

**Thesis Title   
  
Are you sitting (un)comfortably? Then I’ll begin.**

**An autoethnographic account of social defences in a secondary school assembly hall.**

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**Abstract**

Drawing upon Kleinian psychoanalytical theory of object–relations, this thesis examines systems psychodynamics within my role as a Year 7 Form tutor in a mainstream secondary academy school. In an autoethnographic study, I observe how anxiety and the unconscious social defences associated with it are represented in many aspects of my job, particularly through taking my form group into school assembly as a psychological process. Reflecting on five short stories of my experiences, I offer an analysis of the confused and disquieting feelings I experienced in my role. I then develop a reflective model to explain my gradual dissociation from the core function/culture or primary task of the school. By accepting Isabel Menzies Lyth’s observation that the “evasion of anxiety inhibits growth” (1988, p.109), some conclusions are drawn to suggest that the social defences evident in the assembly inhibit the pastoral system’s capacity to adequately contain the children’s unbearable feelings of anxiety.

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# Chapter 1

## Chapter structure

Introduction

Section 1: Setting the scene

Section 2: What is my thesis about?

Section 3: The school environment and the role of the form tutor

Research question

Section 4: Epistemological assumptions and challenges

Section 5: Thesis outline

### Introduction

My thesis is about anxiety. It is an examination of the social defences that professionals in organisations unconsciously build to defend themselves against the intolerable anxiety associated with doing the job. I have recorded my experiences as a Year 7 Form tutor in a mainstream English secondary school through a series of five internal monologues that recorded how doing that job made me feel. Both the joy and the pain.

In this chapter, I will set out the scope of my thesis and how I put it all together. I begin by setting the scene, introducing myself and questioning why I felt such a profound sense of disquiet about being in the school and doing my job that I struggled to explain it to myself. I move on to describe the school, before considering my role as a pastoral form tutor and then explain how I arrived at my research question. This enables me to discuss my positionality and research subjectivity. Towards the end of this chapter, I offer a brief synopsis of each of the following chapters.

I start with a brief reflection of one of the less commonly known roles of the secondary teacher. Here, I set the scene in the assembly hall, which serves as the background for many of my stories in Chapter 4 and which informs my observations throughout the thesis.

## Setting the scene

### My internal monologue - supporting Shav with his Y11 English poetry exam.

The following monologue recalls my memories of supporting Shav (not his real name), in his final Y11 English poetry exam. For students who have a learning contract, or for those that have been given an allowance for extra time, readers can be provided and are usually support staff, or teachers from another department. As a task, it comes under the dreaded *'and any other duties, that the Head sees fit'*, on the job description somewhere behind Equal Opportunities and how not to do manual handling. It is rarely, if ever, acknowledged, but it's custom and practice, or at least expected goodwill, that if you can, you will support the students and the school at a difficult time for all concerned.

Under the usual exam conditions, my role was to read the examination instructions and questions to him whilst he sat next to me sweating and scribbling his answers down in the booklet. Having whispered the questions, you just sit there, in silence, trying not to disturb the other candidates, watching the clock, and trying not to let your mind wander. For me, sitting next to Shav in the assembly hall re-awakens long suppressed emotions and memories of failing most of my own exams …

*Why are they always about death?*

*There’ll be someone in a valley soon feeling mournful next, there’s always someone in a valley, somewhere. Or autumn.*

*Will there be a murmuration of starlings next? Like he'll know what that is. Or a mound of furrowed earth. Crows. You always get crows in winter, as black as jet. Or coal.*

*If he remembers to turn the page over. Don’t forget to add the metaphors.*

*Poor kid.*

*I do sometimes think, is it any wonder they hate school?*

*Me, I loved the words and the images. But then I liked English.*

*An Anthem for Doomed Youth.*

*Seems fitting.*

*I wonder why they never do war poetry from today. Someone must have written war poetry from the Gulf, or Iraq, Afghanistan?*

*Dulce et decorum est.*

*It’s so elegant. Balanced. Rhythmic.*

*I wish I understood Latin.*

*My dad does. Different generation I suppose.*

*It's old fashioned now. It was then. But it would make me feel superior, I could Lord it over them, god knows I don't need that. I'm not going to admit to that in the staffroom.*

*I wish I’d worked harder when I was at school.*

*The Latin reminds me of going to mass as a boy. The strong, burning, Incense wafting out.*

*I can still smell it to this day.*

*It's odd there’s something about sitting here, the unbearable silence as the dust arcs in the light.*

*Numb.*

*Maybes it’s my aching back.*

*These plastic chairs are so hard, and uncomfortable … it makes me think of Holy Communion at St. Cuthbert’s. Me and Sal used to crane our necks so we could see under the pews, to see what shoes the women were wearing. It was far more interesting. I wonder if she still remembers? I bet she does.*

*Lento e Largo. A “Symphony of Sorrowful songs”.*

*Now that is an elegy of grief. I’m going to have that played at my funeral.*

*To feel loss like that? I played it to the Y7s as a punishment once, I can’t remember why now. Or, what’s that other one, Nimrod?*

*They’ll all be charging into the valley of Death any time soon.*

*And there they are. Of course, they are! Next page.*

*I remember Han telling me it's all about the imagery and assonance but he does rattle on a bit, still better than Shelley.*

*It's no wonder Miss looks stressed. I don’t know who I feel sorrier for Shav or her, poor thing, she’s got no nails left.*

*Oh, why do they always set them the same ones, he can't remember them. They’re so hard.*

*Some of these kids are only 15, they should set them grime, or garage or whatever it is.*

*On second thoughts, perhaps not.*

*I want to whisper the answer to him.*

*It’s gone cold. Half of the hall is bathed in sunlight, baking, my half’s freezing. This poor kid. No wonder he wants a swig of water. No wonder he needs a bit of extra time. He looks lost, I bet he didn’t revise.*

*I don’t blame him.*

*The air’s thin. Dry.*

*Those specks of dust still twist and spiral in the sunlight. Drifting away. Lost to me.*

*It’s so still. There’s a strange cadence; muffled sighs punctured only by that kid's cough.*

*For pity's sake, I wish someone would get him some water.*

*I’m not sure she should be wearing those heels, should she, shouldn’t they have flats on in here, clomping around?*

*Sounds like the 600 whenever she walks past.*

*He’ll turn the page over in a minute.*

*There’ll be a verse about churches or ecclesiastical furniture next. Mousey Thompson. We always had to learn about him. No idea why.*

*It really is freezing sitting here now. It’s so bright on that side now they can barely see the paper in front of them.*

*I’m stiff as a board.*

*Oh god, no, it’s a simile, no, no, not there.*

*I’m going to have to tell him, I can’t bear to watch.*

*If I lean in*

*…his blazer has that slightly damp, dog smell.*

*It would be nice, just for once, to help one of the popular girls. At least you know that they'll have*

*showered. I always get the lads.*

*… but if I lean in; could I pretend I'm reading the next question?*

*Whisper to him.*

*Could I?*

The acoustics in the hall seem to amplify my whispers and it’s difficult sometimes. I can’t quite work out why.

One minute I’m in the staffroom, trying not to scald myself whilst putting one of those flimsy, plastic lids on my coffee the ones that never quite seem to fit, wondering what I’m doing for the rest of the day; the next, I’m whispering a Cambridge poetry anthology to one of the Year 11s who can’t read because someone's called in sick again.

Unseen poetry. He’s got a learning support plan, it's not his fault. He’s never going to remember the quotations. Never mind compare them with another poem. He doesn’t stand a chance. I’m not teaching that morning and I’m a SEN teacher. I’m hardly going to turn around and say no, I’ve got paperwork to complete, lessons to plan. I love my job but it can also be intense.

Working in a large secondary school can feel chaotic; no matter how much we try to control the moment it often feels like we are just reacting to conditions outside the scope of our actions. There’s something about this tension, between the human behaviours which define us and the space that feels uncomfortable and needs thinking about.

## Section 1: What is my thesis about?

This thesis is written for ‘self’. It’s about me, and my life -story and about how working at one school made me feel. It isn’t a traditional scientific analysis of my state of mind but a blurred, boundaryless amalgam of my anxiety, my feelings and my thoughts. There is nothing in this thesis that represents writing that can be measured through positivist criteria. That was never my intention. I want to use this process to inform my practice through a form of critical reflection. I’m not trying to change anyone else’s behaviours, their thinking or practice Neither do I seek to make grand claims to anything other than myself and my performance, both the good and the bad. This is the way that I see the world, now and then and how by reflecting on myself I diarise my process of change.

I describe something of my experiences of working in the school and how they make me feel. By reflecting on these often confusing and contradictory internal thoughts I give voice to all of my unspoken fears and anxieties and through that analysis come to elaborate something of the psychodynamic processes that occurred in situ. I found the following thought useful in shaping the journey that I embark upon

*“And to be a person entails much more than the capacity for intellectual performance. The person is not merely cognitive; the person is multi-faceted. We might identify (among others) the bodily, emotional aesthetic, moral, social and political dimensions of ‘personhood’, together with the essential character of ‘being-in-becoming’. On this account, by no means all schooling is educational; indeed, it is possible to argue that institutionalization is inimical to the development of the person.”* (Best & Geddes, 2002, p.272).

To understand these dynamics better, I apply Isabel Menzies Lyth’s seminal theory of social defences published in 1959 and I consider how we construct a series of unconscious defences to protect ourselves against pervasive and persecutory forms of anxiety in school. I focus on the psychological and draw on aspects of the procedural and the professional through a series of short stories that seemed to burst out of me in a way I had never experienced before. I write primarily about the psychodynamics of being in the assembly hall and what that means to me, my anxieties about the job and I reflect on the behaviour of other colleagues and children. I conclude with some thoughts about the importance of embedding psychoanalytic supervision techniques in schools (Hanley, 2017) and finish with some closing observations about the consequences of unconscious defences on the children in my form extending the conclusions of both Ellen Ramvi (2009, 2011) and Simon Tucker (2015).

## Section 2: The school environment and the role of the form tutor

I work in a school with a complex history, characterised by multiple school inspection failures, forced academy conversion, rebranded and taken over by a national chain of academy trusts and with falling pupil rolls. It has a reputation. A disproportionately high percentage of the children were in receipt of Free School Meals. The school’s GCSE exam results had fallen below the national benchmark year on year, acute numbers of children failing to pass the standard five good grades at GCSE, even fewer children passing with English and mathematics. There have been acute problems with non-school attendance, disproportionately high numbers of children excluded for behaviour-related problems, a dizzying number of children out of school through fixed term exclusions. Little surprise then that there was a correspondingly high rate of staff turnover.

On beginning my employment at the school, as I registered my unaccustomed excitement about working there its routines seemed normal, the usual ebb and flow of a mainstream secondary school, perhaps a little strict at times, but nothing remarkable, nothing out of place. I was aware that a new management team had been recruited to instil a firm sense of discipline. Moreover, the Head was a confusing blend of compassion in the privacy of his own wood-panelled office, whilst on the corridors, his demeanour was bullish, his manner authoritarian (Obholzer, 1994, p.41). He was wedded to the observance of strict discipline and traditional teaching methods. His external world frequently seemed at odds with the man I came to know slightly through my one-to-one work with the children on child protection orders. Yet, woe betide the child, teacher or teaching assistant who forgot which side of the corridor we were supposed to walk down. He prioritised discipline through attention to the marginal things – uniform irregularities were to be challenged, punctuality was important, and politeness to all was to be expected. Nothing wrong with any of that particularly there is no harm in children knowing where they stand.

The multi-academy trust’s corporate Mission, Vision and Values statement went along the lines typical of those you often seem to see in schools forced to join the academy programme after being placed in special measures. “Promoting better futures for all” or “Be better, realise your dreams” or similar. Strip a school of most of its local assets, bring in a national private academy chain, sponsored ideally by a faith organisation or philanthropist, build a shiny new building, but leave the same children from the same estate without addressing the structural problems that they face, windswept estates blighted by high unemployment, poor housing stock, ‘they’ re not from around here, them’ mentality. Change the management team frequently, stir repeatedly over a high heat, and then simmer gently afterwards. Keep your fingers crossed and pop it into a fan assisted oven while walking away and forgetting that you left the temperature gauge on too high a setting. Cynicism aside, I haven’t got a better idea. I can’t help thinking that it is much harder to do in practice.

As I settled easily into the routines of school life, I was happy. I liked the Head, the structure, the firm boundaries. I loved working with the children and my colleagues in my staffroom. Naively, I was easily impressed by the shininess of the reception area with its City of London high finance, executive feel, high ceilings, whitewashed interiors, chrome and plate glass finish. The toxic, intimidatingly spikey, pot plants that you know didn’t come from the local garden centre seemingly so out of place were perhaps, on reflection, a portent of things to come.

As teachers, we were a talented, if disparate, and committed group of professionals. We worked well generally and supported a lot of distressed children. I shut my senses off to the occasionally unnecessary shouting and the jostling as the children collided around the school corridors. I ignored the language and the contemptuous attitudes of the children. Life in the pressure-cooker. High stakes; physically and mentally exhausting, but compelling. You want to be there at first, it’s addictive. The adrenaline surges through you. Once that bell goes, you go. It’s exciting. Non–stop. Maybe the stockbroker building was deliberate after all?

I don’t want to admit that I was starting to normalise problematic behaviour in staff and students. Best to ignore it. I’m definitely not going to put my head up above the parapet. Resilient. Strong? I’m skilled and experienced. Head down. Ignore the pain.

*What is that feeling?*

*It doesn’t make sense.*

*Something seems out of place but I’m not sure what?*

This has become the motivation for my thesis.

Not so much mind the gap, as find an alternative to filling up the gaps.

### Motivation: On locating my role within a psychodynamic perspective

“It appears from the data collected that in some schools where institutional ‘success’ is judged by the outcomes of public examinations and league tables (and in some instances where the academic/pastoral divide is likely to be most marked), young people can be easily ‘left behind’”. (Tucker, 2015, p.5)

My motivation for undertaking this thesis is in part to contribute to making school a happier, safer place by improving the quality of mental health awareness within organisations[[1]](#footnote-1) (see APPCIOS website) and to achieve this by recognising where social defences exist (Jacques, 1955; Menzies Lyth, 1959; Bain, 1998). I wasn’t looking for a research problem, I just felt something wasn’t right. As my journey proceeds in the school I come to understand how “the evasion of anxiety inhibits growth” (Menzies Lyth, 1988 p.109) and I want to share this with my colleagues as a means of improving the organisational dynamic within the school.

I also recognise that to tackle all the aspects of a school would be too big an undertaking to condense into one small research thesis. There are too many variables; the staff, the children, so for the purposes of this thesis and keeping it as manageable as possible I decided to focus only on me and my role as a pastoral form tutor. I take the point that this is a long road and it isn’t easy. “The difficulty for many schools is the vacuum between the pastoral care needs of the school and the theoretical and practical knowledge of how to fill that void” (Grove, 2004, p.37). It seems to me that this gap may be reduced, if my experiences are anything to go by, by understanding that whilst psychoanalysis and psychodynamic theories may not be forgotten, they seem strangely neglected and under-utilised within education. I think that gap can be filled through means of psychoanalysis and by applying psychodynamic practice to our ways of working.

I want to contribute to the call for making psychoanalytic, psychodynamic practices in school available through CPD sessions and training (Hanko, 2002; Sprince, 2002; Hyman, 2012; Barrow, 2015; Hanley, 2017). Whilst I have struggled to find anything very specific to locate the role of the form tutor within a psychoanalytical tradition, I share Terry Hanley’s plea for the incorporation of “pluralistic group supervision” (Hanley, 2017 p.260) strategies within secondary schools to alleviate the “emotional labour” associated with the work of teachers. (Hanley, 2017 p.263). Where I differ slightly, is that many teachers do not seem to realise how much we need this support because it remains unknown and unrecognizable to us.

### Developing a focus for my thesis: From form tutor to carer and all the way back to form tutor again

To help narrow my focus, I decided to concentrate on one aspect of my role within the school; something that actually represented the best of both my social work training and my teaching background. Being a Year 7 form tutor was also an aspect of school life that I really enjoyed and gained a lot of professional amusement and satisfaction from, despite never receiving any training or support in the role. I want to use a section of this space now just to try and tease through the nature of the role.

Understanding how I fit into the form tutor’s role proves more difficult than at first, I had thought. There is scant training available on understanding the role of the pastoral form tutor. It sometimes feels that with only limited time in the school day, the role comes a long way behind educating students for time-poor teachers. I took on the role partly because that’s 'just what we do'. I didn’t put much thought into it, until now perhaps. I spent even less time on it compared to my normal duties.

**So, what exactly is the role of the form tutor?**

Michael Marland is the central figure who defined much of the common day-to-day role of the form tutor in schools. He traced the role from the 1950s to the 1970s, suggesting that the role has shifted with the educational pedagogy and policy from the more rigid, disciplinary function of the 1950s, to the more caring and nurturing role of the 1970s (Marland, 1974, 2004, Marland and Rogers, 1997). I would suggest that the circle has been squared in the context of academy schools and we have gone back to the 1950s again.

Needless to say, the role has been subject to the vagaries of government policy over time, (Marland, 2002, p.3). It has moved from a focus on supporting educational achievement and learning to its position today in the modern academy secondary school; so too the language seems to reflect the policies of the government of the day and the local priorities of the school. To my mind, this has become increasingly managerial and perhaps more technical, focusing on the new climate for learning and/or the Teaching and Learning assessment pathways of the day (see, for example, the technical conditions for implementing changes to exam reforms, and accountability measures via Progress 8)[[2]](#footnote-2).

Regardless of these not wholly unsurprising, if nonetheless ridiculously complicated changes, Lodge sees the role as having a special position within the school, as do I. A little depressingly, however, she identifies the role of the tutor as pretty much at the bottom of the hierarchy of the school, (Lodge, 2000, p.36). Similarly, Jonathon Robinson, Director of Teaching School for the Advanced Learning Alliance, suggests that the form tutor’s role is “ARGUABLY THE MOST UNDERRATED RESPONSIBILITY IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL!” (2015) [caps as in the original]. It is difficult to disagree, since it is one of those roles that requires significant non-contact time to allow for the phone calls to anxious parents, to contact colleagues, and to meet with pastoral heads. It’s a role that feels increasingly important, a point I come onto in a moment, and yet somehow it has become a 'fit it in alongside the rest of your duties as best you can' type of role.

I would argue that fundamentally, the scope of the role has expanded exponentially, marked to a large extent by the social effects of austerity following the 2008 financial crash. Our role seems to have become as much about acting like ancillary health and well-being professionals, once, but no longer, a familiar sight within schools. We have witnessed the erosion of school nursing services, school counselling teams, safeguarding teams, and in some cases, anecdotally, even SEN staff in mainstream schools squeezed out by acute pressures on school budgets and accusations of “selection by stealth” (The Guardian, 5th September, 2017). Tutors have played a pivotal role in moving from educational to social pedagogy and in supporting learning. The role seems paradoxically to have expanded both in terms of complexity, whilst the resources available seem to have receded. Tutors are now expected to promote primary health-care, promote British Values, (see the UK government’s PREVENT strategy 2011, p.68)[[3]](#footnote-3) support child protection referrals, and even act as a universal mental health screening and referral service.

Marland, cited here by Professor Ron Best, himself a leading authority on pastoral care in education, saw “complementary separate aims” (2014, p.176) for pastoral care that diverge from mainstream delivery:

“(1) to assist the individual to enrich his personal life;

(2)  to help prepare the young person for educational choice;

(3)  to offer guidance and counselling, helping young people to make their own decisions ...;

(4)  to support the ‘subject’ teaching;

(5)  to assist the individual to develop his or her own lifestyle and to respect that of  others;

(6)  to maintain the orderly atmosphere in which all this is possible.” (Marland, 1975 cited in Best, R., 2014, p. 176).

Some twenty years later, Reynolds's view of the overall function of the role is similar, but he assumes a slightly less noble vision of the job, one altogether more recognisable at least to me:

“a. being a person available to discuss any problems;

b. being able to provide a sense of security;

c. being in a position to monitor progress;

d. serving to provide a link between pupil, school and home” (Reynolds, 1995, p.32).

I note a subtle shift in how the language has changed from the post-war period to include a focus on organisational development. Robinson goes on to suggest that form tutors engender "organizational skills and establish a positive class dynamic and atmosphere" (presentation, June 2015). In a later paper, Marland, reviewing how the role has changed from the 1950s, reflects on the similarities of the role. Here, he suggests

“They were expected to give first-level pastoral and academic care to each pupil in their group.

Example of good practice: one tutor had an exercise book. He designated a double page spread to each pupil and noted salient points like:

family set up, names, siblings, information on health, basic ability (top, middle or bottom of the class), special educational needs and problems, attendance and punctuality. A good tutor followed up unauthorized absences and lateness and noted any specific pastoral needs, for example behaviour problems – in those days called ‘indiscipline’.” (Marland, 2002, p.7).

I take his point, although my role seems a lot less strategic and more practical. I might be tempted to suggest that my experiences feel more akin to acting like the children’s ever hopeful, avuncular figure standing haplessly at the front, who, hopefully, some of the children might think was fair minded and usually on their side. Who just about remembers to register their attendance, and who often feels obliged to tell them off when they are late, who feels like he is their surrogate mother, and who tries to manage, with limited success, their inter and intra-form friendship groups.

I try to help them feel like they belong, manage 7C's group identity at inter-form football, and almost always fail to contain the immature boyfriend-girlfriend fallouts and disagreements, the ‘he said-she said’ moments of babysitting. I pretend to act tough and discipline them, occasionally remembering to read out school year group messages, cajole the children into joining up to all manner of societies and book clubs, track down lost and stolen, help them to hide from the Librarian whenever she chases up their library fines with absolutely no success. I fix broken lockers, manage and do not manage their lunch money, try and fail to answer phone calls from anxious parents, except in the case of the one dad whose son in actual fact wasn't *being* bullied but *was* the bully. I help the children avoid my senior colleagues who are forever patrolling the corridors outside our form room, remind the children to attend detention, stick up for them, occasionally give them a squeeze when they are sad, sometimes make them laugh, and remind them that they will be alright and that it will all feel better in the morning. I constantly nag them, ask them, beg them, not to use their phones in class and to stop guzzling energy drinks surreptitiously when they think my back is turned. I plead with them to stop scribbling over their form handbook, school property, and each other, blow my budget allowance on printing their timetables out, again and again, when they forgot them. I force them to do activities that none of us want to do at that time in the morning, especially ‘Ninja mathematics’. (That was never my idea).

Once, or twice a week, proudly, I walk them into the assembly hall.

There are times when I forget that it can be fun.

What there doesn’t seem to be in the literature is that occasionally hopeful mix of compassion and containment. My role, the wiping of their tears, picking up their litter and tucking their chairs in after the bell has gone and they’ve shuffled off to Period 1 lessons, seems absent.

**On the provision of pastoral care**

Lodge argues that all schools have implicit and explicit pastoral goals (2000, p.36) however, as my experience suggests, this pastoral function is itself dynamic and can change. Tucker, citing Best, suggests that pastoral care can be defined as the provision of “enrichment, individual choice, the provision of guidance and counselling, growth of respect, support for ‘subject’ teaching and what I have interpreted as the creation of an environment that supports effective learning” (Best, cited in Tucker, 2015, p. 6).

Of the emerging themes and topics that come up in the literature, it is possible to detect a couple of dominant approaches, the first and more obvious function, to support educational attainment, teaching and learning (Lodge, 2000). I recognise this in terms of forcing the children to take part in silent reading, silent study, completing ‘Ninja maths’ puzzles[[4]](#footnote-4), and the second, perhaps, slightly opaque function to establish links between the health and well-being of the child via the day to day delivery of the PSHE curriculum (Marland, 1989, cited in Best, 2014).

There are aspects of my stories and monologues in Chapter 4 that hint at and describe my experiences, trapped between the children in my form group and the harsh disciplinary culture within the assembly hall. McCluskey, et al. identify an emphasis on these “punitive rather than preventative approaches” (2015, p.595), I see that very much as part of the first tier of Barrow’s analysis, operating at the procedural level of the role, again I hint at some of the frustrations of this role in my second story in Chapter 4 and identify something of the role in terms of managing behaviour and exclusion, attendance to (in)discipline, behaviour sanctions, and school uniform discrepancies. The title of Chapter 2 encapsulates the way in which this can drive a wedge between the staffroom and the classroom.

In more recent years, the evolution of the Blairite, Social Emotional Aspects of Learning curriculum piloted in 2004 has been well documented. It focuses on emotional literacy, helping children to become self – aware learners and attuned to understanding others and establishing more empathetic social skills (Seal Community n.d.)[[5]](#footnote-5) Its importance was diminished somewhat by the then Coalition government from 2010–2015 with its singular determination to reduce public spending, heralding a decade of austerity and cuts. I see in the form class room the effects of these policies, measured non-academically, in terms of the extra snacks and fruit that I bring in from home and surreptitiously leave on my desk for those children that don’t have enough to eat during morning break, in the volume of second hand clothes we recycle daily within the school and the success of our school food bank[[6]](#footnote-6)

The current minority Conservative administration of Theresa May has, belatedly it seems, recognised the adverse effects of the Cameron – Gove partnership in terms of the damaging lack of support for children suffering mental health problems in schools. “With an estimated 1 in 10 children suffering from mental health conditions in the UK in some reports from leading charities working in children’s psychological welfare suggest that with every £1 invested in counselling in primary schools some £6 could be returned” (DFE, 2015, Young Minds n.d., Place2 Be, 2018). In my role, more prosaically, I seem to spend a vast proportion of my time helping the children to manage their friendships and fallouts. One of the many things that strike me most about my pastoral role is focused around the children’s desire to belong. It is less how to cope with the endemic bullying and more how to help them make and then sustain their friendships.

That the social and emotional aspects of the role are well researched and continue to be lobbied for politically seems vital. Another aspect of this role that also interested me, was in seeking to understand my role in the school in terms of the children’s behaviour and, as I was to establish, more importantly that of the staff. Part of the rationale for me investigating this role was to uncover why some of our children seemed to behave as they did. Originally, and again in my third year, I spent too long thinking about this as an aspect of the role without realising the profound effect we, as teachers, have on the dynamics of our relationships with the children. When I gained permission from the then-Head to write up my research I imagined that I would ‘find the answer’ to the first of my many undeveloped research questions on the state of the children’s behaviour. I assumed, I now think wrongly, that the uncomfortable sense of disquiet that I felt was based around my concerns about the behaviours of some of the children. I found some of these extreme in a mainstream school and in my opinion, at the time, felt that this warranted further thinking. That notwithstanding, I also had concerns about what I felt was a largely negative attitude towards the behaviour of the children around the school. There were many, and still are, many very accepting, tolerant and dedicated teachers working in the school with some very challenging and difficult children. What shapes my thesis is my huge admiration for teachers and support staff who bend over backwards to support these children. I gaze at my colleagues half in wonder and half in sheer amazement that they get out of bed every morning and contain the worries, the trials and tribulations of these children. I know of some who travel from other cities to work there getting up ridiculously early just so that they can do the job. There has to be something very special about the place to make someone want to do that each morning. I don’t know what it is for other teachers but I wonder if it is something similar to the feeling of worry that I have about the children when I’ m not there and we’ re pre-occupied by the long holidays. These teachers do more than offer a constant for some very troubled children; they provide a sanctuary from the everyday challenges of their lives. Not all the children by any stretch of the imagination but for what feels like a disproportionate number of the children school is a safer place to be than their homes. It doesn’t always feel that safe a place to work most of the time.

Notwithstanding the genuine efforts of most of my colleagues, part of my disquiet seems to centre on that opaque sense of a lack of safety. We had allowed a culture to build up where the children were seen as the problem and where it was commonplace to describe children as ‘feral’. I would be a hypocrite if I hadn’t done, said and thought the same things myself. Nonetheless, I was taught by a wonderful colleague and the then-Principal at a college where I taught in an inner London FE college several years ago, that all we were doing was labelling and constructing a model of student deficit to take root - in effect, blaming the people for whom the organisation was established. At the time I was developing my research question, I was also reading Clive Harbour’s *Schooling as Violence* and kept returning to the chapter on *Schools and inhuman capital theory* (2004, p.39). Blaming the children didn’t wash with my values.

### *Rationale* - Of keeping “the institution-as-a-whole” (Obholzer and Roberts, 1994, p.134) in mind?

Even though I can see colleagues bending over backwards to help children there still feels a strange lack of connection between the teachers and many of the children. Why, when everything seemed to be in place, the new building, the orderliness, the timetables, the activities was this disconnect so striking and how can it be explained? My unease wasn’t obvious to me at first. Perhaps it wasn’t until I left? There were tell-tale signs, admittedly; the plethora of ‘behaviour support’ staff clicking nervously into their walkie-talkies, rushing after distressed students. Public and sometimes violent exchanges between senior school leaders and students, students chaotically colliding into one another at speed seemed the norm and were quickly routinized, but gradually came to overwhelm the staff’s confidence in their abilities to manage day to day. Recording the everyday in school is messy work. Chaotic. I needed a framework to make sense of what was going on around me and what I couldn’t always see but could almost feel.

As I had always considered myself to apply what might be termed a psycho–social approach to working with children and families (Cooper and Lees, 2015; Hoggett, 2015) but with my supervisor’s tutelage, I reached a conclusion that it might be worth examining my experiences from a different perspective to explain my feelings. What if these casual and not so casual encounters between teachers and students might have been masking states of “pervasive anxiety” (Armstrong and Rustin, 2015, p.3) or “a variety of feelings which threaten to be overwhelming” (ibid., 2015, p.6).

So I turned to psychoanalysis, and in particular, became intrigued by systems psychodynamics theory. My rationale is summed up in a quotation from Larry Hirschhorn, who explains:

“By recognising the limitations of classic psychoanalytical theory, which focuses primarily on the tensions between an individual’s instincts and defences, and drawing on modern object-relations theory, which highlights how people use one another to stabilize their inner lives, we can understand how psychodynamic processes *within* people help shape the relationships *between* them.” (Hirschhorn, 1988, p.4).

## Section 3: Research question

### Research aims & objectives

#### Aim

I spent most of my third year on the EdD testing different ideas, research questions and concepts. As I tested and developed my ideas, I became interested in what it might mean for the children to go to school in that area and why so many of them seemed to hate being at school. In fact, perhaps one of the best ways to explore the children’s lived experience was to think about my lived experience and how I was behaving?

The idea that I might have a part to play in the way others around me behaved was not a comfortable one. I resisted this thought until I felt confident that it was acceptable to write about my experiences, the frustration, the joy, the despair; sometimes even just the sheer boredom of working at the school. It dawned on me one day when sitting with my form in assembly; what better space to observe all those micro-interactions and routines, the essence of my day-to-day experiences?

I started to apply social defences theory to my experiences of taking my tutor group into assembly. Developed by Jacques, (1955) and Isabel Menzies Lyth (1959) it can be used to see in practice the development of social defences across most public-sector organisations and those with a specific role around human relations. I had read Isabel Menzies Lyth’s seminal paper, *The functioning of social systems as a defence against anxiety* (1959) in the first part of the course. In it, she addresses similar themes to those I identified in my school; high staff turnover, disquiet amongst middle management, and problems for junior staff, relating to the changing hierarchies. Her study focused on the nursing service in a large hospital, however. At this stage, it wasn’t clear whether I could apply her findings to explain my experiences in an educational setting. Nonetheless, many of my experiences seemed similar to those of the nurses, for example her suggestion that “In institutions, significant elements of both content and dynamics are likely to be held in common by members, derived from a shared external situation and possibly common internal situation, through conscious and unconscious collusive interactions between them” (Menzies Lyth, 1988, p. 28). This seemed to fit with my observations of the interactions around the academy school.

Her theory has since been applied by many contemporary researchers and writers (Rustin, 2015; Hinshelwood, 1979; 1998; Ramvi, 2009; 2013; Sprince, 2002). Most of them have sought to assess the relevance of her theories in a more contemporary society, 50 years on from when she originally identified these defences and their impact in a large general hospital. Her suggestion was that by addressing the gap between the emotional wellbeing of the professionals within the organisation and either the patients, service users, or the children they support, it is possible to establish a more emotionally mature and therefore safer space with improved outcomes for all. Margaret Rustin focused on the way in which “ordinary professionals may deploy defences against mental pain” (Rustin, 2005, p.11). She notes that, “Defences against such awareness are much to the fore in the story reported, and defences against recognizing reality necessarily involve severe distortions in the mind’s capacity to function.” (Rustin, 2005, p.12).

My research aim is to try and add to the theory of psychodynamic practice by reflecting on social defences within school and to consider both the nature and form of the relationships as they develop between staff and students in the school. How might unseen unrecognized barriers form and hinder that relationship?

### Objectives

I could do this best by thinking about me and reflecting on my relationships with the children I teach. I wanted to record my involvement in preparing my lower school form group for assemblies. I decided that I will use autoethnographic research methods to understand how social defences are generated unconsciously within the school. I made a series of reflective diary entries and journal notes, which I will incorporate into five stories to describe how working in the school made me feel. That might help cast some light on the psychodynamic processes going on elsewhere in the school?

Autoethnographic research methodology enables me to offer some insight into the culture of the school at the time. The advantages of this approach will enable me to organise my notes, help me to maintain the anonymity both of the school and the children, and allow me to collect data that I can organise systematically before interrogating my datasets.

### Motivation for my research

I held certain specific pastoral responsibilities for the children’s well-being at school. As a form tutor, it was just part of the role. Nobody ever showed me what to do or how to be a form tutor, nor did I ever give it much thought other than who my group would be. The mundane, everyday responsibility fitted my interest in the ebb and flow of the workplace and the ordinariness of doing the job. In that sense, this one aspect of my job might be useful to focus in on and to think about. I did not come across anything in my early readings that provided a personal or subjective account of how being a form tutor makes me feel. I like being a form tutor. It’s one of the spaces I can call my own, I like building a rapport with the students and generally, it’s an interesting, engaging and enjoyable part of my job. In a secondary school, it gives me some consistency with a group of children that I don’t teach and that generally wouldn’t be on my caseload. This wasn’t quite the case in reality, however. After I had first written this statement and my role developed, a number of students who transferred into the school midway through the term were allocated to my form, with my agreement, for me to keep a closer watch on them given their home circumstances. Among my form duties was the job of leading my registration form into weekly assemblies.

I began to watch weekly assemblies more closely, observing their topics, themes, the delivery, I was less interested in the style of delivery at first, but I did start to reflect on the type of subjects and themes and came to understand that indeed the assembly might provide insight into the culture of the school. The more I started to develop my ideas, the more I felt that I started to notice certain behaviours. Most of these were wholly typical and followed a seasonal pattern; some were interesting and enjoyable; others felt quite confrontational in a way that I had never noticed before. Some contained so much information and were delivered in such a way as to leave me saturated and overwhelmed with information. Interestingly, I also started to observe how almost all of my students ‘hated’ assembly. Most used words like ‘hate’ or ‘boring’ to describe them. Some seemed to see assemblies simply as part of their timetable to be endured. Anecdotally, as I floated my research idea with close colleagues, some of the teaching staff confided that they felt vulnerable and exposed. Some middle management staff confessed that they hated speaking in public, citing assemblies as one aspect of the job they didn’t particularly enjoy.

I was beginning to reflect on a feeling that I was coerced somehow by forces unclear to me, and that are beyond my control, to engage with certain practices in the school that I felt were pedagogically dubious and that I didn’t fully agree with.

### Research question

It occurred to me (again whilst sitting in another assembly) that they also provided a window into the wider culture of the school. I decided, therefore, that my research question could use the school assembly as a site with which to add focus to my thesis and to cast light on what I was beginning to feel might be some defensive positions exhibited around the school.

I narrowed my focus to concentrate predominantly on thinking about my involvement in shaping the kinds of defensive behaviours identified in social defences theory. I felt a sense of drifting towards discomfort, perhaps being disquieted rather than alarmed. I revised my question again, this time to focus more specifically as my reading became more attuned, to psychoanalysis and to exploring unconscious defensive practices within the setting. Eventually, following Obholzer’s question that if “structure is essential for the competent functioning of the organization, confusion abounds … What are the factors contributing to the perpetuation of this state?” (1994, p.39). I settled on the question:

Given an analysis of school assemblies, how do schools perpetuate social defence systems? What might the consequences be, if any, and for whom?

## Section 4: Epistemological assumptions and challenges

The first challenge I encountered when thinking about preparing my research was in focusing on social defences theory. This was new to me. Secondly, it was only through the process of really thinking about my research question that I eventually decided what I wanted the focus to be on. This was an uncertain process requiring many iterations, tutorials and discussions. I felt that the assembly was the right space to observe behaviours, but what took the time was the slow realisation of how I felt and how anxious I was beginning to feel. This became not just about the primary task of the school, but about *my place* in the whole system or domains of the school.

Psychoanalytic theory seems to provide some insight about sense–making. One of the difficulties I have faced concerns my own inability to satisfactorily pinpoint my ‘feeling’ or ‘sense’ that something in the school was amiss. Stephen Frosh describes ‘sense’ as important both in terms of allowing “one to understand a psychological event, but it explains in a casual way, and in so doing it also makes a difference to it.” (2012, p.38) I have found this a particularly helpful reference point from theory to demonstrate the relevance of applying theoretical ideas from psychoanalysis to my day–to–day lived experiences.

From the point of drafting my ethics proposal, I diverged significantly in my choice of methodology. I thought then that I would sit and observe others, applying a more ethnographic perspective. I was wrong, however, as I couldn’t speak about the experiences of others. I hadn’t read about or considered the significance of my role in shaping the behaviours and the systems of behaviours in which I was immersed. Autoethnography thus offered a far more honest opportunity for reflection on how preparing my form for assembly actually made me feel. Albeit that we have time theoretically to reflect on our practice in school, I had never really thought before about how my job and the things I did actually made me feel. Had I, when faced with it only ever paid lip service to how powerful my leadership role was, as The Head of Student Welfare? I was responsible for enquiring about children’s personal, domestic lives and deciding what remained confidential and what I needed to share to protect children from significant harm.

One of the challenges of writing autoethnographically was in being honest with myself. My experience of school, as joyful as it could be, was that we avoided writing about how we felt. I did everything possible to avoid thinking about my feelings, from drinking in the pub on a Friday night afterwards with colleagues to participating in a false belief system that only we really knew how hard our jobs were. One of my challenges in writing this thesis has been in having to think about how I really was feeling without realising it at the time. I offer the stories in Chapter 4 simply as an account of my lived experiences and try to make sense of my feelings in Chapter 5.

My interpretation is even more challenging, but I now realise vital in the development of my thinking. One of the most exciting and transforming aspects of my thesis was the gradual realisation that I was blocking how I felt and lying to myself about it, which is a big part of why it took me so long to complete this thesis. I couldn’t write Chapter 5 because I unconsciously didn’t want to admit how I felt. As I gradually unlocked this through the creation of my ‘spiral’ diagram (Figure 5.1), so I began an incredibly enervating journey which moved me from my ontological position towards one of creating new knowledge. This process has helped me to understand that my social reality, my day-to-day lived experiences, can not only be shared meaningfully with others, but I hope that with this new reality I can locate my experiences in a theoretical framework and use those ideas to convey meaning about the culture of the school.

### Positionality

I hold professional qualifications in teaching and as a qualified social worker with training in mental health. I think that my experiences as a dual professional should be beneficial in performing this role well. Nonetheless, I have mused on whether it is because I left teaching for social work and then re – entered the teaching profession again afterwards that I often felt slightly out on a limb at school. Perhaps part of my uncertainty may be more about the new values I cherish as a social worker, grounded in a professional Code of Practice, and which seem more aligned to my personality than those in teaching. I often regret not finding social work until too late in my career. I sort of fell into the profession more my chance than design and in some ways think I’m more of a social carer in temperament than a statutory social worker. At a practical level, in this job, my social work training provides an excellent foundation for the role of a form tutor. I apply casework management skills and contained anxiety and the children’s emotions. As a reflective practitioner, I am skilled at planning and representing the school at child protection meetings and practised in working empathetically with parents. Nonetheless, there have been times where I also felt that I occupied a different perspective from the majority of teachers that I worked with. I am older than most of my colleagues and have a previous background in management both in statutory Children’s Services department in my beloved Islington and as a Head of Department in a post-16 educational setting. I teach children with additional needs and SEN. My experiences were well received by the Head and the leadership team. They went out of their way to appoint me in the first instance, I think recognising my skills and knowledge.

On occasion there were times however, when my experience challenged the leadership within the school, no more so than when advocating for the needs of distressed children. Part of my role included advocating for children at risk of either fixed term or permanent exclusion. Frequently, I found myself close to agreeing with the families against the prevailing opinions of my employer. I had recently completed a Masters in Social Work at the time and my renewed commitment to the Ethical Code of Practice of Social Workers[[7]](#footnote-7), and the new HCPC Standards of proficiency[[8]](#footnote-8) sat uneasily alongside the more draconian, as I saw it, aspects of my teaching role within school.

I have to acknowledge to myself however that this is not a straightforward or conventional route into working with children. Throughout the process of writing this thesis I have been forced to confront to myself why I ended up with this unusual hybrid role based on my equally unusual, but not necessarily uncommon, experiences as both teacher and social worker. The split frequently drives me mad. I hate it. I thought that they would work well together and yet in reality I find it hard to reconcile these two positions even if I do think there is real value in the areas that overlap. Nigella, my line manager always felt that having both these professional interests was in my favour when it came to the job interview. I’m not so sure. It wasn’t what led me to feeling caught between two contrasting ethical and value-based positions. Nevertheless, I want to use this next section just to draw on some of my formative experiences as they helped me understand my career ambitions.

I was brought up a Catholic but attended a Church of England school. My dad, a retired headteacher, came from a family of Catholics in the North East of England. His mother, a mental health nurse, and my beloved great aunt who stepped into her shoes when she died when I was only 9, was a ward sister who served in the Queen Alexandria Nursing Corps in the second world war and who nursed the soldiers of Montgomery’s 8th Army in Palestine. She regularly attended mass whilst in Jerusalem and as a child, my sister Sare, and I attended mass every Sunday. I loved the fact that I was brought up as a Catholic who attended a Church of England state school. It seemed unusual.

My dad’s proud left-wing credentials and belief in the separation of religion and schooling never deserted him. As a child, me and Sare got lost in the pews, row upon row, not dissimilar to the rows of hard plastic bucket seats in the assembly hall, and we played games, counting things, and whispering stories to each other to amuse ourselves to while away the hours we spent not understanding Mass. We gamely repeated the routines and rituals, I can still remember most of the Mass off by heart now, its lyricism woven into my DNA. The rituals. The smells, the hard furniture, the singing, the candlewax covered Hymnals. We watched fascinated, absorbed, as our dad made crosses out of palm leaves without using sticky tape, without breaking them. I used to hide in my coat petrified by the priests serving Holy Communion terrified at the thought that one day I might have to be an altar boy. I was frightened, awkward, and were it not for Sare’s imaginative games, peeping under the pews to see what shoes the glamorous ladies were wearing as they passed us by I would have hated it.

As it was, I didn’t. I enjoyed being there. I knew it was something that only we did as children in my school. I knew that I was part of something even if I didn’t know what that something was or meant? I miss the sense of belonging even now. Albeit, that now I can’t reconcile the politics, the abuse, the *othering*, that terrifying woman who used to preach about saving the unborn child and then seemed to take great delight in showing macabre pictures of the worst images of abortions imaginable. I was a kid, there were kids younger than me there for goodness sake. Have you no pity? I didn’t even know what an abortion was; please don’t force your reprehensible politics down other people’s throats. The sad thing for me now as an adult is in feeling torn between two positions, of belonging and knowing I can’t belong anymore. I despise the church now, a place where you can belong but only if you’ re one of them. I can’t tolerate membership of an institution that outwardly preaches love thy neighbour but not if he’s gay.

As a boy, I couldn’t work out why homosexuality was considered to be quite so dreadful. I hate the fact that to be something it means you have to be anti-something else, I wish membership wasn’t always like that. Please, please don’t be so horrible to one another. I hate it. I genuinely hate it, I’m nine. I know it’s wrong. The inflamed language and the rhetoric, preaching your bile, shouting at others and with your one, simplistic, dominant voice echoing around a large, cold building as if everyone one agrees with your point of view. Things are just more nuanced, more complicated than that aged 9, or 49. This seems strangely redolent of what I’m doing now.

I have always found solace and belonging in large groups. In football crowds, assemblies, gatherings, pop concerts, political rallies, the lecture hall but I’ve always wanted to be in a something that’s not anti-other things. Why faith and religious groups seem to have so many rules is beyond me? You can take your placards and your grim photos and your lousy made – up politics of division. I’m not a joiner.

I recognise now, however much I try to block them out, that those formative years, my Catholic values persist, hard work, be selfless to others, be good, and do good work. They endure and I am proud of that aspect of my upbringing. I can’t help thinking perhaps that these formative feelings fuel my split professionalism, and place a premium on caring for others, to be empathetic to those in need, to teach? This is about me trying to integrate these two things, and to recognise that both are acceptable.

### Researcher subjectivity

My unconscious experiences of anxiety have shaped my research interests and my conclusions. As I penned this section originally, I left scribbled in the margins the words, “also, I had the data and the history of repeat failings”. Taken out of context they could mean many things; yet here for me they cast some insight into the difficulties I have had in selecting my research question and in struggling to think clearly about my interpretation of the events as they unfolded around me.

There are multiple meanings to the events that I witnessed, recorded, and chose to write about. The generalizability of my research is limited by my subjectivity. Not all of my colleagues will agree that I can speak with any authority about the ‘feel’ of an institution based on my first visit and on only two years in the school, albeit with 20 years’ varied public sector experience. I have struggled to assert where I stand when it comes to knowing what the ‘feel’ of a place actually means. I would like to study the school’s culture, but then how can I really know whether others’ experiences are similar? To attend to this question, I need to explore the school’s values and the language we use but only as I understand it through my perspective. The EdD offers a great opportunity then for such critical reflection.

My very limited knowledge of autoethnography has helped me to try and explore these ideas in terms of my experience. That is the only ‘truth’ I can speak. I can only offer a glimpse of a place at a particular time. I only came to realise this when reading Clifford Geertz’s seminal ethnographic essay, “Thick description: Toward an interpretive theory of culture’, in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected essays* (1973). I was taken with the evocative way he writes, his skills as an anthropologist enhanced with the techniques of the novelist. He encourages his readers to write down their epiphanies, experiences, those fragmentary moments, because without doing so they become lost to time. Whilst reading Geertz’s description, I came to realise the meaning of the phrase “Beauty lives though lilies die” (Delamont, 2016, p.131) and sought to strengthen the precision and transparency of my stories with attention to the nuances of the interactions in the assembly hall.

Emboldened, I began to use his techniques to firm up my subjectivity, moving from analysis to interpretation. Geertz writes:

“to become aware of it is to realize that the line between mode of representation and substantive content is as undrawable in cultural analysis as it is in painting; and that fact in turn seems to threaten the objective status of anthropological knowledge by suggesting that its source is not social reality but scholarly artifice.” (1973, p.16).

### Research Objective

His reflection made me attend to writing stories that are as full and as detailed as possible to allow readers to form their own conclusions. I have included an appendix in Chapter 4 with as much ‘thick description’ as possible of the size, shape and contours of the assembly hall. Unlike Geertz, I feel limited, restrained; appropriately, but still unable to provide further context, unable to present the collection of fieldwork notes and reports that I have access to, to preserve their anonymity. I have changed all the names and the references to my colleagues, to the children in my form, and regrettably decided not to include some of the original accounts, PowerPoint slides and handouts that I recorded over the period of my data collation, since they are branded with corporate colours, and logos that would identify the school. (I did this in response to the welcome suggestions from my ethics reviewers, see Appendix 3.2). I see a difficult tension between the need to protect, with a necessity to allow readers a transparent view of my position.

Where possible, I try to overcome this by following Geertz’s example by writing accounts rich in detail and thick description. I hope that I can engender transferable, relatable emotions and feelings. Geertz writes of the importance of analysing and interpretation; therefore I have sought to write thick description of other events too. I aim for this to provide insight into the culture, including a brief selection of assemblies and one story of an email exchange. I hope that the breadth of my stories allows for scope and interpretation in addition to my own. I have tried to be as accurate as possible without compromising anyone else.

There are limitations to my study which I consider more fully in Chapter 5 as my thesis develops here, however I pay particular attention to the advice of Pat Sikes, who recommends checking back with others who were there at the time to see if our written accounts accord with their experiences of the same event (Sikes, 2005, p.89). It becomes apparent later in my story why I was unable to ‘track back’ and ask former friends and colleagues for their views of my stories. After careful consideration in supervision, I reached a conclusion that this might compromise my ethics approval, or at least require another application. I therefore asked some critical friends, unrelated to the school, to read my stories instead, as they are presented here. The three that were returned were broadly complimentary, and none of them identified any areas where they felt that I had compromised either myself, the children, colleagues, or the school.

I remain troubled by the fact that I have written a series of stories based on my perception that the school authorities didn’t always seem to hold the children in mind and that I perceived something of the organisational culture to be misaligned. A counter-position could be made here. I thought that there might be something misaligned either in terms of the culture, or the pastoral system, or in the way we were with the children (and correspondingly, the way that the children were with one another) but it is also just opinion. I acknowledge the limitations of this assumption. I have never led a school or an educational institution. I can speak with only limited authority about educational leadership or pedagogical theory. The school was organised conventionally; it did have a pastoral care system in place, and as I have explained, mine was a powerful voice in that system. I witnessed countless acts of kindness and compassion on the part of staff and between children. Not only did I wholly value working there and believed that we were doing some good, I enjoyed being there too. If anyone was culpable for the way we were to the children, then that also includes me.

My position as student researcher may also be limited because of my unconsciously unexamined condition at the time of writing. Could I be open to an accusation of confirmation bias? I make some speculative conclusions based on a very small sample of data. My conclusions could be wholly erroneous. I even go on to make a claim that my conclusions might be worthy of further study, in effect suggesting that the experiences of one or two children might be accurate reading for an entire cohort based solely on my intuition. I accept those as limitations and failings and acknowledge them as such. I have sought throughout to remind myself that this is only my experience and my account. I make no grand claims to the contrary.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge that my observations were not driven deductively but rather inductively through observation whilst in situ – almost more a form of observable accident. Whilst the Head acknowledged that there were issues with the children’s behaviour, no one asked me to think about social defences. Nor was I approached to write about social defences in the context of the school assembly. Neither was I prevented or refused permission.

## Section 5: Thesis outline

#### An outline of my chapters:

**Chapter 2 “what’s this then, *Ali Babar?*”**

Adopting a psychoanalytical perspective, I explore the development of the unconscious mind, and define some key defensive behaviours as I understand them from within the Kleinian tradition of object–relations theory. Following this, I trace the development of social defences theory as defined by Isabel Menzies Lyth. I conclude with a short discussion of how her work has been applied in schools and educational settings.

**Chapter 3 Storying Schools**

Focusing on my methods and methodology, I start with some observations of thick description from Geertz and then introduce autoethnography. I conclude the chapter with some brief thoughts on the importance of relational ethics in the development of my thesis using Tracey’s “8 big tent criteria for excellent qualitative research” (2010).

**Chapter 4 “isn’t that right, Mr. Coombs”?**

In this chapter, I present five internal monologues – short stories that I consider to be a good sample with which to explain what it feels like for me to work in the school.

**Chapter 5 “Sit still, and be quiet, Y7”!**

Here, I propose some possible explanations from theory and consider some implications for practice. I discuss in detail what it meant to me to work in the school and how it made me feel. I offer a reflective diagram that synthesises my experiences with the theoretical concepts discussed in Chapter 2 and suggest some recommendations for reflection and learning spaces (Bain, 1998).

**Chapter 6 Some concluding thoughts on how the “evasion of anxiety inhibits growth”** (Menzies Lyth, 1988, p.109)

I conclude with some observations of writing an autoethnographic study of social defences in a mainstream secondary academy school represented through an analysis of the school assembly.

### Research outcome

I hope to contribute to an ongoing body of knowledge in system psychodynamics that explains how the “evasion of anxiety inhibits growth”, (Menzies Lyth, 1988, p.109). From observing some school assemblies, I reached a conclusion that when children become emotionally overwhelmed with information that they process unconsciously as threatening, they ‘block’ them out (Klein, 1960; Bion, 1967; Davou, 2002). In the thesis, I draw some conclusions which in the spirit of ongoing action research, it might be useful to think about further in schools.

### Chapter Conclusion

After four years of preparing and writing up this thesis, I no longer work in the school, yet I still feel an enormous personal connection to the place, to former friends and colleagues, to the community. I miss the confusing, sometimes frightening and occasionally bruising exchanges with the students. Despite my feelings of fondness for the children, reflecting on my experiences is overwhelming. I still tremble at the thought of morning ‘duty’; evocative of powerful but submerged feelings of anxiety. Standing at the bottom of the modern, chrome and glass staircase, acting as a security barrier, preventing the children from going up the stairs, I always enjoyed the children’s stories of their weekends and their customary greetings. I enjoyed the ritualistic games we played, their inching past me, step-by-step, my amused, half-hearted rebukes and our shared subversion of the rules. In truth, standing as I was required to do in the main atrium on the inside of the plate glass doors, I found myself, frequently distracted by what was happening on the outside, wishing the bell would ring so that I could move to the privacy of my classroom and the relative safety of managing my registration form.

Attempting to understand these complex dynamics in an institution is not easy. It seems not so much about ‘minding the gap’ as bringing meaning to the unconscious spaces. I have used systems psychodynamic thinking to explain how we might move from a state of “giving up ignorance or something that is thought to be known”, (Bain, 1998, p.416). I can relate to others’ experiences of teaching in a modern school, where

“idealised and generalised classrooms seemed to offer me nothing but endless personal and professional failure – why could I not make it all work like I was supposed to? Still, the muddle and chaos, the delight of the triumphs and the despair of the difficulties all seemed important” (Bibby, 2011, p.2).

I share Bibby’s view that “to begin to make sense of this and other education-based contractions we need to think differently” (Bibby, 2011, p.5) She, like me, clearly identifies the necessity to find a framework, a theoretical perspective that helps us to hold the incompatible feelings that collide and left me feeling emotionally shattered. In this aspect, like Bibby, I turned to psychoanalysis to help me contextualise these apparently contradictory feelings.

In the next chapter I describe some principles to explain my understanding of the unconscious mind and I become taken with the notion of how we find ourselves defending all sorts of aspects of ourselves and our practice. As she puts it, we are beings “constituted with defences, we are defended subjects” (Bibby, 2011, p.5). I go on to suggest that these unconscious defences necessary for *being* in school may inhibit a state of “being-in-becoming” (Best and Geddes, 2002, p.272) for both staff and for the children.

# **Chapter 2** “What’s this then, *Ali Babar*?”

## A literature review of anxiety and the unconscious defences we use at work.

### Introduction

I titled this chapter with a comment that I overheard and scribbled down in my diary whilst on ‘duty’ from a senior colleague spoken to a child who had arrived at school late, wearing loosely-fitting, grey, flannel jogging bottoms instead of uniform. There are many ways to interpret this brief exchange. I spent some time considering whether to include this comment at all, yet the exchange highlights the importance of context, something I address later in Chapter 3.

Spoken in a split second, one obvious interpretation might be that this was simply an ill – considered, clumsy and thoughtless remark. Or perhaps, it was an attempt to share a comedic moment with a student she knows very well, a child resilient enough to make light of the situation. Perhaps this was her attempt to defuse or to deflect from a situation, sensing the child’s embarrassment in front of others. Possibly, it came from the sheer exasperation of having worked with a child who repeatedly pushes the boundaries in terms of non-compliance with the school’s dress code. The school retains a wardrobe of second-hand items of uniform available for free to those children who come without the appropriate clothes, but many prefer to accept a sanction instead of donning second-hand clothing. I wasn’t certain of the context. The fact remains, in that split second, she said, as many of us have in teaching and come to regret, what she really was thinking in that moment. The difference, perhaps, is that she said it to a student who had been the subject of a statutory social care plan for child neglect.

I suspect my colleague knew something of the child’s circumstances. She was possibly anxious, perhaps about the child, and her customary professionalism, her conscious mind, could have been wrong-footed and rendered wholly ineffective by her unconscious mind. It is also possible that she simply forgot.

Sometimes knowing something of the reality of our students’ home lives and domestic arrangements can feel too much to cope with. Most of the time I would rather not know. We know more than I sometimes think we should about the children’s home lives. A dedicated, and well–meaning, teacher said something in the moment and made an oblique reference that was lost on the student (even if the *real* meaning wasn’t) I suspect because she found the truth of his life too unbearable to hold onto. We seldom talked about how working with these children made us feel (Sprince, 2002). Wider knowledge of traumatic events in the lives of the children induced many barriers for the staff, as well as for the children (Kalu, 2002; Greenwood, 2002).

When I originally planned my research question, I imagined that I would write about the children I usually work with, those suffering from neglect, family issues, or mental health conditions. It was through my reading about anxiety and social defence theory, however, that I realised, with the help of my supervisor, that I would come to understand more about the lives of my students by recognising how teaching staff and professionals create unconscious defences against anxiety.

Psychoanalytic theory as Long suggests, offers a means of explaining how humans create ways to “dispel, fight or avoid” (Long, 2015, p.39). In this chapter, I want to explore the meanings behind some of the key terms that I discuss throughout the thesis. It begins with a brief exploration of psychoanalytic theory and seeks to define some key terms. Prominent amongst these are ‘anxiety’, ‘conscious’ and ‘unconscious’ behaviours and the kind of ‘defensive’ behaviours we use to alleviate or to lessen our anxiety. Space prevents me from defining all defensive behaviours in one thesis, so I have included only those behaviours which I came across from within my data and that seemed most relevant to my research question. These include ‘splitting’, ‘projection’, ‘denial and disavowal’, and the process of transference that I believe I recorded in the assembly hall.

**Purpose of this literature review:**

I seek to trace the antecedents of Kleinian psychoanalysis through the Bionian concept of containment and social defences theory in organisational settings as defined by Isabel Menzies Lyth.

## Chapter structure

The works of the thinkers, academics and scholars reflected in this chapter provide the foundation for my thesis. I have organised this chapter into five broad sections that explain the development of my reflections.

**Section 1: Psychoanalytic theory and the unconscious mind**

Locating my work in the psychoanalytic tradition means beginning with an explanation of the unconscious and how this shapes human behaviour. For this, I largely rely on the contributions of Stephen Frosh.

**Section 2: On anxiety**

All of my reading is grounded in the object-relations theory developed by Melanie Klein (1882 -1960). I focus, in particular, on her explanations of persecutory anxiety.

**Section 3: On defences against anxiety**

Before I can ground my interpretation of my data socially, I describe defensive behaviours, again drawing on Frosh and in particular two Special Editions of the *Journal of Psychodynamic Practice* and the *Journal of Social Work Practice* published in 2002 and 2011 respectively.

**Section 4: On the formation of social defences in organisation settings**

Here I consider Isabel Menzies Lyth’s classic case study of the formation of social defence theory and then consider the application of her theory within broader organisational settings, drawing principally on the work of David Armstrong and Michael Rustin, amongst others who have developed and applied her ideas.

**Section 5: Are these ideas about social defences applicable to education, schools and learning?**

I conclude my literature review by focusing on how scholars have applied social defence theory to education and schools. In *Must Try Harder!* (2015), Simon Tucker examines the application of social defences as utilised with his study of primary school head teachers and their experiences of leadership. I also consider the valuable work of professor Ellen Ramvi who, in a number of her studies, considers the impact of the social defences utilised within the classroom by teachers. There isn’t as extensive a volume of material in this area as I had at first imagined which, I suggest, is of interest in itself.

## Section 1: Psychoanalytic theory and the unconscious mind at work

### A brief overview of psychoanalytic theory

I want to explore how teachers defend themselves against our unconscious mind when we’ re at work. Psychoanalytical theory therefore helps me to locate my research because of its obvious focus on the unconscious. The pioneering work of Freud suggests that “there are hidden aspects of human mental life which, while remaining hidden, nevertheless influence conscious processes” (Halton, 1994, p.13). This hidden unknown aspect of the unconscious fascinates me and that the effects of it might be evident in the culture of a school is surely contentious, but has absorbed me throughout my research. One of the best metaphors I have come across to describe the unconscious is from Stephen Frosh who likens the unconscious to a sea surrounding the small island of our conscious mind. I draw on Stephen Frosh’s extension of this metaphor below.

There are two primary aspects of the mind and there is considerable disagreement amongst psychoanalysts about the timing of when the mind begins this process of splitting usually when the baby is at a particularly tender age. Nonetheless there is general agreement that there is some process of splitting between the conscious and the unconscious. To extend Frosh’s metaphor, it is possible to interpret this process as the conscious mind defends itself like a small island against a more powerful sea. Here the powerful and tumultuous waves of the unconscious crash down around the island battering it’s coastal defences. Sometimes, eroding the beaches and cliff top paths changing forever the topography of our coastline, transforming the outward appearance of the rocks, beachfront and forever shaping the landscape of the island. There is precious little that our tiny consciousness can do to tame this ever dynamic and powerful force.

Perhaps more alarmingly still, unlike the sea, the power of our unconsciousness remains largely unknown to us. That something so powerful and yet so unknown to the individual, that can exert such influence, tormenting our inner self, shaping our thoughts before our conscious mind has thought them, or spoken of them is understandably difficult to imagine.

Halton suggests that Freud recognised the inevitable resistance to his ideas but felt certain through his interpretation of his patients dreams, the slips of their tongue, the repeated mistakes that we all make “as evidence of meaningful mental life of which we are not aware” (Halton, 1994, p.13). Little wonder our conscious mind is unable to contain the fluid, dynamic unconscious mind with all its pejorative thoughts. The unconscious contains all our inner desires, passions, phantasies, our sexual drive, anxieties and fears. The holed oil tanker of our dreams and nightmares ran aground by the force of the storm. This constant battle between two aspects of the mind is at the heart of psychoanalytical thinking and gives centrality to the dynamic tension of the mind. The inability of our conscious mind to control the inner world of the unconscious is apparent sometimes in our dreams and phantasies. Freudian slips often make plain to others our contradictory internal world of tension, ambiguities and uncertainties.

The unconscious is not something we can see, nor can we control it. Indeed if anything psychoanalysts would suggest that it exerts considerable influence over us. Of course where this unconscious world stems from and what this might look like is disputed. It seems remarkable that in a world of scientific advances and insight the exact form and function of the unconscious mind is so unknown outside of the field of psychoanalysis. It seems equally remarkable that this unknown quality should be at the root of our behaviours, attitudes and our unspoken thoughts. Perhaps even more remarkable that we can only attain acknowledgement of the unconscious wishes, fears and phantasies that shape our own inner world through analysis of our thoughts with trained counsellors and therapists. To understand more about the unconscious, and to attain greater insight into how this entity influences our behaviours at work next, I will examine the contributions of some leading psychoanalysts.

In my readings Melanie Klein, Anna Freud are two of the most well-known psychoanalysts who extend Freud’s work and although I very much admire their work I also enjoyed the insights of amongst others Wilfred Bion, Donald Winnicott, Donald Meltzer, and Susan Isaac’s contributions on child development all of whom influenced my thinking significantly. Of these one of the least well known psychoanalysts, at least to the public at large, whose work I am taken with is Isabel Menzies Lyth. A student of Bion’s, and very much the architect of my foray into social defences theory, describes the unconscious as a social system,

“Psychoanalysis is directly concerned with the patient’s internal world as he shows it to the analyst. This internal world consists of images and phantasies, conscious and unconscious, of other people, the self and interpersonal relationship, of roles and role relationship, all of which exist within a structure. It is a social system, an imaginary institution.” (Menzies Lyth, 1989, p.35)

Psychoanalysts write of the duality of tension in the space where “unconscious ideas are always trying to make themselves heard and felt” (Frosh, 2012, p.9) regardless of how our conscious minds try to order and sometimes oppose them. Referencing Wilfred Bion, a key influence upon Menzies Lyth and who is discussed later in this chapter, she describes the centrality of the dilemma accordingly:

“Bion emphasizes how difficult it is for human beings to relate to each other in a realistic way in a joint task (Bion, 1961). He describes the human being as a group animal: as such he cannot get on without other human beings. Unfortunately, he cannot get on very well with them either. Yet he must establish effective co-operation in life’s tasks. That is his dilemma. Understanding his attempts at solving this dilemma, at evading it or defending himself against the anxieties it arouses, are central to the understanding of groups and institutions.” (Menzies Lyth, 1989, p.27).

In this thesis I want to describe some of the unconscious defences that I erected to guard against the anxiety aroused by my job. Indeed, it may be possible to say that my stories as presented in Chapter 4 are simply a series of defensive positions, but before I come onto that, I wish to find out more about how defences come to exist in the first place and what purpose they serve.

Defensive mechanisms evolve and change over time depending on the dominant mood of the day (Frosh, 2012, p.9). Here I return to Frosh’s original metaphor of the sea evocative again conjuring up further images of coastal defences and cliffs smashed and eroded against the untrammelled power of the sea. “Defences are *necessary*; the ‘sea’ which is the unconscious can never be completely tamed, nor will blocking it with dams ever fully succeed, for not only is it wild, but there are monsters in the deep.” (Frosh, 2002, p.31). Two things emerge here. First, that defences are protective and therefore of value; we ought not to lose sense of that. Yet simultaneously, one is also sometimes left, to mix metaphors, with an image of the boy with only his finger in the dam as cracks begin to emerge. What, if anything, can we do to protect ourselves from our own unconscious monsters?

## Section 2: On anxiety

### Introduction

Susan Long, a consultant psychoanalyst at the Tavistock Centre for Human Relations, describes anxiety as “a signal that something to be feared is about to happen. Anxiety signals the likelihood of something that a child has previously learnt to fear or that is instinctively threatening” (Long, 2015, p.39).

Anxiety is a human condition. It is prevalent in society, often unrecognised, and its effects mis-diagnosed. As humans we use a variety of techniques to disguise how we feel and usually as an unconscious response to anxiety (Frosh, 2002). These unknown, perhaps unrecognised behaviours can take the form of anger or aggressive behaviour, denial, displacement, or even misplaced humour (Trevithick, 2011). There are times when we can’t contain our anxiety and the consequent effects on others can be equally fretful and problematic.

To understand the importance of defensive behaviours organisationally as developed by Jacques and Menzies Lyth, it is important to understand their thinking as influenced by Klein’s ideas. Instead of seeing the maturation of the child in stages, Klein focused on the exchange between phantasy and reality in the inner world of the child. Klein considered herself as building on the work of Freud; her work differed materially from his in the sense that she developed a notion of the child’s inner world as based on the ‘taking in’ and ‘pushing out’ of “destructive impulses” directed into an object, usually the mother (Spensley, 2014, p.170[[9]](#footnote-9)). She developed the notion of object–relations and studied the nature of greed and envy within infants and children (Klein, 1957; Frosh, 2002). Here, it is possible to detect one of her foremost conclusions, in the way in which she describes how “recurrent experiences of gratification and frustration are powerful stimuli for libidinal and destructive impulses, for love and hatred.” (Klein, 1952, p. 62).

### Kleinian explanations of anxiety

Melanie Klein, (1882-1960) was an Austrian born in Vienna and one of the leading scholars in psychoanalysis. A clinician, she “recognised the centrality of the infant’s first relationships with its primary caregivers and, most significantly, she elucidated the early mental processes that build up a person’s inner emotional world.”[[10]](#footnote-10) Halton concurs suggesting that her main contribution was in developing this “early conceptualization of an unconscious inner world.” (Halton, 1994, p.13). Whilst Meltzer (1975), similarly stresses that this aspect of her insight, “developing a very concrete conception of the inner world” (Meltzer, 1975, p.8) is what differentiates her most from others at the time.

I subscribe to a view that whenever I have read a major theorist’s work in prior study, I have often found that the original is easier to comprehend and invariably better written than their admirers and colleagues. Klein’s writing and similarly, that of Isabel Menzies Lyth, whose insight makes up the main focus of this chapter and indeed thesis, seem more straightforward than those of their followers.

The more I read of Klein, the more interested I became in the woman, the mother, and the person, as well as her theoretical ideas. Similarly, Menzies Lyth’s early career and her move into psychoanalysis, working as one of the few senior women in Tavistock in the post-war period, feels like an area rich in potential for further study. At this stage I must concentrate on their ideas, although I have really rather enjoyed imagining their qualities as individuals, I came across a passage which I thought seemed to sum up the woman behind the erudite scholar:

“There was a time when I felt very badly because my work on bringing out the problem of aggression led to the result that there was nothing but aggression. I was quite despairing. Whatever I heard in seminars, in the Society, it all was aggression, aggression, aggression … the point is that aggression can only be tolerated when it is modified, mitigated, if we are able to bring out the capacity for love.” (Spillius, E. cited in Brearley, 2010, p.81).

This passage seems particularly thoughtful and offers compelling insight into her thinking, her concerns about her work becoming translated as authoritative. It points to her own uncertainties and I have tried to keep that in mind as I begin to reflect on her theoretical approaches.

### Understanding anxiety in response to the death drive

Klein’s work is fundamental to our understanding of defensive behaviour, to know how the mind splits in the face of deathly impulses (Klein, 1939; Frosh, 2002, p.29; Blass, 2014). She believed in and wrote about the development of our anxieties as both paranoid and persecutory. Foremost amongst her beliefs is that anxiety stems from the infant’s earliest anxieties about death: “I put forward the hypothesis that anxiety is aroused by the danger which threatens the organism from the death instinct; and I suggested that this is the primary cause of anxiety. . . anxiety has its origin in the fear of death” (Klein, 1946a, cited in Blass, 2014, p. 614).

Through observing infants’ play, Klein thought that the infant occupied various positions, beginning at first with what she termed the ‘paranoid-schizoid’ position in early infancy. This she came to understand as a position where the infant suffered acute forms of anxiety caused by the trauma of birth and fear of death. The very young baby in his earliest 3 months of life defends against his anxiety by splitting and projecting (Bibby, 2011, p.9) all his feelings of despair, disappointment and / or happiness onto his mother figure (Meltzer, 1975).

### The paranoid-schizoid position

Describing these earliest phases of infant anxiety as the paranoid-schizoid position, Klein focused on the defences infants adopt at times and moments of crisis and which reappear indissolubly throughout our lives. She identifies, the anxious states experienced by babies as well as the good. The baby’s feelings, at times, both good and bad, feeling loved and secure or threatened and anxious, the terror and the fear, as building their inner world. When the baby experiences positive and negative feelings, they become part of their inner world. If the baby takes in (introjects) the mother into their world as a safe, loving and dependable object, they positively strengthen the part of the inner self defined by instinctual impulses. Klein argues that if these developments happen, the baby becomes a stable personality, capable of loving, and sharing, friendly and sympathetic.

At the very earliest moments of life babies establish an internal world at the point of what Meltzer calls the “differentiation between self and object for an inner world to be built up” (Meltzer, 1975, p.8). As the baby develops and matures, for Klein, so too he or she comes to understand their relationship with their primary carer. For the infant, the capacity to love and to feel a sense of anxiety is deep rooted in the infant’s earliest mental processes. In a similar manner the baby will push out (projects) these feelings onto another, again usually the mother.

Klein sees the mother as loving; she cares for and feeds the baby. When the baby forms a positive, strong identification with the mother, so too she can form a strong bond with the father and other significant figures. This can be seen in the way the infant plays and relates to younger children, copying the attitudes and behaviours of the mother. The mother represents the entirety of the baby’s world. The mother represents both good and danger. Everything in the baby’s life; indeed their very safety, is instinctively dependent on the mother. The baby has emerged in effect in a world that they cannot understand or grasp intellectually. Resentment about frustration, the hate stirred up by it, the incapacity to be reconciled, and envy are powerful destructive impulses that are projected onto the mother. Klein calls this ‘persecutory anxiety’. However good the baby, innate aggressiveness and hate always remain. She argues that the baby experiences a form of ‘persecutory anxiety’ from the process of birth and their readjustment to reality of their new world (Klein, 1960; Segal, 1964).

Klein suggests that through experiencing this conflict and anxiety the baby can overcome the paranoid-schizoid position and move to another state she describes as the depressive position, where through the taking in of happiness, joy and love the baby can overcome, or “attain”, “achieve”, “penetrate” the depressive position (Meltzer, 1975, p.10). These negative persecutory feelings only then for the infant to be filled with guilt and despair at the pain he has caused his mother. The baby has a desire to cause reparation for the previously projected feelings of hatred and aggression (Halton, 1994).

These early primitive, elemental feelings can resurface in later adolescence and in adult life too. For Klein, we never lose them. So where the new born feels lacks the capacity to love or feels anxious and they are unable to make sense of their reality, then those feelings come back to us in later life when similarly we feel threatened, anxious or uncertain. As adults we can feel that primitive terror inside us filling up and occasionally spilling over evident perhaps through the way we shout at pupils, and in our unthinking, unmodified words and actions. Our unconscious resumes control. This is a theme I return to throughout my thesis but this section is important to me because I associate the terror and the fear that the baby experiences in coming to terms with his reality as like mine in the assembly hall defending myself within the organisation.

## Section 3: Forms of defence mechanisms as a response to anxiety

In this section I describe the defences used to protect ourselves from these primitive feelings associated with anxiety. For Klein, “unconscious phantasies form the central building blocks of psychological life” (Weiss, 2017, p.805). In developing her theories, Klein understood the development of the infant’s phantasies as:

“…conceptualized as direct expressions of internal and external object relationships. Like a kaleidoscope, they offer access to the structure of the internal world and the workings of the emotional connections within. They show how primitive emotional experiences are turned into ‘thought’, which can be exchanged, transmitted and transformed.” (Weiss, 2017, p. 803).

Where the child feels anxious, a set of unconscious defences can emerge, which defend us against anxiety.

### What are ‘defences’ and ‘defensiveness’?

In his classic text, *Individual psychotherapy and the science of psychodynamics* (1979), David H. Malan cites case material which interprets the actions or “mechanism” of human beings that he describes as “expressive” things that we say or do, perhaps to deflect criticism or to divert attention away from something we may have said or done that we know we should not have said. These behaviours seek to “deflect” or “displace” our actions onto someone else (Malan, 1979, p.8).

Frosh suggests that:

“…the accusation of defensiveness levelled against other, perhaps particularly our loved ones, is one of the commonest strategies of argumentation. Generally, it denotes a supposed attempt by the other to stave off an attack on her or his self, a process of denial, particularly of uncomfortable emotional truths.” (Frosh, 2002, p. 26).

He argues that the notion of defensiveness in everyday life is relatively common and lacks psychoanalytical explanation except where the suggestion of ‘being defensive’ becomes to be seen as:

“defending against some inner awareness of an emotion or desire which they do not wish to acknowledge. This emotion is something troubling or, more specifically, shameful, to the self: for example, that one is really depressed and in need of help” (Frosh, 2002, p.27)

Here, Frosh writes about a feeling inside us which “wells up” and which “sparks off or chimes in with unconscious thoughts” (p.27). It makes sense if you think about those moments in life when you feel under threat, or attack, in everyday language when our backs are against the wall, we defend ourselves, we block, we seek to blame someone else - I didn’t mark those registers because the system was down? At this stage, I wish only to consider some of the most well-known defences, as they are instrumental the development of these later chapters. I will focus on the two key defences of ‘splitting’ and ‘projection’.

### Splitting

A process from the earliest stages of infancy, Blass describes splitting as,

“of the object itself being split, the very self being fragmented. To split the object itself is, according to Klein, to split the mind (the ego), not merely to split representations (images of external objects and of oneself as an object, that reside within the mind).” (Blass, 2015, p.133)

This process is one that lasts with us through maturation. For Klein, children split things into ‘good’ or ‘persecutory’ (bad). A defence is thus projected onto an object. They cling to one good object and develop their capacity to love that object, be it a favourite toy, scarf, blanket, or person. However, in some cases where the child’s inner world perceives a threat to their ego, they defend through forms of projection. She concluded that persecutory anxiety reinforces the need to “keep separate the loved object from the dangerous one” (Klein, 1960, p.8). So here we see the picture of a mind that can feel and be one way – happy, content and loving and then another way – angry, distressed and hateful with these two states of mind disconnected. The mind working to keep separate these feeling states, disrupting a continuity of being. How does the baby (and later, the adult) move on / develop from this state? Here we have the emergence of an associated mental mechanism, one that draws the other into the psychological process.

### Projection

Klein’s concept of projection is another defence central to my thesis. The infant projects their emotions and thoughts into others, at first into the mother figure. Depending on our inner world, we project these feelings in either a positive or hostile way (and sometimes they are returned in a similar way). If projection is predominantly hostile, real empathy and understanding of others is impaired. Good experiences tend to lessen the anger, modify the persecutory experiences, and mobilise the baby’s love and gratitude (Klein, 1960).

The emphasis is on the baby to take in the characteristics of the object and is dependent on being influenced by them positively. In a healthy mother-baby relationship, for Klein, the baby’s innate aggressiveness is projected onto the mother and in turn interpreted by the mother. The mother internalises the baby’s emotions and thus contains them.

Where the mother has the intellectual capacity to contain the baby’s emotion, she is able to understand it. She then projects forms of love back onto the baby through food, warmth, comfort and the associated warm words, for example, “there, there”. The baby introjects these feelings into their mental world. When the baby proves that he or she can accept and sustain the intake of food and love, then he or she can overcome their hurt or the pain associated with frustration more readily. When delight in the baby is expressed through those warm words, and/or accompanied by physical touch, so he or she regains the feelings of love.

Klein describes the persecution some babies feel by focusing on the ‘greedy baby’ who might enjoy whatever he receives for the time being but can quickly become dissatisfied and then seeks more. When more is not forthcoming, he becomes even more dissatisfied. If he cannot get what he wants from his mother or other immediate members of the family, then he seeks that attention elsewhere:

“there is no doubt that greed is caused by anxiety – the anxiety of being deprived, of being robbed, and of not being good enough to be loved. The infant who is so greedy for love and attention is also insecure about his capacity to love; and all these anxieties reinforce greed” (Klein, 1960, p.8)

Klein thought that envy develops because the baby’s frustration at not being fed when he is hungry makes him feel neglected and this frustration leads to a phantasy that the mother is deliberately withholding food from him. This causes suspicion, which is the basis for envy. Nothing can be fully enjoyed because the desired object has already been spoiled by envy. (Klein, 1960).

How an individual experiences introjection and projection is lasting and inimical to the person’s development and how they come to understand their links with their outside world. Introjection and projection are not just infantile processes; they affect us all. They are present in every life stage and are affected by maturation but are maintained. They are linked for Klein to the baby’s phantasies: “Defensive fantasies demonstrate the fact that fantasy does not precede reality but ­protects the psyche from unbearable reality” (Knox, 2003, p.207). It is why you often see young people ‘fixate’ on a member of staff often after a large fall out or an argument. I draw on the notion of unbearable phantasies in my conclusions in Chapters 5 and 6.

### Containment

Wilfred Bion, (1897 – 1979) a psychoanalyst studied, and undertook analysis with Melanie Klein. In 1931, Klein had also noted this ‘epistemophillic instinct’. He developed some of her ideas, suggesting that infants are also born with a desire to know (Ramvi, 2009, p.2). Bion “believed that knowledge of the psychological precedes that of the physical world and that the emotional experience between infant and mother was vital for the capacity to think” (Dover, 2002, p. 314). Bion suggests that social groups play a central role in formulating the experiences of the child. In education, this is understood in the context of group dynamics, where the frustrations associated with learning are either contained and ostensibly nurtured by and within the processes of the group (K) or avoided and therefore reduced, becoming meaningless (-K). In this case, the relationship is mutually dependent. If the child’s membership of the group is secured, then the child and the group will develop (Williams, 2013 p.78).

Bion’s work is a difficult read; nevertheless, his ideas have influenced the scholars whose ideas I have read and whose work cumulatively led me towards some of my conclusions. I found papers by Alcorn (2010), Kalu (2002), Dover, (2002) Ramvi (2007, 2010) and Williams, (2013), particularly helpful in applying his theory to the children’s responses as they left the assembly hall.

Alcorn (2010) describes the relevance of Bion’s -K for teachers as a necessary prerequisite to “understand the emotional ecology of a mind struggling with itself”, as two parts of the self in conflict (2010, p.347), whilst Williams, (2013) deciphers Bion accordingly:

“In developing the terms Beta elements and Alpha functions, Bion (1962) offers a framework for conceptualising how we learn from experience. Beta elements are described as particles of raw experience that are not able to be developed into thoughts. Due to this condition, these elements have to be removed from conscious- ness and this is done through thoughtless activities, mindless group behaviour, acting out or other impulsive behaviour” (Williams, 2013, p.78).

Both agree that the emotional context is key. The formalised space of the school assembly seems only to amplify the intensity of the student’s emotional experience.

Williams (2013) describes the Bionian concept of container/contained as crucial in this context. He suggests:

“the individual’s relationship to the group can be formulated as contained ♂ and container ♀, in which the group functions as a container and the individual is contained to the extent that the k-link functions to enable ‘learning from’ or the acquisition of knowledge to take place” (p.78).

It is important to reflect on Bion’s ideas, firstly as they permeate my thesis, but also because there is some suggestion that the author whose work I focus primarily on and consider next is strongly influenced by his thinking and may herself have been in analysis with Bion (Hoggett, 2015, p.52).

## Section 4: From the formation of social defences to a wider theoretical approach

I have provided an explanation of how infants defend against forms of persecutory anxiety as elaborated by Melanie Klein. Defences maybe directed towards an object in the position between the child’s internal phantasy and their reality. Klein shows that our defences against forms of persecutory anxiety; here the paranoid-schizoid position are carried with us into adulthood at times of crisis. The idea that our individual defences can unconsciously come together in a social place like an institution seems counter-intuitive and yet, makes sense when we think about all of our personal worries about work, who we like working with, who we don’t, how we work together and so on. How often does one hear oneself blame someone else, a process, the people in timetabling, or find an excuse for one’s own poor behaviour? Jon Stokes portrays the inherent dilemmas of working sociably with others. He describes the powerful emotions and anxieties provoked by working with others as “overwhelming” and as a set of contradictory tensions, as a “wish to join together and the wish to be separate” (Stokes, 1994, p.19).

Elliot Jacques and Isabel Menzies Lyth, both noted Kleinian psychoanalysts, developed these ideas originally describing them for the first time as *social defences*. The authors consider how these internal fears may be commonplace within organisations. Whilst Jacques developed the idea of social defences, it is Menzies Lyth’s later study that catapulted this theory into the wider public sphere. She argued, which is one reason why her work has been so influential, that individuals within organisations unconsciously create defences to protect themselves against their anxieties about the nature of their roles or, as she termed it, the primary task. In her study she observed how these social defences functioned in a large general hospital and involved the imposition of strict controls regulating personal contact between nurses and their patients. Unconsciously, hospitals, schools and large public welfare organisations in the post-war, “Golden Age” from 1948–70 (Hobsbawm, 1993, p.53) implemented defences designed to limit emotional contact with their patients. She considered the policies, procedures, and the imposition of strict routines and rotas as counter-productive, restrictive defences.

A psychoanalyst working in the tradition of the object–relations school, influenced by the writings of Melanie Klein, Menzies Lyth’s case study into the functioning of social defences in nursing has since become a seminal case study in organisational psychology. Her legacy has influenced many other writers since and has been extended into other fields of study both within the public and corporate sectors. Menzies Lyth was one of the founding members of the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations in London and one of the few women to hold such a position. Ultimately, her work stands out amongst her contemporaries from the Tavistock Clinic (albeit that in her second volume she cites Jacques, Trist, and Bain amongst others as writers whose work influenced her) for explaining how some institutions and organisations struggle with balancing their primary goals whilst maintaining a measured and contented workforce.

In post-war Britain, she presented a series of ideas based on her observations of the behaviour of nurses in a general teaching hospital in the late 1950s. Employed by a large hospital to explain problems associated with issues of staff retention and low morale, she concluded that the way the nurses’ duties were organised might be an unconscious institutional response to the emotional anxieties aroused with the daily tasks of nursing.

Menzies Lyth’s work makes me think that some of the behaviours I witnessed, and perpetuated unconsciously in my role as a form tutor, were similar. Our culture of strict, or even in some cases, blind, adherence to the rules governing behaviour and discipline, may have had the consequence of unconsciously defending against our anxiety about the primary task. In Chapter 4, I describe how working in the school made me feel and in Chapter 5, I link these feelings to my belief that the strictness of the routines and the attempts of staff to modify the children’s behaviours as they enter the assembly embody Jacques and Menzies Lyth’s perceptions of social defences within organisations.

This chapter concludes by focusing particularly on the prevalence of anxiety in educational settings through Ellen Ramvi, whose work examines the effect of anxiety in newly qualified teachers, (2007; 2009; 2011) and Simon Tucker (2015) whose work with primary school head teachers records a similar pattern of anxiety-related behaviours caused by a similar set of pressures relating to external regulation through the Schools Inspectorate. Even though this made me think more specifically of the value of Jacques’ approach, it is the consequences of not recognising anxiety that interest me.

Isabel Menzies Lyth wrote her seminal work in 1959. It was published in 1960 through the Tavistock Centre for Human Relations. For anyone who has ever been involved in teaching, her study provides an explanation for many of the whispered conversations and muted thoughts shared in the staff room. She gives voice to the inexplicable frustrations in providing care for others and feeling sometimes as if ‘the rug has been pulled from beneath your feet’ because the ‘system’ doesn’t seem to function very well. Of her contemporaries, she cites Alistair Bain as instrumental in developing “role-analysis, structure analysis, and work-culture analysis” (Menzies Lyth, 1989, p.34). Here, I concentrate on the latter, described in his later work as a system of defensive domains, which I sardonically understand as those moments when the teacher has the kernel of an excellent lesson but knows that they won’t be able to deliver it because they need to plan a risk assessment, make a timetable change, or requisition a form from the Finance office but there isn’t a budget, so you buy the item yourself, in your lunch break, and forget to get a receipt for it. Eventually, you stay in the classroom and deliver a routine lesson.

For the nurse, the routine task of attending to the patient becomes impaired by administrative and organisational impediments, such as the inflexibility of the ward rota. In school, similarly, the rigidity of the timetable that means children must move from one side of the building to the other without a break. All of those inexplicably preventative obstacles to outstanding classroom practice are added perspective through her case study. She describes the dilemma in the work-culture that I have mused upon earlier as:

“For years student nurses have been exhorted to “nurse the whole patient as a person”. This is usually what the student wants to do, but the role system and the institutional structure in nursing, especially multiple indiscriminate care-taking, too often make it impossible. The danger is that people become disappointed, frustrated and disillusioned. Attitudes change back in defence against these feelings and in line with the demands of the institutional system, or people cannot tolerate the system and leave.” (Menzies Lyth, 1989, p.37)

Menzies Lyth was initially recruited by the hospital to analyse problems associated with nursing recruitment and retention. Drawing on the tradition of group–relations theory, she adopted a social–therapeutic approach to consider this problem (Menzies Lyth, 1959; 1988). She linked this work–related stress with a more pervasive, systemic exploration linked to nurses’ working practices and experiences. She was able to relate this to the then-emerging recognition of systems psychology within organisational settings that was starting to emerge from the Tavistock at the time.

Her work does not seek to glamorise; instead she concentrates on the mundanity of roles, the nature of work, and its febrile nature. She illustrates the disagreeable nature of bathing elderly male patients for young student nurses and allows the reader to imagine the emotional toll caused by attending to the sick. Her case study, *The functioning of social systems as a defence against anxiety: A report on a study of the nursing service of a general hospital* (Menzies, 1959**;** 1961 [1961b]**;** 1988) seems as relevant today as it was when it was first published and allows a useful insight into the behaviours apparent in the school assembly hall.

Whereas in the hospital, the anticipation of confrontation with the patient’s family is projected on to the nurse, similarly, an organisational anxiety pervades the modern secondary school. The school may be called on to explain understandable trips or mistakes, thus preventing the class teacher from forming a meaningful relationship with parents. She affords an explanation for why operational practice issues – often resulting from simple, honest mistakes - have become over complicated, exacerbated, and muddled, resulting in omission, secrecy, and on occasion even malpractice.

The allocation of student nurses

Hospitals relied significantly on student nurses to provide the majority of nursing tasks to patients. The priority in terms of nursing was more focused towards acquiring practical nursing skills rather than gaining a formal nursing education. Student nurses experienced three months’ training in Preliminary Training School (1988, p.44) before being allocated to practical training on a ward. Menzies Lyth found it increasingly difficult to ignore the emotional anxieties that the student nurses presented when interviewed by her team. She couldn’t ignore the “high level of tension, distress, and anxiety” (1988, p.45) posed by the problem of student nurse allocation. Furthermore, reflecting senior nurses’ concerns about high levels of sickness and absenteeism, she agreed that the system seemed on the verge of a complete breakdown. The matron was then at the top of the nursing hierarchy, with overall responsibility for the organisation of nursing clinical practice. The student nurse was at the other end of the scale. It seemed as if the short cycles of ward-based rotas were designed ostensibly to limit emotional exposure to their patients, but were paradoxically increasing anxiety rather than reducing it.

Most student nurses entered the profession to care for patients. Together with junior ward nurses who had equally become attached to their patients found the enforced separation caused by moving onto new nursing rotas, often mid-way through their patient’s recovery, particularly distressing. In a Catch-22, they were prevented from nursing the very patients for whom they had joined the service to nurse by a system of organisational processes designed to limit their exposure to patients. She also recorded numerous emotional difficulties for the patients caused by the nurses’ shift patterns. The organisational processes that were designed to protect the nurses’ welfare were having the opposite effect. The situation was exacerbated as new nurses struggled to form new relationships with the patients on the ward. Menzies related the problems of recruitment and retention to the avoidance of anxiety connected to what she describes as the ‘primary task’.

Projection as a defence against anxiety

Nursing the sick creates feelings of anxiety for nurses, patients, and patients’ relatives. Menzies’s study highlighted the primitive projections of anxiety onto nurses by patients and family members. Patient’s project their own feelings of “‘dependence’ and, in some cases, strong, erotic phantasy and libidinal impulses onto the nurse” (Menzies Lyth, 1988, p.48). Their daily interactions with the relatives of the patients added to the sense of anxiety and despair that the nurses already experienced. Families and relatives of the patient resented the nurses for their expertise, so they also came to envy the nurses' close proximity to their loved ones. Consequently, nurses were placed in a situation where, without their necessary agreement, they had to find ways of managing often hostile and negative feelings associated with depression, worry and anxiety projected onto them by the patients’ relatives. That is not to say that patients don’t also project feelings of warmth, gratitude, and emotions associated with relief, but these feelings can also weigh heavily on nurses trying to complete their primary task (Menzies Lyth, 1959).

Transference

Menzies and her team began to note how patients passed the responsibility for their own welfare back on to the nursing staff. They recorded how patients frequently refused to take responsibility for their own actions and became overwhelmed by their own anxieties relating to their illness, thus transferring their anxiety onto the medical staff.

“Patients and relatives treat the staff in such a way as to ensure that the nurses experience these feelings instead of – or partly instead of – themselves: for example, by refusing or trying to refuse to participate in important decisions about the patient and so forcing responsibility and anxiety back on to the hospital” (Menzies Lyth, 1988, p.49)

Similarly, this transference inculcates a dependency which, when combined with the existing levels of stress and anxiety of the nurses, is absorbed within the administration of the wards. She suggests that the culture and the organisation of routine tasks eroded the capacity of the nurse to function effectively. Not unlike today, senior nurses were frustrated by additional organisational problems for patients who did not require hospitalisation or were hospitalised because they, or their families, couldn’t face the stresses of their illness at home. The emotional demands of the job meant that the nurse was at “considerable risk of being flooded by intense and unmanageable anxiety” (1988, p.50). She began to note the development of what she describes as “socially structured defence mechanisms” (Menzies Lyth, 1988, p.50).

Her paper is important because she argued that it was individuals within the setting that developed social defences, unlike Jacques (1955) who suggested in his earlier paper that social defences developed through external social forces related to the organisation. So for her, social defence systems developed over time through the “often unconscious” collusion and agreement of the members of the institution (p. 51). Unconscious processes become normalised over time, almost as the ‘way we do business’. She attributes this process to the process of inducting new recruits into the hospital. Once a nurse is appointed to a new role, they must adapt to the social defence systems within that organisation. As a consequence, they become exposed to the same responses to the primary task and continue, through a form of unconscious collusion, to perpetuate these systems and processes.

From a lecture delivered in 1986, she describes the processes whereby:

“members become like the institution in significant ways – by introjecting and operating its characteristic defence mechanism, sharing common attitudes, carrying on traditional types of relationships. If an individual cannot achieve this identification, he is unlikely to remain a member. If he remains too different his is likely to be rejected by the institution because he does not ‘fit’. If he tries to conform to something which is too foreign to him, he may find it stressful and leave.” (Menzies Lyth, 1989, p.42)

This insight is one of the primary motivations for studying Menzies Lyth and for considering the applicability of her paper on social defences to a school.

#### What are social defences and how did she arrive at her conclusions?

Social defences are an unconscious response to the primary task developed by individuals within the institution. Menzies Lyth saw many of the defences as necessary and serving a purpose. There has to be some organisation of nursing duties on the ward, just as in schooling children need to be organised and classes allocated to a timetable and so on. Certainly, within schools there has to be some kind of organisational responsibility. Similarly, nurses and patients require a functional organisation, but her paper identifies how these systems can come to obscure the emotional needs of the staff, patients, and children.

There is evidence available of all these defences from my experiences of being a member of the school teaching staff, both in terms of staff meetings, informal discussions, and “corridor- conversations”. At this stage, however, it is worth perhaps just examining the first four and the last two defences in the bulleted list of defences below, as they correlate most with my own observations of the school assembly. That is not to deny the significance of the others, but to offer a focus to my review. I have chosen to add emphasis in bold to identify the defences that seem to me the most relevant in terms of my study for ease, but they are not as they were in her original text. I have, however, left them in the order in which she intended them.

She observed the following defences in her case study:

* **“The splitting up of the nurse-patient relationships.**
* **Depersonalization, categorization, and denial of the significance of the individual.**
* **Detachment and denial of feelings.**
* **The attempt to eliminate decisions by *ritual* task performance** (my italics, it seems to me that this is particularly relevant to the function of the school assembly, see Chapter 5).
* Reducing the weight of responsibility in decision – making by checks and counterchecks.
* Collusive social redistribution of responsibility and irresponsibility.
* Purposeful obscurity in the formal distribution of responsibility.
* The reduction of the impact of responsibility by delegation to superiors.
* **Idealization and underestimation of personal developmental possibilities.**
* **Avoidance of change.”** (Menzies Lyth, 1988, p.50-62) [emphasis added for clarity]

1. “The splitting up of the nurse-patient relationships” (1988, p.51).

The first social defence seems relevant, particularly if we replace the words “nurse-patient” with the words “teacher-pupil”.

She begins with noting the inherent problem for the nurse in reducing her levels of anxiety regarding her primary relationship with the patient. This is central to the conclusions she draws in her paper. The closer and more concentrated her relationship becomes with the patient, the more her anxiety increases. For Menzies Lyth, this is when the nursing service seeks unconsciously to protect the nurse by splitting up her contact with the patient by creating task lists and ward rotas designed to minimise the nurse’s exposure to their patients and their illnesses (1988, p.51).

2. “Depersonalization, categorization, and denial of the significance of the individual” (1988, p.52).

Menzies Lyth observed the way patients were organised by their illnesses in the hospital. She noticed sterile cleansing of illnesses by nurses, who categorised patients by their presenting symptoms rather than their individual needs and personalities. She noticed how, when pressed, nurses refused to express a preference for one patient over another. Moreover, despite acknowledging the need not to, they referred to patients by their bed numbers rather than their names. An unavoidable culture of “the patient in bed 10” emerged despite the fact that the nurses themselves perceived this to be poor practice.

Menzies Lyth is sympathetic and acknowledges how difficult it must be for the nurses to remember the names of 30-plus patients in a ward with a high turnover. There are a great many similarities to the school setting. It is not uncommon to hear teaching staff refer to an entire year group as ‘difficult’ or ‘hard work’; whole classes become categorised as problematic in some way. I know colleagues who routinely say things like “I’ve got my awful Y8 group in Period 5 on Friday”.

3. “Detachment and denial of feelings” (1988, p.53).

Menzies Lyth illustrates the processes by which student nurses are reminded of the need to preserve their distance from the object that caused them potential distress. Setting a professional distance from one’s patients was considered important in maintaining an appropriate air of respectability. Ward sisters instilled the virtues of ‘good’ ward discipline through setting short rotas, maintaining a sense of hustle and bustle, of *busyness* (my italics, see Chapter 5), and the frequent movement of nurses from ward to ward, from patient to patient. In this sense, as we have discussed, it becomes challenging for nurses to sustain a close bond with their patients; the preservation of their professionalism comes at an emotional cost. She saw this defence as institutional repression, with the system denying feelings that were nonetheless recognised by the senior nurses, who felt that they lacked the confidence or the know-how to respond to the emotional stresses evident in junior nurses (1988, p.54).

4. “The attempt to eliminate decisions by ritual task – performance” (1988, p.54).

Menzies Lyth observes the ritual performance of tasks. For the sisters managing the organisation of the ward, it became imperative to reduce the complexity of the tasks. There are benefits for nurses in simplifying complex tasks, leading to the reduction of risk. The workplace culture which enforces the routinised application of a tick-box mentality, or the task-list, is designed to limit risk, thereby preserving the nurses’ confidence in their duties. However, as Menzies Lyth points out, all decisions where the outcome is unknown engender a sense of anxiety. The ward managers therefore seek to reduce this anxiety on nursing staff by “minimizing the number and variety of decisions that must be made.” (1988, p.55).

5. “Idealization and underestimation of personal developmental possibilities” (1988, p.60).

Menzies Lyth articulates a significant theme here which features in my own data. Idealisation and the underestimation of developmental possibilities becomes an important social defence. She acknowledges the hospital’s need to build confidence in nurses’ professionalism amongst the public to maintain the efficient running of the hospital, so they do everything they can to affirm that the nurses recruited to the wards are efficient, professional and effective. (1988, p.61)

Secondly, she notes a central dilemma for ward managers, namely that there exists an impetus to recruit the very best nurses (an ideal), but that retaining them means progression to more meaningful roles within the organisation or lose them to other hospitals. In fact, most of the nursing tasks are largely quite menial, however. Menzies Lyth recognises that this is itself an “essential element in the social defence system” because with a high retention rate, the nursing service would be, “flooded” (1988, p.61) with highly skilled nurses for whom there are insufficient jobs.

6. “Avoidance of change” (1988, p.62).

“Change is inevitably to some extent an excursion into the unknown. It implies a commitment to future events that are not entirely predictable and to their consequences, and inevitably provokes doubt and anxiety.” (Menzies Lyth, 1988, p.62)

For the nursing service in particular, she argues that the avoidance of change is axiomatic. The nursing service, as she wryly observes, seems determined to preserve traditional forms of practice, bowing to the inevitable only at the last moment. For her, it seems that only when the service is “at the point of crisis” (1988, p.62) do they make incremental change, thus creating further stress and anxiety. When the (then relatively new) NHS needed more technically competent nurses, adaptable and more flexible nursing seemed to be undertaken by “semi–qualified student nurses” (1988, p.63).

The functional purpose of the social defence system is the alleviation of anxiety, stress and uncertainty. Menzies Lyth’s insight shows that by ‘organizing out’ as many of these potential situations, the social defence system inhibits a process by which the nurse might be helped to reflect on these situations and address them as a necessary feature of their work. This is achieved by reducing unnecessary tasks, the imposition of strict routines, alleviating situations that might cause potential conflict between nurse and patient (1988, p.63).

Feelings of anxiety aroused by the nursing task forces regression to a deep, primitive defence (1988, p.64). Whilst the organisation of a rota system around the various wards of the hospital was vital in expanding the experiences of the student nurses and ensured the primary task of the organisation was met, in the longer term, without enabling nurses to confront their anxieties in a systematic and therapeutic capacity which she understood as “the evasion of anxiety inhibits growth” (Menzies Lyth, 1988, p.109).

**The hierarchical organisation of tasks**

Menzies Lyth explained the problems in the hospital through this basic failure to address the psychic needs of the staff rather than by attending to the primary task or the structure of their institution. When nurses experienced high dissatisfaction with their jobs, junior nurses came to resent the power that senior nurses had over them and envied their knowledge of individual patients, which they felt was used to mark their position as junior nurses. Both staff and student nurses felt angry towards hospital managers for moving them around the hospital so frequently without an explanation, given that they had little or no time to prepare themselves psychologically for working on a new ward with new patients.

**What were her conclusions and why did they become so significant?**

1. The most obvious conclusion to be drawn from her work is that she was the first to describe the effects of social defences developed internally by members of the organisation rather than as a response to external or outside forces, as Jacques had before her.

2. She described the nursing system as ineffective, controversially both in terms of the way it handles anxiety in the workplace and as inefficient in terms of the way the system generates low morale and high turnover. Moreover, she sees the effects of social defences as leading to the simplification of tasks and a reductive ‘checklist’ mentality. This reduces the opportunities for decision-making, the management of risk, and learning from mistakes. More broadly, it reduces personal satisfaction for senior nurses and student nurses in using clinical judgement. All of which go some way to explain the nursing retention difficulties she was originally commissioned to investigate.

3. It is a feature of the hospital that whilst new training opportunities arise for nurses the social defences against anxiety are reinforced rather than dismantled. In keeping with Jacques’ analysis, she concurs that the understanding and management of anxiety is central to achieving social change. Her paper documents in detail how intolerable feelings associated with the primary task take over once the social defences become, in her words, “restructured” (1988, p.78).

4. There is also something fascinating about the level of detail that she provides in terms of the insight she brings to the functioning of the hospital. Her paper offers a richness both in terms of the daily struggles faced by individual nurses combined with an ability to focus on the detail and connect this to a wider set of what now might be described as strategic or perhaps corporate objectives. Her insight demonstrates how even the most progressive practitioners in a well-regarded hospital find themselves unable to deliver change and respond flexibly to the presenting needs of staff and patients.

That is not to say that there were no criticisms of her approach. Certainly, when it was first published, it caused a considerable furore (she published some of the openly hostile letters and critique of her paper from the *Nursing Times* in her later essays (1988, p.89) many seem to miss the point, and are perhaps evidence of the kind of corporate denial and resistance she was beginning to experience.

**How “the evasion of anxiety inhibits growth”** (Menzies Lyth, 1988)

In a passage entitled “on how the evasion of anxiety inhibits growth”, in one of her later volumes she responds to the criticism that she received at the time her study was published as being about the importance of setting out a series of principles rather than providing institutions with a “blueprint” for change. *The Dynamics of the Social - Selected essays* *Volume 2*, published one year later. Her response to the ferocity of the criticisms contained in a paper presented to a nursing conference, published in the *Nursing Times* in 1961, [1961a] (Menzies Lyth,1988) offers some recommendations for a way forward. The primary recommendation amongst these is that nurses need to address the anxiety evoked by their tasks. She suggests that it might be possible to offer more “intensive contact with patients” (1988, p. 114). In another similarly brief follow-up paper (1969) Menzies Lyth provides some useful pointers with which to elaborate her choice of research method. She clearly valued working within an institution committed to clear goals, allowing her to be “directed by the field as regards the organization and its problem.” (1988, p.127). She alludes to a ‘socio-therapeutic’ approach to explains the richness of her results and a method that is worth emulating in terms of my own data collation techniques. In this final ‘explanatory’ paper she describes the need to ‘feel’ the data inside oneself, which for her means to take in and feel the stress of the organisation itself (Menzies – Lyth, 1989, p.128) a theme that resonates with my own experiences in school (see Chapters 3 and 4).

### An appraisal of the significance of Menzies Lyth’s contribution

I would suggest that her work is relatively limited in terms of schools and education, as I will come onto later; however, countless papers have been published across many nationalities, disciplines and sectors that use her ideas to extend other’s research (Bain, 1998; Hinshelwood & Skogstad, 2000; Ramvi, 2007; 2010; 2013, Lawlor, 2009, Lees et al., 2013) to cite but a few rich examples. At this point, I wish to explore the mixed legacy of her study.

In this section, I wish to consider in more detail how her work has been accepted, evaluated and developed into what is more commonly referred to now as systems psychodynamics theory (Lawlor, 2009; 2016).Armstrong and Rustin (2015) frame the evolution of her ideas historically, more accurately as within a more socio-technical perspective, referencing Trist and Bamforth’s original consultancy work into the mining industry in the 1950s, whilst others instead have identified the presence of social defences located within a more managerial technocratic systems approach (Hyde and Thomas, 2002).

An assemblage of theorists, writers and analysts that I have grouped loosely as having a connection to the Tavistock school unsurprisingly understand her work clinically as relating to the study of human relations, (Bain, 1998; Lawlor, 2015; Long, 2015). James Krantz related her study to Bionian concepts of containment (2015). Hoggett, Cooper and Lees (2015), and others seem to place her thinking within a psycho-social and applied human relations paradigm, while others have reconceptualised her work as a form of “cultural theory” (Krantz, 2015, p. 101). Given the range and complexity of these alternative applications, it may be worth examining these main categories briefly to contextualise and to describe systems psychodynamic theory.

I have grouped these accordingly as:

1. Social/environmental (external pressures) versus individual (internal unconscious defences)
2. Socio – technical (and managerial model)
3. Applied psycho social models; and
4. Cultural theory

#### Are social defences caused within the organisation primarily as a response to social and therefore external or psychological and therefore - internal demands?

There seems little doubt that similar forms of anxiety exist for individual members of organisations and that common defences to these unique anxieties exist. There is, however, a scholarly debate about whether they emerge as either a response to social pressures (the model favoured by Jacques (1955)) where the institution acts as a container of interpersonal anxiety or as a response to the type of primary task as suggested by Menzies Lyth (Hoggett, 2015, p.51). Both have antecedents within Klein’s thinking in relation to persecutory anxiety, however the primacy of one view seems to have changed over time. Menzies Lyth’s view radically changed this thinking and we saw the emergence of a more internal psychoanalytical view emerge. Then, with the gradual erosion of traditional hierarchical structures in the workplace from arguably the mid 1980s onwards, Jacques’ original position has regained critical acclaim once more (I can find no specific date, but this seems to coincide with that period of neo-liberal globalisation). Armstrong and Rustin seek to settle the argument with the suggestion that both are “equally relevant” (2015, p.19).

“A hierarchy of merit and achievement” (Armstrong and Rustin, 2015, p.16)

A discussion of socio-technical theory

Through “Social defences against anxiety explorations in a paradigm”, (2015) Armstrong and Rustin provide a rich context with which to examine the importance of understanding anxiety in organisational settings.

A central theme emerges from their analysis which is repeated throughout my thesis, namely, that when anxiety threatens to overwhelm group members social defences begin to emerge (Armstrong and Rustin, 2015, p. 13-14). Primary tasks can lead to corresponding primitive anxieties. For teachers, the dominant primary task is to ensure that their pupils learn, however learning is innately a complex task and one without guaranteed success. Teachers cannot guarantee that children will learn. That they may fail to learn causes anxiety for teachers. They suggest that this is itself linked to a larger anxiety, which they see as inseparable from learning and involves the risk of “not knowing”. It is one of the key activities for all educationalists to contain the vulnerability of learners so that they can come to tolerate “not knowing”. Armstrong and Rustin consider how the psychoanalytic concepts of splitting and projection enabled Menzies Lyth to describe nurses who projected their anxieties upwards into senior staff only to find them blocked and so unconsciously project them downwards into their patients. They infer that these behaviours become “mirrored” across different levels of the organisations (p.12) an important finding of my own, particularly in my third story.

They also consider whether Menzies Lyth’s ideas still have weight given the changed social climate, observing how society was formed by more traditional, hierarchical organisational structures. They describe this as the change “from government to governance” (p.15). They insist that the transition from the market economy to new globalised capital reflect progressive changes marked by an erosion of traditional, “extended hierarchies” which have been replaced by “networks, systems of developed authority and discipline rewarded through sanction and reward for success or failure” (2015, p.15).

Nonetheless, regardless of these changed ‘modalities of power” the forms of anxieties faced by schools, hospitals and others remain. Pressures of performativity through inspections and “published league tables…exercise formidable pressures on organizations and are the external source of anxieties no doubt of both productive and destructive kinds” (2015, p.16). This “exercises formidable pressures on organizations and are the source of anxieties” (2015, p.16). This rather suggests that Jacques’s earlier, less recognised work is deserving of more credit in term of his observations here. Social defences may become “embedded as routine assumptions and practices become taken for granted”. A position thus emerges which defines anxiety as being maintained both internally and as an external response to a new state of socio-technical bureaucracy.

#### Managerialism

There is another broad domain which seems evident in the literature that seems concerned with change management. It seems largely preoccupied with managerial psychology (Allcorn, 1995; Yiannis and Carr, 2002,) or staff resistance to change management (Hede and Bovey, 2015). I mainly discounted these approaches, although in their introduction to a review of psychodynamic practices in mental health hospital settings, Paula Hyde and Alan Thomas clearly see the value in social defence theory, noting that “socially structured defences evolve as the result of collusive unconscious interactions between members of the organisation.” (Hyde and Thomas, 2002, p.410). They reach a conclusion that change within organisations is often desirable however technical, “rigid barriers” (p.413) such as excessive paperwork and systems which over-medicalise patients, prevent the delivery of better services for staff and patients and avoid original problems.

#### 3. Psychosocial perspectives

Paul Hoggett usefully locates social defences within the context of a national policy agenda. His ideas resonate insomuch that assemblies frequently seem to contain a subliminal, and no so subliminal, policy message - a conduit for the transmission of government ideology to children and parents. Hoggett is critical of Menzies Lyth’s original account for being “over psychologistic and under socialized”, seeing her focus on the primary task as ill-informed and reflecting on the task of the team as “always problematic, contested and socially-constructed” (Hoggett, 2005, cited in Hoggett, 2015, p.51).

His perspective is interesting in so far that he sees the character of a social defence as defined by what he terms, “psycho–logic” defences against overwhelming feelings, including rationalisation, reaction formation, denial and projection (Trevithick, 2011) but may also be informed by wider social processes, including ‘structures of feeling’, a theory developed by Williams (1977). He suggests that all defences achieve, at best, a kind of compromise, and pathological organisations are as much an expression of destructiveness as a defence against it (Steiner, 1993, cited in Hoggett, 2015, p.53).

His view suggests a blurred boundary between the “inner world and the social world” (Frosh and Baraitser 2008, cited in Bibby, 2011, p.8), where education “enters into everyday understanding and practice, and how the world ‘out there’ gets into every one of us” (ibid). Hoggett argues that anxiety is “a powerful force within society” referencing any number of moral panics within society that affect organisations which pull these inwards to be then “contained, embodied, enacted or projected” (2015, p.57). His ideas resonate when one thinks of the current moral panic now instilled under Ofsted in terms of specialist safeguarding issues that have become the subject of school duties such as the PREVENT and FGM agendas.

#### 4. Cultural theory

Papadopoulos suggests that there are limitations to social defence theory, principally that it sees issues as “cause rather than as symptom” (2015, p.106). His criticism is linked to the technical, managerial discipline, which points to the lack of take up by managers in driving change management initiatives (Bovey and Hede, 2001; Yiannis and Carr, 2002). Social defences theory seems less well known outside psychoanalytic theory and as such, this seems fair criticism. Papadopoulos concludes by suggesting that “utilizing cultural theory also allows us to better infer the possible causes and social processes through which social defences operate and the likely consequences they may generate upon the organization or social context” (2015, p.106). Social defences operate through what he calls a “‘guiding social logic” that generates a distinctive thought-style that influences the way people collectively think and act”. He believes that Menzies Lyth’s study ‘side-stepped’ issues of agency, and I am inclined to agree with him, noting how the nurses seemed isolated and disenfranchised. Ultimately, cultural theory would suggest that the “wider hospital structure was itself contributing to” the retention issues (2015, p.105).

It becomes possible to gain a sense of the division between the social and the psychological throughout each of these perspectives. The next stage for me is to establish what has been written about social defences in schools.

## Section 5: Are social defences applicable to education, schools and learning?

“Taking risks involves the possibility of failure, humiliation and emotional pain. Learning in any true sense can only arise out of doubt, uncertainty and frustration of not knowing – unsafe territory for our young people who need to defend themselves at all costs against any repetition of their pain.” (Kalu, 2002 p.360)

One of the challenges in researching the impact of social defences in school is that whilst Menzies Lyth’s work has been widely recognised within psychodynamic theory (Bain, 1998; Whittaker, 2011; Armstrong & Rustin, 2015), in healthcare (Lees et al., 2013; Hyde and Thomas, 2015) and social work (Trevithick, 2011; Cooper and Lees, 2015), relatively little has been written about it in terms of schooling and education. There are notable exceptions from within the Early Years (Elfer and Page, 2013), including Elfer’s account in the Armstrong and Rustin volume (2015). I found two paper’s that focus on education and schooling that specifically relate to social defences. Nonetheless, both have a significant bearing on my own observations and are worthy of some discussion.

Simon Tucker’s article *Still not good enough! Must Try Harde*r - *an exploration of social defences in schools* (2015) reflects the anxieties of primary head teachers exposed to increased regulation in changing social times. Ellen Ramvi, whose own doctoral research was motivated by a desire to understand “What characterizes social defense systems?” (2009) and explores how social defences are pushed down the school onto the teachers. She was interested in how they coped with these pressures within a classroom setting.

Tucker (2015) discusses the acute levels of stress that many in the teaching profession experience. He cites research from the UK government and teacher Trade Unions as evidence of the incredible pressure and high burnout rate associated with education and teaching. Tucker identifies changing social pressures as one cause for this. He notes a “paranoid anxiety” in schools; the dual pressures on Head teachers as a result of meeting tasks traditionally contained by the care system, combined with a constant unrealistic demand from parents and external agencies.

Similarly to Armstrong and Rustin, he observes how anxiety was once contained within more traditional hierarchical organisations and notes that this “can no longer be true of schools” (2015, p.265) suggesting instead that “what has become apparent is a position of aggregation, separation, and isolation”:

“Responsibilities that are increasingly pushed into schools are monitored and inspected, providing relief for those higher up the organizational hierarchy but apparently leaving destructive impulses and associated anxieties wedged in the school itself. It has the net result of severing responsibility and ensuring contamination does not spread to the wide system. It is not on the face of it a model of containment; it is a type of quarantine.” (Tucker, 2015, p.265)

He describes schools as islands within their community soaking up collective social, regulatory, and local communities of anxiety. The same shifting global pressures on the economy and employment occur; so, the focus on performance and educational attainment intensifies. Tucker argues that this societal discourse exposes schools to a pressure he sees as a correlate of governmentality. Pressures on schools to be seen to be academically high achieving become normalised, while “underlying fears about social chaos represent powerful political drivers to establish and maintain systems of control through schools” (Tucker, 2015, p.265). The outcome for head teachers is that this scrutiny and control paradoxically “increases the levels of paranoid anxiety within the system” (Tucker, 2015, p.265).

Where Tucker concentrates on the impact of social defences for Head teachers, in her paper, *What characterizes social defense systems?* (2009) Ramvi seeks to understand how teachers lose control over their feelings. Helpfully, for the secondary form tutor, she suggests that “Teaching is recognised as a profession demanding a high level of emotional labour.” (Ramvi, 2010, p. 330).

Combining Bionian theory with her own empirical research, Ramvi focuses on seeking to understand “how teachers learn from their emotions precisely because they are charged with developing their student’s ability to do this kind of emotional work”, (Ramvi, 2010, p.331). Staff can no longer control their emotions as easily as they once could and these uncontained levels of anxiety shape the teachers’ relationships with their students in the classroom. She describes an interaction with one class teacher, who states:

“It is more like, not a fear exactly, not anxiety but more the feeling, no let me call it fear for the time being, then perhaps I’ll find a better word, but fear of doing things that you don’t wish to do, that you are not able to look after all of them, for example, that is a thing that you don’t want to occur, or explode because you become so incredibly angry that you just lose control.” (Ramvi, 2010, p.334).

Ramvi summarises her research by noting the tremendous impact of anxiety on the teaching staff:

“after just a few months of teaching – one can define her ideals connected to feelings as a feeling rule, which can be summarized in this way: ‘I must have control over my feelings, not lose my composure, but be even tempered and stable’. This feeling rule is so strong that she experiences fear or anxiety about not being able to live up to it.” (Ramvi, 2010, p.338).

### How will my study fill any gaps in the literature?

Whilst Kleinian object–relations and Bion’s container-contained theory are very well known and provide the basis for my understanding of defensiveness, it is Menzies Lyth’s extension of those ideas into the social arena that forms the basis of my readings. That notwithstanding, other than Elfer’s work on social defences in the nursery, which falls outside of the scope of my thesis, there does not seem to be a vast research base which explores social defences in schools. My hope is that I can add to the investigations by Ramvi and Tucker with my own examples from the school, in particular from studying the psychodynamics of the school assembly.

The next chapter describes my research methods and how I came to organise my data using autoethnography.

Chapter 3 “Storying Schools”[[11]](#footnote-11)

“It is the researcher’s task, then, to trace how those other times lead in the instance of this or that subject to the very present constitution of a self and of the set of practices which define it.” (Clough, 2002, p.64)

## Introduction

In Chapter 1, I introduced the background of my role and the context of the school. I tried to convey my inexplicable sense of unease about the school – my sense of “I wonder what’s going on here?” moments, or “why do I feel as if something isn’t quite right?”. In this chapter, I will set out my rationale for selecting autoethnography as my research method. My aim was to try and understand more about my role and the culture of the organisation.

I describe how I realised that autoethnography as a method, whilst seemingly controversial, enabled me to make sense of the school’s culture through telling my story and by reflecting on my values. I explain how my ‘messy’ fieldwork data was gathered and organised and I reflect on my decision-making and some of the challenges that I faced and hopefully overcame.

## Chapter structure

The chapter is laid out in five sections. The first offers a definition of autoethnography, discusses its relative merits as a method, and explores something of the contested positions apparent within the literature. I try to write evenly about the benefits of this approach, mindful of its limitations. I have picked up, and try to do justice to, a healthy debate about the applicability of this research method. In the middle section, I move on to discuss the more technical aspects of my approach, document my decision-making, illustrate which data from my fieldwork I chose to use, and how I analysed my data using Clough’s narrative schema (2002), and Chang’s “Autoethnography as method” (2008) for analysing and interpreting my data. Finally, I offer some thoughts about how my data might be evaluated using “Qualitative Quality: Eight “Big-Tent” Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research” (Tracey, 2010).

I decided that I would follow the structure that Sikes used in setting out her voluminous and definitive collection of essays in Autoethnography (2013):

“Section 1: Origins and antecedents of autoethnography

Section 2: Approaches to and critiques of autoethnography

Section 3: Ethical concerns regarding autoethnography

Section 4: Writing and representing autoethnography

Section 5: Speaking for myself” (Sikes, P., 2013. pages v - ix)

## Section 1: Origins and antecedents of autoethnography

### 1. Section Outline

“We write as an Other, and for an Other” (Boylorn and Orbe, 2014, p.15)

In this section, I aim to accomplish a number of things. Firstly, to agree a definition of autoethnography, to explain how and why I chose this approach. I will begin with a definition of autoethnography, particularly emphasising its historical development and links with autobiography, ethnography, and to an extent anthropology. Secondly, I will consider its benefits, and limitations as a means of analysing my observations of school assemblies. I describe how autoethnography enabled me to examine the dominant culture in the school, at that time, through the use of story and values; and finally, demonstrate how I started to systematically interpret my experiences to illuminate the culture of the school at that time.

It is difficult to fathom the subtle distinctions as discussed in Chapter 2 between the psychoanalytical, social and environmental processes which characterise organisations and between social phenomenology, human interaction and the study of behaviour. I have a feeling that Isabel Menzies Lyth would not necessarily approve of my methods, but I hope that by reflecting on the candour behind the stories presented in Chapter 4 and the various iterations to my drafts, she could understand how I was able to apply her theory to make sense of the culture of the school. Pragmatically, I needed a methodology that helped me to distil meaning from my scribbled notes on the back of class registers and so with my supervisor’s help, I settled on autoethnography.

I was immersed in a culture that I wanted to make more sense of. I saw in autoethnography a means of recording the “absent but implicit”, (Beres, 2017 recorded from a paper presented at a seminar 4th May, 2017.) Dr Laura Beres is an English-born, Canadian academic who visited Leeds Trinity University and spoke at a seminar I was invited to. I also knew from having read Menzies Lyth that there were often defensive behaviours at play in organisational settings but hadn’t necessarily made any definitive connection between the school’s climate (Riekie et al., 2017) and social defences theory. It was only when I started to think about gathering data from the school assemblies that I felt autoethnography would enable me to make sense of Laura’s observation.

### 2. What is autoethnography?

Simplistically then, autoethnography is a research method which enables the analysis of personal experience to illuminate, and therefore to make more sense of one’s culture. Inspired by anthropology, it uses the best techniques of story–telling and autobiographical writing to combine value-centred thinking. Derived clearly from ethnography, it seeks to systematically analyse the impact of the researcher’s life story, memories, and personal narrative. Unlike ethnography, which seeks a more ‘outsider looking in’ explanation, autoethnography reverses this by choosing to look from within to make sense of the external. In my case, it offers a way to systematically analyse my memories, notes, and observations whilst going about my job as a form tutor. It is a chance to record how I saw the world at that point in time, for good or for ill.

I make extensive use in this section of Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams and Arthur P Bochner’s work. In my reading about the method they come up time and again, together with Pat Sikes from the University of Sheffield, as leading advocates of this method. Carolyn Ellis is one of the contemporary writers recognised as having promoted this approach (Sikes, 2015) who in turn credits Deborah Reed-Danahay as one of its earliest advocates, with a tradition relating to anthropological observation, field work and record keeping (Ellis, 2008).

From Ellis, Adams and Bochner’s 2011 paper, “Autoethnography: an overview” published in *Historical Social Research*/*Historiche Sozialforschung*, they describe autoethnography as:

“an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno.) (Ellis, 2004; Holman Jones, 2005).” (Ellis et al., p.273).

Reed-Danahay explains the kind of techniques that could be included under the umbrella of autoethnographic research methods, as “oral history, case history, case study, life history, life story, self story, and personal experience story” (Denzin, 1989, cited in Reed-Danahay, 1997, p.13). The centrality of the method, its uniqueness as a method, is that all data collected “entails the incorporation of elements of one’s own life experience when writing about others through biography or ethnography” (Denzin, 1989 cited in Reed-Danahay, 1997, p.6). Serendipitously for me, as a teacher with a professional social work qualification, she suggests that the autoethnographer is a “boundary crosser” (Reed-Danahy,1997, p.3); someone who can address the role of dual–identity. She goes on to suggest that the challenge for theorists emerging from a post-colonial, post–modern perspective is in “questioning identity and selfhood, of voice and authenticity, and of cultural displacement and exile.” (Reed-Danahay, 1997, p.3).

Two other advocates of this approach, Robin Boylorn and Mark Orbe (2014) continue this thread. They similarly describe autoethnography as a dual process, the ““blending” of storytelling, almost as a form of creative writing with a study of social groups, giving ‘voice to’ (the ethnography aspect) ‘previously silenced and marginalized experiences’” (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014, p.15). This rights-based perspective also speaks to me given my feeling that the children seem to come off second best in the school’s, wholly understandable, drive to attain a positive Ofsted rating.

Ellis portrays this duality as:

“…an autobiographical genre of writing and research, autoethnography displays multiple layers of consciousness. Autoethnographers gaze back and forth. First, they look through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience. Next, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations. As they zoom backward and forward, inward and outward, distinctions between the personal and the cultural become blurred, sometimes beyond distinct recognition.” (2008, p.2).

This also defines my need for a moveable, semi-permeable research method given I was engaged in almost contradictory positions both as employee and participant whilst trying to retain a sense of subjectivity. I questioned myself all the time. After assembly - “what am I doing this for”, “how have I ended up in this place”, “is this me, or is it them?”, and “does anyone else feel this too?” - perhaps even the me that I now recognise as a student researcher. These were the questions firing around my mind and that influenced how I came to value that dynamic and creative research space.

#### 2. A methodology to explore cultural practice through story and values?

Ellis et al. (2011) refer to this experience as that moment when biographers write

about “epiphany’s” (p.275). Those reflections that mark a moment of significance, either a memory, personal story, a recollection, or a shared event. They suggest that the biographer writes, collects, interprets, organises and writes these epiphanies down so that they can be shared, disseminated and discussed within the wider culture. They note that these epiphanies may be ‘existential crises” and refer to them as “self–claimed, phenomena in which one person may consider an experience transformative’” while recognising that another may not (Ellis et al, 2011, p.275).

A picture thus begins to emerge for me of the researcher capturing the essence of the moment in story form, but crucially as an insider. Ellis et al contrast this with ethnographic researchers who operate more from an ‘outside–in’ position. Time, place and the researcher’s relationship to that place all become important for me in pinpointing the psycho-dynamic relationships that connect them all. For Ellis and colleagues, these factors translate into the processes of studying culture, for example how the researcher comes to make sense of relational practices, areas of commonality such as values, beliefs, and shared moments. The function of which helps “‘insiders’ (cultural members) and ‘outsiders’ (cultural strangers) better understand the culture” (Maso, 2001, cited in Ellis et al. 2011). They see ethnographers as researchers who do this by immersing themselves within the culture (Ellis et al., 2011, p.276). It would seem, therefore, that it is the combination of these two alternative approaches that make the essence of good autoethnography; the recording of epiphany-like moments, which “stem from, or are made possible by, being part of a culture and / or by possessing a particular cultural identity” (ibid, p.276) and of being on the inside. (ibid, p.276).

As I read more about autoethnography, so too I distinguished a sense of this method as a means of articulating the voices of those people on the margins as ‘stories’ and a sense of commonality based on shared values. Both were features of my writing in Part 1 of the EdD. The next section seeks to explore autoethnography as a method that places the values of the researcher centre stage.

#### Story-telling as a ‘voice’ (for marginalized groups)

As I organised my data in Chapter 4, I became fascinated with the idea of the story in research. Capturing my ‘story’ and those of my students was becoming a central theme within my research. I justified this to myself by reading Clifford Geertz’s work on writing ‘thick description’ (see Part 2 of this chapter), and from absorbing tenets of Ellis’s 2011 paper.

Here, Ellis notes the widespread use of autoethnography as a response, in part, to the crisis of representation in post modernity, as well as a recognition that scholars needed to “proffer stories rather than theories” (2011, p.274). She argues that this provides more legitimacy than the accepted wisdom of presenting theory and findings which emphasise the scientific aspects of social science. This could, perhaps, be a limitation of autoethnography as method, either as a response to an historical legacy issue or a wider perception of the illegitimacy of qualitative social science methods when compared to ‘hard’ science. I wonder if, as qualitative social scientists, we talk ourselves out of our ability to engage with and to make sense of the ‘micro-level’ interactions, perhaps reducing the tremendous power of narrative and story to enhance cultural meaning, be it through life, work, community, arts or music. To me, this approach seems to offer a form in which I can share some of my experiences in that particular time and space and locate them within the context of narrative. It allows me to express how exposure to social defences in the workplace made me feel. A learning point for me is that I then made a mistake in my ethics application in assuming that it was an ethnographic approach. I tried to remedy this in my response to the ethics reviewer’s suggestions (see Appendix 3.2). At least if I concentrate on autoethnography, it reduces the exposure to others in the school and preserves their anonymity.

#### ‘Value-centric’ not ‘value-free’

If writing stories is one obvious benefit of autoethnography, another is almost certainly its ability to be “value centric rather than pretending to be value free” (Ellis et al., 2011, p.274). Ellis and colleagues explain that one of the benefits of thinking in this way is in recognising and accepting personal subjectivity in the construction and design of research. This subjectivity is embodied “by the researcher’s own values and principles” (Ellis et al., 2011, p.274), rather than making grand claims to positional neutrality and/or objectivity. They suggest that the value of autoethnography lies in its ability to produce:

“meaningful, accessible and evocative research grounded in personal experience, research that would sensitize readers to issues of identity politics, to experiences shrouded in silence, and to forms of representation that deepen our capacity to empathize with people who are different from us.” (Ellis et al., 2011, p.274).

Autoethnography recognises and welcomes personal insights and feelings, as well as the researcher’s influence on research, rather than, in their words, “hiding from these matters or assuming that they don’t exist” (ibid, p.274).

Not just acknowledging difference in all its many forms but writing from within difference seems common to the writings that I have read. This also seems compatible with psychodynamic approaches that offer such insight into our internal worlds. As a teacher/student-researcher searching for a suitable methodology with which to make sense of their own experiences, Boylorn and Orbe’s reflection resonates with my earlier thoughts about the ethics reviewer’s initial concerns:

“Autoethnography is oftentimes serendipitous, occurring when we are going about our everyday lives. Autoethnography is also therapeutic, embodied (Berry, 2012), performative, (Spry, 2010) and queer (Adams & Holman Jones, 2008), speaking from, for and to the margins” (Boylorn and Orbe, 2014, p.18).

What strikes me about my immersive experiences within the massed body of the assembly hall is that I could draw out some of the psychodynamics to cast light on my internal world, if nothing else. I could observe the micro-level, the interactions, the whispered conversations between students, the barked instructions between staff directed at the students, thus gaining insight into our culture. Moreover, one of the more useful aspects of autoethnography could be in helping me to articulate a voice for the relatively powerless in our increasingly bureaucratized schools, perhaps me, and my Form group?

Reed-Danahay champions the merits of a research methodology which addresses “who speaks and on behalf of whom are vital questions to ask of all ethnographic and autobiographical writing.” (1997, p.3) going further by focusing on themes of “cultural displacement or a situation of exile” (1997, p.4). She links this phenomenon of displacement to “rapid socio-cultural change, of globalization and transculturation” (Reed-Danahay, 1997, p.4).

## Section 2: Approaches to and critiques of autoethnography

### Different kinds of ethnographies

There are many disciplines within ethnography, but all focus on exploring time, space, location, and aspects of organisational culture. Now, I want to establish which method lends itself best to mapping the contours of the school assembly. I have had to narrow the focus of this for practical reasons of word limits and appropriateness, so for example I have here made the decision to reject indigenous ethnographies as impractical and concentrate instead only on discussing the relative merits of narrative and reflexive autoethnographic techniques.

#### Narrative ethnography

The school assembly provides a dramatic narrative. My first thoughts suggest that the hall becomes a place which defines our childhood memories from our own school days, certainly if mine are anything to go by, contributing to shaping childhood experiences, creating emotional interactions, and exerting powerful forces. In my opening monologue, all I do is let my mind wander off and all the time I am transported back into my childhood, memories of being at mass, memories of being in the hall when it was used for exams, the trauma of taking and failing most of my exams, recalling strange poems I didn’t understand, remembering unusual characters like Mousey Thompson or ‘Mr Samson’, throwing chalk at me in assembly when I was bored.

Ellis et al. describe narrative ethnography as “referring to texts presented in the form of stories that incorporate the ethnographer’s experiences and analysis of others” (2011, p.278). I am uncertain about the ‘analysis of others’ aspect of their definition insomuch that my research idea crystallised as a result of being immersed in the place and in my role. It feels more like a form of social anthropology. I did not feel comfortable observing colleagues, and students without potentially altering their behaviour. Ethically I felt uncomfortable about reaching judgements about close colleagues, many of whom I admired, including the children in my form group. That notwithstanding, there is an aspect of research culture from which it became difficult to disassociate myself entirely. The assembly is such a public space, rich with human dynamics. Writing my stories inevitably must reflect my interpretation of others. I therefore need to be mindful of the potential for causing harm to others.

#### Reflexive ethnography

Reflexive ethnography focuses on “the ethnographer studying his or her life alongside cultural members lives” (Ellis et al., 2011, p.278). This seems more acceptable to me ethically. In effect, this approach seeks to document how the researcher’s life has been transformed by their membership of the particular social phenomenon. I could add “layered accounts” to support my observation, write up my feelings and thoughts in diary or journal form, and reflect on my experiences alongside the data (Ellis et al., 2011, p.278) This has the advantage of what Ellis and her colleagues refer to as a capacity to “frame existing research as a source of questions and comparisons” rather than a “measure of truth” (both quotations taken from Charmaz, 1983, p.117 cited in Ellis et al., 2011, p.278). Citing Ellis’s own earlier work Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2011 continue by noting that layered accounts use “vignettes, reflexivity, multiple voices and introspection” (Ellis, 1991 cited in Ellis, et al, 2011, p.278) to “invoke” readers to join in with the “emergent experience” of doing and writing research” (both quotations taken from Ronai, 1992, p.123, cited in Ellis et al., 2011, p.279).

Meanwhile, Chang (2008) is mindful that when there is a significant element of “confessional-emotive writing”, the outcome of which she describes as “autoethnographers’ vulnerable self-exposure opens a door to readers’ participation in the stories” (Chang, 2008, p.145). Whilst there are undoubtedly moments of self–reflection in my datasets that make me feel exposed and slightly awkward when reading them back, perhaps this element of insecurity and fragility adds meaning and thus makes this technique a better fit.

#### Reflexive ethnography, as a cultural member, in the school assembly

“When researchers write autoethnographies, they seek to produce aesthetic and evocative thick descriptions of personal and interpersonal experience.” (Ellis et al., 2011, p.277)

It would seem fair to say that there has been an increase in the use of autobiographical and story data in education in recent years (Campbell and McNamara, 2007). Working in education opens up wonderful possibilities for studying human relations, casting insight into power dynamics. My hope is that others might be able to relate to my data. All I can hope to do, therefore, is to tease out an exploratory sense of what it means to me to work in a school and to share some of the joys and the ambiguities of working in this organisational domain. When discussing my idea with my critical friends, they could relate to the idea that most of us have experience/s from our childhood of sitting through innumerable assemblies. It’s not a universal trope, but it offers an experiential quality that I can play with creatively through my narratives.

I accept that there is nothing particularly new in this method compared with other more well–known approaches, Pole and Morrison (2003) identify the proliferation of ethnography as a research tool favoured particularly amongst student researchers, yet what distinguishes my research from the more traditional ethnographic approach is in recording the profound and transformative effects those experiences had on me and how I needed a tool to contain my feelings. I can do that safely without compromising others and without making me feel too vulnerable.

#### Are the techniques of autoethnography helpful for discussing social defences?

Being mindful of the benefits of both the approaches discussed, the next section considers whether autoethnography is a good fit to better understand social defence theory. I wanted a method which would enable the analysis and interpretation of personal feelings in an organisational and work context. Menzies Lyth’s original insight that individual members of organisations create social defences was based on more psychoanalytical ethnographic techniques. She did not set out to create a theory of social defensiveness; rather it emerged as an outcome of her consultancy and practice. Given my hesitation in adopting more ethnographic approaches, at least autoethnography provides a mechanism with which to consider my behaviours and, as becomes apparent later, my defensiveness through my life story, (Reed-Danahay, 1997). Given that unconscious defences are so personal and given the limits of my study, it seems possible to reach a position as the teacher/student–researcher to “create a pathway to an authentic self” (Boylorn and Orbe, 2014, p.23). In effect, I can only narrate my experiences at the intersection between the personal and the social culture of being in the school in that space and of that time. I note Sikes’s dictum that:

“writing as a process of inquiry. Ruth Behar alludes to this linking I believe, when she suggests that ‘Autoethnography is a process to map an intermediate space we can’t quite define yet, a borderland between passion and intellect, analysis and subjectivity, ethnography and autobiography’” (Sikes, 2013, p. xliv).

Furthermore, there is another aspect of autoethnography that fits well with an account primarily interested in the creation of social defences, which is that it promotes rights-based thinking and social justice. It is less about a form of student deficit, where we blame children’s behaviour and their upbringing. As a social worker, that doesn’t sit well with my training. This way I can think about my role and my connections with my colleagues. Understanding the connections and the partnerships we form. That is a key lesson for me in developing my reflexive experiences by writing this thesis. It allows me to explore Klein’s theory of object relations. For example, in school, we seem almost routinely, to blame the children, their parents, and their community. Their perceived ‘deficits’ become *our* object. We project our insecurities and anxieties into them. Boylorn and Orbe “talk about autoethnography as a critical method by using three central features of critical theory, which include: to understand the lived experience of real people in context, to examine social conditions and uncover oppressive power arrangements, and to fuse theory and action to challenge processes of domination.” (2014, p. 20).

## Section 3: Ethical concerns regarding autoethnography

“Autoethnography has been criticized for being nonanalytic, self-indulgent, irreverent, sentimental, and romantic. The focus on the narrative, not the performative I, has also been criticized (Jackson & Mazzei, 2008, p. 299). Autoethnography has been criticized for being too artful. It has been criticized for not being scientific, for having no theory, no concepts, no hypotheses… Apples and oranges again. Autoethnography cannot be judged by traditional positivist criteria. The goal is not to produce a standard social science article. The goal is to write performance texts in a way that moves others to ethical action.” (Denzin, 2014, p.2/3)

This is perhaps one of my favourite quotations, the imagery Denzin conjures of a method which seems almost to disrupt conventional research methods is one I find appealing. The juxtaposition rejects the notion of comparison to either literary or art forms. The autobiographical aspect, with an implied criticism of weak or untestable data, is countered instead as to “disrupt the binary of science and art. Autoethnographers believe this method can be rigorous, theoretical, and analytical and emotional, therapeutic, and inclusive of personal and social phenomena” (Ellis, 2012, p. 283). I believe that too. It suits my investigation.

Boylorn and Orbe, keen advocates of this method themselves, sensibly urge their readers to reflect on the limitations of autoethnography as a method in terms of trying to highlight the contradictions and tensions contained within. For instance, they suggest that readers need to think about the imbalance between “revealment – concealment” (2014, p.29). In this example they refer primarily to the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, who proposes a theory of dialectics based on the notion that inherent within all human experiences are a “dynamic knot of contradictions in understanding personal relationships” (Boylorn and Orbe, 2014, p.29). Notwithstanding their words of caution, it is that very perspective which to my mind makes it an ideal method for my study. It accommodates my initial worries when constructing my thesis that I might be sharing too much, for instance I worried about how fine is the difference between reflexive positionality and confession? Should I have done more personally, more professionally, to challenge some of the practices I observed in assembly? Was it, in truth, far easier to turn a blind eye? I grapple with these questions when developing my model in Section 5.1. However, by the time I reach my conclusion and I have worked through my data I no long worry and feel secure in highlighting that very subjectivity as one of the many strengths of autoethnography.

### Ethical Guidance

I sought guidance in the form of the BERA Ethical Guidelines (2011) for educational research, I wholly agree with the general sense of ‘doing no harm’, as a form tutor that sits well with my personal and professional values, I have done everything I can to observe this guidance. That the student – researcher has a duty to their participants, and to themselves” (see point 9 under responsibility to the research profession, (BERA 2011)) makes sense,

“The Association considers that educational researchers should operate within an ethic of respect for any persons involved in the research they are undertaking. Individuals should be treated fairly, sensitively, with dignity, and within an ethic of respect and freedom from prejudice regardless of age, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, nationality, cultural identity, partnership status, faith, disability, political belief or any other significant difference. This ethic of respect should apply to both **the researchers themselves and any individuals participating in the research either directly or indirectly”** [emphasis added]. (BERA ethical guidelines for Educational research 2011, p.5)

I also applied Wellington’s adage, that all good research should be uncompromisingly ethical. In his “eight rules” (2015, p.115) Wellington makes the case unequivocally that the student researcher has a moral responsibility not just to the wider research community, but a more personal and pressing claim to ensure the probity of their research to employers, pupils and colleagues. I also feel that given the autobiographical nature of this research, I have a duty to myself to ensure the veracity of my claims.

I also consider the subjective nature of my position in reaching these conclusions. The anonymised “Bob” amongst others (see Chapter 4, stories 1 and 5 particularly), for example, might view the world from a very different perspective. The risk of making any further claims to truth are reduced further, given my use of storying. One aspects of my research to consider is that the use of imagination may make my claims unsafe or difficult to prove. I am mindful that “particular emphasis needs to be placed on the use of imagination to develop empathy.” (Campbell and McNamara, 2007, p.110).

Writing inductively, my research ideas were never fully developed beforehand, but developed into a research question through my reflections and interpretations; my creative lens, through which I could categorise and make meaning of my values and personal responses to the assemblies. Campbell and McNamara assert that the “process of imagining is claimed by Hardy (1986) as the link between ‘storying’ and theorising.” Similarly, there is nothing to say that just because I saw something that it is what I think it might be other than my fieldwork notes, memory and descriptions. In summary, there are issues of power through ‘storying’ and theorising’ as well as power dynamics in research.

Goodson and Sikes discuss the benefits of undertaking research in a covert manner. “Studies of powerful groups or individuals or investigations into socially unacceptable or even illegal attitudes, behaviours or practices” (2001, p. 92) will inevitably be difficult because participants will refuse to engage in the research. This research process does, however, offer me the chance to provide context to why those behaviours might exist, even if on reflection they might seem unacceptable. The fact that I can contextualize this now, might offer an explanation as to why I felt so uncomfortable at the time. However that is with the benefit of hindsight and through the process of writing this thesis. My colleagues are not so fortunate. Campbell and McNamara offer the following thought, that “honesty and truth are problematic areas in narrative and fictionalised accounts” (2007, p.109). Even if they were particularly focused on storytelling as a method, there is still some value to me in their observations more broadly.

“There is a background problem that the very assiduousness of these endeavours can mask. This concerns the ways in which the ethical has been conceived in the modern world. The ethical comes in, as it were, at points of conflict – where there is a question over confidentiality, where there are competing interests, where the research is sensitive in some way. What is left out is that broader conception in which it is recognised that values permeate our lives...and hence inevitably there at the start in research in education”. (Standish, 2002, p. 211 cited in McNamee, and Bridges, 2002).

I consider this point as a useful basis with which to proceed. In some places I have sanitised some of the more oppressive behaviours to preserve the integrity of my colleagues’ practice, my practice, and our maintenance of them. There are other places where I have made explicit terms that added to my sense of discomfort. The use of the word ‘feral’ to describe the children as a minor example (see story 3 in Chapter 4 in particular). In order to learn from applying psychoanalytic theories and concepts, as Ramvi suggests, the value of this exercise must be so “teachers are to learn from experience, schools must allow room for reconciliation between the teachers' ideal and reality.” (Ramvi, 2010, p.342).

## Section 4: Writing and representing autoethnography

### Some practical issues

This is complex work and requires careful attention to the processes of designing, collecting and establishing knowledge. The techniques of storytelling, biography, and narrative have become more widely accepted within educational research but note that this is not without problems and requires some thought about what I consider to be the ethics of storytelling (Ellis et al., 2011). In this section, I want to reflect on some of these ethical quandaries and reflect on some of these in terms of processes, for example do autoethnographic techniques place the weight of ‘exposure’ onto the teacher-researcher practitioner? Here I also must acknowledge mistakes in my design process and when collecting my research.

My stories are grounded ontologically. I have ethical permission, I sought ethical clearance from the Head long before I applied for ethical clearance from the University. Nevertheless, on the ground, in the assembly hall, the dynamics and the situations come thick and fast. I’m not a dramatist; writing thick description risks my identification.

Given that I was already in role before I had the idea of using the assembly hall, not everyone would have remembered that I was writing up my notes afterwards, even if they are notes of my own feelings. I suspect most wouldn’t have cared, but it was impossible to inform everyone before or afterwards given that I was sitting in the banked seating with my form. I led and took part in assemblies. If I had told too many of my colleagues then there was also a risk that this might have put them off their stride. Instead, what I decided to do was to concentrate mainly on the processes before and after assembly rather than during. I mitigate this by describing the wider aspects of the school’s administrative systems. Wherever possible afterwards, I tried to discuss my ideas and research informally and didn’t register any negative complaints. Nonetheless, school employment is a small world and we are dependent on others for references.

One of my caveats about the research was to try and record as wide a selection of material as possible and to then share my findings with the school staff. This was my intention when I applied for ethical permission and I thought I might try and publish. My conversation with the Head was always that we would use this as action-informed research to improve our practice. I have a very high regard for the Head and for the staff. I have serious professional respect for the role and the complexity of the job. I am not so certain that I will publish now.

## Criteria for the evaluation of qualitative research

In addition to drawing on the BERA Research ethics procedure, I favour Tracey’s eight big tent criteria. In her paper, Tracey provides eight ‘big-tent’ criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research (2010). I want to record my thinking under each of these criteria. I began by thinking “what am I trying to do with my research?”, “what do I want this research to speak to?” and “how might I get there?”

**1 Worthy topic**

My research in Chapter 2 suggested that there were gaps in the literature. My supervisor thought this was a relatively original idea and both the Head and the university had given me ethical permission to investigate this as an issue. Critical friends also liked the idea of studying the assembly.

Discussing school assembly always prompted a response whenever I was able to bring it up, either with my own students, colleagues, my form, or other professionals. Most of us have at some point in our lives, either as pupils or teachers, sat in assembly. Moreover, at least as far as I could find, there was no research that used the assembly to examine social defence systems in schools, which means that this might offer a new interpretation.

Professionally, I could answer this point relatively easily; school was a hard place to work and the stress of working in a ‘tough’ school had to be about more than the difficult relationship we as teachers often had with the children. From the staff room chat, I recognised as well that new staff found it exceptionally difficult to orientate their way around the school. The very high turnover of NQTs, supply, and agency staff who left suggested that there was an issue. The school suffered a problem in terms of attendance and the number of children excluded (I have these figures but will not provide the data because this is too sensitive).

I overcame issues of research design by undertaking interpretations of my feelings. That made me realise before I developed my spiral diagram that my experiences were valuable. I address this further in Chapter 5.

That I have experienced sitting cross legged in assembly as a boy, with my form as a teacher, and have, on occasion, led an assembly might be interesting to others and might open a useful platform for wider debate and discussion. Others might be able to relate to my stories.

**2 Rich rigour**

Autoethnography values the everyday lived experience. It allows researchers to attend to the detail and to find form in a particular time and space and locate them within the context of narrative. Sikes conveys a sense of this rigorous attention to detail when writing about a visit she made to an SEBD school. Her writing inspired me to use thick description to attend to the micro-level in my writing in Chapter 4. For instance, Sikes writes,

“It’s time for me to hear the story of the school. We got to Harry’s room, a large office, dominated by a picture of Cassius Clay before he was Mohammed Ali, triumphant having beaten Sonny Liston. Harry opens up a drawer in his desk and invites me to look inside There are a number of knives, razor blades fixed to various makeshift handles, a length of bicycle chain, a sharpened screwdriver, and a couple of chisels. "Look at this. They were all confiscated during my first few weeks here. I keep them to remind me not to get too cocky. Keep them in mind while I’m talking.” (Sikes, 2010, p.7).

I want to write like that and to capture that sense of being there in that space at that time. To pay attention to the detail. I hope in Chapter 4 to write with that simple sophistication and fluency. The value of Sikes’ approach is in allowing her readers to travel with her to that place.

**3 Sincerity**

I like assemblies. I have in the course of my planning and discussions over the years of writing this thesis only met one other person who actually likes and values school assemblies. I also like stories. Some of my earliest and fondest memories of school are of listening to Mr. Samson tell us about Aesop’s Fables in assembly. Those fables have remained with me into adulthood. I loved working with my form group and I only want the best for the children and colleagues past and present. Throughout my research gathering, I have been as open and as transparent as possible about the research. Whilst reaching my conclusions has surprised me, in terms of the method I only ever wanted to write something that reflects the complexity and the nuances of working in a hard school. I am only writing about myself; nonetheless, having tried my best to describe these experiences and how they made me feel, I have tried to be as open and as transparent as I could be. The teaching staff are amongst the most committed professionals I have ever worked with who, on a daily, hourly, basis, bend over backwards to support the children and are surely deserving of accolades that they will never receive.

**4 Credibility**

I worked at the school for more than two and a half years in a variety of teaching, supervisory, and non - teaching roles. In that time, I managed a pastoral and welfare team. I held a caseload of complex cases and taught the national curriculum across Key Stages 3 and 4. A qualified teacher for 20 years, I have professional experience as a curriculum Head of Department in special needs education. I have participated in pastoral education for many years in a variety of maintained and non-maintained educational settings. I have also worked as a qualified social worker in a variety of professional children and families social care settings in the UK.

My managerial duties entailed managing the safeguarding, child protection and school counselling services, and to participate fully across the ‘life’ of the school. I also participated in all normal functions of the school with a range of roles and duties that included attendance at OFSTED planning meetings, staff meetings, and doing ‘duty’. For two years I attended school assembly with a variety of classes, before managing my own form and taking them to weekly assemblies for one school year. On floating the idea of recording notes from assemblies to senior colleagues I was invited by the senior Deputy Head to join in and to contribute new topics to be covered in assemblies. I did this in a trusted, and I hope meaningful way.

**5 Resonance**

I am fortunate in that I was able to send copies of my stories nervously to critical friends, experienced academics and writers, for comment. I was delighted that they were kind enough to return them with favourable comments, one of which included, “I can smell the school”. Given that I felt rather exposed at the time in the candid nature of my reflections, I was profoundly grateful that they could relate to them.

**6 Significant contribution**

• Conceptually/theoretically

Sikes explores the benefits of writing about schools using thick description and narrative research. She writes evocatively, capturing the adrenaline, the energy and the chaos of being in school. I have tried to emulate the honesty in her accounts. She reflects on one of her students who chose to use this technique because “research could be helpful to him in that it would encourage him to reflect critically and systematically on his work and thereby, could potentially lead him to insights and understandings capable of informing his professional activities” (Sikes, 2010).

It was only through reflecting on how I felt that I was able to draw a new theoretical model. I reflect on this in Chapter 5, but in short, I have developed an abstract concept by thinking about why I engaged in shouting at my form and then why feeling anxious made me reflect on my unconscious behaviours. From this position, I have developed a model based on Kleinian approaches. This reflection in Chapter 5.1 seeks to provide insight into the culture of the school and my personal conflict and eventual stages of separation.

I was only able to arrive at this through this process of interpretation and reflection throughout the EdD. Consequently, this research may offer a small contribution to the existing theory around social defences and explain some of the issues that I witnessed at school. It may explain, in part, why some children feel inhibited by their experiences of schooling and impact on their long-term educational attainment.

**7 Ethical**

Ethical approval was obtained for this research from the University’s Ethics Committee under the number 008133.

Since first thinking about why I felt so uneasy about the experiences of being in the school, I first discussed and gain ethical approval from the Executive head teacher and subsequently, with his deputy, the de facto head teacher of the school. Both agreed that I could gather data from the school and were wholly supportive throughout the data collection period.

* Relational ethics

I want to attend to the importance of relational ethics in my thesis. Sikes explains relational ethics as a means of, acknowledging, “inter-personal relationships, connectedness, and a responsibility to care for each other” (Sikes, 2013, p.60). Ellis makes the point that relational ethics are paramount for the autoethnographer. She suggests that autoethnographers consider “relational concerns as a crucial dimension of inquiry” (Ellis et al, 2011, p.281). Noting that in “using personal experience, autoethnographers not only implicate themselves with their work, but also close, intimate others” (Ellis et al, 2011, p.281) suggesting that autoethnographers “often maintain and value interpersonal ties with their participant, thus making relational ethics more complicated” noting that “participants often become friends” (Ibid, p.281). This almost certainly is why I chose deliberately to use reflexive autoethnography. Furthermore, I have always sought to be honest about my time in the school, the limitations of the job, and my inadequacies in the role. This means that when I thought about what it might mean to be the person who delivers the assembly, I recognised that I only ever took part in delivering two assemblies and they are really difficult to do. You are at the front, subject to public scrutiny, and the performative ‘act’ isn’t easy. No one taught me how to deliver assemblies when I trained as a teacher. In my thesis, I recognise that I have professional duties as a teacher and I played a part in the construction of these assemblies. I felt that I needed to change my research method from ethnography to autoethnography to limit the exposure I placed onto my friends and colleagues.

Professionally, I was never to attain the heights of being in the Senior Leadership Team, or a Head, although I have great respect for the role and its office. I have paid particular attention to analysing my experiences openly and critically, but I write cautiously and have tried to be non–judgemental in my writing of others.

* Exiting ethics (leaving the scene and sharing the research)

I took steps to reduce the likelihood of any personal identifiers, either for staff or students, by reflecting more on the transformative effect that this experience had on me. Although I undertook general class discussions with my form afterwards about their enjoyment or otherwise of assemblies and teased out their thoughts, I deliberately chose not to interview children nor individual members of staff. Ellis suggests that “relational ethics requires researchers to act from our hearts and minds, to acknowledge our binds to others and initiate and maintain conversations (Bergen; 1998, Slattery & Rapp; 2003).” (Ellis, 2007, reproduced in Sikes, 2013, p.14)

**8 Meaningful coherence**

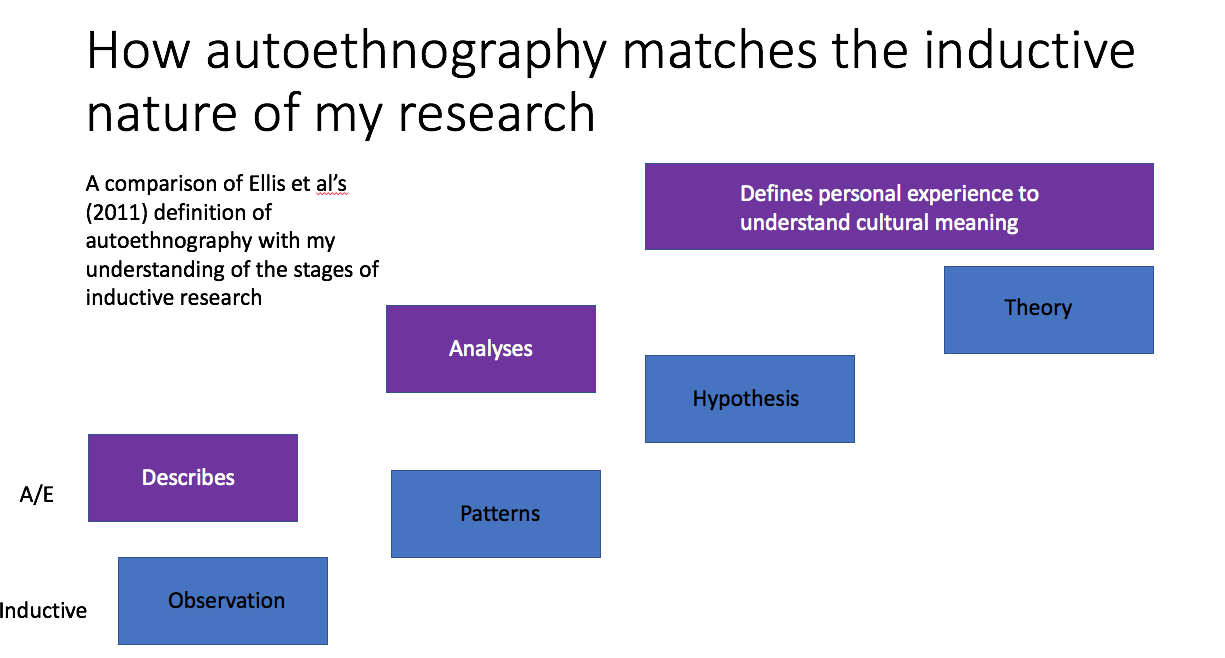
In the next chapter, I set out a selection of stories. These are not, as it turns out, just about the school assembly, but they do have a degree of verisimilitude and a selection of my data that I subsequently analyse in Chapter 5.

My challenge has been to curate these in an order, either sequentially or chronologically. In fact, I chose to order them organisationally and topically following Chang’s approach. The datasets that I used more or less selected themselves. They flowed most easily from my fingertips and I felt compelled to include them partly because of that. I tried to write about the stories that were the most interesting to me, and which offered coherence to help me theorise about my time at the school. Some seemed bleak on second reading; to offset this I provide an account in Appendix 4.4 of some more joyous and positive assemblies in the interests of balance.

### From research question to autoethnographic account:

I was searching for an appropriate method that would help me to explore my research question. Given my intention to write interpretively, it occurred to me that to write in a “therapeutic and embodied” way (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014) would match the inductive nature of my study. “Autoethnography offers an approach to research and writing that describes and systematically analyses personal experience to understand cultural experience” (Ellis et al, 2011). I see a similarity here with developing inductive research.

Figure 1



### Doing autoethnographic fieldwork in educational settings: some notes on data collection, ordering my fieldwork, and a record of my decision-making

#### How I gathered and organised my data

“For despite the sterility of instruments, we never come innocent to a research task, or a situation of events; rather we situate these events not merely in the institutional meanings which our profession provides, but also constitute them as expressions of ourselves”. (Clough, 2002, p.64)

This section explains how I reached these conclusions and reflects on my processes of data refinement, interpretation and analysis.

As I alluded to in Chapter 1, one of the transformative moments that shaped the development of my thesis was the discovery of Clifford Geertz’s collection of essays, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, published in 1973. This now classic anthropological text, particularly Ch. 1, “Thick description; toward an interpretive theory of culture”, has helped me to engender a transition in my research from observation to analysis. When I read his account, I realised the value of what I had even if I knew that I had to go back over them and reorganise them in a much more logical way rather than relying on simple observation. I had been loosely aware of Geertz’s contribution from prior study and my previous teaching, but I hadn’t read his essays, nor had I properly made the connection between interpretation and analysis.

In this book he offers a central argument that transformed my thinking, arguing that “culture is public because meaning is public” (Geertz, 1973, p.12). He illustrates his point with a simple explanation with two boys, each of whom make a movement of their eyes in unison. He asks, “was it a twitch of the eye, or a wink?” (Geertz, 1973, p.12). Did one of them make an involuntary twitch, whilst the other a more, conspiratorial perhaps, knowing wink? Could it be that this second child, seeing the involuntary twitch of the other boy’s eye, exaggerates his wink for comedic effect, at the other’s discomfort, possibly as a form of intimidation? Perhaps to another group of children, already frightened by the bullying behaviours of this second child, the exaggerated wink is a signal to them to beware. Or perhaps this sly wink actually serves to isolate him within the group?

Whilst I have done no justice to Geertz’s analysis, I recollect this point only to illustrate its resonance for me when trying to think about what I thought I experienced and what it might have meant. He writes, “to become aware of it is to realize that the line between mode of representation and substantive content is as undrawable in cultural analysis as it is in painting; and that fact in turn seems to threaten the objective status of anthropological knowledge by suggesting that its source is not social reality but scholarly artifice.” (1973, p.16).

**Clough’s schema for recording narrative**

I made some pragmatic decisions about which approaches were best suited to recording my data. Here I discuss the relative merits of two contrasting approaches and my decision to explain the school’s culture and my role within it.

In a messy compromise between these two not wholly dissimilar methodological approaches, I tried to use the best of both. I interpret my fieldwork notes in a way that I think assumes Chang’s more social scientific thinking together with Clough’s narrative approach. I am not wholly convinced that I did either justice nor perhaps that either approaches suit an autoethnographic, psychoanalytical thesis, but I had to make a pragmatic decision.

In *Narrative and Fictions in Educational Research* (2002) Peter Clough presents a helpful table to label his data. I thought that this would be the solution to my own problems of capturing my scribbled field notes before analysing them. In combining life stories and narrative accounts with pupils and parents, he sets out a “schematization of his data sources” (Clough, 2002, p.71) and this approach to holding material thematically makes sense to me. I tried to gather my data similarly, copying his table and his key words/codes, but I couldn’t quite make his schema fit. His approach made sense to me when manipulating data from my stories, but unlike Clough, I wasn’t trying to capture fictional plot devices, or characterisation. I wasn’t convinced that this matched the autoethnographic essence of my experiences in the assembly hall. Nevertheless, I recognise that my records are of a similar narrative structure and I have used some of his terms in recording my data/method, such as recording “personal experience/ memory/ imagination” (Clough, 2002, p.72).

Moreover, when analysing his stories of being a teacher he concerns himself with what I see as a creative dilemma, or tension between subjective meaning, phenomenological research and social context. I was inspired by Clough’s work on first reading, and he gave me much to meditate over,

“’For educational practices’ are pre-eminently worlds of paid-up meanings – as it were – and attributions; in experience they issue from and are set about with meanings which are always ready-to-hand. And as researchers of educational practices, we ourselves give shape, weight and identity to these meanings: we do not come innocent to a task or situation of events; rather, we wilfully situate those events not merely in the institutional meanings which our profession provides but also, and in the same moment, we constitute them as expressions of ourselves.” (2002, p.84)

In my data collection techniques, I have been mindful of Clough’s adage that, “I am telling my versions of stories which I have created as a result of *my own* interactions and intuition, remembering Richardson’s warning that ‘desires to speak for others are suspect (1994: 523)’” (Clough, 2002, p.9). I thought that I would keep these warnings fixed in my mind throughout before I turned back to Chang’s 10 strategies for autoethnographic evaluation.

## Specific processes and procedures:

Having researched some different methodologies, I settled on Chang’s approach. In the next section, I explain how I followed her methods and applied her 10-point strategy to my datasets. This is how I made sense of all those fragments of observations and memories.

### Data Collection

#### On making some key decisions

What to include and what to exclude? At first, I recorded a number of incidents, stories and memories from my role as a form tutor. These included some of the mundane, and some of the more memorable occasions, like the time when a senior member of the pastoral staff suddenly burst into my form room, almost as if to catch me and the children out. And did. Which just served to make me feel more like the object of an organisational culture of secret surveillance. I was once ‘caught’ allowing my group to use their mobile phones, which caused an almighty uproar. My thinking at the time was that an amnesty might be the more sensible solution given that the children were all secretly looking at their phones when my back was turned and I felt like I was fighting a losing battle. If I could contain it within form time, I thought, they might get their addiction to checking their phones out of their systems before Period 1. Needless to say, this thinking wasn’t well received.

The data that I used to create my stories was influenced by a series of assemblies over a period of time that reflected key moments, not necessarily within my chosen timeframe. That is partly because to capture the culture of the school, I started to think about recording the more ‘typical’ assemblies, such as the harvest festival, fireworks safety assembly, the November Commemorative assemblies, and at one point considered recording a year in the life of the school through assemblies.

I also started to think that perhaps these were not necessarily the most fascinating aspect of my research. Eventually with my supervisor’s help, I settled on five stories from 18 different episodes, primarily of being in assembly. The principal difficulty that I had, and that I didn’t plan for effectively, was in selecting a manageable and coherent set of data. I simply had far more than I imagined I would at the beginning. Even with his help, I had to make a pragmatic decision in the end to focus on one aspect of the role and record my experiences in the assemblies.

### Organising my data

I used a form of ‘funnelling’ as a method to organise my fieldwork notes and diary. I started with a ‘messy’ pile of PowerPoint slides, random fieldwork notes, and ad-hoc comments from my diary, which I then tried to narrow down into more manageable groupings of data.I started to organise data initially by topic or themes. Delamont debates the merits of organising data either by broad topics, which I tried at first, or by “preserving the temporal structure of the data” (2016, p.134). Initially, I tried to organise in broad categories, but I didn’t think that this did justice to the episodic nature of the assemblies. I could see broad themes emerging over time, hence my use of social defences theory, but settled eventually on trying to describe the evolution of my ideas by topic and then chronologically. The sequence of my data mirrors the evolution of my ideas as mapped against my interpretation of social defences theory in Figure 5.1 in Chapter 5.

I was only actively involved in two or three assemblies during my employment at the school and omitted to use these in my final decision–making process, partly because too many other staff and children were involved and partly because I think it might have identified the school. Ultimately, I have had to make some difficult decisions and jettison some good data. I regret that the choices I made seem overly negative and left negative memories, given that there were many more traditional assemblies where my colleagues instilled a positive outcome for the children, either through motivational dialogues, speeches, or by playing You Tube clips (the Derek Redmond assembly had me in tears every time, see Appendix 4.4) I found this aspect of my research very frustrating.

### Labelling

Chang identifies a “primary organizational label” and a “secondary topical label” (2008, p.116). The primary label captures the basic demographics: date / time, place, who collected the data, how, and the data source, whereas the secondary label refers to the contextual information relating to the content of the data. In this case, this refers to who the main actors were, what the data was about, and the geography of the data (Chang, 2002, p.116). This was more relevant to Chang’s studies than mine, although I have sought to make the distinction between the labels clear, particularly in my ‘case material’ when entering the assembly hall. I also admire the simplicity of her approach for using the ‘4-ws’ – (who, what, when and where), in both categories.

The key points that I used to shape my analysis included thinking about the value of the ‘when’, which enables the researcher to relay when they collect data about their thoughts and behaviours. Chang points out how important this is in terms of capturing memory data. This is important for understanding when an event occurred and when it was interpreted (Chang, 2008, p.117).

The 'who' is most useful in the secondary tool kit as “a database for the next stage of the data analysis and interpretation in which you explore the connectivity between self and others”. The ‘who’ I found to be useful for recording the authors of different documents, in my case some of the presentation material and copies of the PowerPoint slide shows I obtained with permission from the school. In fact I have not now used this as they were too difficult to anonymise.

I used the same label terms as Chang (2008, p.117) which include:

* Self-recollection (SR)
* Self-observation (SO)

### Chang’s 10-point strategy for analysing and interpreting data

The aim of this section outlines Chang’s approach, which influenced how I came to analyse my stories in Chapter 5. She describes this process as a means to “look for cultural themes with which to organize” (Chang, 2008, p.126)

“You are expected to review, fracture, categorize, rearrange, probe, select, deselect, and sometimes simply gaze at collected data in order to comprehend how ideas, behaviours, material objects, and experiences from the data interrelate and what they really mean to actors and their environments.” (Chang, 2008, p.127)

I found her suggestion that you keep “memos”, and search for “repeated topics, emerging themes, salient patterns, and mini and grand categories” (Chang, 2008, p.131), the most useful process with which to engender meaning. Categorising my data using these four themes was a pivotal moment for me because for the first time, I was truly in a position to start to determine some meanings. Prior to that, I had a broad outline of what the data looked like (which can be seen in Appendix 4.2 - Analysis and interpretation) where I had examined forensically each line of my stories. I applied line numbering in MS Word to the stories and then scrutinised each line, turning them over and over in my head, looking for recurring topics, themes, and categories. The process was absorbing although time consuming. All the while I was searching for themes and patterns, which eventually began to crystallise via Chang’s recurring themes. It was strange, at first; I wasn’t sure if I could ascertain anything from the data and at times found the process quite frustrating, but something must have stuck because by following her methods, repeatedly questioning meaning, drilling down into the data, and in my case writing copious Post-it notes, which I spread across my desk, ‘clumping’ them together in broad categories, teasing out similarities and differences. Appendix 4.2 details a sample of this line by line analysis.

Whilst I decided not to include the originals in the Appendices that accompany this chapter, frustratingly, because they would identify the school. I then tried however to categorise a series of ‘grand’ and ‘mini’ categories (see Appendix 4.3 on the data management process). I recorded the outcomes of the process here, which I describe below.

Here, I describe each of her strategies briefly to give an indication of the approach that influenced my thinking and how I started to organise my data. I want to demonstrate how I developed my ideas from Bazeley’s methods and my initial starting point, to show how I started to organise my data more systematically. Here, with my interpretation underneath each one of her points. She suggests:

1. “Search for recurring topics”

See Appendix 4.2 on the data management process for a list of recurring topics that I sought to categorise.

2 “Look for cultural themes”

I have included Story 2 and the first part of Story 3 because they offer insight into the wider culture of the school.

3. “Identify exceptional occurrences”

I allowed myself some creative freedom by selecting the data that ‘leapt off the page’, was interesting or unusual and that had a lasting affect (this dilemma is well explored by Delamont, who suggests writing about whatever has captured the researcher’s imagination 2016, pp. 102; see my decision-making tree below). The pity of doing that, and the disservice that I did to my many esteemed colleagues and the children, is that I tended to remember the assemblies that were unsettling. Those which challenged my sense of self and/or my professional competency, and/ or where the ‘tone’ of the assembly seemed particularly brutal on the children, or which seemed harrowing if not distressing, tended to make their mark on me emotionally. They were also more of note for being ‘cringeworthy’ and bringing negative experiences.

4. “Analyse inclusion and omission”

In a sense this is the hardest aspect of my analysis. Given the amount of data that I collected unknowingly, this became a real challenge. The key omission was in excluding the more positive assemblies and the more mundane information exchange-focused assemblies. I also omitted to include some of the more unpleasant data, for example where I overheard a colleague speak to a child aggressively and which I felt was an unjust or unfair presentation of that member of staff or their true intentions or of the school in general.

5. “Connect the present with the past”

Being immersed within the assembly presented me with a sense of the head’s vision. I often thought of this as if through the eyes of one of the children. Many of my reflections in Chapter 5, my introductory monologue, and my stories in Chapter 4 became confused with my emotions and childhood memories. I have tried to identify this as a learning point in Appendix 1.1 (the author as source material).

6. “Analyse relationships between self and others”

I develop this more fully in Chapter 5.

7. “Compare yourself with other people’s cases”

I think that this is a limitation of Chang’s theory, insomuch that I may be hoisted by my own petard when trying to do this convincingly while writing autoethnographically. Nonetheless, I do draw some tentative observations and conclusion in Stories 2, 4, and 5.

8. “Contextualise broadly”

I have sought to do this by offering an introductory monologue, which I hope sets the scene. I have then followed this up with a brief account of other assemblies, which depicts the culture of the school more favourably. It is important to me to recognise the joy, the fun and the humour in my interactions with children and colleagues, as well as the frustrations and challenges.

9. “Compare with social science constructs”

This is another one of the limitations of my decision to apply this approach. Here, I find myself more aligned with Clough’s position as outlined above.

10. “Frame with theories”.

When I started my analysis and I began to frame all my observations through systems psychodynamic theory, I started to see a number of trends in the data, from which (as I have discussed throughout this section), it became possible to determine a number of recurring themes based around a number of defensive themes which I address in Chapter 5. (Chang, 2008, pp. 131-137)

What I regret most is having to choose at all, partly because of the demands of the word count and because my memory falters and my description is open to challenge. The veracity of my writing is open to debate and my account rests only on my voice, which risks presenting a one-dimensional perspective of the school. In this, I can empathise with the critics of autoethnography as a method (Delamont, 2016; Wellington, 2015). I therefore offer my stories in Chapter 4 mindful that interpretation rests ultimately with the reader.

To recap, in terms of process, I started with a loose collection, fragments of data, and observations, which I wrote into my stories. I then considered a number of alternative approaches before settling on Chang’s 10-point strategy. This was a crucial moment in the evolution of my analysis – I analysed my data line-by-line (see Appendix 4.2) before categorising these emerging themes and recurring patterns into overarching categories, laid out in the table in Appendix 4.3.

## Section 5: Speaking for myself

“…writing about ourselves usually implicates other people because there is very little that we do in total isolation” (Sikes, P., 2013, p.59).

Boylorn and Orbe (citing Madison, 2012) note that “critical autoethnographers are invested in the politics of positionality” (Boylorn and Orbe, 2014, p.15). They suggest that this method provides the opportunity to explain the intersection of cultural and personal “standpoints”, (ibid, p.15) with a sense of improving “our shared knowledge and interconnectedness of the human experience”. (Ibid p.15) They continue with their opinion that autoethnography stands out from other research tools for its ability to challenge social injustice, but also for the profound sense of researchers taking responsibility for what they refer to as “our subjective lenses through reflexivity. We write as an Other, and for an Other.” (Boylorn and Orbe, 2014, p.15)

The first paper that I referred to by Carolyn Ellis seems to be a useful starting place for the teacher/student researcher in understanding not just how my record of sitting in school assembly fits in a technical methodological sense, but crucially in lending shape to how sitting in the assembly made me feel, made me relate to my students and colleagues, and make sense of that particular process of acculturation. Perhaps autoethnography opens up the means of locating how it makes me feel as a responsible adult in that space and why I felt compelled to join in with a culture I felt to be innately unbearable.

I would never pretend to be a professional autoethnographer. I can relate, however, to a method that enables me to observe, reflect, process, and to recount autobiographical stories and in this sense, I feel that this approach is useful. That is not to say that I am not cognisant of some of the limitations of using this approach. Sikes describes this as “I will now move on to reflect on worries around narrative representation that I have experienced having written it, under the headings of: Creating a sense of ‘feel’ and ‘place’, ‘Othering’, First encounters, and ‘My place in all this.” (2010, p.10). This feels slightly limiting but I am also aware that my approach is similar.

Given that I wish to use autoethnographic techniques as a means of making sense of my experiences and perhaps to cast some light on the culture of the school at the time, I have sought to keep Sikes’s words in mind throughout. I can’t guarantee that I have always done this correctly but I have tried to be mindful of my responsibilities to others implicated in my study. Part of my response to Sikes’s concerns are that like so much of her writing, I have sought to write with candour; to write vividly and to allow others to find my stories accessible and engaging, or at least I hope they will. I share many of her concerns, however. I have alluded to my worry that what I have written only warrants my own reflections, but I note that observation and stories are valid and relevant in setting context. They suggest that it is acceptable to write autobiographically and to write in their words in a “political, socially just and socially-conscious” (Ellis et al. 2011, p.273) way.

In this section I aim to accomplish two things. Firstly, I pay particular attention to the importance of relational ethics, something which I’m not sure I understood until I started and need to reflect on further still. Secondly, I attempt to demonstrate a framework by which my findings might be considered. I have tried to be mindful about “how the stories that come from us …impact on the people and the institutions they are about" (Sikes 2010, p.14). I recognise that there are limitations to the ethical position that I have taken. I feel, particularly in Chapter 4 when I came to analyse my data, that several of my colleagues are implicated, and as the University’s ethics advisor pointed out, it would be relatively easy to identify the Head and his colleagues given his role in setting the general tone and culture of the school in question (see the University Ethics Approval form in the Appendices that accompany this chapter). What also concerned me was a doubt that I had enough data with which to infer cultural meaning. Are my feelings worth reporting, why didn’t I pay more attention to them at the time, did they have any value to me as teacher, a student-researcher, and to others?

### Chapter conclusion

I conclude this chapter by reflecting on the suitability of autoethnography as a method for my thesis. Before I started, I shared some of the concerns expressed about the methodology, for example that the data is ungeneralizable and cannot easily be reproduced. Its strengths, in terms of drawing on stories and memory, add creative expression and resonance to others, but perhaps this subjectivity could also be classed as a weakness. Nonetheless, three important epiphanies occurred during the evolution of my research design. The first is that I have learnt more about the importance of process. Autoethnography enabled me to record feelings rigorously, enabling systematic analysis. It lends itself well to interpretation. The qualitative rigour demanded by Tracey helped me to contain my ethical worries. I care very much about the school, the staff, and the children most of all. I have no interest in causing them harm. I see the value of my research as in explaining and hopefully in improving practice, perhaps through CPD and training. All the events that unfold in Chapter 4 actually happened and I was there as participant and observed as an actor. These events happened to me and this is my best attempt to reflect those ideas in the way that I understood them at the time.

Secondly, the space and the time in which they happened are also important. I have tried my best to write ‘thickly’ and to describe the colours, sounds and contours of being in that space at that time, with the hope that they might also resonate with others. Critically, my final observation (and one I discussed in detail with my supervisor in tutorial) is in recognising the synergy between autoethnography and psychoanalysis to theorise about my experiences. I can bridge the gap between adding insight from the individual more broadly to explain cultural, organisational phenomena. To add meaning. Both positions are acceptable.

Figure 2



I see the combination of these three conditions as essential in helping me to formulate my short stories and in the development of my model as outlined in Chapter 5.

This is my story.

# Chapter 4 “Isn’t that right, Mr. Coombs?”

## Storying my experiences

I present the following stories as my account of working as a form tutor in the school. They are quite difficult for me to read. I feel quite exposed. My stories are emotive, raw, humorous, but at times I feel I come across as bitter, gossipy, maybe unprofessional. Occasionally compassionate. Human. They describe me at my most conflicted; at my most uncomfortable.

As with my opening vignette, these stories represent a series of internal monologues, in some places with comments recorded as they were spoken, as accurately as possible but anonymised to avoid breaching the confidence of those present. All names are fictionalised. The events are real.

They mean so much more to me than I ever thought possible. I try to explain why in Chapter 5.

## Story 1: Reflections on taking the register before entering the hall

*As usual, I hear them, long before I see them all lining up along an upper landing. The chrome and plate glass walkway is reminiscent of a large, corporate, city finance building. I am reminded of those images of stock market traders jostling and pushing past one another to make a sale. The difference between the two might only be the noise. Not that I think they are making that much noise but it seems louder than it is because the acoustics are terrible. It is such an enclosed, cramped space. Strange, broken sounds seem to bounce off the walls and ceiling. Groups of children congregate, lining up, form by form, along this irregular, triangular-shaped landing. Some wait patiently, most whisper excitedly to their friends. The dimly lit waiting area before the entrance to the hall is marked by even more lines of children in their grey-blue blazers, shouting, giggling anxiously, whispering loudly. Blending into a hushed cacophony. A whispered noise that almost deafens.*

*I smile at a few* *of the* *children, acknowledge a fleeting nod from a colleague who hurries past. I always seem late. This bothers me, I always feel like the senior staff are looking at me, Bob offers his customary, condescending,* “Moooorning Mr Coombs” *elongating and emphasizing the middle vowels, his voice dripping with a* “late again Sir?” *sneer. Always a sniffy comment made in front of my form. He makes me feel small; puny, putting me in my place.*

*Late again. I’m not late but once, in the past, I remember being held up in C1, my staff room, dealing with some issue, and one of his colleagues had to take the register in my absence, by the time I arrived she was pecking away at the kids in my form, impatient and cross with them. Cross with me. Cross because my children weren’t lined up alphabetically in order so that it was easier for whomever it was who covered for me that morning. A fair point, but in fact, no one had ever told me that’s what they did. Learning by default again. C1 was as far away from the hall as it was possible to be, three flights of stairs.*

“Morning Sir”, *I try to say as brightly as I can. Indicating that I’m in on the running joke. I hate it.*

*Most of the kids are totally disinterested, heads down, turned away. My form group is always lined up tightly against the Head’s office, right in front of the polished pine wood fronted window. I can’t quite put my finger on why this is, but there is something about this which unnerves me. The blinds are usually half drawn, nevertheless it always feels very public; that I am facing their window whilst I’m faffing about trying to take the register. There is something of a cheap, 1980s TV cop show that makes me think of a secret one-way mirror that they’re all hiding behind.*

*More hushed greetings to others, busy shushing the children. I’m beginning to think that their ‘shushes’ and barked orders to* “Be quiet, Year 7” *are louder than the noises that the children are making.*

“Morning Sir”,

“Morning Miss” *I nod hopefully in the direction of the deputy Head. I turn and see Bob distributing paper registers self-importantly to my colleagues.*

“Morning Mr Coombs” *he says it again but more politely this time, just because she’s standing by his side. (still, not Sir, though I noticed from Bob, the fussy old woodpecker, he’s like Professor Yaffle from Bagpuss).*

*Friendly or unfriendly? I’m not sure I care anymore.*

*The Sir/ Miss thing always seems to hide something, our true feelings. It’s anachronistic, but very easy to fall into. Useful for me though when I forget their names. I never really understand why there has to be this concerted, almost exhausting, effort to make a load of children be quiet before they enter the assembly hall. The kids are 11. They’re going to make some noise. Why wouldn’t they? They’re stood close enough to one another, they can see their friends in other forms. It’s quite exciting, nervous. I suppose I am too, weirdly.*

*Instead of lining them up outside, we’ve brought them in from the yard. It’s a bit nicer for them, but inevitably becomes an extension of their morning play. I don’t want them making so much noise that I can’t hear myself think, but in a low-ceilinged entrance room with over 250 kids, it’s a bit of a losing fight; what were they thinking? I think the senior leaders and the Head fantasize that they’ re in a prep school with the boys all silently waiting respectfully. Our kids go to one of the toughest secondaries in the city. Still, when they’re 11 you can shout at them and get away with it.*

*Bob thrusts my register at me. In my form room we complete them on SIMs. Here, it’s on paper. It could be parchment. Momentary panic, do I have a pen? Phew, a cheap office biro, it’s in the wrong colour but it’ll have to do. There is never anything for me to rest my pen against. I can’t lean on the Head’s office wall to make the diagonal mark next to their names so I fudge it, and tick their names off, one by one, whilst resting it on the palm of my hand. The pen makes a cheap, scratchy mark.*

*I like the kids in my form. They’ re a bit bonkers. Some are still a bit shy. I know who they sit with. I know their friendship groups, I tend to know who’s in, and who’s out. I’m really fond of them generally; yeah Bradley drives me mad, and maybe he scares me a little.* *The, ever so street, “handbag girls” are always fun, and usually seem pleased to see me, I’m not sexy Simon, the NQT, but I’m the next best thing. They’re bunched together, one of them eagerly bouncing around, like a puppy, gossipy but harmless; the two more serious, ever so bright, and well-behaved girls lag behind. The American girl, hair in French plaits, reserved, always presentable, poor kid having to come here, she’s done amazingly well to fit in. Then Danielle with her two friends, always jabbering, but fun and sweet. Then the more sensible lads, Kemal joins us, pushes in at the last minute, a rabbit trapped in the headlights; Henry and his pals, polite but a bit highly strung; then little Terence, our autistic lad, cheerful, tidy, always in the right place. I take my mark from him, but I’ve long since given up trying to organise them into alphabetical order.* *Too hard this early in the morning. Besides, I’m not entirely certain that I even know their second names.*

*They shuffle off, snaking around the corner, ignoring the senior staff trying to come out of their office door, good for you, I think, before I feel compelled to stop the line in order to let Brian out,* “Thank you, Mr Coombs!”, *I feel like an insufferable suck up.* “Press up tightly against the wall Y7”. *They are not allowed to walk normally. I’m still trying to take their names. I know their names but I still have to call them out in a pretence like the assistant Head. A hurried glance over towards Miss P, the English teacher who always seems to smile encouragingly to me. I’m sure she gets it. Her kids always seem well ordered and seem to know what it is that they’re supposed to be doing. I’m not quite so sure the same can be said for mine.*

*One in, one out.*

*Eventually, turning past the corner into the entrance we file past the deputy Head, a man, taller than me, massive. Another one of the assistant Heads, both big, be-suited men perform a final uniform inspection,* “straighten that tie, where’s your blazer?” silence, *more barked orders*. Silence. *They seem to scream. More*, “Morning Sir(s)” *and we’re in the hall. Temporary respite. I’m in, I always feel like I’ve snuck into a night club,* “how old are you?” *18*, “yeah right, when was your birthday?”. *We inch our way into the cavernous white washed assembly hall, move around to the stacked seating, past more senior staff quietening the children down. Scrutinising them; scrutinising me more like. Purpose built, wooden floors that seem to amplify every step that the heels of my shoes make. I tried to walk on them lightly to lessen the clanking sound, as I get closer to the corner where we turn to ascend into our seats, I lift the heels of my shoes off the floor, teetering past the Head on the balls of my feet. Hard to imagine what I must look like.*

The assembly hall is vast. A big, raised stage at the front, heavy black drapes, you can see the wings at the side of the stage; the baby grand piano pushed to the side with its cover on.

*I’ve only ever seen it played once.*

*I ascend the stairs with my form, you can see the look of horror on the face of the unlucky kid that I choose to sit next to, wishing I’d have sat somewhere, anywhere, else.*

*I’m still trying to check that I’ve counted everyone in. Someone’s missing, who’s missing?* *I recheck, craning my neck along the line. I know there’s a late - poor kid, he’ll be sitting at the front on his own, ushered in impatiently, and glared at. It’s too late for him now …*

An impatient “Morning Y7”, a mumbled “morning Sir” back, “sit up straight Year 7”, “backs straight please Y7”, now let’s do that again. “Good Morning Year 7 …”

## Story 2: The Christmas Jumper emails

*A suppressed snort from Ms. H usually implied something good was coming. Sitting behind me in our cramped, L-shaped, staff room it was not always possible to determine what was coming, but whatever it was, she was always on it first. She reminded me of the character Radar, in the US sitcom MASH, she could always hear the helicopters before they appeared, and typically on this occasion she was ahead of us.* “What is it now, Miss”?

*“Coombs”, in our office we always called each other by our surnames even when there were no kids present (this always seemed unremarked on), “have you seen the email from Brian?”*

*Earlier that day, I had interrupted my colleagues discussing whether or not the children, and the staff, would be allowed to wear our Christmas jumpers on the last day of term before Christmas. This had been banned by one of the many previous head teachers before I started working there. The children’s behaviour had been so appalling, in the past, that we now operated a strict uniform policy and any infringement from this strict rule risked taking a backwards step in regaining discipline over the children and jeopardising what small improvements in discipline that had been gained. There was to be no let up. The fight to impose order and to attain high standards meant strict adherence to uniform.* *Seemed a bit tough but I wasn’t there then and I had heard the rumours. Fair enough.*

Subsequently, this was the only school I had worked in which made staff attend INSET days in full business suits. The school, like most, had a dress code for staff which largely meant dressing like your dad, or in this case, Brian. It was observed by most staff, more or less, it certainly wasn’t worth the effort not to appear in a suit.

This Christmas, however, was slightly different. There had been a marked improvement in behaviour. There had been some speculation that this year, we might be allowed a dress down day for Christmas. The school was in the 4th year of the latest Head’s regime, the children he started with had moved up the school year and were now in Y10, things felt slightly safer, less chaotic, we, *I*, felt slightly less vulnerable walking down the corridors. Most schools in the area did something similar, and we were being led by a new deputy Head. Less austere perhaps than the Head, he always seemed approachable to me, friendly even, by comparison. *(I liked him very much, in fact, he was a sporty ‘bloke’, liked football, and generally was good for some well-judged banter).* Miss H., like the others, thought he might relent on the Christmas jumper issue. I was never able to ascertain where this initiative had come from, but someone, perhaps in our staff meeting, had tentatively raised the subject. It might have been Miss H. as she, like many of us, felt that the kids should be allowed some sort of ‘wind – down’ event to mark the gradual improvement in behaviour across the school.

There was no doubt in my mind that the SLT would sanction the wearing of Christmas jumpers for staff and students and it would be a massive shot in the arm, a boost for morale. A calm, safe, activity that, staff and students, could all share. It seemed such a none event, that it didn’t even occur to me that they would do anything other than agree that we could wear Christmas jumpers. *Who would mind?*

And then I started to read the first of Brian’s emails.

An email was circulated to all staff to advise us of the procedure for the end of term. This included all the usual procedural stuff, finishing slightly earlier on the Friday, children would be escorted off the premises in an orderly fashion, by 2 o’ clock latest, all staff were asked to come and wish the children well for Christmas. All class teachers would bring their children down, early and in order. There would not, however, be any wearing of Christmas jumpers. The school imposed a strict uniform policy and this would be maintained. Lots more detail about gates, bells, locking up, and school Christmas lunches. The usual end of term stuff.

At 11.00 on the same morning another email pinged through to advise us all that, on reflection, there would now be the opportunity for students to wear a Christmas jumper to school on the Friday before we broke up. Teaching staff however were NOT permitted to wear a jumper but must come in dressed in their usual attire. Approximately 10 minutes later, a third email appeared, this time to correct the previous email. This was sent as a reminder to all staff that students could wear their Christmas jumper but that they must do this over their school blouse/shirt but only with their school blazer on top over the offending jumper. A diagram of the school’s dress code for the children was attached, as a reminder, to all form tutors.

The pressure on the back of our throats and nostrils by this point was starting to become slightly unbearable; there were riotous giggles spreading from all corners of the staff room now with exasperated sighs and shakes of the head from those veterans who’d seen it all before.

Just at the moment when we thought that the situation couldn’t spiral into the realms of farce any further, a final email was dispatched from the estates team. This was for clarification. It stated that staff would also now be permitted to wear a Christmas jumper should they wish to pay £1. This must however be worn over our shirt and tie or “ladies” blouse, and under our suit jackets as well. Staff were reminded of their responsibilities at all times to obey the dress code and that all Christmas jumpers must be worn with appropriate trousers and/or skirt.

*Some of my female colleagues threatened conspiratorially to come in wearing only their Christmas jumpers.* *Cue an uncontrollable break down of bodily functions. People were corpsing, laughing out loud with laughter, sniggering violently, and spluttering.*

In the end, the event passed off remarkably smoothly. We sang Christmas carols, and some staff danced as the children filed out between two rows of teaching staff. It was of course quite lovely. In assembly, on that final Friday before we broke up, the Senior Leaders were all present wearing their Christmas jumpers, without, their suit jackets, except for Bob. *Which didn’t surprise any of us, me, the other staff or the kids.*

Those children that could paid their pound and looked like normal kids at school for the first time. *They seemed happy and relaxed.* There weren’t any incidents of bullying relating to the wearing of Christmas jumpers. Thankfully, all of my colleagues remembered to wear their skirts.

## Story 3: The misname to induce ‘shame’ assembly

“Yeah, he might be big, but he still likes sausage”,

*His nasty, provocative words were whispered just loudly enough so that I could hear and followed by sniggers as the three of them came through the heavy, mag-lock doors along the top corridor. I was seething inside, furious with the children. I had come to expect the immaturity but I was spitting mad at their sneakiness, the cleverness, of their challenge. It was the risible contempt behind their words, so commonplace in the school, that really wound me up.*

*Mocking and defiant.*

*Daring me to respond.*

*I was only leaving the office, walking along the corridor past the SEN classrooms. I don’t think I was even going anywhere in particular, but now I didn’t know what to do. At once, humiliated, angry and hurt. A simple routine made into an event. These kids were in Y11, they were leaving shortly, and the ringleader had a reputation, self-styled, as the hardest (the coolest?) kid in the school. He was grandstanding, showing off and I was simple, easy fodder. Two-thirds my size, my desire was to teach him a proper lesson. Or to cry? I felt flushed, foolish. Isolated and clumsy.*

*I don’t even know him, don’t teach him and he knows nothing about me*. *He isn’t remotely interested. Couldn’t care less. It’s in the moment.*

*I have no response, and he’s won. But he knew that beforehand. What am I going to do, shout at him? Plead with him? Ingratiate myself with him? Do I sidle up to him and pretend I’m big enough to let him mock me? End him? I want to take him out. I can’t. As soon as I look at him, close in on him, his friends are by his side and protective; what am I going to do, send all three to G35? I can’t rely on anyone to support me. He isn’t bothered, he isn’t even thinking, he doesn’t need to, it’s the culture of the school. I’m just sport.*

Hyper-vigilant kids; alert to everything.

*Or am I cross really because I want him to see me as one of the good guys, one of the cleverer, smarter new members of staff. “hey guys, come on, I get, I’m with you…I’m in on the deceit, guys”. Pathetic. I hate myself for feeling proud that he knows I’m bigger. I’ve been working out. Working at the school makes you feel that you need to bulk out.*

*The culture shock isn’t working. Even the little ones in lower school are up on their toes. They sometimes remind me of boxers pacing the ring, twitchy, fast muscle tissue. A colleague once described them as meerkats, going about their business but always on watch. Alert. The school caretakers now locked the external fences and gates, stopped visitors coming into school drop-offs when the children were on break. 300 children, in the canteen, and playground were up on their toes, alive! All the kids were jumpy. It didn’t make me feel safe or less safe, it just reinforced a common viewpoint*. *We were helpless. Exasperated.* *These kids were bad.* *Badly behaved. Feral.* *When I first started there, I bridled every time I heard my senior colleagues who had been there for longer use that word, but they were*. *I was going native. I had become like one of them. One of them. I promised myself that I wouldn’t.*

*The truth was, of course, that the majority of the kids weren’t bad. In fact, they’re no different to any of the kids I’ve seen or taught anywhere else, it’s just that they are always hypervigilant. A former Head and mentor once described his school in East London to me as “volatile”. On edge. The same feels true here, and across all the year groups. Even the youngest children.*

*The hope was that each new year group could begin the journey differently. Be the way we wanted them to be for their sake. When one new student came into the school, our plan was to do everything humanly possible, everything we could to ensure she didn’t go into care like the other four in her family. We really wanted it to be different for her. We have that level of commitment to these kids. It frequently astonished me that some of the roughest kids could be given such care by such a disparate group of staff. Some staff who had been reduced by these kids. Day in and day out. Still, they kept coming back, taking it, made careers out of it. They really cared for the children.*

*You could feel the tiredness.*

*You could sense it.*

*The ‘misname to induce shame’ assemblies came to symbolise that for me.*

*These assemblies were not called ‘name and shame’; that was how I felt and how I came to think of them afterwards*.

We had seen a worrying downturn in this age group’s attendance and behaviour overall around the academy. We needed to do something, to try anything. It was important that the youngest children were drilled in the way we wanted them to behave so that once they began to ascend the year groups, by the time they got to be in Y11, they knew how we wanted them to behave, were polite, tolerant of themselves and one another. So, these children had their usual morning assembly and then, in the afternoon, an additional ‘reminder’ assembly.

I was covering and took my colleague’s class down one Friday afternoon to one of the dance studios because the hall was being used for exams. I looked forward to them at first because double period on a Friday with a cover class, even of Y7s, was hard going. Anything to lessen the load. I remember filing up the stairs with my children onto the second floor and lining them up in absolute silence along the wall of the corridor outside the dance studio until the whole of Y7 joined us. The children were processed, in class order, and made to sit cross-legged onto the floor of the dance studio, in silence, whereby one member of the managers read out a series of instructions, news items, anything not covered in the morning. All staff had previously been urged to write to the managers with items of good and bad news before the assembly.

Children who had achieved something positive were asked to stand whilst their achievements were applauded by all of us, staff and children alike. This always seemed so lovely and I, like the other teachers present, took great pleasure in clapping and praising the children. I was delighted when I saw one of the children that I had been working with, the girl we had all made a vow to help, stand, and very bashfully, receive the applause of her classmates and year group. I remember catching her eye and mock-clapping to signify our knowing, the irony, *I was so pleased with her I could have burst.* And she knew it. She gave a public show of being mortified, but I detected that she was also just as pleased to be standing for getting it right. For once. Brilliant.

After a number of children had taken turns to stand it soon became apparent that it was always the same children. Inevitably our one, incredibly hard-working Chinese lad was left standing, seemingly oblivious to the mood of his peers. He was becoming increasingly less popular the more his unabashed enthusiasm for standing up began to grate on the other kids, and frankly on me. *Alright son, we’re pretending to be at Defcon 4 here, read in between the lines*.

The next moment, the mood soured abruptly. The lead teacher then started to read from another list and told another group of children to stand up whilst their misdemeanours were announced to the rest of us. *I was sitting at the back enjoying the whole affair and caught unaware by the sudden shift in mood, having to change from smiley, happy Sir full of encouragement to cross and mean Sir. I was never very good at this. I crossed my arms and made the effort to look stern, drew a scowl across my face. It’s hard to sustain*. The usual, naughty kids stood up, and smirked at their mates before sullenly skulking off to the front. They were admonished for not quite knowing what they were supposed to do by two of the senior staff. Some tried to look like they enjoyed the ignominy. The insouciant, put upon look, scowling eyes glaring into the middle distance. Actually, they looked wretched. *I felt miserable*. *The tone had turned.*

Inevitably, my utterly lovely, wild-eyed, student arose and made her way to the front. She adopted the same affronted look. She was always going to be in trouble. Once the assembled offenders had been brought to the front, and we had all listened to their crimes, the assembly was brought to a close. The other children filed out in silence whilst the Assistant Head tore strips off them deliberately just loudly enough so that the goodies could see what would befall them if they transgressed the school rules. *Such a shame.*

I remember going to two more of these assemblies before I could face them no longer. I had started to send my positive emails through but in the end couldn’t bring myself to do that anymore either as this rigmarole increasingly left me feeling like one of those tell-tale, know-it-all, school prefects. *Awkward*. It occurred to me afterwards that it wasn’t really the assembly itself, that was always trite, a blunt instrument, but more, it was the rictus grin on the face of one of the members of staff behind the lead teacher that left me feeling increasingly uncomfortable and trapped. *It felt unbearable.*

Thankfully, these assemblies were short-lived. Passed off as a trial. A deliberate, short, sharp shock designed to reassert the way we wanted the children to behave. And a part of me gets it. Something, anything. But I was never sure ...*I thought I had bought in, but I’m just not sure.*

## Story 4: A brief encounter with a maths teacher

*So, I suppose, here's the thing, I wasn't really paying attention. When I say really … I’m not sure I was paying attention at all.*

*So far as I can tell, the children were all where they were supposed to be.*

*Row up on row of them. The usual. Banked seating.*

*Rows of uniforms and bags crammed into those plastic folding seats. They’ve barely changed since I was at school. At least this lot don’t have to sit cross-legged on the floor like we used to do. Rucksacks. Hair in plaits, some with hair pulled back tied up with scrunchies. Lots of blazers. Rows of children wearing school blazers. I always think my lot look quite tidy. Teachers situated at either end. Me, sitting at one end. My lot fill up two rows.*

*Kids. In. Blazers.*

*The hall feels still this morning. The air thin. Warm. A suffocated silence. I know I was drifting off. God knows I've sat through enough of these bloody things.*

*A 6 ft. book end.*

*As usual, I deliberately sit close to Bradley the sociopath. When I say sit, I mean, sit so close to him I can almost count his freckles. I can almost smell him. Which means neither of us are comfortable.*

“Pack it in”.

*My posture, in fact my whole presence is designed to reinforce the rules to him. Although like the rest of them he’s calm this morning. He seems calm today. Small mercy. I’ll take calm.*

*The usual refrain…dull… something about the kids not being good enough. Implication we' re not good enough. The school’s not good enough. We' re in special measures, yah de yah …*

*Drifting off. I can't even pretend my mind's wandering. It's just sitting there ossifying.*

*Mmh*?

“Isn't that right?... **Mr. Coombs**”!!?

“What is”? *startled, I panic momentarily that I might have nodded off.*

“These boys will have to spend Period 2 with me and I can give them an extra detention after my maths class, isn't that right - Mr. Coombs?”

*Her tone insistent.*

“Oh, er, right, yes Miss,” *I concur, vaguely.*

“But I'm not sure they did anything Miss, did they?”

“They kicked my student's chair twice, Sir.”

“Oh”, *drawing a frown across my face.*

*Oh ...*

*I look at Bradley and his mate. Eyes down. Passive. They don’t look at me.*

*Did they?*

*I have a vague memory that she might have turned around midway through the assembly and glared at them, had she?*

*But had they done it? Fidget? … definitely. Kick the back of someone's seat? Yeah, probably, pulled someone’s hair, absolutely. But this morning? Did they…what if they hadn’t kicked her chair? She looks a bit of a goody two shoes to me. One of the girls, a handbag girl, who wears her knock off, oversized Michael Kors in the crook of her arm, like a shotgun - she might just be the kind to drop them in it for no good reason. Just because she can.*

*Time seems to slow. In reality, seconds pass.*

*Peculiarly, neither have the usual expectant air that they are in for it. Their customary he-said-she-said face, their usual art form. And yet, what if, just possibly, they have simply moved their feet, cramped, sandwiched in between their rucksacks and the back of the kid in front’s seat… why am I even giving this a second thought?*

Might it be possible *… I don’t know? I have no idea.*

Oh right, Miss.

“Yes, well … I will see you two at the end of my class, boys.”

*She glares at me.*

*I look at the two of them. They aren't allowed to glare at me but I feel their hostility.*

The assembly ends. “Sorry lads” *I whimpered* as they squeeze past me, *I didn't do you any favours there. Neither acknowledge me or say anything as they edge past me and descend, slowly, down the stairs.*

Remorseful. Why did I let her speak to me like that? And in front of the children? What's she even thinking? Chill down for goodness sake. A flash of hatred.

It's odd, usually she is tense but likeable.

The rest of my kids file out past me. I'm left alone. Standing. Disquieted by this briefest of exchanges.

Ron, the caretaker, slams the rows of folding seats down into their recess. The clattering sound amplified. It reverberates back off the whitewashed walls of the hall sounding for a brief moment as, I imagine, artillery fire might sound. Their echoes break my silence.

Alone. I file out.

## Story 5: The assembly when Lemar locks down

*I do think he sometimes gets a bit carried away. I sometimes feel like he thinks he’s delivering the Gettysburg Address except that none of us feel particularly free. It feels more like a form of bondage. I’ m not sure there’s all that much in the way of emancipation going on here. Sufferance definitely. But not suffrage.*

I’m never really sure how time seems to stand still for so long. It’s like we go in, sit down, and then enter some kind of parallel vortex. You know that there is sunlight out there somewhere, or at least daylight, and lessons must start at 9 am, promptly. But I sometimes feel like I might be coming back on myself. We’ re all allowed to leave early to get to our classes on time, if we have classes that is, but on Friday, thanks largely to the unknown idiots in timetabling, I don’t teach Period 1 but do a double in the afternoon instead, so I’m stuck here.

I did sneak out early once or twice and left, imitating the same slightly odd, but rather graceful posture I’d seen some of my female colleagues do, where, they seem to lift their heels off the ground and walk on their tippy toes, so as not to make a clacking sound as they leave the hall. I tried to do the same but just felt awkward and foolish like one of those great, whopping birds you see on an Attenborough, hopping along arms out stretched for balance. I always seem to have great wooden clogs on my feet whilst my 14-and-a-half stone frame (*who am I kidding?)* wobbles precariously as I descend. I had tried to adopt the look of a very harassed, and frenetic, school child protection officer, called out suddenly to deal with, largely non-existent child protection emergencies. Although I don’t know why that has to look like I’m a drug-addled, crazy flamingo. For a time, this early escape was my happy ritual, and I had been getting away with it as well, until Nigella had caught me out once.

I think on this occasion my escape route had been blocked, and I seem to have slipped quickly through the first two of the three trance-like stages of assembly - daydream and fidget, before moving straight into the final corpse stage - *lethargy.*

*I really have sat here for too long now.*

*Honest, make it stop. Please. Ken Dodd would have gone off by now. Not that any of them, bless them, would have got that reference. Miss H. always says, “aw, bless” a lot. Yet another mind wandering off moment.*

I shuffle around in my seat.

“… your school” …. “your futures”. *Tune back out.*

*Drift. Eyes wander.*

Smile up at the kids’ photos on the wall. *Such a lovely idea. Daft though that they put them so high up the kids can’t even see themselves in the portraits. And they’re starting to fade with all the sunlight now.*

“keep moving forward”

“… these aren’t our pathways …they’ re yours”

“…OFSTED report …”

Temporarily re-join. *Ah yes, tell the kids we just had a poor OFSTED. That should do it. Back in the room. There’s the favourite shot of adrenaline that we all needed. If in doubt, crack out the old phrases. Except, they’re only 11 for pity sake, man. We’re addicted. OFSTED junkies. It’s not our fault. It’s them. They’re coming. It’s not us. It’s them. It is.*

*We have to do this because of them. Oh God.*

*I can’t bear it any longer. This is all getting ridiculously complicated. I know I should be feeling all motivated and inspired,* in fact, hold on this is a bit better, more pace to it, a nice ‘reach for the stars’ graphic*. Oh no, too much. Now there’s another one. We’ll have a rocket blasting off next.* Oh, and there it is.

*Return to the kids; crane my neck along the row, check on Bradley, still no movement. Crikey, he can’t have had his energy drink for breakfast…progress?*

Back to the spreadsheet tables filling the screen above the stage. *Complicated. How does a new grade 9 relate to the old A\*, when does a five become the equivalent to a C at GCSE? Is it a five, or is it a four? I should have read the bumf. I don’t want the kids to ask their form tutors for help with understanding it Bob. Don’t ask me for advice on it. Pleee-ase. Has it got something to do with Progress 8? I overheard Miss H. talking about this in the staffroom, ah, I can’t remember.*

*Bloody Gove. The man wasn’t even a teacher. Fair play he didn’t want to be a teacher. But it’s not like we’re going to try and play at being the Environment Secretary, or whatever he is now, for crying out loud. I’m not going to go home and try and plumb in a new boiler. Talking of which the man will be in tonight to look at the sink. I must text A.*

*Actually, I’m starting to feel for Bob now. I’m not sure this is anything he really understands either. This can’t be his message, surely? There is no way he came up with this. I bet it was that new deputy head, who looked all enthusiastic, someone said he was the expert.*

“Children, tell Bradley to pack it in. Whisper it down the row. Pack it in *now.” Whisper a growl. Half a turn of his head. No effect.*

*How much of this does Bob think they’ re going to get, seriously?*

“A new climate for learning.” *Oh no.*

“new categories of behaviour as you go up in to Year 8, including, “Defiant” and “Immature””

*Of course, they’ re immature, they’ re just children. I can feel myself starting to explode. Panic, did I just say that out loud? No one seems to be looking. Close one.*

*Hang on, this just doesn’t make sense now*, “chewing in class”, “poor preparation for work” *is now, immature? Oh goodness.*

*Bob, these small people in front of you are called children. Bob.*

*Please look at them. Not having a pen? they never have pens. It’s just how they are, they’re not bank robbers. I forget to bring a pen. I don’t think I even have a pen.*

*Oh, it’s getting absurd.*

“A Parenting Order” *… of course it is. Just the trick. That’ll learn ‘em.*

*Littering is now classed as* “defiant behaviour”. *Well, I don’t like littering and school can look messy sometimes but it’s not that bad. Mmm, maybes? Seems a bit harsh though.*

*Oh Bob, don’t spell behaviour the American way. Drives me mad. PE though, so ....*

“Turnaround time is to take place in the Turnaround room”.

*No. Really? Not the internal exclusion room anymore? Ok. In fairness, I can see the sense of that, the usual suspects do spend too long out of normal classes, they spend ages in there but only because they like it more than they like their normal classes. Mind, if I were them, I’d rather spend some time in there with Miss. S. She’s hard but at least she’s fair. And the kids know it.*

“we will try to get the sanctions right for you …”

“Disruptive behaviour will earn a 45-minute detention”.

*Really? For continued failure to follow instructions? Really!?! Oh. Oh. He’s going in hard. Oh dear.*

*Seriously, 45 minutes detention for failing to complete homework? Nah, he’s lost it before he’s started. You can’t do that. These kids don’t respond to lots of random shouting and harsh punishment, mate. They’ve spent their lives being shouted at.*

“… the bar is high here …the bar is going to be higher next year”

*Bob seems to have slowed down again.*

“What did you think of that assembly then, Lemar?” I whisper as we leave.

“I dunno Sir, I wasn’t listening.

I never listen when he’s speaking”

*I can’t blame him. I feel my shoulders drop.*

# Chapter 5 “Sit still and be quiet Y7!”

## Discussion

"It is not on the face of it, a model of containment; it is a type of quarantine.” (Tucker, 2015, p.265)

### Chapter structure

* Section 1: On how my experiences made me feel
* Section 2: Some concluding thoughts:
  + A possible impact for the children?
  + Some recommendations that could be implemented by staff.

My aim in this chapter is to make sense of my experiences and from these to offer some critical insight into the culture of the school. Written in two parts, the first offers some thoughts about how working at the school made me feel. I analysed my stories in Appendix 4.1 and in this chapter, I have interpreted my experiences and present them in the form of a reflective diagram predicated on some of the defensive behaviours discussed in Chapter 2. I locate them within psychodynamic systems theory (social defences theory) and return to Stephen Frosh’s and Pamela Trevithick’s explanations of defensiveness. If Chapter 4 describes my experiences subjectively, then this chapter represents a more theoretical interpretation. As Truss points out, “it is important to reflect on the author’s role as both subject and object” (2009, p.368). Here I realise that many of my observations jump around, my model is deliberately messy, the parallel lines indicating a flow between different positions. Readers should be aware that the twists and turns of my model are to suggest the non – linear nature of my observations. They are written chronologically, and yet I see elements of defenses in different stories.

In the second section of the chapter, I offer some observations about being with the children, watching them sitting in assembly fidgeting uncomfortably. This may, for some, be associated more with psychological discomfort rather than the hardness of the plastic seats. I suggest, albeit cannot generalise, that this may be an outcome of the teachers’ social defences.

Finally, in concluding remarks, I offer some thoughts on the longer–term effects of defensive behaviours on staff in the school and recommend implementing psychodynamic practice in CPD sessions.

## Section 1: On how my experiences made me feel

“An externally containing and coherent organization supports us, yet we also hate, envy and fear institutions for their apparent power over us, and they can easily become personifications of persecuting figures from our internal worlds. However, when organizations seem fragile and unpredictable, they become more like a rather inadequate foster parent than a second home.” (Stokes, 1994, p.128)

In Chapter 4, I deliberately left my stories to ‘speak’ for themselves, I wanted to make them the centrepiece of my thesis. This was a ‘technical’ decision that I made with my supervisor’s guidance and we spent time in tutorial discussing the relative merits of whether to offer an explanation of how writing and thinking about them made me feel. I grimace to myself whenever I read them back. I had some doubts at first about whether anyone else might relate to them. What if it was only me that felt this way? To work around this I was very fortunate to have some critical friends and former colleagues to read them for me who offered that encouraging nudge of reassurance.

I sat down and faced up to how I felt and wrote some more words. It was a profound moment for me. It felt as if I was writing about something that was alive but untouched, unknown, my unconscious self, perhaps. At first it was unnerving to open myself up so candidly and in perpetuity but I also wanted to push myself and felt that this was another strength of autoethnography as a method. Afterwards through the position of writing and reflecting I came to realise the value of this process. Similar to the processes of therapeutic supervision, by working these stories through by thinking about my connections with others and then my reflections on those experiences I was able to realise Menzies Lyth’s observations about evading anxiety. I moved from a state of feeling uncomfortable in my practice to one of confidence. It is almost as if one has to open oneself up, be candid and accept one’s insecurities and frustrations, to tease them through and to come out feeling altogether more mindful. Alert.

Overcoming my reluctance was a profound moment of learning for me as I developed my thesis. It became a transformative developmental stage in my thinking. I knew from Ellis’s work in Chapter 3 that all autoethnographers share similar fears and worries and that for her the quality of their work is more meaningful for including their moments of uncertainty (Ellis, 2013). I’ve realised now that my first strategy of avoidance was a defence and only served to narrow my thinking. I also came to understand that readers would almost certainly see through my unconscious defences epitomised by my garrulous and occasionally waspish comments and perhaps the tone of my stories.

In this section, I concentrate on working through my feelings about what the stories mean to me. I explain how the stories came to signify my disidentification (Daehnert, 1998) from the core values of the organisation. What I learnt from supervision was that I needed to work through the stories and if I continued to defend against my feelings (and not attempt to do the hard work of thinking about my feelings) I wouldn’t learn anything new about myself or my professional role. Writing down how I felt would help me to think more clearly. On the basis of this thesis, through further therapeutic reflection, I have come to understand the split paternal roles that I internalised as both potent, compassionate and loving (Wright, A. in therapeutic supervision, April 2018).

### Five reflective stories of systemic defensiveness

I closed my eyes and sketched what became a spiral. I created a series of loops which represented the themes of my stories. The picture reminds me of when I uncoiled a spring out of shape as a child. At first, I envisaged drawing a circle, but felt that this didn’t reflect accurately how I had arrived at this process of reflection through the reading I was doing simultaneously for my doctorate. A coil or spiral thus seemed a more uneven representation of my journey; of becoming critically aware and yet finding myself in a contested position. I even imagined an upside-down bass clef motif but felt that the circular motion of the spirals offered a more useful visual representation of the sense of fluidity and occasional slippage backwards to my original position. With a bigger pencil I would have created a solid thick line which slowly dissolved and fragmented the more I realised how far I had dissociated myself from the organisation.

The elevated trajectory in the final stage of the diagram is explained more fully in this section, however it was induced by reflection on a changed position. I can’t quite square the circle and my new knowledge doesn’t quite feed back into the school anymore. I wanted to capture that transition diagrammatically. A more self-reflective, critical me was emerging. Eventually, I replaced the solid line I had originally drawn with the parallel lines to signify the splitting of my experiences and the fact that in the early stages of my experiences I felt that I could and often wanted to settle back into the comfortable old routines and rituals of the organisation, as this is often easier. The rituals and routines that I know help me to feel superficially comfortable.

I have included the model below and then write about how I came to uncover my feelings behind the stories that are represented here.

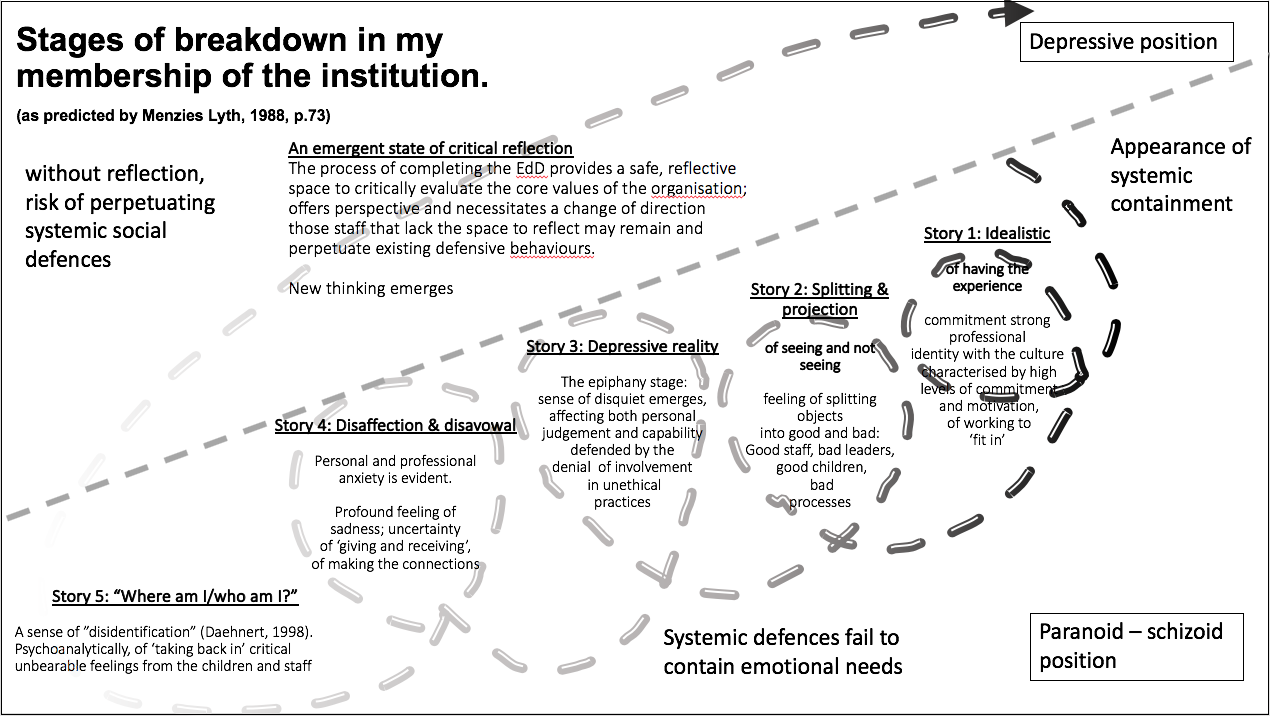
### The direct impact of social defences for the individual within the organisation

Menzies Lyth predicts a separation for the individual when, in some cases, their defences do not align with those of the corporate organisation. She reminds us that ”defences are, and can be, operated only by individuals.” (1988, p.73) This is what made her paper so distinct at the time. She goes on to suggest:

Their behaviour is the link between their psychic defences and the institution. Membership necessitates an adequate degree of matching between individual and social defence systems … (Menzies-Lyth, 1988, p.73).

If the mis-alignment between the individual and the social defences cannot be reconciled, then she predicted a “breakdown”, leading to an eventual separation as the only inevitable outcome. See Figure 3 in the diagram below.

Figure 3



## Story 1: Pre – assembly registration and routines

### Theme 1: Idealism: of having the experience and of trying to ‘fit in’

*Idealism, commitment, a strong professional identity with the school*

*characterised by high levels of commitment, motivation*

*a sense of pride in taking my students into assembly; ability to ‘laugh off’ the anomalies, the perverse disincentives within the system, knowing that you can overcome them for the good of the task.*

The first of my five stories describe my commitment to the culture of the school, pride in the task, and yet my underlying anxiety about the chaotic nature of performing even the simplest routine tasks in the school. It speaks to my desire to do the job well and the pressure I felt to perform under the scrutiny of senior colleagues and the SLT. The story explains my uncertainty organising children in an unfamiliar routine, recalling Hirschhorn’s view, which echoes Menzies Lyth, that by “lending our individual and collective authority to a ritual task we behave in a depersonalized way” (Hirschhorn, 2000, p.3). Intense, but nonetheless enjoyable, the role was largely positive. I was optimistic. I had a sense of looking forward. Once we were assembled, having navigated the narrow confines of the upstairs landing area, the bright white space of the hall itself speaks symbolically to a bright future.

How confusing then that I also recognise feeling constricted, nervous and ill at ease. Under a tremendous scrutiny. Who was really under supervision, the children, or me? A mild sense of disapproval, of being judged as not quite up to it by “Bob”. I have never been very good at managing discipline. I’m not interested in confrontation and fail to see how Bob manages that aspect of the job. Story 1 reflects some of my disappointment in never really managing the process satisfactorily and in never achieving the objective of instilling an almost military discipline into the children. Perhaps, I think I feel regretful that I never lived up to his ‘hard man’ persona and I feel as if he made a judgement quite quickly that I wasn’t up to the task.

My childhood memories flood back (see Appendix 1.1, the author as data source) and I was often in mind of my dad. He loves stories. When I was a child he spent hours reading to me and my sister, making up stories, and telling corny jokes. I get my love of words and storytelling and humour from him. I’m glad he’s my dad. Hard to reconcile other memories of my confused emotions as a child. Accomplished, well read and nurturing, he could be strict and disciplined, himself a former Head teacher, I didn’t ever want to get on the wrong side of him. I needed those qualities then. A disciplinarian, I didn’t want to let him down. As an adult, I always suspect that I never quite lived up to his expectations. I wonder if there was a residue of my feelings of sublimation in my exchanges with Bob? It’s an unfair comparison and yet, unlike with my dad I feel physically ‘puny’ and ‘weak’ in comparison to Bob. Measuring six foot two in height, Bob is still bigger than me. Manlier even, or just physically stronger? There was a very macho culture at the school. Most of the leaders were ex sports, PE staff. Big, mainly white, men. The children in my form weren’t nervous around them. I was.

I only ever wanted to work in a school in a deprived ward and to do so in a setting with a sound ethos for children where their lives could be made better through the skills and dedication of that group of teachers. I wanted to be a part of that skilled team. I recognise that my frustration comes from misaligning my professional identity with the school’s culture and its ethos, even though I also felt genuine pride in my job. I distinctly recall feeling proud to take my form into assembly and to be with them. It was painful when I sensed that someone else, in this case Bob, and the other SLT members, didn’t always seem to recognise this. The school clearly needs order and discipline. There is clearly a need for structure to their day. The children do need to be silent, respectful of one another and to line up properly; and, from time to time, to be shouted at if they are misbehaving. The children however are also 11 years old and not in the Marine Corps.

At this stage, I still had a very strong (*naive*) sense of optimism; a bemused but still optimistic worldview that I could transcend some of the martinet, peacock–like behaviours, the constant harrying to and fro, the shouting and the incessant routines associated with lining the children up. I could comply with these behaviours because initially I knew, or I felt, that I was a part of something valuable. Of making a contribution.

**Theoretical interpretation**

This story represents my idealistic view of the school. Idealising something is a defence. Trevithick describes idealisation as “the way in which ambivalent or contradictory feelings are kept apart and split into different representations, where one ‘object is constructed as being wholly and ideally “good” and the other as wholly and ideally ‘bad’.” (2011, p.397). It’s not wrong, idealisation can be a positive. At the same time my desire to fit in means I see but don’t want to see the ritual harassment of staff and children. I am blinded by my idealised view of the school. Trevithick describes this situation as containing the “unbearable disappointment and despair that this can lead to.” (2011, p.398).

The aspirational messages delivered through the assembly about ‘new climates of learning’ represent the impossible “idealized form” (Menzies Lyth, 1988, p.61). Inevitably, these ideals can become problematic. For instance, here, the ritualistic entrance and egress for staff and the children compelled to tiptoe in and back out of the assembly hall in silence represent an ideal that can never be attained.

## Story 2: The Christmas jumper emails

### Theme 2: Splitting and projection

### of ‘seeing and not seeing’

*Story 2 speaks to me of a sense of time passing, of my establishment in my role. By the time of writing this story, I’ve started to understand my place within the culture, and the infrastructure of the school. In Story 2 I try to provide the context within which the assemblies function; this story captures other features of communication, the wider ebb and flow of the school.*

I understand more about my place. I am a part of the school. I have established my identity, and it is more widely understood amongst others. I’ve made a few mistakes, I’ve had a fairly public disagreement with one of the senior teachers. I have been, and I am becoming a bit more awkward; challenging the orthodoxy, at the same time I am confident. I can also perform well and I value my job highly. I have formed a secure bond with my form group; I think we’ve got an understanding. The children respond. They know what to do and when I need them to perform, give or take, and, in return, I advocate on their behalf when they get into bother or become a nuisance. I am content.

I’m also starting to make good acquaintances and friendships across the staff team. Socially within the school, I’m a fixture in the pub on a Friday night. As part of this experience, I’m beginning to ‘air’ some of my frustrations at the perverse routines and sudden changes in policy. My waspish comments and sarcasm (my customary defence) are directed towards the slightly muddled, messy approaches to some aspects of the way that the school is organised; some of the ‘systems’ I’m working within are starting to grate and seem more like jumping through hoops for the sake of it, rather than for adding meaning. I have a growing awareness, a sense that things are not quite as they seem; much of this is displaced upwards and projected onto the senior management team. I think like my colleagues more firmly embedded within the system; but cracks in my allegiance to the school’s culture are appearing. I don’t understand why some of the ‘ways of working’ seem to exacerbate organisational uncertainty and provide greater consistency. The Christmas jumper email is an example of this confused, muddled thinking. My colleagues seem unaware that by blindly implementing bad policies we maintain “the folly of managing activity” (Seddon, 2008, p.60) within the system. We are rigidly perpetuating a system which seems idiosyncratic and inflexible.

The emails present a comedic opportunity with which to satirise my experiences:

*“Christmas jumpers, on or off, Sir? Under the blazer, over the blouse, up or down?”*

We, (I’ve aligned myself with the staff team), we, the undersigned, are becoming dazed with the sudden changes of direction and the contrasts. It’s the small things that accumulate and that become so frustrating.

I want to scream:

*Just make a decision, stick with it. Make the right decision, do it for the children, show them that you recognize the distance they have travelled, and let us feel proud of them and each other. Value their achievements. Don’t vacillate between one place and another because you think that the Head might want you to stick to his original idea. Take some responsibility, and we’ll all genuinely do our best to respond.*

As it is, at this stage, it feels messy. It seems confused. I’m starting to feel confused, and when I feel uncertain, I act like a child. I regress. I poke fun. I misbehave. Being funny, highlighting someone else’s indecision, plays to my devilish side. I’m unconsciously *othering*. Like the Year 11 pupil in Story 3, I feel so hard done by, I’m doing the same thing to my colleagues. I can start to ingratiate myself with others and become part of a wider group. I can make more friends here with others in the staff team. It’s low-hanging fruit and that being sarcastic, I’m starting to realise, is one of my defensive positions.

Confusingly still (and the spiral in my diagram seeks to show this sense of fluidity), these feelings are contradictory. Brian is a different leader, he’s no Bob (Story 1 and 5). Personally and professionally, I really admire the man. I couldn’t admit this in the staffroom, but to myself, I want to go on the journey with him. I don’t think I have gained his respect though and I harbour desires to draw his attention to me. He’s old school and he’s been used to commanding respect; I admire that even if he unnerves me at the same time. I want to tell him that I admire him but can’t bring myself to do that. It’s easier to sit on the outside poking fun. My regret; my shame.

I don’t want people to fail; I certainly don’t want *him* to fail, I think in part because he reminds me of my dad’s generation. He dresses like a bank manager, very smart, big suit, but with a natty, tailored look. He’s rock hard. If you were a child you’d know where you stood with old school teachers like him. Now? I’m not so sure. I still want to stand four-square with him. I need the stability. In the not too distant past those kids would have jumped when he said jump, and we would have too. I feel unsettled by a nagging feeling that I am somehow culpable in the passing of the ‘old guard’.

Worse still, as I look around the staffroom, might his fading authority make me the ‘old guard’ now?

**Interpretation:**

In Story 2, we see the unravelling of the new world order; what was once the vision begins to fracture. The story speaks to the power of division and splitting:

“Up until about 6 months the infant has desired and attacked and been attached to what Klein calls part-objects – an available good breast that nourishes him and that he loves, and a bad breast that he destroys and can experience as attacking him in retaliation. He protects the good breast that he needs from his own destructiveness by the defensive procedures Klein calls splitting and idealization.” (Phillips, 1988, p.55)

Splitting as a social defence is one of the key findings from Menzies Lyth. In her paper, she identifies this defence as central to the system of defences used in the hospital. She describes how even the most basic tasks of the hospital nurse are ordered and even their relationship with their patients is split to avoid causing anxiety; the nursing service “helps in achieving detachment from patients,” (1988, p.103) attempting to relieve nurses from anxiety by splitting up their opportunities to develop meaningful and close relationships with patients. As with Menzies Lyth’s junior nurses who demonstrate these paranoid-schizoid positions (Klein, 1932) splitting their patients into ‘good’ or ‘bad’ becomes easier to accentuate difference and alleviate their stress.

As I begin to observe the confusion within the organisation, something in one part of my psyche begins to loathe the incompetence and so too I begin a gradual process of splitting leading to separation. To sneer and to belittle something I know that I need. That I am beginning to see someone’s else anxiety symbolised through the muddled emails shames not him but me. I begin to reject the routines I once relied on for safety and structure.

Meanwhile in the assembly hall, we also begin to split and to divide our elaborate exhortations to the silent majority, our appeal for the children to join with us against the ‘naughty children’, don’t be like them/be like us, do the right thing. Make the right choice for yourselves. It’s evidence of splitting the children into ‘good’ and ‘bad’ groups (his form was noisy today/her group were badly behaved, thank goodness that late child isn’t one of mine, they’re in someone else’s form group).

Menzies Lyth’s case study points to the use of routines and rituals as a mechanism of defending the junior nurse against their anxieties. She describes the mechanistic splitting of tasks as ritual task-performance, designed to eliminate decisions. Her contention is that allowing nurses to make decisions inevitably leads to further forms of stress insomuch that there is anxiety in not fully knowing the outcome of their decision. To defend against this further level of anxiety thus compels nurses to avoid decision-making through creating ritual task lists (Menzies Lyth,1960, p.103). Tick the box. In Paula Hyde and Alan Thomas’s paper on organisational defences, they re-examine her work and see a similar theme noting how in mental health services “uncertainties arising from any decision were eliminated by ritual task performance that discouraged the nurse from using her own discretion and initiative to plan work.” (2002, p.410).

Just like my colleague set in his ways, another outcome of social defence systems is that they lead to the avoidance of change. That makes sense to me. Doing what you know saves you from having to think. Part of me resents my emerging knowledge and insights.

“Efforts to initiate serious change were often met with acute anxiety and hostility, which conveyed the idea that the people concerned felt very threatened, the threat being nothing less than social chaos and individual breakdown. To give up known ways of behaviour and embark on the unknown were felt to be intolerable,” (Menzies Lyth 1960, p. 118).

A senior leader determinedly holding onto formal hierarchies, ‘what we once knew’, ‘the way we do things here’ demonstrates his anxiety not to change, and his inability to “respond in contextually sensitive ways” (Hirschhorn, 2000, p.3). I would suggest also in culturally contextual ways. The bureaucratic system in school is organised in such a way as to help individuals to take responsibility. Decision-making becomes difficult because to engage with too many changes causes profound uncertainty about the role and that exacerbates our feelings of anxiety. My second story personifies anxiety in even the most experienced of senior colleagues, whose contradictory messages suggest the threat of “crisis and operational breakdown” (Menzies Lyth, 1988, p.110).

## Story 3: The misname to induce ‘shame’ assembly

### Theme 3: depressive reality

*I didn’t affect change in the culture. I perpetuated the culture. I feel compelled to participate within a system whose values I’ m beginning to realise I don’t share. And yet, I still took part in the pantomime of the ‘name and shame’ assembly, I became part of the baying crowd in a gladiatorial contest. I have pretended to myself that I wasn’t. I denied my own actions to myself.*

This is the most complex of my stories to examine since it represents a pivotal moment. My knowing sense that something wasn’t right ethically coincided with a critical, transition away from an organisational culture I desperately wanted to be a part of. The most obvious point to make is that this story reflects my loss of respect for the values of the senior leadership team. I lost myself too, particularly in my exchange with the Y11 student. I lost a little bit of my professional self-regard and I came to hate myself in that moment. I knew that I was in denial. I felt stuck. Cardona suggests that “denial as an organizational defence disables people from thinking, and therefore from bringing about any change” (1994, p.142). She’s right.

I want to blame everyone else, the boy, the SLT, the culture. I have nailed my colours to the mast of a leadership team that seems reduced, lost. Our hold on discipline is unravelling and beginning to feel threadbare. Noisy, scornful children, contemptuous of staff, staff similarly angry and closed off. Chaos everywhere. Out of control children, running in the corridors, pushing the boundaries; my phantasised (real?) disintegration of the old disciplinary regime. A vision reduced to a binary position: the naming and shaming of children. This knowledge tests my faith in their vision and methods. The more I am compelled to take part the more I feel alienated, distanced from what I thought was our shared set of beliefs. The identification with the children starts to become dominant. I thought this was about trying to make the children’s lives better; wasn’t it? I’m not so aligned with the values of the school that I want to perpetuate these scornful behaviours. Behaviours which seem to perpetuate a fissure between us and them, staff and the children, but which am I? I didn’t come into it to take part in this and, to my shame, there I am all of a sudden, clapping and booing; it’s me pulling that rictus grin across my face. I’m participating in this ghoulish Hall of Mirrors. When I see my own reflection staring back at me I am so ashamed. It’s a performance, a parody, the children know it, we know it, we’ re bound together.

As I return to this briefest of exchanges with the Y11 student I come to realise that our exchange mirrors my own disappointment for not finding him afterwards and explaining to him how his actions made me feel. I didn’t have the courage to go up to him afterwards and say that his actions really upset me and caused me pain. Had I plucked up the courage, is it possible that in a similar situation with an important other in his life, a future employer perhaps, he might think again about his actions? Instead, I froze; his actions caught me out. He stopped me in my tracks, but my problem was not explaining this to him. I didn’t and he’s long gone now.

I excuse myself for not doing this by blaming the busyness and the frantic nature of my job. It’s taken me months of working at this thesis to figure this out. Far too long.

**Interpretation**

Here, my feelings of disquiet materialise in the form of behaviours I don’t want to recognise. Bion’s container–contained model applies in the sense that sometimes teachers find themselves defending against closeness and intimacy. What if our anxiety about our role means we repress our instincts to protect against intimacy and to contain the children’s anxiety? Might it be that by defending against attachments we create a form of emotional inertia, or paralysis? We feel exposed to forms of persecutory anxiety and so we try to defend against this by controlling one of the few objects at our disposal - the children.

Another explanation emerges signified by the expression, “that ‘rictus grin’ staring back at me”, which might represent what Donald Winnicott describes as the emergence of a false self (1960a). Winnicott suggests that the False Self exists only to act as a defence:

“The concept of the false self (as I call it) is not a difficult one. The false self is built up on a basis of compliance. It can have a defensive function, which is the protection of the true self. A principle governing human life could be formulated in the following words: only the true self can feel real, but the true self must never be affected by external reality, must never comply. When the false self becomes exploited and treated as real there is a growing sense in the individual of futility and despair.” (Winnicott (1960/1965c) cited in Schlauch, 2016 p.133).

My reflection of my compulsion in the misname to induce shame assembly is suggestive of my own need to defend myself from a culture in which I created a false me, as the ‘shouty, mean’ teacher, a role I was never comfortable with. Similarly to Klein, Winnicott suggests that the infant is required to make his own an accommodation to the conscious and unconscious needs of his carers upon whom he is reliant. He notes, “where the mother cannot adapt well enough, the infant gets seduced into a compliance, and a compliant False Self reacts to environmental demands and the infant seems to accept them” (Winnicott 1960a, p.146, cited in Daehnert, 1998, p.253). In this case, exaggerated arguably by the extra public scrutiny under which I think we all felt, I made an accommodation to those senior colleagues around me and this increased my existing levels of discomfort and unease.

I think that our social defences act in such a way as to both protect us at difficult emotional moments in our job, simultaneously making us seem remote and unprofessional when in fact we’ re distressed and at our wits’ end. When the truth is avoided/denied, we often don’t know how to respond.

This didn’t occur during the misname to induce shame assembly but is important nevertheless. At the end of one of the most moving and positive assemblies, we showed a YouTube clip of Derek Redmond a British athlete from the 1992 Barcelona Olympics who pulls his hamstring during the race and cannot compete. In the clip, his father leaps down from the stands and holds him and proceeds to support him over the finishing line in last place. As he limps over the line my tears flowed freely in front of my form group. Once, I found Bob, who had led the assembly, also drying his eyes but seemingly hiding out of sight of the children. It was impossible not to emote and for a brief moment we seemed to share a bond. That this disciplinarian felt moved to tears by the video, as some of the children also did, might have enabled them to attune to their emotions. Instead, Bob felt compelled to hide his emotions. Social defences, “whilst well intentioned, this strategy served to deny the inevitably painful aspects of nursing experience by suggesting that such feelings were illegitimate and unprofessional (Menzies Lyth,1970 cited in Page and Elfer, 2013, p.557). I suggest that we can try to disavow these feelings, but if the video was intended to be emotional, to highlight a difficult, painful struggle, to deny the resulting emotion seems to be contradictory to what was intended by showing it.

## Story 4: A brief encounter with a maths teacher

### Theme 4: Disaffection and disavowal - Personal and professional anxiety is evident

*Beleaguered. Cold. Distant. Removed.*

I’ve lost my *bon mots*. My sense of elation and joy. I feel cold to other people’s wants. This is unusual for me. I like people. I like working with and being with people, yet by this stage of my journey I feel abject. Something is missing. I don’t know if I want to continue with the charade of being there anymore. In my brief exchange with a maths teacher, I suddenly realise that the job is dull and repetitive and I feel quite empty. The boys have taken one for me. I don’t know that I care anymore. They’ re always going to be in trouble in a school like this. A glance out of place and they’ll be in seclusion.

I like the teacher. I was a bit surprised that she seems to have bought in. *If she has*, she was acting as if she believed every word of her threat to the boys. I know she held them back at the end of her class. I wish she hadn’t, even if they had done something heinous. I am filled with sorrow at the thought. It occurs to me that maybe she’s just a better teacher than me. I wish she hadn’t dragged me into whatever it is that she’s going through though. I wish I’d taken the time to find out but actually, the truth is that I don’t really want to know.

Whilst I was writing my stories, I was also completing my university reading. Wilfrid Bion, a doctor and psychoanalyst who entered analysis with Melanie Klein, wrote a number of leading works including *Learning from Experience* (1962). Bion’s message about learning from experience can be described as “getting involved in what one doesn’t know” (Ramvi, 2009, p.2). He suggests we often resist or avoid knowledge, preferring instead to not want to know. It’s less threatening to our self if we search for “minus knowledge (–K)” (Ramvi, 2009). My internal world feels numbed by my experiences. By now, I’d rather not know. I have switched off and tried to bury my feelings. I don’t have to feel anything anymore that way. It’s easier for me to go through the rituals and routines. Registering the children for assembly? No problem. Line them up? Sure. “Be quiet Year 7?”, Easy. Tell some lads off Miss so you can be seen in the new climate of learning to be doing your job? Of course, go ahead, why wouldn’t you? I would. I do. Turn a blind eye to poor behaviour? Bob was right after all. It’s easier that way. I just haven’t the energy to reinforce every rule. There are just too many.

At this point, I had become far more interested in the critical dimensions of my thesis and how that helped me to make sense of the mundane day to day. I began to think more broadly about how anxiety is projected between colleagues. I’d become more interested in measuring whether I’ve got something interesting for the thesis. So, some kids are at the wrong end of a telling off? It happens. I’m hardened to it. They can be really rude and mean. Good. Tough luck.

**Interpretation**

I realised the significance of Story 4 describes Menzies Lyth’s argument that we collude with one another by "socially redistributing responsibility and irresponsibility” (1960, p.104). She argues that “each nurse must face, and in some way, resolve a painful conflict over accepting the responsibilities of her role.” (1960, p. 104). Our personal and professional anxiety becomes evident.

I felt somehow that I had become drawn into a conflict, not necessarily of my own making but which felt to me that my colleague was acting out of character, aligning herself to the ‘new climate of learning’. Survival. I still recall that exchange with a huge sense of sadness, a loss somehow. I always sensed that her unnecessarily indignant championing of her form class was misplaced and I suspect illustrated her levels of anxiety about her place in the new regime. Menzies Lyth explains this phenomenon as:

“…the intrapsychic conflict is alleviated, at least as far as the conscious experiences of nurses are concerned, by a technique that partly converts it into an interpersonal conflict. People in certain roles tend to be described as ‘responsible’ by themselves and some extent by others, and in other roles people are described as ‘irresponsible’. Nurses habitually complain that other nurses are irresponsible, behave carelessly and impulsively, and in consequence must be ceaselessly supervised and disciplined.” (1959, p. 105).

She concludes by suggesting that her team realised that these habits became enmeshed in an unconscious system of defences. Not one that was recognised by nurses and one that they often denied being involved with, but one which nevertheless permeated the culture of the hospital. My sense of this exchange is one which speaks to a personal and professional anxiety and this story speaks to a more profound sense of loss and uncertainty. Story 4 becomes emblematic of my personal uncertainty about my place within the organisation, signifying my precarious hold on to the core values of the school.

Psychodynamically, the story can be seen as emblematic of a wider issue in which previously good relations became easily disrupted and cast aside when we felt under intense supervision and scrutiny. Story 4 captures the essence of how our camaraderie, our sense of making meaningful connections becomes disrupted. As staff, we project our anxiety into one another. The critical point, is that we are unable to follow this exchange up and work it through in a meaningful way. Hirschhorn reminds us:

“…although people rely on social defences to contain their anxiety and to scapegoat clients, customers, or co-workers, they also desire to restore their experience of psychological wholeness and repair the real or imagined psychological damage they have done in devaluing others.” (2000, p.10).

Without some due reparation, this whispered exchange, this briefest of moments, leaves another disquieting moment.

## Story 5: The assembly when Lemar locks down

### Theme 5: Where am I / who am I?

*Social defences can serve a valuable function but by now, their positive effect has evaporated. The lack of a containing effect becomes transparent as anxiety becomes projected onto the children. Personally, I know I’m on my way out of the door. My feelings are contested and problematic. I want to reach out to protect the children, I can feel a deeply personal, paternal need to protect them from threats but feel helplessness in the knowledge that I won’t be there. A profound sense of failure and yet, am I becoming critically more alert about future possibilities?*

By the time I started to write my fifth story, I had re-read Menzies and her later essays and I was certain that the function of the hierarchy to contain our anxiety had broken down. The assembly where Lemar’s locks down his own feelings, caps the whole sequence of my experiences and the whole assemblage of data that I had been collecting. The language in school had changed. If the bar’s going to get higher, I thought, well, it’s already too high for me now. As soon as I heard Bob powering through his slides that morning, with Lemar by my side, I saw how he became increasingly frozen. Has he defended himself by switching off, locking his unbearable thoughts away? (Greenwood, 2002). I can’t prove it but I feel certain now that the outcome of our collective anxiety was to push our fears and worries onto the children. Instead of us containing the children’s anxieties, we were expecting them to contain ours.

It wasn’t that I minded them coming up with another *new* climate of learning, I could even, cope, just about, with the relish in Bob’s pronounced delivery as he savoured every syllable of ‘getting the sanctions right’ for the (silent majority of) children, the hiding their real intent to sign ‘naughty*’* children up to a contract and to lock them out of school when inevitably they failed to meet the terms of their new behaviour contract. Under the rhetoric, our social defences to support the ‘silent majority’ were at risk of perpetuating a culture where the school belonged to the professional adults. Our decisions. Our choices. What of the children at risk of exclusion and their parents?

Moreover, what of my own place within this system? I was less immersed than I had been in Story 1, but in a school that should have been *for* children like Lemar, for him to be allowed the space to get it wrong and to ‘fail’, in a supportive place where he could learn from his mistakes. I was becoming culpable in condemning him and his friends. The boy was overwhelmed, his ‘lock down’, the blocking out was his defence against these unbearable feelings. I acknowledge that many of my colleagues would not see it this way. I suggest that his shutting out of unbearable feelings isn’t his response, but ours.

By Story 5, I felt a complete sense of disidentification. I knew that I wasn’t going to be in post for much longer. They had decided not to renew my contract, an overspend on the budget; I had mixed emotions about this. I had started to create new critical thinking about the culture of the school. Relief, sadness, narcissistic worry about the children - who will ever look after them better than me? I loved those kids, even the ones that exhausted me. I felt remorseful.

The combined effect of these feelings means that I had moved away almost completely from my earlier idealism and instead find myself taking back in the unbearable positions of the children. I’d started to align myself with the children. In my external world I am seen to play along, but this time with the children, not the staff. I must protect my internal me. I regress to childhood. A child in a system that doesn’t remember what childhood is like. I start behaving badly, pulling jokes to the children, whisper it. Pass it along. I need to play. To resist, not to misbehave. Adult me reflects that I am no longer certain where I am or who I am. I know it’s not right for me and I want to move on. I’m no longer aligned to the system but instead I am with the children.

My position has shifted even from my colleagues as it was in Story 2. What’s worse, it compounds my sense of not knowing and loss. I know that I can’t be accepted by the hierarchy, the staff or the children. That feels alienating and lonely.

**Interpretation**

*A position characterised by “disidentification” (Daehnert, 1998, p.251) from the organisation.*

I suggest that this stage of my stories speaks to the transference of anxiety onto the children. In my case, it becomes a process of what I have termed ‘organisational disidentification’. By this stage my employment at the school had become symbolised by my rejection of the school’s core values. My sense of myself in my stories relates to an internalised feeling of disidentification from the organisation. Klein observed that for the child to move successfully into maturation, it becomes vital to realise that it is possible to have “both hateful feelings and phantasy’s of love towards the object”[[12]](#footnote-12)

Similarly, I recognised that I had a desire to stay fully focused on my role, and the organisation, whilst also recognising this state of disidentification. I came to resent the fact that my contempt for Bob’s anxiety about his place within the new climate of learning in Story 5, was my object, and it limited my ability to act effectively on behalf of the children in my form. I hated his obsequiousness and my own inertia. I hated the fact that I needed to move on and yet recognised that I had to move on for my own sense of self.

I needed to move on.

## Section 2: Some concluding thoughts

### The impact of social defences on the children

**Introduction**

In Section 1, I laid out some of my observations, analysis and interpretation of my data. Here, my intention is to offer some observations from theory to explain how the children might have made sense of the mixed messages they heard through the assembly. Given that I spent most of my time sitting there wishing I was somewhere else, why would we expect the children to be any different? Similarly, I was beginning to think that if I felt fairly anxious about being in the assembly, what on earth might the children have made of it? At least I was getting paid to be there. Frustratingly, and this is one of the limitations of my thesis, it was only as I neared the end of my data collection period that I came up with the idea that it might be the psychodynamic processes of the assembly themselves, as well as the messages contained therein, that were responsible for the children’s antipathy towards assembly. Given the autoethnographic nature of my thesis, I didn’t seek permission to interview the children, but in the circumstances, it would be hard not to at least offer some thoughts about what it might have felt like for them. I will explore this thought with emphasis on my fifth story, the assembly where Lemar Locks down, suggesting that he might have acted as a barometer for the rest of my form.

I started to think, from reading psychoanalytical theory, that one of the reasons the children always looked so fed up before and during assembly wasn’t just because the seats were uncomfortable, but because it was, for some, emotionally unbearable. I wondered if our social defences had the consequence of pushing these emotional anxieties down onto the children, whose own unconscious defences blocked any more meaningful response other than “I dunno Sir, I never listen when he speaks”. In other words, was it easier not to listen because to listen would force the children to have to think about messages that were simply too much?

**Of learning and not learning from experience?**

To elaborate my ideas further I begin by discussing Bion’s concept of learning through experience. Might the behaviours of the children within my form within assembly be described as a process of resisting knowledge, of not wanting to know? I have had to come to terms with the thought that it could be argued that my pastoral form group, itself a subset of a bigger group (the pastoral system within the school here understood symbolically as ‘assembly’), failed to offer containment of the children’s emotional anxiety? Williams (2013) describes the Bionian concept of container/contained as crucial in this context. He suggests that:

“…the individual’s relationship to the group can be formulated as contained ♂ and container ♀, in which the group functions as a container and the individual is contained to the extent that the k-link functions to enable ‘learning from’ or the acquisition of knowledge to take place” (p.78).

I thus started to think of the experiences that the children experienced in the assembly as -K. The children were unconsciously defending and projecting:

“taking risks involves the possibility of failure, humiliation and emotional pain. Learning in any true sense can arise only out of doubt, uncertainty and the frustration of not knowing – unsafe territory for our young people who need to defend themselves at all costs against any repetition of their pain.” (Kalu, 2002, p. 360).

From everything I learned in Chapter 2, through Frosh and Trevithick, it appears they have no control over that process.

This emotional context seems to play out against a variety of intense feelings. Greenwood (2002) suggests that children have only limited control over their unconscious and will “defend themselves vigorously against” (Greenwood, 2002, p.295) prior traumatic distress. This in turn can be very challenging for their teachers to understand. She suggests that “original experience may become lost to conscious memory. Or painful experiences and the feelings associated with them may be quite unbearable, causing inhibitions and blockages” (Greenwood, 2002, p. 296).

Moreover, their emotional needs were not just uncontained, they were actually threatened by the school’s aspiration of the idealised child, perhaps the children in “Bob’s” silent majority?

Whilst all the events were real and recorded from my notes, they were also a composite, words and phrases included or excluded to preserve anonymity. At this point, I started to reflect on whether to include the exact words and phrases as ‘Bob’ delivered them and as I had written them from my original notes in my fifth story. As I started to analyse the meaning behind the words again, I reached the conclusion that in this section the actual phrases used provide some insight into how the children might have felt if their emotional needs and frustrations were avoided or evacuated (Williams, 2013, p.7) What it must have felt like for the children to be on the receiving end of these mixed messages and to be measured against an impossible ideal:

“Rules are good things, they are there to guide you, to make you better, morally knowing what is right and wrong.”

“Rules are important, they are triggers for your behaviour.

“We need to change our culture”

“This is embarrassing….”

“We will try and get the sanctions right for you”

For the record, it wasn’t the only time the children had these and similar messages explained to them. These messages were being drilled into the children on a weekly basis.

“we need to change our culture”, and, in the same breath, “this is embarrassing”.

It is hardly a surprise that the children leave the assembly drained from the experience.

“If the practitioner is able to acknowledge emotions, there is an opportunity for alpha functions to enable a mature relating and developmental growth. However, if the emotions are not able to be acknowledged, but forced to be defended against, the beta elements generated in the experience will give rise to an omnipotent relating. In this case, negative action (-K) is likely to occur, producing behaviour to avoid thought, characterised by repetition and stagnation.” (Williams, 2013, p.79)

**Of stalled emotional development?**

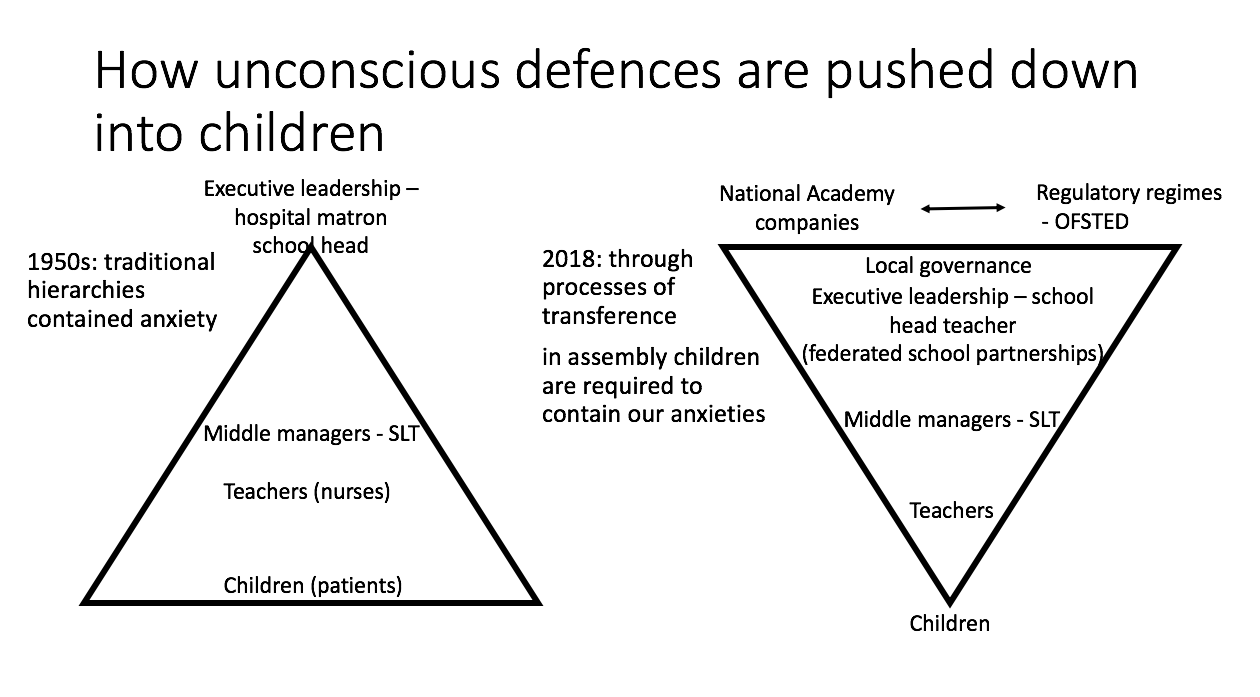
What then of the environment itself? I have never quite been able to shake my sense that the psychodynamics of the school assembly seemed to distort my sense of reality. I wonder if it did for the children too? In my stories, I draw attention to the colours, sounds, and contours of the hall. I was trying to cultivate a sense of the ethereal quality of the assembly hall and / or the dance studio with its Hall of Mirrors. Might this have an impact on the children? There was something disquieting about being in that space. It left me feeling drowsy. This disembodied space seemed to alter our relationship with the children at another level. It seems paradoxical that we spent so much time shouting at the children to be quiet in a space designed to amplify rather than extinguish noise. This amplification seemed only to point to the impossibility of the disciplinary function. To try and impose a regulatory regime (Silbert and Jacklin, 2015) of silence seemed counterproductive, not least because the children, confined to their rows, sitting squashed, trapped uncomfortably between large bags and coats. Confined by the teachers’ angry glares and whispered hushes. I think there was something else going on here more than just shouting at the children to be quiet.

I am perhaps being overly imaginative here, but shapes, sounds, noises, and motions all seemed to take on a different unknown quality. Something about that space seemed to temporarily alter our relationships. Normal childish exuberances were stilled. Quietened. Deadened, even. Perhaps that’s where their boredom, their “I hate assemblies, Sir” refrain, came from or have we, inadvertently, engineered a culture of compliance where the pastoral system within the school, here, as the assembly, seems “stagnant” (Williams, 2013) to the emotional needs of the children. I am reminded of a similar observation from a subsequent action research analysis on the effect of long-term stays in hospital for children by Menzies Lyth, who notes, “An important aspect of hospitalization and treatment for many children is immobilization. This deprives the child of a normal means of dealing with feelings and problems: by activity” (Menzies Lyth, 1988, p. 139). I wonder if, by noisily enforcing this culture of silence, our positions become increasingly polarised, perhaps ultimately immobilizing our relationships with the children?

I’m prepared to accept that this may be stretching the point slightly, but Winnicott’s observations of the relationship between mother and child seem eerily reminiscent of my sense of our distorted relationships with the children. “The child with an unresponsive mother – the mother whose face is frozen by a depressed mood – is forced to perceive, to read the mood at the cost of his own feelings being recognized. This perception that pre-empts apperception is an early form of compliance” (Winnicott, 1960 cited in Phillips, 1988 p. 128 p.129-30) Whilst Bob and I act as *loco in parentis* for the mother and we ignore how the children feel, or create a hostile environment through the assembly, then perhaps we become frozen by a depressed mood and we inhibit the children’s capacity to develop effectively.

Perhaps we have engineered this culture because we lack the knowledge of psychodynamic practice? Admittedly this is far outside the scope of this thesis; nevertheless it came to fascinate me and is something that I would like to return to, possibly in other research.

Figure 4



In the next section, I consider the long-term effects of social defences for the teaching community.

## Section 3: Lessons for staff

**Introduction**

Here, I suggest a new, ‘contemporary’ social defence that I associate with being at the school, one that I allude to within the stories. I was often left exhausted emotionally by the complexity of my cases in the school and gradually became physically shattered. I equate this with the sense of the frenetic busyness; of never stopping to stand still and think. If only we had.

**How can we help teachers to understand the impact of social defences?**

If we are to understand the children, we need to understand our behaviours first, (Billington, 2000; 2006; Bibby, 2011; Hyman, 2012; Sprince, 2002; Ramvi, 2009; 2011) and that schools should provide the means to offer a ‘holding’ role (Hyman, 2012). In my role as a form tutor, I came to reconsider how the children’s behaviour represents far more than locking down. It helped me to understand why the children close themselves off from their feelings.

Perhaps it is, after all, our well intentioned if unthinking adherence to conveying ‘*the* message’ to the children in the hall that needs to be re-examined. It might well be our actions, our behaviours, the projection of our anxieties about our primary task that requires attention, rather than the children’s response as we tend to focus on? It has become easier to measure the student in a deficit model, it is easier to find fault or to ‘blame’ the community, the area, or perceived deficits in the children’s families rather than looking to our anxieties about the job and our lack of insight or knowledge? On this I agree with Billington’s insight through his case studies in *Separating, losing and excluding children*, *narratives of difference,* 2000. I can see why he rejects a ‘cuppa’ with the staff at Gary’s school to create a neutral space from which to help conduct his assessment.

Moreover, the transference of our emotional anxiety within the assembly hall must amplify all the children’s emotions, including the happiness, joy and all those other mixed feelings of uncertainty, or of rejection. Our pedagogical practices limit children’s capacity to choose; for example, in the assembly we displayed children’s work, digitally projected onto large whiteboards suspended from the ceiling, without asking their permission. We established routines where they were forced to the front to be sanctioned or rewarded for their academic achievements or lack thereof (see Story 3). This hyper-intensification manifested unbearable feelings and emotions so overwhelming that they had no recourse but to ‘lock down’. That our limitations occur at the unconscious level and collectively is hard to grasp, yet as Greenwood suggests:

“The problem can then be exacerbated by the understandably negative reactions of those around them. Without a lot of insight, psychological knowledge and prior thinking, it will be hard for teachers and carers to see any trigger for such antisocial behaviour. Children will then be in ‘double trouble’, labelled, despaired of and needing a hard shell to stop them feeling the unbearable badness inside.” (2002, p.296)

Perhaps the intensity of the gaze in the assembly hall that we were all exposed to meant that we all repressed our emotions?

**Understanding frenetic ‘busy-ness’ as a social defence**

I also want to suggest that we create a frenetic busyness to avoid the primary function of our job. If we are always running (Stone, 2009), then we haven’t the time to reflect nor to think about how anxious we feel. This becomes self-serving and acts as another defensive position. The dizzying pace of the organisation, constantly feeling late and not good enough in Story 1, along with the dominant focus on attendance, behaviour and attainment, limited my capacity to hold (Hyman, 2012) the emotional needs of my form. I often felt that I needed to be seen to be busy, which whilst “superficially comforting” felt like a recurring form of “self-defeating” defence (Hyde and Thomas, 2002, p.409).

**Stage 6: Who have I become - an emergent state of critical reflection?**

In this section, I explore a new critical position represented in Figure 5.1 about how my journey unfolded and what happened to me when by writing about my experiences in the thesis, I stopped running and started thinking.

*The point is that this was never for him. It was always for me to prove to myself that I could be clever like him. But I can’t. It was never going to be enough. I’m not in competition with him. I’m not a Head teacher. I really don’t want to be one … but don’t get rid of me. It doesn’t stack up - overspend the budget for sure, don’t renew the contract, but please don’t get rid of me. There are people here who can’t do what I can do, aren’t as experienced as me (am I too qualified to work here now?). There are macho, sports teachers here incapable of admitting their mistakes, weaknesses and yet you choose them over me? Really?*

*That hurts.*

*It’s not that they won’t love these kids like I do. It’s that they can’t love the kids like I do. I miss them. And you’ve taken them away from me. But kept some lemons who can’t emote, who wouldn’t ever put themselves through this, who wouldn’t look for new ways of doing things. Instead you’ve left these kids with a bunch of security guards. Think.*

*It was my privilege to work with those children. Lecturing at the university isn’t the same, teaching largely white, well-off, clever students to be, hopefully, cleverer - so what, anyone can do that. Teaching students who are better scholars than I am to be bright - big deal. I’d give it up tomorrow to teach my form again. We barely have a tutorial system in the university. I can’t do what I’m good at doing.*

*Teaching 7C was my privilege.*

*I thought this was about my symbolic father figures in the school, about Bob and Brian. It isn’t it. I’m not the avuncular chap standing haplessly at the front. It’s me. I’m the dad. What I brought to this role were my skills as a dad. I fed, nurtured and loved those children like they were my own. But it’s more than that.*

*It’s also about my anguish and my sorrow at parting - I won’t ever get to watch them grow up. Usually the form tutor stays with their group as they get older and 7C becomes 8C. Now, I can’t watch what happens to them, be there for them, protect them. I can’t see how they will develop.*

*Worse, I can’t bring my new knowledge to help them grow up in a brutal system. A beginning, middle and profoundly unsatisfactory end.*

I see the emergence of this new position as a process similar to the shift from the paranoid–schizoid to the depressive position where, like the new born baby coming to terms with their reality in Chapter 2, I have become more critically alert - able to reflect on the implications of my behaviour on the children. My acknowledgement of this process offers me greater insight and meaning about the consequences of my actions and also makes me feel both a sense of relief and sadness.

Klein sees this transition thus:

“If the confluence of loved and hated figures can be borne, anxiety begins to centre on the welfare and survival of the other as a whole object, eventually giving rise to remorseful guilt and poignant sadness, linked to the deepening of love. With pining for what has been lost or damaged by hate comes an urge to repair”. [[13]](#footnote-13)

A mental process, a “mental constellation” [[14]](#footnote-14)has occurred which precludes my membership, my belonging to the group with all of its comfortable certainties and routines. The focus of my “good internal object” means that now I recognise these as defensive positions. I know why they are there and what purpose they serve. For Klein, the “depressive position functioning, means that the individual can take personal responsibility and perceive him - or herself and the other as separate”[[15]](#footnote-15) More knowledge isn’t necessarily easier (Bion, 1962, Ramvi, 2009). I am more emotionally centred for reflecting on my experiences and for writing them down and also lonelier. Adrift. A contradictory state of certainty and uncertainty. I want to return to school and to share with them what I’ve discovered. Yet would this be welcomed, well received? I feel that it is better to be in my position now, in possession of new knowledge, but perversely might this new state of critical awareness mean that I have started a process of separation from which I can’t return? The only thing that has changed is me.

## Recommendations

### On how employing psychoanalytic techniques could engender a more compassionate culture within the school.

I began this Chapter with a quote from Simon Tucker’s paper: *Still not good enough! Must try harder: an exploration of social defences in schools* (2015). Here I extend Tucker’s insight to the pressures that head teachers are under by considering the impact of social defences when projected onto the children.

Whilst Tucker notes how the absence of old hierarchies in schools mean that head teachers become left with an intolerable burden, managing dangerous ideals of educational attainment, they understandably create a series of social defences against the intolerable pressures that they face from staff, parents, stakeholders, and government in the context of “crumbling societal fabric” (2015, p.258). In Ramvi’s analysis (2010) she gives expression to social defence systems as a means of protection but “where teachers can evade acknowledging mutual vulnerability in their relationships with their students” 2010, p.342). My reading of her paper, made me contemplate, when I talked to Lemar after an assembly, whether his response was as the result of ‘Bob’s’ anxiety, as transferred onto the children. Bob’s ideal of a new climate for learning left both the children and teachers under an unbearable psychological burden. I have reached a conclusion that there is real benefit in employing psychoanalytic techniques to engender a safer, more compassionate culture within the school, thus reducing our shared burden.

### Reaffirming a commitment to my own Continuous Professional Development

Since first reading her work, I have been privileged to join (in the capacity of a trainee student counsellor) a professional Association set up by Jenny Sprince, a chartered psychotherapist, to promote the benefits of therapeutic psychodynamic practice and research in organisational settings. In the belief that we will all benefit from “Making psychodynamic insights accessible to teachers as an integral part of their professional task” (Hanko, 2002).I share the Association’s objectives and want to promote Jenny’s impassioned plea for establishing “internal models of containment” (2002, p.160) within other schools.

As she argues, “through a structure that provides a multi-layered experience of psychodynamic thinking for groups at all levels. They have to use this to promote and model responsive, honest and authoritative management and to foster supportive relationships between senior and junior staff, males and females, adults and children” (Sprince, 2002, p.160). With emphasis on a more therapeutic, holding, environment, colleagues, regardless of their place within the school hierarchy, can be taught the value of working through emotional anxieties about the job. We may become less mistrustful of one another, perhaps more engaged, mindful of the challenges of working in a complex emotional space and will almost certainly see significantly improved outcomes for children. It was Jenny who suggested to me that the behaviours recorded in my second story were symptomatic of ‘muddled thinking’.

### Creating a more compassionate culture within the school by employing psychoanalytic group work techniques

I suggest that the children’s behaviours in school mirror our own, for example, the Y11 student who expelled his homophobic insult was unconsciously projecting aspects of the same macho culture that he had been immersed in throughout the assembly. In the corridor outside my staffroom, away from the strict supervision of the assembly hall, his group merely project what they have come to learn. Whether he transfers repressed desires, or anxieties about his sexuality onto me, the fact is that he feels he can because he is immersed in a culture where it is deemed acceptable to behave in an aggressive manner where children are separated out, isolated from their group, as demonstrated in the misname to induce shame assemblies. Why then wouldn’t he do the same to me in his space? It’s become what he knows – a learnt behaviour. Sprince points to the often-parallel behaviours she observed when working in a secure residential home between the staff and the children (2002). She noted that whilst the children in care homes often demonstrated chaotic behaviours, she noticed that their guardians were similarly engaged in destructive and chaotic relationships in their private and professional lives. She used psychoanalytic techniques through group work to explore their unconscious behaviours, creating a calmer, more reflective community.

Similarly, psychoanalytic techniques introduced into CPD sessions would offer emotional security for staff working in a school that is challenging. It may even help to improve retention and recruitment rates. Kalu suggests that practitioners supporting distressed children also need to find the time and the space to seek containment for themselves.

“It is the adult taking in the projections and reacting with them that makes the difference. It is not reacting with undue anger or anxiety from our own emotions but rather finding a modified response in keeping with what the child has communicated.” (Kalu, 2002, p. 372).

By investing in psychoanalytical approaches, we can engender this fairer more compassionate culture instead of avoiding difficult emotional tasks. It is not difficult to join in and to keep shouting at children in a place where it has become the norm to shout at children. It is far harder to attend to the difficult emotional aspects of working in the school and recognising our collective need for emotional compassion as teachers. “Turning a blind eye” for Steiner, (1985) means ignoring and not working through in psychoanalytical terms “difficult emotions, topics or relations” (Steiner, (1985) cited in Ramvi, 2009, p. 5). When analysing Story 3, I realised that one of the hardest things I had to do was to make an accommodation to the fact that he had caused me pain and I resented him for that. I now regret letting these feelings fester for such a long period of time and wish that I had explained to the student how his words had made me feel. If I had found the time, and courage, to work this through with him he might also have learnt something. Perhaps he might have learned not to do the same to others and risk damaging his relationships in later life. The culture in school was not conducive to these approaches. Working in this space for teachers can feel isolated and lonely, which was marked by my inadequate response to the Y11 student and in my muted and unsatisfactory exchange with my colleague in Story 4. Ramvi (2009) identifies similar muted exchanges which she frames as a form of vulnerability, “to be naked and vulnerable is to have no protection. The teacher is being driven towards this lack of protection in his/her relationship to the students” (p.7). I think that psychoanalytic group work would help to reduce this form of vulnerability and strengthen the emotional maturity of the staff team.

### Is the outcome of the school assembly to push teachers’ anxieties about the primary task down onto the children?

This may be an extension of Menzies Lyth’s original theory and it certainly needs further research before I can make any claim with certainty. This isn’t a departure from her original theory, but an extension of Tucker and Ramvi’s work with primary head teachers and teaching staff respectively. I offer the conclusion, from my observations at school, that by perpetuating a system of social defences we unconsciously pushed our adult anxieties down onto the children. By constantly idealising the silent majority, through projecting PowerPoint slides about exam reforms, holding children to account against new behaviour policies, and highlighting their strengths and their inadequacies, we ran the risk of forcing our anxieties on to the children. That is driven, I suspect, by both a real threat to staff and the teacher’s internal phantasised anxieties, at least my own, about OFSTED, which only serves to make the point.

The children lack the emotional valency (Obholzer, 1994, p.134) to cope with this. Our anxieties, perceived as a threat by the children’s unconscious may be summed up by Lemar’s muted, frozen response. We know that the role of the unconscious is to defend against unwanted threats leaving the pupil disoriented, and prone to misunderstanding and confusion:

“Information that has some emotional significance for the individual is assessed … and, if this mechanism detects threat, the individual develops unconscious fear and anxiety that mobilize adaptive responses to situations to which immediate action is necessary” (Davou, 2002, p.287)

If Lemar can serve both as the individual child and as a composite of my form group, then his response may provide some insight into how unconscious processes influence the children’s behaviour and the learning process. As I concluded my research, I was beginning to reflect on my observations of the children’s responses to being in assembly as more than just about being bored; something unseen was inhibiting the hoped for, motivational spring in the step, making the whole experience feel muted and ambivalent. I surmised that this may be a consequence of our social defences as projected onto the children. Or perhaps they were just fed up with being measured constantly against an idealised pupil phantasised entirely out of the teachers’ minds. Perhaps it was that unbearable notion that needed to be defended against.

Through the opportunity and privilege of working towards my EdD, I have been enabled to think far more about myself, my personality and the role. By way of an epiphany, I now fundamentally believe that the position of form tutor made me embrace what might be considered, the quality of nurturance. That feels good. I feel good in that role. Stronger than when I’m playing at being a shouty father. Where the old Head’s religious views demanded strong, traditional male teachers; the role of the male teacher as carer is seen as circumspect and therefore rejected. Pastoral care roles in secondary schools may traditionally have been seen as the domain of female teachers, but from my experience, children just value and trust people who are attuned to their emotions. Pastoral care is everyone’s responsibility. I value my experiences of being a male teacher who cares about the children in his form, even loves them like a father figure. Perhaps there might be challenges for some boys receiving that fatherly warmth and compassion from another man, if they have been lacking it and yet, it didn’t seem too. I tried to contain all the children’s needs and most of the time, like I suspect most of my colleagues, I simply tried to be there and keep them in my mind.

## 

## What have I contributed?

1. A reflective model to support Menzies–Lyth’s insights to explain how I perceived that the individual member of the group can become rejected by the wider system for continuing to use their own defences (Menzies-Lyth, 1988, p.73);
2. From my observations of the psychodynamics of the assembly hall, I postulate that unconscious social defences are pushed down onto the children through transference and inhibit their potential development;
3. An acknowledgement that it’s acceptable to be me, and that perhaps I did some good;
4. I have joined a new professional Association and have started training in therapeutic supervision accredited by the British Psychoanalytic Council.

Epilogue:

From The History Boys *“*[*One of the hardest things for boys to learn is that a teacher is human. One of the hardest things for a teacher to learn is not to try and tell them.*](http://www.azquotes.com/quote/395543)*”*

(Alan Bennett, 2004, p.42)

*I’m told that Bob wept when he was asked to leave. I wasn’t there. I was long gone. He came in late one night when everyone had left for the day and picked up his belongings. The only people to see him were the caretakers and the cleaning staff. Former colleagues I’m still in contact with told me that he had tears in his eyes and looked back wistfully as he walked through the reception area to the upper landings where we spent so many hours lining the kids up for assembly.*

*Poor bloke. He was a colour sergeant. He knew it. We knew it. He was only carrying out his orders. I felt more for him than I did when I left. It was his life. He arose at 5 am, travelled in ready for work sometimes at 6am in the morning. The rest of us slumped in at 8 am.*

*Dumped unceremoniously.*

*They say a new broom sweeps clean and here the new Executive Head was no exception. The deputy, the SLT, and interestingly, or so I noticed, an awful lot of experienced staff all over a certain age, all walked or were bounced. I mentioned it to the union rep once, but he was too busy retiring anyway. He hadn’t spotted it, but it’s interesting to me how the new academies are employing very young teachers. They’re cheaper. Helps with the budget deficit. You bring in experienced staff who cost a lot to steady the ship, then you get rid of them when they break the bank. Boom and bust micro-economics. I imagine that the finance people in HQ have to square the circle, but I can’t help thinking that a lot of wisdom walks out of the door.*

*Falling school rolls, a demographic dip, lousy results. A triple whammy.*

*My lovely maths teacher lasted for six months before she too was kicked out.*

*Brian left. Off to sunny France. Topped up his pension nicely, time now to top up his tan. Good on him.*

*Poor Bob. No such joy. Another school will pick him up somewhere.*

*A couple of years later, after I had left the school, I bumped into Lemar unexpectedly. I coach junior Sunday league football and was invited to a training session for coaches led by a very well – respected Premier League Youth Academy coach who was using some lads from one of the big, local football club’s academy squads to demonstrate some techniques to us. There was a lad, more of a man, who ran like a stallion, big, strong, fit, disciplined. He beat the rest hands down, quick feet. I had no idea who he was but I heard some of the others use his name and, in the gloomy dusk, recognised him. Afterwards, chatting to one of the other coaches I enquired who the big centre – forward was, and we realized it was my Lemar.*

*“He’s brilliant”, the other coach enthused, “big and strong, fast. We’ll not be able to keep him here, there are a couple of the big clubs after him. He paused, and looked at me, “if he can keep his head.”*

*I went up to Lemar and shook him by the hand. He didn’t recognise me at first, out of context I suppose, and he seemed slightly embarrassed but I wasn’t. I gabbled on like a kid about him to my mate in the car on the way home as if he was one of my own. I was so proud of him.*

*Bob would have been too. Pity, he’ll never get to know.*

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**New Association membership/CPD**

* Member of the Association for Psychodynamic Practice and Counselling in Organisational Settings (APPCIOS)
* APPCIOS Mentor, Dr. Anne-Marie Wright (ongoing)
* 6-week Work Discussion Webinar in psychodynamic practice with Susan MacIver, July 2016
* Member of the group for the advancement of psychodynamics and psychotherapy in social work (GAPS), promoting therapeutic and relationship-based approaches in social work.

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**Chapter 1 Appendices**

Appendix 1.1 The author as data source

**Chapter 2 Appendices**

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## Chapter 1: Appendices

### Appendix 1.1 The author as data source.

After Ellis et al (2007), Sikes (2010, 2013) and the other autoethnographers in Chapter 3 I started to think far more about how I could use autoethnographic techniques to understand who I am and the cultural influences that informed my values and beliefs. I use some of these images as the basis for a lecture that I deliver called “Storying childhood” and tease out parallels with my students encouraging them to imagine the holistic lives of the children that they will work with. Very similar to life story work, the collage of photos was my attempt to apply Chang’s autoethnographic culturegram (2008, p.98) to my life when I was growing up. The following pages include some examples of how my literature in this thesis has informed my new role as a university lecturer in Education, Inclusion and Childhood Studies.

By reflecting on my experiences so too I have reflected on the values I learnt from my family and realized through this process how important they were in shaping my future identity. My interests, passions, career choices and all of my doubts, uncertainties and my strengths. They were inimical to my sense of me in becoming (Best and Geddes, 2002).

Completing these teaching materials for my students brings some authenticity to my teaching with undergraduates. I ask them to use a culturegram to generate their own story to think about their journey, how they got where they are and how their multiple identities and psychologies intertwine to create their sense of self. I show them these slides, of me as a boy in the garden with my granddad and ask them to think about the juxtaposition of my happy and loving childhood memories playing in our garden in contrast to some of the family homes / gardens I have visited during my social work practice.

Sample of slides from my lecture to demonstrate how I have applied new learning at Leeds Trinity University:

**Slide 1** “Of writing self,

“The emphasis on self, biography, history and experience must always work back and forth between three concerns: the concerns of performance, of process, and/or of analysis.

A focus on performance produces performance texts, the tale and the telling … a focus on process examines a social form, or event...the focus on analysis looks at the specific lives of individuals who live the process that is being studied in order to locate their lives in their historical moment.” (Denzin, 2013)

**Slide 2** Drawing on my own experiences - Of the author as a boy with my late grandfather.



Is this a form of autoethnographic data?

A photo of childhood?

A memory?

an artifact?

A data source to be:

•recorded,

•categorized

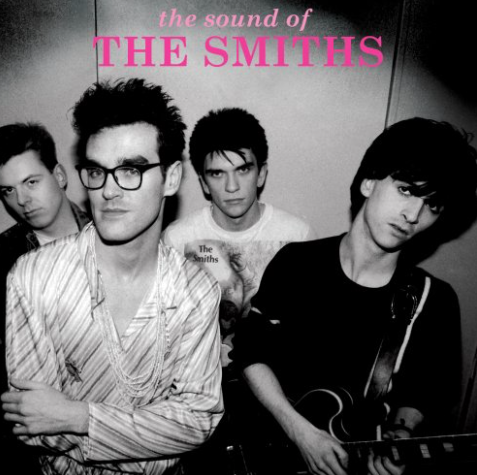
•themes to be analyzed?

•interpreted?

Questions from my students in discussion include:

* Is memory data?
* Can we write about childhood memories, dreams, imagination?
* is it “academic enough”?

**Slide 3** “Bring into relation your experience with three levels of discourse – personal (autobiography), popular (community stories, oral history or popular culture) [and] expert (disciplines of knowledge). In each case use ... *(the)* sting of memory to locate items significant to you.” (Ulmer, 1989 in Denzin, 2013)”

**Slide 4:** **Sample** **Culture gram**

3 x Images removed by author under copyright infringement

(adapted from Chang, H. (2008: 131) its aim is to visualize your social and cultural self and from that I created my childhood culturegram. I only started using these materials through the EdD but on realizing their value in helping me to identify myself through my story and subsequently, the stories in Chapter 4.



This template is left blank for my students to complete as they choose. In seminar, we discuss what if anything they have included or omitted and why?

I offer a version here removed for lack of copyright permission. The influences of my dad’s and now my politics are particularly evident. The North East of England, in the 1980s was a region decimated by industrial decline, and unemployment.

Brought up by a left – wing Catholic, I was instilled with a strong commitment to social justice, equality and fairness. To help others was one of the values passed down from my parents.

## Chapter 2: Appendices

### Appendix 2.1: Architecture of my reading

In this Appendix I will describe some of the iterative processes that I went through to refine my research question. From prior study I discovered and came to very much admire Dr. Diana Ridley from Sheffield Hallam University who wrote a guide for student’s on “How to do a Literature Review” (2012). I recommend this book to my own graduate students. In her book she recommends different ways of ordering reading and I started with broad “Categories of reading”, reading the output of the main theorists whose work interested me, principally Menzies Lyth, and Melanie Klein, and then re focused my readings more systematically before making some further design decisions.

How the literature led me to develop my ideas in the thesis

Ridley recommends creating an “architecture” of reading (Ridley, 2012) enabling student researchers to refine several areas or themes for analysis from the research. In turn, I evaluated these for relevance, whilst broadly allowing the conclusions that I teased from them intuitively to point me in a direction that seemed relevant. As I read I also shaped and then iteratively edited my research. Before I developed a specific architecture for my thesis I started to pull articles and data from a variety of different sources that were naturally of interest to me and from which I was able to form some emerging arguments through my reading. The following sources form the basis for a more detailed ‘architecture’ of my ideas and whilst they seemed quite random at first began to provide a loose structure before beginning a more systematic synthesis of material from the literature. These categories represent a history of my reading. This table shows some of the broad categories of reading that I started to work with before narrowing my focus. Some of these early themes resonate throughout for example “shame” and others like disciplinarity and Foucauldian concepts of power and discipline I discarded as I developed my thinking. Eventually, for the sake of wordage, and manageability I had to make some further decisions, rejecting these as themes that didn’t fit or match my research question either on the advice of my supervisor or because I felt that I was straying too far from the point. This decision making has proven remarkably difficult to do and, as I reflect on writing the thesis becomes one of the most instrumental aspects of my learning.

I started to focus my reading into key concepts and ideas from which I shaped my discussion. The following table represents an account of the major ideas, theories and influences that have shaped the ideas present in this thesis chronologically

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Key steps in developing my argument from the literature** | **Key References** |
| Accounts of power, separation, loss and anxiety working with marginalised and distressed children was key in defining the direction of my thesis and his five principles for working with children, listening to them, thinking about how we speak of children are very important to me now in the evolution of my practice and teaching (2006). | Billington, T. (2000) Separating, losing and excluding children, narratives of difference Routlege Falmer  Working with children: assessment, representation and intervention London: Sage. (2006) |
| Billington’s narratives of difference led me to thinking about how anxiety and shame are misunderstood in school systems.  When first developing my research I thought about my student who felt he had to “put on his face before heading home”, and the Y9 anger management student who “still slept with the landing light on”. My initial poster presentation title was after her experiences but here I started to see this as a move away from shame and focus more on anxiety.  Shame was beginning to feel like a student deficit model, the children’s behaviours were their fault and / or their upbringing rather than as a consequence of our professional actions. It was apparent through Story 3 how we tried to induce shame within our students. | Shane, (2009) Monroe, (2012) |
| Through supervision I was beginning to draw on more psychoanalytical thought and “Key concepts in psychoanalysis” was helpful in explaining key terms in psychoanalysis in simple, straight forward terms. I developed ideas about splitting and projection and defences. | Frosh, S. (2002). Key concepts in psychoanalysis |
| I also started to develop my understanding of the assembly as about transference, counter transference and focusing on the relationships in assembly as an outcome of defences against persecutory anxiety.  I started to read about Bion, mindful of concepts like, container/contained, and learning from experience. I was particularly interested in his theories of ‘not wanting to know’ (-K) did this relate to what I was seeing with the children in assembly? | Klein, M. (1960) Our adult world and its roots in infancy; Envy and gratitude, Volume 3, (1957)  Bion, W. (1962) Learning from Experience: key themes:  Container/contained  Desire to understand /  desire not to know |
| On the functioning of social defence systems against anxiety in institutions helped me to understand how our actions in schools seemed more connected with teacher’s anxieties about the job. I knew that the work made me feel anxious but until I read Menzies Lyth I was unable to see the development of this, holistically, and at an organizational level, and it was profound. | Menzies, Lyth, I. (1959, 1988) |
| Papers that helped me to develop and then to apply my understanding of social defences in schools, the creation of defences against the primary task in the school  Organisations, anxieties and defences; towards a psychoanalytic, social psychology  If we recognize the premise, posed by Tucker that systems of hierarchy in schools have failed to contain anxiety how can we create schools as therapeutically safe places to be?  I realized, following Tucker, and my field notes, that hierarchical pressures in schools push anxiety from Head teachers, past teachers and possibly onto students directly?  I started to consider the effect of the regulatory framework as a disciplinary power specifically whether OFSTED as a form of social defence system (answered by Tucker’s analysis); extend and broaden this to look at the persecutory nature of regulation and inspection regimes. | Bibby, Tamara (2011) Education an impossible profession – psychoanalytical explorations of learning and classrooms? |
| Bain, A. (1998) on systems defensive domains |
| Ramvi, E. (2009, 2010) on defences in teacher’s classroom experiences |
| Armstrong, D & Rustin, M. (2015) (eds.) Social defences against anxiety, explorations in a paradigm  Tucker, S. (2015) still not good enough must try harder: an exploration of social defences in schools. |
| I started to think about the school as a containing environment and what happens if schools don’t provide emotional support to staff and students. This was a background paper but very influential to me in helping me to think about my anxiety working in the school and my general unease in practicing there. | Bion Theories of containment, ‘The school as a holding environment.’ Hyman, S. (Third Psychoanalysis in Education Conference Dec. 2016) |
| Reflective practice was clearly foremost in the development of my thesis by this stage, the literature pointed specifically to me understand my role and paying attention to the emotional connection and to my feelings and the tensions that I had between my personal values and professional practice. Fook’s work on the reflective teacher/social worker was well known to me and Williams’ paper on Bion and the reflective practitioner was pivotal in the direction of my thesis. | Sprince, J. (2002), Fook, (2002, 2007), Williams, A. (2013) |
| Emotional significance of learning mobilizes unconscious fear and anxiety. I was reading psychodynamics lit. and relationships at this stage. | Davou, B. (2002) how unconscious processes influencing learning  Best and Geddes, (2002) Editorial to the Special Edition of the Journal of Psychodynamic Practice in Education |
| By this stage I was fascinated by psychodynamic practice and the notion of maturation and emotional development, of ‘being–in–becoming’ was fascinating. This notion of children developing personality, identity and the challenges juxtaposed by in built defences within organisational systems was illuminating to me. |

## Appendix 2.2: First search results (Key questions table)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Paper | How does this paper define the topic | What issues or debates are raised? | Key source? Why? | What concepts, models, perspectives, theories are presented? | **What questions and problems does the Paper address?** | **What methods (if any) are employed in the paper?** | In what ways does this paper relate to other papers in this field? | How has the paper helped to develop my understanding of the topic? |
| **1** | Considering Shame and its Implications for Student Learning  Johnson, Diane Elizabeth  8300 UNSW College Student Journal, 2012, Vol.46(1), p.3-17 [Peer Reviewed Journal] | Shame is associated with variables thought to be closely associated with student learning – sense of community, burnout and achievement goals. | Underlines the significance of Nathanson’s compass of shame, dealing with student’s sudden shame in the classroom | Yes, useful for understanding Story 3 background reading | Promotes Nathanson’s earlier work on understanding the importance of community as a vehicle for supporting students affected by shame. | Teacher’s lack of empathy, focus on controls. Ignores their anxieties. | Academic lit review; quant. analysis of student survey 2010 | references Nathanson in the abstract his “compass of shame in understanding students' struggles with shame.” | Relevant for locating Story 3 in the context of damaging effects of shaming students offers a contrasting model? |
| **2** | Marshall Alcorn  Shame, classroom resistance, and Bion’s desire not to know  Marshall Alcorn  8300 UNSW ETD: Educação Temática Digital, Vol 13, Iss 1, Pp 225-237 (2011) | Applies psychoanalytical perspective, links to Bion’s desire not to know. | When teachers lack immediacy, are unclear, and/or demonstrate poor communication competence, students tend to report heightened negative emotional reactions. | Yes, important later for story 3 and my analysis in C5 | In the present study, elaborate ERT by exploring the effects of teacher communication behaviours and emotional processes on discrete negative emotions, including anger, anxiety, shame, hopelessness, and boredom. | Emotional response theory (ERT), recent researchers have observed connections between teachers' communication behaviours and students' emotional reactions. | Uses cross-sectional survey data, tested a hypothesized predictive model using structural equation modelling; | Referenced Silvan Tomkins concept of shame, second author in my preliminary search to name this author | Introduced concept of Emotional Response Theory  Very interesting later in my discussion, C5, links with William’s 2013 paper? |
| **3** | SHAME AND LEARNING  Shane, Paul for UNSW American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 1980, Vol.50(2), pp.348-355 [Peer Reviewed Journal] | Overcoming cognitive shame can lead to learning, mastery, and competence. Implications for mental health work in other settings are offered. | Here he examines how understanding cognitive shame provides opportunities for educators and students to cope more adequately with issues of trust, loneliness, and separation in classroom settings. | Yes, Name and misname assemblies? interesting background reading | “What is meant by “learning has its roots in shame” is that the desire to know be- gins with the recognition and location of the source of one’s shame.” Useful & interesting perspective. | The central thesis of this paper is that there are forms of learning that are a by-product of overcoming shame. | Among the emotional concomitants of shame discussed in the literature are I) shock, 2) the fear of abandonment, and 3) feelings of isolation. | Referenced Erikson second stage of psychosocial development autonomy versus shame and doubt | Very useful discussion of shame:  Clear, definitions;  Limitations US – based model? |
| **4** | Shame Solutions: How Shame Impacts School-Aged Children and What Teachers Can Do to Help  Monroe, Ann  8300 UNSW The Educational Forum, 2008, Vol.73(1), p.58-66 [Peer Reviewed Journal] | This essay investigates shame theory and explores how societal shaming practices manifest themselves in schools. References the “dunce cap”. | School-aged children have invariably been exposed to shame at home and receive an extra dose of it in our current school system. | Useful background reading, overly classroom focused. | Alternative pedagogical strategies—those that avoid shame and shaming—are discussed and endorsed. | Though many psychologists and researchers argue over the age at which humans first experience shame, all agree that by age two children have the capacity to be shamed (Lansky and Morrison 1997). | Lit. review and theoretical discussion | Snowballing ref: Nathanson 2000 Referenced Erikson 1950 Theory of psychosocial Development | Examines the negative effects of shame on human development. Offers alternatives to shaming in the school and alternative ped. practices to shaming children. |
| **5** | The Relationship Between Psychopathology and Shame in Secondary School Students  Ang, Rebecca P.; Khoo, Angeline  8300 Pastoral Care in Education, 2004, Vol.22(1), p.25-33 [Peer Reviewed Journal] | Psychopathology | Implications of these findings with regard to comorbidity of psychopathology and its relationship to shame, classroom interventions, as well as implications pertaining to teachers' and counsellors' work with at-risk students. | No | Quantitative psychology; very dense, mathematical concepts | This study investigated the relationship between psychopathology and shame. | Quant – but interested in psycho pathology but intro to a new Journal worth exploring = | - | Didn’t understand the paper’s approach. |
| **6** | Education – an impossible profession Tamara Bibby Routledge Press Taylor Francis Group, 2011, | Educational lecturer, IOE uses psychoanalytical theory in the classroom context, | Discusses perspectives of P/A | YES, for discussion /analysis in C5 | Psychoanalytical | Lack of P/A thinking in the education system, fascinating omissions in teacher training and lack of reflection. | Application of theoretical perspectives, | integrates P/A theory to the classroom but feels very theoretical. Dense read. | Complex reading but relates specifically to P/A in the classroom, very interesting but hard reading. |
| **7** | Rustin, Margaret companion piece to the Climbie enquiry, 2005 | Discusses defences used by the whole enquiry against the emotional pain associated with Climbie | Argues that the whole exercise of the Laming Inquiry was really a social defence against emotional pain | Yes \*\* | Psychoanalytical  / psychodynamic  Practice | explains how, social workers can become overwhelmed by anxiety. Absorbing read resonates with my experiences. | Discourse analysis /  Social defences theory | links to Andrew Cooper, write a companion piece and his work links to Armstrong and Rustin’s 2015 collection | Highly influential, paper introduced to in Part 1, |
| **8** | Defences and defensiveness in social work practice British Journal of Social Work, Pamela Trevithick | Advocating for a more psychoanalytical interpretation of social work | Defines psychoanalytical terms from psychoanalysis - regarding personal defence and how they can be applied to social work  Very useful for describing children’s personal defence less so for a theoretical perspective ion social defences in organizational settings | YES \*\*\* | Psychoanalytical  / psychodynamic  Practice  And Social Work theory/ practice | Locates social workers responses to why families present as they sometimes do in reality, grounded in anxiety, offers a remarkable insight and definitions of social defences thinking and practice. | Social defences theory | She guest edits a Special Journal in Social Work which covers social defences and P/A. | I contacted her to discuss social defences. This is a key paper. |
| **9** | A psycho – social perspective on social defences  Paul Hoggett in Social defences against anxiety Eds. Armstrong, D. and Rustin, M. 2015 | Through a psycho – social lens | Focus less on defences against anxiety but on feelings that might be overwhelming. Non-school based adopts theoretical perspective Ch. 3 in Armstrong and Rustin | Yes \* | Introduces psycho-social perspective as a reflective critique of IML and SD theory | Applies a psycho-social lens to SD theory and deepen the relationship between psychoanalytic and sociological thinking to enhance IML’s theory | Psycho-social | Part of the Armstrong and Rustin’s 2015 collection | overly focused on the social over the psycho analytical perhaps? but  Very useful critique of social defences theory |
| **10** | Tucker, S. Still not good enough! Must try harder: an exploration of social defences in schools in Eds. Armstrong, D. and Rustin, M. 2015 | Focus on social defences in schools through primary research with head teachers | Suggests that external forces like inspection regimes (OFSTED) locate anxiety lower down in the school | Yes \*\*\* | One of the only papers that looks at SD in schools and educational settings | Hierarchy’s create feelings of aggregation, separation and isolation | Psychoanalytic | Part of the Armstrong and Rustin’s 2015 collection | Key paper, see Chapter 5, Story 5, does my work link /extend arguably Tucker’s ideas? |
| **11** | Armstrong and Rustin introduction in Social defences against anxiety (Eds.) Armstrong, D. and Rustin, M. 2015 | Introduction to themes raise in a symposium on social defences | Introductory essay explains the basis of their decision to develop a symposium on systems of SD | Yes \*\*\* | Introduces SD psychoanalytically across a huge array of human services sectors, draws on different theoretical, practice | Argues for the continued relevance of SD as a defence against anxiety | Psychoanalytic | Editorial | Key collection, introduces and brings SD theory into the 21st century, fascinating collection of essays |
| **12** | Halton, William Obsessional – punitive defences in care systems: Menzies Lyth revisited. in Social defences against anxiety (Eds.) Armstrong, D. and Rustin, M. 2015 | Introduces psych social settings charts rise of obsessional focus on ‘perfectibility’ around statistics and performance measures within public sector institutions and practices | A re- evaluation of IML’s case study | Yes \* | Focuses on IML’s case study | Focuses on language and obsessional behaviour in IML’s case study | Psychoanalytic | Theoretical interpretation | Poses the question does her paper miss obsessional mechanisms as a SD? |
| **13** | Cooper Andrew, & Lees, Amanda Spotlit: defences against anxiety in contemporary human services organizations, 2015 | Article references fear and dread in an ethnographic case study of three CP teams and references |  | YES\*\*\* |  | Raymond Williams’s structure of feelings | Cultural studies | in Social defences against anxiety (Eds.) Armstrong, D. and Rustin, M. 2015 | Writes a lot of social work theory use of gaming theory in child protection practice |
| **14** | Menzies I, in Therapeutic Communities in Hinshelwood and Manning (1979) | She identifies a drift away from the primary focus for organisations as a key problem seeing schools based in a psych social context recognizes the muddle society causes for school | Thinks schools have lost primary task focus and therefore muddled, sees pastoral well-being as fostering dependence | No |  | Feels as if it were written in the sixties and seventies sound principles but feels out dated | references her own consultancy in adolescent homes for children | Made me search and read her later collection of essays | Background, some insight into her personality? |
| **15** | Sprince, J. developing containment: psychoanalytic consultancy to a therapeutic community for traumatized children 2002 | Development of group work thinking, focus on the anxieties of staff in therapeutic communities to impact the residents. | Need to contain emotional anxieties of staff | YES \*\*\* | Need to contain the emotional wellbeing of professional carers before to address their emotional anxieties about doing the job | Many of the descriptive passages resonate and remind me of work in SS, excellent focus on the individual practice at the micro level depicts her skills as a consultant | Psychodynamic psycho-therapeutic | APPCIOS; spoke to Jenny as part of my job at school, aim to bring them in for consultancy | Very important work resonates with me possible limitations given my work is in a mainstream community; |
| **16** | Bion, Beckett and Bob, Gordon, J. and Kirtchuk, G. Brit Journal of Psychotherapy, 2010 | Reflection piece re-establishing reflective spaces (reflective practice groups) in organizations | Interesting, historical description, background reading | No | Reflections by two clinical psychotherapists at the Cassell Hospital based on the work of Bion and his patient Beckett (less Bion more Beckett and their professor Bob Hinshelwood) |  | Psychodynamic psycho-therapeutic |  | Interesting background reading, focus on the mythologies of Bion and the Tavi? |
| **17** | Experiences in groups Bion, W. | Founding father of group work and assumptions? | Introduces theories of belonging to groups and not belonging, | Yes \*\*\* | anxiety not wanting to know | Leading theorist | Psychoanalytical thinking | Critical theorist, follower of Klein | Very dense but essential reading |
| **18** | Organisational defences revisited: systems and contexts Paula Hyde and Alan B Thomas Journal of managerial psychology17, 5 p.408 | Analysis of organizational defences in health care settings in mental health | Reflections by Manchester business school that attempts to change existing patterns of work | Yes good context | How increases in u/c anxiety can lead to entrenched resistance in the form of organizational defences. | Evidence of social defences in mental health care and barriers to practice | Focus on organisational management/ social defences | Leading theorist | Emerald Insight publishers, but interesting application to mental health settings |
| **19** | Containing anxiety in institutions, Isabel Menzies Lyth, 1988 | Selection of essays, Vol. 1 | Reproduction of seminal classic study in hospital | Yes \*\*\* | interesting introductory interview with author discussing her early carer and development of the Tavistock. | Developed social defences theory and original case study | Psychoanalytical / Tavistock thinker | Leading theorist | Key paper/volume includes my copy of her 1960 Case Study republished |
| **20** | The dynamics of the social selected essays Isabel Menzies Lyth, 1989 | Selection of essays, Vol. 2 | insight into her later thinking, application of her ideas in other hospitals and long stay settings | Yes \*\* | Wider application of P/A consultancy and work in corporate world, links with other key Tavi writers like Trist | Developed social defences theory and original case study | Psychoanalytical | Leading theorist | As above; |
| **21** | Therapeutic Communities, reflections and progress, edited by Bob Hinshelwood, and Nick Manning, 1979 | Selection of essays | Fascinating read, locating health within a critical P? frame | Yes |  |  | Psychoanalytical | Hinshelwood | Background, some very interesting ideas but dated? |
| **22** | Changing landscapes in safeguarding babies and young children in England | Applies social ecology thinking to issues re safeguarding | Interesting article on the legislative changes in terms of CP disagree with conclusion | No |  |  | Social ecology | Bronfenbrenner, 1979 | Fascinating read but not relevant, thought it was about human services and psychology |
| **23** | “I’m beyond caring” a report to the Francis report Marcus Evans in Social defences against anxiety (Eds.) Armstrong, D. and Rustin, M. 2015 | Application of Social defences theory |  | Yes \* | Describes staff over capacity for care in the health services as overwhelming, continuation to IML’s case study. | Responds to Francis by relating changes in privatization and sees the development of survival anxiety –with similarities to schools | Social defences theory | Menzies Lyth | Application of SD theory into wider mainstream medicine/ NHS |
| **24** | What characterizes social defense systems? Ellen Ramvi | Examines teacher’s anxiety about the effects of schools jamming defences down in the classroom level | An ethnographic study of social defences in schools focused on teacher’s anxieties about the primary task | YES \*\*\* | Sets up key definitions of social defences, based on IML, Bion and unconscious forms of anxiety in the classroom |  | Social defences/ Bion | Bion / links to Tony’s 2013 paper. links to Tuckers observations | A key paper, one of my earliest reads and instrumental in explaining social defences and shaping my thesis. |
| **25** | Concentric circles of containment: a psychodynamic contribution to working in pupil referral units, Claudia McLoughlin, 2012, | psychodynamic approach to offering onsite therapeutic child and adolescent mental health services | Similar to Sprince article dealing with containment and looking more a t children less social defense systems | Yes\* | Bion's concept of containment as the necessary foundation for emotional growth and genuine learning | What worked well in PRUs? | psychoanalytic consultation and open systems theory | Bion, Winnicott, Hyman,  And Malberg | Helpful examination of the pressures and psychic emotional anxieties working with traumatised children |
| **26** | The school as a holding environment, Stephen Hyman, 2012 | Theories of containment and emotional attunement and for the school to develop a holding attitude | Practical ways that school psychologists can influence schools to be effective holding environments for students and faculty members. | YES \*\* | A holding mind set is introduced into the school community by the school psychologist, there is an opportunity for staff internalization | Donald Winnicott's work on holding and Peter Fonagy's writings on mentalization are central themes | Psychoanalytic practice, educational psychology | Fonagy Williams, Malberg, Winnicott | Met Stephen at Conference, influential in shaping the direction of my thesis. His paper is focused on clinical practice not systems psychodynamics. |
| **27** | Putting the pieces of the puzzle together: a mentalization based approach to early intervention in primary schools, Malberg, NT, 2012 | looks at applying psychotherapeutic approach in school | to reduce the number of early school suspensions in children ages 3–7 | Background | seek to provide a comprehensive approach to early emotional and behavioural difficulties within the school environment | emphasis on involvement and support of school personnel during the process of referral, assessment and intervention | developmental  psychotherapeutic  approach | Winnicott, Hyman, 2012, Fonagy, Peter current government policy on MH in schools | Thought it would be a bit more useful than it actually is |
| **28** | Lawlor, D. (2009), ‘Menzies 50 years on’ Journal of Human Relations | Discussion of her enduring legacy, development of systems psychodynamics | Poses some questions for the future of organisational development | Yes | Focus on Human relations work |  | Psychoanalytic theory, social defences theory |  | Introduction of term secondary anxiety, met him on my 2009 training |
| **29** | Social defences against organizational learning, Bain, Alistair 1998, Human Relations | Discusses the problems of maladaptive social defences | How do social defences affect the capacity of the organisation to learn? | YES \*\* | Creation of organizational awareness before becoming learning organizations | System domain defences | Psychoanalysis / Organisational learning | Eric Trist, IML  Tavi School, James Krantz | Introduces concept of systems defense domains to me |
| **30** | Obholzer, Anton The unconscious at work, 1994 | Individual and organizational stress at work | Organisations have directly observable structures and functions and an unconscious life comparable to that described by psychoanalysis | Yes \*\*\* | Introduces concept of valency at work | Human mental life that remain hidden but influence conscious processes | Psychoanalysis / Organisational learning | Bion, Tavistock writers | Development of research question. |

## 

## Appendix 2.3: Second search results, on checking the lit. to establish the currency of my ideas

Over the duration of the course I feel that I have become more adept, more practised at narrowing the terms of my library searches. Given that it was over 3 years since I began my first search, I felt compelled to revisit the literature for a second time using some of the terms that I was unfamiliar with when I began drafting Chapter 2. I wanted to check that I wasn’t missing anything significant given that I had arrived at the basis of a model drawn from my experiences and my stories in chapter 4. If Appendix 2.2 represents a “stage 1”, where broad searches helped me to define my ideas, this might be a “Stage 2” a more refined search, given what I know now.

I ‘short-listed’ my existing terms using a process of clustering, a series of what seemed like more ‘subject-focused’ search terms. At the beginning of my thesis I had to familiarise myself with key terms in psychoanalysis, social defences, and defensiveness. By the point of ‘writing up’ I was trying to think in a more specific way about my data, and wanted to check that what I was proposing seemed relevant and fit for purpose. I hadn’t realised by this stage quite how much knowledge I seemed to have amassed and how far I had come in my studies.

I have deliberately left psychoanalysis out of this search term because of an intuition that the term “psychoanalysis” might skew my results and the terms I have been using would refine my argument. In fact, I’m not convinced this was entirely right as the subject came up in a few papers. By this point in my journey I was interested in the *application* of psychoanalysis in practice-based educational settings.

**Transcript of my later searches:**

**New ‘subject focused’ search terms;**

So, I uploaded the following into the library search engine:

Search term A: 1: “Systems psychodynamics theory”; “organisational psychology”, “social defences”, “defensiveness”, “schools and educational settings”;

Search term A: 2: "Systems psychodynamics theory"; "organisational psychology"; "social defences"; "defensiveness"; "schools"; "leadership"; "educational settings"; "children's behaviour"

Search term A: 3: “Systems psychodynamics theory”; “organisational psychology”, “social defences”, “defensiveness”, “schools and educational settings”; AND “Human relations theory” *(I wondered if there was anything about either Human relations in terms of HR processes, or similar to the Journal of Human Relations as published by the Tavistock Journal).*

**Record of Journal Searches:**

I followed the Library Gateway central search engine at Sheffield Hallam University, and then opted for “Search guides”, and which splits under the “Social Sciences” between “psychology, sociology and politics” and “Education and Autism” within our Institute of Education for the purposes of teaching and research.

1. **“Education and autism”**

I began with searches under “Education and autism” and applied my search terms.

1. **British Education index**

I applied my key search terms, which yielded the following search categories and results:

My initial search returned no results, a SMART text searching automatically generated by EBSCOhost identified 3 papers which I discarded related to manic defences within adolescence, assessment for students and appreciative inquiry.

I tried similar searches:

1. “Systems psychodynamics theory”; “organisational psychology”, “social defences”, “defensiveness”, “schools and educational settings”; AND “resistance to change in schools”; AND teacher’s attitudes and behaviours” which returned 0 results.
2. “Systems psychodynamics theory”; “organisational psychology”, “social defences”, “defensiveness”, “schools and educational settings”; AND “organisational defences”; AND “resistance to change in schools” which returned 0 results.
3. **Education databases on Pro - Quest**

Search A: 1 returned 0 results

Search A: 2 returned 0 results

1. **Applied Social Sciences Index & Abstracts (ASSIA)**

At that point I moved onto ASSIA.

1. I applied my key original search terms (A:1), which yielded the following 11 categories:

1. “Organisational defences” (selected for further search, this returned 2, 538 results of which I took the first page of 20 papers to refine my search)
2. “criminal and code and defences”
3. “educational and system”
4. “educational and systems” (selected for further search, this returned 38, 759 results, the first 20 results were too broad and covered everything from social workers in the US to education in health care recovery systems/discarded)
5. defences and in and international and criminal and law
6. educational technology and criminal and law
7. educational technology and schools
8. educational marketing and schools
9. American and educational and system
10. Educational and system and conflict (selected for further search, this returned 11,228 results, discarded)
11. Discipline and the educational system (selected for further search, 8,512 results returned, more interesting and closer, but primarily focused on systems of discipline in educational punitive institutions, again too broad)

Taken together, accidentally, as one general search this returned 2 results:

The first on couple therapy I discarded, and the other returned one of the excellent articles that I had previously found and referenced focused on social defences in mental health care systems,

“Hyde, P.; Thomas A.B. (2002). Organisational defences revisited: systems and contexts, Journal of Managerial Psychology, Bradford Vol. 17, 5 408-421

1.2 I selected “organisational defences”

The first page of 20 papers stretched over a period of time from 1975 – 2018. I noticed a ‘spike’ in terms of the number of papers published in each decade:

1990 – 1999 = 648 articles

2000 – 2009 = 1,131 articles

2010 – 2018 = 740

of the first 20 papers I started to see an emergent trend in titles that included my search terms published under the Journal of Managerial Psychology. They did not include the terms “education” or “schools” or “children” in their titles.

I added the following papers to my reading list:

Organised by relevance of their abstract

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **No.** | **Author/s** | **Title** | **Journal** | **Year/Page ref** | **Abstract** |
| 1 | Bovey, Wayne H; Hede, Andrew. | Resistance to organisational change: The role of defence mechanisms | Journal of Managerial Psychology; Bradford | Vol. 16, Iss. 7/8, (2001): 534-548. | The published literature on resistance to organizational change has focused more on organizational issues rather than individual psychological factors. This study investigated the role of both adaptive and maladaptive defense mechanisms in individual resistance. Surveys were conducted in nine organizations undergoing major change and responses were obtained from 615 employees. The results indicate that five maladaptive defense mechanisms are positively correlated with behavioral intention to resist change, namely, projection, acting out, isolation of affect, dissociation and denial. The adaptive defense mechanism of humor was found to be negatively correlated with resistance intention. |
| 2 | Gabriel, Yiannis; Carr, Adrian. | Organizations, management and psychoanalysis: An overview | Journal of Managerial Psychology; Bradford | Vol. 17, Iss. 5, (2002): 348-365. |  |
| 3 | Cooper, A. | Psychoanalysis and the politics of organisational theory | **Journal of Social Work Practice** | Vol. 10, Iss. 2, (November 1996): 137-145. | Explores the importance of a fuller engagement between psychoanalytic and sociological understandings of organisational life with reference to the intersection between socially constructed defences in social work |
| 4 | Allcorn, S. | Understanding organizational culture as the quality of workplace subjectivity | **Human Relations** | Vol. 48, Iss. 1, (January 1995): 73-96. | Organization culture contains psychosocial defenses against the experience of anxiety in the workplace. It is thus possible to understand organization culture by the quantity, quality and permanence of these defenses. Psychoanalytic object relations development theory provides a means of understanding psychological defenses. |

I noted the listing of the Alistair Bain article, (1998) that I had referred to in an earlier draft of Chapter 5 and then observed the similarities between the model or stage of dissociation that I had drawn from analysing my stories and the similarities to the ‘five maladaptive defence mechanisms’ referred to in the Bovey and Hede paper (2001).

This is an exciting development which I want to explore further and may enhance my model referred in Appendix 5.1.

Further search terms:

From the title of their paper adapted a new set of search terms, still within ASSIA

including:

“organisational defences”; “resistance to change in schools”; “teacher’s attitudes and behaviours” which returned 0 results.

I tried:

“organisational defences”; “resistance to change"; "schools”; “teacher’s attitudes and behaviours”, which also returned 0 hits. (https://search-proquest-com.lcproxy.shu.ac.uk/BCB0E646887547F9PQ/false?accountid=13827)

and then,

“organisational defences”, “Teacher attitudes and resistance to change”, 0 returns

(https://search-proquest-com.lcproxy.shu.ac.uk/BCB0E646887547F9PQ/false?accountid=13827)

“social defences”, “Teacher attitudes and resistance to change”, 0 returns (https://search-proquest com.lcproxy.shu.ac.uk/CC18D7ACD9814FACPQ/false?accountid=13827)

I rejected the search tip from ASSIA to look for teacher attitudes and resistance to change which yielded 358 returns but which seemed to suggest an overly broad and eclectic mix of papers covering subjects from teacher’s resistance to changes in assessment techniques, faculty sense making in Higher Ed. and inclusive art.

2. I searched again this time removing the apostrophes specifically under organisational defences and found new categories:

“Schools as social systems” (selected for further search returned 51, 710 results seemingly centred around the school social work profession in the US)

“social and organisational issues for information systems”

“educational settings”

“educational and system”

“educational and systems”

“social work settings”

“conflict management and social work settings”

“educational marketing and schools”

“educational technology and schools”

“dealing with power struggles in clinical and educational settings”

**3. New Search 2 in ASSIA:**

I searched again adding the terms ‘schools’, ‘leadership’ and ‘children’s behaviour’: "System psychodynamics theory"; "organisational psychology"; "social defences";

"defensiveness"; "schools"; "leadership"; "educational settings"; "children's behaviour",

this returned 0 results.

1. **Emerald Insight**

In preparing Chapter 2 I’d read a few interesting papers from Emerald Insight and followed links through their education portal.

I ran Searches A: I – 3 again with little success producing one article on generative leadership from 2012, that I discarded. I noticed however that Emerald Insight have a HR learning and organization studies portal and ran the searches again similarly generating the one article.

1. **Child development and adolescent studies (database)**

My next Search engine I noticed was labelled as New, Child development and adolescent studies powered by EBSCO Host which also returned 0 results.

1. **Psychology, Sociology and Politics**

**Psych INFO:**

Search A: 1 - 3 yielded 0 results

**SCOPUS:**

Searches A1 – 3 yielded 0 results

**Web of science:**

Searches A1 – 3 yielded 0 result

**General Key word search**

Using four of the five keywords in the Bovey and Hede (2001). Resistance to organisational change: The role of defence mechanisms, paper substituting, “humour” for “dissociation”.

C: 1 Therefore I searched under “organizational change”, “Resistance”, “defence” and “dissociation” which produced 1, 050 results the first two related to their article and the next to a paper in genetic analysis of host resistance, discarded.

C: 2 “dissociation, theories of”, “organisational settings”, “defence”

C: 3 dissociation, organisational defences, schools, education, leadership, UK

C: 4 dissociation, social defences, schools, education, leadership, UK

1. **Journal Search:**

I returned to some searches of individual Journals at this stage concentrating on the Journal of Managerial Psychology and adding others I had previously found useful. I applied the search term C: 1 to each journal search.

British Journal of Sociology of Education

Journal of Human Relations

Journal of Managerial Psychology, 1986 – present

Search C: 1 returned two studies the Bovey and Hede article and another on psychoanalytical consultancy that wasn’t relevant.

Search C: 3 returned 24 articles of which only the one listed below seemed relevant

Organised by relevance (abstract)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **No.** | **Author/s** | **Title** | **Journal** | **Year/Page ref** | **Abstract** |
| 1 | Stoten, D. W. | Education work and identity in an English Sixth Form college | International Journal of Organizational Analysis | Vol. 23 Issue: 2, pp.233-249 | The purpose of the paper is to explore how education workers position themselves with an organisational culture and fashion a workplace identity. The research involved both professionally qualified teachers and support staff in an inclusive approach and drew theoretical concepts from Structuralist approaches such as labour process theory to Foucauldian post-structuralism and Habermasian critical theory on the nature of identity, power and control. This paper also sought to establish whether there was any difference in the positions taken by teaching and support staff. |

Key Journals that shaped the development of my reading:

International Journal of Psychoanalysis

Journal of Pastoral Care in Education

Journal of Psychodynamic Practice

## Chapter 3 Appendices

## Appendix 3.1: Ethics Approval letter

“Mind the Gap” - reflections on anxiety in childhood.

Introduction:

I am a fourth-year doctoral student completing a taught doctorate in Education at the University of Sheffield. I lecture part – time at the Centre for Educational Studies at Hull University. To complete my studies, I am required to complete an observational, theoretical or experiential dissertation to the equivalent of approx. 55, 000 words.

Mr Heritage gave me verbal and written permission to complete my observations at school. He was always supportive of the work, and offered me the opportunity to gather research at the school provided the appropriate ethical considerations were satisfied. We agreed that I would draft an outline of the research and I decided that it was important to submit this to the current Head for approval. This will in turn be provided to the University ethics committee before completion of the write up stage.

Purpose of the dissertation

Susan Long a consultant psychoanalyst at the Tavistock Centre for Human Relations describes anxiety as, “a signal that something to be feared is about to happen. Anxiety signals the likelihood of something that a child has previously learnt to fear or that is instinctively threatening” (2015, p.39).

Anxiety is something that most of us have experienced at one point or another in our lives whether starting at school, going for an interview, being asked to see the teacher – “see me” may be anxiety – inducing? Anxiety may be the fear of the unknown, the fear of speaking in public or the fear of falling to pieces. Anxiety is an incredibly powerful feeling. It shapes our thinking, how we learn and can affect decision – making either overtly or subconsciously. There are clearly aspects of anxiety that are related to shame and anger.

Long again suggests that psychoanalysis demonstrates the power of anxiety by showing how we create ways to “dispel, fight or avoid it”. My specific interest is in understanding the links between anxiety, teaching and learning. I use theory from the discipline of psychoanalysis to understand this condition. Isabel Menzies - Lyth a famous researcher from the Tavistock Centre proposed an idea in 1959, based on research in a hospital, that showed how we create social defences against anxiety - ways of organizing our social structures and cultural activities to “dispel, fight, or to avoid anxiety”. The tasks we organize themselves create anxiety and so paradoxically deflect from their very purposes.

My dissertation focuses on one aspect of our school life that we often take for granted – the secondary school assembly. I want to make a micro study of our assemblies as they are delivered to assess whether they have a role in forming or are a form of social defence present in the setting. As part of my usual duties as a Y7 form tutor I want to observe and record assemblies of interest for a term and make fieldwork records. I will ‘scribble’ my rough notes during the assembly but not in a way which detracts from the function of the assembly or my professional role as a form tutor. These notes will be made available to you and or colleagues on your request. I am not recording individual assemblies rather themes and the processes of assembly. I do not wish to make not, nor will I comment upon individual’s delivery of material. I will not include assemblies delivered by external visitors nor will I use data in any way that identifies individuals, the school, its staff or parent Trust.

Disclaimer

This is an ethnographic study based on observation and note – keeping and all data collected for this research will be anonymous. The school, parent trust/organization, geographic location and individuals will remain anonymous. This research is a largely theoretical study no children or staff will be interviewed, no photographic evidence or other secondary data will be used to identify the school. The data collected, case notes and observations will be held securely and will not be used for any other purposes other than scholarly research and enquiry. Permission will be sought by the student researcher if, at a later stage, data from this dissertation is extracted for external publication either at conference or in a peer reviewed article.

I agree that the data, as described above, can be used from this school to support the completion of this research project, and will be subject to the standards set out within the University’s ethics guidance.

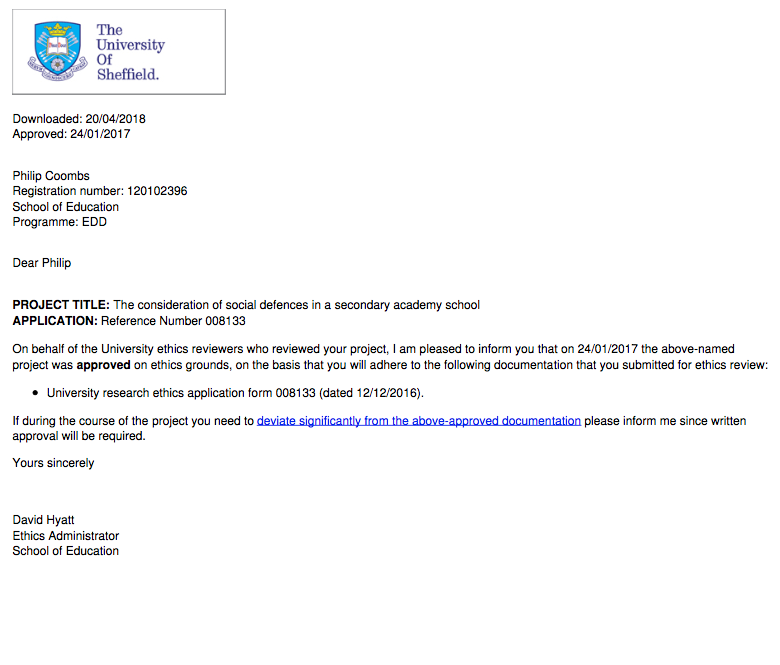


………………………………………………………………………………………..

Mr L Morritt

Principal

SSA date 14/7/16



## Appendix 3.2: Ethics approval response to university Ethics Panel

In this appendix, I record how I have changed some of my thinking in response to the reviewer’s comments in yellow.

**1. Aims & Objectives**

* **Point 1** “I think this sounds really fascinating and it seems there is plenty of scope here for you to develop the fieldwork as you describe. Have you considered engaging pupils or staff as research participants? I just wonder if this could help understand more about how they perceive what is happening in the assembly scenarios you describe and whether your interpretation of their responses etc connects with their own articulation and representation of events.
* **Point 2** “Not an ethical issue, but seemingly some inconsistencies, e.g. hard to reconcile 'Most of the time the school is well organised and staff and children understand their roles and place within the school' with 'unthinking changes pushed down onto them in such a chaotic school'.

**Point 1** *I have worried about this throughout my write up insomuch that I draw some conclusions based on my own interpretation of what explained the student’s reaction, viz. Story 5. I have made the point that this is based on a very small sample of data and my findings are not easily generalizable. Consequently, I have tried to write with much less certainty. I wish I had longer, spent less time testing my ideas and more time gathering research. Ideally, I would like to have included staff and student’s perspectives rather than simply my own. I think this represents some of my slightly muddled thinking when I submitted this ethics form about whether I wanted to do an ethnographic or autoethnographic study. In the end I am satisfied that autoethnographic was the right choice; limiting exposure of others and allowing me to capture some of the harsher realities of working in the school. When school staff understood what I was studying, the VP with responsibility for assemblies asked me to help him redesign them and one of the things I did, inadvertently, and partly out my own excitement, was to ask my form group for their feelings about assembly. I made a research decision not to use what the students said. I do recognise that this may have shaped subliminally my conclusions.*

**Point 2** *I agree with the reviewer’s suggestion. My commentary here seems slightly misleading. I felt quite critical of the school at times and I think that this seeped through into my analysis and my stories. By distancing myself from the school I hope to lessen the sense of the school as a “hostile working environment”. Nevertheless, I do think that this speaks to the ‘confusion’, in fact the whole premise of my research issue as a dual state of being both comfortable and uncomfortable at the same time. That it is possible to accept that both positions exist, accounts for the sense of ambiguity, of uncertainty/certainty - why does being here make me feel like this? I have grappled with this duality throughout. I am also mindful of my role in this and in my write up I have tried to write less overtly critically of the school. I write more about how hard it is for all of us, the senior management included, especially, the senior management, to lead and implement changes which I recognise they wholeheartedly believe are in the best interests of the school. In my write up, I decided to concentrate far more on my role and my feelings hence my changed focus to autoethnography.*

* **Point 3** “See above comment. Also, what exactly will you observe in this complex social setting? How will you decide what to include/exclude? Will you identify a particular cohort to study within the assembly, or try to capture the whole student body? What are the practical implications for inclusion/exclusion, for both staff and pupils? Are the assemblies whole school/by year group/led by different staff and does this make any difference? Will you share your observations and interpretations with those you observe, if so how and when? Will their be a 'right of reply' for them?
* **Point 4** 'Ethnographic methodology' and 'Ethnomethodology' seem to be used as equivalent/interchangeable terms-requires further thought/clarification.

**Points 3 and 4**

*I didn’t set very focused inclusion and exclusion criteria. I had done a lot of the readings and I liked the organic evolution of my ideas. It felt quite creative at the time but I recognise this as a possible limitation of my research design. I did consider focusing on a whole range of different assemblies in different year groups and at different times and stages of the school year. I did discuss this in supervision. In the end, I decided that the autobiographical experiences were still valuable and from which I could draw conclusions. I also feel quite strongly that the benefits of autoethnography are its capacity to allow an analysis of a subjective position. These are my experiences and my interpretation of my feelings. That noted, I learnt a lot about the difficulties of decision-making in research design by thinking about this reviewers comments. Moreover, for practical reasons, my research ‘window’ was shortened by having to leave school albeit I think I had sufficient data to provide insight into my feelings and the culture of the school which readers can judge for themselves. I think this is, in a sense, a forum to ‘test’ my ideas if successful, I may be able to apply for funding for further study, and if possible, I may then seek to apply more ethnographic methodology.*

*My hope was that the recommendations that I draw could be shared with the school staff by way of CPD.*

**3. Consent**

* **Point 5** Do you think you need parent/pupil/staff permission as well? If not, why not?

**Point 5** *I decided not to interview staff and children and didn’t feel it was appropriate to ask parents for permission. I make no mention in my final write up of individual children. I have been fastidious in seeking to anonymise the details, names, places names, gender, ethnicity of all those I refer to throughout. I accept that this is another limitation of my study however, I see this as a point for further learning. I felt a Duty of Care to protect the children from any identification but conceivably they might be recognizable to others through association with me. This is a risk but one I think is very minimal. This was a decision I made as a consequence of this feedback.*

**5. Potential Harm to Participants**

What is the potential for physical and/or psychological harm/distress to the participants?

I anticipate that the degree of ‘harm’ in this research will be minimal. As such given that it is observational research of ‘systems and processes’ that there is no inconvenience to any participants nor can I envisage uncovering any illegal activities. I suspect the worst may be more about reputational harm although the vast majority of assemblies are positive. They are also ‘public’ insomuch that there are lots of staff in attendance, and occasionally we have outside visitors coming into school who sit in an assembly. They are governed under the OFSTED framework, school policy and usual safeguarding procedures.

We occasionally have speakers willing to come in and talk to the students and it is not my intention to comment on or make notes of any external speakers. There is no chaplaincy service that ever comes in to the school. In the past year we have had 1 external and that was our police liaison officer who delivers the “Stay Safe” on Bonfire night assembly. The content is not particularly relevant to my research question but I would note, and classify.

How will this be managed to ensure appropriate protection and well-being of the participants?

I will not record, publish or use 'data' that identifies an individual speaker either colleague, student or external visitor. See above.

* **Point 6** I think this requires further thought. You state that the Exec. Head and his deputy have given signed permission for undertaking this data collection-I'm wondering what they think the nature of the study is, given that above, you've referred to a 'chaotic' school and one that ‘seems so challenging and often hostile…on occasion, quite volatile, and an intimidating place to work’.   
  You state that ‘The current team were brought in by an external agency to enforce discipline, “hammer down on poor behaviour” (the dep. HT’s words to me on starting)’ and that ‘under the current leadership team the school has instigated a strict disciplinary code of conduct strictly monitored by the SLT’.

You wish to use ‘samples of the powerpoint used by senior colleagues’ in the hope that ‘the school assembly might provide a useful window into the vision of the Head teacher’ and understand the ‘way senior teachers create a domain of power through the discourse of the assembly’. Given all of this, I think you need to do more to indicate how you will ‘protect’ the Head Teacher from ‘harm’ given that they are ultimately responsible for setting the tone and ethos of the school and therefore (I would have thought) easily identified in the study, as it is currently framed.

**Point 6** *see my earlier comments. I think this feedback specifically made me re think my methodology and fixed upon me the idea of using autoethnography. In the end I have not included, and this is why I haven’t included or submitted actual copies of the Power Point slides that I collected. My approach did change from the original permission that I was given which is why I reapplied for permission to the new Head with a clearer focus on the specifics of my research. Sadly, only one of my teaching colleagues still works at the school. The school has been merged with another and has a new identity. None of the key actors in my study, myself, “Bob”, “Brian”, the exec. Head, or the then new Head, still work at the school. I no longer work in the sector. (These decisions were made for budgetary purposes, elsewhere in the academy Trust, and has no connection with my research).*

**1*. Data Confidentiality Measures***

* **Point 7** I think the possibility of publication needs to be mentioned in participant information and consent for data to be used in this way. I do suggest you think carefully about how to secure voluntary informed consent from all participants.

**Point 7**

*This point is important. I had verbal consent from the Exec. Head, written consent from the new Head, and informed the Vice Principals, responsible for Pastoral care and tutors, and another for assemblies. I deliberately omitted assemblies and data I felt were highly sensitive, or where we had outside visitors and speakers. My worry was practical. I couldn’t get down quickly enough from my place at the back of the hall, and I didn’t want to put anyone off who was unaccustomed to delivery or public speaking. In fact the police officer who delivered the firework prevention assembly was more than happy for me to use his material. I decided not to in the end. I obtained verbal consent from my colleague in story 4 who wasn’t actually from the maths department, and had no recollection of the incident when I described it. She agreed that I could use our exchange provided that she remained anonymous. Very sadly, like the rest of us, she too was forced to leave the school again for financial / budgetary reasons unfortunately, as a consequence, I was unable to gain her written consent. I haven’t included samples of data from the assemblies except in the wording, “climate of learning” which I felt was suitably nondescript and a universal term. I decided, with my supervisor’s guidance, to write about autoethnography. I have decided not to publish data or findings from my study.*

*I found the comments of the Ethic’s Reviewer’s invaluable in helping me to finesse and hopefully improve the quality of my thesis, and the reliability of some of my conclusions. I would like to thank them for their insight and time. I learnt much about the challenges of research and the limitations of my study through this feedback. I think it is better as a consequence of their feedback.*

Chapter 4: Appendices

### Appendix 4.1 Data Collection table

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Data collection strategy (primary labelling: organizational)** | | | | | **Data Content (secondary labelling: how)** | | | | |
| Data Set | Date | Collector | Type | Location | Time | People involved | Source | Place |  |
| 0 | March – 15 – Mar 17 | PC | Do (Test data) | Diary record entries | Throughout data collection period | PC | Journal / diary notes | School/home |  |
| 1 | 08/01/17 – 08/04/17 | PC | SR | E / AH | 08.35 (morning registration bell) | Self, children from form, S; SLT; O | Self (composite of reflections and notes from journal) | E, AH |  |
| 2 | 09/12/16 – 15/12/16 | PC | Do/SR | C1 Staffroom | AM/ PM  (notes record early - mid morning) | SLT / O / Various teachers/staff (S) in staffroom | SLT/O/ S Emails | School: C1 staffroom |  |
| 3 | 13/02/17;  20/02/17 | PC | S/O; SR | Dance Studio (AH) | 2.30pm | SLT / O / Various teachers/staff (S) | Self (composite of reflections and notes from journal) | School: dance studio – temporary AH |  |
| 4 | 24/03/17 | PC | S/O; SR | AH | 08.40 – 09.00 am | Self, ST. / CH | Self (composite of reflections and notes from journal) | AH |  |
| 5 | 08/07/16 | PC | Do; S/O; SR | AH | 08.40 – 09.00 am | Self / CH | Self (composite of reflections and notes from journal) | AH |  |
| 6 | 16/06/16 | PC | S/O; SR | AH | 2:30pm | SLT / O / Various teachers/staff (S) | Self (composite of reflections and notes from journal) | AH |  |
| 7 | 16/12/16 | PC | S/O; SR | AH | 2:30pm | SLT / O / Various teachers/staff (S) | Self (composite of reflections and notes from journal) | AH |  |
| 8 | 11/03/17 | PC | Do; S/O; SR | AH | 09:00 – 10:00 | SLT / O / Various teachers/staff (S) | DO | AH |  |
| 9 | 13/09/16 | PC | S/O; SR | AH | 08:40 – 09:00 | SLT / O / Various teachers/staff (S) | Self (composite of reflections and notes from journal) | AH |  |
| 10 | 03/03/17 | PC | S/O; SR | AH | 08:40 – 09:00 | SLT | Self (composite of reflections and notes from journal) | AH |  |
| 11 | 15/05/15;  20/03/17 | PC | S/O; SR | AH | 08:40 – 09:00 | SLT | Self (composite of reflections and notes from journal) | AH |  |
| 12 | 27/02/17 | PC | S/O; SR | AH | 08:40 – 09:00 | SLT | Self (composite of reflections and notes from journal) | AH |  |
| 13 | Various, on-going dates not recorded | PC | S/O; SR | AH | 08:40 – 09:00 | SLT | Self (composite of reflections and notes from journal) | AH |  |
| 14 | 17/03/17 | PC | S/O; SR | AH | 08:40 – 09:00 | SLT | Self (composite of reflections and notes from journal) | AH |  |
| 15 | 30/03/17 | PC | O | AH | 08:40 – 09:00 | O | Self (composite of reflections and notes from journal) | AH |  |
| 15 | 08/07/16 | PC | Do | AH | NA | SLT | Power Point slides dataset 5 | AH |  |
| 16 | Sep. 2016 | PC | Do | AH/E | NA | Self | Drawing schematic diagram AH layout | NA |  |
| 17 | 30 March 16 | PC | DO | AH | NA | Self | Press Release | NA |  |
| 18 | May 2017 | PC | S/R Culture / grams (originals not submitted but a later version used in Appendix 1.1) |  | NA | Self |  | NA |  |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Key:  SR = self – reflective  Vi = visual  Do = document  Drawing  S/O = self-observational  Adapted from Chang (2008 p.120) | AH = assembly hall  E = entrance/waiting area  C = classroom  Ch = children in form  SLT = Senior Leadership Team  ST. = staff | CH – children in my form group  O = others (refers to other staff, external visitors and / or specific children involved, recorded or from my complex care cases. |

## Appendix 4.2: Analysis and interpretation

**Data set 1 Pre assembly registration**

The first of my “stories” of being in assembly as a form tutor are written up as a reflection of preparing my form for the process of entering the assembly hall. In it I try to document how it makes me feel to take registration under the watchful scrutiny both of the children and my senior colleagues.

**Analysis and interpretation**

**1 interpretation**

1. **Recurring topics, themes and patterns:**

**Key themes:**

1. **‘para-military’**

**Ordering & Inspection**

Para 7, line 9: ‘always seem well ordered’

Para 8, line 4: ‘Final uniform inspection, straighten that tie, where’s your blazer’

Para 8, line 10 ‘scrutinizing them, scrutinizing me more like’

Analysis

Ordering of the children and rearranging into an order

* Maintenance of order, discipline
* Surveillance and scrutiny
* supervision
* Uniform inspection
* A sense of readiness for what, usually nothing much, to sit and be ‘still’

**Lining up and queuing**

* Para 1, Line 2: ‘my form or class queuing’
* How much time children seem required to spend in lines, waiting, in some form of silence
* P1: line 9: ‘lines of children as usual congregating, lining up’
* P1: line 12: ‘more lines of children’

Analysis

* Stillness (readiness for learning seems to suggest that children ought to be still)
* Recurring pattern - My reflection /memory is of a great line of children that meanders and snakes around the landing into the hall; before final inspection check. The children had to be pushed up closely to the wall but weren’t allowed to slump or slouch against the wall.

**Noise and silence**

* Para 1, Line 2: ‘I hear before I see’
* Para 1, line 8: ‘strange, broken sounds’
* Para 1, lines 13 – 14: ‘whispering loudly, a hushed cacophony of noise
* Para 4, lines 1 – 4: ‘busy shushing the children’
* Para 8, line 9: ‘quietening the children down’

1. **Analysis**

* Contrast between a gathering/coming together of many, in this case the children into one small, confined space with low ceilings, and a harried constant ‘shushing’ of children suppressing a natural noise, 200 children coming together naturally can’t but not make noise, it’s an impossibility.
* Teachers were just expending almost unnecessary energy and time, becoming increasingly cross, and agitated with one another and the children. We were contained within his space against our will in a conflict. A constant battle for supremacy. Them versus us. Quiet, be quiet, more whispering, giggles stifled. Attack, followed by parry. Exhausting and unnecessary.
* What you start to feel is that your measure of success under scrutiny is of course not the children that are scrutinized and order but your professionalism, your ability to be a good teacher feels under constant surveillance and threat based on an unconscious decision by the senior leadership team to quieten your class or form. If they are overly loud, giggly, (behave and act like children the more we are condemned/criticised?)
* The trope of children being seen and not heard?
* Seems ironic because they are being commanded to come to a space which is designed as a gathering, congregating in a space designed in part to amplify sound. Except that they’ re not allowed too.
* The idea of children seen to be well behaved is for the child to be immaculately presented but mainly silent, immaculately silent?

**Size and age**

Recurring topic: Size differentials: Big men v small children

Para 2, line 6: ‘he makes me feel small: puny’

Para 8, line 2: ‘a massive man, huge, taller than me’

Para 8, line 3: ‘but another big, be-suited man.’

Age

Para 4, line 10

Para 4, line: 20

Analysis

Horror at the idea of children having to ‘squeeze through two big burly men’ asst. heads and deputy heads before they enter the main hall – it was close physically, makes you feel a bit uncomfortable.

Of the ‘Body’, shape and contour

Of the children’s bodies, their individual bodies and the holistic student body – the year 7 cohort

‘we do unto the individual and the collective body’, we organize within groups and the student body.

I was often reminded of the contour of an Ordnance Survey map, with ‘greyish blue’ contours lines and markings, made by the children’s bodies as they wound their human way around the sharp angles of the upper landing before entering the hall. They wrapped their form, wending their way, creating their patterns, their shape around the cold, hard edges of a building that might be more formally used for an office worker’s atrium or landing. (Para 1: lines 3 and 4: ‘the chrome and plate glass walkway reminiscent of a corporate city finance building.’

**Theme: Anxiety (and resistance?)**

Para 2, line 9: ‘Crossness’, ‘pecking at the children’

Analysis - Chang’s strategy & analysis of your sense of self and others

Constant crossness, on the part of busy but twitchy teachers. General memory of cross ‘patchiness’. A sense of on your toes jumpiness. The anxiety comes across more amongst the staff coupled with an overriding image and memory of feeling constantly frowned at by others.

**Topic or recurring pattern: ‘my anxiety in the role’**

Para 2, line 3: ‘senior staff looking at me’

Para 2, line 6: ‘he makes me feel small: puny’

Para 3, line 5: ‘unnerves me’

Para 3, lines 8-9: ‘secret, one way mirror they’ re hiding behind’

Para 5, line 4: ‘momentary panic …. Phew’

Para 5, line 7: ‘I fudge it’

Para 7, line 4: ‘I feel like an insufferable suck up’

Para 7, line 9-10 ‘her kids always seem well – ordered, and to know what they are doing. I’m not quite so sure about mine.’

Para 8, line 10 ‘scrutinizing them, scrutinizing me more like’

of Resistance?

From the children? Perhaps – there is a sense that the whispered noise, getting louder before being told off is a bout resistance, pushing the boundaries.

Ready to pull a mock affronted face, an innocent ‘what *me* Sir?’ them v us. I think that some of the behaviours, the sullenness, their ‘zoning out’ and looking, or turning away’ is emblematic of their blocking of unbearable emotions (Bion, 1962).

Resistance from staff? No. Got to be seen to do it right, to be doing things right. There isn’t really any resistance to how we feel. Do it. Get the job done. Not time, not time to think about it. In fairness in the big scheme of everything we’ re dealing with in school this is tiny. Infinitesimal. And yet – illustrative of a wider malaise? It is such a minor event as not to be thought about. It’s just how it is. The culture. Get them in. Line them up in silence. Tidy them up, hope they don’t mess about. Otherwise you’ re in for the chop. Ok better do as I’m told. Be as others expect.

A form of anxiety?Is this exemplified in the constant shushing and silence, the gestures, the harried, sparrow-like attentiveness? Perhaps, the expended effort and energy is symptomatic of a collective, broader organisational anxiety?

The chatter, the giggling the pushing and shoving in line, the gesticulations made by staff and the threatening postures, glares, stance is all designed to impose order and silence but of course paradoxically creates all the more noise and sound. Energy. Mayhem. Tension. It draws on the impossibility of trying to keep actually creates noise being extinguished but bubbling away constantly and resurfacing. Staff are constantly trying to suppress noise, silence and shushing but to what end?

We never discuss how to improve what we could do to re-organise this process, what we could do better. We lack the collegiality of a mature friendly team of colleagues, people able to think about a problem and try to come up with something better.

**Supervision and scrutiny of staff**

Para 2 He makes me feel small: puny, like one of them’

Analysis

Something of “Bob’s” anxiety, all the registers must come from him, he is the centre of our attention, he must be seen to organise and to distribute the papers the registers.

He acts as the NCO, the sergeant major at arms (para –military recurring pattern again).

**Recurring pattern: ‘Them and us: Children versus adult’**

**Anthropomorphic**

Para 2, Line 9 ‘pecking at’

Para 7, line 1, shuffle off, snaking around the corner’

**Analysis**

Links to “feral” in Para 2. Here, I describe one of the senior members of staff as ‘pecking away’ at the children in my form and I have a clear memory of her as bird-like, pecking away at the children.

Check that this isn’t a recurring theme that seems to link with a running pattern later in the dataset where we discuss the children as feral, that was a very powerful image in my mind and I wonder if I see something from a Victorian moral image or metaphor as children like animals, birds, flora and fauna?

Very strong metaphor/image within my writing but link to my unconscious anxiety about describing the children as feral. I really hated the expression and it felt part of the culture of the school. I hated myself for using the word. I slipped into it. Perhaps that’s really what I thought – “False Self” (Winnicott)?

Holding myself up to an ideal/ failing to meet the ideal.

**Individual data analysis and interpretation -**

Data set 2: The Christmas Jumper emails

I included this story as a data to illustrate the wider culture of the school. The data has nothing to do with the assembly but speaks instead to a wider culture within the school. Focusing as it does on a series of email exchanges from a senior leader at the school it picks apart the minutiae of school, and wider organisational life, exposing something I think of the emotional fragility of working in a hectic and volatile secondary school in special measures. The email starts off as a mildly humorous recollection, a series almost of waspish anecdotes, but then the absurdity of the situation describes, I think, something of the emotional fragility of what it means to work in a school environment and how even the most mundane event can begin to become overwhelming.

**Analysis**

1. **Recurring topics, themes and patterns:**

**Key themes:**

**Unconscious Defensive behaviours?**

Para 1, Line 1: “Suppressed snort”, “Cramped staff room”

Para 1 Calling each by surnames - maintaining a distance

**Theme – emotional fragility** that comes from working, trying to turn around such a volatile setting

Represents an acknowledgement of a demanding context and environment within which to work. It is a form of emotional labour.

**Themes Splitting and projection** them and us - Staff versus SLT

Key theme (recurring) **Maintenance of order and control**

**Theme – confused thinking**

Repeat email messages

**Some Interpretive thoughts - Setting the scene**

By using autoethnographic techniques I had hoped to portray something of the culture of the school setting. The fluidity, the sense of movement. Are there similarities with Menzies Lyth’s work in terms of managing the functioning of the two organisations? There has to be something of the scale, patients and children, busyness, rushing around. Imposing order and discipline without really understanding the effect? Perhaps here the reader might begin to observe something of the broader culture in the school, how the service(s) side of the school often seems to collide, or be counter to the delivery of a culture of teaching and learning? Intuitively, it seems at odds with the primary task of the school. However this falls beyond the scope of this study and instead I want to reflect on the emotional burden that comes from working in such a volatile setting.

This dataset underscores something of the permanent state of “muddled and confused thinking” that was present in the school (Sprince, 2016) and this emanates I believe directly from the fragility of the place. My initial sense is that this may come from a sense of the emotional challenges of working in this setting overwhelming the collective ‘we’. It was so emotionally unbearable that both student and staff found these pressures uncontainable. In that sense, forming social defences becomes evident.

This might be apparent in some of the reflections that I record in this piece note for instance, calling each other by surname, taking the rise out of each other and particularly the projection, splitting behaviours onto senior members of staff are all obvious defensive behaviours. The process of sending repeat contradictory messages in the emails illustrates a corporate wide, institutional anxiety that reminds me of the social defences witnessed by Menzies Lyth and her team. There is within this passage more of the recurring themes that Chang observes – here I see the desire to assert an authoritative position based on a para –military desire to order and to control. In effect, asserting discipline over a mob without recognizing that there might be a spiral of organizational anxiety means that we are carrying the burden of feeling emotionally overwhelmed. We might have reached our capacity for care?

Extenuating circumstances for why the school might have seemed a safer place to be and for that reason why the children deserved the opportunity to wear their jumpers:

By the end of this term, the staff and the children all deserved some kind of reward however small. The environment had improved, even if the same old anxieties, as exemplified by the email were still ever present. We had to control those open space otherwise pandemonium would, it still did, break loose.

Despite this for the children in mainstream, the vast majority, life seemed better. Improved. They deserved the opportunity to wear a Christmas jumper.

This email incident does show the complexities of running a massive, complex institution and I think highlights the challenges for senior leaders. Including such a low-level observation, demonstrates how difficult it can be to get it right increases organisational anxiety. Split between doing things right and doing the right thing?

Of seeing and not seeing?

Splitting

**Data Set 3: the misname to induce ‘shame’ assembly**

This is the episode in my time at the school that shaped the direction of my thesis most assuredly. In it I recount how desperate to avoid a worryingly decline in non-school attendance and some fairly poor behaviour. They did this by trying something new, at least something I hadn’t encountered at the school before in terms of their pastoral programme, they constructed an assembly designed not unreasonably, to nip the poor behaviours in the bud, to form and to maintain an ideal? Certainly by Y11. There was no question that the year group as a whole were behaving badly. Many children at this stage in the school cycle were disgruntled however what I think this story does is to demonstrate how the assembly becomes the vehicle for managing the institutional response to anxiety in particular the school leadership’s response to managing powerful emotional dynamics.

The story begins with my encounter, one of many, that I experienced over the years which draws on the student’s lack of capacity to contain his own complex emotional feelings and how he projected them onto me.

Here, the ‘Name and shame’ assemblies signify to me, the institution’s unconscious response to the kind of petty, name calling that I encountered by the Y11 student outside my staffroom. What we see is how the assembly comes to mirror the intolerable feelings experienced by the children.

**Analysis and interpretation**

**1 interpretation**

**Recurring topics, themes and patterns:**

**Key themes:**

Shame

Our shame as teachers, my shame in particular feeling mortified about what we were engaged in. What were we doing? How had we found ourselves so lost that we thought these behaviours were acceptable? Mortification that this was quite enjoyable there was a visceral, unconscious feeling that somehow, I liked this, did the experience of meeting out these behaviours allow me to address the sense of emasculation that I had felt through Story 1 - the classic symptoms and signs of a culture of bullying perhaps? I have the luxury of using this space to reflect deeply on my own actions and impulses, desires.

Strong memories, visceral feelings, squirming my way out of this whole debacle.

Anger

Sometimes the kids were feral, horrible. After everything we had done for them, still they couldn’t get it right. No wonder we were so frustrated.

Hurt

What were the feelings of the children, I never knew, I could guess, fight or flight? Smirking to bury the ignominious feelings of being propelled to the front. Lots of transference? Staff transference and projection.

Embarrassment

Setting children up to fail against the illusion of the ideal child. The ideal teacher we never discussed. Or rarely. I am embarrassed at the thought that not only could I, was I associated with this.

Collusion?

What about my own mixed feelings of splitting and projection. Classic example of splitting into ‘good’ and ‘bad’ children. It was very primal. Good and bad teachers perhaps? Makes me feel quite contemptuous of my colleagues actually.

Important not to lose sight of the fact we tried something here as a pilot, and it was stopped fairly quickly. It was only implemented two or three times at most before being stopped. I was not able to participate in any review of practice.

**Analysis**

Depressive reality

Here, I’m starting to feel excruciating intolerable feelings embarrassment, does this relate to a sense of drift, of wanting to move away. Being in this process was anathema. It wasn’t why I went into teaching. I’m not sure what school has become? Is it me, us or is it the wider education system?

Defences:

On how mirroring the children’s language really serves as a mirror’s of our own defences.

Defences include identifying with the aggressor – (Frosh, 2002, p.28).

I only learnt later about Lacan’s mirror stage. I keep seeing my face staring back at me in the mirrors in the dance studio where the assemblies took place.

I can see how the Y11 boy comes to treat me with such scorn and contempt. I think he is mirroring what he sees and is at the wrong end of every day. Is he replicating/transferring what he feels back onto me. Instead of containing his feelings, introjecting them, taking them in, I’m resistant.

Or am I acting in a traditional maternal role, whether I like it or not, he too emasculates me, like my big colleagues in Story 1?

He can project his hurt, his pain, anxiety, projected onto me, my defence kicks in, to freeze. I’m rooted to the spot. I can still see in my mind’s eye where the, what felt like an assault, took place. It was an assault.

The more we look, the less we seem to see? Seeing and not seeing?

## Appendix 4.3: Data management process

### Data Refinement Process

In this section I want to explain how I arrived at some of my conclusions from the data. I started by using Chang’s categories and looked for repeated topics, emerging trends and salient patterns, and put these into a table. I wanted to record my analysis in a table. I wanted a simple device to store the data and allow readers to understand how I started to refine the data. In table 1 I use Chang’s categories for analysing memos and noting patterns in the data. I included this table as a first ‘go’ to show my initial thinking. The data in the table isn’t necessarily presented with a linear or with a logical flow but more like a collection of raw data and first thoughts. There is some repetition its more by way of starting the process of thinking about what I can see in the data. It is more by way of a process of funnelling, and looking for emerging themes in the data.

**Data Analysis**

**Table 4.1 – Summary of emerging themes and categories**

All horizontal category labels are from Chang’s approach to recording and organizing “memos”, (2008, p.131). I decided to put this into tabular form to help order my thinking/analysis. My intention is to distil meta categories from the emerging themes and patterns in the data. There are some recurring topics which I have struggled to ‘box’ off but I have retained important recurring themes when providing context to the culture of the school so for example ‘feral’ wasn’t a theme that recurred nor was it used in a formal assembly –setting but it sticks with me as a culturally relevant term.

(see summary of emerging themes and grand categories on the next page number 253)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Repeated topics** | **Emerging themes** | **Salient patterns** | **Mini categories** | **Grand categories** |
| **Story 1** | 1. ‘Para-militarism’ | * Order, ordering and inspection? * Control; controlling * Maintenance of order and discipline * Obedience * Compliance * Repetition | * enforced obedience * Surveillance, and scrutiny? * Responsibility and leadership? * Supervision - oppositional positioning *them and us* * Pavlovian behaviour management techniques? | * Confusion between staff and children, becomes a pattern repeated in other areas of the data | * Confusion * splitting (recurring category particularly in story. 3) * unthinking behaviours |
| 2. Lining up and queuing | * Enforced stillness * Waiting & repetition | * Compliance and obedience to procedural forms of managing behaviour * To be still - paradoxical  1. Expectation, learnt behaviour; and 2. a form of punishment to expect children to be still for such long periods 3. of waiting, wasted time?  * Historicity - The way we have always managed children – line them up, make then wait, it’s “how we do it here”? * Confinement to a small space – restricted movement – a regime? * Regulating and punishing the body – be still, stop, start move when I say? | * Enforced stillness? * Making children wait around for so long * Confinement * Links to enforcement * Restriction | * Defensive behaviours: *do we all feel like we have to fit in to some ideal?* * Containment within a space – restricted movement * Contradictions here in us rushing around forcing them to stand still |
| 3. Noise and silence | * Paradoxical contrast between silence and noise | * children seen and not heard - sense of harking back to a ‘golden’ era of what it means to manage children – repressed behaviours   Limitations enforced on staff and children taking the register | * restriction of sound; * repressed behaviours – teachers and children | * form of repression – *whose repressed here, teachers or children, does this start to explain my discomfort?* |
| 4. Size and age | * size differentials:   me, my size, the size of the staff, the smallness | * ‘puny’, ‘puniness’   comparison between healthiness, (re affluence, wealth) of the teaching staff with the skinniness/poverty of the children? | * there are a lot of opposites beginning to emerge esp. me and my role   Paradoxical contrast in behaviour - *the children don’t have to fit in, but I do?* | * role confusion – I’m happy and sad at the same time I like the job but hate the tasks sometimes – *Idealism about the role?* |
| 5. Idealism – *my anxiety to fit in*? | * self, identity, and othering? * uncertainty about the role – organisationally * “feral”, whose behaviours here are feral? Is it ours? Have we eroded our professionalism? | * my comparison of me to the others * insecurity about my position in the school **(see dataset 4)** * the contradiction between the role of the pastoral tutor, be kind to the children * Forced compliance and obedience to a situation which doesn’t make sense | * inherent contradiction in the role causes confusion between pastoral responsibility, to meet the holistic welfare needs of the children, whilst simultaneously telling them off and forcing compliance to rules that might not be in their best interests? * *The good / bad breast? There is no maternal figure? Links with Kleinian persecutory anxiety* | * Idealism – *my anxiety to fit in* * Reluctance and hesitation to do the wrong thing – to be found wanting |
| **Story 2** | * to be held accountable *(and to not want to be)* * *splitting* * *projection* | * fear of failure * fear of getting it wrong (on the part of senior leaders) * hesitant, cautious, conservative leadership styles **(see dataset 3)** | * muddled thinking across the school (links to dataset 1) * To be held accountable but not to have any real power – this form of splitting is really palpable in the school Uncertainty and avoidance * Uncertainty, and confusion about the role causes anxiety – leading to social defensive behaviours? | * Forms of muddled thinking uncertainty and anxiety, fear that the Head might not validate or *approve of the decision* * Centralized power in the hands of the head – the delegative leadership style is paranoid-schizoid * Fear the head might not approve us Need for paternal approval but no maternal figure, I fill that in this role as tutor. | * Splitting behaviours – do I love these children or do I hate them, * do I love the paternal figure or do I hate him? |
| **Story 3** | * Inducing shame (mine/his?) * Othering * Denial * Depression | * The children don’t want to be there? (I’m not sure that the staff do either, ***I don’t***) * Social economic class * Language – I’m starting to see the children anthropomorphically, as feral? * “identification with the aggressor” (Frosh, 2002, p.28) * Good/ bad object - I hate the Y11 boy and the way he makes me feel | * Confusion – sense of we have to do something but not having a clear thoughtful, considered approach * Lack of hierarchical ‘containment’ but instead supervision and accountability rather than containment * Refusal to ignore the underlying symptom, because that shows us as largely failing * Perverse enjoyment of our power \_ I can join in being the father figure telling them off * Where’s the safe maternal figure to run too, I’m not fulfilling this role any longer. * Abuse / mis / abuse of power | * Innate anxiety to be seen do something, to have a plan, running around for adults offers stark contrast with the need for the children to be still? * Responsibility and leadership (see dataset 1) * Is my discomfort compounded from a tension between my earlier ideals and desire to fit in, contrasted with the discomfort of doing things I don’t agree with? * Accountability rather than certainty and containment by the school management team * Insecurity about the primary task, leads to a form of organisational anxiety - our defensive position * Unconscious organisational anxiety about having to work with ‘these’, badly behaved children ignoring the fact it is our behaviour we need to question * Mirroring behaviours - *antipathy between staff and children.* | * Hatred*(?), disavowal, this is becoming my dislike of* **me** *in this situation.* * Depressive reality –see Klein (*I am, waking up to the reality (movement from the paranoid – schizoid to a depressive state)).* |
| **Story 4** | * Cynicism * Disaffection | * Insecurity about my /our position in the school (**see dataset 1)** * Sense of desperation – to be seen to act – to do something by contrast to the need for the children to be still? * Disavowal | * sense that staff need to be seen to comply with the organisational culture * Contradictory behaviours | * Anxiety about the future * role confusion * job insecurity * uncertainty - I feel remorse | * Fear * Insecurity about the job, the role – anxiety causes her to project on me, I am the object for her anxiety. * Of giving and receiving and of taking back in |
| **Story 5** | * Idealisation – unachievable - ideal child, the ideal learner * Transference of anxiety | * Boredom * Egotism * Frustration, farce, (humour is defensive) * Are new policies becoming overly complex? Frustration which feeds into my feeling of complete dissatisfaction now | * There is a sense of embarrassment at being there listening to this * Unrealistic expectations – idealism? * ‘persecutory anxiety’ – paranoia, doing this task is causing Bob anxiety? | * Aggressive, controlling behaviours again, our way or the high way – a culture which contrasts with the holistic, pastoral element of the assembly? * This is all about pain (Bob’s and the children) * Transference onto the children? Depicts children, staff and **me**? switching off – the emotional pain can only be dealt with by blocking it out – switching off, being bored, becomes a defensive coping mechanism to manage the intolerable pain | * My dissociation from the organisation, this is more than discomfort it is distressing * Leads to a grief about hat was, - Kleinian death drive and persecutory anxiety - profound loss – I don’t want to be in this place? |

## Appendix 4.4: A description of other assemblies that informed my thesis (discarded)

The following provides a sample of assemblies that influenced my thinking but that I didn’t include in the stories in Chapter 4. They represent a selection of the assemblies I observed during the preparation and development of my thesis. They are a random selection and otherwise might pass without merit. Geertz refers to this as the task of the social ethnographer – the “inscription of social discourse”, recording an occurrence making it into an ‘account’ (Geertz, 1993, p.19) so as not to lose it. They were important to me because I either had a direct role in them, they were unique, less about information exchange and instruction and adding further meaning to the culture of the school.

These excerpts are taken from self – observation and fieldwork notes.

**The televised football match (6)**

Anxiety about low – school attendance. On this occasion attendance was not affected. It was decided to allow the children to watch the match in response to an even greater fear that the attendance figures for the day would be ruined because the children, it was believed, falsely, would be encouraged to stay off school that day by their friends and family. The anxiety now turned how the school authorities could plan for the children to watch the game in a non-excitable, and orderly manner.

A plan was drawn up to allow lower school children to watch the game in their classrooms, on the electronic whiteboards, whilst the upper school children could watch the game in the main assembly hall. At half time, which coincided with the end of the school day, those children that wanted to watch the match could come into the hall. The whole episode passed without incident, staff and the children enjoyed a shared experience, ever watchful staff lowered their guard and fun was had.

The children enjoyed a pleasant, shared experience possibly even generating a greater sense of belonging to the school. As teachers we went from ‘bouncers’ to being fans just like the children. We sat with the children and it was lovely. The senior VP took the lead by choosing to sit down and just watch the match. My colleague and I joined our form group.

**The staff Christmas Showcase (7)**

The staff Christmas shows were formative experiences and always the most joyous events. The children engaged; they were carefree, encouraged to participate to sing, shout and to squeal with pleasure. The children articulated the perfect expression of happiness and joy.

The Performing Arts staff led a chorus of other staff in an upbeat end of term Christmas extravaganza. The children sat in friendship groups not forms. I was entranced as some of my most hardened colleagues engaged in joyful, acrobatic displays, comedy scenes. The SLT staff who I think chose to ignore some of the less than polite catcalls, did a song and dance routine. The staff put on comedy sketches, a mock boy band tribute which caused some of the senior girls to have a melt down and even my maths teacher, who was far from grumpy, and the person I think she is, performed an unusual gymnastic display that was quite extraordinary. Staff from across the school, had been practising dance moves after hours, some had put on the most incredible jazzy dance scene.

It was an expression of unadulterated joy and finished with a rendition of the Twelve days of Christmas with which everyone joined in. Simple. Magical. These were the people I wanted to work with and who I loved being a part of their team. Moments like this reminded me why I trained to be a teacher. Put that in your recruitment adverts.

**Theatre Company Visit (9)**

This was a remarkable experience organised by the then Head of Music (since left) in the assembly hall. It was one of the most joyous experience we shared as a school community. The singers were inspiring. They encouraged the children to participate in a performance of Carmen by scratch complete with costumes and piano accompaniment. Remarkable in so many ways not just for their virtuosity but also for the children’s engagement. My notes record my delight at the power of music to convey story and to capture the children’s imagination. Most interestingly, from re reading my observations of the time, was the initial enthusiasm to join in by the toughest lad in his Year and his then refusal when he overheard some of the other children in his group whispering in disbelief that he was going to participate. My notes also record how I joined in and used singing, badly, as a means of managing my form group’s behaviour. The more sarcastic they were the louder I sang. They soon gave up sniggering. Begged me to stop!! I observed what I thought seemed a reluctance to participate by Bob.

**Student Council – Litter collection (10)**

Whilst less exciting, this was an interesting, unusual assembly in that it was led by a senior colleague who rarely led assemblies and was particularly child centred. She was understandably concerned with an increase in the amount of littering and chewing gum across the school estate. She had set the student council the task of visiting other, supposedly better schools, to find out how they reduced littering. There was some mockery of the slightly unfortunate delivery of one of the students who nervously recorded their outcomes of their visits but that aside my sense was that most children were forgiving and open to the council’s recommendations. I very much admired his nerve. Brave lad. Even though she was standing close to him for moral support, her presence served to enforce the message. Meanwhile most the children seemed attentive to his message without her necessarily needing to be there. It was compelling.

**The Derek Redmond assembly (11)**

Saw this twice – delivered both times by acting Assistant Heads. The clips and the video were expertly delivered, Bob was kind, adept and sensitive. The other teacher was inspiring. The video clip itself to be found on YouTube is heartrending and has had me in tears both times. Thankfully it was dark and none of the children could see me blubbering. I wouldn’t have cared if they had. I spoke with Bob afterwards and admitted that I had been moved and his response was to admit that his father had died when he was eighteen and he couldn’t ever watch the video without feeling moved to tears. Very poignant.

**Travel broadens the mind assembly (12)**

My notes also show that I enjoyed this assembly but couldn’t quite fathom the point behind it. One of the friendlier, younger Assistant Heads, who has since left the school, delivered an assembly linked to the benefits of travelling and, how travel broadens the mind. This was a useful and valuable lesson for some of our children. Given that they come from one of the most deprived estates in England it was difficult to judge whether or not she pitched it at the right level. Nonetheless, this was an interesting ruminative assembly complete with photos of children from her previous school who had travelled a field trip. I wondered if this was a ‘filler’. My notes record a pointed comment about rubbing our children’s noses in it, which was unnecessary on my behalf but just left me with a feeling of imbalance perhaps. None the less it was at least colourful and a different technique from the usual Power Point bronze, silver and gold (diary entry) sporting metaphor.

**Assemblies by Mr Carmichael** (not his real name) (13)

A great story teller, whenever ‘Sir’ (respectfully, Sir) delivered an assembly they were thoughtful and considered. I often wondered if some people can just do this and have an ability to communicate at the right level with children. Experience? His assemblies always brought a sense of interest and pleasure to the role and he was extremely popular with staff and students. He had worked in the school his entire career rising eventually to become one of the senior deputy Heads. He did invite me to help him organise the assemblies by theme when he learnt about my research and I submitted a number of ideas and thoughts. The only assemblies I delivered at school I did with him. He once told me that in his estimation he had delivered over 600 assemblies to children over his career and you could tell. His experience was obvious.

**IT safeguarding assembly Staying Safe online (14)**

Excellent assembly delivered on the perils of online cyber bullying and threats. Delivered by the Head of Science. Very thorough. Started by asking the children who had access to a Facebook account, all put their hands up and he says “why? your’ re only 11, and you’ re not allowed by law until your 13”? You could have heard a pin drop. I noted his technique was repeating the question when asking them how many have a Snapchat account (most of them still put their hands up) and then delivered a very effective warning about not exposing themselves to online bullying, staying safe online etc. My notes indicate that I felt that this was particularly effective message. Delivered calmly, and without threat it was balanced and responsive to the children’s needs.

**The Stay Safe at Bonfire night assembly (15)**

Delivered by the school police liaison officer (an external) and therefore not included in my data selection for that reason. Most of the children of course have heard this message relayed to them countless times through their primary schooling, and of course, in big school they know this now and one senses that some switched off during this assembly but our visitor licks them back into life with a suitably gruesome image at the end.

It was important to offer these observations as a counter-point to provide insight, contrast, and perspective perhaps to the analysis of my main datasets.

1. See the Association for Psychodynamic Practice and Counselling in Organisational Settings, http://appcios.com/?page\_id=187 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\_data/file/696998/Secondary\_accountability-measures.pdf). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Home Office, Prevent Strategy, 2011 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. (see, http://www.ninjamaths.com.au) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. (http://www.sealcommunity.org/node/356). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. (see, https://www.trusselltrust.org). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. https://www.basw.co.uk/codeofethics/ [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. https://www.hcpc-uk.org/publications/standards/ [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Memories of Melanie Klein: an interview with Hanna Segal, http://www.melanie-klein-trust.org.uk/klein [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. http://www.melanie-klein-trust.org.uk/klein [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. *(*used with kind permission from Pat Sikes, February 17th 2017 at an EdD writing weekend from *“*Storying schools: issues around attempts to create a sense of feel and place in narrative research writing”, *2005)* [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. http://www.melanie-klein-trust.org.uk/depressive-position [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. http://www.melanie-klein-trust.org.uk/depressive-position [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-15)