

**Exploring Young People's  
Aspirations**

**In 'Urban Regeneration' Settings: a critical reflection**

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## i. Abstract

Discourses of aspirations have become increasingly prominent in the youth studies literatures and related research. This thesis reports a research project which explored the experiences of a group of young people aged sixteen who had been identified as possibly becoming ‘not in education, employment or training’ (NEET) and who had undertaken a mentoring programme. Specifically, for this thesis, the young people’s views of their aspirations both prior to the mentoring programme and post the programme were explored. Despite increased interest in the aspirations of young people, there is limited research on how this concept is defined and recognised by young people themselves. This thesis thus sought to address this gap in knowledge. Two focus groups each of ten participants were planned. The young people consented verbally to take part in the focus groups. However, only five young people participated and were prepared to give written consent for their views to be used in this research project. Additionally, no parents were prepared to give written consent. It was not possible to discover why the remaining young people, or their parents did not consent. Conjecture suggests that perhaps they were weary of what they perceived as intervention, having undertaken the mentoring programme; or perhaps they just did not want to discuss their aspirations. Of the five young participants who did consent to have their views reported, thematic analysis revealed themes of ‘aspirations’, ‘mental health’, ‘belonging’ and ‘fun’.

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ii. Declaration

**DECLARATION**

**This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.**

Signed ..... (candidate)

Date .....

**STATEMENT 1**

**This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where correction services have been used, the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in a footnote(s).**

**Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.**

Signed ..... (candidate)

Date .....

**STATEMENT 2**

**I hereby give consent for my thesis, if accepted, to be available for photocopying and for interlibrary loan, and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organisations.**

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### **iii. Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisors Dr Kathryn Kinmond and Orlagh McCabe for the useful comments, remarks and engagement through the learning process of this master's thesis. Furthermore, I would like to thank Susan Cobb for her support on the way. Also, I like to thank the young people who participated in the focus groups, who have willingly shared their precious time during the process of my research.

#### **iv. The Researcher**

I write this thesis as a thirty-five year-old mature post-graduate student returning to education some eighteen years following an exciting career in the DIY sector. Following my older sibling's example, I left the 'conveyor belt' of education from secondary education to college, completing my prescribed BTEC qualifications along the way in the hope that this path would lead me to paid work and happy parents. Our parents both worked full- time throughout our years of compulsory education and had followed the traditional transitions from school to full-time employment, the textile industry for mother, and for father a forty plus- year's career in engineering. Further education was never a conversation that we had had at home or at school. I can only assume for this reason that there was no need to discuss it! Upon finishing my BTEC qualification I acquired a part-time job at a local DIY store that would see me earn my first of many wage packets, fulfilling my aspirations to own my first car, and from there I began to work my way up the ladder. During my years of training, the economic downturn brought with it a lack of funding to support skills development in the sector and therefore a decision to return to full-time education was made, one that has been life changing for me as I write my post-graduate degree, whilst working full time.

Today, young people experience the same broken transitions; and with fewer jobs available post - education, young 'aspirant workers' who also struggle in education, are finding a 'make-do' course at college as a solution to a non-existent job. It is these marginalised young people for whom this thesis aims to speak.

## **Background to research and context**

### **v. Introduction**

This research project initially aimed to investigate the experiences of 20 year ten and eleven pupils participating in a schools mentoring project - an intervention for pupils identified as disengaged from education and deemed at risk of becoming 'not in education, employment or training'(NEET). The programme offered its participants a weekly mentor opportunity through private and third sector networks, opportunities to build confidence and to realise career pathways. The programme also included a range of sporting and creative group activities for the male and female participants.

The original aim of the research was to explore the views of the young people involved in the schools mentoring project, to hear their views of the programme with the aim of developing the project for future groups of young people.

The mentor programme was initially developed for young women disengaged from education and was designed to raise aspirations and build confidence in them, aiming to prevent them from becoming NEET, however, the programme was then broadened to include both young men and young women aged between 14 and 16. Listening to the voices of the participants was a key driver for this research; information which was then planned to inform the local authority of their experiences and ultimately to bring about policy changes.

As stated above, one of the key aims of the mentoring programme was to raise the young people's aspirations. However, whilst talking with the young people along their journey on the programme it became evident that there were many different understandings of the term 'aspirations'. This research project then developed out of work evaluating the mentoring project and aimed to hear the experiences of the participants but also to begin to consider their understanding of the term 'aspirations' and what they believed the impact of the project would be on their personal aspirations. However, sadly, there was a lack of engagement in the Focus Groups designed to evaluate the project and to 'hear' the young people's voices. Certainly, they took part in the stage of the project which discussed the intervention programme. However, the focus group research designed to enable the young people to discuss their understandings and experiences of their 'aspirations' both

before and after the intervention, were unfortunately, not well represented. There was a noticeable lack of participation by the young people in the research. Thus, the initial aim to collect empirical data from the 20 participants became impossible, due to a lack of informed consent by the young people to have their views recorded in the focus group sessions; consequently, a change to the originally intended project is presented here.

The revised focus of this study discusses the amended research, recording the views of the five young people who consented to having their voices heard. It then adopts a reflective approach, highlighting the social constructions of a group of marginalised young people (Burr, 2015; Cartmel and Furlong 1997; Gergen, 2008 in Burr 2015; Jones, 2009), in the context of a rights based discourse (Jones, 2009; UNCRC, 1989).

The overall research question has remained the same, despite the forced changes to participation; the impact of which is discussed throughout the thesis.

The research question for this project is detailed below:

#### **vi. The research question**

**What are the aspirations of young people living in a northern post-industrial town?**

This question will be explored through two main research aims:

- To explore young people's definitions of aspirations
- To review the impact of a specific mentoring programme on the young people's aspirations

To answer the research question and explore the overall aims listed above, the research adopted an interpretive approach. Being mindful that this project was to be submitted for a higher degree an appropriate theoretical framework was required through which to consider the answers and responses given in the study. In keeping with the research question, a social constructionist (Gergen, 2009), and a children's

rights perspective (Jones, 2009; UNCRC, 1989), provided a platform on which to gather, analyse, and share the views and experiences of the young people who participated in this research. Social constructionism provides a context for re-viewing and reconsidering ‘taken for granted knowledge’ (Burr, 2015:2) which facilitated a new look at the messages about aspirations that the young people were communicating. By adopting a rights-based perspective the voices of the young people might be heard and their words might then be theoretically considered (Donnelley, 2010; Jones, 2009). These theoretical perspectives underpin the research by providing a critical perspective to the way in which we observe the world (Gergen, 2009; Burr, 2015), and the discourses of the young people living in it.

## vii. Thesis structure

Chapter one discusses ‘youth’ in a social and rights-based context. This includes a review of the offer for young people in a contemporary, political and social context, and a discussion of the language commonly used to define aspirations (Jones, 2009); words such as ‘troubled’ (Cote, 2014), and ‘generational worklessness’ (Shildrick et al., 2012), are often used to describe young people living within urban regeneration areas (Roberts and Sykes, 2000). Yet, arguably these are all socially constructed ideas (Gergen, 2009) that are measured and used to define the policies and services for these marginalised children and young people (Cote, 2014). A critique of existing policy and youth related services will argue how both are guided by historical constructions of children and young people as a ‘social problem to be remedied’ (Jones, 2009). These themes will be further investigated to address the overall question of youth aspirations in urban regeneration settings, within a local context, including a critical approach to existing policy for young people. There follows an exploration of the transitions of young people (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997), and of particular interest for this thesis, young people living in urban regeneration settings (Roberts and Sykes, 2000), and the aspirations of young people participating in a schools mentor programme (Burr, 2015; Jones, 2009).

Chapter two explores and discusses the holistic constructions of young people, including the implications of their rights and the impact of this on their aspirations (Gutman and Akerman, 2008). It also presents discourses of gender of young people

in late modernity (Burr, 2015; Nayak and Kehily, 2013) to reflect the focus on young women's' aspirations in the first part of the project. Young people's voices are by law protected under the United Nations Convention on the rights of the Child (UNCRC), which states that, 'Every child has the right to an education, to be healthy, to grow up safe and to be heard' (UNCRC, 1989). From a theoretical perspective research is also considered, providing a conceptual approach to researching 'youth' as individuals. (Donnelley, 2010; Jones, 2009; Lee, 2001; Prout, 2005)

Chapter three provides a justification for the research approach, which remained the same despite the necessary changes to the project. The chapter details the process of the original research and discusses the rationale behind the enforced changes. Detail is given for the revised study of the participants, which highlights the importance of the voice of young people to inform services and policies through a rights based discourse. The theoretical underpinning for the research methodology, Interpretivism, provides a philosophical base on which the discourses of rights for young people are reviewed. This approach is also guided by a method of deep reflection (Moon, 2006), enabling a focus of the findings of five young people through two focus group sessions. The theory of Social Constructionism remains a key theme throughout the research methodology, underpinning through existing policy and strategy at a local level, and the focus group results.

Chapter four reporting of the research findings adopts a reflective approach to both the analysis and reporting of the research findings. This section identifies the four major themes that were identified in the participants' transcripts. These themes are analysed and discussed in the context of the literature review in chapters 1 and 2.

Chapter five offers a theory of reflection (Moon, 2006), to further analyse the constructions of young people in policy and society and offers discussions of how these factors continue to frame their lives. Reflection is largely based on further processing of knowledge and understanding, and emotions that we already possess (Moon, 2006). So for this project by adopting a reflective approach the research has taken on a fuller investigation of the responses from the young people in a social setting and in doing so, has highlighted a number of themes to address, which, through further reflection using Moon's approach, explores the young people's

understanding of the term ‘aspirations’. This method also highlights the consideration of youth voice and rights.

To conclude this research project, Chapter five also summarises the reflection process and findings discussed in Chapter four, within the context of the literature reviewed in chapters one and two, aimed at addressing the initial research aims. Recommendations for local policy and stakeholders are subsequently offered for Local Government dissemination at council level to better inform the local decision makers of the views of young service user from urban regeneration areas.

## **Chapter One. Exploring Aspirations**

We view young people as individual agents negotiating their lives through a range of discourses, including: action, identity, transition, inequality, dependence, and society (Jones, 2009:4). This holistic view is one that this research project aims to address, where the young people participating in a school's intervention programme are viewed as 'beings' within a multidisciplinary society, and their aspirations are considered within a rights based context which empowers them (Jones, 2009:4).

As Fuller (2013) noted recently, despite ambitious local government strategies, it is evident that there is limited discussion of young people and how we are to support their aspirational pathways to 2030. At the same time, the path-dependent nature and clustering of social and economic inequality in urban post-industrial settings remains a constant reminder of the scale of the problems confronting all those involved (Fuller, 2013). This is evident through local deprivation neighbourhood reports such as the ONS Neighbourhood statistics.

Certainly, the roles of social policies at a local level are significant to all aspects of youth engagement as highlighted in current government strategy for young people relating to 'Positive for Youth', which through a number of youth related forums including the British Youth Council, young voices are said to influence local policy decisions and strategy. However, arguably this must be accessible to all young people in all communities to be an effective policy.

The aspirations of young people remains a difficult concept to define and has been the subject of many research papers over the past 30 years (Gutman and Akerman, 2008; Jones, 2009; Spohrer, 2011). Research highlights the recurrent debates around young people's aspirations, with political speeches, policy documents and reports suggesting that young people, especially those young people who are so-called disadvantaged have a 'poverty' or lack' of aspiration (Archer et al., 2010). However, as Menzies (2013) argued, to say that disadvantaged young people have no aspirations is unacceptable.

In 2013, Loic Menzies proposed that we should challenge the myth within education and education policy that young people have low aspirations when the real challenge for disadvantaged young people is actually *achieving* their aspirations. In his report

he proposes that to better support young people we must move from Model A to Model B (Menzies, 2013:4). See Fig 1. This move outlines the need to provide a suitable action to ensure sustainable outcomes for young people.

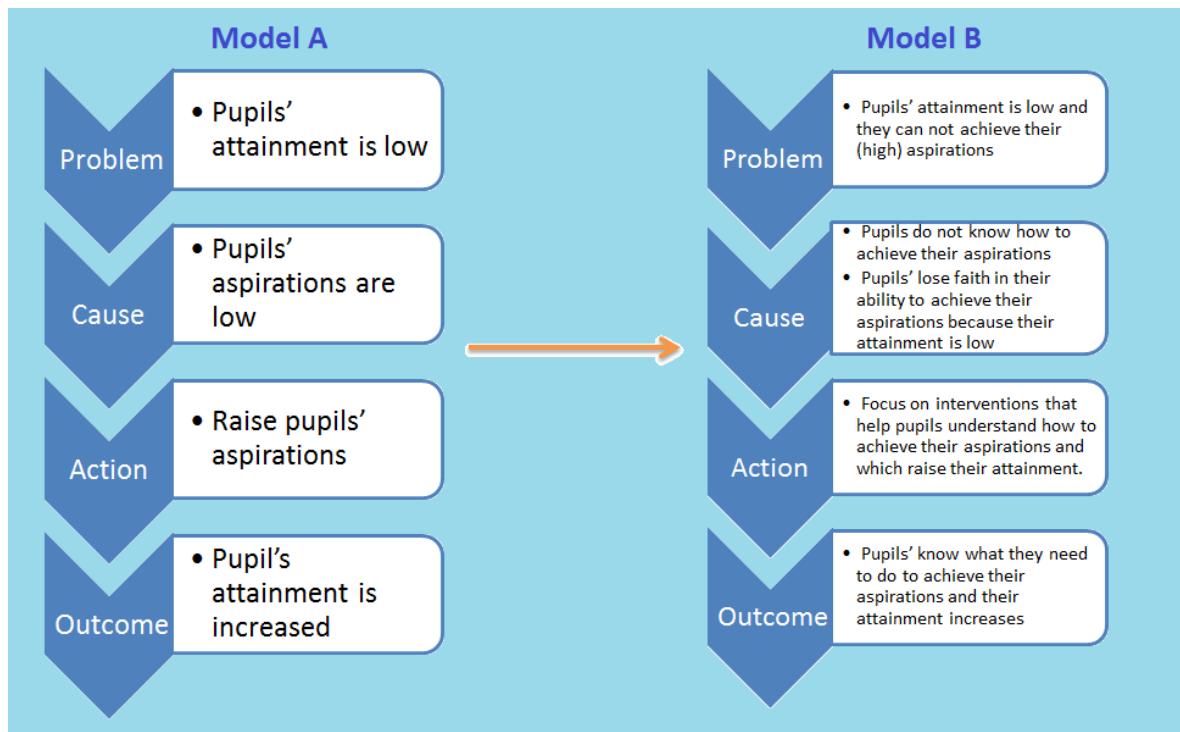


Fig 1. (\*Menzies, 2013:4 competing models of aspirations)

Menzies also suggests that education policy should be inclusive of parental support and through collaborative engagement in all aspects of their children's aspirations and learning. This approach requires a greater consideration of parental need and Menzies goes on to suggest that engagement is most effective when:

- It is collaborative, builds strong relationships and focuses on learning.
- Schools meet parents on their own terms by tapping into their needs and interests, creating environments that feel comfortable to them and involving other members of their community.

Further, parental attachment to children, therefore, is less a function of instinct than a function of how parents in a particular culture or historical era perceive their responsibilities toward their children (Newman, 2006). This concept of time must be

considered within the discourses of youth outlined in this paper. With changing governments and changing economies, young people are effected in different ways to the generations before them. This fundamental principal is missing from policy today. However, through Local Authority community partnerships there is a call to work together to create cohesion and localism through a decentralisation of power, this can be seen through the collaborative working between providers of Education, Local Enterprise Partnerships and voluntary sector groups. However, practically there are many barriers including government funding cuts which reduce resources and therefore opportunities for action.

It is these young people who are reported to have lower aspirations than their peers who live in areas classed as economically and socially wealthy, and are therefore deemed to be less-likely to engage in education, employment or training (Gutman and Akerman, 2008). Policy attributes this to families with generational worklessness, ‘where the ideas of three generation of the family have never worked’ (Macdonald et al., 2014) and low aspirations exist and that this is therefore reflected in the UK welfare system (Bynner, 2010). With young people classed as NEET they have little option but to ‘sign on’ as this is a local service that they can access for some financial support and job opportunities.

With this in mind, raising the aspirations of those young people who remain disengaged from education, employment or training remains high on the government’s agenda, with a clear message that young people who remain disengaged will be targeted and signposted to a suitable intervention offer (DfE, 2013). With such a strong message conveyed to children and young people and reinforced through the National Curriculum attainment targets and through rigorous testing and examinations, as proposed over five years ago by the then Education Secretary Michael Gove (DfE, 2012), young people would no longer complete course work in their secondary school years, which does not favour the more creative subjects such as Art and IT. Following changes in educational leadership under the coalition government, and announced by the then newly appointed Secretary for Education, Nicky Morgan, the UK secondary curriculum would see a return to the GCSE format of course work and examination for year eleven pupils. This change will impact the young people in this research, due to the element of coursework and examination, where young people may be in need of further support due to a number

of barriers to education which can include academic attainment and low educational aspirations.

The National Curriculum provides a universal framework for young people, regardless of their background or educational attainment, unless under the Special Educational Needs Curriculum (SENC), young people are required to attend secondary school education from the age of ten to eighteen (under the RPA), to learn and engage in assessments and examinations. This is compulsory education which is enforced by the government and enforced by the parent/guardian of the young person. Young people are then required to remain in further education, or in an apprenticeship with a view to securing a position of economic activity. This journey remains a traditional transition for young people through policy (Bynner, 2003). However, through existing research and evidence reported in this thesis it is clear that some young people are not experiencing traditional transitions and are being limited in fulfilling their aspirations as highlighted in the UNCRC (Landsown, 2011). There remains a clear gap in the consideration of rights within the childhood and youth offer today (Montgomery, 2010), which is further discussed in chapter two.

Not all young people have academic aspirations. Many young people today are looking for job security (Cote, 2014). However, it must also be considered that through historical government budgets for education services young people may also be affected due to cuts in public spending (Cote, 2014). This includes a reduction in young people's careers and sign posting services such as Connexions and health services. Therefore, young people from economically deprived backgrounds considering further education may be excluded from such aspirations. Those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds who have high aspirations may then be unable to overcome the financial and social obstacles to achievement, particularly where multiple barriers exist (Gutman & Ackerman, 2008). For these groups where family resources are lacking, other means of supporting aspirations such as schools and teachers appear to be more significant than they are for others.

It is important here to discuss mental health problems which is identified in youth research, (Arnett, 2014; Duffy, 2016; Furlong, 2013), and is disseminated through government database reporting (ONS). Mental health is closely linked to aspirations and participation as young people who are NEET are more likely to suffer from

mental health problems (Duffy, 2016). Discussions also include having the right to be angry and class-based privilege. This echoes a Bourdieu-inspired understanding of the interaction between the interpretation of subject's actions and class-based identities. An example of this is the Anti-Social Behaviour Order (ASBO), where young people under the age of 18 restricted from voting and having their say, may choose to exert their views in anger and instead wear the order as a badge of honour in protest. Without suffrage, young people have limited recourse to express their discontent or exert a claim for fairer treatment (Duffy, 2016:3).

Cultural capital is a fundamental facilitator of social mobility for these young people, (Bennett, 2014), which can ultimately aide educational or vocational aspirations through experiential learning (Kolb, 1984). By stretching young people beyond their current experience of education and wider learning, whether that be in the school environment of their local community, research has demonstrated that although 'Aspirations begin to shape early in a child's life, [they] are modified by experience and the environment', (Gutman and Akerman, 2008: i). This concept can be further explored through the idea of a Chronosystem, (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

(Bronfenbrenner, 1979) (fig, 2) proposes a Chronosystem, adding a concept of time relating to a child's environment. In particular, transitions of young people as the child develops and ages, entering key milestones such as adolescence and young adulthood they may react differently to environmental changes and may be more able to determine how such change will affect them. Arguably, this model is appropriate to this research, which focuses predominantly on the Micro and Mesosystems; many of the problems the young people face manifested in childhood but change over time due to changes in their environments (Furlong et al., 2007:6). However, it will also apply to how the resulting intervention programme can address the reasons for their behaviour, therefore having a chronological effect on how they respond and behave.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) describes three key settings for the developing person (see fig, 2). The Microsystem is the most important setting for a young child, containing the immediate family where the majority of time is spent, and which has the most emotional influence. Bronfenbrenner (1994:40) outlines The Mesosystem comprising, 'the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings

containing the developing person- for example the linkages between home and school, home and extended family or home and friends, health care settings and finally community facilities such as neighbourhoods, libraries and playgrounds'. The Mesosystem can be described as a system of Microsystems. The Macrosystem influences the individual's development from a more strategic viewpoint relating to social class, cultural beliefs and practices, religion and law. This system consists of overarching pattern of Micro and Mesosystems in which the developing individual lives. It provides background characteristics of culture, sub culture, religion and politics, social class or other broader social context. This may influence resources, hazards, lifestyles, opportunity strictures, life course options and patters of social interchange. Thus, this model suggests that children who are raised in affluent, upper to middle class Macrosystems may take a different life course to those raised in lower classes where deprivation is high. It further suggests that equally, children raised in families who closely follow religion may be influenced during development to have a different set of core beliefs than those who originate from families where religion is absent.

A child's development is determined by their experiences in the settings they spend time in with adults and peers acting as role models demonstrating appropriate ways to behave, talking, reading, and providing materials for play (socialisation) (Bowlby, 1969), linked to parental aspirations (Exosystem) within a child's Microsystem. A young person may be experiencing a range of complex systems related to their parent/guardian issues within their microsystem, if they do not feel that they can resolve this through attachment at home (Bowlby, 1969).

Family-school relationships are grounded in an ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1992), suggesting that children learn and grow within distinct systems including child/family and school/schooling systems (Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000), proving that such system interactions are vital in the social and educational development of children and young people.

Figure 2. Bronfenbrenner's Chronosystem, (1979).

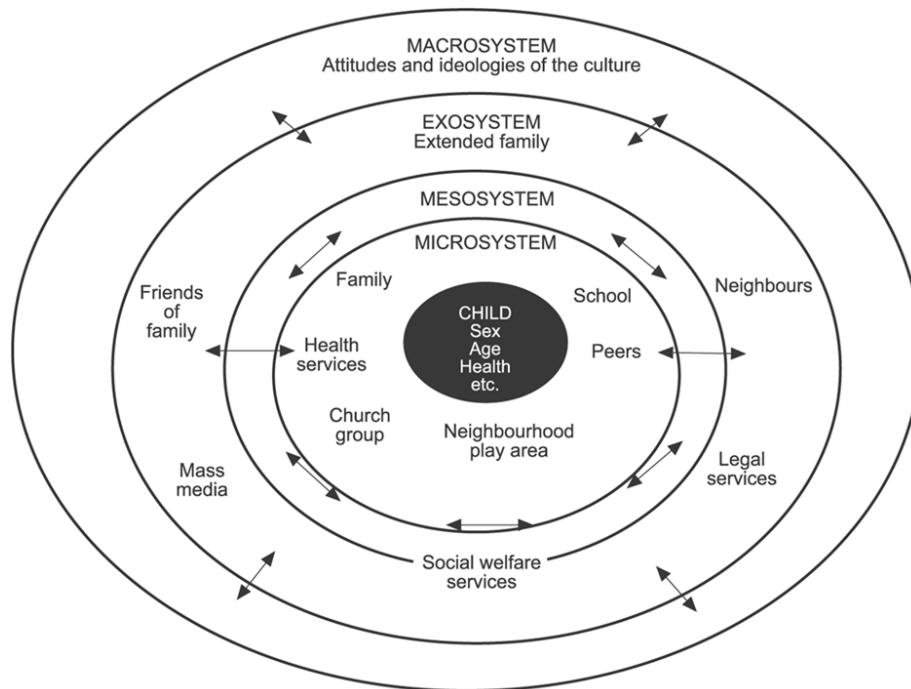


Fig. 2. Source: Dockrell, J., and Messer, D. (1999).

Where school and home systems are unable to support individual development and thus an intervention is required (Cote, 2014), the Widening Participation programme REF is a key vehicle for young people to realise their potential, and through a range of programmes young people are exposed to Higher Education Institutes and opportunities, which can develop skills and confidence for work readiness (Cote, 2014). The need for post programme information is also vitally important to ensure young people are kept on track with their aspirations and transitions to FE, training and employment. This can be provided through the provision of an excellent careers service within schools and communities offering information advice and guidance and financial support.

## 1.1 Transitions

Youth transitions are a central theme that runs through the sociology of youth (Murray and Gayle, 2012). To secure any outcome, such as gaining an educational qualification or securing a particular job, 'an individual must mobilize structural

resources (such as economic, social and cultural capital) as well as capacities usually regarded as indicative of agency (such as motivation and effort)' (Furlong et al., 2007:6). Arguably, this concept, for young people is determined by having access to the resources needed to support such secure outcomes. For young people living within environments of low aspirations, arguably this is even more important.

The 1980s saw a shift in economic realities and emphasis towards the service sector and knowledge industries and away from primary production and manufacturing. During a particularly volatile economy, the Conservative Government's led by Margaret Thatcher, policy vision at the time for privatisation, 'growth means change', saw changes to the welfare system. The basic principles of comprehensive public services for health, education, social security and social service remained largely intact (Alcock & May, 2014:9). This saw many changes to education and labour market policies. These policies aimed to: (a) increase levels of education to provide human capital for emerging industries, and (b) deregulate labour markets to enable national economies to be globally competitive (Woodman and Wynn, 2012).

By the 1990s researchers highlight a distinct change in transitions, with extended dependency including living at home and being economically dependent on their families (Cohen, 1997 & Epstein, 1998). Young lives were hit by a decline in independent benefits, including the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA), causing an increase in the number of student loans. Arguably, many young people struggled to transition from dependence to independence through vocational courses and low paid employment. These uneven and fragmented transitions (Jones, 2009; Gutman and Akerman, 2008), echo the individual experiences of young people and their families, with traditional markers of adulthood becoming separated from each other (Irwin, 1995). Young people continue to negotiate complex transitions from school to work in an ever-changing and challenging world (Bynner, 2010).

Current strategies to tackle youth unemployment continue to fail to support all young people considered as NEET (House of Commons Education Committee, 2010). Research suggests a restructuring regarding transitions with more young people making 'slow-track transitions' (Kehily, 2009) through extended participation in further and higher education and 'uncertain' and 'fragmented' transitions as explained by (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007).

Increasing demand for educated workers and specialised skills in post-industrialised society has meant that young people are forced to engage with the education system or face long term unemployment. This was certainly a New Labour policy which envisaged young people moving in to Higher Education, however today's socio-economic landscape has seen a significant shift for young people into vocational courses and job ready schemes, 'with an increase of commodified qualifications with young people leaving education and instead of finding a unique career path, they are taking jobs not consistent with their skills and qualifications' (Standing, 2011 cited in Antonucci et al., 2014:15). Further (France, 2007, in Antonucci et al., 2014:15), speaks of a 'change in choice biographies where young people are faced with wide ranging choices in their lives'. This could be seen as a positive change for young people. Indeed, Arnett (2006) calls this 'emerging adulthood' and talks of the individualisation of young people in late modernity. However, some researchers see that this leads young people to the exposure of risks as they make their choices in society and the responsibility of how they manage those risks (Arnett, 2000). Therefore, youth transitions become institutionalised by social policy structures, with different welfare regimes shaping transitions and how young people negotiate them (Bynner, 2005).

The experiences of young people's transitions can also be considered within a socio-demographic context, by class, gender, race and place, creating different experiences and inequality of opportunity within these social divisions by how they intersect and effect transitions to adulthood (Antonucci et al., 2013). This is evident through the growing research of the lack of young people from Black and Ethnic Minority (BEM) groups participating at Universities (Taylor, 2010).

Further factors affecting transitions include what social theorists call 'capital'; it is these capitals which provide resources to equip young people within society by creating advantages and disadvantages that underpin inequality. This can be seen in the form of networks created by young people within society to support social mobility and opportunities. It is the individualisation of young people to use these resources as social actors to best negotiate their social location. This in turn will support transitions to Education, Employment or Training.

During times of austerity, social policy has caused many changes in these class based and structural variances that have exacerbated social class difference (Antonucci et al., 2013). This directly impacts young people from working class and or low-income backgrounds who tend to be disproportionately less likely to participate in higher education (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007), instead opting to engage within the labour market directly from post-compulsory education (Cote, 2014). Such changes affect all young people, however not equally. Changes to the manufacturing industry have seen a great impact on young people's trajectories into work with deindustrialisation seeing a transformation from manufacturing to services based economies. Standing, (2011 in Antonucci et al., 2013) argue that there is an expanding precariat, where young people are finding themselves in precarious work for longer with many young people accessing low skilled and low paid jobs, including the controversial zero-hour contract accessed by many marginalised young people often as the only choice of work in a competitive labour market (Berrington et al., 2014). This then leaves young people marginalised from welfare benefit systems due to lack of time to qualify (Standing, 2011 in Antonucci et al., 2013).

This instability is evident as young people are choosing to opt into apprenticeships and Higher-Level Apprenticeships (HLA's) to gain skills whilst working. This is important to young people to secure paid work which in turn reflects their skills at the end of their training and will provide security for their future. From a policy perspective, this in turn will increase the number of young people who are economically active. A response which has been supported by both the current Conservative and previous coalition government, through policies to encourage continued education and to boost the number of places on apprenticeships, and more recently Higher Level Apprenticeships (HLA's), (Cote, 2014). Raising the Participation age (RPA) to 18 by 2015, places accountability on Local Authorities to ensure that all those young people post-GCSE's are still in full-time education, an apprenticeship or employment with training (Gregg, 2014). This as we know is not achievable for all young people, as reflected in the current UK NEET statistics and the reports of a failing Apprenticeship programme. It is also seen been many as a knee jerk reaction by policy makers to the current economic climate (Cote, 2014).

Research suggests that current government policies are producing results for young people aged sixteen to nineteen but have done little to smooth the transition of

young people from school to work (Gregg, 2014). The rise in apprenticeship starts among the under-nineteens has been modest, with increased numbers of apprenticeships mainly driven by older age groups (Gregg, 2014). A reduction in NEET figures remain high on the Local Authority agenda. With recent developments for economic regeneration through partnership bids aiming to bring economic prosperity and opportunities for increased apprenticeship opportunities for young people through government and partnership sponsored University Technical Colleges (UTC). Although it must be made clear that this option will not suit all young people, with many aspirant workers (OECD, 2010) seeking to join the labour market, including low skilled jobs. Current research suggests that trends in apprenticeships are emerging but with a competitive edge. This could be attributed to the May 2015 elections, when Conservative leader David Cameron pledged three million pounds' investment for apprenticeships. The number of Apprenticeships continues to increase.

Former Labour leader Ed Milliband spoke of Labour's plans to increase the spending on Apprenticeships to provide a further 80,000 placements. During a recent walk around the Jaguar Land Rover plant in Wolverhampton, he stated that,

‘Labour proposes guarantee that every school leaver who gets the grades will be offered high-quality placement, an apprenticeship guarantee, by which every school leaver who gets the grades would be able to begin a high-quality apprenticeship’. (The Guardian, 2015).

This would leave behind those young people who will fail to achieve A-C GCSE grades. For the young people in this research whose aspirations are to work, they will require further support to achieve their aspirational goals due to the competitiveness of those young people who are getting the grades. We need to focus on the current social and economic context, and policy should reflect.

This research portrays an idea of ‘new politics’ to overcome national economic struggle. With public spending cuts rife and ‘bearing most heavily on the poor’, (Taylor-Gooby and Stoker, 2011:7) a deepening of social inequalities can be seen. There remains great scepticism surrounding the raising of the school leaving age or (RPA) seemingly increased at a time when the Government feels pressure to reduce youth unemployment, where keeping young people in school effectively takes them

out of statistics regarding young people seeking employment (Sheerman, 2014). Research into the policy responses from the then coalition Government indicated three broad areas: first, encouraging young people to extend participation in education or training; second, seeking to accelerate the recruitment of young people by employers; and third, to offer valuable work experience to those struggling to make quick transitions from education to employment. (Gregg, 2014), the Institute for Policy Research at the University of Bath argues that 'the first and third approaches evidenced some success, but overall the responses to policy are poor'. With, policies extending educational transitions overlooking the existing problems surrounding graduate unemployment and underemployment (MacDonald, 2011), there are key messages for policy to consider: In response to high levels of youth unemployment, the government has introduced policies to raise participation in education and training of eleven to sixteen year olds through school intervention programmes such as the Widening participation scheme, whose aim

'.... is to promote and provide the opportunity of successful participation in higher education to everyone who can benefit from it. This is vital for social justice and economic competitiveness'

(HEFCE, 2014).

Historically it can be seen that young people are victims of political motives due to existing economic pressures (Cote, 2014). Arguably, this is evident in the changes in educational policy for young people, from New Labour's focus on 'education, education, education', where young people and inclusion in education were high on the agenda. This is contrasted by the Conservative Government, raising educational attainment and promoting competition in the labour market (Cote, 2014).

The current policy drive for mass expansion of university participation offers a different but arguably, equally flawed approach, by focusing on academic skills alone which limits the opportunities for those young people with vocational aspirations (Tunstall et al., 2012; Cote, 2014). Political economy theorists (Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Henslin, Henslin, & Keiser, 1976; in (Cote 2014:82-83), suggests that the comparatively recent expansion of university systems create a surplus of white-collar workers. These white-collar workers then compete with each other for jobs, so wages are kept low. It is fact that a large percentage of university graduates are

underemployed, and Cote (2014) notes that this has been a 'dirty little secret' for years (2014: 83). Therefore, there remains a gap for those young people who are not aspiring to an academic career, but who are looking for paid work to provide security.

This concept relates back to the young people featured in this research, living in urban regeneration areas.

Young people from working class communities are monitored through local government strategies including school intervention programmes, free school meals (FSM's) and those young people already labelled as NEET through social and political constructions (Gergen, 2009). Whilst many of these interventions can be seen as supportive for young people's aspirations all sides must be considered and compared to the experiences of young people, to determine how effective these intervention programmes and service offers are and if they are successfully supporting transitions from education to employment or training, in particular those young people living in areas of multiple deprivation (Kintrea, St Clair, Huston, 2011).

## 1.2 Class

Social and Cultural Capital appear to be a crucial factor when considering aspirations (Menzies, 2013). Perry and Francis (2010) claim that by focusing on aspirations alone, there is a danger of apportioning the cause to the individuals and overlooking the issue relating to the lack of social and cultural capital.

Bourdieu (1977) defines 'social capital' as those resources learned and shared amongst social systems, families or specific groups and 'cultural capital' as the familiarity with the dominant culture, possession of cultural resources, the use of particular languages and other behavioural characters. These are defined as 'capitals' and differ amongst social classes, as discussed by (Roberts, 2011). Those from middle class backgrounds have a greater access to these resources and can therefore negotiate the resources required in support of their aspirational goals.

Taking a further critical approach, and by adopting a Marxist ideology, it is clear that the former coalition government policy for education, employment and training had created a distinct class system (Kintrea, St Clair, Huston, 2011; Cote, 2014). To

further explore this view research can adopt a perspective of Functionalism (Durkheim, 1964) and Human Capital theory (Becker, 1976; Cote, 2014). As a functionalist, Durkheim posits that education is necessary for social solidarity where knowledge and skills are desired in a developed society, and where a society is economically developed, specialist skills including a technology and science based industry can promote high economic growth, and this is favourable to the government (Florida, 2012).

Durkheim's view of university as 'meritocracy', is of an 'elite' based on skills and talent rather than wealth and social class, which therefore promotes social mobility, correcting pre-existing inequalities of opportunity by equipping graduates with the human capital skills needed and used in the labour market (Durkheim, 1964). Education policy favours the view of Becker's human capitalist approach, which excludes young people such as the current NEET cohort from accessing higher education and apprenticeship opportunities due to lower prior educational attainment. Thus the existing policy does not favour those with low educational attainment, or low skilled work aspirations. Existing policy reforms could be said to be reminiscent of 1980's Thatcherism, which in effect is causing young people to take jobs with little security such as a zero-hour contract to survive. The alternative is to remain unemployed and claim state benefits such as Job Seekers Allowance.

### **1.3 Urban Regeneration Areas**

The concept of 'urban regeneration' was established after the Second World War. During the war, there was virtually no house building, and 208,000 dwellings destroyed, 250,000 made uninhabitable and over 250,000 seriously damaged (equal in total to 5 per cent of the housing stock). After this, the Government moved towards improvement of housing rather than demolishing it. New issues had started to emerge at the end of 1960s such as problems of economic restructuring, growing urban deprivation, social exclusion and environmental degradation. Urban Regeneration research suggests that 'British cities were among the earliest in Europe to experience this wave of economic restructuring and social change, partly as a result of poor industrial competitiveness, outworn infrastructure and social tensions in the inner cities' (Crouch and Fraser, 2008:3; Mehta, 2008). Many of the

UK cities have faced a wave of this blight after 1970s. The main reason was de-industrialisation coupled with suburbanisation. Many of the cities have suffered from tremendous population loss during the last four decades. The post-industrial town featured in this research has suffered due to a decline in the manufacturing industry, which has affected several generations within the town. The aspirations of young people living in areas labelled as 'urban regeneration' is a key focus of this research and is explored through a definition of Urban Regeneration. This can be described as a positive change:

'a comprehensive and integrated vision and action, which leads to the resolution of urban problems and which seeks to bring about a lasting improvement in the economic, physical, social and environmental condition of an area that has been subject to change, requires additional support, and should therefore be supported through programmes such as widening participation to provide aspirational support for young people to realise their potential'. (Roberts and Sykes 2000:4 in Greenhalgh and Shaw; 2002).

#### **1.4 A North West Post-Industrial Town**

Historically, intervention programmes have failed to address the rising cases of anti-social behaviour, and teenage pregnancy, along with low educational attainment levels and a reduction in jobs, meaning a rise in lost profit due to rent arrears and associated costs (JRF, 2012). Through a partnership working these issues can be addressed in a cost effective manner whilst adopting a community-based approach.

'In the past 10 years' partnership has become a defining characteristic of British urban regeneration. This is in recognition of the fact that economic decline, social exclusion and area dereliction are problems that have proved too severe and complex to be resolved by any one agency, local government, business or community group acting alone'. (Carley, 2000; Chapman, et al., 2000).

This project is set within a post-industrial North West town where communities are identified as problematic due to experiencing multiple levels of deprivation and targeted families are signposted to the governments so-called 'Troubled Families' programme. Recent NEET intervention projects developed by the Local Authority

and stakeholders have included a thorough review of existing youth related policies and local strategies. These have highlighted key problems and opportunities within neighbourhoods where associated costs have been identified. Problems include limited planning and provision of youth engagement policies, poor efficiency of investment and resource provision across stakeholders and also a lack of expertise in community-level data collection of disengaged youth. With this in mind, it can be assumed that there is a significant lack of understanding of the needs of young people and their aspirations within Central Government and Local Authority policy.

Poverty, unemployment, and low educational attainment, highlight key inequalities embedded within this distinct and culturally diverse market town. With historical first and second generations of immigration, local policies have changed dramatically to reflect the multiple deprivations and changing demographics. Young people face higher than average (compared with county/national figures) (DfE, 2010), anti-social behaviour, young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs), and teenage pregnancy as well as lower than average educational attainment, fewer successful youth transitions and limited access to post-16 education and training. Through a more accurate understanding of these determinants of aspirations and through assessment and improvement of youth engagement at neighbourhood level, school intervention programmes may be well placed to support a Local Authority in reduction of anti-social behaviour and crime. This may even help to drive long-term strategic aims to support a transformational regeneration plan, providing the programme is both well researched, theoretically underpinned and has measured positive outcomes.

The spiralling costs associated with these issues can be seen to have led the development of local youth intervention programmes (JRF, 2012). However, an economic benefit approach does not favour young people as often this means cuts in some services to provide other services, including the removal of the Connexions services which has featured in many praising Ofsted reports:

In the best local authority areas, the Connexions services were an integral part of the strategy [...] They played a lead role in establishing priorities for collaborative action [...] They were crucial in ensuring that other providers understood what hurdles potentially vulnerable young people had to overcome (Ofsted, 2010).

In November 2010 a move by the Coalition Government, as part of its cost-cutting measures announced that the service should become an all-age careers service. This would include any obligations placed upon the Secretary of State to direct Local Authorities to deliver certain types of careers advice. This move would see schools having the overall responsibility for careers guidance for young people, subsequently reducing the support that schools could offer due to a lack of resource. In relation to this research, the impact of such changes would mean that young people would receive limited or possibly no guidance in support of their aspirational goals.

Whereas the previous Connexions service dedicated their resources to young people's careers (Stotten, 2014). Such changes would see existing partnership links within the communities lost and in addition with a change in direction to provide an all-age careers service, the effort and resources allocated to tackling NEETs may be reduced significantly. This would see much of the dynamic work undertaken through local partnerships lost as result of central government cutbacks and many vulnerable young people, including those classed as NEET facing uncertainty. Under scrutiny corners may be cut where the recruitment of trained staff is substituted with volunteers, and activities offered may not be aimed at supporting aspirational goals and more so keeping young people under the radar in a 'Big Brother' type programme.

Local Authority based initiatives aimed at addressing some of these issues include an ambitious economic regeneration strategy to support economic development to 2030. The key objectives of the strategy include, 'the creation of a nationally significant economic centre with a total population in excess of 100,000 people', (currently it has about 83,000) (ONS, 2012), that in turn will make the area 'one of the leading centres for advanced engineering and manufacturing centres in England' and ultimately will be, 'recognised as a sought-after place for people to live, work, put down roots and develop their talents' (Acevo Commission, 2012).

## **1.5 Policy**

During the 1980's the UK was in a deep economic depression, an era increasingly characterised by neo-liberalism (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007), a Thatcher Conservative Government with a focus upon 'new politics' sought to solve the

economy with extensive public spending cuts and economic restructure (MacDonald, 2011). This led to youth becoming ‘increasingly marginalized within a contracted youth labour market’ (Barry, 2010). With the gap in social equality increasing and youth unemployment figures reaching 1 million at their peak, this sparked violent social turmoil and mass riots throughout the 1980’s (Burnett, 1994). In the UK context, this rekindling of interest in young people’s lives has also been fuelled by New Labour’s focus over the last decade on youth interventions strategies as a key tool for tackling social exclusion and promoting wider social inclusion (Heath et al., 2009:3).

Such services have been provided by Connexions, Anti-social behaviour policies and teenage pregnancy. Such programmes create considerable interest amongst researchers of young people (Heath et al., 2009).

This has provided many opportunities for both official and unofficial policy evaluation (Stotten, 2014), which conclude that young people have low aspirations and require strategies to support their transitions to Education, Employment or Training (EET).

With a continued focus for the UK Government on raising the aspirations of young people in a bid to resolve the growing socio-economic impacts of young people (NEET). This cohort of young people seen as having a negative impact on local Government and local business resources highlighted in reports generated during the initial coalition agenda, *Youth the crisis we cannot afford* (Acevo Commission, 2011). This report was widely used by local authorities to inform such intervention programmes as featured in this project. Where schools reported by Ofsted as ‘In special measures’, are seeking support from the local authority, a social housing landlord and public services to develop a key intervention programme to tackle rising costs due to young people who are not engaging with the current system.

As discussed numerous cuts have been made to youth related services where young people relied on both financial and mentor support both during and post education. By providing unique opportunities such as this research project which is developed and delivered at grass roots level, young people including the hard to reach are provided with a platform on which to have their say. Allowing them to share their experiences of services designed to support life as a fourteen-year-old today. It is

through these young voices that we begin to develop a reality of their lives and their needs; through an in-depth examination gaps are identified.

## **1.6 Widening Participation**

Since World War II, equality of educational opportunity has been the bedrock of social and political discourse. Using a timeline approach\* (Appendix C), to highlight the Key dates of UK policy changes on widening participation in higher education, followed by a discussion to link contemporary discourse of young people's educational aspirations (ESRC, 2008).

Following on from the Dearing report of 1997, Widening Participation has been an issue of increasing importance in the UK. The report heralded a new phase of HE expansion. Intervening in education where young people had differential chances of progressing to HE with respect to the socio-economic status of their family: those from higher socio-economic backgrounds were six times more likely to go into HE than those from lower ones (Harrison, 2012). Although Widening Participation (WP) is a contemporary issue, participation in higher education has been rising steadily for the last 50 years (Chowdry et al., 2013; Tight, 2012).

The term 'widening participation' is one that tends to be closely identified with the Labour Government, elected in the United Kingdom in 1997 (Harrison, 2012). A key focus of their policy was to increase by half the number of 18–30 year olds who participated in higher education (Labour Party, 2001). This commitment was to open the offer of higher education to a more diverse group of students (Department for Education and Skills [DfES] 2003a, 2003b). A number of Higher Education Institutes in the United Kingdom had practised Widening Participation for many years prior to 1997, and in this respect the concept was not new (Chowdry et al., 2013; Tight, 2012). The Labour Government however, appeared to be attempting to bring widening participation into the mainstream; challenging the perceived elitism of certain universities and offering an experience of higher education to all those who had 'the ability to benefit' (DfES 2003b).

The future shape of higher education – and the place of widening participation within this – was uncertain until the coalition government published their white paper

response (DBIS, 2011) to Lord Browne's report on higher education funding and student finance (Browne 2010). The white paper suggested a shift towards a more customer-focused higher education system and one in which HEIs must 'take more responsibility for increasing social mobility' (DBIS, 2011, 4). However, this appeared to be social mobility only for 'individuals with the highest academic potential' (DBIS, 2011: 7), suggesting a narrower interpretation of widening participation than that outlined by the Labour Government (who were keen to offer opportunities to all those who had the 'ability to benefit'; DfES, 2003b).

This change in direction, from Labour's focus on 'education, education, education', where all young people had information and support for their aspirations, to the coalition reforms and world class education leading to a competitive labour market, now leaves behind those young people for whom the Widening Participation schemes supported (Cote, 2014). Although current government policy highlights the benefits of apprenticeships and continues to increase the number of places available it is the current policy for education where young people within the UK educational system may fail to achieve the required academic qualifications to compete for their aspirational careers. As the young participants discuss in their focus group a lack of understanding of their individual needs within the educational system and beyond is evident. The remainder of this chapter will focus on local contexts, and what this means for them in terms of their aspirational goals and future transitions.

It can be argued that for over fifteen years' youth policies needed more progression and less restarts, otherwise young people will remain in a continuing cycle moving in and out of the NEET status with no long-term benefits (Crisp and Powell, 2016). The current education system was designed, conceived and structured during the industrial revolution, intended for academics, (Robinson, 2011). The situation does not seem to have changed markedly (Chowdry et al., 2013; Tight, 2012). Arguably, this is society not following the structures they set in place, (Robinson, 2011). An example of this can be seen in the changes to the University entrance fees which undermines the role of the Widening Participation scheme designed to engage young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Chowdry et al., 2013; Tight, 2012). At the time, the EMA offered financial support to over 70% of young people as they studied A-level and BTEC qualifications. Whilst also seen as an incentive to increase participation in further education it was estimated that an extra 10% of

young people stayed in education due to EMA. The most deprived districts were affected by the coalition's cuts with affluent areas of London approximately 10,000 teenagers would lose their EMA (Toynbee & Walker, 2011), while in more affluent areas for example Chelsea, fewer than 900 young people would be affected. This unequal distribution of educational support is reflected in the increasingly diverse and cultural settings within society today. Specifically, young people living in areas of multiple-deprivation, and deemed to have a low status of cultural capital, are those who are caught in the continued entrenchment of traditional forms of inequality (Cote, 2014).

For the young participants in this research such support would provide an opportunity to engage in further education and training to gain skills for apprenticeships and employment and to support aspirations for higher education. There are opportunities for government-supported bursaries, however without access to this information young people may not be aware that such an offer exists or how to begin to apply for such support.

With this in mind, it can also be argued that the current education system contributes to the broken transitions of young people that we see reflected in the local NEET statistics reported within central and local government portals. Certainly the educational system dictates young people's options and therefore, arguably, influences subsequent outcomes. Research points to the economic benefits (Lambert, 2009), and benefits to social justice (DfES, 2006 in Wilkins and Burke), through increased participation in education. There remains a deeply rooted construction of young people living in areas of deprivation and in particular urban regeneration areas and their aspirations to work and succeed.

A study by (Crawford, Johnson, Machin, Vignoles, 2011) concluded that 'if policy is to improve social mobility via improvements in individuals' skill levels, then there must be genuine gains in skill levels, and the skills acquired must be valued in the labour market'.

## **Chapter 2. Youth Voice and Participation**

Social-constructionism is a widely respected body of knowledge within social science theory and discourse (James, 1998; Uprichard, 2008; Jenks, 1996; Andrews, 2012). The socially constructed child has been the subject of much debate over the past three decades, the child is perceived as a social actor actively constructing their childhood as ‘being’, and the ‘becoming’ child as an adult in the making, who lacks the experiences of an adult that they will become (Jones, 2009; James, 2008; Woodman, 2009). The voices of today’s ‘youth’ (Jones, 2009), identified as ‘emerging adulthood’ (Bynner, 2001, Lee, 2001; Woodman and Wynn, 2012) is a relatively new discourse within the field of research. Young people want to be considered as an individual who is ‘becoming’ an ‘adult’ and from a temporal aspect, (Uprichard, 2008) suggests that young people must be considered as both ‘beings’ and ‘becomings’ when addressing a temporal perspective to young people as social agents of their current and future lives. By advocating a rights based approach, research considers young people as both ‘being’ and ‘becomings’, they are individual young people with a voice, who can have a say in the things that will shape their live as they transition to adulthood (Uprichard, 2008).

By adopting a holistic and multi-disciplinary approach to constructions including, transitions, (James and Prout, 1997) and policy and participation (Pelke, 2004) one can consider the individual as a ‘being’, and not as a biological ‘sixteen year old’ to be protected. Taking this idea of a holistic approach a step further one can refer to key research of youth aspirations, through an examination of how aspirations are effected by social environments whilst also highlighting implications for current policies and practices (Gutman and Ackerman, 2008). In addition, through their extensive research of youth transitions, Furlong and Cartmel have provided 30 years of ground breaking evidence to inform researchers and policymakers of the complexity of young people’s lives, allowing researchers to break away from the linear constructs of society and focus their efforts on understanding the complex-psychological and social individual whom researchers are exploring within the emerging literature of youth studies (Woodman et al., 2013).

These socially constructed ideas are reflected in welfare services designed to support children and young people's lives such as social care, education, intervention and/or prevention (McCall, 2000; Pelke, 2004). The concern here is that we view children within a particular timeframe and not as individual beings (Lee, 2001; Prout and James, 1997, Uprichard, 2008), which does not always reflect the needs of services that may be required at that given time. For example, this is evident in changes to local authority policy during times of austerity where services that children and their families access are subject to cut backs and even closure. These services are fundamental in supporting young people and their families with resources for health and wellbeing.

In more recent times popular definitions of youth in Western societies are concerned with the life stage between childhood and adulthood, the transitional period between being dependent and becoming independent as discussed by (Kehilly, 2007). These concepts are fundamental to childhood research, which Wyness, (2006:26) states have emerged from 'a powerful adult myth, a series of stories and accounts' responsible for locating children as subordinate in society. Gittins (1998) argued almost thirty years ago that, childhood is the invention of adults, reflecting their needs and fears and shaped by the cultural assumptions of adult society (Gittins, 1998); which indicated that children are seen as vulnerable and in need of protection from society. Through historical discourses of youth as sub-cultures, young people are seen to be dependant young people who are to be protected from society and themselves (Gutman and Akerman, 2008), that is, they are not yet capable of making decisions for themselves. As discussed previously, they are 'becomings' and not yet 'beings' (Lee, 2001; Prout, 2005). Arguably, little has changed today (James and James, 2004).

Conversely, new and exciting developments within the field of research with children and young people is focusing on a so called 'emerging youth' (Arnett, 2013; Woodman and Wyn, 2012; Furlong, 2009; Macdonald, 2014). The conceptualisation and understanding of youth has been previously approached holistically by considering 'youth' in three different perspectives: cultural, comparative and biographical (Robb, 2007). A biographical approach considers the things that mean to most to young people, including 'mobility, home, belonging, intimacy and social life' (Henderson, et al., 2007). This approach captures the dynamic character of

young people's lives. It is evident from the results of the focus groups that the young people in this research are dynamic and unique in their individual biographies (Robb, 2007)

From these constructions a discourse of 'youth at risk' is created, echoed in policy by laws aimed at protecting young people from both society and themselves (Capuzzi and Gross, 2014). This protection of vulnerable young people has been maintained through the provision of rules to keep young people from harm, and by punishing those young people who do not comply with the law (Capuzzi and Gross, 2014).

Through interventions aimed at protecting young people from the law such as, Anti-social Behaviour Orders (ASBO), in response to this society heard 'asbos and proud', which called for a critical and reflective rethink of community safety and policy development (Squires, 2005). This research provides evidence that this particular intervention designed to protect young people and society was misinformed and lacked the input form young people and the community to provide an effective solution.

## **2.1 Rights**

The United Nations, Convention on the rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989), with a particular focus on Article 12 states that children have the right to have their views given due weight in all matters affecting them. The idea that children are bearers of rights rather than objects of concern is relatively recent but is one that has been enormously influential (Montgomery, 2010:149; Kaseem, Murphy, Taylor 2009). For Children, these rights are defined primarily in the UNCRC, providing an internationally endorsed set of standards through which states are required to operate within a children's rights framework.

The research community is continually looking for ways to ensure that children's participation is explored and highlighted (Lundy and McEvoy, 2011), and is: truly voluntary and that children are safe (Hill, 2006; Morrow and Richards, 1996); that they are given creative ways of expressing themselves (Clark and Moss, 2001 Cook and Hess, 2007; O'Kane, 2008); and that they are given feedback on engaged in research outcomes (Tidsall et al., 2009). Further, Lundy and McEvoy (2011) state

that a children's rights informed approach should be – safe, inclusive and provide engaging opportunities and a focus on assisting children in the formation of their views. As participants within research studies children should be supported to enjoy a right to have assistance in the formation of their views, as advised in (CRC, Article 12), they should have access to information (CRC, Article 17) and as stipulated in (CRC, Article 5) guidance from adults. (See Lundy & McEvoy, 2011). However, the issue is complicated by the definitions of youth and the social constructions as previously explored that defines the lives of these young people who are striving to succeed in becoming an adult. Robb (2007) suggests that services for young people are constructed partly in relation to how childhood itself is constructed, an idealisation of childhood and a view of young people as innocents who need to be protected by adults, (pg. 269).

The previous Children's Commissioner for England Maggie Atkinson spoke at Government Knowledge, Third Annual Children and Young People's Conference in October 2014, stating that, as a country we are breaking the law by not listening to young people and acting upon their voices. In particular, young people from marginalised communities are particularly vulnerable to the laws surrounding the consent of young people. Davis (1998) suggests that in speaking of children's voices, we must be careful not to imply a single voice emerging from a 'homogenous' culture. He suggests, therefore, that educationalists must acknowledge the diversity of children's voices and explore multiple realities within educational settings. Equally, where the parent/guardian of a young person is not acting on the best interests of the young person in their care, the rights of that young person are not met (Heath et al., 2009). This highlights the concerns of vulnerable young people not being informed of the basic services available to them to ensure that they can live safe and productive lives as outlined in the UNCRC.

The UK Government state that, 'All UK Government policies and practices must comply with the UNCRC', (1991). It is clear however, that through a critical analysis of existing policy and literature there remain gaps in national policy and local services for children and young people that must be addressed to ensure the local NEET cohort is supported, so that they can realise their full potential, be aware of their rights to have a say, and in doing so raise their confidence and support their aspirations (Gutman and Akerman, 2008). McLeod (2001) suggests that

marginalized groups in particular may be more at risk of being overlooked, which presents difficulties where children and young people may be by definition most likely to be amongst those harder to reach/harder to hear groups, and therefore apparently more in need of having their voice heard.

Partnership and collaborative working within local communities is essential for social change, including those communities faced with multiple deprivation where resources are stretched and funding is limited. However, if the needs and rights are not met there will be no room for change and therefore the existing gaps will remain and possibly widen (Lupton and Fitzgerald, 2015).

The two factors highlighted above, participation and voice are prominent themes in this research, as highlighted in previous research of young people's participation, including (Arnstein, 1969), and later (Hart, 1992) adaption of Arnstein's Ladder of young people's participation, which is also linked to the rights of young people to participate and to be taken seriously in decision making. Through the voices of the focus group participants this research can provide evidence-based feedback to inform the school and wider community of their aspirations, to improve the offer for young people as they have actively informed the project of their individual needs. This can be difficult to achieve should the motivations for the schools and local partnerships be aimed at market research for children and young people (Heath et al., 2009), as the needs of the young people will not be met leaving a negative feeling and a possible lack of trust in future research. The aims of the researcher in this case are to obtain the views of young people and to disseminate those views for a better understanding of needs and rights and citizenship.

Unlike the Big Society initiative 'Positive for Youth' where UK policy makers put into place interventions for young people's services that provided only social control in a time with low youth unemployment and a strained sense of community belonging (Buckland, 2013). The voluntary sector provides services that are accessible for everyone, and often provide a multi-agency approach to a range of services designed to promote health and wellbeing. These basic needs by right can support young people's aspirations and transitions to further education or employment. This approach provides services for young people living in areas of regeneration where

such resources can be the difference between young people engaging or becoming NEET due to poor health and access to information to support aspirations.

For young people, having a say is not an easy matter, and is recognised by the Children's Commissioner, whose job is to promote and protect the rights of all children in England with a particular focus on children and young people with difficulties or challenges in their lives, and in particular those living away from home, in or leaving care, or receiving social care services (Children's Commissioner, 2014). A children's rights approach to participation is acknowledged by a Takeover Day event in November every year giving children and young people the chance to work with adults for the day and be involved in decision-making (Children's Commissioner, 2014: Why Rights Matter). Young people are empowered to ask questions and challenge political figures on issues that really matter to them. As highlighted in a review of education policy for young people living in socio economic deprivation, there is continued limitation to their life chances, with a number of unforeseen health and wellbeing issues added to the list of barriers to achieve aspirational goals and ultimately self-fulfilment (Walker and Donaldson, 2010). Such events can promote opportunities for young people to realise their potential and in doing so raise their aspirations. Such events can also promote a sense of belonging through participation with other young people in that age group. Through an evaluation of such events researchers of young people can be informed through the experiences of young people.

Through a review of key literature, it is evident that policies for young people in the UK remain underpinned by traditional and often negative constructions. They are often not informed by theoretical concepts of children and young people living in a contemporary society. Previously explored constructions of young people as 'in need of protection' continues to silence their voice within social and political arenas. It can be therefore argued that young people continue to not 'have their say'.

The literature referred to so far in this thesis has focussed on children and young people within a social and political setting, however, a key discourse related to young people's rights and aspirations and one that is increasingly referred to by social researchers and in the media is Gender.

According to the UCAS Chief Executive Mary Curnock Cook OBE, the picture for female participation in STEM education is changing, as stated by the numbers of young women participating in these subjects continues to increase. This is positive news for young people living in post-industrial towns where increasingly male dominated roles are prominent and young women are empowered through national initiatives and local programmes to realise their potential.

Further research on gendered aspirations (Allen and Hollingworth, 2010), suggests that young people remain disadvantaged in their career aspirations due to ideas of gendered pathways in education. Allen and Hollingworth found that young people still consider STEM subjects to be masculine, ‘for young women in particular there remain conflicts between their ‘self-identity’ and perception of what it means to be a ‘scientist’, ‘mathematician’ or ‘engineer’ which may deter them from pursuing these pathways’ (Archer et al., 2012; Mendick 2006, Macdonald 2014 in Allen and Mendick, 2015:7).

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Gender plays a significant role in aspirations, which is perhaps unsurprising as the initial focus of the school’s mentor programme was on young girls partnered with women from the local business and voluntary sectors as their mentors. With comments referring to activities that the girls would like to see included in future programmes, beauty was featured and is often regarded as typical activity for young girls of this age group.

A topical issue in both historical and current discourse of youth, (Nayak & Kehily, 2013:6) state that gender is a negotiation that occurs within a matrix of social and historical forces enshrined in ideological arenas of law, religion, family, schooling, media, work and so forth.

It can be argued that schools convey strong messages of masculinity and femininity through subject choices, creating gender bias in STEM subjects (Nayak & Kehily, 2013) and as highlighted by UCAS Director Mary Curnock Cook during a recent key note speech at a Manchester Conference.

This is also evident when considering the Western World ideas of gender through personal possessions, sense of identity and power relations. (In 1985:5 Burr, talked of 'vertical gender divisions of labour', where men are more likely than women to occupy high status, powerful positions and of 'Horizontal gender divisions of labour' in terms of the kind of jobs that people do. It can be argued that this is still the case, that there are women's jobs in the caring and service industries, and men's jobs in industry and commerce. Research by Javier Polavieja (2014) argues that a continued focus on the profession of girls and women will not change the labour market. For example, 'giving boys the confidence to go into occupations that are not traditionally seen as 'men's work' could help raise the value placed on those jobs.' (Javier Polavieja, 2014. p31). There is a continued focus on raising aspirations for women to consider careers in STEM occupations, and in particular, careers in engineering. BT open reach carers page offers a case study of women as engineers.

Despite the Equal Pay Act 1970, The Sex Discrimination Act (1975) and the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) there remains inequality amongst men and women, a topic that continues to be widely discussed as campaigns are held for women to hold managerial positions, and men are widely sought to become primary teachers. It can be argued therefore, that the social sciences have an important role to play both in explaining gender differences and inequalities and in making recommendations for change.

Further, (Butler, 2012) argues, men should be encouraged into female-dominated subjects such as nursing, teaching and social work, just as science and engineering is promoted to women. She also highlights that although women were outnumbered in subjects such as computer science, the gender discrepancy was actually greater in nursing and in subjects allied to medicine, which includes nursing, which requires a greater number of skilled workers.

This view of gender inequality is relevant in contemporary discourses of youth. In the focus group, the girl's response to the activities on offer questioned why they didn't

have football in their programme and asked why it doesn't allow for the boys and girls to join together for such activities. This is a mature approach for the group and echoes that of research findings including Polavieja (2014) and Mary Curnock Cook (2015), young people are informing us through agency and arguably, they have a right to express their views that matter to them and to be heard. They also express a desire to participate, as the research themes suggest, the wish to belong to a group of young people and to have a say in that participation.

Theoretical models of participation tie into the concept of 'belonging' and how young people connect and engage with their immediate community. Roger Hart (1997) proposed the first comprehensive definition of the concept of participation based on his experiences in environmental studies. He described participation as the process of sharing decisions that affect the life of the community in which one lives. It is the means by which democracy is built and the standard by which democracy should be measured. According to Hart, participation is the fundamental right of citizenship (1992:5). The key element of Hart's definition is decision-making. He describes participation as a ladder, with levels of youth involvement in projects ranging from non-participation to full participation. Hart categorises eight levels of participation, calling this the Ladder of Participation. Hart notes that the first three rungs are non-participation. Rung one, young people are manipulated, rung two, young people are decoration, rung three young people are tokenized, rung four young people are assigned and informed, rung six is adult initiated and decisions are shared with young people, rung seven, young people lead and initiate action and finally rung 8 young people and adults share decision making.

It can be suggested that a further rung is added, rung nine, where young people can take the lead. This adaptation of Hart's model, allowing young people to make their own decisions with the support of others is multi-disciplinary in its approach and addresses the themes of aspirations, mental health and belonging.

Through a review of literature, considering theoretical notions of young people, their aspirations and transitions, including a critique of policy designed for young people, it is clear that there are many gaps in supporting their transitions in life from education to employment. A young person will both construct a social reality and form part of other people's constructions, education and aspirations including the implicit models

that underpin policy. These ways of speaking about oneself connect to powerful ideas circulating in UK society about the role of the individual in shaping their future within a ‘meritocracy’, (Cameron, 2012), wherein politicians assert the importance of hard work to achieving one’s aspirations and finding happiness. Through collaborative working within the community as suggested by the proposed adaptation of Hart’s model, young people can begin to realise their potential and gain further information and support through working together with adults to make informed and confident decisions about their lives.

## **Chapter 3 Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

#### **A Schools Based Intervention Programme**

The participants of this research have all been identified as 'at risk' of becoming NEET, determined by a range of factors linked to educational attainment and behaviour and have been assigned to a collaborative programme as an intervention to raise their aspirations in their final year of secondary school.

The programme aimed to raise the aspirations of the young people by providing mentoring activities for male and female secondary high school pupils. The idea was that teenagers should have a mentor, someone who has life experiences which they can use to help steer their mentee on the right path, not only provide teenagers with a mentor but also incorporate team sessions and ready for work sessions.

The programme additionally sought to address anti-social behaviour and promote safe relationships. The programme was both developed and delivered through a collaborative partnership with the Community Partnerships Team and Local Constabulary, who originally designed the programme to tackle an increase in anti-social behaviour and the increasing rates of alcohol related incidents. The programme worked initially with two local secondary schools, an academy and a cooperative both in Ofsted special measures. By providing disengaged pupils with a range of activities to reflect the aims and objectives of the programme, including self-defence classes, sexual health sessions, and drugs and alcohol related workshops.

The sessions also included visits by young people who volunteered to share their personal stories with the pupils. During the initial pilot phase, the offer expanded to include team building workshops and visit days to local organisations to experience work and to discuss career opportunities with professionals within the sector. This offer correlated with the focus on reducing the 5% NEETs for the Local Council by providing young people with career experiences and information. Also on the agenda for the local government was the increase in teenage pregnancy rates with some of the highest figures in the county. Following the closure of several youth services offers as previously discussed, including the popular Connexions services, Local Authority figures report an increase in the occurrence of teenage pregnancy and

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs). With some of the highest rates in Europe for Teenage Pregnancy, and STI rates nationally are 1 in 5, (ONS, 2012), all of these factors add to the complex lives that young people face as they negotiate their lives with increasingly reduced services.

The original aim of this research was to tell the stories of 20 young male and female pupils aged sixteen years in a northern post-industrial town. However, as detailed earlier, this was not possible due to many of the young people failing to consent to having their comments used in this research study. They participated in the workshops which were part of the mentoring intervention programme and they also took part in discussions about the programme. However, fifteen of the twenty young people did not consent to having their comments used in the study. Nevertheless, the research question was retained and is given below along with the research aims. This is to report the views and comments of the five young people who did consent. It is beyond the remit of the current study to investigate the reasons the young people made the decisions they did regarding participation and consent for quotes to be used. Nonetheless, reflection on the whole research process, including possible reasons for the young people's choices, are presented.

### **The research question is**

### **What are the aspirations of young people living in a northern post- industrial town?**

The aims are

- To explore a young person's definition of aspirations
- To review the impact of the mentoring programme on the young people

A research focus group approach was identified as an appropriate research method as it allows for the collection of experientially based data, to form a complete picture of the experiences of the pupils (Finch and Lewis, 2003). This qualitative approach requires the researcher to remain as true to the participants' realities as possible through the collection of their stories (Heath et al., 2009). It was felt important that

the young people were given the chance to talk openly and without criticism, of their aspirational goals and how they translate in the current context for young people.

The theoretical underpinning of the empirical research was identified as Interpretivism as this provided a solid base to explore the experiences of young people who it can be argued are social-agents of their own life worlds (Ritchie and Lewis, 2014); specifically to provide voice to the experiences of young people who may be disengaged from education and services and to provide an opportunity for the young people to reflect on their own experiences of the intervention programme that they had been ascribed to, which aimed to raise their aspirations. Interpretivism, as the name implies, involves researchers interpreting elements of the study, (Ritchie et al., 2014:11). Therefore, ‘interpretive researchers assume that access to reality (given or socially constructed) is only through social constructions such as language, consciousness, shared meanings, and instruments’ (Myers, 2008:38). Therefore, an Interpretivist approach was deemed appropriate to provide a base on which to undertake this research as the young people were able to provide their understanding of aspirations and transitions.

Within an Interpretivist epistemology, it was appropriate to adopt a social constructionist approach (Gergen, 2009) which ‘...emphasises that knowledge is actively ‘constructed’ by human beings’ (Ritchie et al., 2014:13). This research project then aimed to reflect the view that all reality is constructed within the confines of culture in which we live; our culture ‘.... shap[ing] the way in which we see things...and giv[ing] us a quite definite view of the world’ (Crotty, 1998:58). In attempting to make sense of the social world, social constructionists view knowledge as constructed by people through their interaction.

This section will now consider this research within a children’s rights-based approach, to highlight the safe, inclusive and engaging opportunities when research has a focus on assisting children and young people in the formation of their views. Through adopting this approach, confidence is raised within the individual, which can lead to a more child-centred informed research outcomes (Lundy and McEvoy, 2011).

This research aimed to provide an opportunity for young people to express their voice in line with their rights as defined by the United Nations Convention on the

Rights for the Child (CRC) (United Nations, 1989). This view of children as right-holders and not just able to but entitled to engage in the process of research, 'has significant implications for research processes' (Lundy and McEvoy, 2011: 1). This approach requires the researcher to carefully consider their position in the research, to not only include safe, inclusive and engaging opportunities for children and young people to express their views but also on deliberate strategies to assist children in formation of their views (Lundy, 2011).

For instance, there are many research questions that researchers may wish to explore, which may not be understood by children and young people themselves, and therefore they will not be in a position to form a view on all matters affecting them. Being mindful of this it was considered important to frame the questions and language that was meaningful and understandable to the young people involved in the research (Lundy, 2011).

Additionally, it was important to consider the relationship between researcher and participant as this is key to enabling children and young people to confidently contribute to the research; therefore, a distinct rights informed approach was deemed appropriate. This position links closely to Article (12) of the CRC, discussed above, which requires the decision-maker to first; 'presume that a child has the capacity to form his or her own views', on matters affecting him or her (UN, 2009:9), and second, to ensure that children/young people are informed, 'about matters, options and possible decisions to be taken and their consequences by those who are responsible for hearing the child. (UN, 2009:10).

Another concern for this project was to not only hear the voices of young people, but to also have their voices taken seriously in all matters affecting them. Again linking into Article 12 of the CRC within the boundaries of international law, this emphasises that children/young people have the right to these considerations; something that was considered important to the process of this study. Indeed, it was stressed to the young people at all times that, their voices would be heard and taken account of within this research project.

Children/young people's rights are defined primarily in the United Nations Convention on the rights of the Child ('the CRC') (United Nations, 1989) providing an internationally endorsed set of standards through which states are required to

operate within a children's rights framework. As a researcher for an educational institution, this project complies with these standards and as recognized by other researchers completing research with children and young people (see Christensen and James, 2008; Greene and Hogan, 2005).

### **3.2 Research Reflexivity**

'Research is generally about discovery and not of knowing the answers before one starts,' (Moon, 2004:1) and this position is certainly relevant to this study as lack of consent to report the voices of the participants had neither been expected nor prepared for.

Reflexivity requires the researcher to be aware of their effect on the process and outcomes of research created on the basis that 'knowledge cannot be separated from the knower' (Steedman, 1991:53) but also being mindful that, 'In the social sciences, there is only interpretation. Nothing speaks for itself' (Denzin, 1994:500). These two different research positions then informed thinking and reflection around this research. The concepts, once defined needed to be used with a degree of reflexivity, giving due recognition to the 'contextual contingency and partiality' of any given interpretation of a socially constructed truth (Nayak, 2003:31). Halliday (2007) reminds the researcher that we must understand the effects on the researcher on the researched instead of trying to eliminate them (p,138).

I have endeavoured to conduct the entire research project within this reflexive framework. Through a review of literature for reflective practice and buy adopting both Gibbs and Moon's models of reflection to inform this research project.

### **3.3 Method**

#### **Research Focus Groups**

Historically, the research focus group has become an increasingly used method of data collection within the social research field, changing from a tool for market research (Bloor et al., 2001), to a now well established mainstream method across

the field of social research, where they are widely used and are an extremely valuable research approach (Ritchie et al., 2014:213). In researching with young people there are many issues to be aware of including, participation, not wanting to speak, interrupting, and the need to ensure the work is peer dominated (Heath et al., 2009:35). The dynamic concept of a research focus group provides an engaging space for young people to interact and have their say and in doing so data is generated between all participants (Ritchie et al., 2014:171). Focus groups are also described as a ‘group interview’. Although not a collection of individual interviews, the group interacts, and through a process of listening, reflection, consideration and clarification through a dynamic process, participant’s views are sharpened and refined, moving to a much deeper and more considered level (Bloor et al., 2001; Bryman, 2001; Kitzinger and Barbour, 1999). This dynamic, or synergy (Stewart and Shamdasni, 1990), sees the group working together, and in doing so creating a spontaneous dialogue facilitated by a stronger social context, revealing more from the individual based on the subject area through the groups continued interaction. Within this framework, the researcher becomes an observer and the group take over as an interviewer (Ritchie et al., 2014). The focus group provides a more natural environment than that of the individual interview, creating a real life situation of influence because participants are influencing and influenced by others- just as they are in real life. (Kreuger and Cadey, 2000:11).

This was an important factor in providing the research focus groups for these young people to have a say without feeling overwhelmed by the research process. The research focus group format also aimed to provide a fun and informative session for both the researcher and the young people (this is evident by the interactions at the beginning and as a group during the recorded data), who could also hear their own responses and those of their peers. It must also be noted that the research focus group sessions provided a chance for the young people to reflect on their own participation in the intervention programme, and what their aspirations and goals mean to them and where they would go next to begin their transitions to education, employment or training.

The planned procedure for the focus groups was that each session would consist of ten pupils from each school participating during their usual timetabled activity slot and in a room that the young people are used to meeting in. However, due to a lack

of interest and consent on the day, only 5 pupils took part in the two focus groups. Two young people from one school took part in one session and three young people from another school in a second session.

### **3.4 Ethics**

Any research study raises ethical considerations (Ritchie and Lewis, 2013:66), however, the nature of qualitative research naturally raises issues that are not always anticipated which means that ethical considerations have a great significance in qualitative research (Ritchie and Lewis, 2013:66). The moral integrity of the researcher is also a critically important aspect of ensuring that the research process and a researcher's findings are trustworthy and valid (Nagy Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2010:59).

This initial phase of this research project included the completion of an ethics proposal for the intended methodological approach, to confirm that I could proceed with the planning of the research focus groups. I was aware that it is the responsibility of all researchers to ensure that their research is well conceived and designed (Heath et al., 2009:21). Due to the target group for this project, time was initially spent reviewing literature based on researching the lives of young people.

There is a distinctiveness of youth research (Heath et al., 2009:2). As evident in the literature reviewed, young people are a unique group in society. This statement echoes the aims of this project, and suggests the complex nature of researching with young people. Although researching youth in contemporary society is a popular area of research and intrigue in social science (Heath et al., 2009) It can also be argued that 'in certain respects, many of the methodological issues and choices facing youth researchers are no different from those facing any group of social researchers (Heath et al., 2009:4).

The following sections will discuss the approach taken to adhere to the correct ethical codes of practice.

The British Sociological Association state that, 'Research involving children requires particular care'. The consent of the child should be sought in addition to that of the

parent. Researchers should use their skills to provide information that could be understood by the child, and their judgement to decide on the child's capacity to understand what is being proposed. Specialist advice and expertise should be sought where relevant. 'Researchers should have regard for issues of child protection and make provision for the potential disclosure of abuse' (BSA, 2010). For the purpose of this study, the young people provided both verbal and written consent to participate in this research. This was not without challenge, and it is discussed later in this section.

Ethical approval for this research project was given by the Manchester Metropolitan University's Department of Interdisciplinary Studies ethics committee. The following discussion will focus on the challenges of undertaking this research project, and how they were managed.

### **3.5 Informed consent**

The aims of this project were to hear the voices of young people, yet taking account of the requirements for informed consent for a person aged sixteen this raised some challenges. The current position regarding obtaining consent from young people for research is bound up with the notion of 'Gillick Competency'; based on the assumption that a young person with 'sufficient understanding' can provide consent in their own right, and that under such circumstances a parent has no right to override their child's wishes' (Heath et al., 2009:27).

Therefore, the participant information packs received by all twenty individuals provided sufficient information written in an appropriate style and language to enable the participants to give their own consent, if aged sixteen. The participant information sheet (Appendix 6) and consent form (Appendix 5) were also discussed with the young people and they were able to ask questions. At this point all twenty young people gave verbal consent to take part in the research focus groups. The teaching staff witnessed this. For the purpose of this research and as part of the schools programme, the young people provided verbal consent to participate in the focus group sessions during their usual mentor one to one time. However, only five

participants then decided to participate and provided a signed consent form to allow their voices to be heard and recorded.

Fifteen young people did not wish to participate or to give written consent to have their words put forward as part of this study. Possibly, they may have had a lack of interest for the results of the research focus group, or possibly, they did not feel empowered to have their voices heard and taken account of. Maybe, having teachers present at the start of the process impacted their experience. Unfortunately, these will remain unanswered questions.

The fifteen young people who chose not to give written consent to participate may have decided to take part with the support of the school programme leaders and their mentors; or they may not. It is certainly beyond the remit of this study to explore, but nonetheless, if good quality research with young people is to be carried out, particularly research with hard to reach young people, then this is a question worth pursuing.

### **3.6 Anonymity**

Alongside the principle of informed consent, the researcher must also consider anonymity, even though individual participants may state that they would like their own names to be used within a report. Curiously, as a researcher I was asking the young people to make their views known; therefore, it seems paradoxical to maintain their anonymity when they expressed the desire to be identified. Indeed, this is a much-debated issue within youth research. For example, Heath et al. (2009) outline several examples to be cautious when considering anonymity of young people in research; for example, a participant's views may include critical comments towards a member of staff, which may create problems for that young person in public.

Through exercising anonymity, a young person may feel they can say more without consequence, however caution should also be dealt when giving young people the freedom to say whatever they wish without regard for the consequences (Heath et al., 2009). To manage these two possible outcomes ground rules were established within the group to ensure everyone could have their say whilst respecting the facilitator and other participants.

In order to retain the anonymity of the five participants who had chosen to participate each individual chose a colour for themselves to be identified by. This was a deliberate strategy to allow the young people some control in the research process – as they decided to be identified by colours (rather than animals or any other item) and they then chose their own personal colour identifier. The girls chose colours including purple (PU), pink (PI) and Baby Blue (BB). Whereas the boys chose to be identified by the colours black and blue. The researcher was identified as (F). The focus groups consisting of young people who had given written consent were audio recorded and the resulting data, transcribed verbatim. The data transcribed was from the five participants from across the two groups.

### **3.7 Data Analysis**

Analysis of the data was undertaken using inductive Thematic Analysis (TA) (Braun & Clarke, 2006). That is, no pre-existing theory was imposed on the analysis. Rather, analysis was grounded in the data itself; the words given by the young people.

TA is essentially a method for identifying and analysing patterns in qualitative data (Clarke, 2013). It moves beyond counting explicit words or phrases and focuses on identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas within the data, that is, themes. Codes are then typically developed to represent the identified themes and applied or linked to raw data as summary markers for later analysis (Guest et al., 2012).

The TA for this project followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps. These are outlined below together with the application of the six steps to the current research. This process provides researchers with a distinct explanation of what it is and how it is carried out. Thematic analysis is performed through the process of coding in six phases to create recognised and meaningful patterns.

The data collected from the focus groups is transcribed verbatim. During this process any initial thoughts and ideas are noted down as this is considered an essential stage in analysis (Riessman, 1993). The transcribed data is then read numerous times and, in addition, the recordings should also be listened to several times to ensure the accurateness of the transcript. This process of 'repeated reading' (Braun

& Clarke, 2006) and the use of the recordings to listen to the data, results in data immersion and strengthens the researcher's understanding of the data.

Following on from this initial stage and building on the produced transcription the data must now be coded. These codes identify the features of the data that 'stand out', this could be something that a participant repeated several times.

The third stage involves searching for themes, these clarify larger sections of the data by merging different codes that may have been very similar or may have been considered the same within the data. These initial codes can then be incorporated into themes.

Braun and Clarke (2006) also suggest the development of thematic maps to aid the generation of themes. These helped the researcher to visualise and consider the links and associations between themes. This ensured the themes accurately reflected what was evident in the data set as a whole (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Once the themes are clear the analysis can move on to stage five.

Here the themes must be clearly defined and an analysis must be provided. The final stage or the report production involves identifying quotes within the transcript to explain the themes. These examples must clearly define the themes. The process of thematic analysis revealed themes of 'aspirations' and 'mental health'. These themes will be discussed in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 4 Findings and Discussion**

### **4.1 Introduction**

Four major themes were identified in the participants' transcripts. These were: 'Aspirations', 'Mental Health', 'Belonging' and 'Fun'.

Given that the focus of the mentoring programme and the resultant discussions in the focus groups was around 'Aspirations' and encouraging the young people to have aspirations, it is unsurprising that this is noted as a major theme evident in the transcripts. However, the young people's interpretations of 'Aspirations' is perhaps more surprising and will be discussed below.

The second theme of 'Mental Health' is very evident throughout the transcripts. It is clear that the young people were all struggling with mental health issues of different kinds; again though this is perhaps unsurprising as this group was brought together from students selected to undertake the mentoring programme because of issues they were experiencing either in school or outside.

What was evident from the transcripts was that the mentoring programme had had a positive effect on the participants' mental health. This links into the theme of 'Belonging' as being part of a team or group and belonging to something was discussed by the participants.

The final theme of 'Fun' is discussed by all the participants. It is clear that having fun is an important motivator for their activities and their experiences.

### **4.2 Aspirations**

As discussed, the school mentoring intervention in which this research study was based involved focus groups to explore how the young people now felt – having engaged with this programme. A central feature of the intervention programme was to raise their aspirations and encourage them to aim to look beyond the perhaps 'expected' route for their lives (Furlong, 2006; Lundy and McEvoy, 2011). Thus, the focus groups also asked them to talk about the mentoring programme, and how far this had impacted their understanding of aspirations and their personal aspirations

(Lundy and McEvoy, 2011). Unsurprisingly then, this theme was evident across the participants' responses. This is seen in the participants' comments below: When discussing their aspirations before participating in the intervention programme one of the young males from year 11 stated

Lines 60 - 64

F: What were your goals and ambitions, so again going back before the programme, what goals and ambitions did you have?

*Blue: Go College, get good grades, become a policeman, or a cameraman,*

*I'm good at maths though, and that's it, I just want to get good.*

F: So that's before the programme?

*Blue: Yeah*

Another one stated

*Black it's been like a child thing, I've always wanted join the army, (Line 65)*

Although the group had spent time at a local University with staff and students and reported positively on the experience, none of the participants made reference to an academic career when asked about their aspirations and goals post-programme. Indeed only one of the boys had completed a Further Education qualification during his secondary education.

However, it became clear that despite the mentoring programme not all the participants understood the term aspirations in the 'traditional' way – as related to careers (Bynner, 2010). They were then not applying this traditional understanding of the concept to their own lives.

Nonetheless, it was clear that the young people had grappled with the concept and were able to apply it to themselves in various ways. Moreover, they were all keen to

talk about their personal aspirations in the focus group. All participants identified that they had aspirations both prior to the mentoring programme, and also that they had aspirations post participation in the schools intervention programme. However, it became clear that there was some confusion around what aspirations are and where to go for support to reach their aspirations and maintain them. The boys seemed more confident and shared their plans for post-secondary life/education whereas, the girls' responses indicate more confusion. One participant responded with apparent uncertainty around the term when asked about her aspirations, as shown in the extract below:

*Pu: I didn't really have any. I had them for my future plans like, I wanted to be a lawyer, or a chef, that was it I think.* (lines 28-30)

She clearly was not linking her 'future plans' to the term 'aspirations'. This is also shown in the following response where the participant uses the term 'goals' rather than 'aspirations'

*BB: Erm, I didn't have any goals in mind.*

Other responses from the female participants showed that their 'aspirations' were linked to managing relationships.

One of the girls linked aspirations before the programme to staying safe and coping with bullying. (Lines 23-26)

F: What were your goals and ambitions before the programme?

*Pi: Just ignore it all and keep your head held high.*

F: When you say 'it all' could you say what do you mean by that?

*Pi: The bullies, ignore the bullies and that.*

#### **4.3 Mental health** is the second theme identified in the transcripts.

Prior to the mentoring programme, the participants talked about their various experiences of mental ill-health. Discussing how they felt post the mentoring programme most then reported much more positive mental health. Both these responses are captured in the overall theme of mental health discussed below:

One boy clearly expressed distress in his life before the programme and the narrative he gave was the single longest piece of text delivered in the focus group by any participant. It is detailed below.

Lines 15-35.

Black: *Right, well I was just naughty, silly, I wasn't getting along, I was losing my temper all the time, I was down right defiant, always answering back.*

Blue: (jumps in) *swearing, violent, pushy*

Black: *I was... I was using violence as the answer for everything else.*

Blue: *I was cheerful before I started but something happened, a couple of months before that they made me join, cos my parents split up, and I was really depressed at that point and wondering what to do as it was getting worse and worse, even the fact that my parents were fighting over me and trying to use me, and even on my birthday to hurt each other, .....*

Blue: *Depressed, lonely, you couldn't trust anyone, and I felt like I shouldn't and I had to build up other feelings as well cos I didn't want many people to worry. It felt worse every now and then, and it was just so upsetting. Every time I go home I just think what is it now, fighting, arguing, crying, police involved.*

This response highlights the personal issues that are impacting on this young person's life, and which would surely have impacted upon his school work and his aspirations for his future. The mentor programme aimed to engage young people who are at risk of becoming NEET and arguably, it is vital to consider the person

holistically and understand their life issues to provide them with the right support needed, and then be in the best position to signpost the young people to the right services for support.

One of the female participants also described poor mental health prior to taking part in the programme:

Pu: *I was depressed and unhappy. I had no confidence and suffered from anxiety a lot.* (line 3)

Another female participant stated

. Pi: *I was unhappy and bullied.* (line 2)

With a third stating

. BB: *I was unhappy and depressed* (line 5)

It is evident in the participants' comments that the male participants were experiencing and expressing their mental ill-health issues through violence, whereas the female participants were more introspective, experiencing unhappiness and depression. This corresponds to research outlining gender differences in mental ill-health. The Children's Society (*The Good Child Report*, 2015) states that there remains a gender gap in childhood mental health in the UK reporting that there is a slight tendency (not always in evidence) for girls to have lower overall subjective well-being than boys. Research into mental health debates that poor mental health in young people can be linked to conditions of late modernity, linking to 'modern and individualised transitions where young people are forced to interpret diverse sets of experiences' (Furlong, 2013:172) It also relates to difficulties in predicting labour market outcomes and navigating the 'sea of uncertainty' (Evans and Furlong, 1997:172). Further, research suggests that mental and emotional well-being is steadily overtaking physical difficulty as the biggest health challenge facing young people. As a result, young people's emotional well-being and needs are a significant concern within contemporary youth studies (Duffy, 2016) & (Arnett, 2014). High

profile data, including the ONS provides evidence for concern, Arnett (2016) suggests that whilst quantitative data can provide evidence for symptoms and screening, qualitative studies are crucial in gaining a deeper understanding of how mental health problems are understood and experienced amongst young people.

Looking now at the participants' responses to the mentoring programme and any impact on their mental health it is evident that there was a general feeling of the positive nature of the mentoring programme in terms of 'positive mental health'.

For example, one of the young male participants discussed the positive effects of the programme in terms of psychological and behavioural issues:

Lines 77-83 Boys year 11

Black: *Well it's helped me quite a lot like a mentioned. I've got better control over my temper, my language and emotions in general, it's also help me to realise that I'm not on my own, and that I don't need to go in the army, schools there to help me and not just order me around, due to like the boxing sessions and going out and mixing with people that I wouldn't normally tend to mix with has sorta widen my view of things, and although things can go wrong it's not as bad as people say it is. There's two sides to each story.*

Another male participant talked of the programme encouraging him to trust people more:

Lines 45-47. Blue: *I feel like I could trust more people now, I now know who my friends are and I can trust them, and then if something does go on, I can spend time with them instead of having to be in the argument, and if I'm upset my mates will cheer me up.*

Post the intervention the boys also focused on their personal safety, but this time their responses were more positive as illustrated below:

Lines 73- 76

Blue: *well, it just makes me feel safer in school.*

. F: can you elaborate on that?

Blue: *ooh, let's see, so if someone is taking the mick or say bullying, or one of my mates is getting picked on I can help them and they help me.*

Lines 48-50

Examples of the female participants' responses are given below:

. Pu: *It did a little bit. Erm, like I say it build my confidence up*

Only one participant had a particularly negative experience with no positive lasting impact from participating in the programme (Lines 61 – 65).

. F: Do you feel any differently from taking part?

. BB: *Erm* (long pause no answer)

. F: You said before you feel the same, so the programme hasn't had a big impact for you then?

. BB: *No.*

The participant's responses also focussed heavily on discussions of family, friends, mentors and peers. These sub-themes have informed the code or theme 'belonging'. This highlights that these groups are of great importance to young people and often refer to the time spent with these significant groups, including social time where they can share common interests together, as highlighted in the following extracts.

Discussion of the themes of ‘belonging’ are presented below with evidence from the young people’s voices.

#### **4.4 Belonging**

The participants identified a sense of belonging through their responses to participation in the programme, and also through positive responses to the social aspects of being with friends and the safety that such time can bring. Linking to Bowlby’s theory of Socialisation (1969), a key development of young people whereby children are taught, and learn, to meet the expectations of, and to fit into, a given society (James and James, 2008 p.127), the need for young people to belong to a group is clearly of great importance, and featured predominantly in the extracts taken from the focus group. Interlinking themes of family and their influences on the aspirations of the young people including suggestions made of cultural tastes, knowledge, and abilities play in relation to the processes of class formation in contemporary societies, (Bennett, 2014). To highlight the importance of cultural belonging, Bourdieu’s sociological concept of cultural capital and how this concept can create both positive and negative outcomes for young people within their micro and macro social settings as outlined in Chapter 1 using Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theoretical Model, (2005).

There was also much discussion around the mentor relationships, some positive and some negative. Role models play an important role in the concepts described by several of the participants, including support in their behaviours towards the programme and in developing their aspirational goals. Such role models can be influential in supporting the voices of today’s ‘youth’ (Jones, 2009), as ‘emerging adulthood’ (Bynner, 2001, Lee, 2001, Woodman and Wynn, 2012) as a new discourse within the field of research. With much interest in the evolving youth from a complex layer within a constructed world (Bourdieu, 1978) to a complex-psychological being (Woodman, 2013). Through a multidisciplinary focus of this emerging concept of young people a wider context of their lives are considered, allowing also for consideration of a young person’s social mobility to be considered, affected through the various discourses associated with the socially constructed youth (Gergen, 2009).

The girls discussed the importance of having support around them, and spending time with their friends:

.F: So what did you like about that activity?

.Pu: *That we were all put in groups with other people and had to like communicate with other people, we had to do team work and work together.* (lines 91-92).

The boys discussed the importance of belonging:

Lines 122-134. Black: *The (university) was alright it was fun and mixed us for the first time as a school who we wouldn't normally mix with, cos we just wouldn't. And it did help me to relax a bit around new people.*

#### 4.5 Fun

The final theme identified is 'Fun'. Participants talked about the importance of having fun.

Black: *The Uni was alright it was fun and mixed us for the first time as a school who we wouldn't normally mix with, cos we just wouldn't..... The fire station was cool; it was great* (lines 122-126)

Blue: *but the experiences made me have a right laugh I really enjoyed it. Crewe Hall, especially was really good cos it's a place I've never been to, it's a really nice place. I went with two of my girl best mates and we had a right laugh.* (lines 128-130)

It was clear that the participants all placed importance on having fun.

An interesting response found in the data was that of young people realising that they have a voice, and that they can make a difference in sharing their experiences (Lundy and McEvoy, 2011). This is evident from the beginning of the session when the participants are asked to choose a colour to identify themselves for the analysis; the question was asked why they could not be known by their actual names; why do we have to be anonymous? I want people to know what I think! Although this is an exciting development to see young people passionate about their views, and indeed should be nurtured and supported by their tutors as an empowering aspiration to ‘have a say’, young people remain underpinned by traditional constructions of children and young people as a ‘social problem to be remedied’ (MacDonald et al., 1993). Young people are restricted to having their say in certain forums as dictated by policy and law. Constructions of young people as ‘becomings’ (Lee, 2001; Prout, 2005) and not yet mature enough to take on responsibilities that are deemed to be risky in society. As previously discussed, anonymity during research with young people is an important ethical consideration that can be fraught with many consequences both positive and negative (Heath et al., 2009:34). One of the research aims for this project, to provide young people with an opportunity to be heard can be facilitated using anonymity as previously discussed, and can be an effective way of sharing the experiences of young people who are participating in a schools intervention programme (Heath et al., 2009). Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on The Rights of the Child (UNCRC) states that children are listened to and have their views taken seriously. Through the focus group the young people were able to have their say, and in doing so their voices are heard in a report reflecting young people’s experiences. Article 13 of the UNCRC states that, ‘Children have the right to get and share information, as long as the information is not damaging to them or others’. In exercising the right to freedom of expression, children have the responsibility to also respect the rights, freedoms and reputations of others. The freedom of expression includes the right to share information in any way they choose, ‘including by talking, drawing or writing’ (UNCRC, 1989. Article 13 Freedom of Expression). Through research, addressing the barriers to realising the full potential of young people who are referred to as NEET, and often faced by young people living in urban regeneration areas (JRF, 2012), opportunities to share experiences and exercise rights is not only a legal right for young people. As highlighted previously, the recent consideration of young people as the bearers of

rights rather than objects of concern (Montgomery, 2010:149) is influential in the future development of programmes for young people living within urban regeneration areas to engage in school and community forums. Through participation in the focus group sessions the five participants have exercised their rights through a process that has considered their rights to participate and their protection in doing so.

A final consideration for one male participant is the reality of being a young carer and having to skip sessions to look after a sibling.

Line 163: Blue: Yeah, I was either sick or busy, I look after my brother

Line 195: Blue: I can't actually stay much longer I need to go and get my brother.

It can be concluded that the young people value sharing their activity time with friends of both sexes. There is also a reality here that whether a girl or boy, when you have a family background where both parents are either working or are on shift patterns and you have a younger sibling, some young people are relied upon to become a carer. This is wider than the scope of this research project but is an important matter to reflect upon in light of the themes discussed here.

#### **4.6 Procedural issues**

The main methodological issue arising was participants from the girls group in particular struggled to engage fully in conversation, and the sessions followed a structure more akin to an interview (i.e., question and answer). It was difficult to encourage responses that were longer than a few words; often one-word responses would be given. There is the potential to gain some very useful information from young people aged fourteen to sixteen; however, it can be a timely process to gain enough information to make the analysis process worthwhile. It was also found that the questions were answered quickly and due to relatively short attention spans; this was a finding similar to that of Miller (2000).

There were at times issues with certain members of the groups making themselves heard more than others, thus the researcher had to encourage those happier to sit back and let others take the lead (Kirk, 2007). However, through a little

encouragement all participants appeared comfortable talking with each other and participated equally, a result of the careful selection process. It was useful to have the boys and girls in separate groups as it was evident that the boys engaged differently during the focus groups to the girls, they were much more impulsive in their responses. Another issue raised in these separate groups were the discussions around emotions linked to families, which was stronger for the boys. The girls mentioned issues but chose not to discuss in as much details as the boys.

#### **4.7 Conclusion of findings**

There is an opportunity here to further investigate the lack of participation of young people in research, specifically to highlight the importance of including young people in the research and development of programmes directly related to youth services and policy, and also from a rights perspective. There is a clear outcome from this raw data that young people feel empowered when they have a say, and when they know that their responses will be heard/seen by adults. It is also evident that young people feel supported and more confident when they have a mentor who can take time to listen to what they have to say, and respond to their questions in a supportive manner. The responses from both groups has switched from at times basic and single word responses, to talking at great length of the importance that their mentors and friends have had during their time in school and on the intervention programme. This information might be used by schools and local authorities to inform a more inclusive forum for young people to share their experiences, and it can also be recommended to involve young people in the development of such interventions going forward that may save time and resources where existing programmes and services are having little effect on the desired aims of a programme. This discussion will be further reflected upon in Chapter 5.

## **Chapter 5 Reflection**

### **5.1 Introduction**

Firstly, I must reflect on my reasons to include a reflective chapter in my thesis, whether it is to provide, ‘a purposeful framing and reframing of material in internal experience with the intention of learning’, as described by (Moon (2004:97).

Reflection is a form of mental processing – like a form of thinking – which we use to fulfil a purpose or to achieve some anticipated outcome. Moon suggests that we should apply this process to complicated and unstructured ideas, which is then processed by the knowledge and emotions that we already know (based on Moon, 1999).

This research project has taken on the framework of Kolb’s experiential learning model, as a new researcher within the realms of social science the whole process has caused me to reflect throughout my four years of post-graduate study and subsequent writing of this research paper. As a reflective practitioner, I have chosen to refer to Kolb’s experiential model and Gibbs remodelling of Kolb’s experiential model to include emotion. Moon’s theory of reflective practice will continue to provide a framework for deeper reflection of the research. As a new researcher in the social science world I began to reflect on the very nature of researching young people’s lives, and realised that it would be a complex undertaking, and therefore would require a reflective approach and framework to enable the deepest form of reflection or reflexivity, as recommended by (Moon, 2004:97).

As previously mentioned, to guide my reflection I will refer to Gibbs’ (1988) Reflective Cycle and Moon’s (2009) model of Deep Reflection. As a formal model of reflection. Gibbs’ model outlines six stages of reflection: Description, Feelings, Evaluation, Analysis, Conclusion and Action Plan. Each stage provides a useful guide for evaluation and reflection whilst also providing feedback to identify key areas to inform further reflection and research. The following discussion and reflection is guided by these theoretical models.

## **5.2 Discussion**

As mentioned previously, researchers who have studied aspirations of children and young people have found the topic to be a complex minefield of factors that interweave the lives of the researched as they negotiate their lives. Through empirical data findings, it is evident that the lives of these young people are largely shaped and influenced by countless, and complex factors within a local context, and too often with adverse consequences.

Through a thorough review of existing policy in both a National and Local context it has been found that the existing offer for young people in this post-industrial North West Town does not effectively support all young people in post-compulsory education. As youth unemployment remains stagnant with little sign of reducing under the previous coalition government, in the run up to the general election the former Labour Leader Ed Milliband announced 'Apprenticeships for each and every young person who gets the grade', which is ironic in the misrepresentation of the young people who may not achieve the grades required. Apprenticeships can offer skills and qualifications for young people to enter the labour market, those young people who are aspirational workers, the young people from a line of skilled workers in their families, particularly within a post-industrial setting known as 'Intergenerational Aspirations' (Gutman and Akerman, 2008), where young people are influenced by the parents' aspirations.

The aims of the research project 'To explore young people's understanding of aspirations', and to 'Investigating the impact of a mentor programme on YP's aspirations', required an insight into the individuals transition from school to EET, in order to establish the needs of every individual. To assume that everyone fits into the same box is unacceptable and must be addressed by institutions alike. The method of focus groups adopted for this project aimed to allow the young people participating in this study to express their personal experiences although as we know, the researcher can have an impact on the responses of the participant's in many ways. If the researcher is not skilled in working with groups, the young people will not be engaged and the focus group will not be effective. As a youth worker of six years I have experience of working with diverse groups of young people and so I felt

confident in meeting with the groups and running the focus groups, however, I was not prepared that the young people would not wish to participate.

Young people are human beings with the same rights to live and prosper in life as an adult. However, the issue is complicated by the definitions of youth and the social constructions that define the lives of these young people who are striving to succeed in becoming an adult. (Robb, 2007) suggests that, 'services for young people are constructed partly in relation to how childhood itself is constructed, an idealisation of childhood and a view of young people as innocents who need to be protected by adults'. Further, 'The idea that children are bearers of rights rather than objects of concern is relatively recent but is one that has been enormously influential' (Montgomery, 2010: 149). This has been highlighted by the voices of the young people who have participated in this research.

It has been identified through literature that young people are experiencing extended transitions, a longer road to adulthood, defined by (Arnett, 2015) as 'Emerging Adulthood', a book I wish I had read when I was eighteen! This concept does not get a mention in many recent publications about development in the teens and twenties. In referring to the transition to adulthood, and as discussed in earlier chapters, many social scientists prefer to use the more established terms 'youth' and 'young adulthood' to represent the period spanning the transition from adolescent dependency to adult independence and its extension (for many young people) in the current era (Bynner, 2008:252 & Cote, 2014).

This theory, cross-referenced with the research and literature reviewed and discussed earlier in this thesis which focusses on the constructions of young people and through a rights-based discourse, presents that young people continue to be seen as 'at risk' and to be protected, however, policy fails to link the theory and so a gap remains in which young people are being failed by society. Partnership and collaborative working is essential for social change within communities such as the post-industrial towns where urban regeneration is linked to key projects, such as the HS2 rail project, where towns faced with multiple deprivation are set to be revamped and economies boosted. However, if the needs and rights are not met there will be no room for change, and therefore the existing gaps will remain and possibly widen. This research project has identified a continued gap in both national and local policy

for those young people who are left behind by failing policies where today's emerging adult and their aspirations are misunderstood.

### **5.3 Reflection**

As a post-graduate research student embarking upon my first research project I am finding the whole process a challenge, therefore a theory that is both simple and effective is most welcome, as explained by (Moon, 2001), 'In common-sense terms, reflection lies somewhere around the notion of learning'. As a learner, I am keen to express my passion for researching young people's lives whilst respecting the complex nature of this topic. By adopting a theoretical underpinning for all aspects of my research, I aim to develop my learning through experience to become a well-rounded academic in this research field. The aims of the research do not profess to be a paradigm, however the research highlights the need for a whole community approach to youth participation, in line with the UNCRC. During the first year of research, I delivered the research abstract at the Journal of Youth Studies Conference in Glasgow, which resulted in many academics advising me that I would not succeed in engaging the young people in my focus group sessions. Looking back now at the process of the focus groups this warning seems accurate. As a youth worker, I have experience of youth engagement with a diverse group of young people; therefore, I had no doubt that I could engage these young people. The focus groups were great fun and I really enjoyed spending time with the two groups and particularly enjoyed knowing that they had the opportunity to have their say. On reflection I feel that I could have done more to engage them possibly by engaging their parents in the process, allowing them to be a part of the experience, and possibly raising the profile of the research aims and outcomes to receive their backing.

My initial feelings, I couldn't believe my sadness and frustration as only five of the twenty young people who had showed interest in having their voice heard consented. As a passionate youth worker I am keen to hear the experiences of young people, with a view to supporting them and bringing about positive change in their lives, in both a community an academic based setting.

To conclude, through my own reflection on this research project, and through feedback received I have noted both positive and negative points that I can now take forward to form a reflective diary to inform my research approach, including research methodology. On completion of this exercise, and through peer feedback I have identified areas that I must now develop further to ensure an effective use of these strategies going forward to better inform future research strategies. Through peer feedback and support, I have identified key areas that must be addressed to ensure I can meet the university requirements for level seven academic requirements.

To help to consolidate all of this information I must now develop an action plan. As a social science researcher, it is vital to make reflective practice an important part of my on-going methodological plan to further develop my skills for research; through reference to key theorists including, Kolb (1984) & Moon (2001).

To further develop my practical skills, I will refer to Kolb's (1984) model of experiential learning. Through engagement with further reading of experience and reflection, I will continue to develop in confidence, both practically and academically. As a researcher linked to an academic institute, the research process has benefited from the help and support of a dedicated Director of Studies. For methods of reflection, I will focus on Gibbs' (1988) reflective cycle to continue to analyse my research approach to build on existing strengths and to better inform design, evaluation and dissemination of my findings.

Working closely with my academic advisors has allowed a period of reflection through an approach of deep reflection, providing a thorough examination of all evidence throughout my research. Through the support of my director of studies a reflection on my progress has allowed me to, 'move beyond descriptive writing' (Moon, 2001), to enable my own voice to guide my writing through personal experiential learning.

The focus group method adopted for this project focused on all participants of the schools intervention project. Out of the twenty young people approached, five participants returned their participant information sheets and consent forms to the school project leaders. The aims of this project was to hear the lived experiences of young people and their aspirations. Without the words of young people, we will never really understand young people and their agency. The Children's Commissioner for

England Maggie Atkinson recently spoke at a local government conference, stating that as a country we are breaking the law by not listening to young people and acting upon their voices. Young people have a right to be heard and a right to have their opinions taken into consideration. Nonetheless, they need to speak and express their views when given the opportunity. If they choose not to do so when offered the opportunity – as in this research project – then arguably, it is an obligation of society to find out why they choose not to engage. Unfortunately, this was beyond the remit of this project but it is important to consider in future work.

For academic purposes, this chapter has provided a detailed reflection of the projects aims and outcomes, including a consideration of any pitfalls experienced. The method of data collection chosen has been particularly problematic, in which the initial issue of consent was not given by all of the young people. If we do not hear the experiences and needs of young people, how can we expect services for children and young people to reflect their needs? As a researcher considering the aspirations of young people through a rights discourse perspective, a consideration of the individual is reflected upon during the process. Gibb's expands Kolb's reflective cycle by adding 'emotion' where the individual is considered and links to the rights discourse aim of this thesis. This is key to the theoretical underpinning of this research.

#### **5.4 Reflection of the Focus Groups**

Through the interactions between the focus group facilitator and the participants a unique study was created which was immersed within a specific social, cultural and political context with young participants, often termed as 'Hard-to-Reach' young people who are 'At Risk' of becoming disengaged from education, employment or training (NEET). In this instance, considerable thought was given to the methodological and ethical approaches to research with these vulnerable young people (Ritchie et al., 2014). The project aimed to give the young people participating in the schools project a voice to inform both the programme designers and the wider community of their individual experiences. Mostly, however, they chose not to engage with this. The programme was designed to (re)engage 'At Risk' young people within an educational setting with the support of teachers and external

mentors from a range of professions. The idea was that teenagers should have a mentor, someone who has life experiences that they might use to help steer their mentee on the right path. As a reflective researcher, consideration was also given to the views and behaviours of the participants, as this may not have been expected. The way this is handled is dependent upon the individual researcher (Skeggs, 1997), the method of data collection chosen and the interpretation of the data (Walford, 1991; Russell, 2005) which has been considered through an extensive review of current literature based on researching with young people. Perhaps the most challenging concept as a new researcher is to consider that we have an impact on the focus group. By adopting a reflexive approach to the methodology is a way of dealing with the issues arising from the knowledge that much of what the researcher sees is a result of her own presence (Holliday, 2007:137).

The participants sat around a group of tables and each took it in turn to come in with a colour they had chosen to represent themselves and to speak clearly into the microphone to say their colour. This activity worked well in breaking the ice between myself and the groups, and each other, and was useful for testing the equipment as advised by the university technician as I booked out the equipment.

The group received a brief on the reason for the research focus groups and that they would be asked a series of questions about the intervention programme. They also agreed to a set of rules to be respectful of allowing each other to speak during the session. The teachers were briefed that they would not be invited into the room during the focus group session. However, they were present before the research focus group began formally. On reflection, this may have impacted the young people's views of the research focus group as it may have seemed a further part of their classes. Indeed, the young people were brought together routinely by teaching staff. So in some ways the session was not out of the ordinary for them and this may have impacted upon their considering it to be research. However, this question was never asked of the young people and no comments were made by them on the matter.

Reflecting back on the procedural issues there were times when the young people found it hard to engage in conversation with the facilitator, often providing short answers or nothing at all. On reflection of the methodology of the focus groups,

perhaps the setting of the school environment and with someone who they had only recently met had an impact on their willingness to respond. Perhaps a meeting with the young people prior to the focus group would help to break the ice. Using another familiar venue such as a youth club could also be considered.

As a facilitator of the focus groups I really enjoyed meeting with the young people, and in particular I enjoyed providing an opportunity for them to have a say on their experience of participating in the mentor programme. On reflection of the individual responses I found it challenging to listen to the young people as they described the times when they felt sad and depressed either at home or school or both, which made me more determined to ensure they had the time to have their say. In contrast, it was good to hear the young people talking about the fun times that they experienced during the programme and how they were making plans for the summer and in some cases jobs and further vocational study. It has made me realise how important it is to provide these opportunities for young people to share their experiences.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

This thesis set out to explore a young person's definition of aspirations in relation to their transitions, and to review the impact of a specific mentoring programme on the experiences of the young people.

Through a social constructionist view of young people within the current political and economic climate, it can be concluded that that young people from urban-regeneration settings are marginalised from having a say on the issues that matter to them and impact on their lives, and are forced to negotiate the institutional frameworks within an unstable and complex economic, political and social context with reduced financial support and increasingly restricted choices post-secondary education.

A number of recommendations have been proposed for local authority dissemination, which when applied appropriately, will inform a more holistic approach to children and young people's services, including their engagement, participation and future success by way of rights. This thesis provides a children's

rights account of the concept of ‘aspirations’, and in doing so acknowledges that all young people have aspirations, it is the support and opportunities that are missing from the current offer and must be developed within a Local Authority context, which is within the scope of this research.

The findings of this project will inform the local government agenda of the importance of listening to the experiences of young people, and through empowerment of these voices, a healthier, wealthier and wiser community with service provision for young people and their families will ensure that aspirations are realised, achieved and sustained. The offer must also include a range of career based opportunities for vocational and employment (volunteering, apprenticeships, mentoring, job-share etc.).

It is hoped that this thesis provides an opportunity for continued research of young people’s aspirations, with a particular focus on young people ‘having a say’ in both an educational and non-school setting, such as a community group or youth group, where young people feel at ease and confident to engage with the researcher, this could be through a focus group with activities, or via an electronic survey which can be easily accessed using popular smartphone technology.

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A**

Focus Group: One

Two participants:

Blue

Black

Facilitator: F

1. F: Well my name is Fiona, Fiona Burgess from MMU Cheshire and I'm here to research the
2. TWISTA Project, this is a focus group just for you, as and you have completed your consent
3. forms. If you could say your colour into the mic for me.
4. Both Participants complete this.
5. So, I have a couple of activities and a series of questions that I want you to take part in. And
6. this will help, erm it's all about your opinion, your experience be as honest as you want, if
7. you're not sure just ask, discuss things, this is an open forum, forget about the microphone

8. there. So the first question is
9. F: I want you to describe yourself before you started the TWISTA programme.  
I have got a
10. few words here if you want to use those feel free.
11. Black: I'm alright
12. Blue: Does this have to be said in a controlled way? It doesn't.
13. Black: Do I have to say my colour first?
14. F: No it's ok.
15. Black: Right, well I was just naughty, silly, I wasn't getting along, I was losing  
my temper all
16. the time, I was downright defiant, always answering back.
17. Blue: (jumps in) swearing, violent, pushy
18. Black: I was; I was using violence as the answer for everything else.
19. Blue: I was cheerful before I started but something happened, a couple of  
months before
20. that they made me join, cos my parents split up, and I was really depressed at  
that point and
21. wondering what to do as it was getting worse and worse, even the fact that  
my parents
22. were fighting over me and trying to use me, and even on my birthday to hurt  
each other, so
23. the teachers at my school knew that I was a bit upset so, erm, asked me if I  
wanted to join, I
24. said OK then. So it's cheered me up a little bit, well quiet a lot.

25. F: So how would you describe yourself then? You said you are cheery now, how were you
26. feeling, you said quite a few things there.
27. Blue: I'm quite cheery now after doing TWISTA SISTA. I've met quite a few new people, had
28. a few laughs, I've climbed to the top of a tower on the fire station. (outdoor challenges are
29. effective in gaining confidence)
30. F: So, go back, back again because you described in detail before joining the TWISTA
31. programme, what words would you describe yourself?
32. Blue: Depressed, lonely, you couldn't trust anyone, and I felt like I shouldn't and I had to
33. build up other feelings as well cos I didn't want many people to worry. It felt worse every
34. now and then, and it was just so upsetting. Every time I go home I just think what is it now,
35. fighting, arguing, crying, police involved.
36. F: Black, did you want to add any descriptive words?
37. Black: Like I said it was just pure outright defiant, violence was my only way of interpreting
38. things and dealing with stuff. Yeah, I became quiet nasty, I was pushing everybody away.
39. F: So both quite negative things?
40. Both: Yeah
41. F: Is there anything else you would like to add?

42. Both: No not really.
43. F: OK, Q2 so now bring yourself forward to the end of TWISTA and can you do the same
44. thing, describe yourself for me.
45. Blue: I feel like I could trust more people now, I now know who my friends are and I can trust
46. them, and then if something does go on, I can spend time with them instead of having to be
47. in the argument, and if I'm upset my mates will cheer me up.
48. Blue: (talking to black) nothing's changed about you has it?
49. Black: I'm less aggressive.
50. Blue: (interrupts) I don't believe you. (Is Black saying this to appease me?)
51. Black: I've started letting people in, friends, generally mates, my mentor gave my help on
52. how to control my temper when I felt like lashing out, It gave me a release, made me feel
53. like myself, happy, and like I belong in the school.
54. F: So your mentor, is that your TWISTA mentor?
55. Black: Yeah.
56. F: Is there anything else that you want to add blue?
57. Blue: No
58. F: ok, thanks for that.
59. F: So question 3. What were your goals and ambitions, so again going back before the
60. TWISTA programme, what goals and ambitions did you have?

61. Blue: Go college, get good grades, become a policeman, or a cameraman,
62. I'm good at maths though, and that's it, I just want to get good.
63. F: So that's before the TWISTA programme?
64. Blue: Yeah
65. Black: it's been like a child thing, I've always wanted join the army, I felt like that was the
66. only place I could fit in and control myself.
67. F: OK, did you want to add anything else?
68. Both No, not really.
69. F: OK, so question four. Did taking part in the TWISTA programme help you?
70. Blue: Are you asking mentally? Or how we look at things?
71. Black: (interrupts) Just in general did it help. (Black puts Blue on the right track of thought)
72. F: Yes, in general. You just say how did it help you.
73. Blue: well, it just makes me feel safer in school.
74. F: can you elaborate on that?
75. Blue: ooh, let's see, so if someone is taking the mick or say bullying, or one of my mates is
76. getting picked on I can help them and they help me.
77. Black: Well it's helped me quite a lot like a mentioned. I've got better control over my
78. temper, my language and emotions in general, it's also help me to realise that I'm not on
79. my own, and that I don't need to go in the army, schools there to help me and not just order

80. me around, due to like the boxing sessions with TWISTA, and going out and mixing with
81. people that I wouldn't normally tend to mix with has sorta widen my view of things, and
82. although things can go wrong it's not as bad as people say it is. There's two sides to each
83. story.
84. F: Is that ok for both of you?
85. Both: Yeah.
86. F: So next question, question five; What workshops did you attend? What did you think
87. about them? And did you have any suggestions for future workshops?
88. Blue: Workshops? (Blue questioned what I meant here by workshops) I would class
89. workshop as learning new skills, with an educational output.
90. F: Workshops or activities during the programme? (Trying to understand their
91. interpretation of the sessions)
92. Blue: Activities, yeah, we never went to any workshops. I only went to the MMU and the
93. fire station ones.
94. Black: (interrupts) you were at the MMU, college and the fire station
95. Blue: Yeah, I didn't want to do it, I was really upset they put me on some ladders and made
96. me climb really, really high.

97. F: So you did the team building and fire station day, so tell me about the fire station day.
98. Blue: Erm, let's see, ok, they put you in a room that's pitch black, so you can fall over really
99. easy it's smokey as well so you need a mask, so you can hardly see, they make you climb
100. really, really high and I'm scared of heights. They drive you around in a truck with a
101. really- loud horn, so overall I would say it was really fun. That is all. (This was a
102. challenging task for Blue, but I feel he is glad he took part)
103. Black: Your definition of fun is extremely weird.
104. Blue: My definition of fun is something that's really-really scary!
105. F: OK so tell me about the MMU team session.
106. Blue: I think we as a team nailed it, it was us and people from another school, it was
107. me and
108. a load of others.
109. F: What did you think about that experience?
110. Blue: Fun. Good fun.
111. Black; It was different want it really, if you think about it.
112. F: So would you recommend those workshops again?
113. Blue: Yeah.
114. F: (to Blue) Even the fire station?
115. Blue: Yeah, I said it was fun.

116. Black: I've been there since the start and not missed a session, so I've been to
117. everything
118. that they've put on. Probably enjoyed the boxing sessions the most, cos it was just
119. a
120. different release that allowed me to burn out the energy I had left in my body.
121. Blue: We got ta punch a teacher!
122. Black: The MMU was alright it was fun and mixed us for the first time as a school
123. who we wouldn't normally mix with, cos we just wouldn't. And it did help me to
124. relax a bit
125. around
126. new people. The fire station was cool; it was great (Blue interrupts: Scary!) I had just
127. come
128. off a two-year BTEC course at the fire station, so it was doing it again, but the
129. experiences
130. made me have a right laugh I really enjoyed it. Crewe Hall, especially was really god
131. cos its a
132. place I've never been to, it's a really nice place. I went with two of my girl best
133. mates and
134. we had a right laugh. To be quiet honest I like it all.

135. Blue: The only place I wish they'd took us is paintballing. That would have been the
136. best
137. part.
138. Black: That would have been ace.
139. F: Why do you think that?
140. Black: cos I personally think that the place that Blue's coming from is the team
141. building.
142. Blue: It is, but I think It's so fun I did it with one of my mates and I had ammo left and
143. he only
144. had a few left, we had to distract him and screamed at him, I gave one of my mates
145. some
146. ammo that cost £4.50!
147. F: OK, so thinking about all the activities that you have done, the team session was
148. about
149. having fun through team building and problem solving, the fire station and Crewe
150. Hall was
151. about taster sessions and careers, so how would paintballing fit in to the
152. programme?
153. Black: it's competitive team building activities, you could mix the groups up to see

154. how well
155. we could work together.
156. F: So this is paintballing?
157. Black: Yeah, but also its gonna make bonds, you come out with a few bruises,  
but
158. its ace
159. and something that most people enjoy, I would definitely recommend it.
160. F: So is there anything else you would like to add? Any other suggestions for
161. workshops? I
162. know (Blue) you only attended two.
163. Blue: Yeah, I was either sick or busy, I look after my brother.
164. Black: I would probably go for a gym, a talk about a gym, because people  
especially
165. our age want to get fit and have the perfect body. But I know personally some
166. people and from personal experience you can overdo it, and some people  
certainly
167. need to be aware of that.
168. F: OK. So have there been any health related things in these sessions?
169. Black: Yeah drugs and alcohol. (to Blue) And that teenage pregnancy things  
that me
170. and you
171. went to. That was different, the bloke came in a spoke from the heart, it  
moved
172. me and I

173. didn't expect it to. Who was that? Was it a guest visitor? A young parent?
174. Blue: Yeah, he was a young parent he was 15 and really naughty in school and didn't
175. pay much attention, failed grades and didn't get a good job.
176. Black: Yeah but he pulled it back in the end.
177. Blue: he kept pushing.
178. Black: There was a twist though, it was his mother there too. His girlfriend left so he
179. was stuck with the baby.
180. Blue: I think it was his mum, no, Mrs Smith said, would anyone want to be like him.
181. Black: It seriously put me off wanting a baby at a young age and wanting to be a
182. dad. It
183. come with a lot of responsibilities, I would give advice to anyone to wait until
184. they've
185. done what they want, or at least set themselves up with something before they
186. go out
187. and look to build a family.
188. F: OK. Is there anything else you would like to add?
189. Both: no that's ok (Blue: that's covered everything)
190. F: Thanks for that. OK. Question 6 then. Have you got any plans for what you want to
191. do next and what are they?

192. Blue: College. I want to do college, work hard on my maths and education.
193. Black: (to blue) and public services.
194. Blue: Yeah, police and public services.
195. Blue: I can't actually stay much longer I need to go and get my brother.
196. F: No problem, we have nearly done.
197. Black: I've been offered to go on a student panel (Wulvern Housing) and arrange to
198. offer courses like this for other young people, get them roped in to have the
199. experience as well. But is still have not deterred, I want to be in the army, a
200. paratrooper.
201. F: OK, question 7. Did you enjoy the programme?
202. Blue: Yes. That is all. There is no other word. (Rushing as needs to leave)
203. Black: It was ace.
204. F: So if you hadn't gone on it what would you have thought of others taking part?
205. Blue: We would still be miserable sods.
206. Black: I doubt I would still be at the school on my course.
207. F: Would you recommend it to other friends?
208. Black: Yeah
209. Blue: Yes, Unless it's my little brother. Unless he's the star attraction then other
210. people get the star attraction then he will just cry.
211. Black: I would recommend it to everyone I know.
212. F: Would you change anything at all about the programme?

213. Black: No.
214. F: Apart from the activities additions.
215. Blue: Actually yes, I would make it quite a bit longer.
216. F: Than a year?
217. Black: I would say it should be ongoing throughout the secondary high school
218. years.
219. F: Ok, so the final question. Use one word to describe your TWISTA experience. Give
220. me a descriptive word.
221. Blue: Magnificent
222. Black: I'll keep it short and snappy- ACE.
223. Blue: Is that it, is that all it's worth?
224. F: So magnificent is a big word to use, is that definitely your word for being on the
225. project?
226. Blue: It was quite good. Really good.
227. Black: Ace. I reckon that pretty much sums it up.
228. Blue: I'll give it a thumbs up.
229. Black: It was amazing, is another one I would use if I was pushed.
230. Black: I would say that his course should be taken all around the country.
231. F: Ok, so thank you very much for taking part.

## **Appendix B**

### **Focus Group: Two**

3 participants:

Pink-Pi

Purple-Pu

Baby Blue- BB

Facilitator- F

1. Q1: Use descriptive words to describe yourself before the TWISTA programme.
2. Pi: I was unhappy and bullied.
3. Pu: I was depressed and unhappy. I had no confidence and suffered from anxiety a lot. My
4. mentor helped me to build my confidence.
5. BB: I was unhappy and depressed.
6. Q2: Use words to describe yourself after the TWISTA programme.
7. Pi: I felt confident and happy cos everyone had helped me.
8. Pu; I had more confidence, more self-esteem. I pushed myself cos I had more confidence, I
9. feel happy.
10. BB: I don't think mine has changed much to be fair

11. F: Is there any reason why that might be?
12. BB: Just family problems really.
13. F: Is that been all the way through the programme, before, during and after?
14. BB: Yeah
15. Pink: I felt some stuff as before, I have improved but feel some stuff as before.  
(issues)
16. continue)
17. F: So you go back and feel negative and then positive again?
18. Pi: Yeah, I go back and too.
19. F: Is there anything that helps you to stay in the now though?
20. Pi: No not really.
21. F: So you flit between not feeling great and then positive?
22. Pi: Yeah
23. Q3: What were your goals and ambitions before the TWISTA programme?
24. Pi: Just ignore it all and keep your head held hi.
25. F: When you say 'it all' could you say what do you mean by that?
26. Pi: The bullies, ignore the bullies and that.
27. F: So that's quite a positive stance, keep your head held high and keep going.
28. Pu: I didn't really have any. I had them for my future plans like, I wanted to be a lawyer, or
29. a chef, that was it I think.
30. BB: Erm, I didn't have any goals in mind.
31. F: So did you think I really want to be this, or was there anything that inspired you at the

32. time?
33. F: No response
34. Q4: Did taking part in the TWISTA programme help you?
35. Pi: Well, it just helped me like
36. F: Has it made any difference to your goals and aspirations before, and do you have any
37. goals and aspirations now? Is there anything that you want to do from the programme?
38. Pi: Yeah, well I want to be a designer, like make dresses or design houses.
39. F: So quite a big goal then?!
40. Pi: Yeah!
41. F: So has that come from taking part in the programme?
42. Pi: A little yeah. (identifying that she had aspirations without the need for an intervention
43. programme)
44. F: So do you feel different from taking part in the programme?
45. Pi: Yeah
46. Purple: What was the question again?
47. F: repeats the question.
48. Pu: It did a little bit. Erm, like I say it build my confidence up and then actually put me on
49. the track to decide where I wanted to be so I chose out of being a lawyer r a chef, and
50. chose the chef one.

51. F: Why was that, if you don't mind me asking.
52. Pu: Cos I enjoy it and if I did it I would enjoy my job and if I was a lawyer I wouldn't enjoy it
53. and wouldn't like myself. (Mature approach to career aspirations)
54. F: Did you get to discuss that in the programme with anyone?
55. Pu: Yeah, my mentor.
56. F: So you could have a good chat about things?
57. Pu: Yeah we would chat a lot.
58. BB: Yeah it did help me decide what I want to do. (BB mentions often negative and positive
59. things. Possibly due to not having the same mentor contact has confused more than
60. helped)
61. F: Do you feel any differently from taking part?
62. BB: Erm (long pause no answer)
63. F: You said before you feel the same, so the programme hasn't had a big impact for you
64. then?
65. BB: No.
66. Q5: Workshops which ones did you attend?
67. Pu: Workshops?
68. F: Activities, sorry, the activities that you attended on the programme.
69. Pu: I went all of them, apart from the second visit to South Cheshire College cos I was ill.

70. F: So what did you think about them?
71. Pu: They were good; Crewe Hall was good I got a bit fed up after though cos I was a bit tired.
72. F: Why was it good?
73. Pu: Cos there were lots of things to do, and it was old, it was good if you get what I mean, I
74. like old things, and then the modern bit like the new bit I didn't really like that bit cos they
75. added onto the old bit. (Discussions needed with you YP to explain business needs-
76. adapting to customer needs?)
77. F: So the modern bit, is that the restaurant area? Did you get to have a chat about anything
78. to do with chef careers?
79. Pu: Yeah, we went into the restaurant and did some work? We served some food.
80. F: Waited on?
81. Pu: Yeah we did a bit of that.
82. F: Did you get to cook anything?
83. Pu: No, Ooh yeah me made some cookies with chocolate chips and stuff. And MMU
84. was
85. good.
86. F: The team session?
87. Pu: Yeah, that was funny.

88. F: The lads said they were exhausted!
89. Pu: Yeah they were all running around like mad!
90. F: So what did you like about that activity?
91. Pu: That we were all put in groups with other people and had to communicate with
92. other
93. people, we had to do team work and work together.
94. F: Any other workshops that you want to comment on?
95. Pu: The fire station was alright
96. BB: I never went to the fire station.
97. F: You didn't get the chance?
98. BB: No.
99. Pi: (to Pu) you were trying to flirt!
100. Pu: no I weren't!
101. F: (to BB) when you said you didn't go was that a personal choice?
102. BB: No, something happened. (I didn't press on here)
103. F: Any others?
104. BB: Crewe Hall was good.
105. F: Pink?
106. Pi: I only came halfway through then went to them all. I liked Crewe Hall we made
107. beds and did cooking and served people.
108. F: So you enjoyed that, hands-on doing things?

109. Pi: Yeah.

110. F: Any others?

111. Pi: The fire station, cos we got to hold the house and had to pull it out.

112. F: Did they turn the water on?

113. Pu: No, we had to drag it across the pavement through some orange cones.

(12 min

114. 15s)

115. Pi: We had to do it on our own but the fire people helped us.

116. Pi: I didn't really like SCC, it was a bit boring.

117. F: Can you tell me why?

118. Pi: We kept walking round for nearly an hour and we walked and kept going in  
the

119. rooms, it was a bit boring. (SCC opportunity to sell college to YP here!!)

120. Pu: I'm glad I didn't go.

121. F: So you did two visits there?

122. BB: We went after Crewe Hall

123. Pu: there for the first sessions went it started to meet our mentors and stuff.

124. F: Like a welcome?

125. Pu: Yeah,

126. Pi: I like the project where we did like the canvass. (referring to the creative  
art

127. workshop)

128. Pu: Yeah. I enjoyed that.

129. F: Where did you do that?
130. Pi: Here (SWS school) But we got people here.
131. Pu: And then they got presented at MMU (reference to the TWISTA graduation
132. event at MMU)
133. F: Oh yeah we saw them they were great! So visitors came in and helped you with
134. that then?
135. Pi: Erm, yeah, the mentors.
136. F: What would you like to do then? So if you had the chance to come back next year
137. what would you want to do the same workshops or new ones?
138. Pu: I would like to see a bit more improvement, cos we had a few weeks where we
139. wouldn't do anything and had loads of one to ones and that was boring. And that
140. was going on a lot. (lack of activity group got bored) I would like to see an
141. improvement on what activities we can do, like people coming into school and do
142. stuff with us, and go out.
143. BB: I enjoyed the boxing that time, and do more activities and go out.
144. F: OK, so for the whole year how did it work out?
145. BB: No it was 1-1s for two weeks and then. I didn't have a mentor at all.
146. Pi: No you did at the start.

147. BB: Then my mentor never came back.
148. F: were you given any reason for that?
149. BB: No.
150. Pi: I enjoyed the boxing. You had to do like the statue of liberty pose (proudly
151. demonstrates with BB)
152. Pu: I do boxing on a Thursday though
153. BB: Where?
154. PU: Chongi.
155. F: That's a local club?
156. Pu: Yeah, but it's finished now.
157. F: So what aspects of boxing do you like, besides the physical part? What does that
158. mean to you?
159. BB: Fitness
160. F: so what other workshops would you like?
161. Pu: Go Maccie D's and help out and get free food. Yeah, It would be good cos you
162. could communicate more and have a good time.
163. Pi: I think like do nails
164. BB: Did that didn't you?
165. Pi: Yeah, but they used the wrong stuff and they came off quick. S
166. Pu: she didn't bring acrylics or anything in.
167. Pi: So they came of the next day.

168. F: So nails, eating out, anything else?
169. BB: Hair and beauty
170. F: Are you all in your final year?
171. Pu: It's our final year (PU/BB) it's pinks she's got two years left.
172. F: Ok, so thinking about the workshops supporting aspirations, giving you different
173. ideas and career suggestions. Like hair and nails, apart from the activity, what else
174. would you want?
175. BB: Instead of it just being girls it would be good to have the lads there as well.
176. Pu: Yeah, it would be fun to have the lads there as well. Cos like
177. BB: I like the DJ-ing
178. Pu: I think if we had the lads it would lighten the mood up a bit more so we've got a
179. mix. (PU perhaps suggesting the programme was a little dull?)
180. Bb: it would be funnier
181. Pu: Yeah, it would liven it up a bit cos they're energetic.
182. F: OK, any other thoughts on the workshops?
183. All: No
184. F: OK, so Q6: Have you got any plans for next and what are they?
185. BB: What do you mean?
186. F: OK, so you're not doing the programme anymore, when you come back, so what

187. will you do then?
188. Pi: Start it again!
189. PB: Yeah, it was really fun and there was a load of confidence.
190. F: OK, so what about BB?
191. BB: I think they should just let year 11s do it.
192. Pi: I think It should be a couple from each year that do it
193. BB: They just did 9 and 10 didn't they.
194. Pi: or 10-11
195. Pu: 9-11
196. F: 9-11, so the last 3 years of secondary?
197. Pu: cos were a bit more mature than years 7 or 8.
198. BB: They wouldn't put all their effort into it
199. Pu: I would want to do it again cos It gave me someone to talk to and something to
200. do on a Wednesday.
201. Pi: And you always had like someone there for ya listening to you. Many people
202. don't have that.
203. F: So do you think it would be good to have that earlier?
204. All: Yeah
205. F: So when you come into year 7 do you think that would be useful thinking back to
206. your year 7, do you think that would be useful?
207. BB: I would have loved it.

208. F: So you think you would have appreciated that, doing something in the week?
209. BB: Yeah
210. Pu: Not for me
211. F: OK, so not for everyone then? So some people would have benefited from it.
212. BB: no
213. F: So if it was offered and you didn't have to do it.
214. BB: Yeah, I'd do it again.
215. PU: I'd deffo do it again. if it started after the six week's holiday's I'd defo do it
216. again.
217. BB: Cos it was fun and you get to talk to someone and look forward to it.
218. F: So when you come back after six weeks and you've not got TWISTA, what are you
219. all going to do?
220. BB: nothing.
221. Pi: And that's why people get into trouble. (awareness and making a
222. recommendation)
223. F: So there are no clubs or societies or after school activities?
224. Pu: I joined this Wulvern thing, I don't know what it is yet. My mentor said she would
225. come in and talk to me about it cos she works for Wulvern.
226. F: So you're still getting some contact time with your mentor after?

227. Pu: Yeah she said she would come in every week and see me. (just one mentor
228. arranged this- other participants have not arranged to do this)
229. F: Ok, so you'll keep continuing that, so is that happening for anyone else then?
230. BB: I don't know.
231. Pu: No. (direct answer from participant- should this be for all and not just one- or
232. even not allowed at all?) Post-programme offer is not existent)
233. F: Is that arranged with Dawn then? I know Lindsay had been running the Kings
234. Grove sessions.
235. Pu: No, it's just me and my mentor.
236. F: Any other plans, things you would like to do?
237. BB: I would do it again but I need a mentor. (BB didn't have a mentor due to
238. attendance issues with both)
239. F: So if I turned up you wouldn't take part.
240. Pu: I would want the same mentor. (connected with one person but not as confident
241. to share with others)
242. Q7: Did you enjoy the programme?
243. Pu: Yeah I enjoyed it loads.
244. Pi: I wouldn't change anything cos it was that good.
245. Pu: I would recommend it to my mates' cos they're good activities.

246. Pi: Then we would have more people to talk to.
247. F: Taking part?
248. Pi: Like my friend, erm, she told me to join so I did.
249. F: So It wasn't the teacher who said to you take part?
250. Pi: no my friend asked the teacher if I could and they said yeah.
251. F: Was everyone else told they had got to come in?
252. (Distracted by the clock whizzing round)
253. F: you would all recommend it to your friends.
254. All: Yes
255. F: So has anyone found it not useful and wished they had not done it. I know you
256. have all mentioned positive things.
257. F: No response verbally (heads shake to signify a no answer)
258. F: Q8 in your own words, describe your experience on the TWISTA programme.
259. Pi: Inspiring, inspired, made me happy, and confident, and positive.
260. Pi: What does that say?
261. F: Enthusiastic. Say you didn't want to do anything at the start and now you want to
262. volunteer, keep busy and get involved in lots of things.
263. Pu: I was like that, I didn't want to do it at first, and then my mentor came along and
264. got me through it.
265. Pi: I was shy.

266. Pu: Me too, and then I wanted to join in I felt positive.
267. Pu: I didn't want to talk to my mentor cos I didn't know her, and then I got to know
268. her.
269. F: Ok, any other words or anything you would like to add?
270. F: No response from the group
271. F: Well thank you very much for your time today.

## **Appendix C:**

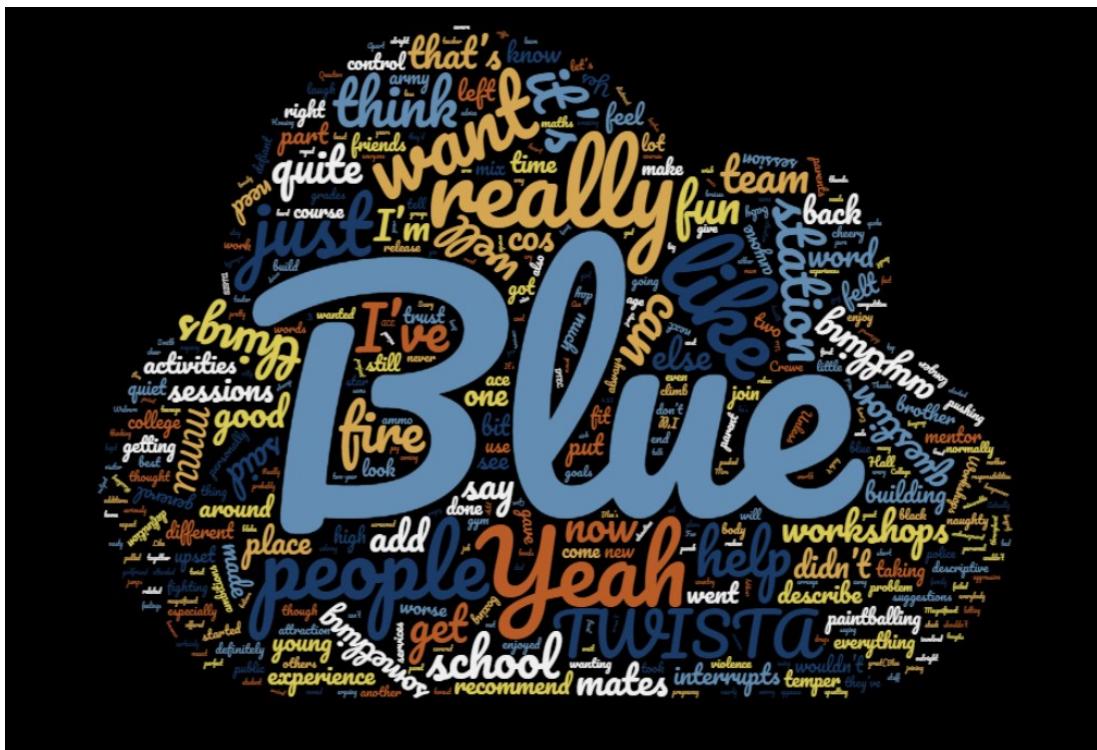
### Key dates of UK policy changes on widening participation in higher education\* (pg: 58)

- 1997 Publication of Dearing Report on Higher Education in the Learning Society
- 1997 Labour Government in power, committed to 'Education, education, education,' accepts a revised version of Dearing
- 2003 White Paper on 'The Future of Higher Education'. Cmnd 5735.
- 2005 Higher Education Act created Office of Fair Access (OFFA) and post of Access Regulator
- 2006 Department for Education and Skills (DfES) Paper Widening Participation in HE: Creating opportunity, releasing potential, achieving excellence
- 2007 June, Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) and Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) replaced (DfES)

## **Appendix D:**

## Wordle clouds

Created from Year 11 Boys transcript



Created from the Year 11 Girls transcript



## **Appendix E**

### **Participant Information Sheet**

#### **Research Participation Information**

##### **Research title:**

Exploring Youth Aspirations in Urban Regeneration Settings

My name is Fiona Burgess Email: [f.burgess@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:f.burgess@mmu.ac.uk). I am a student at Manchester Metropolitan University Cheshire Campus. As part of my research, I would like to get the views and experiences of young people as participants of the schools mentor programme TWISTA.

##### **Your Views and Experiences**

For my research project to be useful, it needs the views and experiences of young people who participate in such intervention programmes. Are you due to complete your year on the TWISTA programme? Is this your second year on the programme? Would you be willing to share your experience with fellow students? Then it is these views and experiences I would like to hear.

To make good use of everyone's time, the way I would like to be able to listen to what you have to say is using a Focus Group. A Focus Group is a short meeting (max. 1 hour) designed to get about 9 young people together, who all want to talk about something that matters to them. I am looking to run two focus groups, that are easy to get to (i.e. at your school), and in a comfortable place to sit and talk in. As the researcher, I would organise and run the focus group, but it would be about ensuring your view and experiences could be shared together.

##### **When and where are the focus groups?**

The Focus Group will take place on Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> July 2014 at your school, and the first thing you will need to do is fill in the **Participant Consent Form**

##### **Any questions**

If you have any questions about taking part in the research, or you think you might need some additional support so you could take part, please contact me using the contact information below, or ask your parent/guardian, mentor or teacher to contact me.

##### **Agreeing to take part in a Focus Group.**

If you've decided already that you want to take part, you can now fill in the **Research Participant Consent Form**, (You will have had one of these given to you today with this information). Please return this form prior to taking part in either of the two planned focus groups. This is important to ensure I can collect and use your personal views and experiences in the research. I will need to make an audio recording and take notes during the Focus Group.

**If you agree to be at a Focus Group that will be recorded** then the recording will be transcribed into written notes afterwards. Each person taking part will be replaced in the written notes with a participant number, and will not be possible for you or anyone else to be identified when the research is written as a report. All the data collected will be kept in a secure place (i.e. locked cabinet and/or a computer that is password protected) and to which only the researcher has access. The recorded data will be kept until the end of the research process, following which all data will be destroyed.

I want to make this research as useful as possible to improve access to and services for young people, so the results of the research may be published (e.g. in a journal, magazine, or online) or presented at a conference or in other meetings. The consent form also asks if you are OK with that happening.

During the focus group, if you become fed up, uncomfortable or upset about what is being talked about, without giving reason, you can leave and if you wish to, come back (more than once if need be), refuse to answer or discuss anything that you don't want to talk about.

If you would like to discuss this research project further, or ask questions about anything you have read, please contact me either via email or your school leader (see contact details below). If at any stage you should experience any problems that the researcher has been unable to resolve, you can contact Dr. Kathy Kinmond research Supervisor, or Orlagh McCabe at MMU Cheshire whose contact details are also given below.

Fiona Burgess (Researcher) Contact Details:

Email: [f.burgess@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:f.burgess@mmu.ac.uk)

Dr Kathy Kinmond: [k.kinmond@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:k.kinmond@mmu.ac.uk)

Orlagh McCabe: [o.mccabe@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:o.mccabe@mmu.ac.uk)

## **Appendix F**

Participant Consent Form.

### **Consent form**

#### **Exploring Youth Aspirations in Urban Regeneration Settings**

Researcher: Fiona H. Burgess

Contact details: f.burgess@mmu.ac.uk

Supervisor: Dr Kathy Kinmond, k.kinmond@mmu.ac.uk

**(If you consent, please sign your initials in the boxes provided)**

I have read and fully understand the information sheet and have had the opportunity  
to ask questions

I agree to participate in the study and am happy for my contribution to be tape  
recorded and transcribed

I acknowledge that my participation is voluntary and that I am able to withdraw  
without giving a reason

I consent to direct quotations from the focus group to be used in research reports

I consent for any data I have provided to be used in publications, conferences and  
presentations

I understand that all data provided by me will be securely held then destroyed after 5 years

I understand that I have the right to withdraw my data up until 1 month following the focus groups

Participants signature.....

Name (Please print) .....

Researcher signature.....

Name (Please print) .....