given that in my previous interactions with Jane she had sometimes been forthcoming and others reticent, I was surprised to find we had no trouble in finding conversation. Jane began by telling me about the plan for the day and some background information about the young person, Lewis, whose PEP review meeting I would be observing. Lewis, she explained, is in year 10 at a new mainstream secondary school after his foster placement in South Traley had broken down and the new placement was out-of-borough. Knowing that 1 in 11 young people experience three or more placements in a year (Gov.uk, 2021), I was not surprised to hear that Lewis' placement had broken down.

However, I *was* surprised by the rush of sadness I felt as the government statistics I had spent so long reviewing were now attached to the lived experiences of a young person whose reality was one of 'chronic and repeated loss events around one's identity and sense of belonging within a permanent system' (Samuels, 2009:1229). Jane was complimentary about Lewis' new foster carers and confident that Lewis had settled well into his new school with the support of an engaged and proactive Designated Teacher (DT) who is doing her best to fulfil her statutory role in 'promoting the educational achievement of every looked-after and previously looked-after child on the school's roll' (Department for Education, 2018b:11). Jane shared that she was eager to talk to the DT about the use of the Pupil Premium Plus in addressing Lewis' needs, who has autism, and ameliorating the effects of his 'fragmented educational experience' and 'disrupted learning' (Department for Education, 2018b:7).

Momentarily turning my attention to the beautiful countryside through which we were now driving and the monotone repetitiveness of the phone satnav, Jane drew my attention back as she began to explain that she had done her best to inform everyone who would be present at today's review meeting and gain initial consent for me to attend. I was thankful she had taken time to make such calls, particularly as I was beginning to learn and experience the

peripatetic nature of her role as she travelled to attend multiple review meetings across the country every week, including a recent 6-hour round trip, with little time spent within the council offices. After further conversation, during which time elapsed quickly, the sat-nav directed Jane into the car park of a grey, concrete building with stripes of colour. Much to our surprise, given the lack of signage, this was Lewis' new secondary school where the PEP was being held. Having arrived 30-minutes early, we remained in the car as we waited for the time pass. Jane removed her iPad from her bag, placed it on her lap, and began to log into South Traley's system via 4G. As she did so, she sighed heavily and, sensing my expression of concern, explained she had just received an email which informed her that an unaccompanied asylum-seeking young person had gone into school, been verbally abusive, and was suspected of being under the influence. She described this as a "*heart sink moment*" because he had been "*doing well*" until this point and this would be a "*level 2 or level 3*" incident. Although not sure what a "*level 2 or level 3*" incident might be within the context of this young person's school, Jane's exasperation appeared to be linked to the record of negative behaviour rather than the events which had led the young person to attend school intoxicated. This, I felt was a symptom of the terrors of performativity (Ball, 2003) which are so deeply embedded within the neoliberal education machine and the practice of those, such as Jane, working with young people in local authority care.

Entering the School

With five minutes before the meeting was due to begin, Jane swiftly put her iPad away, and, with one foot already out of the car door, announced it was time to go in. Soon reaching a green metal gate, acting as a controlled break in the metal fence running the perimeter of the concrete building, Jane buzzed the intercom. A receptionist's voice filled our ears, "*Hello, can I help?*". "*Yes, we are here for a PEP...*" Jane replied, as the gate buzzed before she

could finish her sentence. Now approaching the glass sliding doors which lay behind the gate, Jane had to ring yet another intercom which finally permitted us to enter the school building. As this second “buzz” rang in my ears, I was made acutely aware of the role of the architectural composition of the school building in producing monitored, ‘docile bodies’ (students, staff, and visitors) (Foucault, 1991; Haggerty and Ericson, 2000) through the control of physical movement in and out. Now in the reception area, we were immediately handed a visitor’s badge and subsequently directed to a computer screen which required us to enter the car registration plate, have a photograph taken, and enter the number of the badge we had just received. Further trapped by the ‘roots’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 2019 [1987]) of the ‘surveillant assemblage’ of the school, which rely ‘on machines to make and record discrete observations’, we were now subject to the ‘interface of technology and corporeality’ as each of our bodies became a ‘flesh-technology-information amalgam’(Haraway, 1991; Haggerty and Ericson, 2000:611&612).

Having inputted the information, Jane and I were directed to sit on the sofa area behind us. It was as I sat down that I noticed how large the reception area was. On the left-hand side there were two child mannequins dressed in the school’s uniform and, around the rest of the room, a collection of furniture around a Persian-inspired rug and coffee table with flowers. The fusion of ‘homely’ and school décor within the reception area was a strange combination and felt somewhat like a distraction from the impossibility of escape from the monitoring practices of the school (Haggerty and Ericson, 2000). Just then two people entered through the sliding doors and smiled at Jane. They were Lewis’, foster carer, June, and Social Worker, Gail. After introducing myself and everyone made some small talk around the coffee table, the Designated Teacher, Holly, entered through the doors at the other end of the

reception area and led us upstairs into a room with a large rectangular table around which there were eight chairs.

The Review Meeting

Taking a momentary pause as I looked around the room trying to decide where I would be best placed, I sat down next to Jane who immediately requested that introductions³⁵ take place before the review meeting commenced. Jane was suddenly exuberating a confidence I had not yet witnessed during my time in South Traley as she took control of the meeting and offered to Chair. Without any objection, Jane formally opened the review meeting by asking Holly, “*Could you tell me about Lewis’ progress?*”. Nodding, Holly referred to the information on the laptop placed in front of her and, going through each of the subjects, read out Lewis’ predicted and current working grades. Having gone through this list at some speed, with the sound of Jane’s fingers inputting the information into the PEP form on her iPad filling any fleeting moments of silence, I was surprised that Jane had managed to notice there was a larger gap between Lewis’ predicted grade and current grade in subjects with a greater written element including English and History. Asking Holly what was being done in these subjects to help Lewis and if there was an identifiable use for the Pupil Premium Plus funding, I suddenly noticed, on the other side of the table, June’s body language change as she leant forward and moved her hand toward the centre of the table signalling that she wished to speak. Soon noticing, Holly asked June to share her thoughts, “*I think Lewis could use a laptop*” June explained directly to Holly. Already aware of South Traley’s reluctance to purchase laptops through my interviews with Diane, Rachel, and Jane due to the absence of measurable impact, I felt my hands become clammy and my heartbeat grow faster as I wondered how Jane might respond to June’s request. “*We don’t automatically provide*

³⁵ This was point in the PEP meeting where information and consent forms were provided, read, and signed.

laptops” Jane interjected, “*but you could use your Pupil Premium. We give you two payments of £700, and you can apply for additional, targeted funding*” as June continued to explained, speaking over Jane, she had been asking for a laptop since Lewis had joined the school.

Recognising the tension, Holly diffused the situation by explaining that each week Lewis misses the latter half of his History and first half of his English lesson, which run consecutively, to receive Speech and Language Therapy (SALT) which is what the Pupil Premium Plus funds. These sessions had been in place in his previous school and the Therapist had agreed to continue, Jane added, but would go some way in explaining the gap she had identified. Together, Gail, Jane, and Holly discussed Lewis’ language needs as related to his autism and the most recent report from the Therapist which identified an improvement in his speech in a 1:1 environment. This report which acted as an ‘impact indicator’ (De St Croix et al., 2020), led to an agreement between Gail, Jane, and Holly that Lewis’ SALT sessions would need to continue. However, now turning to June, Gail asked which day would be best for her to collect Lewis from school if the session could be arranged for 3-4pm. “*Wednesday if possible so I can pick him up after I have been at the Foodbank*” she replied. And, without any further discussion, Jane, Gail, and Holly made notes and they moved on.

Involving the Young Person

At that moment, the door knocked, and a receptionist appeared. “*Are you ready for Lewis to come in?*” she asked. With a unanimous nod from those in the room, Lewis’ smiling face appeared and, beckoning him in, Holly pointed to the seat between herself and June. Noticing my presence, Lewis and I exchanged a smile as Jane introduced me to him and allowed me to

explain why I was there³⁶. The meeting continued as Jane turned to Lewis and asked, “*How do you feel about your SALT sessions, Lewis?*”. Although he now appeared nervous, Lewis shared with the room that he enjoyed them, and they were making him more confident in his speech. Recognising the courage Lewis was demonstrating in speaking to a room of people including someone new (me), Gail quickly encouraged him: “*Lewis, let me just say how impressed I am with your speech and the courage you have shown in speaking in front of new people*”. In response, Lewis’ cheeks filled with colour as he looked down in his lap, trying to hide the smile that was now stretching from ear to ear. After this short exchange, the meeting continued at some pace as they moved through a series of topics: behaviour, homework, post-16 options, and prom. As these topics were covered, I became increasingly aware of the lack of direct communication between Lewis and the professionals around the table.

Despite having had extensive time for adult-led discussions before Lewis arrived in the room, the meeting continued in the same manner as they talked *about* him rather than *to* him. This struck me as being distinctly at odds with the concept of person-centred practice (PCP) which has ‘gained growing recognition across the contexts of health, social, care, and education’ in recent years (Corrigan, 2014:269). PCP is embedded within the SEND Code of Practice (Department for Education and Department of Health, 2015) which guides Education and Health Care Plans (EHCP), plans which are not to be ‘seen in isolation’ from others such as PEPs (Department for Education, 2021:36). EHCPs are to be guided by consultation with (Department for Education, 2015:147):

‘the child and the child’s parent or the young person throughout the process of assessment and production of an EHC plan. They should also involve the child as far as possible in this process. The needs of the individual child and young person should

³⁶This refers to providing information about the research and collecting the correct consent.

sit at the heart of the assessment and planning process. Planning should start with the individual and local authorities **must** have regard to the views, wishes and feelings of the child, child's parent or young person, their aspirations, the outcomes they wish to seek and the support they need to achieve them'.

On behalf of Lewis, who has an EHCP because of his diagnosis of autism (along with the 53% of young people in local authority care who have a diagnosis of SEND at the end of KS4 (Department for Education, 2020)), I found myself feeling frustrated that his PEP review meeting was not involving him 'as far as possible' (Department for Education, 2015:147). Perhaps this is because the PEP statutory guidance is far removed from PCP principles found within the SEND Code of Practice. In fact, the only section of the *Promoting the Education of Looked-After Children and Previously Looked-After Children: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities* (Department for Education, 2018c) guidance which refers to the child's voice can be found in a subsection titled 'Giving the Child a Voice'. Perhaps the shortest section of the guidance, 'giving voice' is defined as a responsibility to 'promote a culture' and 'understand the importance' of the child's voice without guidance on what this might look like in practice (Department for Education, 2018c:11).

Leaving

The meeting was drawn to a close as Jane checked through the PEP form on her iPad, confirming she had all the information required, and organised a date for Lewis' next review meeting the following term. This is because '[g]ood practice is to ensure the Social Worker, DT and carer have the date of the next PEP review meeting in their diary before they leave' (National Association of Virtual School Heads, 2019:44). As everyone drew their chair back, standing up to leave the room, I thanked Lewis for allowing me to be part of his review meeting and wished him all the best. He smiled politely in return. Holly led us back down the

stairs and into the reception area where we returned our visitors badges, said goodbye to Gail and June, and Jane and I got back into the car ready to drive onto the following review meeting.

8.3 Constraining and Channelling Affectivity: The Striated Space of PEPs

The Striated Space of PEPs

In the vignette above, several deep striations, or scores, of the Virtual School ensemble and, more specifically, the education space of PEPs emerge. All such scores, I argue, are technologies of control which serve, in this context, to contain and channel the affectivity of staff and young people which does not present performative ‘value’. Part of the (late) neoliberal (McGimpsey, 2017) molar structure which seeks to produce bodies ‘in debt’ who might be coiled by ‘continuous forms of control’ (Deleuze, 1992a:7), these scores mark out ‘paths’ within the ensemble which, already implicitly explored within the earlier chapters of this thesis, are made explicit within the practice of PEPs. The first of these scores is that of the hierarchical binary of gender – Male/Female – which, an effect of the molar patriarchal system, formed the wolf whistle into a kind of ‘hail’ via interpellation (Althusser, 1971) of me as ‘sex object’ (Kottler and Swartz, 1995:186). As my gender impinged upon my body (Lloyd, 1999:195), a kind of ‘hyper-visibility’ (Youdell, 2011:41) ensued as I found myself feeling vulnerable and this, a process of subjectivation, named and constrained my body as Female ‘Other’. Although this did not occur within the geographical space of the PEP, it serves as a reminder of the striations which exist around the female staff and young people within the ensemble, constraining their ability to express, safely, that which is affective.

The second of these scores is the ‘hierarchical space’ (Bayne, 2004:305) of South Traley Council offices which I repeatedly observed as I sat in the blue chairs and watched the power

imbalance between the council staff and the subordinate ‘customer’ unfold. This, an effect of the wider neoliberal machine, has transformed public services users into ‘customers’ (Richter and Cornford, 2008) who interact with representatives and, acting as gatekeepers, determine who is allowed ‘access’ to the requested service. It is the ‘rule-intensive’ (Tamboukou, 2008:360) structure of such institutions which represents another striation of the Virtual School ensemble, connecting into the PEP space as it contextualises the culture within which the Virtual School staff work.

Third, is the score through which ‘docile bodies’ (Foucault, 1991; Haggerty and Ericson, 2000) – of students and staff – are produced by the technologies of ‘societies of control’ (Deleuze, 1992a). It is within these societies that ‘one is never finished with anything’ (Deleuze, 1992a:5) as the ‘roots’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 2019 [1987]) of the educational system, which rely on ‘machines to make and record discrete observations’, forms bodies into ‘flesh-technology information amalgam’ (Harraway, 1991; Haggerty and Ericson, 2000:611&612). This reliance upon technology, a ‘mutation of capitalism’, to record and monitor acts as a ‘system of domination’ over the affective (Deleuze, 1992a:6&7). Linked to this striation, is the score of ‘knowledge’ which takes life from the ‘roots’ of surveillance. Within this context, knowledge of the young person is made ‘visible through non-human entities such as timetables, grades and resources’ which is, in turn ‘translated into provision’ (Parker, 2017:162). I observed this taking place in every PEP meeting as data became the ‘currency of investment’ and a linearity forged between provision costs, outputs, ‘impact’ (measurable outcomes), and monetary ‘value’ of such outcomes (De St Croix et al., 2020:450-457), constraining and channelling the affective.

Mapping the Virtual School Ensemble: The Role of Loss, Grief, Love, and Care

Finally, there is the score of the ‘systems of administrative rationality’ to which the ‘professionals’ of the Virtual School ensemble are subject and through which ‘control is exerted’ (Wang, 2011:144). This control is exerted in and through policy which constrains their practice and determines whose voice can be ‘heard as authoritative’ (Ball, 1993; Wang, 2011:144). One effect of such control is that young people’s voices and, therefore, their affective lives are not heard or only heard in circumscribed moments. Drawing on my ethnographic field notes, I focus on this last score as I consider the effects of and relationship between power and listening as it relates to the channelling and control of affect.

Listening and Power: An Adult Agenda

During my time spent shadowing Jane, I became increasingly aware of the power imbalance between the adult attendees and the young person for whom the meeting was being held. This imbalance was overtly articulated by the imposition of an adult, ‘professional’ agenda upon the young person who, if present, was invited to respond at various stages but impeded from being given the time and space to share their own agenda *and* have this heard (McLeod, 2007). This ‘professional’ agenda is directed by the Virtual School staff member who “*takes the lead*” (Sophie) in consultation with the PEP form which is focused on “*monitoring and reviewing*” (Wendy), engagement, behaviour, and progress. As a result, limits are placed upon the shape and direction of the review meeting. This form is completed, in South Traley, on an iPad via grade input and “*free text*” (Rachel) which is designed to evaluate “*what schools are putting in place for looked-after children, how they’re spending the Pupil Premium and really working with them to sort of identify what works and what doesn’t*” (Wendy). I immediately noted the effects of such limits in my first PEP review meeting as I witnessed the meeting happening *around* the young person, in which their voice ‘became almost tokenistic and their wishes were secondary to the more active entities such as

availability of tuition and resources' (Parker, 2017:165). This, an effect of the discursive power of policy, is evidence of the redistribution of voice where 'it does not matter what some people say or think, only certain voices can be heard as meaningful or authoritative' (Ball, 1993:15). The young person to whom I refer, William, a male student in Year 7, had recently moved to be in the same foster placement as his brother, upon his request, after his previous placement had broken down. Despite having requested to live with his brother in the face of loss and grief of breakdown and choosing to attend his PEP review meeting at a new school, all evidence of William's demonstrable engagement with his life and educational outcomes, little direct communication took place between William and the adults around the table. Instead, the meeting was rushed through at speed as a disengaged DT created a "cold" (Jane) atmosphere.

In this way, listening is 'closely bound up with issues of power', particularly given that the imposition of a 'professional' agenda for PEP review meetings serves to legitimise the marginalisation of young people's voices (Spicer and Evans, 2006; McLeod, 2007:278). As I continued to observe further PEP review meetings, I found this legitimisation to take place repeatedly as young people's voices were only heard upon invitation. This had the effect of foreclosing any opportunity for them to set the agenda themselves within a safe space as their voice was either channelled into the agenda set by the adults or evacuated entirely. This stands in conflict with the 'recent focus of pupil involvement in UK law' (Parker, 2017:166). One such example took place in a review meeting for Eno, a black, female student in Year 10. It was as Jane made her way through the PEP document, which was 'scaffolding the meeting' (Parker, 2017:159), that she reached the section about mental health and turned to Eno to ask, "*Eno, how is your mental health?*". I was immediately shocked by Jane's direct questioning of Eno in relation to a sensitive topic with a room of adults, some she knew well,

others not so. I looked to Jane to see if there was any recognition of this, but she seemed unaware as she waited upon a response from Eno. I then turned my attention to Eno as she convincingly claimed she was “*fine*” and appeared to be unphased by the direct questioning. It was her simultaneous smirk, however, that prevented me from knowing whether she was hiding the truth or facing disbelief at this questioning in front of a room full of professionals waiting in anticipation for an answer. This moment serves to evidence the focus on completing a form based around ‘accelerated progress and the closing of the attainment gap’ (Parker, 2017:165) at the detriment of care by considering the way in which sensitive questions, such as those pertaining to mental health, might be asked.

I use these ethnographic moments to trace the score of the ‘systems of administrative rationality’ (Wang, 2011:144) as the voices of the ‘professionals’ of the Virtual School ensemble, who are subject to the discursive power and control of policy, are made ‘meaningful or authoritative’ (Ball, 1993:15). Such distribution of voice serves as a means through which affect, that is loss, grief, love, and care, can be converted and channelled within the education space of PEPs. This is as young people’s voices are silenced or channelled in ways which might make their answers ‘valuable’ to the PEP process. This argument is supported by Parker (2017:163) who, through her ANT reading of change for young people in local authority care, observed ‘Mr Dunn’ take a ‘deterministic stance’ as he enrolled ‘Alice’s’ grades as ‘the truth’ of her academic performance which detracted ‘from her voiced opinion on her likes and dislikes in terms of subjects’. For clarification, I am not arguing that any of the practitioners I encountered during my ethnographic field work consciously seek to exclude the views of the young people for whom they are corporate parents, but that within the constraints of PEP policy, local and national, face ‘limited possibilities...for thinking ‘otherwise’ (Ball, 1993:15). Instead, I argue that with constrained

space to share and discuss feelings, emotions, sensations, ‘likes and dislikes’, and so on, ‘the flows of affectivities, bodies and meanings’ (Youdell and Armstrong, 2011:145) are, as already demonstrated in this thesis, converted and channelled by the various scores of the striated space of PEPs. Such channelling is an effect of the circulating relations of power which serves to (re)make young people in local authority care into subjects that are ‘recognizable’ (Butler, 2004:5; Youdell and Armstrong, 2011) within the Virtual School ensemble’s ‘space of closure’ (Bayne, 2004:302).

8.4 Affective Eruption: The Smooth Space of PEPs

Whilst there is much to be said about the scores of the straited space of PEPs, this must be considered in conjunction with the coexistent³⁷ smooth space which offers opportunity for ‘various components’ of the Virtual School ensemble to ‘align themselves to create a network that facilitates change’ for young people in local authority care (Parker, 2017:156). Such change is the product of the disruption, potentiality, and ‘becoming’ (Youdell and Armstrong, 2011:145) within the nomadic, ‘open space’ (Bayne, 2004:303) that is ‘in principle infinite, open, and unlimited in every direction; it has neither top nor bottom nor center; it does not assign fixed and mobile elements but rather distributes a continuous variation’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 2019 [1987]:475-476). It is important for this thesis to explore such space given that this is where future possibilities for an affectively-led, political Virtual School community, that resists the systematic disenfranchisement of loss, shows care, wrestles with subjectivations, and allows the affective to exist within the open space, might be imagined. I use the following, and final, section of this chapter, therefore, to draw upon an ethnographic

³⁷ The two spaces ‘*pervade* one another’ (Bayne, 2004:303) and there is a constant movement between ‘between deterritorialization – freeing ourselves from the restrictions and boundaries of controlled, striated spaces – and reterritorialization – repositioning ourselves within new regimes of striated spaces’ (Tamboukou, 2008:360).

moment of destabilisation (Parker, 2017) which helps to trace the PEP space ‘associated with movement and instability, through which...new identities and spatial practices become possible’ (Lysgård and Rye, 2017:2121). This moment occurred during a PEP meeting with an Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker (UASC), Asad, who is in year 11. An Arabic speaker, Asad was the only young person I observed who was present in their PEP review meeting from beginning to end. His continuous presence encouraged the adults to conduct a meeting more in line with PCP (Corrigan, 2014), particularly given that everything each of them said was translated for Asad to understand. I draw on this moment, which I have titled *The Wasp*, as a moment of affective disruption, one that fled from the scores of the striated space, a moment that I have not been able to forget. I use it to demonstrate the potentiality that exists within the PEP space, a space set up for the affective to exist if the coexistent smooth space is recognised and valued within the wider Virtual School ensemble.

The Wasp

As the Designated Teacher began to describe Asad as a “*role model student*” with hundreds of “*house points*”, from the corner of my eye I noticed a wasp fly through the open window. As the buzzing began to drown out any other sound, commanding everyone’s attention, silence fell upon the room. Asad’s foster carer ducked as the wasp flew above her head. Although fearful, as my heart began to race, I focused my efforts on remaining calm and doing my best to continue my observations. As I did so, I began to feel the tensing of bodies as the faces of agitation filled my line of sight. I was particularly aware of Jane’s physical response to the wasp who, sat next to me, began to lose her usual composure and reassured presence. Despite the emerging commotion as everyone tried to assess how to deal with the wasp, Asad’s calmness was distracting. Without looking to locate the wasp visually, Asad lifted his arm upright into the air, opened his hand, and crushed the wasp within his palm. As

I looked on in disbelief, Asad drew his arm down and released a dying wasp onto the table. Sitting back, he looked around confused by the anxiety which was, by now, palpable and seemed almost expectant that the meeting would now resume. I was impressed by his accuracy and absence of fear, but his foster carer immediately told him off as she warned him that the wasp was likely to sting him. With a similar tone, Jane joined in as she told him the wasp would be angered because of his actions. Noticing the way in which the practitioners had lost control of the room as the fear they felt was directed toward Asad in anger, Asad's translator leant over and calmly swept the insect onto the floor as he reassured everyone it was "*not a wasp*" and there was no need to worry. After a momentary pause, during which everyone silently reflected on what had just happened, the foster carer cut through the tension as she asked the Designated Teacher if Asad had enough points to attend the prom.

I use this ethnographic excerpt as a demonstrable moment of destabilisation (Parker, 2017), a 'line of flight' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2019 [1987]), as Asad's 'movements', which are 'operative at the minute or molecular level, and which need to be mapped' (Ringrose, 2011:603), deterritorialise the flow of power (Deleuze and Guattari, 2018 [1984]) which sustains the striated space. This deterritorialisation gives 'permission' for the affective to escape, momentarily, from the 'normative strata' (Ringrose, 2011:602); a kind of 'affective eruption' (Mountz, 2017:74). Of course, it cannot be overlooked that Deleuze and Guattari (2019 [1987]:293) use the analogy of the wasp and the orchid:

'A line of becoming is not defined by points it connects...on the contrary, it passes *between* points, it comes up through the middle...The line of becoming that unites the wasp and the orchid produces and shared deterritorialization: of the wasp, in that it becomes a liberated piece of the orchid's reproductive system, but also of the orchid,

in that it becomes the object of an orgasm in the wasp, also liberated from its own reproduction’.

This analogy is used to demonstrate ‘becoming’ as they are both ‘transformed into something else’, breaking ‘from their essential categories’ (Youngblood Jackson, 2010:581). In my own ethnographic excerpt, becoming is demonstrated as the essential categories of ‘wasp’ and ‘UASC young person in local authority care’ are disrupted as the two bodies come together. It is in the movement of Asad lifting his hand and crushing the wasp that a ‘newness...is created’ (Youngblood Jackson, 2010:581). Unprepared for this newness, the adults in the room are stripped of what is ‘meaningful or authoritative’ (Ball, 1993:15) and their affectivity also erupts. This is demonstrative of the ‘continual production of difference immanent within events’ (Stagoll, 2005:21) within the smooth space.

Whilst the smooth space of PEPs might be ‘terrifying’ (Youdell and Armstrong, 2011:148), it is only by tracing that which is ‘operative at the minute or molecular level’ (Ringrose, 2011:603) that the moments of ‘release’ from the normative scores of striation can be identified. In focusing on *The Wasp*, a moment which lasted no longer than a minute, I seek to draw attention to what can happen when ‘subjectivities and flows of affectivities’ are unsettled and the PEP space undergoes a kind of resignification (Youdell and Armstrong, 2011:150). This resignification has demonstrable effects on freeing individuals from their subjectivities, releasing the meeting from its normative structure, and dismantling the hierarchical power relations which stop young people’s voices from being heard. This can be seen in the shift of power as Asad crushes the wasp and the adults in the room show evidence of anxious bodily sensations which are translated into expressions of anger. In focusing on this small moment, I seek to argue that there exists possibility within the PEP space to allow affectivity to flow, for young people to explore their ambiguous loss and grief, and for

practitioners' compulsions of care to be shown. It is only in the smooth space that PEP practice, which escapes the scores of the striated space, can be imagined and the affective can outwardly coexist with the performative.

8.5 Concluding Thoughts

In this chapter I have sought to trace the enactment of PEPs within the Virtual School ensemble, focussing on the striated and smooth space as I followed this situational line of the map. I began by exploring PEPs as an 'obligatory passage point' (Callon, 1986; Latour, 1987) of the Virtual School ensemble, acting as a kind of 'funnel neck' (Parker, 2017:157) through which 'all relations' within the ensemble, including corporate parenting, the Pupil Premium Plus, and experiences of loss and grief, 'must flow' 'at some point' (Fenwick and Edwards, 2010:9). In doing so, I drew attention to the simultaneous role PEPs play in both constraining meaning and practice *and* opening up possibilities for 'becoming' (Youdell and Armstrong, 2011). Using Deleuze and Guattari's (2019 [1987]) theorisation of 'striated' and 'smooth' space, I then presented a vignette of a PEP meeting which, as a 'focused description of a series of events taken to be representative, typical, or emblematic' (Miles and Huberman, 1994:81), sought to foreground the critical discussion of these two coexistent spaces of PEPs which followed. In this discussion I considered the technologies of control which serve, in this context, to contain and channel the affectivity of staff and young people which does not present performative 'value'. Using an example of power and listening, I drew attention to the ways in which the circulating relations of power serve to (re)make young people in local authority care into subjects as 'recognizable' (Butler, 2004:5; Youdell and Armstrong, 2011) within the Virtual School ensemble's 'space of closure' (Bayne, 2004:302). Finally, drawing on an excerpt titled *The Wasp*, I traced the smooth space of PEPs to demonstrate their potentiality in the possibility and becoming of the ensemble. This is used as a way in which

to imagine a future ensemble which allows the affectivity of this smooth space to escape. If made productive, this escape might enable young people and practitioners to express their affectivity without being contained and constrained by the normative and hierarchical scores of the striated space which is made intolerable throughout this thesis.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

The Implications of a Mapping for Thinking About Radical Change Within and to the Virtual School Ensemble

9.0 Introduction

‘Instead of submitting ourselves to the tyranny of ‘alternatives’, perhaps we might embrace a commitment to uncertainty and the exploration of ethical heterotopias’

(Ball, 2021:391)

As the numbers of young people in local authority care continues to rise year on year and the social care system perpetuates inequality, there is no place, I argue, in research or in policy, for creating the ‘illusion of change...without...substance’ (MacAlister, 2022:4). That is why this thesis has sought to critically map the Virtual School ensemble, considering the implications of thinking for radical change. In the wake of the Independent Review of Children’s Social Care (MacAlister, 2022:8), which calls for a ‘dramatic whole system reset’ predicated on ‘loving relationships’, I recognise the need, however, to be cautious about urgently presenting a ‘once in a generation opportunity’ for change. Not wishing to mute the sense of urgency and growing discussions around young people’s vulnerability, in the ‘primary scene’ of infant dependency, to be exploited by abuse and neglect (Butler, 2003:10&17), the need for love and care based on ‘emotional intimacy’ (Page, 2018), and the social care’s systemic issue of ‘chronic and repeated loss’ (Samuels, 2009:1229), there is a parallel conversation which must take place. Beginning this conversation within this thesis, I argue that the continued and pervasive connection to economic costs ‘that continue to rise’ (MacAlister, 2022:8) and the performative demands for measuring ‘impact’ and ‘outcomes’

placed upon the Virtual School ensemble have violent consequences for a group of young people whose loss and grief experiences are subsequently channelled, converted – disenfranchised.

Arguing for a future Virtual School ensemble upon which (Professional) loving and caring relationships are made productive as means unto themselves, a ‘dramatic whole system reset’ (MacAlister, 2022:8) can, and must, only begin when the connections made between loss, grief, love and care and ‘outcomes,’ as a measure of their ‘value’, are dismantled. Without this dismantling, the loss and grief that young people face, and the love and care practitioners are willing to demonstrate, remain channelled and converted by a system which only provides authorisation to love and care in the face of loss and grief if it is of performative and, ultimately, economic ‘value’. With inherently violent effects, thinking beyond this and into furnishing a ‘sense of political community’ (Butler, 2003:12) within the Virtual School ensemble requires a conversation about how, at the level of policy, we might re-frame the construction of the ‘problematic’ young person in need of ‘intervention’ as a way in which to produce ‘outcomes’. To begin this conversation, I argue that by mapping the Virtual School ensemble, I have drawn attention to the need for critical ‘witnessing’ (Zembylas, 2006; Gerson, 2009). If critical witnessing is made productive, practitioners might be able to bang their fists on the table in rage as they shout, “[w]hat don’t you understand? *We are the parents!*” (Mary) without feeling like they are “*trying to ram a round peg in a square hole*” (Jane). This is only possible, however, if affective eruption can be freed from the grip of subjectivating processes which channel, convert, and foreclose opportunities for rage to “collapse into grief” (Butler, 2014:no pagination). In this concluding chapter, I seek to explore this further as I consider how I have attended to my research questions by tracing the articulations of four elements of the ensemble, the ways in which I have attempted to provide

an original contribution to the fields in which I wish to speak, and ultimately seek to articulate the implications of my thesis.

9.1 Returning to the Research Questions: Mapping the Virtual School Ensemble

RQ1. Loss and Grief

How are loss and grief articulated in the Virtual School ensemble?

Exploring the articulation of loss and grief within the Virtual School ensemble is an integral aspect of my ethico-political commitment to the inclusion of affect in an ethnographic mapping of the ensemble. This is because loss and grief are universal aspects of the human condition (Butler, 2003) which are further evoked by entry into local authority care by eliciting ‘abrupt changes in close relationships and family environments’ for which ‘anticipatory adjustment’ cannot be made (Mitchell and Kuczynski, 2010:437). For young people in local authority care, whose ‘primary scene’ is exploited (Butler, 2003:10) by acts of abuse and/or neglect (Gov.uk, 2021), the consideration of loss and grief as an element in the ‘composition of relations between parts’ (Deleuze, 1992 [1968]:218-219), is, I argue, indispensable within a thesis seeking to map the Virtual School ensemble. To map this aspect of the ensemble, and therefore answer the first research question, I sought to chart the recording and monitoring function of the neoliberal education machine and its effects on the articulation of loss and grief. To do so, I focussed on three effects: the machinic disenfranchisement of care and the impossibility of sustained enfranchising practice, the discursive production of the ‘neurologically damaged’ young person through processes of subjectivation, and the conversion or ‘translation’ of attachment theory in practice which further exemplified the previous effects. By tracing each of these effects, I demonstrated the confrontation between the individual ethic of care that drives practitioners’ desire to act as

engaged witnesses (Gerson, 2009) and the monitoring and recording demands of the neoliberal education machine which makes such practice impossible to sustain.

The emergence and nature of this confrontation signals a ‘way in’ to the articulation, and thus role, of loss and grief within the Virtual School ensemble. Importantly, following this ‘way in’ through analysis of my ethnographic data shows only fleeting opportunities for loss and grief to escape into the ensemble before it is captured and channelled and converted, and/or made into something ‘unspeakable’ (McIvor, 2012:412). The transient and ephemeral nature of enfranchising practice means that moments of escape are soon foreclosed, acting as a form of destruction and violence (Butler, 2003), by the neoliberal education machine. One way in which this foreclosure occurs is via the fusion and translation of Attachment Theory and neuroscience. This fusion, and subsequent translation, functions to subjectivate young people in local authority care into the position of ‘lack’ and ‘impossible learner’ (Youdell, 2006; Bradbury, 2013). This, I argue, leaves ‘no room for caring’ within the Virtual School ensemble and forces practitioners to work within a constant tension between their own ethical desire for caring practice and the machinic demands which are embedded so deeply within their ‘choices, beliefs, bodies, and desires’ (Cole and Gannon, 2017:81) that they begin to police their own practice. This means, in line with the literature concerning ambiguous loss, young people’s non-death loss experienced prior to entry into and whilst in the care system is perpetuated and disenfranchised, despite practitioners’ best efforts to C.A.R.E (communication, affirmation, recognition of experiences) (Mitchell, 2016; Mitchell, 2018), via the performative demands placed upon them. Overall, I argue that a future affectively-led, political Virtual School community cannot be understood without a foundational understanding of loss and grief as affectivities experienced by young people alongside the disenfranchising practices of the system in which they are forced to exist. Using my

ethnographic data to expose the role of loss and grief, I demonstrate the multiple effects of the neoliberal education machine which capture, convert, and channel such affects to render them measurable and ‘valuable’, performatively speaking. This has damaging effects on young people in local authority care who are, as a result, positioned as ‘impossible’ subjects, furthering the internalisation of their affective lives.

RQ2. Corporate Parenting

What do love and care as a ‘corporate parent’ look like in the Virtual School ensemble?

The love and care that young people in local authority care both need and deserve has tended ‘not to be a central theme in the care system, despite its relevance to children who have often not experienced adequate love in their early lives’ (Evans, 2020:72). As a result, it has become a ‘taboo’ not only for the young people themselves who ‘unconsciously forbid themselves’ from experiencing love and care but also for the practitioners working with them, leaving young people at risk of ‘remaining unloved within the care system’ (Evans, 2020:72). Attending to love and care, as affectivities, I argue, should be central to the work of the corporate parent and the functioning of the Virtual School ensemble as an affectively-led ‘political community’ (Butler, 2003:12) built upon an ethical responsibility to loss and grief as a critical ‘witness’ (Zembylas, 2006; Gerson, 2009). In Chapter 7, I attempted to trace the enactment of corporate parenting policy as its processes and practices are ‘written onto bodies’, producing certain ‘subject positions’ (Ball et al., 2012:3). Drawing on the concepts of Professional Love and the distinction between caring *for* and *about*, I worked within the refrain of Stephen Ball and Webb and Gulson to trace corporate parenting as it is ‘translated from text to action’, that is enacted (Ball et al., 2012:3). Such a tracing begins with corporate parenting policy texts which bind together, ‘in a particular system of meaning’ (Howarth and Stravrakakis, 2000:8), love and care which can be separated into seven monitorable

principles and connected back into the practice of corporate parenting. As such, a kind of ‘equivalence-making’ (Walton and Boon, 2014:355) is ‘written onto bodies’ (Ball et al., 2012:3) as an expectation of altruistic care is to be demonstrated in a way that is recordable and monitorable.

Drawing on my observational field notes, I was constantly drawn to the ‘compulsion to care’ (Page, 2018:138) demonstrated by the practitioners of the ensemble. However, whilst every practitioner appeared to shape their practice as a corporate parent by a genuine sense of care toward the young people, this did not extend into an ‘emotional intimacy’ which is necessary in the framework of Professional Love (Page, 2018:138). This, I argue, is because the ‘relational aspects’ of corporate parenting are channelled into a ‘universalised systems of assessment, monitoring and review’ (Holland, 2010:1677) so as to fulfil the performative demands of the neoliberal education machine by re-coding Professional Love (Page, 2018). Therefore, whilst corporate parenting policy employs ‘affective tones’ (Deleuze, 1994:139), these are used to obscure the performative underneath which forms practitioners as service providers who must care *about* the young people before caring *for* them (Steckley and Smith, 2011). Furthermore, in drawing attention to the two ‘modes’ of corporate parenting, I sought to demonstrate how such wider systems and forces produce a collision between caring and monitoring which, consistently disrupting their practice, leaves them to exist in a space of frustration. Unable to traverse both ‘modes’ simultaneously, the technologies of control, which serve to contain, convert, and channel affectivity, redirect the ‘compulsion to care’ (Page, 2018:138) into that which has immediate performative ‘value’. Overall, I argue that corporate parents are foreclosed from demonstrating love and care via an ‘emotional intimacy’ as their ‘compulsion to care’ is converted and channelled into that which is

measurable (Page, 2018:138), forcing them to resign to the fact that “*at the end of the day*”, they “*aren’t their parents, are they?*” (Elizabeth).

RQ3. The Pupil Premium Plus

What is the relationship between the Pupil Premium Plus and educational ‘value’ within the Virtual School ensemble?

As identified in answering the previous two research questions, the wider neoliberal context within which the Virtual School ensemble exists, and from which the performative is derived, places limits on the articulation of loss and grief, love and care. This is because the well-known consequences of performativity include the measurement, judgement, and regulation of what constitutes ‘value’. Much of this is defined in economic terms via the measurement of ‘long-term economic activity’; the production of bodies with ‘skills, experience and knowledge’ (Hall and Pulsford, 2019:242&249). This is a kind of exchange between capital investment and outcomes. Such an exchange is evident within the Pupil Premium Plus which ‘invests’ £2300 (now £2410) per capita in exchange for ‘raising the attainment of disadvantaged pupils of all abilities’ where data is used to quantify the ‘value’ between investment and outcomes (Education Skills and Funding Agency, 2021). In Chapter 6, I attempted to trace the movement of Pupil Premium Plus money as it flows from government (ESFA) to the young person through the local authority (Virtual School) and schools/(external) service providers.

Using the work of Deleuze (1971) and Smith (2011), I was able to critically investigate the relationship between the Pupil Premium Plus money – the usually ‘unexamined subtext of neoliberalism’ (Ball, 2012b:23) – and educational ‘value’ within the ensemble. This investigation allowed me to identify the Virtual School as a ‘pole’ which intercepts the

‘incoming and outgoing’ (Smith, 2011:43) of money, giving it permission or blocking it from flowing. Then, looking at the variety of ‘interventions’ used by the four local authorities and presenting three ‘case studies’ of external service providers commissioned by South Traley, I found that every intervention used by the Virtual Schools were deemed to “*demonstrate impact*” (Saleem). In cases where this ceased or did not happen, the flow of money was intercepted given that it could no longer be converted into stock, or ‘value’. I paid particular attention to the consequences of converting the affective into data in order that it might represent ‘value’ (Dewson et al., 2000). Therefore, the relationship between the Pupil Premium Plus and educational ‘value’ within the Virtual School ensemble is one characterised by the production of outcomes in a process of exchange. In the realisation of this exchange, young people’s ‘psychosocial complexity’ is flattened in favour of an ‘impact indicator’ (De St Croix et al., 2020:465). This has damaging and violent consequences for the young people of the ensemble.

9.2 Loss, Grief, Love, and Care: Making an Original Contribution

Through this thesis, which attempts to understand the role of loss, grief, love, and care in a wider map of the Virtual School ensemble, I have sought not to tell researchers and practitioners ‘what to think’ but to ‘intervene’ in established ways of thinking in order to make an original contribution to the relevant fields of research and practice (Fenwick and Edwards, 2010). To these relevant fields, namely (critical) education policy sociology (research) and the Virtual School (practice), I offer a critical account of a ‘whole’ (the Virtual School which comprises affective *and* techno-bureaucratic elements) in the context of the wider neoliberal education machine within which affectivity and performativity relate. In doing so, and focussing on four key policies within the Virtual School context, I proffer this thesis, first, as a contribution to existing scholarship which provides a critical account of the

‘makings and effects of contemporary education policy’ (Youdell, 2015:110). In using this scholarship, located within the field of (critical) education policy sociology and including the work of Professor Stephen Ball, Professor Deborah Youdell, and Doctor Ian McGimpsey, I was able to define policy as being ‘one part of a much wider ensemble of factors and forces’ (Youdell, 2015:110). By mapping the Virtual School as an ‘ensemble’ of this kind, I offer an imagination, to the Virtual School’s field of practice, a future community which is affectively-led and political by making productive both the loss and grief faced by young people in local authority care *and* the love and care already willing to be demonstrated by the practitioners.

Complimenting the critical tools of education policy sociology, I drew upon the theoretical contributions of Baruch Spinoza, Giles Deleuze, alongside Judith Butler, to furnish an ethico-political project. This is a kind of project which uses policy as a techno-bureaucratic ‘entryway’ to map the Virtual School ensemble but does not privilege this over other elements, including the affective. All engaging with the affectivity of the body, I drew upon the work of these theorists to offer an original contribution to the body of research which, as part of (critical) education policy sociology, engages with Deleuzo-Spinozian thinking. In doing so, I was able to formulate a theoretical framework of ontology via ethics which ‘permitted’ me to work with a ‘flattened’ ontology, bringing together the affective (loss, grief, love, and care) *and* the techno-bureaucratic (national and local policy, money, and processes of commissioning) as I mapped the ensemble. This shifts the way in which ‘contemporary subjectivity’ is constituted (Ruddick, 2010:23). Taking this forward into the development of a ‘fertile space’ (Müller and Schurr, 2016) between assemblage and Actor Network theories, I used the work of Müller and Schurr (2016), extended by Sage et al. (2020), to locate and furnish a space in which I could ethically *and* recognisably trace the role

of loss, grief, love, and care within the Virtual School ensemble. Part of this furnishing was the development of a language through which to describe the ‘whole’ (*ensemble*) Virtual School, its parts (*elements*), relational effects (*articulations*), how its relations come to be (*desire* and *affect*), and their results (*effects*).

By applying this theoretical framework to a new research and practice setting of children’s social care and, more specifically, the Virtual School, I sought to develop a means for ‘intervening in education policy for positive change’ (Gale, 2001; Savage et al., 2021:307). An area of research and practice which sparingly, if at all, engages with Deleuzo-Spinozian theory, I have made an original contribution to this field. Anchored by that which ‘I cease to be accepted’, the ‘intolerable (Foucault, 1994:175-176), I use this theoretical contribution to offer a ‘new’ way of thinking about the disenfranchisement of loss and grief and the converting and channelling of love and care within this field. Desiring to ‘make a difference’ to the way in which this field of research and of practice views that which is lost and grieved, and the opportunity provided by the Virtual School to witness such experiences in a caring and loving manner, I provide an alternative way of ‘doing and seeing the world’ (Blackmore, 2014:515). I do so in multiple ways, including by combining the concepts of ambiguous loss (Boss, 1999) and (dis)enfranchisement (Doka, 1999) to attend to the process and effects of a systematic conversion, channelling, and foreclosure of young people’s loss and grief which is not related to physical death but to changes elicited by entry into a particular system of ‘care’.

Identifying this loss and grief, alongside love and care, as affectivities, I drew on the work of Ahmed (2004) to offer an understanding of affect within the ensemble. ‘[D]eparting from the recent tendency to separate’ affect and emotion to, instead, acknowledge their contiguity as ‘they slide into each other; they stick, and cohere, even when they are separated’ (Ahmed,

2010:231), I took emotion and affect to be in a relational process of materialisation in which affect is ‘mediated’ by the ‘readings of the bodies of others’ (Ahmed, 2004:30). In doing so, I offer a contribution to the ‘affective turn’ of the social sciences (Clough, 2008). A turn indebted to the work of Spinoza and Deleuze, this carved out a space in which I was able to oppose the marginalisation of young people by rejecting the representational history of the social sciences. As a result, I attend to the ‘political potentials of affect and emotions’ (Zembylas, 2020:59&65) which is oftentimes removed from social work research and practice, including the Virtual School, as symptomatic of its offer of a “‘service’ rather than ‘care’ per se’ (Collins, 2018; Brown et al., 2019:221). I do so by tracing the (dis)enfranchisement of (ambiguous) loss and grief, the understanding of trauma and attachment, the nature of the relationships between corporate parents and the young people, and the relationship between affectivity and educational ‘value’ or performativity within the Virtual School ensemble.

As a ‘methodological entry point’ (Savage et al., 2021:311) into tracing these areas, I applied a version of the methodological approach presented by Youdell and McGimpsey (2015:119) labelled as ‘assemblage ethnography’. Forming my own iteration of this approach, I combined assemblage ethnography with ANT as a way in which to ‘plug’ into the Virtual School ensemble and trace the articulations of each of the elements – loss and grief, the Pupil Premium Plus, corporate parenting, and PEPs. As there are currently no critical ethnographic investigations of the Virtual School in which a researcher has spent an extended period embedded within a local authority observing and shadowing day-to-day practice, this is a key aspect of my original contribution. By doing so, I was able to:

1. Make productive the complexity of the Virtual School ensemble by holding together the affective *and* techno-bureaucratic across a ‘flat’ ontology

2. Hold together the forces of affectivity and performativity as part of the wider neoliberal education machine
3. Map the relationship between monetary flows, policy, organisations, affectivities, subjectivities, and so on by using policy as one of the ‘multiple entryways’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 2019 [1987]:12)
4. Trace four elements identified within the ethnographic field work: loss and grief, the Pupil Premium Plus, corporate parenting, and PEPs
5. Attend to the ‘trajectories of these elements as they change in state’ (Deleuze, 1992b cited in; Youdell and McGimpsey, 2015:120) and,
6. Take seriously the ‘intersubjective processes of being and becoming’ (Youdell and McGimpsey, 2015:119) to imagine future possibilities for the Virtual School ensemble.

This is a distinct methodological approach within the field of research pertaining to young people in local authority care and, more specifically, the Virtual School.

In tracing four elements of the Virtual School ensemble (loss and grief, the Pupil Premium Plus, corporate parenting, and PEPs), I attended to the performative charting and recording function of the neoliberal education machine and its effects on the articulation of both these elements and the affective (loss, grief, love, and care). In doing so, I first exposed the ways in which children’s social care continues to (un)do young people as their loss and grief is ‘not so much ignored as it is misinterpreted and misunderstood’ (Knight and Gitterman, 2019:168) and they are left to “dance” alone (Mitchell, 2016; Mitchell, 2018; Gitterman and Knight, 2019). Focusing on three effects of the competing demands between the performative and loss and grief (the machinic disenfranchisement of care and the impossibility of sustained enfranchising practice, the discursive production of the ‘neurologically damaged’ young

person through processes of subjectivation, and the conversion or ‘translation’ of attachment theory in practice which further demonstrates the previous effects), I identified a confrontation. This confrontation occurs between the individual ethic of care that drives the practitioners’ desire to act as ‘engaged witnesses’ (Gerson, 2009) and the monitoring and recording demands of the neoliberal education machine which makes such practice impossible to sustain. These functions of the neoliberal education machine, I argue, leave ‘no room for caring’ (Ball, 2003:224) within the Virtual School ensemble and, as a result, forms an environment of disenfranchisement which only allows for fleeting moments of critical ‘witnessing’ (Zembylas, 2006; Gerson, 2009) as affectivity ‘escapes’. As a result, I offer a developed understanding of the (dis)enfranchising processes and practices of the Virtual School ensemble as they pertain to loss and grief.

Second, by tracing the ways in which the affective is converted into data as the ‘currency of investment’ (De St Croix et al., 2020:450-457) by the wider neoliberal education machine, I drew attention to the way in which PEPs operate by coding the Pupil Premium Plus, its distribution and investment. I did so by tracing the movement of the Pupil Premium Plus money, focussing on its flow, stock, and code (Deleuze, 1971; Smith, 2011). In doing so, I contribute to the field of knowledge pertaining to the Pupil Premium Plus and to traditional social science which oftentimes neglects money as the ‘unexamined subtext’ of neoliberalism (Ball, 2012b:23). This is important because whilst there has been increasing attention within policy and academic literature to the Pupil Premium Plus, little is still known ‘about how it is spent and to what effect’ (Sebba and Berridge, 2019:540). Seeking to insert knowledge into this ‘gap’, I explored the various distributional models employed by the Virtual Schools included within the research. This enabled me to develop an understanding of the similarities and differences between the distributional models adopted by each of the local authorities and

the extent to which the ‘considerable flexibility’ (Department for Education, 2018a; National Association of Virtual School Heads, 2019) afforded to Virtual School Heads is used in practice. Furthermore, this allowed me to demonstrate the way in which the Pupil Premium Plus as money, or ‘financial practices’, brings into existence ‘value’ via investment (Ball, 2012b:23) through case studies of three external service providers commissioned by South Traleay.

Third, I identified the tension the corporate parents of the Virtual School ensemble experience as they navigate their ‘compulsion to care’ (Page, 2018:138) alongside the performative demands placed upon them by the wider neoliberal education machine. In doing so, I contribute to the small body of critical literature pertaining to corporate parenting by attempting to extend its theoretical and detached analysis into an investigation of its practice, maintaining a critical awareness of the relationship to and the processes of the neoliberal education machine. Seeking to bring an understanding of the affective – love and care – to this body of literature, I traced corporate parenting policy as it is ‘translated from text to action’ (Ball et al., 2012:3) within the Virtual School ensemble. ‘Beginning’ with the ‘affective tones’ (Deleuze, 1994:139) employed by policy texts, I contribute an understanding of the distance between the framework of Professional Love (Page, 2018) and that of corporate parenting via a re-coding. Drawing on the distinction between caring *about* and caring *for* (Steckley and Smith, 2011) to develop this analysis, I identified the tension experienced by corporate parents of the Virtual School ensemble which results in feelings of frustration as their ‘compulsion to care’ is channelled and converted, foreclosed from developing into an ‘emotional intimacy’ (Page, 2018:138). As a result, I contribute to the existing argument that corporate parenting is part of a fragmented network (Rocco-Briggs, 2008) which curates relationships within ‘resource limited, bureaucratic, statutory

organisational contexts' and, as a result, enacts 'surveillance, control and protection of service users' rather than developing loving relationships (Collins, 2018:7&16; Page, 2018; Turner and Percy-Smith, 2020).

Finally, I positioned PEPs as an 'obligatory passage point' (Callon, 1986; Latour, 1987) of the Virtual School ensemble through which 'all relations' within the ensemble, including corporate parenting, the Pupil Premium Plus, and experiences of loss and grief, 'must flow' 'at some point' (Fenwick and Edwards, 2010:9). Through this positioning, I contribute knowledge to the practice of this policy as it is enacted within the Virtual School ensemble. Applying the concept of smooth and striated space (Deleuze and Guattari, 2019 [1987]) to the analysis of my PEP observations, I was able to develop the existing argument that PEPs act as a kind of 'funnel neck' (Parker, 2017:157) as I traced the simultaneous constraints and openings produced by the practice of PEPs within the Virtual School ensemble. It was through this tracing I demonstrated the ways in which PEPs serve to (re)make young people in local authority care into 'recognizable' subjects (Butler, 2004:5; Youdell and Armstrong, 2011) *and* offer potentiality for allowing affect to escape from the normative and hierarchical scores of the ensemble. As a result, I contribute an opening through which a wider discussion might take place about the future possibilities of the Virtual School ensemble. These possibilities are ones in which affectivity might be freed from the deep striations which currently foreclose opportunities for rage to "collapse into grief" (Butler, 2014:no pagination) and practitioners from responding through 'emotional intimacy' (Page, 2018:138).

Overall, I have made an original contribution to the relevant fields of (critical) education policy sociology and the Virtual School through this critical mapping of the Virtual School ensemble. Paying attention to the role of loss, grief, love, and care within the context of the

wider neoliberal education machine which relates performativity and affectivity, I have been able to draw attention to the damaging and violent processes and practices of the ensemble. However, I have also been able to identify moments of ‘hope’ by drawing attention to enfranchising practices and moments of affective escape. I offer this as a platform from which a future affectively-led, political community might be imagined. From this offering, I do not extend into conceiving of ‘alternatives’ but find satisfaction in revealing the Virtual School’s ‘contingency’, making it intolerable rather than seeking to present a set of actions required for its improvement (Ball, 2020:877). In the final section of this chapter, which brings this thesis to a close, I think about the implications of my findings and arguments as I tentatively ‘peer’ into an alternative space.

9.3 Implications of Mapping the Virtual School Ensemble

Whilst I have drawn attention to the channelling, conversion, and sometimes foreclosure of loss, grief, love, and care, there remains a need to address the implications this work might – and does – have on policy and practice. Given that I locate my work within the field of (critical) education policy sociology, my tendency, as I come to the final conclusions of my research, could be to think about the ways in which I might offer a kind of rational, ‘redemptive’ account of a future Virtual School ensemble with a series of implications and suggestions for policy and practice. This would involve occupying the space of policy sociology which teeters between a ‘romantic modernism – *we just have to get it right* – and a pragmatic neoliberalism – *it needs improvement* – both of which tie us, in different ways, to the tired but resilient fantasies of education policy’ (Clarke, 2019; Ball, 2020:870). Not wanting, however, to tell researchers and practitioners, or even policymakers, ‘what to think’ but, instead, to ‘intervene’ in established ways of thinking (Fenwick and Edwards, 2010), I make an attempt to take seriously Ball’s (2020:877) call to resist the desire to ‘conceive of

alternatives' which are not possible 'within the discursive possibilities we' currently inhabit but, instead, find satisfaction in revealing the Virtual School's 'contingency', making it intolerable rather than seeking to present a set of actions required for its improvement (Ball, 2020:877).

Having already exposed the contingency of the Virtual School ensemble by founding my research upon a commitment to that which is intolerable through the production of a critical mapping, I have repeatedly drawn attention to the nature and effects of this ensemble on practitioners and young people as it functions in the refrain of the neoliberal education machine. Of particular concern for this thesis is the damaging consequences of the problematisation of young people in local authority care as in need of 'intervention' to produce, and improve, quantifiable 'outcomes' and the production of practitioners as service deliverers commissioned to pursue such 'outcomes'. Therefore, whilst I take seriously Ball's (2020:870&877) call to resist the desire to 'conceive of alternatives', recognising the need 'for critique rather than simply criticism as a starting point for thinking education differently', stopping short of peering 'over the edge' (Allan, 1999:48) of the current Virtual School ensemble into an alternative space is, I contend, to fall foul of the coils of the serpent (Deleuze, 1992a).

Acknowledging this may well be an investment into the 'comforts of hope' (Ball, 2020:877) however, I take this 'risk' to fulfil my commitment to producing an ethico-political project for a marginalised group of young people. In other words, without making any kind of attempt to imagine a future 'fundamental reconstruction' (Allen, 2015:12) of the Virtual School ensemble, I would be giving in to the very real 'absurdity of education' (Ball, 2020:877) which, just like the conception of impossible alternatives, also has damaging

consequences for a group of young people already foreclosed from occupying the space of the ‘ideal learner’ (Youdell, 2006; Bradbury, 2013). It is as much an ethical choice as it is a ‘pursuit of hope’ (Allen, 2015:8), therefore, to use the critical mapping of this thesis to call for a conversation, at the level of policy, which wrestles with the productivity of practitioner love and care as a form of ‘witnessing’ used to attend to and enfranchise loss and grief experiences of young people within the Virtual School ensemble.

To imagine this productivity, and reject the neoliberal, machinic and violent problematisation of young people within the ensemble, I specifically argue for a continued conversation around the re-framing, at the level of policy, of the terms of reference used to understand and improve the educational trajectories of young people in local authority care. These terms of reference, I argue, must be sourced in the development of a greater understanding, a ‘getting lost’ (Lather, 2007; Ball, 2021) in the (ambiguous) loss and grief experiences of young people in local authority care and the role that love and care, not predicated on the production of outcomes, might have on the enfranchisement of such experiences in practice. This conversation will contribute, I argue, to opening a ‘space in which education may be thought differently’ (Ball, 2021:390) if ‘emotional intimacy’ (Page, 2018) is approached as being productive for the sake of forming a “political community” (Butler, 2014:no pagination). A community which exists as an ‘enduring presence’ through commitment to ‘dialogue, knowledge and memory in the face of fear and forgetting’ (Gerson, 2009:1355).

This opening must grasp on to the desire of the Virtual School, which is sourced, I argue, in the potentiality of the ensemble which, when thought of as a formation of elements (affective and techno-bureaucratic), is ‘uniquely positioned’ to enfranchise young people’s loss and grief at the ‘micro-, mezzo-, and macro level’ (Knight and Gitterman, 2019:165). This desire

was identified throughout this thesis in spaces such as the resources available to the ensemble, the fleeting moments of affective escape, and the practitioners' 'compulsion to care' (Page, 2018). This is the starting point, I argue, for imagining a future affectively-led political community which takes seriously the ambiguous loss and grief experiences of young people in local authority care and the role that love and care can play in its enfranchisement. Practically speaking, extending the findings of this thesis, and contributing to this conversation would begin by investing further research which listens to the voices of the young people of the ensemble. The ethnographic research of this thesis, cut short due to the diagnosis of a life-threatening illness, is unable to extend this conversation as built upon the experiences, needs, and desires of the young people which listens to and elevates their voice. This is integral to avoid further claims to change as 'illusion...without...substance' (MacAlister, 2022:4).

In summary, through this ethnographic exploration of the Virtual School ensemble, I have produced a critical map which, in tracing the articulations of four elements, consistently points to the damaging effects the performative underneath has on the role of loss, grief, love, and care. Determined to refute and refuse (Ball, 2021) such demands, I join the recently published Independent Review of Children's Social Care in calling for a 'dramatic whole system reset' (MacAlister, 2022:8). However, unlike this Review, I do so based upon the pressing need to dismantle the connections made between loss, grief, love and care and 'outcomes,' as a measure of their 'value'. Returning, then, to a quotation from Jane, who works for South Traley Virtual School, I urge policy makers, practitioners, and researchers to recognise the value of 'getting lost' (Lather, 2007; Ball, 2021) in the damaging and violent consequences of a system which is "*trying to ram a round peg in a square hole...just banging, and...doing damage*" to the lives of a group of young people who exist in an

‘unfinished process of grieving’ (Freud, 1923; Butler, 1995:166). This group is one who need to be permitted to let their “rage collapse into grief” (Butler, 2014:no pagination) knowing they can do so within a community made up of committed and engaged witnesses who are permitted to create ‘liveable meaning’ (Gerson, 2009:1343) via ‘emotional intimacy’ (Page, 2018).

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Summary of Field Work

1a. Semi-Structured Interviews

	Pseudonym	Job Title	Location	Date
1.	Diane	PEP Improvement Officer	South Traley	07.12.18
2.	Rachel	Virtual School Head Teacher	South Traley	12.12.18
3.	Wendy	PEP Quality and Compliance Officer	South Traley	12.12.18
4.	Alex	Primary PEP Officer	South Traley	17.12.18
5.	Jane	Secondary School Improvement Officer	South Traley	19.12.18
6.	Stuart	CEO Online Tutoring Company	South Traley	17.01.19
7.	Suzie	Equestrian Centre (Therapy)	South Traley	05.02.19
8.	Sophie	Social Worker - CP Team	South Traley	15.02.19
9.	Jack	Employability Consultant for Careers Company	South Traley	22.02.19
10.	Saleem and Mary	Virtual School Head Teacher x2	East Withstell and Fordhill	06.03.19
11.	Elizabeth	Designated Teacher	South Traley	21.03.19
12.	Helen	School Liaison Teacher	Wamslow	25.04.19
13.	Rachel	Virtual School Head Teacher	South Traley	26.04.19
14.	Richard	Virtual School Specialist Support	South Traley	26.04.19

1b. Observations and Activities

	Activity	Location	Date
1.	Meeting to discuss Local Authority A project involvement	South Traley	07.09.18
2.	Meeting to finalise Local Authority A project involvement	South Traley	28.09.18
3.	Time spent in council offices – DBS discussions	South Traley	03.10.18
4.	Designated Teacher Forum	Secondary school (South Traley)	18.10.18
5.	Trauma and Attachment Training	Secondary school (South Traley)	22.10.18
6.	Virtual School training day	South Traley	24.10.18
7.	National Careers Event	Birmingham NEC (South Traley)	16.11.18
8.	Meeting with VSH to update on project	South Traley	19.11.18
9.	Day of interviews with staff and staff Christmas lunch	South Traley	19.12.18
10.	Visit to online tutoring company offices	Company offices (South Traley)	16.01.19

Mapping the Virtual School Ensemble: The Role of Loss, Grief, Love, and Care

11.	Day of meeting with VSH to update on project	South Traley	17.01.19
12.	Visit to alternative education provision setting (charity)	AEP (South Traley)	28.01.19
13.	Careers event in a secondary school	Secondary school (South Traley)	30.01.19
14.	Tour of equestrian therapy centre (company and charity)	Equestrian Centre (South Traley)	05.02.19
15.	Time spent waiting for interview with Social Worker	South Traley	14.02.19
16.	Day of interview with Social Worker	South Traley	15.02.19
17.	Careers event for young people in local authority care	Meeting room (South Traley)	22.02.19
18.	Day of interview with VSH's of East Withstell and Fordhill	East Withstell	06.03.19
19.	Day of interview with Designated Teacher	Secondary school (South Traley)	21.03.19
20.	PEP Meeting	Secondary school (South Traley)	28.03.19
21.	PEP Meeting	Secondary school (South Traley)	28.03.19
22.	PEP Meeting	Secondary school (South Traley)	02.04.19
23.	PEP Meeting	Secondary school (South Traley)	02.04.19
24.	PEP Meeting	Secondary school (South Traley)	02.04.19
25.	Interview with School Liaison Teacher	Pub, Wamslow	25.04.19
26.	Day of interviews with Virtual School staff	South Traley	26.04.19
27.	PEP Meeting	Secondary school (South Traley)	01.05.19
28.	PEP Meeting	Secondary school (South Traley)	03.05.19

Appendix 2: Interview Schedule

Interview Schedule for All Practitioners

Interview Schedule (All Practitioners)

Introductions and what is going to happen

1. Thank you for agreeing to take part in this interview and your willingness to give up your time to talk to me.
2. This interview is intended as an informal discussion about the Pupil Premium Plus.
3. The interview should last no longer than an hour. I will ask a few questions and maybe use some prompting statements or questions if there are things that I would like to explore further, but this should really be a conversation about the Pupil Premium Plus led by your own thoughts and opinions. Are there are limits on your time which we need to be conscious of?
4. Introduce myself – Hannah, doctoral research at the University of Birmingham. Conducting a research project which looks at the Pupil Premium Plus and the effects the money has on looked-after children and young people’s educational experiences.
5. Can I just check that you have received the information which was sent to you prior to this interview and that you have understood it? Are there any questions or issues that have arisen from it?
6. The interview will contribute to the research study which will be written into a thesis for my PhD.
7. The interview will be recorded.
8. As is detailed within the information sheet, you will be anonymised within the data. This means I will make every effort to ensure you are not identifiable from the interview data. You, the organisation you are working for, and the location will be anonymised within the thesis. However, anonymity cannot be guaranteed.
9. Please could I ask you to sign the consent form? I also should remind you that if at any point you would like to withdraw from the interview, you have every right to do so.
10. Is there anything you would like to discuss before the audio recorder is turned on?

Switch on audio recorder.

Introductory Questions

1. Could you tell me about your role as [x] and what this entails on a day to day basis?
2. How long have you worked within this role?

3. What did you do prior to this role? Do you think it prepared you for this role?
4. What qualifications do you hold that relate to this role?

Pupil Premium Plus

So, could you tell me what you know about the Pupil Premium Plus and how your role relates to it?

Things to cover:

1. Their understanding of the PP+
2. How their role relates to the young people and the PP+ (and other policies) - what do they do?
3. What do they think of the PP+?
4. Have they had any training on how to use the PP+?
5. How do they view LACYP? (Take note of language used to describe the children)
6. What interventions have they seen the PP+ fund?
7. How do the PEP meetings work? Do they discuss the PP+?
8. How is the PP+ allocated? (For VSH and for other stakeholders)

[Is there anything we haven't talked about that they would like to/think we should discuss?]

Closing Comments

1. Thank you for your time and very helpful contribution.
2. You are still entitled to withdraw from the project until 31st January 2019 but after this point you will be unable to as your data will have formed part of my research outputs.
3. Are there any closing comments you would like to make?

The interview will be recorded and then transcribed but it may be important to make quick initial notes and thoughts during the interview:

Notes:

Appendix 3: Observation Schedule

Appendix 3a: Virtual School Observation Schedule

Virtual School Observation Schedule

The observations of Virtual School will take a relatively unstructured format. However, there are a series of research themes, drawn from the research questions, which I should consider when writing my field notes:

1. Understanding of Pupil Premium Plus
 - a. Use, purpose, definition – through language used
2. Allocation of Pupil Premium Plus to educational providers
3. Budget management
4. Limits of use – educational focus?
5. Current use of Pupil Premium Plus
 - a. Are there discussions/uncertainties?
 - b. Problems occurring?
 - c. Positive uses?
6. Opinions of education policies including Pupil Premium Plus and Corporate Parenting
7. Involvement and interaction with other stakeholders
 - a. Distribution of responsibility to stakeholders
8. Language used when talking about educational policies and young people
 - a. With me
 - b. To other colleagues
 - c. To other stakeholders
9. Interactions/relationships with young people
10. Involvement of young person in decisions

Session Information

Date	
Time Start	
Time End	
Venue(s)	
People Present	

Fieldnotes

Appendix 3b: Personal Education Plan Meeting Observation Guide

Personal Education Plan Meeting Observation Template

The observations of Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings will take a relatively unstructured format, following the meeting as it unfolds. However, there are a series of research themes, drawn from the research questions, which I should consider when writing my field notes:

1. Time of session
 - a. Has the young person been taken out of lesson for the meeting to take place?
2. Location of the session
 - a. Description of the room – initial feelings about the room
 - b. Room in view?
3. Physical structure of the meeting
 - a. Seating/table arrangements
 - b. Position of professionals versus young person
4. Involvement of the young person in the meeting
5. Engagement of the young person in the meeting
6. Approach of professionals to the young person
7. Discussion of the Pupil Premium Plus in the meeting
 - a. New use?
 - b. Evaluation of previous use?
 - c. Professionals involved in the discussion – who leads?
 - d. Professionals’ approach to Pupil Premium Plus
 - e. Young person’s response to Pupil Premium Plus
8. Prominence of the Pupil Premium Plus in the meeting
 - a. Minor or major part
9. Methods used to document Pupil Premium Plus previous and future use

I will observe a series of PEP meetings, I will not partake in any of the discussions and endeavour not to become a pseudo-member of the meeting.

Session Information

Date	
Time Start	
Time End	
Venue(s)	
People Present	

Fieldnotes

Appendix 4

Appendix 4a: Information Sheet for Stakeholders (Interview)

The Pupil Premium Plus: The Implementation and Effects of Educational Policy for Children and Young People in Local Authority Care

Interviews: Information Sheet for Stakeholders

It is well known that children and young people in local authority care are less likely than their peers to achieve the national benchmark at GCSE level. There have been several policy measures introduced to try and close the educational gap between these young people and their peers. One of these measures is the Pupil Premium Plus which provides £2,300 per young person in local authority care (or adopted). This research project is collecting information, specifically, about the implantation and effects of the Pupil Premium Plus and, more broadly, the implementation and effects of educational policy for children and young people in local authority care.

I am a doctoral researcher from the School of Education, University of Birmingham and the research project has been approved by the ethics committee at the University of Birmingham. In trying to understand the implementation of the Pupil Premium Plus and its effects, I am organising; observations of the Virtual School team, schools, and Personal Education Plan meetings; interviews with key stakeholders (Virtual School Heads, head teachers, teachers, foster carers, and social workers); and focus groups with children and young people in foster care.

You have been provided with this information sheet because you are a key stakeholder within the Pupil Premium Plus policy. I would like to interview you to explore your interaction with and views of the Pupil Premium Plus. The interview will feel much like an ordinary conversation, allowing you to discuss the areas you feel are most important. The interview will last approximately one hour and, with your permission, will be audio-recorded.

Your participation is voluntary but if you do agree to participate, the interview will be arranged at a suitable time and in a convenient place for you. Within the interview, you do not have to discuss anything you do not wish to, and you can change your mind about giving permission. I will take great care to ensure that their data is handled and stored confidentially and securely. This means only my doctoral supervisors and I will have access to the raw data, hardcopies of which will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and electronic copies on password protected and encrypted devices. Your data will be used only for the purposes of the research and presented in an academic context, namely my thesis and at academic conferences. All outputs will protect your identity by using pseudonyms and removing other identifying information such as school names and locations. The data will not be shared with any third party.

If, after reading this information, you are willing to participate in the interview, please refer to the two identical consent forms to sign. One form I will keep for my records and the other will be for you to keep. This consent form will confirm your agreement to partake and will give you the details of how you can withdraw if you wish to, please keep this safe. It is your right to withdraw and you can do this by contacting me on the email address below at any point before Monday 7th October 2019. Withdrawal will not be possible after this date as the

data will have been pseudonymised, meaning I will no longer be able to identify you and remove your data from the project.

If you would like any further information about the research project you can contact me via email at [REDACTED] or my project supervisors: Dr Ian McGimpsey [REDACTED] and Dr Kalwant Bhopal [REDACTED]

Thank you for your interest in my project,

Hannah Bowden,
Doctoral Researcher,
University of Birmingham

Appendix 4b: Consent Form for Stakeholders (Interview)

**UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM**

The Pupil Premium Plus: The Implementation and Effects of Educational Policy for Children and Young People in Local Authority Care

Interviews: Consent Form for Stakeholders

This research project looks, specifically, at the implementation and effects of the Pupil Premium plus policy and, more broadly, at the implementation and effects of educational policy for children and young people in local authority care. I am a doctoral researcher at the University of Birmingham and, alongside focus groups with young people who receive the money, will be conducting observations of Personal Education Plan meetings, Virtual School Heads, and classrooms; and interviews with children and young people and with key professionals involved with the Pupil Premium Plus (the Virtual School team, head teachers, teachers, social workers, and foster carers).

By signing this consent form, you are agreeing to be interviewed about the Pupil Premium Plus. This interview will last approximately an hour and, with your permission, will be audio-recorded, as detailed in the information sheet. You are also agreeing for the data to be collected, stored, and used to conduct the research project, also explained in the information sheet.

To show that you have been fully informed about the research and the ways I will use the information I gather from my research, and to confirm that you give you consent to participate in the research (please see below about withdrawal), please sign and date below:

I agree/do not agree for my interview to be recorded (Please delete as appropriate)

Name: _____
(please print and sign)

Date: _____

You have the right to withdraw from the research. If you would like to withdraw from the research, please email me at [REDACTED] by Monday 7th October 2019. Withdrawal before this date will enable me to remove any information relating to the young person before I include the data within my research outputs. Notification after this date will prevent withdrawal as the data will be pseudonymised and included in the research outputs.

If you feel that you need to make a complaint about any part of my research, you are free to do. In this eventuality, please contact Dr Ian McGimpsey at [REDACTED]. Any complaint will be treated in the strictest of confidence and pursued in line with the University of Birmingham complaints procedure.

Thank you for agreeing to take part,
Hannah Bowden, Doctoral Researcher, University of Birmingham

Appendix 4c: Information Sheet for Virtual School Staff (Interviews and Observations)

The Pupil Premium Plus: The Implementation and Effects of Educational Policy for Looked-After Children and Young People in Local Authority Care

Interviews and Observations: Information Sheet for Virtual School Head Teachers.

It is well known that children and young people in local authority care are less likely than their peers to achieve the national benchmark at GCSE level. There have been several policy measures introduced to try and close the educational gap between these young people and their peers. One of these measures is the Pupil Premium Plus which provides £2,300 per young person in local authority care (or adopted). This research project is collecting information, specifically, about the implantation and effects of the Pupil Premium Plus and, more broadly, the implementation and effects of educational policy for children and young people in local authority care.

I am a doctoral researcher from the School of Education, University of Birmingham and the research project has been approved by the ethics committee at the University of Birmingham. In trying to understand the implementation of the Pupil Premium Plus and its effects, I am organising; observations of the Virtual School team, classrooms, and Personal Education Plan meetings; interviews with key stakeholders (Virtual School Heads, head teachers, teachers, foster carers, and social workers); and focus groups with children and young people in foster care.

You have been provided with this information sheet because I would like to invite you to partake in the research project. I would like to observe your work as a member of the Virtual School team. The observations will focus on your work with the children and young people in care, other stakeholders involved with the Pupil Premium Plus (e.g. teachers, social workers, and foster carers). These observations will not require you to do anything different. I would also like to interview you to further explore you work with, understanding of, and experience with the Pupil Premium Plus. This interview will last approximately one hour and with your permission, will be audio-recorded. The interview will be arranged at a convenient time and will take place in a suitable and comfortable environment.

Your participation is voluntary. You will not have do not discuss anything you do not wish, and you can change your mind about giving permission by withdrawing from the observations and/or interview at any point. Only my doctoral supervisors and I will have access to the raw data, hardcopies of which will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and electronic copies will be stored on password protected and encrypted devices. Your data will be used for the purposes of the research and presented in an academic context, namely my thesis and within academic conferences. All outputs will protect your identity by using pseudonyms and removing other identifying information such the local authority's location. The data will not be shared with any third party.

If, after reading this information, you are willing to partake in the focus group, you will find two identical consent forms to sign. One form I will keep for my records and the other will be for you to keep. This consent form will confirm your permission to participate and will give you the details of how you can withdraw if you wish to, please keep this safe. You have every right to withdraw from the research; you can contact me on the email address provided below. You can withdraw at any point until Monday 7th October 2019. Withdrawal will not

be possible after this date as the data will have been pseudonymised, meaning I will no longer be able to identify you and remove your data from the project.

If you would like any further information about the research project you can contact me via email at [REDACTED] or my project supervisors: Dr Ian McGimpsey [REDACTED] and Dr Kalwant Bhopal [REDACTED]

Thank you for your interest in my project,

Hannah Bowden,
Doctoral Researcher,
University of Birmingham

Appendix 4d: Consent Form for Virtual School Staff (Interviews and Observations)

**UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM**

The Pupil Premium Plus: The Implementation and Effects of Educational Policy for Children and Young People in Local Authority Care

Interviews and Observations: Consent form for Virtual School Employees

This research project looks, specifically, at the implementation and effects of the Pupil Premium plus policy and, more broadly, at the implementation and effects of educational policy for children and young people in local authority care. I am a doctoral researcher at the University of Birmingham and, alongside focus groups with young people who receive the money, will be conducting observations of Personal Education Plan meetings, Virtual School Heads, and classrooms; and interviews with children and young people and with key professionals involved with the Pupil Premium Plus (the Virtual School team, head teachers, teachers, social workers, and foster carers).

By signing this consent form, you are agreeing for your working practice to be observed and to be interviewed about the Pupil Premium Plus, as detailed in the information sheet. You are also agreeing for their data to be collected and used to conduct the research project, also explained in the information sheet.

To show that you have been fully informed about the research and the ways I will use the information I gather from my research, and to confirm that you give you consent to participate in the research (please see below about withdrawal), please sign and date below:

I agree/do not agree for my interview to be recorded (Please delete as appropriate)

Name: _____
(please print and sign)

Date: _____

The young person has the right to withdraw from the research. If they would like to do so, please email me at [REDACTED] by Monday 7th October 2019. Withdrawal before this date will enable me to remove any information relating to the young person before I include the data within my research outputs. Notification after this date will prevent withdrawal as the data will be pseudonymised and included in the research outputs.

If you feel that you need to make a complaint about any part of my research, you are free to do. In this eventuality, please contact Dr Ian McGimpsey at [REDACTED]. Any complaint will be treated in the strictest of confidence and pursued in line with the University of Birmingham complaints procedure.

Thank you for agreeing to take part,
Hannah Bowden, Doctoral Researcher, University of Birmingham

Appendix 4e: Information Sheet for PEP Observations - Professionals

The Pupil Premium Plus: The Implementation and Effects of Educational Policy on Children and Young People in Local Authority Care

Personal Education Plan Meeting Observation: Information Sheet for Professionals

It is well known that children and young people in local authority care are less likely than their peers to achieve the national benchmark at GCSE level. There have been several policy measures introduced to try and close the educational gap between these young people and their peers. One of these measures is the Pupil Premium Plus which provides £2,300 per young person in local authority care (or adopted). This research project is collecting information, specifically, about the implantation and effects of the Pupil Premium Plus and, more broadly, the implementation and effects of educational policy for children and young people in local authority care.

I am a doctoral researcher from the School of Education, University of Birmingham and the research project has been approved by the ethics committee at the University of Birmingham. In trying to understand the implementation of the Pupil Premium Plus and its effects, I am organising; observations of the Virtual School team, classrooms, and Personal Education Plan meetings; interviews with key stakeholders (Virtual School Heads, head teachers, teachers, foster carers, and social workers); and focus groups with children and young people in foster care.

You have been provided with this information sheet because you are part of the multi-disciplinary team who will be conducting the Personal Education Plan meeting of a child or young person who is in receipt of the Pupil Premium Plus and has been invited to take part in this project. I am requesting your permission for the Personal Education Plan meeting to be observed. During this observation I will take notes on anything pertaining to the Pupil Premium Plus whilst any other information will not be noted.

Your participation is voluntary, and you can change your mind about giving permission at any point during the Personal Education Plan meeting. Only my doctoral supervisors and I will have access to the raw data, hardcopies of which will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and electronic copies will be stored on password protected and encrypted devices. The data collected from the meeting will be used for the purposes of the research and presented in an academic context, namely my thesis and within academic conferences. All outputs will protect the identity of everyone present by using pseudonyms and by removing any other identifying information such as school names and locations. The data will not be shared with any third party.

If, after reading this information, you are willing to partake in the focus group, you will find two identical consent forms to sign. One form I will keep for my records and the other will be for you to keep. This consent form will confirm your permission to participate and provide the details of how to withdraw retrospectively, please keep this safe. You have every right to withdraw from the research; you can contact me on the email address provided below. You can do this at any point until Monday 7th October 2019. Withdrawal will not be possible after this date as the data will have been pseudonymised, meaning I will no longer be able to identify you and remove your data from the outputs.

If you would like any further information about the research project you can contact me via email at [REDACTED] or my project supervisors: Dr Ian McGimpsey [REDACTED] and Dr Kalwant Bhopal [REDACTED]

Thank you for your interest in my project,

Hannah Bowden,
Doctoral Researcher,
University of Birmingham

Appendix 4f: Consent Form for PEP Observations – Professionals

**UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM**

The Pupil Premium Plus: The Implementation and Effects of Educational Policy on Looked-After Children and Young People in Local Authority Care

Personal Education Plan Meeting Observation: Consent Form for Professionals

This research project looks, specifically, at the implementation and effects of the Pupil Premium plus policy and, more broadly, at the implementation and effects of educational policy for children and young people in local authority care. I am a doctoral researcher at the University of Birmingham and, alongside focus groups with young people who receive the money, will be conducting observations of Personal Education Plan meetings, Virtual School Heads, and classrooms; and interviews with children and young people and with key professionals involved with the Pupil Premium Plus (the Virtual School team, head teachers, teachers, social workers, and foster carers).

By signing this consent form, you are agreeing for me to observe the Personal Education Plan meeting of a young person in receipt of the Pupil Premium Plus, for which you will be in attendance. This is detailed within the information sheet. You are also agreeing for their data to be collected and used to conduct the research project, also explained in the information sheet.

To show that you have been fully informed about the research and the ways I will use the information I gather from my research, and to confirm that you give you consent to participate in the research (please see below about withdrawal), please sign and date below:

Name: _____
(please print and sign)

Date: _____

You have the right to withdraw from the research. If they would like to do so, please email me at [REDACTED] by Monday 7th October 2019. Withdrawal before this date will enable me to remove any information relating to you before I include the data within my research outputs. Notification after this date will prevent withdrawal as the data will be pseudonymised and included in the research outputs.

If you feel that you need to make a complaint about any part of my research, you are free to do. In this eventuality, please contact Dr Ian McGimpsey at [REDACTED]. Any complaint will be treated in the strictest of confidence and pursued in line with the University of Birmingham complaints procedure.

Thank you for agreeing to take part,

Hannah Bowden, Doctoral Researcher, University of Birmingham

Appendix 4g: Information Sheet for PEP Observations – Young People (Version 1 and 2)

The Pupil Premium Plus: The Implementation and Effects of Educational Policy on Children and Young People in Local Authority Care

Personal Education Plan Meeting Observation: Information Sheet for Young People

There have been several policies introduced by the Government to provide extra help in school for young people in local authority. One of these is the Pupil Premium Plus which provides £2300 per young person to Virtual Schools and is to be used for educational purposes.

I am a researcher from the University of Birmingham and my project has been assessed and approved by the ethics committee at the University of Birmingham. I am trying to understand how this money is used and its effects. In order for me to do this, I am conducting; group discussions with young people in local authority care; observations of the Virtual School team, schools, and Personal Education Plan meetings; and interviews with key people involved in making sure the Pupil Premium Plus money is used properly (the Virtual School team, head teachers, teachers, social workers, and foster carers).

It is important to me that your voice is heard within my project and so I would like to invite you to take part in the project. I would like to observe your Personal Education Plan meeting. During this observation, I will make notes on things that relate to the Pupil Premium Plus. Anything else that is discussed about you, that does not relate to the Pupil Premium Plus, I will not make notes about.

I will take great care to ensure that your data is handed and stored confidentially and securely. This means all the data will be stored on password protected and encrypted devices or a locked cabinet and will only be accessible to myself and my project supervisors. Within my project I will use false names which will mean you are not identifiable, I will also remove any other identifying information such as school name and location. The data I gather will be used within my final project and in other academic situations such as conferences.

If you are willing to take part in the research, I will give you two identical consent forms for you to sign, one for my records and one for you to keep. This consent form will confirm your right to withdraw from the research and provide you with the information about how you can do this, please keep it safe. If you would like to withdraw from the project at any point, you can contact me through the email address below. You can withdraw at any point up to Monday 7th October 2019. After this date, withdrawal will not be possible as my project will only include the false names and I will no longer be able to identify and remove your data.

If you would like any further information about the research project you can contact me via email at [REDACTED] or my project supervisors: Dr Ian McGimpsey [REDACTED] and Dr Kalwant Bhopal [REDACTED]




Thank you for your interest in my project,

Hannah Bowden,
Doctoral Researcher,
University of Birmingham

“The Pupil Premium Plus: The Implementation and Effects of Educational Policy for Children and Young People in Local Authority Care”

Personal Education Plan Meeting Observation Information Sheet – Young Person

What is the research project about?

	The ‘Pupil Premium Plus’ is a pot of money that is given to the Virtual School to help young people in care get the best education. The Government gives them £2300 for each young person.
	The Virtual School works with schools to make sure it is spent on things that will help each individual get the best education for them.
	My research project is looking at how the Virtual School gives this money to schools, what schools use it for, and young people’s experiences and feelings about it.

What am I doing?

I am a researcher from the University of Birmingham who is interested in understanding the Pupil Premium Plus. I will be:

- *Meeting* with groups of young people in local authority care through focus groups
- *Meeting* with individual young people in local authority care through interviews
- *Watching* what happens in the Virtual School and Personal Education Plan meetings
- *Looking* at school websites

What is being asked of you?

Because it is important to me that I understand your experiences of the Pupil Premium Plus, I would like to watch your Personal Education Plan meeting(s). Whilst I am watching, I will be making notes about the Pupil Premium Plus. I will not make notes about anything else you talk about and I will not take part in the meeting.

What happens to your information and do you have to take part?

This project has been passed by the ethics panel at the University of Birmingham who make sure that every project is done correctly and safely. All the information that I collect will be kept safely (on password and encrypted devices or locked away). The University asks that the information I collect is kept for 10 years, but only my supervisors, who help me with my project, and I will be able to see it. When I write about what I have found, I will give you another name and I will remove any personal information such as the name of the school that you go to - this is to make sure other people do not know who you are. The information I collect and write about will be used in different ways, for example in a big essay and in presentations. *If you are unsure about this paragraph, please talk to your carer or social worker, they will be able to explain it to you.*

You do not have to be part of the project and even if you say yes, you can change your mind. You can change your mind up until **Monday 7th October 2019** (after this date I will have chosen your false name, so I will not be able to find your information). If this happens, please let me know in person or by sending me an email - [REDACTED]

What do you need to do now?

If you would like to take part, please sign your name on the other form that you have been given – please print it off twice and sign both, I need a copy and you do too.

If you would you like any further information you can contact me on the email address above or my project supervisors: Dr Ian McGimpsey [REDACTED] and Dr Kalwant Bhopal [REDACTED]

Thank you for reading about my project,
Hannah Bowden, Doctoral Researcher, University of Birmingham

Appendix 4h: Consent Form for PEP Observations – Young People

**UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM**

The Pupil Premium Plus: The Implementation and Effects of Educational Policy on Looked-After Children and Young People in Local Authority Care

Personal Education Plan Meeting Observation: Consent Form for Young People

This research project is looking at the implementation and effects of the Pupil Premium Plus policy. I am a doctoral researcher at the University of Birmingham and, alongside focus groups with young people who receive the money, will be conducting observations of Personal Education Plan meetings, Virtual School Heads, and classrooms; and interviews with children and young people and with key professionals involved with the Pupil Premium Plus (the Virtual School team, head teachers, teachers, social workers, and foster carers).

By signing this consent form, you are agreeing for me to observe your Personal Education Plan meeting. Whilst I observe your meeting, I will make notes about anything that relates to the Pupil Premium Plus, anything else about you, which is not related, I will not make notes on. This is detailed in the information sheet. You are also agreeing for you data to be collected and used in my research project, also explained in the information sheet.

To show that you have been fully informed about the research and the ways I will use the information I gather from my research, and to confirm that you give you consent to participate in the research (please see below about withdrawal), please sign and date below:

Name: _____
(please print and sign)

Date: _____

You have the right to withdraw from the research. If you would like to do so, please email me at [REDACTED] by Monday 7th October 2019. Withdrawal before this date will enable me to remove any information relating to you before I include the data within my research outputs. Notification after this date will prevent withdrawal as the data will only include false names and I will no longer be able to identify you within research outputs.

If you feel that you need to make a complaint about any part of my research, you are free to do. In this eventuality, please contact Dr Ian McGimpsey at [REDACTED]. Any complaint will be treated in the strictest of confidence and pursued in line with the University of Birmingham complaints procedure.

Thank you for agreeing to take part,

Hannah Bowden,
Doctoral Researcher
University of Birmingham

Appendix 4i: Information Form for PEP Observations – Guardians (PR)

The Pupil Premium Plus: The Implementation and Effects of Educational Policy on Children and Young People in Local Authority Care

Personal Education Plan Meeting Observation: Information Sheet for Guardians

It is well known that children and young people in local authority care are less likely than their peers to achieve the national benchmark at GCSE level. There have been several policy measures introduced to try and close the educational gap between these young people and their peers. One of these measures is the Pupil Premium Plus which provides £2,300 per young person in local authority care (or adopted). This research project is collecting information, specifically, about the implantation and effects of the Pupil Premium Plus and, more broadly, the implementation and effects of educational policy for children and young people in local authority care.

I am a doctoral researcher from the School of Education, University of Birmingham and the research project has been approved by the ethics committee at the University of Birmingham. In trying to understand the implementation of the Pupil Premium Plus and its effects, I am organising; observations of the Virtual School team, classrooms, and Personal Education Plan meetings; interviews with key stakeholders (Virtual School Heads, head teachers, teachers, foster carers, and social workers); and focus groups with children and young people in foster care.

You have been provided with this information sheet because you are the Guardian of a young person who has been invited to take part in the project. It is important that you understand the project and provide permission for them to take part. I am requesting your permission to observe the Personal Education Plan meeting of the young person your care. During this observation, I will take notes on anything pertaining to the Pupil Premium Plus. Any other information unrelated to the Pupil Premium Plus will not be noted.

Participation is voluntary for the young person and they can change their mind and withdraw their consent at any time during the Personal Education Plan meeting. Only my doctoral supervisors and I will have access to the raw data, hardcopies of which will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and electronic copies will be stored on password protected and encrypted devices. The young person's data will be used for the purposes of the research and presented in an academic context, namely my thesis and within academic conferences. All outputs will protect the identity of the young person by using pseudonyms and removing other identifying information such as school names and locations. The data will not be shared with any third party.

If, after reading this information, you are willing for the young person in your care to partake in the focus group, you will find two identical consent forms to sign. One form I will keep for my records and the other will be for you to keep. This consent form will confirm your permission for the young person to partake and will give you the details of how they can withdraw if they wish to, please keep this safe. The young person has every right to withdraw from the research and, if at any point you believe they would like to withdraw, you can contact me on the email address provided below. They can withdraw at any point until Monday 7th October 2019. Withdrawal will not be possible after this date as the data will

have been pseudonymised, meaning I will no longer be able to identify the young person and remove their data from the project.

If you would like any further information about the research project you can contact me via email at [REDACTED] or my project supervisors: Dr Ian McGimpsey [REDACTED] and Dr Kalwant Bhopal [REDACTED]

Thank you for your interest in my project,

Hannah Bowden,
Doctoral Researcher,
University of Birmingham

Appendix 4j: Consent Form for PEP Observations – Guardians (PR)

**UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM**

The Pupil Premium Plus: The Implementation and Effects of Educational Policy on Children and Young People in Local Authority Care

Personal Education Plan Meeting Observation: Consent Form for Guardians

This research project looks, specifically, at the implementation and effects of the Pupil Premium plus policy and, more broadly, at the implementation and effects of educational policy for children and young people in local authority care. I am a doctoral researcher at the University of Birmingham and, alongside focus groups with young people who receive the money, will be conducting observations of Personal Education Plan meetings, Virtual School Heads, and classrooms; and interviews with children and young people and with key professionals involved with the Pupil Premium Plus (the Virtual School team, head teachers, teachers, social workers, and foster carers).

By signing this consent form, you are agreeing for the young person in your care have their Personal Education Plan meeting observed, as detailed in the information sheet. You are also agreeing for their data to be collected and used to conduct the research project, also explained in the information sheet.

To show that you have been fully informed about the research and the ways I will use the information I gather from my research, and to confirm that you give you consent for the young person to participate in the research (please see below about withdrawal), please sign and date below:

Name: _____
(please print and sign)

Date: _____

The young person has the right to withdraw from the research. If they would like to do so, please email me at [REDACTED] by Monday 7th October 2019. Withdrawal before this date will enable me to remove any information relating to the young person before I include the data within my research outputs. Notification after this date will prevent withdrawal as the data will be pseudonymised and included in the research outputs.

If you feel that you need to make a complaint about any part of my research, you are free to do. In this eventuality, please contact Dr Ian McGimpsey at [REDACTED]. Any complaint will be treated in the strictest of confidence and pursued in line with the University of Birmingham complaints procedure.

Thank you for agreeing to take part,

Hannah Bowden,
Doctoral Researcher, University of Birmingham

Appendix 4k: Information Sheet for PEP Observations – Attendee

“The Pupil Premium Plus: The Implementation and Effects of Educational Policy for Children and Young People in Local Authority Care”

Personal Education Plan Meeting Observation Information Sheet – Professionals

What is the project about?

In 2017, 14% of young people in local authority care achieved the then five A*-C benchmark compared to 67% of their peers. In recent years, there have been several policy measures introduced to try and close this educational gap. One such measure is the Pupil Premium Plus. The Pupil Premium Plus gives £2300 per child or young person in local authority care to each Virtual School. The Virtual School then allocates this money to the relevant schools who are to use it to aid their educational attainment. This research project is interested in the implementation and effects of educational policy for children and young people in local authority care, specifically the Pupil Premium Plus.

What am I doing?

I am a doctoral researcher from the University of Birmingham and to understand the implementation and effects of the Pupil Premium Plus, I will be conducting:

- **Focus groups** with young people in local authority care
- **Interviews** with young people in local authority care and key professionals
- **Observations** of the Virtual School and Personal Education Plan meetings
- **Document analysis** of school websites and prospectuses

What is being asked of you?

You have been provided with this information sheet because you are part of the multi-disciplinary team who will be conducting/attending the Personal Education Plan meeting(s) of a young person who is in receipt of the Pupil Premium Plus. I am requesting your permission for the Personal Education Plan meeting(s) to be observed. During this observation, I will take notes on anything pertaining to the Pupil Premium Plus whilst other information will not be noted. I will not participate in the meeting.

What happens to your data and do you have to participate?

This project has been approved by the ethics committee at the University of Birmingham and I will take great care to ensure that your data is handled and stored confidentially and securely. This means that all the data I collect will be stored on password protected and encrypted devices or in a locked cabinet. In line with the university’s policy, the data will be stored for 10 years but will only be accessible to myself and my project supervisors. Your data will be used in outputs which are in line with the purposes of the research e.g. a thesis and conferences. These outputs will protect your identity by using pseudonyms and changing or removing other identifying information such as the location of the local authority.

Your participation is voluntary, and you are entitled to withdraw. You can withdraw by contacting me via email: [REDACTED] You must do this before **Monday 7th October 2019**, after this date my project will only include pseudonyms and I will no longer be able to identify and remove your data.

What do you need to do now?

If, after reading the above information, you are happy to take part in the research, please sign the two identical consent forms provided (a copy for my records and a copy for yourself).



If you would you like any further information about the research project you can contact me on the email address above or my project supervisors: Dr Ian McGimpsey [REDACTED] and Dr Kalwant Bhopal [REDACTED]

Thank you for your interest in my project,
Hannah Bowden,
Doctoral Researcher,
University of Birmingham

Appendix 41: Consent Form for PEP Observations – Attendee

**UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM**

“The Pupil Premium Plus: The Implementation and Effects of Educational Policy for Children and Young People in Local Authority Care”

Personal Education Plan Meeting Observation - Professionals

In 2017, 14% of young people in local authority care achieved the then five A*-C benchmark compared to 67% of their peers. In recent years, there have been several policy measures introduced to try and close this educational gap. One such measure is the Pupil Premium Plus. The Pupil Premium Plus gives £2300 per child or young person in local authority care to each Virtual School. The Virtual School then allocates this money to the relevant schools who are to use it to aid their educational attainment. This research project is interested in the implementation and effects of educational policy for children and young people in local authority care, specifically the Pupil Premium Plus.

I am a doctoral researcher from the University of Birmingham and my project has been approved by the University’s ethics committee. To understand the implementation and effects of the Pupil Premium Plus, I will be conducting:

- **Focus groups** with young people in local authority care
- **Interviews** with young people in local authority care and key professionals
- **Observations** of the Virtual School and Personal Education Plan meetings
- **Document analysis** of school websites and prospectuses

By signing this consent form, you are agreeing for me to observe the Personal Education Plan meeting(s) of a young person in receipt of the Pupil Premium Plus, for which you will be in attendance. This is detailed within the information sheet. You are also agreeing for your data to be collected, stored, and used to conduct the research project, also explained within the information sheet.

To show that you have been fully informed about the research and the ways in which I will use the data, and to confirm that you give consent to participate in the research (withdrawal information below), please sign and date below:

Name: _____
(please print and sign)

Date: _____

Your participation is voluntary, and you are entitled to withdraw. If you would like to withdraw, you can contact me via email: [redacted] You must do this before **Monday 7th October 2019**, after this date my project will be pseudonymised and I will not be able to identify and remove your data.

If you feel you need to make a complaint about any part of my research, you are free to do so. In this eventuality, please contact Dr Ian McGimpsey [redacted] Any complaint will be treated in the strictest confidence and pursued in line with the University of Birmingham complaints procedure.

Thank you for agreeing to take part,
Hannah Bowden, Doctoral Researcher, University of Birmingham



Appendix 4m: Information Sheet Observations (General)

“The Pupil Premium Plus: The Implementation and Effects of Educational Policy for Children and Young People in Local Authority Care”

Observation Information Sheet - General

What is the project about?

In 2017, 14% of young people in local authority care achieved the then five A*-C benchmark compared to 67% of their peers. In recent years, there have been several policy measures introduced to try and close this educational gap. One such measure is the Pupil Premium Plus. The Pupil Premium Plus gives £2300 per child or young person in local authority care to each Virtual School. The Virtual School then allocates this money to the relevant schools who are to use it to aid their educational attainment. This research project is interested in the implementation and effects of educational policy for children and young people in local authority care, specifically the Pupil Premium Plus.

What am I doing?

I am a doctoral researcher from the University of Birmingham and, to understand the implementation and effects of the Pupil Premium Plus, I will be conducting:

- **Focus groups** with young people in local authority care
- **Interviews** with young people in local authority care and key professionals
- **Observations** of the Virtual School and Personal Education Plan meetings
- **Document analysis** of school websites and prospectuses

What is being asked of you?

You have been provided with this information because you are being invited to take part in this project. I will be observing and shadowing the Virtual School staff over the 2018/19 academic year and as a result I will be led into different situations (e.g. meetings, events, tutorials), some of which you will be present/active. I will be observing and making notes on the Virtual School staff member, but I am requesting permission to include you in these observations. This will help me to broaden my understanding of the implementation and effects of the Pupil Premium Plus on a daily basis.

What happens to your data and do you have to participate?

This project has been approved by the ethics committee at the University of Birmingham and I will take great care to ensure that your data is handled and stored confidentially and securely. This means that all the data I collect will be stored on password protected and encrypted devices or in a locked cabinet. In line with the university’s policy, the data will be stored for 10 years but will only be accessible to myself and my project supervisors. Your data will be used in outputs which are in line with the purposes of the research e.g. a thesis and conferences. These outputs will protect your identity by using pseudonyms and changing or removing other identifying information such as the location of the local authority.

Your participation is voluntary, and you are entitled to withdraw. You can withdraw by contacting me via email: [REDACTED] You must do this before **Monday 7th October 2019**, after this date my project will only include pseudonyms and I will no longer be able to identify and remove your data.

What do you need to do now?

Mapping the Virtual School Ensemble: The Role of Loss, Grief, Love, and Care

If, after reading the above information, you are happy to take part in the research, please sign the two identical consent forms provided (a copy for my records and a copy for yourself).

If you would you like any further information about the research project you can contact me on the email address above or my project supervisors: Dr Ian McGimpsey [REDACTED] and Dr Kalwant Bhopal [REDACTED]

Thank you for your interest in my project,
Hannah Bowden,
Doctoral Researcher,
University of Birmingham

Appendix 4n: Consent Form Observations (General)

**UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM**

“The Pupil Premium Plus: The Implementation and Effects of Educational Policy for Children and Young People in Local Authority Care”

Observation Consent Form – General

In 2017, 14% of young people in local authority care achieved the then five A*-C benchmark compared to 67% of their peers. In recent years, there have been several policy measures introduced to try and close this educational gap. One such measure is the Pupil Premium Plus. The Pupil Premium Plus gives £2300 per child or young person in local authority care to each Virtual School. The Virtual School then allocates this money to the relevant schools who are to use it to aid their educational attainment. This research project is interested in the implementation and effects of educational policy for children and young people in local authority care, specifically the Pupil Premium Plus.

I am a doctoral researcher from the University of Birmingham and my project has been approved by the University’s ethics committee. To understand the implementation and effects of the Pupil Premium Plus, I will be conducting:

- **Focus groups** with young people in local authority care
- **Interviews** with young people in local authority care and key professionals
- **Observations** of the Virtual School and Personal Education Plan meetings
- **Document analysis** of school websites and prospectuses

By signing this consent form, you agreeing to be observed in situations where I am present as a result of shadowing and observing the Virtual School staff, as detailed in the information sheet. You are also agreeing for your data to be collected, stored, and used to conduct the research project, also explained within the information sheet.

To show that you have been fully informed about the research and the ways in which I will use the data, and the confirm that you give consent to participate in the research (withdrawal information below), please sign and date below:

Name: _____
(please print and sign)

Date: _____

Your participation is voluntary, and you are entitled to withdraw. If you would like to withdraw, you can contact me via email: [redacted] You must do this before **Monday 7th October 2019**, after this date my project will be pseudonymised and I will not be able to identify and remove your data.

If you feel you need to make a complaint about any part of my research, you are free to do so. In this eventuality, please contact Dr Ian McGimpsey [redacted] Any complaint will be treated in the strictest confidence and pursued in line with the University of Birmingham complaints procedure.

Thank you for agreeing to take part,
Hannah Bowden,
Doctoral Researcher, University of Birmingham