

Voluntary Activity in Small Rural Primary Schools: Boundaries, Networks and Trajectories

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Abstract

Voluntary activity - the unpaid and uncoerced giving of time, talent, money, and resources - in primary schools is increasing. However, this increase is not equal, with schools in wealthier areas attracting double the amount of volunteer time and money than those in more deprived areas. Voluntary activity is becoming a necessity rather than a choice, with primary schools increasingly reliant on volunteers and fundraised income. In this context, small schools are experiencing the largest increases in voluntary activity across compulsory education. These are schools with fewer than 100 pupils, often designated as 'rural' by the Department for Education. Whilst frequently conceptualised and promoted as part of a rural idyll in policy and school marketing, England has a highly differentiated countryside, with small schools educating children from a diverse range of backgrounds with a variety of needs. Whilst these schools experience challenges related to their small size, under-prioritisation and underfunding from government, they are often inclusive and caring environments, providing a valuable educational experience difficult to find in larger urban primary schools. Voluntary activity has had and continues to play a vital role in ensuring education can be provided in these contexts. However, it is not well-recognised or researched. It is critical to better understand how voluntary activity happens in different educational contexts and the impact it has on education delivery as well as for staff, students and the volunteers themselves. My research addresses this gap by exploring voluntary activity for two small rural primaries of differing levels of deprivation in Southeast England: Applegood (less deprived) and Oakington (more deprived). This research was conducted through ethnography (2021-2024), with a range of different methods employed during my extended immersion in these schools as a volunteer, researching voluntary activity first-hand. My findings reveal the significance of boundaries and invisible labour, socio-spatial networks and stigma, and trajectories of voluntary activity. My positionality and the methodology adopted (including children's voices) in this research contributes to a holistic and thorough approach to understanding voluntary activity in these environments. This research also contributes to conceptual and theoretical development by working with the total social organisation of labour framework and bringing previously separate fields of literature on educational purpose, parental involvement, gender, capital, stigma, the sociology of work, boundaries, voluntary activity and rurality, into dialogue with each other in the small rural primary context. It also contributes to substantive and policy debates around education and voluntary activity in the current climate.

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Chapter 1: Introductions

Voluntary Activity: Necessity or Choice?

Voluntary activity – the unpaid and uncoerced giving of time, talent, money, and resources – is an integral part of the primary school, and it is increasing. Between 2016 and 2018, “the amount schools raise on average has risen from £41 per pupil, per year to £51 per pupil, per year, increasing to £94 per pupil when we consider PTA [Parent Teacher Association] income” (Body and Hogg, 2018, pg.7). The amount of volunteer time schools receive has also increased from 12.5 minutes per pupil, per week in 2016 to 21 minutes per pupil, per week in 2018 (Ibid). There is much to celebrate about voluntary activity in primary education. From improving academic attainment, benefiting social and emotional well-being, and introducing children to a variety of experiences they might not otherwise encounter, voluntary activity can have a real and lasting impact on pupils early in their educational journeys, encouraging them to grow into caring and thoughtful citizens keen to make a difference in the world. However, in the context of government funding cuts per pupil of an estimated 9% in real terms since 2010 (Drayton et al, 2023), schools are increasingly seeing the use of voluntary activity as a necessity rather than a choice, with primary schools becoming increasingly reliant on volunteers and fundraised income to provide education (Body and Hogg, 2018; Hickey, 2024). In addition, the gaps between schools are widening, with schools in wealthier areas attracting double the amount of volunteer time and money than those in more deprived areas (Body and Hogg, 2018). Consequently, increasing reliance on voluntary activity is potentially exacerbating already existing inequalities between schools, raising “both moral questions about whose responsibility education funding is and social justice concerns about how to ensure a level playing field for all children” (Ibid, pg.22).

These concerns over inequalities have only increased following the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the early 2020s and ongoing cost-of-living crisis, of which schools were and continue to be at the frontline (Lucas et al, 2023; Timmins, 2021; Rio Poncela et al, 2021). Decades of neoliberal reforms have not only cut the educational budget, but they have also cut, reduced, or restructured other essential services for children and their families (Baker, 2023). In this context “schools [are] acting as crucial anchor institutions in the face of a retreating welfare state and the underfunding of services that should provide a supportive ecology for families, communities and child development” (Ibid, pg.1396). Increased responsibilities combined with ongoing staff recruitment and retention issues (Ovenden-Hope and Passy, 2019), mean that schools are struggling to manage the multiple roles they are expected and feel morally compelled to play. Voluntary activity is increasingly filling these gaps left behind by the retrenched welfare state and associated underfunding of services to ensure that children’s needs are met and that they receive the education they deserve.

In this context, small schools are experiencing the largest increases in voluntary activity (Body et al, 2017). For this thesis, ‘small schools’ are defined as schools with fewer than 100 pupils, who are often designated as ‘rural’ by the Department for Education. Whilst often conceptualised and promoted as part of a rural idyll in policy and school marketing (Walker, 2010; CRC, 2010; Hargreaves, 2009; Halfacree, 2009b), England has a highly differentiated countryside (Bagley and Hillyard, 2014; Murdoch et al, 2003), with small schools educating children from a diverse range of backgrounds with diverse needs (Fargas-Malet and Bagley, 2021). As of 2023, there were only 2,034 small schools left in the country (Hill, 2023) – this had almost halved since my research began. And yet, whilst these schools

experience challenges related to their small size, under-prioritisation and underfunding from government, they are often inclusive and caring environments, providing a valuable child-centred education difficult to find in larger urban primary schools. Voluntary activity has had and continues to play a vital role in ensuring this education can be provided in these contexts, sometimes even helping to save these schools from closure (Hargreaves, 2017). It is critical for society that we better understand how voluntary activity happens in different educational contexts and the impact this can have for all those involved if we want to work towards a socially just education system for all. Indeed, at the rate of closure of small rural primaries, we risk losing the opportunity to understand how voluntary activity contributes to valuable educational experiences in these environments for good, and how this could apply to and benefit other educational contexts. This is where my research comes in.

Exploring Voluntary Activity

My thesis explores voluntary activity for two small rural primaries of differing levels of deprivation in South East England: Applegood Church of England Primary School (less deprived) and Oakington Church of England Primary School (more deprived). This research was conducted through ethnography (2021-2024), with a range of different methods employed during my extended immersion in these schools as a volunteer, participating in, watching, listening, asking questions about and “collecting whatever data [was] available to throw light on the” phenomena of voluntary activity (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1997, pg. 1). Payton and Moody (2008) define ‘voluntary *action*’ (emphasis added) as the “voluntary giving of time (in the form of volunteering), money or items for no financial incentive, of one’s own free will and to benefit the environment or someone (individuals or groups) other than, or in addition to, close relatives” (Body and Hogg, 2021, pg.2). Whilst I use this definition, I substitute the word ‘action’ for ‘activity’ to reflect the often unconscious and informal acts that took place in these schools, in contrast to deliberate acts of giving which the word ‘action’ invokes. I also recognise that voluntary activity is multi-sited. Whilst the literature often talks about voluntary work *in* schools, this work does not just happen within the school itself, but also in the homes of staff, students, and their families, in community buildings and public places and, increasingly, online. Thus, I talk about voluntary activity *for* schools to encompass the vast range of settings in which this work takes place. Throughout my research, I explored the voluntary giving of time, money, and resources for Applegood and Oakington. This included people making things, donating things, volunteering their time, skills and energy, fundraising for activities, events or objects the schools required or wanted, organising (and/or supporting) voluntary events and activities, and giving money to the schools.

Building on the literature and addressing gaps in knowledge, my research questions were:

1. What does voluntary activity look like in small rural primary schools?

I explored the forms of voluntary activity, recruitment and requests, the roles and activities undertaken, the money and resources donated, by who, how they are organised, facilitated, managed, and negotiated, and the spaces and relationships involved.

2. How is this voluntary activity experienced by (1) volunteers (including parents/carers and community members) (2) school staff (3) children?

I explored the motivations, feelings, and opinions on the practice of voluntary activity in these schools, from the perspectives of those undertaking it, including the positives and negatives of voluntary activity, and opinions on when it should and should not be used and why.

3. Is there a relationship between level of deprivation and the character of voluntary activity in these schools?

By comparing schools with differing levels of deprivation, I aimed to understand how this might influence the practice and experiences of voluntary activity.

The pictorial introductions in Figures 1 and 2 below capture just some of the voluntary activities taking place for Applegood and Oakington. I will now introduce the two school (communities) in more detail.

Introducing the Research Sites: Applegood and Oakington

Applegood and Oakington are both voluntary-controlled Church of England (CofE) primary schools who federated in 2014. Both schools opened in the early 1800s with financial support from their villages principal landowning families. Pupil numbers fluctuate within and between academic years (as is common with small rural primaries) but both schools usually have around 40-50 pupils. There are only a handful of children in each school who live in the villages of the schools. Many pupils come from Pitford, a nearby large former mining village. However, Applegood have a wider catchment (3.8 square miles) than Oakington (1.9 square miles) and in recent years have been more likely to fill their Reception intake than Oakington. It is common for both schools to have a lot of in-year movement too (children leaving and joining different year groups throughout the academic year). Applegood is a small (relatively affluent) rural village, with the school at the centre, whilst Oakington is a large scattered rural hamlet, with the school on the outskirts and a more mixed socio-economic profile. School-community links are stronger in Applegood, than in Oakington. In 2023/24 Applegood had 9.4% of children eligible for free school meals (FSM), whilst Oakington had 57.9%. Oakington also have 13.2% of children from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) backgrounds, whilst Applegood have none. Both schools have high numbers of children with special educational needs (SEN). In 2023/24, 3% of primary school pupils had an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) and 14.1% had SEN support (ONS, 2024b). In 2023/24, Oakington had 15.4% and Applegood had 16.7% SEN pupils (with EHCPs and/or SEN support). Both schools offer Woodland sessions (Forest School) and Farm sessions (Farm School). The latest Ofsted inspections graded Applegood as 'Good' (2019) and Oakington as 'Requires Improvement' (2022). See Appendix 1 for further detail on my research schools' characteristics.

Whilst it is impossible to include every member of these school communities in my research, I have constructed a *dramatis personae* to introduce readers to some of the characters I encountered and worked alongside during my research (see Appendix 2).

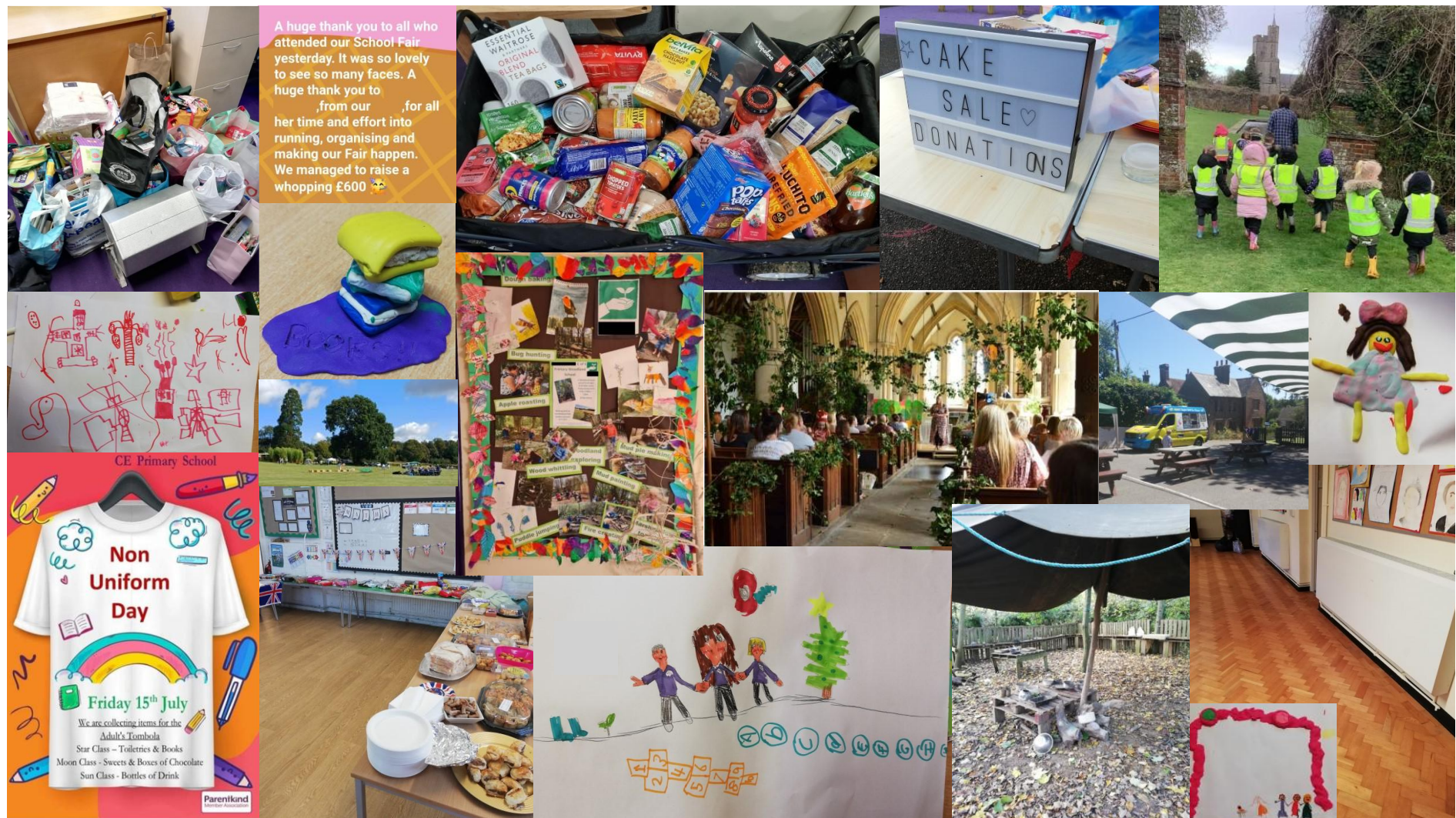


Figure 1 – A pictorial introduction to Voluntary Activity for Applegood CofE Primary School

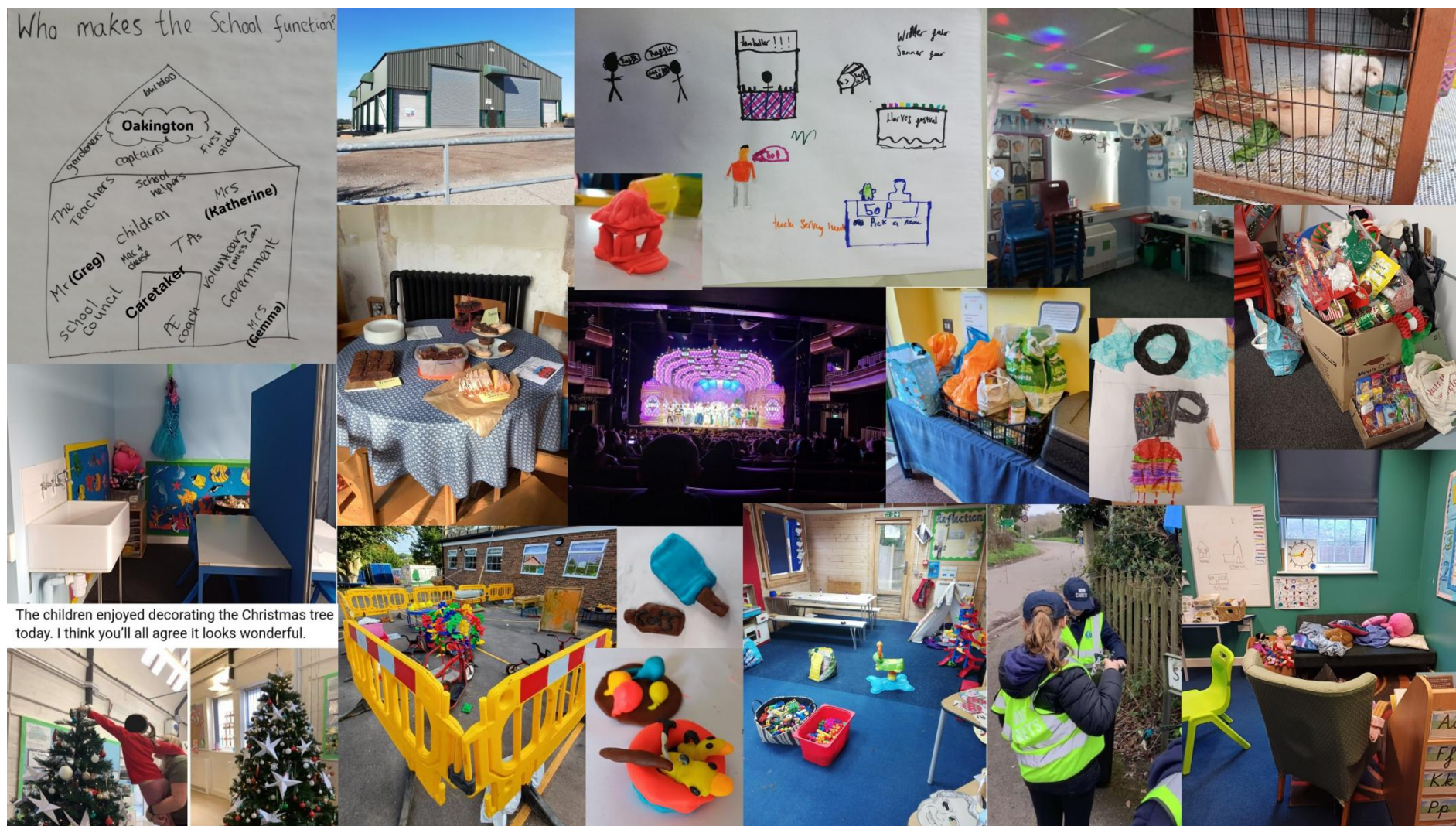


Figure 2 – A pictorial introduction to Voluntary Activity for Oakington CofE Primary School

Motivations

The current context and previous research (reviewed in more detail in Chapters 2 and 3) has shown the need for a qualitative understanding of the implications of increased voluntary activity in small rural primary schools. However, I also have a personal motivation for conducting this research in these schools. I attended both Oakington (aged 4-6) and Applegood (aged 6-10) as a child. I recall the mother who ran breakfast club, choir and music classes; the father who always did the sound and lighting for school plays, and the local elderly lady who walked us to and from the school and village hall and would listen to us read. I remember writing letters to the council to save our local post office, and how the community rallied round to save Applegood from closure. I volunteered in both schools as a teenager (mainly helping with the school's libraries), continued to attend Applegood's summer fairs until my sister finished there in 2014 and completed my sixth-form research project on Pupil Premium at Oakington in 2016. In 2020, I worked as a teaching assistant (TA) at Oakington during the COVID pandemic before beginning my research with the schools in 2021. I also live in Oakington village, a 3-minute walk from the school. There are individuals in these schools and communities who have known me since I was a child, and as an adult (colleague). I reflect on the impact of my positionality within these communities throughout the thesis.

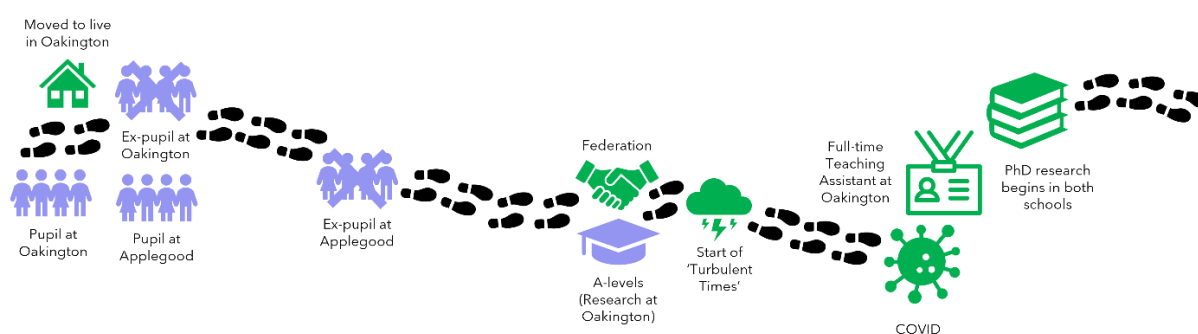


Figure 3 - My trajectory with Oakington and Applegood

I am aware that my childhood memories are very idyllic, and the policy landscape, social context, and the schools themselves have changed much since I attended (see Chapter 2 for further detail). Indeed, working at Oakington in 2020/21 was an invaluable experience which gave me a deep and personal understanding of the challenges these schools face (both day-to-day and long-term in the national policy arena) but also showed me that they are vibrant and treasured environments which both need and deserve closer attention. In my methodology chapter (4), I outline the rationale for researching these specific schools in further detail, but it is also important to acknowledge my personal motivation for the study: I care about these schools, I have unique access to and relationships with them, and I wanted to understand how voluntary activity is experienced so that I might be able to benefit these schools, and schools like them through my research.

Contributions

Small schools are in a situation where the choice to attend them is being eroded by a policy context which purports to promote school diversity and choice, but which in reality, rewards those schools with highest pupil numbers – the antithesis of the nature of a small school (Ovenden-Hope, 2024).

Taking the decision to close a small school reduces the choice and diversity government claims to encourage. And yet, small schools can provide high quality education, vital community spaces, and act as centres for innovation and treasuries for their localities (Gristy, 2023). They also continue to educate children from a diverse range of backgrounds and with diverse needs, providing inclusive and caring environments enabling children to thrive where they may have struggled elsewhere (Fargas-Malet and Bagley, 2021; NAHT, 2023). This is especially the case for pupils with SEN where small schools are fulfilling the goal of ensuring SEN children can be educated in a mainstream setting more than any other school (Ibid). Voluntary activity is key to how these schools are continuing to provide this child-centred and inclusive educational experience within their communities (Hargreaves et al, 2009). Thus, this research is both timely and incredibly important, contributing to numerous substantive and policy debates around educational choice, value, sustainability and inclusion, and the role voluntary activity has to play in the current climate. Indeed, whilst this thesis is an ethnographic exploration of voluntary activity in two small rural primary schools, the contributions extend beyond the immediate environments of Applegood and Oakington into the wider academic and policy context, with applicability to other education settings.

This research also contributes to conceptual and theoretical development by working with the total social organisation of labour (TSOL) framework and bringing previously separate fields of literature on educational purpose, parental involvement, gender, capital, stigma, the sociology of work, boundaries, voluntary activity and rurality, into dialogue with each other in the small rural primary context. This has contributed to expanding our understanding of the work involved in education and how this 'gets done'. The concept of socio-spatial networks has also been applied to this context to show how, beyond level of deprivation, both geographic and social capital combine to influence level and forms of voluntary activity in different educational environments. The concept of stigma has also been applied to understand how and why differences between schools in different contexts and individuals within them enable or prevent certain individuals or groups from being involved in voluntary activity and the inequalities this exacerbates. Finally, this thesis has contributed to our longitudinal and temporal understanding of voluntary activity in different educational contexts using the concept of trajectories to explore how the micro-, meso- and macro-levels of the TSOL influence each other and combine to shape the character of voluntary activity in schools, the meaning this has for the individuals involved and shed light on the long-term trends in voluntary activity. The conceptual and theoretical stance of this thesis works with inclusive definitions of work, enables diverse educational purposes to be explored, and combines theories to add more to our understanding than could have been achieved had a single conceptual or theoretical approach been used.

My positionality and the holistic ethnographic research approach developed through this thesis has enabled an in-depth and meaningful understanding of the nature and consequences of voluntary activity in these schools, how and why it differs between contexts and the lived realities for those involved. Through this research I have developed a comparative geography of voluntary activity considering the social and relational aspects of volunteering, and how this form of work interacts with, depends on, and supports other working practices in primary education. Furthermore, in their recent review of the literature on small rural schools across the world, Fargas-Malet and Bagley (2021) called for children's voices to be included in future research. My thesis addresses this gap by including research with children as a key feature of my ethnographic approach. Their artwork and words are drawn on throughout the thesis, both to ensure their voices are heard, but also to show how their knowledge and engagement with voluntary activity is shaping their understandings of civil society and their role within it.

Thesis Structure

This chapter (1) has served as an introduction to my research. I set the scene by discussing the current increases in voluntary activity in primary education, the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and current cost-of-living crisis on schools and the place of small rural primary schools in this context. Next, I presented the research methodology, including how voluntary activity is conceptualised throughout the thesis and my research questions. I then introduced Applegood and Oakington, the two schools in which I conducted my research, accompanied by visual depictions of the vibrancy and diversity of voluntary activities I encountered and will explore throughout this thesis. I then moved on to detail the motivations (both academic and personal) for conducting the research in these settings and the various contributions I hope to make.

The rest of my thesis is structured as follows. Chapter 2 details in more depth the policy context in which these schools exist. This includes exploring key neoliberal policy reforms made by different governments over the last 50 years which have impacted educational practices. I then move on to discuss the current position of small rural primary schools in particular within this wider neoliberal policy context, including arguments made for and against the closure of small schools, their practices of collaborating with other schools, and promoting their small size and rurality (Moser, 2004; 2005; Halfacree, 2009b) to distinguish themselves and successfully compete in the education market. Finally, I explore the position of Applegood and Oakington in relation to this policy background and their own unique histories as small rural primary schools in different contexts.

Chapter 3 critically explores the literature and presents the research gap my thesis addresses. It is argued that understanding the purposes of education is crucial if any assessment is to be made about the value of voluntary activity for schools. Parental involvement is also a key area, not only because parents role in education has increased and changed with neoliberal reforms, but also because parents are often core volunteers for schools and so debates about their role also need to be explored. The key concept of 'stigma' is also discussed in relation to this literature. The next section presents key conceptual frameworks which guide both my understanding of voluntary activity and my research practice. Voluntary activity is understood as a form of work which interacts with, depends on, and supports other working practices in education. Thus, the key concept of 'boundaries' is discussed. Following this, research on voluntary activity is critically explored. Of particular relevance to this thesis is how voluntary activity varies socially and geographically (socio-spatial understandings) and over time (as part of a life-course or trajectory). I then discuss the somewhat limited (beyond parental involvement) literature on voluntary activity for schools, before focusing specifically on voluntary activity in small rural primaries. Whilst this literature has focused on school-community relationships, a qualitative understanding of the role, nature and impacts of voluntary activity are yet to be addressed. My research fills this gap by bringing the various bodies of literature reviewed into dialogue with each other.

Chapter 4 presents my research methodology. I outline the rationale for my qualitative ethnographic approach and explore the ethics of my research, with a particular focus on researching the familiar, researching in schools with children, and my own positionality and commitment to reflexivity. I then detail the processes of selecting the research schools and (re-)entering the field, before critically discussing the family of methods I deployed in this ethnography. This included observations and fieldnotes, autoethnography, interviews, research with children and documentary analysis. Finally, I reflect on how I left the field, detail the analysis undertaken, and discuss how I wrote up the research.

Chapter 5 is the first of my three findings chapters. This chapter explores my findings related to the significance of boundaries and invisible labour in these small rural primaries. I present an adapted Total Social Organisation of Labour (TSOL) typology for understanding the work of education in these schools, discussing how boundaries are crossed, invisible, and maintained and the consequences of this. This includes debates and tensions around the use of voluntary activity for fundamentals, compared to enrichments, the intense workloads of staff which are exacerbated by their invisible voluntary activity, and the gendered role socialisation children receive through the voluntary activity they see and engage in. I then bring this discussion together through a reflexive autoethnographic account of my own experience with boundaries in these schools and how this impacted me and my participants (and the relationships between us), but also how it developed my understandings of voluntary activity in these settings.

Chapter 6 explores the significance of socio-spatial networks (interpersonal connections/community rooted in space) to the voluntary activity for these schools. I discuss the impact of the two schools differing geographies and present social network maps to ground discussions of the nature and extent of voluntary activity by bridge figures, core volunteers and peripheral/episodic volunteers and their various impacts in their schools. Bridge figures hold multiple positions, numbers and types of connections, linking many other individuals to their schools, often living nearby, having long personal histories and intense involvement. Core volunteers are also intensely involved but do not necessarily live nearby. Peripheral/episodic volunteers are less intensely involved and tend to live further away from the schools. I also develop the concept of socio-spatial stigma to explore how and why voluntary activity differs between but also within the two school environments, and the effects this has. Finally, I reflect on the future development (or not) of the social networks in these differing educational contexts, including differential understandings of 'community' and how it could or should be connected to the schools.

Chapter 7 explores the trajectories of voluntary activity uncovered within these school communities, bringing the key concept of temporality to bear upon understandings of the nature of voluntary activity in these schools and how and why it changes. After analysing the schools timelines (meso-level), I explore in-depth, four individuals (micro-level) from these schools who represent key demographic categories (ex-parent staff member, ex-pupil staff member and SEN parent, grandparent village resident, and SEN parent) and whose trajectories reveal key factors influencing the character of voluntary activity for these schools over time. These factors include (length of) employment, parental experience, the combination and concentration of personal relationships and responsibilities, leadership style of the headteacher, school culture, organisation and context, (self-)identity, and place (geography), shedding light on macro-level trends in voluntary activity. I then explore the consequences of staff-led and co-led voluntary activity organisation (which result from interactions of different school and individual trajectories at different points in time). Finally, I explore how the voluntary activity of the children in these schools has changed over time, both in its orientation and framing, and the consequences of this going forward.

Finally, Chapter 8 presents the conclusions of my research. I review my research aims before exploring my findings and their implications. I then reflect on what the future might hold for Applegood, Oakington and other small rural primaries in the current context. The contributions of my thesis are then explained, including conceptual and theoretical development, speaking to substantive and policy

debates, and my multiple methodological contributions. I end with some final reflections on the role of voluntary activity in education considering the findings of this thesis.

Conclusion

My thesis responds to Corbett's (2015) call for rural education scholarship to engage more with the conceptual tools of sociology and with contemporary social theory, as well as developing a more sophisticated sense of the geography and sociology of rural communities. It also seeks to qualitatively investigate Body and colleagues' identification of increases in voluntary activity in small schools to better understand the lived experiences and consequences of this trend in different settings. In this way it also responds to Kvalsund and Hargreaves (2009) call for the everyday local practices and experiences of the people involved in small rural schools to be included in research. Thus, this thesis brings a range of literatures into dialogue with one another through a holistic research approach centred on two different small rural school settings to better understand the nature and impacts of voluntary activity in these environments and beyond. It also reflects a deep commitment to ethical and reflexive practice and the rights and desires of research participants, including the children. I hope the stories of these schools and the individuals within their communities can speak to the lived experiences and develop understandings of voluntary activity in education.

Chapter 2: Context

This chapter contextualises the focus of voluntary activity in small rural primary schools within the educational policy background of the UK. Whilst Chapter 3 explores the literature and debates surrounding the rationale and consequences of education policy developments, this chapter highlights key points in the chronology of this development. The 1870 Elementary (Forster) Education Act made education compulsory for children aged 5-12 in England and Wales, provided by voluntary religious and secular state schools. Education was a crucial pillar of Beveridge's post-war welfare state with the 1944 (Butler) Education Act introducing free primary and secondary education for all children. The rest of this chapter explores the transition towards neoliberalism in education by exploring key policies introduced by different governments in power over the last 50 years (in chronological order). I then situate small rural primary schools within this context by exploring 'the closure debate' and showing how these schools have been cast as ineffective, inefficient and inferior by neoliberal policy. Finally, I explore where Applegood and Oakington (the two schools introduced in the previous chapter, and in which this research is based) sit in relation to this historical policy environment.

Neoliberal Education

Over the last 50 years, despite changes in government leadership, there have been "many continuities, overlaps and borrowings" (Ball, 2021, pg.17) in UK education policy and a "fundamental shift in organising principles, from welfare education, based on the principles of public service, to neoliberal education, based on the principles of market exchange and competition" (Ball, 2021, pg.2). This led to what Woods and Simkins (2014) call 'neoliberal structural reform' which focuses on school autonomy, institutional diversity and central government control. Whilst 'neoliberalism' is a contested term it has been aligned with, and defined by, a particular set of political priorities including marketisation, (parental) choice, competition, freedom, autonomy, data-driven performance indicators and "a repurposing of education for human capital development" (Hall and Pulsford, 2019, pg.242). Indeed, education has become fundamental to both economic and social policies in government rhetoric and is seen as key to economic competitiveness in the global market, as well as a solution to a variety of social problems (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2013, pgs.328-9).

Conservatives (1976-1997)

Soon after the Conservative government came into power in 1976, the landmark Taylor Report: 'A New Partnership for Our Schools' (1977) was published. As well as a focus on the role of parents in supporting their child(ren)'s schools (advocated by the earlier Plowden report (1967) and a key feature of the education landscape since then which is returned to throughout this thesis), this report had much to say about school governors. School governance is a formal and highly accountable voluntary role that requires governors to be responsible for the management and conduct of their schools (with various models for how this is enacted in practice) (Ranson, 2003; 2012; Ranson et al, 2005). The Taylor Report advocated for governors to be local and connected to their school communities in a sustained and constructive way (Owen, 1978). The Education Act 1980 extended participation rights and widened representation on governing bodies, but local education authorities (LEAs) retained the

power to appoint governors (Whitehead and Aggleton, 1986). The Act also required governing boards to include parent governors, thus seeking to further expand parental participation in education beyond their own child(ren) (Bridges, 1994). There is a vast body of literature about governor demographics, the nature and effectiveness of different models of governance and practices of governing, and the (changing) role of (different types of) governors within the education system (Hetherington and Forrester, 2022; James, 2014; Baxter and Wise, 2013; James et al, 2012; James et al, 2010; Ranson, 2008).

Another key development in this government was the publication of the Warnock Report: 'Special Educational Needs' (1978) which first introduced the term 'SEN' into English education policy (Black, 2019). SEN statements were introduced in 1978 and the Education Act 1981 (implementing many aspects of the Warnock Report) stated that "children should be taught in mainstream schools wherever possible" (unless the parent of the SEN child did not want a mainstream education, or the SEN child's inclusion would be incompatible with the education of others) (Ibid; Lindsay et al, 2020). The role of Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator was introduced from 1982 and made mandatory in 1993 (Ibid). More recently, the Children and Families Act 2014 replaced SEN statements with Education and Health Care Plans (EHCPs) which provide SEN children with a personal budget (Ibid). The huge increase in the teaching assistant (TA) workforce since 2000 has been attributed to the drive for SEN inclusion in mainstream schools (Blatchford et al, 2009; Sharples et al, 2016; Lindsay et al, 2020; Lewis, 2023). The numbers of children with SEN support (identified by their school) and an EHCP (identified by their local authority) has been increasing since 2016 (ONS, 2024b). As of 2024, the number of pupils in England with SEN is over 1.6 million (Ibid).

The Education Reform Act (ERA) 1988 was fundamental in the process of neoliberalisation in England. Introduced by Thatcher's Conservative government, the ERA increased school autonomy through the Local Management of Schools (LMS) which allowed schools to opt out of local authority management and financial control, which was then delegated to the headteacher and governing body of a school (Alcock and May, 2014). It also introduced 'choice' in the form of parental preference of school within an open enrolment system, and the National Funding Formula where funding follows the pupil to the school parents have chosen (Ball, 2021; LeGrand and Bartlett, 1993). Schools then receive their budgets based on "the number, and ages, of the children actually admitted to the school" (Bartlett, 1993, pg.127). The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) was introduced in 1992 to inspect schools on a range of criteria. As a result, schools must now compete for parental preference based on their successful performance in league tables and Ofsted inspections (Alcock and May, 2014). Consequently, the education system has been transformed into a 'quasi-market' governed by the principles of choice for service users (parents and students) and competition between providers (schools) (LeGrand and Bartlett, 1993). The processes involved in this transformation are collectively termed 'marketisation'.

In theory, the quasi-market in education aims to maximise the efficiency benefits of a private market, while retaining the equity benefits of a public service and ultimately bringing "about an improvement in the quality of education provision" (Bartlett, 1993, pg.125). It aims to do this through the creation of a diversity of schools from which to choose from, running schools efficiently to generate surplus and improve facilities to attract more pupils (LeGrand, 2003, pg.109). Indeed, with a focus on educational standards, two other key introductions of the ERA 1988 were that of Key Stages, specifying educational objectives to be reached by a certain age and the National Curriculum, detailing the

subjects and content to be taught and the expected standards to be achieved by all children in schools (Ball, 2021). Ironically, therefore, such changes purporting to promote freedom and choice also combined with reforms which sought to control educational content and restrict curriculum autonomy (Ibid). Furthermore, West and Bailey (2013) argue that ‘choices’ are only ‘preferences’ in reality, and the limits on *real* choice constitute a serious problem in education markets. Exley (2014, pg.26) further highlights how “parents within educational marketplaces are unequally able to exercise choice” in the first place, with middle-class parents benefiting over those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Indeed, many parents do not experience choice as a reality when selecting a school for their child(ren).

New Labour (1997-2010)

Education was central to New Labour’s election campaign and throughout their period in office. The New Labour government consolidated and reinforced many of the education policies introduced by the Conservatives but adopted a wider holistic welfare approach for children and families (Simon, 2013). They launched the Sure Start programme dedicated to supporting families from pregnancy to age 4 in areas of high poverty (Heath et al, 2013) and Education Action Zones, where groups of local schools in deprived areas were to work with local businesses to help them improve. In 2003, New Labour’s ‘Every Child Matters’ policy encouraged schools to become community hubs, providing extended services in their local areas, with schools working together with other agencies to care for the whole child, their families and local communities (Simon, 2013). Whilst it is argued that Extended Services were underpinned by a deficit model of parents and communities (Ibid), Diss and Jarvie (2016) argue that, with dedicated funding (and a genuine commitment to lifelong care for the whole child beyond only academic attainment), extended schools could enrich the lives of parents and children through extra-curricular opportunities, consistent food provision, and enabling mothers labour force participation. Thus, New Labour renewed recognition of the importance of “the relationships between children, families and schools” (Alcock and May, 2014, pg.193) in education.

It is important to point out here that parents involvement in education has existed long before the policies discussed in this chapter. Of particular relevance to the focus of this thesis is the role of Parent Teacher (and Friends) Associations (PT(F)As). Parents can voluntarily join and form PTAs which fundraise for their child(ren)s schools, build school community and represent the parental voice (House of Commons, 2006). In 1956 the National Confederation of Parent Teacher Associations (now called Parentkind) formed out of networks of PTAs and by 2006 they represented over 13,000 individual PTAs across England, Wales, and Northern Ireland (Ibid). Parentkind now have a national advice line, regional advisers, provide information, guidance, special bank rates, model constitutions, a web-building tool and subscription linked insurance for PTAs, as well as seeking to represent parents in media and educational policy. They advocate for increased parental involvement in education and undertake research to explore parent participation in PTAs and the work they do in schools.

Ball (2021) characterises New Labour’s education policies as focusing on ‘managerialism’ and ‘modernisation’. In relation to the first, New Labour introduced New Public Management (NPM) of schools structured by performance measures and regulation through inspection, deliberately weakening the role of local authorities and increasing central and self-governance (Hetherington and Forrester, 2022; Heath et al, 2013). In relation to the second, they also increased targets, intensified the performativity culture in schools, and sought to diversify secondary schooling, creating even

greater 'choice' for parents and children (Reay, 2008). Their 'Curriculum 2000' sought to modernise A-levels and link what is learnt in school to future job opportunities, with a focus on vocational skills (Heath et al, 2013). They also provided extra resources for schools to specialise in particular subject areas (giving them a competitive edge) (Alcock and May, 2014). In addition, their Aim Higher (2001) policy sought to promote participation in further and higher education among young people from disadvantaged backgrounds (Heath et al, 2013). Perhaps one of the most significant legacies of this government which fundamentally altered the landscape of education was the introduction of academies in 2000. Directly funded by central government, academies "allow sponsors [especially local businesses] to replace local Government authorities in the management of schools" (Hall and Pulsford, 2019, pg.243), significantly increasing privatisation in the education system (West and Bailey, 2013). West and Bailey (2013, pg.138) summarise the academies programme as reflecting a radical change "from a national education system, locally administered via democratically elected local education authorities, to a centrally controlled system" with legally binding contracts existing between the government and private education providers.

Coalition and Conservatives (2010-2020)

If New Labour sought to modernise, innovate and focus on vocational skills, the Coalition and Conservative governments from 2010 sought to go 'back to basics' (Ball, 2021) and restore a highly academic curriculum, with a focus on attainment, traditional values, subjects, and forms of pedagogy. They also passed the Academies Act 2010 which made it easier for schools to convert to academies, supposedly giving them greater freedom and autonomy (Ibid) and introduced 'free schools', a form of academy which allows any interested party to set up a school on a non-profit basis with government funding (Allen and Higham, 2018; Hall and Pulsford, 2019). Higham (2014) identified local civil society groups, sponsoring organisations, and existing educational institutions as the most common free school initiators. Policy allowed 'failing' schools to seek support to improve standards by joining multi-academy trusts (MATs) run by charitable and social enterprise organisations (Ibid; West and Bailey, 2013). Despite claims that academisation is the solution to underperformance (with failing schools forced to convert), evidence of their success is contradictory and controversial (Ibid; Keddie, 2018). Not only do "they appear to display a similar diversity of performance to that evident in the previous local authority school system" (Ball, 2021, pg.202) but issues of undemocratic involvement, increased class segregation and stratification and the privileging of private interests undermining education as a public good persist (Keddie, 2018). Allen and Higham (2018) also found that free schools, whilst tending to open in areas of disadvantage, were socially selecting pupils from more affluent backgrounds leading to reproduction of socio-economic inequality.

In line with a focus on attainment, the Ofsted inspection framework underwent reforms in 2012 (when 'requires improvement' replaced 'satisfactory' ratings), 2015 and 2019. Ofsted have been criticised for inconsistency, unfair and unreliable judgements, with some inspections and reports even leading to teacher illness and deaths (Fazackerley, 2023). Indeed, within this context, 2010 saw the beginnings of the intensification of the teacher recruitment and retention crisis (Ovenden-Hope, 2024). Ofsted and governments accountability pressures are a leading cause in teachers decisions to leave the profession (NEU, 2024). As well as poor pay, pressure and workload issues, the closure and funding cuts to wraparound services, mean that teachers are expected not only to educate, but also to be social workers and mental health professionals (Webb and Vulliamy, 2002; Ovenden-Hope and Passy,

2019; Walker, 2023; Postlethwaite, 2023). Indeed, schools are now often the ‘fourth emergency service’ to which families have no choice but to turn (Adams, 2019).

Of particular relevance to this thesis’ focus on voluntary activity in education, the Coalition government’s education policies were part of their wider goal of creating the ‘Big Society’. This involved actively encouraging communities (including the third sector and volunteer citizens) to draw upon (and create) ‘social capital’ in their local areas to ‘empower’ local people to ‘take control’ over local public services (Alcock, 2010). As part of the Big Society agenda, the Coalition government introduced the National Citizen Service (NCS) which they argued would both benefit students future employment prospects and provide social and emotional benefits for the young people involved, encouraging a mixing of students from diverse backgrounds and participation in local social action projects (Bradley, 2012; Dean, 2014). In contrast, however, they also focused on developing character education which Jerome and Kisby (2020) criticise for being paternalistic, anti-democratic and anti-intellectual, as well as individualistic, de-politicised and de-contextualised, suggesting pre-determined conclusions to ethical dilemmas and that bad outcomes are the result of poor individual decisions and personal characteristics without wider critical reflection. The controversy of character education thus sits uncomfortably alongside ‘ideals’ of the Big Society.

Whilst the rhetoric of the ‘Big Society’ fell away from the political narrative quite quickly when the Coalition government took power, the Conservative government’s Civil Society strategy (HM Government, 2018) continued this focus on local voluntary involvement. Despite the positive rhetoric of ‘empowerment’, ‘localism’, and ‘taking control’ these policies have put increased pressure on schools to draw upon the people and resources in their local areas to improve (or sustain) the education provided (Body, 2020; Flint, 2011; Hastings and Matthews, 2015; Morris, 2011) at a time when the education system is suffering increasing funding cuts per pupil (Drayton et al, 2023) and local support services are being reduced or withdrawn altogether (Baker, 2023). Thus, encouragement to draw on local ‘social capital’ through voluntary activity represents attempts by government to make individuals and communities compensate for government cuts (Green et al, 2011; Morris, 2011).

COVID-19 (2020-2023)

Any contextualisation of education policy cannot fail to discuss the huge impact of the global Coronavirus pandemic beginning in 2020. Policies impacting schools during this period included national lockdowns and school closures, continued in-person education for key worker and vulnerable children, online and home-schooling, free school meal vouchers, changes to testing and examinations, school ‘bubbles’ to prevent spread of the virus, and rules around testing and isolation (Timmins, 2021). As the world attempted to ‘return to normal’ after the lifting of COVID restrictions, schools have continued to struggle with behavioural problems, lack of socialisation and poor mental health of pupils, ongoing problems with examinations and assessment, managing catch-up learning and poor pupil attendance (Ibid). Education experts and school leaders believe lockdowns ‘broke the spell’ that bound schools and parents together, with previously taken-for-granted rules around attendance and behaviour now disregarded by parents (Adams, 2023). Timmins (2021) argues that “when it came to education, U-turn was to follow U-turn” (pg.4), that the government approach was very top-down with “command and control [trumping] any form of partnership” (pg.7) and that the complexity of the school system in the UK, did not help with communication issues (pg.16). Biesta (2020a) argues that

the coronavirus 'crisis' showed that those with economic, social, and cultural capital were able to navigate the pandemic more easily than those without, thus highlighting real concerns of educational inequality that need to be seriously considered and addressed.

Small Rural Primary Schools in Social Policy

As a result of the numerous neoliberal education policies discussed above, Ball (2021, pg.211) characterises England's current education provision and performance as a geographically and socially uneven 'patchwork'. But where are small rural primary schools positioned in this patchwork? To answer this question, it is important to first understand how small schools are defined. Whilst there are many challenges to defining small schools (Phillips, 1997; Hargreaves, 2009), they are generally regarded (in policy and academia) as those with fewer than 100 pupils or with 4 or less full-time teachers (often including a teaching head) (Galton and Patrick, 1990). In addition, there are four important features of small schools which require elucidating. The first is that they almost always operate through multi-graded classes, that is multiple year groups educated together in one classroom (Rule, 2005; Hargreaves, 2017). Second, small primaries tend to be in rural areas (Ibid). Third, they have a long history of catering for children with special educational needs (Infed, 2019a; 2019b). And finally, small primaries tend to be church schools (Ball, 2021; Chadwick, 2012; CofE 2014; Cade et al, 2018). These characteristics are vital when attempting to understand and research small primaries because their classroom structures and profiles, rurality and religious characters continue to influence the nature and values embedded in these schools and their local communities (CofE, 2014; Kendall and Knapp, 1996; Morris, 2011), shaping the experiences of teaching and learning and how national policy is interpreted and implemented in these unique school environments. There are now around 2,034 small schools still open in England (Hill, 2023), significantly less than the 11,464 schools there were when neoliberalisation policies began to take effect in the 1980s (O'Brien, 2019).

The Closure Debate

Much of the literature on small rural schools emerged in the context of debates about their economic and educational effectiveness compared to larger schools, especially following neoliberal educational reforms in the 1980s and calls for the closure of small schools (Ribchester and Edwards, 1999). Harrison and Busher's (1995) review of these arguments characterises the 'for-closure' debate in terms of the '3 C's' of cost, curriculum, and culture. Small schools are very expensive to run, with high pupil unit and administration costs and as such their economic viability is always in question. The national funding formula following the ERA 1988 has been particularly damaging for small schools as their defining characteristic of fewer pupils means less funding overall, despite these schools having the same admin costs as larger schools (Hansard (HC Deb) 2019). Whilst these schools are supposed to be financially supported through 'sparsity funding', "very few schools actually qualify for" it (Ibid, col. 428). Furthermore, Galton and Hargreaves (1995) found that the loss of local authority support following the ERA 1988 was particularly difficult for small schools as this support often acted as a buffer in years of low pupil numbers and financial difficulty. It has also been argued that small schools are not educationally viable, with fewer specialist teachers compromising their ability to deliver the National Curriculum effectively (Hargreaves et al, 1996; Vulliamy and Webb, 1995), and with headteachers having to balance management alongside a significant teaching role (Dunning, 1993).

Finally, it is argued that both pupils and teachers are isolated in small rural schools, with reduced peer groups and professional support networks (Harrison and Busher, 1995).

However, the introduction of Standard Assessment Tests (SATs) and Ofsted in the 1990s proved that small schools could hold their own, with their pupils performing as well as, if not better than their counter-parts in larger schools (Hargreaves et al, 1996; Hargreaves, 2017; Rule, 2005). In fact, small primaries consistently rank among some of the best performing in the country, with 92% of village schools rated good or outstanding, compared to 89% nationally (O'Brien, 2019; Hansard (HC Debate) 2019, col. 423). Moreover, important qualitative studies exploring the experiences of attending and working in small rural primaries highlight the benefits of the low pupil-teacher ratio, familial atmosphere, 'happier', caring and supportive learning environments, respect and high standards of behaviour, and the mutually beneficial relationships between schools, parents and their local communities (Bell and Sigsworth, 1987; 1991; 1992; Bottery, 1991; Chadwick, 2012; CofE 2014; Cade et al, 2018; Francis, 1992). Recent literature has also found that small primaries may have greater access (due to surrounding facilities) and ability (due to smaller class sizes) to provide more alternative, enriching educational opportunities such as 'Forest school' (Pimlott-Wilson and Coates, 2019), 'Farm school' (Saunders et al, 2011), and 'Beach school' (Mackintosh, 2017). The National Association of Small Schools (NASS) have created a Manifesto emphasising small schools' roles as assets, centres for communities, innovation, and treasuries for their localities (Gristy, 2023). As well as advocating for the continued existence and fair treatment of small schools, Gristy (2023) draws on a range of international literature and methodologies to emphasise the value and benefits small schools can bring for their pupils, communities, and wider education policy.

Thus, the literature supports the educational (attainment) viability of small rural primaries and seeks to balance the inevitably high pupil cost criticism with arguments espousing the emotional and social benefits of such environments. These arguments place small rural schools in a good position in the education market in which they now must compete. Despite these schools rural localities meaning their "pupil roll is highly vulnerable to both fluctuations in the birth rate and the vagaries of the market" (Moser, 2004), the literature on rural school choice highlights the continued popularity of small (rural and church) schools, especially as they tend to be conceptualised as 'the heart of communities' within a 'rural idyll' (Flecknoe, 2003; Walker, 2010; Walker and Clark, 2010; Hemming and Roberts, 2018). Parents are attracted by the small school (and often religious) ethos encompassing small class sizes, more attention, knowledge of and care for their children due to low pupil-teacher ratios, a genuine concern for pupil welfare, close relationships within the school community and idyllic rural settings in which their children can learn and play, accessing environments and experiences not available in larger urban schools (Flecknoe, 2003; Hemming and Roberts, 2018).

Small rural schools have also adopted diverse and innovative responses to their position in the education market, drawing on and promoting their unique features and characteristics. Moser's (2005) interviews and observations in small rural schools found sophisticated marketing strategies (encouraging media attention, producing magazines and organising school-community events) to entice parents from outside their catchment areas to choose them over their local schools. The added benefits small rural schools can be seen to provide are vital when their small numbers of children mean that statistical measures of attainment are often invalid indicators of success (Hargreaves, 2009; Ovenden-Hope, 2024). In any case, parents may well value different (or at least additional) criteria to attainment (Hemming and Roberts, 2018). Of particular relevance in small rural primaries is the

growing number of SEN children they educate (NAHT, 2023). Many of the benefits of small rural schools mean that they are seen as the next best thing for parents of SEN children who struggle to get into a special school or who want their child to be educated in a mainstream setting (Ibid; Fargas-Malet and Bagley, 2021; Preece and Lessner Lištiaková, 2021). There is a careful balance to be struck here, however. Small schools have small budgets and the additional funding that comes with a child who possesses an EHCP often does not fully cover the support that child will need (NAHT, 2023). Schools must carefully consider whether they can meet the child's needs and ensure the education of other children is not negatively impacted. Nevertheless, small rural schools are often seen as particularly inclusive educational environments and attract families and children with a diverse range of needs.

So, small rural primaries remain a popular 'choice'. However, this can be a dilemma if schools' popularity mean their attractiveness reduces the very feature that made them popular in the first place – their small size (Hemming and Roberts, 2018). Moreover, there is an inherent contradiction in a neoliberal context between the encouragement for schools to compete but also to collaborate (Muijs and Rumyantseva, 2014; Jopling, 2019). Whilst small rural schools are keen to emphasise the benefits of education in their unique environments to attract pupils, they are also keen to avoid competing with other village schools who often share similar aims and ethos (Walker, 2010, pg.714). Consequently, these schools have adopted "innovative rural coping strategies" (Ribchester and Edwards, 1999, pg.60) over the years. One of these is 'clustering' "in which a number of rural schools co-operate and share resources and expertise [and costs] on a voluntary, informal basis" (Hargreaves et al, 2009, pg.81). In Harrison and Busher's (1995, pg.393) study, clustering involved "sharing teachers, equipment, curriculum planning, INSET, school outings and sporting fixtures". Hargreaves et al (1996) found that clustering in small rural schools improved teacher confidence in their abilities to implement the National Curriculum effectively. However, whilst clustering is generally encouraged (CofE, 2014; Cade et al, 2018), Ribchester and Edwards (1998) did identify disadvantages and concerns when developing clusters, such as balancing individual schools needs with cluster needs, achieving parity of input and benefit for individual schools, and practical disadvantages within clusters, such as increased workloads due to cluster organisation responsibilities.

A more formal arrangement small rural schools can enter are 'federations' "in which several schools share a headteacher and governing body" (Hargreaves et al, 2009, pg.81). Thorpe and Williams (2002) study found that successful federation was built on pre-existing collaboration (such as clustering), reduced the admin and workload for schools and meant the positive characteristics of individual schools could be maintained. However, if schools feel forced into federation (often due to financial concerns) the likelihood of success is reduced (Muijs, 2015a; 2015b). In recent years, governments have also been eager to promote academy conversion and the joining of Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) for small schools (Cade et al, 2018, pg.16; DfE, 2019), yet it is felt this presents a risk of small schools losing their identities. In any case, due to the considerable financial burden they represent, small schools are often seen as unattractive to existing MATs (Ovenden-Hope and Passy, 2019; Hill, 2023). Thus, whilst these various forms of collaboration have long been regarded as 'good' solutions to the challenges faced by small rural primaries and do indeed bring many benefits acknowledged by the schools themselves, they have also been adopted as necessary survival strategies for small schools under neoliberalisation.

In 1980 a ‘presumption against closure’ policy for small rural schools was introduced (Hargreaves, 2009) by the government and the closure rate slowed in the 1990s and 2000s (Rule, 2005). Nevertheless, over half of the small primaries in England have closed since 1980 (from 11,464 to 5,406 by 2018) (O’Brien, 2019, pg.1). In 2019 the DfE (2019, pg.17) reiterated the ‘presumption against closure’ of small rural schools, stating “that the case for closure should be strong and clearly in the best interests of educational provision in the area”. Those proposing closure must consider alternatives (including federation), transport implications, whether other good schools can accommodate displaced pupils, whether the size of the school is putting children at an educational disadvantage and, “the overall and long-term impact on the local community of the closure of the village school and of the loss of the building as a community facility” (Ibid, pgs.17-18). Stakeholders must be consulted on any proposals. Whilst this statutory guidance does afford small rural schools some protection, it does not address the challenges these schools continue to face, especially around funding. Indeed, instead of addressing the issues faced by small rural schools, governments throughout the 1970s and 1980s turned both survival strategies and the unique features of small rural primaries into policy assumptions for solutions to (the cost of) rural education provision (Bagley and Hillyard, 2014, pg.68). This includes voluntary activity (discussed further in section 3.5 of Chapter 3).

In any case, this ‘protection’ has not been effective for many small schools, with around 9,430 being closed between 1980 and 2023 (O’Brien, 2019; Hill, 2023). This is particularly damaging for geographically isolated communities where these schools may be the only social constant (Ibid; Ovenden-Hope and Passy, 2019). Recent claims that small schools are less likely to be graded as ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ than the national average (Hill, 2023) have been challenged by criticisms of the Ofsted framework which, it is argued, does not adequately understand the uniqueness or fairly judge the education in small schools (Gristy, 2023; Ovenden-Hope and Passy, 2019). Small rural primaries are in a unique position to provide truly child-centred education based on caring relationships which is inclusive, meaningful and of high quality (Hill, 2023). There is a real risk that we will lose what is most valuable about this education, and opportunities to learn from it, if these schools continue to close. The popular choice to attend a small school is being restricted by their closures and the channelling of pupils into other, larger schools they may not have chosen and where they may be less likely to thrive (Moser, 2007; Fargas-Malet and Bagley, 2021). Not only does this contradict espoused neoliberal policy aims, but it is also unjust and could have real and lasting consequences for thousands of children. Voluntary activity has not only aimed to stem the tide of closures (Ribchester and Edwards, 1999; Hargreaves, 2017), but it also continues to be vital to the everyday educational experiences in small rural schools (Hargreaves et al, 2009; Bagley and Hillyard, 2014). Thus, understanding the role and consequences of voluntary activity in small rural primary schools, especially within the current policy context, is of critical importance.

Applegood and Oakington in Context

The previous chapter introduced Applegood and Oakington (the schools in which this research is based), but where do they sit in relation to the policy context outlined in this chapter? Figure 4 presents a chronicle of each school, with a key policy timeline at the centre. Both schools opened (with the financial support of local philanthropists) in the 1830s. They are both Church of England schools and are voluntary controlled. In May 2006, as with many other small rural schools, the closure of Applegood was proposed. Following the consultation period, in which the parent, staff and local

community rallied round in protest, the school was saved in July 2006. In 2011, a behavioural unit opened on Oakington grounds to accommodate growing numbers of SEN pupils, with the hope of integrating them into mainstream schooling. In 2014, the two schools federated, now sharing the same executive head and governing body. Between 2016 and 2018, both schools experienced a period of turbulence, where the executive head (David) left, many governors were replaced, severe financial issues plagued the federation, and pupil numbers dropped as concerned parents removed their children (especially at Applegood). The behaviour unit also closed during this time having not been successful in integrating its pupils into mainstream schooling and with concerns over its finances and operations. A new executive head (Richard) was brought in to 'save' the schools during this period and managed to improve the schools financial positions.

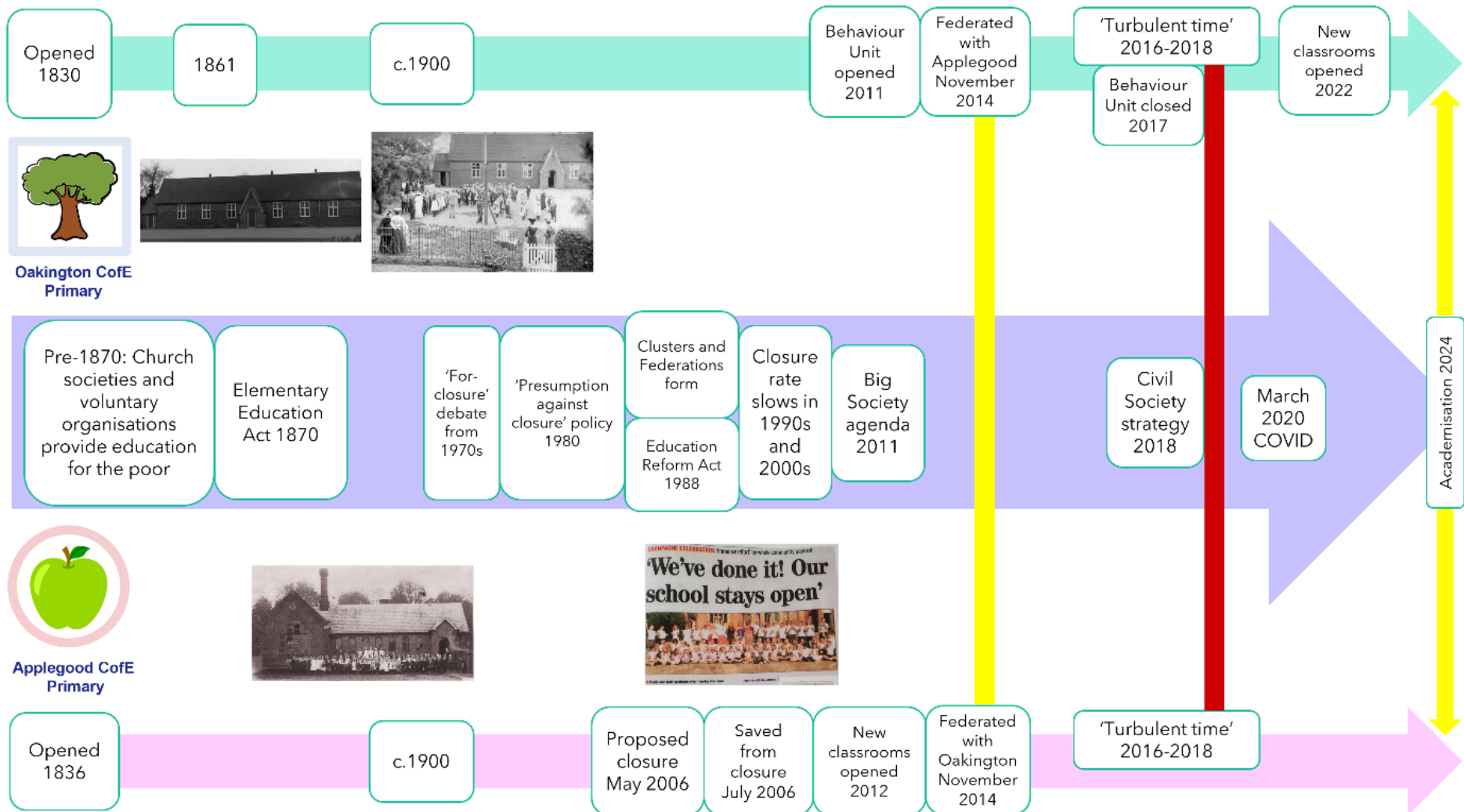


Figure 4 - Timeline for both schools

In 2020, as the schools were beginning to emerge from the turbulent times, the Coronavirus pandemic hit. Richard left in 2021 and Katherine, the former Oakington head of school became the executive head of the federation. Despite emerging from the turbulent times and the pandemic, ongoing challenges facing these small schools (especially around finance and pupil numbers) mean that they are still struggling. As I approached the end of my research, I was informed that both Applegood and Oakington were on the path to academisation. The plan is to form a new Trust with other local small rural primaries. I return to this potential future in the conclusion of my thesis, where I reflect on what academisation might mean for voluntary activity for these schools in the future and considering my research findings.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided an educational policy context for my thesis, focusing on trends towards neoliberalisation in the UK education system since the late 1970s. This has included increasing focus on 'choice, 'competition' and parental involvement, governance, SEN inclusion, modernisation and expanded roles for schools, academisation and free school development, and performativity and teacher recruitment and retention issues. The Big Society agenda and Civil Society strategy were also discussed in relation to funding cuts and encouragement of social capital (voluntary activity) to compensate. The impact of the COVID pandemic was also considered. Next, small rural primary schools were defined, and specific policies explored in the context of 'the closure debate', including cost, culture and curriculum discussions, and trends towards both competition and collaboration through clustering and federation. This chapter has also shown where Applegood and Oakington are positioned in relation to the wider policy context, the policy context of small rural primaries, and their own local histories. In the next chapter I move on to review the relevant literature on educational purposes, parental involvement, conceptualisations of boundaries, work and voluntary activity, voluntary activity in schools more widely, and small rural schools, more specifically.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

Exploring processes of neoliberalisation can lead to questions of what forms of education society values and, indeed, what the ultimate purpose of education is understood to be. This literature review thus begins by exploring definitions of education and debates around its purposes, including qualification, socialisation, subjectification, equality and care. Section 2 explores the vast body of literature around parental involvement in education. This includes critical studies on inequalities that exist between parents, typologies of parental involvement (including co-production), the sociology of stigma (as applied to certain groups of parents), and a consideration of those involved in education who are *not* parents. Section 3 explores how the work of education can be conceptualised through Glucksmann's framework of the Total Social Organisation of Labour, and how it has been extended to include both voluntary work and the informal economy. I discuss how the concept of 'boundaries' is vital to this conceptualisation and how this links back to processes of stigmatisation which perpetuate inequalities between social groups. I then move on to review the literature on voluntary activity; how it is defined, who is involved, why they engage (or stop), geographies of voluntarism and theories of change in volunteering. Section 4 narrows focus by exploring voluntary activity for schools – who engages, the roles and activities undertaken, literature on governors and Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs), children's voluntary activity, and explorations of the impact of voluntary activity in schools. The final section focuses specifically on what is known about voluntary activity for small rural primaries. Throughout each section, gaps in the literature are highlighted, methodologies and findings critiqued, and connections made across bodies of literature to present the current state of sociological knowledge about educational purpose, work, boundaries, capital, stigma and voluntary activity in the small rural primary school context.

3.1. The Purposes of Education

What is the purpose of education? A simple answer to this question might be "nothing less than learning to live" (Jeffreys, 1971, pg.xii) – the purpose of education is to prepare us for life in the society of which we are part. But what this means in practice will differ depending on the context. However, we must always know what our purpose is in education because only when we know what we want to achieve, can we make decisions about content and the kind of relationships most conducive to reaching our aims (Biesta, 2015). To explore educational purpose, it is useful to first attempt to define 'education' itself. This is important not only to guide this discussion, but also because it provides a starting point from which to assess whether purposes might truly be considered 'educational'. In addition, education is often defined in relation to its purpose, but rarely is this purpose articulated, justified, or questioned (Biesta, 2020b).

The word 'education' derives from two different Latin words; 'educere' meaning to 'lead out' or 'draw forth' and 'educare' meaning to 'train' or 'mould' (Bass, 1997). This suggests education involves a balance between social change and social reproduction. Indeed, for Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire (whose influential work will be returned to below), education is always political because it either seeks to maintain the status quo or helps to critique and change reality (Giroux, 2010). Or, as Biesta (2020a, pg.10) puts it, education can be about "production" or "praxis". It will be argued below that current education systems organised through formal schooling tend to be

more successful at the former than the latter. It is useful here, however, to distinguish between 'the school' and 'education'. The school is but one setting in which 'education' might take place. But 'education' is not confined to the temporal or physical boundaries of the school. This is important to acknowledge because schooling may have stated aims and purposes (whether these are achieved or not is another matter), but also unacknowledged consequences of the education (its form and delivery) it provides, but this does not mean that education is, can or should only be provided by institutions alone.

Education may be pursued for extrinsic (instrumental) purposes. For example, the Ancient Greeks sought 'perfection', the Liberals of the Enlightenment sought 'objective' knowledge leading to liberation and the creation of a just, democratic society (Biesta, 2020a; Peters, 1973), and industrial capitalists sought a conformist workforce. Education can also, however, be pursued for intrinsic (non-instrumental) purposes, as an end-in-itself. British philosopher Richard Peters (1973), for example, defines education as the "broad initiation into intrinsically worthwhile forms of knowledge and understanding" (Carr, 2003, pg.198). Activities aimed towards getting a job and being successful in a career might be considered extrinsically worthwhile, but Peters (1973) argues that such activities should be termed 'training' rather than 'education'. This point will be returned to later as, despite Peters (1973) argument, extrinsic activities related to training and preparation for work are nevertheless considered a fundamental purpose of education (DfE and Gibb, 2015). But what would count as intrinsically worthwhile activities? White (2006) has argued that this is not purely a subjective question because we are all born into a society of values which can help us make judgements about what activities we should pursue, and the role of education is to provide individuals with as wide a range of experiences of enjoyable and successful activities as possible, so we are better able to make such judgements for ourselves. Indeed, being able to "reason why" (Peters, 1973, pg.18), to have an "inquiring attitude" (pg.23) and to be reflective about ones choices (pg.21) are, for Peters, crucial aspects of being 'educated'. Similarly, Krashen (2016) has argued that education should help individual students find out what their talents, interests and desires are, how to develop them and ultimately how to use them to benefit others. Such an inclusive purpose for education would appreciate the diversity and individuality of all students and teach the value that one should seek to help others. Thus, educational purposes can reflect both the 'educere' and the 'educare' interpretations of education simultaneously. Education can benefit both the individual, who can find personal fulfilment (intrinsic purpose) and contribute to society (extrinsic purpose), through producing educationally diverse individuals who can benefit a society's well-being in a variety of ways, whether that be to reproduce it or to change it.

Taking the argument that education is an end-in-itself even further, Osberg and Biesta (2021, pg.64) have argued that education is an entity "that emerges only when the symbolic [knowledge], individual [self-hood] and political [collective living] realms of human life are actively coordinated from within". In other words, education's structure and purposes are generated internally, and we cannot (and should not) know what the 'ends' are because education is always an "engagement with an as yet un-manifest future" (Ibid, pg.67). Thus, education should be open-ended, and our understandings are (and should be) constantly re-worked in the different contexts and with the different people with which we act and interact (Ibid). This is especially important in multicultural societies if various contexts, people, and understandings are to be democratically included (Ibid). This approach to understanding education has been termed 'educational democracy' which involves 'care for the future' (Osberg and Biesta, 2021). In keeping with Dewey's (1916) vision of democracy as

“participation in the construction, maintenance and transformation of social and political life” (Biesta et al, 2009, pg.8), education and its purposes should not be taken-for-granted but actively engaged with by all those who have a stake in its consequences (i.e. by everyone). What can be concluded from these arguments is that education is always (and should always be) more than what is learnt in schools or from a formal curriculum, can benefit both the individual, and society and will always be guided by the underlying values of those involved. Varying understandings of and values relating to ‘education’ at different times, in different places and for different people helps explain why education has a variety of ‘functions’ (what education does) and ‘purposes’ (what we wish education to do) (Biesta, 2020b). Yet Biesta (2009) argues that this is not a problem as any vision of good education in multicultural, democratic societies should be the subject of ongoing debate (debate being a fundamental part and value of democracy). In the spirit of this debate, this chapter will now discuss some of the different purposes, and tensions within them, that education can be said to serve.

Qualification

Perhaps the most recognised purpose of education is what Biesta (2009) terms ‘qualification’; education should provide us in some way with the skills, knowledge and understanding necessary to be a part of society. Qualification through content (curriculum and pedagogy) can be very specifically aimed at preparation for a particular job but also very broad encompassing a wide variety of subject matter (Ibid). The purpose underpinning (state-funded) education’s qualification function is often to reproduce the workforce and contribute to economic growth and development (Ibid; DfE and Gibb, 2015). Whilst few dispute that learning to read, write and count at primary school will benefit students in later life (Bass, 1997), striking an appropriate balance between different ‘qualifications’ in the secondary curriculum and beyond is complex, and can be controversial. The National Curriculum in England, for example, focuses on traditional academic subjects and preparation for further (university) education, marginalising more vocational and practical subjects and alternative routes after compulsory schooling (White, 2006). Valorising an elitist interpretation of Peters (1973) distinction between ‘education’ (academic) and ‘training’ (vocational) is contentious for several reasons. Firstly, many children are either not prepared or just not interested in academic courses and so this focus at the expense of providing high quality vocational courses leaves such students doubly cheated because “they do poorly in the required courses, and they are deprived of courses in which they might do well” (Noddings, 2008, pg.35). In addition, statistics show that most school-leavers are likely to enter the service sector, which requires little formal qualification anyway. This calls into question the validity (and highlights the irony) of continuing to promote academic qualification as the main purpose of education as it does not benefit many students, lacks a democratic dimension (Biesta, 2009), and does not contribute to the economy by educating the kind of workforce that our society requires. Indeed, in a postmodern, fast-paced, ever-changing world, it is difficult to predict what children should be qualified for. Nevertheless, reducing their options to a restricted academic curriculum does a disservice to students, to society, and to the very nature of what education could achieve.

Despite the contested nature of the qualification domain of educational purpose, neoliberal ideologies dominating education policy in many countries (including the UK – as discussed in Chapter 2, US, Australia, and New Zealand) place great emphasis on qualification for employment as the first purpose of education (schooling) (DfE and Gibb, 2015). Within this rhetoric, Biesta (2015) identifies a trend towards what he calls ‘learnification’ whereby the language of ‘learning’ has come to dominate every

aspect of education. Students are learners, teachers facilitate learning, schools are learning environments and adult education is lifelong learning. The consequences of attempting to evaluate all this 'learning' by measuring 'outcomes', Biesta (2009) argues, is that we no longer measure what we value in education, but rather value what we measure (i.e. 'effective' education as defined by student attainment scores on standardised tests in a small number of curriculum areas). Instead of trying to 'perfect' (lead out, draw forth) the individuals being educated (and engage in meaningful debates about what kind of individuals we want our education system to foster), neoliberalism ignores difficult questions about educational purpose and instead focuses its energies on seeking to 'perfect' the system (Biesta, 2020a, pg.9). The overwhelming focus of neoliberal policy on the qualification domain of educational purpose turns education from a right into a duty by individualising it (Biesta, 2009) and causes severe stress for young people (Biesta, 2015; Pimlott-Wilson and Coates, 2019) and a professional crisis for teachers (Goodson, 2007; Biesta, 2015) (see below). In addition, the competitiveness such understandings of education creates between pupils and between schools undermines the values of empathy, inclusivity, fairness, and appreciation of diverse strengths that should underpin education in pluralistic, democratic societies (Noddings, 2008; Dewey, 1916) and does not necessarily bring the benefits to either the individual or society it promises. Such a narrow focus also makes it harder to debate other purposes we may wish our education system to fulfil, again undermining the very democratic values we would want our education to inspire (Biesta, 2009).

Socialisation

However much current education policy is focused on qualification, education also has another fundamental purpose, that of 'socialisation'. "Through education, we become members of, and part of particular social, cultural and political 'orders'", we learn the values of society and we learn how to contribute as citizens (Biesta, 2009, pg.40). Through schooling, we are part of a community and (ideally) we are made to feel like we belong and are valued. Being educated alongside others, we forge friendships and memories and learn how to get along with and care for one another. Our schooling also teaches us important lessons "about community organisation, the distribution of power and resources, rights, responsibilities, and of course, injustice" (Westheimer, 2017, pg.15). This all contributes to our sense of citizenship, the values we hold and our conceptions of how we want to lead our lives and make a difference in the world. However, whilst schools are "a potentially powerful tool to shape our society for the better" (Ibid), sociologists have shown how implicit socialisation in schools can have negative effects on our freedoms and outcomes. For example, Bowles and Gintis (1976) argue that schools socialise children through the 'hidden curriculum' to be obedient, hard workers in the capitalist system. Through the 'myth of meritocracy' children are taught that if they work hard and conform to the rules of the school and workplace, this will determine their future position in life (and they are therefore responsible for where they end up). Willis' (1977) seminal ethnography 'Learning to Labour' also showed how working-class 'lads' counter-school culture resulted in their 'self-damnation' by ensuring they entered low-wage, subordinate labour jobs. Despite resisting the teachings of the school, working-class lads still ended up exactly where the unequal education system intended them to and believed that this was by their own choosing. Considering the role formal schooling plays in reproducing social inequalities (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977), it is unsurprising that Illich (1971) called for society to be 'deschooled' (formal schooling abolished), though he did not suggest an alternative. Whilst reproducing social inequality is not an explicit purpose

of education (indeed, as will be discussed below, quite the opposite is true) it is nevertheless a consequence of the organisation, structure, and content of many current education systems.

Although socialisation has long been recognised as an important domain of educational purpose, it has become a more explicit focus with the formalisation of citizenship education on the English National Curriculum by New Labour in 2002 (Kisby, 2007; 2009; Holden, 2003). Kisby (2007; 2009) argues that the underlying rationale of 'citizenship education' was to counter the decline in social capital (networks of relationships within communities, levels of social trust and political engagement) Britain was supposedly experiencing (Ibid; Putnam, 2000; 2002), especially amongst its young people (Biesta et al, 2009). The citizenship curriculum has three stated aims: to encourage social and moral responsibility, community involvement and political literacy (Kerr, 1999; Kisby, 2007). In comparison to the passive socialisation of students discussed above, the focus of citizenship education is very much about promoting "active citizenship" – of learning by doing (Ibid, pgs.84-5). Thus, as well as being equipped with the facts of how the political system works in Britain, students are encouraged to debate issues of concern to them, to go out into their communities and help others, to have the opportunity to experience positions of responsibility and to develop positive attitudes and confidence in their abilities to participate and influence public life (Ibid; Holden, 2003). In short, they are encouraged to behave and engage in democratic ways in preparation for democratic life.

With such stated aims, citizenship education appears to go some way to addressing the social change purpose of education as it aims to equip children with political literacy, give them opportunities to voice their concerns, and encourage them to actively improve reality within their own localities and the wider community (Kisby, 2009). However, Biesta (2009) argues that making citizenship a curriculum subject redefines it as just another aspect of the qualification function of education, though the time it is given is less than that for literacy and numeracy, indicating its lower prioritisation by government (Holden, 2003). It also relies on an exclusive and instrumental definition of 'citizenship' because it assumes young people are not yet citizens and so are dependent on a simple means-end process of education to become 'good citizens' (Biesta et al, 2009). Moreover, there is a pre-defined notion of what a 'good citizen' is, rather than encouraging students to realise for themselves political ways of being and doing (Biesta, 2009). Citizenship education is thus more likely to reproduce the status quo, rather than make progress towards social change. In addition, just as neoliberalism's focus on qualification made students responsible for their own educational 'success' (narrowly defined), so too does its conception of 'citizenship' seek to make citizens responsible "for their own individual health, education and welfare needs so as not to become a burden to the community" (Kisby, 2009, pg.57). Not only does this individualisation undermine the social capital development citizenship education claims to seek to promote, but it also leaves structural inequalities unchallenged (Kisby, 2007) and makes schools and individuals (rather than government) responsible (involuntarily) for the well-being of their communities.

Despite the criticisms that can be made of formal citizenship education, Biesta et al (2009) emphasise that schools are not the only place where (citizenship) education takes place. Students make sense and learn based on "a wide and divergent range of experiences... [and] through their participation in the range of different practices, [communities and relationships] that make up their lives" (Ibid, pgs.7-8). Through their ethnographic work, Biesta et al (2009) found that of particular relevance to young people's citizenship education are the contexts of their family, their peers, leisure activities, paid and unpaid work, the media and formal education/training. The extent to which young people can

experience being a citizen in these contexts is of vital importance to their (self-)conceptions of citizenship (Ibid). For example, for some young people the family provides relationships of respect and trust and a safe environment to discuss political and moral issues (Muddiman et al, 2020). Leisure activities and clubs can also provide opportunities for collaboration, responsibility and relationships with adults which are more equal and democratic than those experienced in school or at home (Biesta et al, 2009). Paid work can also provide the responsibility, relationships, and sense of self-worth some young people may struggle to find elsewhere. Thus, when democratic values are experienced and have relevance to young people's lives, the opportunities for citizenship learning increase and influence their attitudes, dispositions, and self-understandings as citizens (Ibid). Schools tend to be regarded as undemocratic environments, minimising the potential for citizenship learning, and politics does not afford young people the control or influence they can find in other contexts, minimising the likelihood of their engagement (Ibid). These findings show the importance of relationships in education, especially in mediating the impact education can have in different contexts (Biesta et al, 2009). This is something Biesta is keen to emphasise and will be discussed further below.

Equality

Other key purposes of the education system since the beginnings of the 19th century have been to promote equality of access to education, meritocracy (achievement based on individual talent and effort) and social mobility (Ball, 2021; DfE and Gibb, 2015; Reay, 2008). We have already seen above that through the organisational structure of the school and its curriculum, this purpose is currently failing to be achieved. There have been numerous literatures on the relationship between education and the reproduction of various forms of inequalities, especially exploring the link between cultural reproduction and social reproduction (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu, 1986; Lamont and Lareau, 1988). Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) argued that education favours middle-class individuals who possess embodied cultural capital (tastes, attitudes and knowledge), i.e. the legitimate culture of society and rewards them with credentials (symbolic capital) whilst working-class culture is seen as inferior and so is punished with lower attainment (an act of symbolic violence). This ensures that the middle-classes go on to succeed in defining their culture as legitimate and reproducing it in society, whilst the subordinate social position of the working-class is reproduced through their lack of (legitimate) cultural capital. Lamont and Lareau (1988, pg.164) systemised this work and defined cultural capital as "widely shared, legitimate culture made up of high-status cultural signals (attitudes, preferences, behaviours, and goods) used in direct or indirect social and cultural exclusion". They argue that further research on the role of cultural capital in social reproduction should analyse "conflicts around symbolic boundaries... the weight of various items in the legitimate culture... the day-to-day process and micro-level interactions where individuals activate their cultural capital to gain access to social settings or attain desired social results" and practices of direct and indirect inclusion (Ibid, pgs.164-5)¹. In the UK, numerous scholars have explored the relationship between UK policy developments and persistent inequalities, highlighting that inequalities have only grown in the decades since neoliberal reforms have been introduced (Ibid; Ball, 2021). This includes the reproduction of inequalities of class (Ball 1993; 2003; Ball and Vincent, 1998; 2007; Ball et al, 1995; 1996; Reay, 2004a; 2008), gender (Reay, 1998; 2000; 2002; 2004b) and race (Gillborn, 1997; Vincent

¹ This is an area of the literature which my thesis addresses, especially in Chapter 6.

et al, 2013; Bhopal, 2018), as well as how these intersect to compound disadvantage within the education system (Braun et al, 2011; Vincent et al, 2012; Vincent and Maxwell, 2016; Vincent, 2017).

A further key area of inequality which has received comparatively less attention, however, is that of students with special educational needs (SEN), compared to their non-SEN peers. This group differs from those above in that the focus for SEN children has been equal *inclusion* rather than equality of *outcome*. But 'inclusion' can be interpreted as mere 'presence' of SEN children in mainstream schools or better outcomes for SEN students compared to their non-SEN peers (Kalambouka et al, 2007). In terms of the former, the numbers of SEN children in mainstream schools has increased since the 1970s (Black, 2019) and Kalambouka et al's (2007, pg.365) systematic review found that there was "no adverse effects on pupils without SEN of including pupils with special needs in mainstream schools" with 81% of studies reporting positive or neutral effects of 'inclusion' (SEN presence). However, improving outcomes of SEN children is difficult to achieve when it is measured in terms of academic attainment rather than social outcomes (Ibid). Consequently, schools may subtly or overtly prevent SEN children from being admitted due to the increased challenges and associated workloads and costs SEN inclusion entails (Booth, 2023). The vast increase in the teaching assistant workforce since 2000 has been attributed to the drive for SEN inclusion in mainstream schools (Blatchford et al, 2009; Sharples et al, 2016; Lindsay et al, 2020; Lewis, 2023). However, the Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project suggests that the dominant practice of using one-to-one TAs to facilitate SEN inclusion has a strong negative impact on academic progress (Blatchford et al, 2009; Webster and Blatchford, 2015; Sharples et al, 2016). This is because the student may be physically separated from the rest of the class through having their own workstation or working outside the classroom, subtly separated from the qualified teacher and peers by their TA, 'stereo-teaching' (TA repeats input of the teacher), a focus on unengaging task completion or work with no pedagogical content (e.g. colouring in), dependency on the TA, and a devolution of responsibility to TAs who are untrained but expected to adapt content and tasks, with little liaison time with the qualified class teacher (Webster and Blatchford, 2015; Sharples et al, 2016). There is mixed evidence that TA support improves soft outcomes like motivation, confidence and self-esteem for SEN children, and evidence that this support helps ease teacher stress and workload and reduces classroom disruption (Ibid). However, in terms of equal SEN inclusion, there is much that can be improved.

In any case, Biesta (2020b) argues that 'equality' is a complicated purpose for education to achieve. In the first instance, 'equality of opportunity' is hardly ever likely to translate into 'equality of outcomes' due to structural factors beyond schools', teachers', and individual students' control (Biesta, 2009) (though, as we have seen, schools can and do widen these gaps). Moreover, although 'equality of opportunity' is an accepted rhetoric, society could not sustain 'equality of outcomes' (Biesta, 2020a). If all children were equally successful in the same areas, how could they possibly be channelled into the diversity of roles that exist and are necessary for society to function? If all students' education provided them with equal amounts of cultural, social, and financial capital, that capital will have lost its power to serve society's need and desire for 'distinction' (Bourdieu, 1984; Biesta, 2020a). Whilst there are debates to be had about why some professions and roles are valued (socially and monetarily) more than others, a 'perfect' education system (one that reproduces society) depends on it not working perfectly for everyone (Ibid). Thus, qualification, socialisation and (in)equality as functions or consequences of current education systems serve the wider purpose of reproducing society (and its inequalities), rather than contributing to social change (or to inclusive education).

But does it always have to work like this? Paulo Freire, perhaps one of the most influential thinkers in the field of education, thinks not. He argues that humans have an “ontological and historical vocation to be more fully human” (humanisation) (Freire, 2000 [1970], pgs.40-1). Because we are aware of our own consciousness and our existence in space and time, we have the potential to be creative and transform reality should we wish (Blackburn, 2000, pg.5). Thus, Freire argues that the purpose of education should be to equip students with the “knowledge, skills, and social relations that enable [them] to explore the possibilities of what it means to be critical citizens while expanding and deepening their participation in the promise of a substantive democracy” (Giroux, 2010, pg.716). This was to be achieved through a ‘critical pedagogy’ which presents the diversity and complexity of history, encourages critical thinking, healthy scepticism and open debate, and advances human agency so that we may act responsibly and engage in the realities of our world (Giroux, 2010; Freire, 1970; 1994). Ultimately, Freire sees education as a way to ‘free the oppressed’ and give them a voice. However, he argues that current education systems of formal schooling, which he describes as ‘banking education’ involving ‘acts of depositing’ (students receive, file, store and repeat information), is detrimental to students achieving ‘conscientisation’ – “the process by which humans become more aware of the sources of their oppression” and thus liberate themselves from ‘oppression’ (Blackburn, 2000, pgs.6-7). Freire (1970) agrees with many others (see above) that schools are ultimately instruments of oppression. Nevertheless, Freire advocates an understanding of education closer to the ‘educere’ definition and argues it can promote social change towards greater freedom and justice because it is fundamentally “about the making and changing of contexts” (Giroux, 2010, pg.720). For Freire, education is an example of and should work towards ‘praxis’ – the fusion of theory and action to change reality (Blackburn, 2000).

Subjectification

Freire’s arguments reflect Biesta’s (2009) third domain of educational purpose: ‘subjectification’. Where ‘qualification’ is closely related to ‘educare’, subjectification is closely related to ‘educere’ as it involves those being educated “becoming a subject” of their own lives, that is individuals having the freedom to be “autonomous and independent in their thinking and acting” (Ibid, pgs.40-41). In a sense, this involves resistance to education’s socialisation function because it requires students to go beyond what they are taught and what they think they want, to question the existing social, political, and cultural orders and where they are positioned in them, to challenge them and to change reality (Ibid; 2015; 2020c). However, subjectification can be achieved in relation to the socialisation and qualification domains of educational purpose if students are taught how to ask questions and think critically, are exposed to multiple perspectives, if what they are taught is rooted in local contexts so as to have relevance to their lives and developing (self-)understandings, and if students have genuine opportunities to participate and engage in democratic life (Ibid; Westheimer, 2017). Nevertheless, subjectification is not a moral concept and the freedom it embodies can include the freedom not to be responsible if this is what an individual chooses (Biesta, 2020c). To compel individuals to think or act a certain way, even if this is with ‘good’ intentions (as with citizenship education’s desire to promote social connections), is to miss the point of subjectification. The point is to encourage individuals to want to live one’s life in the real world but realise they are not the centre of it, to provide continual encounters with the real, but also reality checks, and the time to work through and understand them (Ibid) (as informal citizenship learning outside of the undemocratic and restricted

structure and curriculum of the school allows). Biesta (2020c, pg.103) argues that this domain of educational purpose is rarely acknowledged or discussed in mainstream politics because it is risky, involving questioning of, and potential challenges to, the status quo and the ever-present risk that students won't make sense of the world the way teachers, schools and government intend. However, it is precisely this risk, Biesta (2020c) argues, which education is all about. To eradicate risk (or aim to reduce it by imposing a narrow curriculum with specific learning outcomes) is to eradicate (or reduce the quality of) education's capacity to give rise to ideas and opportunities that could make a difference in the world (or the world we are yet to know) (Ibid; Westheimer, 2017). This is the danger of current education systems which focus on narrowly defined academic achievement at the expense of all other educational purposes.

Schools and Care

Education is not and should not be only or always about academic attainment (Best, 2007). Schools are places where children socialise, develop, feel a sense of belonging and community and (hopefully) find out where they can contribute to society (Noddings, 2005; 2008; 2012; 2015). A vital aspect of staff's work in schools is, therefore, to *care*. Noddings distinguishes between 'virtue caring' (Noddings, 2012, pg.773) where adults assume "what children need to achieve satisfactory and satisfying lives" and care about bringing that about, and 'relational caring' which involves the carer being receptive and listening to the cared-for's expressed wants and interests (Noddings, 2015, pgs.73-4). This relation is only complete when the carer's efforts are acknowledged by the cared-for and is maintained by both parties over time through the building of trust and through emotional connection and genuine dialogue (Ibid). Whilst, she argues, schools as organisations cannot directly care-for every student (though they can care-about them), they can provide the conditions for caring relations to flourish, and this should be the first and foremost aim of all schools (Noddings, 2005). Moreover, the dialogue involved in caring relations need not necessarily be about school, lessons or academia at all. Indeed, the 'pastoral care' (Marland, 1974) which forms a fundamental part of schools daily activities, often goes beyond the school gates. Schools have legal obligations to safeguard and protect children (Best, 2007; Richards, 2018). School staff are on the 'frontline' when it comes to the care of children as their connection to and knowledge of their students "is second only to (and in some cases superior to) that of the parent or guardian" (Best, 2007, pgs.249-250). They may even become involved in offering 'early help' to families that are struggling (Richards, 2018), thus extending their caring remit beyond individual students. Thus, a climate of caring truly does (and should) underly everything schools do (Noddings, 2012).

Students' education is (often) mediated and facilitated by a 'teacher'. The quality of this relationship can ultimately determine the quality of education the student receives. Teaching has long been considered a professional vocation where teachers exercise autonomy and judgement in what they teach (qualification) and how they teach (socialisation) (Biesta, 2015). Teachers also play an important role in students' subjectification by attempting "to move them beyond what they already know they want" (Ibid, pg.82). Indeed, Freire (1976) argued that the role of educators is to help 'free' the oppressed by engaging in "genuine dialogue" and "creative exchanges" which enable them to achieve conscientisation (Blackburn, 2000, pg.8). However, under neoliberal pressures to provide 'effective' education, teachers have been redefined as 'factors' to be improved rather than professional human beings who should be able to exercise autonomy and judgement when it comes to their students'

education (Biesta, 2015). Not only is this damaging for the students, but it also creates serious tensions for educators themselves (Goodson, 2007; NEU, 2024). Education should not be about teaching to tests and focusing on making sure children achieve the ‘necessary’ qualifications (Giroux, 2010, pg.716). Teaching also involves caring for children’s social, emotional, and mental well-being, supporting them to become informed citizens who are self-reflective about public issues, who have a voice in their communities and can use their individual strengths and civic imaginations to participate, engage and ultimately make a difference in society, and generally being role models for the young people they educate (Ibid; Freire, 1976; Goodson, 2007). In reducing these relationships between teacher and student to mere transactions, neoliberalism threatens both teacher recruitment and retention and damages other educational purposes fundamental to the well-being of individuals, and society.

It can be argued that supporting welfare is an educational purpose because a student’s welfare will impact on their qualification, socialisation and subjectification. One need only reflect on the history of schooling in England to appreciate the pervasiveness of the welfare purpose. Dame schools, Sunday schools and Ragged schools, set up on a largely voluntary basis for the children of the working classes, gave children an escape from (often dangerous) work, provided them food, taught them basic useful skills, and often offered religious instruction and the teaching of values (not forgetting, of course, that the individuals setting up these schools will have had purposes of their own which may not always have been in the interests of those they aimed to ‘educate’) (Kendall and Knapp, 1996). Today, the welfare role of schools is perhaps even more important as funding cuts reduce the availability and access to other children’s services for those most in need in the communities they serve (Kelly et al, 2018; Baker, 2023). So much is expected of schools and the irony is that whilst government policy may explicitly (and narrowly) define their purpose to qualify and socialise students, the reality is that wider policy changes implicitly broaden the scope of what schools are expected to take responsibility for, without acknowledging this work, or providing the funding which would enable schools to better perform it.

Care does not only take place during school hours either, as breakfast clubs and after school clubs become more prevalent is evidence of (Lambie-Mumford and Sims, 2018). But as well as caring for children, schools can also be places of care for the parents themselves, especially those on low incomes with little social capital. Barnes and Nolan (2019) found that parents developed trust and strong personal ties with staff at pivotal moments where they felt supported with personal matters beyond after-school care. These relationships became key sources of social and emotional support for low-income parents (Ibid). Thus, schools have extremely vital roles as caring organisations, for students and families (Best, 2014; Noddings, 2015). However, some scholars, such as Calvert (2009) are concerned about the low status pastoral care seems to have in the current policy context. He argues that caring is often seen as secondary to (or even replaced by) academic roles, is often delegated to non-professional staff, and is not allocated the time or resources it needs and deserves (Ibid). Such concerns reflect the theme prevalent in the literature on educational purpose, that academic achievement is increasingly valued over and above a school’s responsibility to care for students (Best, 2014; Noddings, 2015) and failures to recognise that this care underpins the success of any other educational purpose.

The effect of the coronavirus pandemic on education has been called the “worst education crisis on record” (The World Bank, UNESCO, and UNICEF, 2021, pg.4). From the obvious learning losses, the

consequences of the pandemic on child and youth mental health itself constitutes a “crisis within a crisis” (Ibid, pg.26). During the pandemic the public came to not only recognise the vital roles schools play in children’s lives beyond academic attainment (as sites of socialisation, safety, and care) but also to appreciate the complex task facing school staff. Care became even more difficult during COVID-19 as not only were children (and staff) facing the fears, challenges and restrictions of a dangerous virus, but disruption to daily routines and the closure of schools meant “a lack of access to the resources they usually have through schools” (Ibid). This had serious consequences for the development of language and socialisation skills, coping with mental health, and experiences (or exacerbation) of abuse, bereavement and poverty at home (Lee, 2020). For many, ‘care’ had to take place online, but this was incredibly difficult as staff did not always have the necessary IT skills or training, some children did not have access to the internet or devices and emotional support from teachers, friends and peers was just not the same online (Rio Poncela et al, 2021). Nevertheless, teachers did continue to care throughout the pandemic, at significant emotional, physical, social, and political cost to themselves (Ibid). In fact, many teachers sought to prioritise “the wellbeing of their students over the academic teaching of content” recognising this was what students needed and wanted during such unprecedented conditions as a global pandemic (Ibid, pg.198). This confirms that teaching involves far more than instructing students. It is first and foremost a caring profession, with teachers becoming like parents to a huge heterogenous family (Noddings, 2012). Following the pandemic, well-being and psychological support must be the focus in education going forward (Purdy, 2022), for both staff and students. For teachers cannot care effectively for children if society does not care about and for them.

Thus, there are a wide variety of purposes that direct and underpin education, and many overlap and depend on each other. These multiple purposes must be constantly reflected upon so that negative consequences of structure and content can be addressed, and positive relationships encouraged. Education can be an extremely powerful force for good in the life of the individual and the society of which they are a part, but it is a phenomenon to be constantly engaged with by all who have a stake in its impacts. A key group of stakeholders, whose role in education has been the subject of extensive academic and political debate, is that of parents. It is to the role of parental involvement in education that this literature review now turns.

3.2. Parental Involvement in Education: Inequality, Capital and Stigma

Perhaps the most fundamental shift in education brought about by neoliberalisation since the 1970s (as outlined in Chapter 2) is the change in the role parents are expected to play. Neoliberal discourse and policies have resulted in what Reay (2008, pg.645) calls the “responsibilisation of parents”. They are now responsible for ‘choosing’ what school their children go to, for ‘choosing’ how they are going to be involved in their children’s education and for holding schools to account through those choices. As government and local authorities withdraw from education ‘on-the-ground’, under a rhetoric of greater autonomy, freedom, and empowerment (Ibid), parents have no choice but to choose and are held responsible for those choices (Olmedo and Wilkins, 2017), both individually, for their own child, but also collectively for improving schools and raising standards overall (Reay, 2008). The role of parents in neoliberal education is now so fundamental that Brown (1990, pg.66) argues it has created a parentocracy “where a child’s education is increasingly dependent upon the wealth and wishes of parents, rather than the ability and efforts of pupils”. And because “both parental involvement in schooling and parental choice are classed, ‘raced’, and gendered processes” (Reay, 2008, pg.643),

already privileged children are much more likely to succeed in education than their disadvantaged peers. Parents have a key role to play in the 'involvement for achievement' (Kingston, 2021) expected in neoliberal education systems, with traditional parenting practices of supporting learning at home intensified and formalised in Home-School agreements (Crozier and Reay, 2005). A consequence of increased emphasis on parent-teacher collaboration is the "colonisation of the home by the school" and a blurring of boundaries between the two (Reay, 2008, pgs.641-2). Indeed, Ball (2003) argues neoliberal education policies have led to a paradox where not only are public places of schools becoming increasingly privatised, but the private environment of the home is increasingly becoming publicly regulated and judged. However, neoliberalisation has created "a discourse of parenting in which gendered, racialised and classed notions of parent are not acknowledged, rendering inequalities existing between parents invisible" (Reay, 2008, pg.643). This section will now explore the large body of literature which has attempted to address this.

Gender and 'the Fourth Shift'

One of the biggest societal changes since the second half of the 20th century has been the increasing numbers of women entering the labour market and the associated decline of the 'male breadwinner' family model (where men earn and women care) in favour of a dual earner or 'adult worker' family model (where all adults enter the labour market) (Lewis, 1992; 2001). In reality, however, the male breadwinner model was only ever an ideology (Lewis, 1997) and most European countries have a 'one-and-a-half earner' family model where men work full-time, and women work part-time whilst also taking on the majority of the care work (Lewis, 2001; Chung, 2022). Even with flexible working, women are expected to make time for domestic and care work alongside paid work, whilst men can exercise boundaries between work and home (Ibid). Consequently, a key inequality amongst parents is gendered, that is, the often unspoken yet accepted norm that it is mothers who are (expected to be) the most involved in their child(ren)'s schooling (Reay, 1998; 2004b) as part of their (unpaid) care work, while "fathers are more likely to be 'helping hands'" (Reay, 2008, pg.643) who dip in and out of care whilst their paid work takes primacy. This differential allocation of work between men and women, and mothers and fathers is known in the social sciences as the 'gendered division of labour'.

Before discussing further how the gendered division of labour works in practice, it is useful to explore how sociologists understand 'gender'. West and Zimmerman (1987) conceptualise gender as a routine, methodical and recurring accomplishment embedded in everyday situated interactions which give the impression of essential masculine and feminine 'natures'. Gender relies on individuals being 'accountable' – aligning "our beliefs, our behaviour, and ourselves to the possibility of... evaluation" (Fenstermaker and West, 2002, pg.213) by others "in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one's sex category" (West and Zimmerman, 1987, pg.127). We are always 'doing' gender in the sense that we are always unconsciously aware that we are being evaluated on how we conform to ideologies of essential male or female ways of being (Ibid; Chung, 2022). How we look, how we dress, how we sound, how we carry ourselves are all criteria by which we are evaluated. The social consequence of doing gender is the legitimisation of "one of the most fundamental divisions of society" – that which exists between men and women (West and Zimmerman, 1987, pg.126). Gender is both an outcome and rationale of social situations achieved when it is recognised, accounted for, and enacted in situated conduct (West and Zimmerman, 2009). Adkins and Skeggs (2004) have developed the work of Pierre Bourdieu to argue that gender is simultaneously an important part of habitus ("systems of durable, transposable dispositions [...] that people carry with them that shapes

their attitudes, behaviours and responses to given situations” (Webb et al, 2002, pg.114)) and a social category that structures social fields. This can be seen in the field of work which is structured by the gendered division of labour (Chung, 2022).

When women enter paid work, they face a labour market segregated by gender, both vertically (how far they can progress in a career) and horizontally (which occupations they can and cannot access). For example, the service sector attracts many female employees, especially since its expansion in the second half of the 20th century (Hochschild, 1983). There are also many occupations which have long been feminised since their inception, including nursing (Glucksmann, 2009) and primary teaching (Skelton, 2012). Wolkowitz (2002, pg.499) explains this by arguing that the sexual division of labour “assigns women to the care of bodies and the spaces they inhabit”. Indeed, Pettinger (2019) argues that care work is naturalised as women’s work. Thus, women are expected to and can most likely be found in jobs requiring ‘care’ – of strangers, or their own families. Such work requires emotional and affective labour, “the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display... [which] produces the proper state of mind in others” (Hochschild, 1983, pg.7), aesthetic labour, “the mobilisation, development and commodification of embodied dispositions” (Witz et al, 2003, pg.37) and ‘mood work’; the labour that creates atmosphere and is sensitive to experience and feeling (Highmore and Taylor, 2014). Women are perceived to be best suited to performing this labour. From a young age boys and girls are raised and socialised differently (West and Zimmerman, 1987) – depending on their gender they receive different emotional ‘training’, and girls learn to “make a resource out of feeling” in the absence of access to other resources in patriarchal society (Hochschild, 1983, pg.163). Hochschild (1983, pg.164) refers to this as “the great transmutation” where the family acts as a training ground for emotional labour. Consequently, it is unsurprising that women are found in work which requires service and care, as the skills required in these fields call for an enactment of ‘essential’ feminine qualities and women’s presence (and men’s absence) in these fields reinforce the idea that women are, by their very nature, ‘essentially’ suited to caring roles (Ibid).

Furthermore, when women do enter the realm of paid work (their ‘first shift’), they often end up taking on what Hochschild and Machung (1989) call a ‘second shift’ – unpaid domestic labour and care work at home, alongside paid employment in the public sphere. Consequently, they argue that there has been a ‘stalled revolution’ (Ibid; Hochschild, 1983; 1997). Women have entered the workplace in greater numbers, but the domestic and care work left behind has not been taken up equally by men – it is still there for the woman when she gets home (Lewis, 2001; Lewis and Giullari, 2005) – or if she works-from-home (Chung, 2022). Moreover, the emotion work (the unpaid form of emotional labour) (Hochschild, 2012) expected of women is not restricted to the workplace. Hochschild argues that mothers, alongside their first shift of paid work and second shift of domestic labour, also have a third shift managing the ‘time bind’ created when work becomes home, and home becomes work (Hochschild, 1997). This third shift requires the management of the emotional demands created by women’s increased time in the workplace, calling for the performance of emotional labour in the home (Fielding-Singh and Cooper, 2023). Men are perceived as less skilled in this area. Gillies (2006, pg.286) found that when fathers saw their children in emotional distress, they couldn’t manage their own emotions (Hochschild, 1983) to find solutions to the issues their children faced as well as their female partners could. As a mother in Hays (1996, pg.102) study put it; “He [her husband] hasn’t been educated as a mother... we [women] were trained to see what other people’s needs are. You’re trained in taking care”. This supports Hochschild’s (1983) argument that women are not only expected to perform emotional labour and are ‘trained’ from childhood to do so, but that the reverse is equally

true; men are not expected to perform emotional labour and are not trained to. Thus, the third shift created by the 'time bind' falls to women, increasing the volume of work they ultimately undertake (Fielding-Singh and Cooper, 2023).

Due to the ideology of intensive mothering (Hays, 1996, pgs.145-6), mothers who feel "pushed and pulled in two directions" (home and work), justify their choices by explaining the reasons they are (still) 'good mothers'. One way in which women can enact this cultural ideal is through involvement in their child(ren)'s education. In this field, Bourdieu's (1986) conceptualisation of the role of 'capitals' in navigating social environments and situations (Webb et al, 2002) has been used to develop the concept of 'emotional capital' to explain why and how mothers are perceived to be best suited to, are expected to and indeed, feel they should take responsibility for, their children's education (Reay, 2000; 2004). 'Emotional capital' is defined as "emotional investments made by parents as part of their desire to promote their children's [emotional] well-being and prospects" (Gillies, 2006, pg.285). However, Reay (2000; 2004b) emphasises that emotional capital is a gendered resource – mothers are more likely to possess the "emotional skills, knowledge and experiences" which make up emotional capital (O'Brien, 2008, pg.137). Leidner (2006, pgs.434-6) argues that work is linked to ideas of gender identity and is "central both to... self-identity and to the identity others ascribe to [us]". Thus, engaging in emotion work in education is linked to mothers self-identity as 'good mothers' and enables them to portray to others that they are 'good mothers' (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2013), gaining the status of conforming to the cultural ideology of intensive mothering (Hays, 1996; O'Brien, 2008). Thus, involvement can be a form of symbolic capital mothers can use in the environment of the school to further the interests and priorities of their children and to justify their own choices to engage in paid employment or to be a full-time mum. In fact, mothers invest so much time and energy in their children's schooling that Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson (2013) have argued it constitutes a 'fourth shift', involving considerable emotional complexity, time poverty and physical exhaustion. Head (2020) found that this was becoming even more intense with the increased use of digital technologies, as mothers were expected to receive communications, organise in response to the information received, and were overwhelmed by both the amount and pervasiveness of online involvement required.

So where are the fathers in this literature? Gregory and Milner's (2011) comparative analysis found that whilst the male breadwinner model has declined since the 1970s in Western countries, new forms of masculinity have not yet become culturally dominant. However, concepts such as 'new' fatherhood, 'intimate' fatherhood or 'involved' fatherhood suggests their role is changing and they are doing more with their children, and that masculinity is beginning to expand to include a caring role (Sullivan, 2004; Featherstone, 2009; Offer and Kaplan, 2021). And yet men are not held to the same standards as women when it comes to their role as fathers. They are much more likely to be unquestionably celebrated (no matter what form 'involvement' takes), whereas for women it is taken-for-granted that they should be good mothers, and they are heavily vilified if they do not appear to be conforming to this cultural ideal (Featherstone, 2009). Moreover, fathers tend to select the 'fun' tasks such as taking children on days out, playing outside or reading the bedtime story (Elliott et al, 2018) rather than domestic chores or physical care such as cooking dinner or bath time. Whether and to what extent fathers engage in child care and other domestic tasks, their primary role to achieve 'good father' status still centres around economic provisioning (Elliott et al, 2018; Hoherz and Bryan, 2020). Henz' (2019) analysis of time-use data in the UK found that whilst being the economic provider was but one part of modern fatherhood, significant gender gaps between specific activities, types of care, and timing of

involvement remained and the gaps between fathers of different socio-economic classes were widening. Lower socio-economic fathers tended to be involved with their children less than higher socio-economic fathers, who 'specialised' in interactive rather than physical care and who were more involved at weekends than on weekdays. Whilst fathers would help with homework, they were far less likely to go into school or engage with other parents or staff. Hodkinson and Brook's (2020, pg.780) qualitative interviews with fathers who were primary or equal caregivers and used a "discourse of parental interchangeability", found that mothers were still the emotional 'go to', the organiser and allocator of responsibilities, and the networker (organising events with other parents). Cultural symbols and social and policy traditions were still experienced as strongly gendered and presented a challenge to fathers developing caregiving roles and identities (Ibid). Thus, it appears that despite trends towards more involved fatherhood, attitudes do not always translate to actions and society has not yet 'caught up'. Mothers are still expected to take on domestic duties (including physical care), overall oversight and emotional labour of raising children, including direct involvement in school settings.

Within this literature on parenting roles, it is important to recognise the degree of family diversity many children now experience. For example, from the increase in separated parents, there are many more single-parent households and reconstituted families (Cassidy, 2023; ONS, 2024a; DWP, 2024). There has also been the growth in same-sex parent households (Cassidy, 2023). Each of these family compositions experience additional barriers to involvement in their child(ren)'s education, whether that be lack of time to be involved due to being the sole earner *and* caregiver or continued stigma attached to sexualities and uncertainty over gendered parenting roles in these partnerships (Lindsay et al, 2006; Leland, 2017). Thus, paying attention to the different roles fathers and mothers take in their own child(ren)'s education, and how this work is shared, is vital if the contributions parents make to the field of education, and the different barriers and expectations they may face are to be fully understood. This work is yet to be extended to the field of voluntary work (though see Section 4 below for further discussion of parental voluntary work in education) and how this is divided between the genders. I hope this thesis can contribute to this gap in the literature.

Class and Capital

Whilst we have so far focused on differences between male and female work, gender is not the only social inequality which structures our lives. Fenstermaker and West (2002) have developed West and Zimmerman's (1987) assertion that we 'do gender' by further arguing that we 'do difference'. Other social inequalities such as class and race are accomplishments of social interactions (Fenstermaker and West, 2002). Alongside the gendered division of labour in parental involvement in schooling, research in the field of parent-school relationships has drawn extensively on Pierre Bourdieu's (1986; with Passeron, 1977) work and argues that "parental strategies with regard to education are informed by the forms and volumes of capitals they possess and their ability to activate those capitals in the field of schooling" (Vincent, 2017, pg.548). Consequently, parents with higher levels of economic, social, and cultural capital are more likely to have the resources and knowledge to ensure their children succeed in education (Ball, 1993; 2003; Ball et al, 1995; Ball and Vincent, 1998). This can include being able to afford to move to areas with good schools or paying for additional tutoring to gain entry to them, having the knowledge and education to understand and help with homework and engaging child(ren) in the 'right' after school clubs to mix with the 'right' crowds that will impact their

child(ren)'s own future capital accumulation (a style of parenting Lareau (2003) calls 'concerted cultivation').

Furthermore, emotional capital in education discussed earlier is not only gendered but also classed – it is shown and enacted differently by mothers from different classes (Reay, 2000; Gillies, 2006). Mothers are likely to have different constraints acting upon them which influence the resources (financial, time, emotional, knowledge) they can provide (McRae, 2003). Indeed, Gillies (2006, pg.288) found that working- and middle-class mothers had “alternative values and priorities”, combined with differing volumes of social and cultural capital (which interact with emotional capital) which resulted in different methods of exercising emotional capital. Whereas middle-class mothers are likely to focus on academic success, working-class mothers are more likely to focus on helping their child(ren) 'survive' school. For example, working-class mothers could show their children they were valued and loved by going without to buy them small but highly meaningful treats and gifts to make a difficult day at school more bearable (Ibid). Working-class mothers had lower aspirations and desires surrounding academic success and were more likely to engage in the emotional labour of soothing children's feelings of failure and to want to ensure their children are not 'left behind', work hard, get on with others and stay out of trouble (Ibid). In contrast, middle-class mothers would spend money on their children if it would further their education and emotional support was often employed to help their children cope with the pressures of attaining and retaining high grades (Ibid). Time and emotional energy would be expended in helping children study and to organising extra-curricular activities to further their future prospects (Ibid). In addition, mothers differing views and experiences of schools (both their own and their child(ren)'s) meant that some, especially from lower social classes found schools unwelcoming, daunting and even hostile places, which effected their level and type of involvement (Gillies, 2006; Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2013). The biggest reason for working-class mothers to visit school in Gillies (2006) study was to address concerns over their child being bullied. For middle-class mothers, conversations were more likely to be over their child(ren)'s progress. Thus, mothers from different classes had very different ways and means of accessing and activating emotional capital in their unpaid care work in their child(ren)'s schooling.

Race, Ethnicity and Capital

Race and ethnicity also have an important impact on the parent-school relationship. Various qualitative studies which have interviewed ethnic minority parents have found that, even though they have incredibly high aspirations and determination to see their children succeed, and even when they are of the same social class and possess similar capital to White parents, their capital is “devalued, rejected and treated as illegitimate” by schools (Vincent et al, 2012, pg.350). As Lareau (2003, pg.196) argues “possessing” capital is not the same as “activating” it, and BME parents can find it difficult to do so in the field of education. Moreover, Bhopal's (2014) interviews with 20 BME mothers in rural schools in England found that many experienced overt racism and suspicion by the schools' White communities of parents and teachers. Consequently, minority ethnic parents tend to see their role as being there to defend, rescue and protect their children from a racist education system (Crozier, 2005). Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) communities are a key ethnic group that have difficult relationships with the education system yet are not often considered in the literature due to often still being 'white' (Bhopal, 2018). Bhopal (2018) argues this is because GRTs embody 'non-acceptable whiteness', being seen as poor, aggressive and unworthy of recognition, support or full citizenship.

Not only are they one of the most disadvantaged of all ethnic groups in terms of housing, health and employment, but they also have the “lowest levels of educational attainment of any ethnic group” (Ibid, pg.31). There is a “general lack of understanding within society [including schools] about their culture and lifestyle” which means that GRT families can feel unsafe, insecure, devalued and excluded from schools (Ibid, pg.41) impacting both attainment and levels of involvement.

SEN Parents²

SEN parents also have a different experience of involvement in education. From the beginning their choice of schools is complicated by the added factor of whether to choose a special school or a mainstream school with SEN support. Bajwa-Patel and Devecchi’s (2014) survey of parents of children with SEN found that ‘nowhere seems to fit’ with compromises having to be made on the social or academic aspects of children’s education. Whilst most do choose mainstream school, factors such as specialist staff and facilities, recommendations and small class sizes were the most important factors affecting school choice for SEN parents. Most of these parents found they had to choose schools outside of their local communities to feel their children’s needs would be met. Preece and Lessner Lištiaková’s (2021) qualitative study found that parents of children with autism (representing 2.25% of the school population) preferred rural or coastal small schools for their children as they found the closeness in these environments led to greater acknowledgement and acceptance of SEN amongst the school community and the physical space appealed to their children’s sensory needs. However, SEN parents in these communities also found that a lack of local infrastructure, services and professionals meant they were often housebound when their children were not at school. Furthermore, SEN parents often struggle to get information and guidance on school choice and Booth (2023) found that this lack of communication might well be intentional due to the challenges posed by SEN inclusion. Thus, SEN parents often feel excluded or experience difficult and complex relationships with schools due to their children’s needs. Whilst their involvement might be more intense, this is likely to centre around the specific needs of their child, rather than translating to voluntary activity for the wider school community. Indeed, raising children with SEN often requires more time, energy and money than non-SEN children (Brook, 2011; Preece and Lessner Lištiaková, 2021) and if local support services outside the school are lacking, this may well limit SEN parents capacity to be involved with their children’s school.

Typologies of Parental Involvement

In attempting to understand how parental involvement has evolved over time and alongside policy changes, scholars have developed typologies of involvement to illustrate and explain parents’ positions in relation to schools (see Table 1 below). Historically, parental involvement in education has been largely voluntary but, (as discussed above and in Chapter 2) parents are now expected to take on multiple roles and more extensive involvement within the field of neoliberal education. This has even been argued to extend to ‘co-production’ in the field of primary education (Honingh et al, 2020). Honingh et al (2020, pg.222) define co-production as “the involvement of citizens in the design and delivery of services”. In some cases, the parental involvement expected of neoliberal education

² In this thesis, ‘SEN parents’ refers to parents and carers of children with SEN

systems goes beyond supporting one's own child(ren) to directly initiating, designing, and implementing educational services for many others.

Table 1 - Studies concerning forms of Parental Involvement in Education

Authors	Country	Forms of Involvement (applied to education)
Focus: Categorising Activities		
Epstein and Dauber (1991)	United States	Basic obligations, helping with homework, supporting events, decision-making, governance*, advocacy
Goodall and Montgomery (2014)	United Kingdom	Parental Involvement with school, e.g. parents invited by school to hear children read in the classroom
		Parental Involvement with schooling, e.g. parents take interest and help with homework set by the school
		Parental Engagement with children’s learning, e.g. parents take the lead in providing additional learning opportunities for their child
Focus: Children’s Role		
Edwards and Alldred (2000)	England	Children as active OR passive in parental involvement Children as active OR passive in parental uninvolvement
Focus: Changes in Parental Involvement Over Time		
Bridges (1994)	United Kingdom	Puzzled bystanders (in 1960s and 70s), Supporters, Partners, Governors*, Co-educators, Customers (from 1980s)
Ranson et al (2003)	England and Wales	Active citizens
Olmedo and Wilkins (2017)	England	Supporters, Partners, Co-operative receivers, Consumers (neoliberal), Governors* (neoliberal), Producers (neoliberal)
Smith (2021)	New Zealand	Supporters, Partners, Co-operative receivers, Consumers, Governors*
Focus: Co-production		
Voorberg et al (2015)	International	Co-creation (co-initiation and co-design of services) Co-production (co-implementation of services)
Bovaird et al (2015)	International	Individual Co-Production (Private), e.g. teaching your own child
		Collective Co-Production (Philanthropic), e.g. helping other children learn to read
Brandsen and Honingh (2016)	N/A: Conceptual	Co-design of services, Co-implementation of services, Core tasks performed, Complementary tasks performed
Steen and Brandsen (2020)	N/A: Conceptual	Voluntary Co-production, e.g. parents providing extra-curricular clubs
		Forced Co-production, e.g. enforced home schooling brought about by lockdowns during the COVID pandemic
Body and Hogg (2021, pgs.1-2)	United Kingdom	Individual Co-production: “improving individual children’s attainment”, e.g. helping with homework
		Collective Co-production: “the resourcing and delivery of the service of education through active involvement”, e.g. Free Schools
*Governance is discussed further in Section 4 below		

But what are the consequences of increased co-production in education? Voorberg et al's (2015, pg.1341) systematic literature review found an "implicit assumption that involvement of citizens is a virtue in itself", yet they could not conclude, based on the limited evidence presented in the studies they reviewed, that co-production is beneficial. Whilst co-production can provide service users with greater control over the services they receive, Hastings and Matthews (2015) have cautioned that policies such as the Big Society and localism (which embody elements of co-production) empower the already powerful (middle-classes) in service provision, exacerbating already existing inequalities. Thus, in education, middle-class parents in relatively affluent schools and communities can further the interests of their own children, whilst working-class children are left behind (Body and Hogg, 2021). Consequently, Body and Hogg (2021, pg.3) conclude that "collective co-production exacerbates inequality in primary education".

In addition, whilst co-production can be introduced by government or initiated by citizens, Steen and Brandsen (2020, pg.854) identified "tension between voluntary and forced co-production". So, when parents are voluntarily co-producing complementary services for schools, this might be a positive experience with beneficial outcomes for those involved. But when it becomes "coerced collective co-production" of core services directly encouraged by government policy (and then made a virtual necessity by the withdrawal of funds) (Body and Hogg, 2021, pgs.12-13) it is likely to produce negative experiences and inequalities in outcomes based on an already unequal distribution of resources and capital among social groups. The unexpected and forced co-production brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic (Steen and Brandsen, 2020), for example, highlighted the prevalence of digital poverty and digital exclusion which "has compounded existing inequalities" between pupils (Ball, 2021, pgs.187-9). Whilst the long-term effects of COVID-19 disruptions on education are not yet known, research suggests it will reverse the progress made in closing the attainment gap and "sustained support will be needed to help disadvantaged pupils catch up" (Ibid, pg.187). Co-production cannot be depended upon to repair the damage caused to education by COVID-19, especially for those already disadvantaged before the pandemic began.

Stigma

Although not all parents are equally positioned in the education market, those who can't be involved in the extensive and complex ways demanded by neoliberal responsibilisation are vilified as bad parents who have failed their children by being uncaring or making the wrong choices (Hall and Pulsford, 2019; Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2012; Reay, 2008; Smith, 2021; Ball, 2021). Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson's (2012) study found that school staff's perception of different parents often determined their views on the necessity of providing wraparound care, with the spectre of the heterosexual nuclear family influencing judgements of good parenting. For example, whilst wraparound care was seen as necessary for working parents, if such parents were on high incomes, staff tended to believe that parents were failing to provide their children with family time in the home environment and subjecting them to long, tiring days at school (Ibid). Whilst working was 'virtuous' for middle income parents, it was selfish for high income parents (Ibid). In contrast, non-working parents were seen to not need after-school care, but their children (and some middle-income children) were seen to benefit from breakfast club as they needed feeding (Ibid). Thus, judgements on good parenting are multi-faceted and complex.

Parents cannot seem to ‘win’ however, as they are not only seen as problems if they are not involved but are also accused of being *overly* involved (Smith, 2021). Thus, there is a balance to be struck by parents who are expected to be involved in certain ways, at certain times and at the appropriate levels, yet always respect the superior expertise of teachers and conform to the neoliberal system. In addition, parents are expected to keep surveillance on the school and its staff, whilst schools themselves keep surveillance on students and their parents (Crozier, 1998), often holding stereotypical views (Smith, 2021). However, in attempting to understand parental involvement, Smith (2021) argues that we must appreciate that engagement will vary depending on the context of parents’ lives, and the context of different schools. Indeed, one has only to consider the significant difference between the type of parental involvement (expected) in primary schooling compared to secondary schooling (Edwards and Alldred, 2000). Thus, instead of decontextualising the practices of parental involvement, Smith (2021, pg.190) argues we need to “better consider and value... diverse subject positions” of parents and ask what different parents *could* do, not what they *should* do.

This literature shows that certain parents are *stigmatised*. Stigma has long been studied in the social sciences. Goffman (1963) described stigma as an attribute (known or perceived) that confers a ‘deeply discrediting’ differentness on the possessor and which leads to a ‘spoiled identity’ in the eyes of wider society (and sometimes for the stigmatised themselves). Bourdieu’s (1991) discussion of cultural reproduction explained how those with symbolic power could exercise symbolic violence (stigmatisation) to ensure inequalities were reproduced. Whilst Goffman focused on micro interactions, and Bourdieu took a more macro-level approach, Wacquant (2008) and colleagues (2014) bring the two together with the concept of ‘territorial stigmatisation’ to explain how *spaces* (and the people who live in them) become stigmatised and the real consequences this has. He argues that when personhood is defined by consumption, poor people are denied personhood (Wacquant, 2008). Certain spaces and boroughs that act as ‘material containers’ and ‘mental imageries’ of the poor, thus become “synonyms for social hell” by both the citizenry at large but also by those who live there (Wacquant et al, 2014, pgs.1272-3). Spatial disgrace, he argues, is symbolic of inequality (Wacquant et al, 2014). Yet those who are stigmatised are not passive recipients of labels. They can deflect and defy territorial stigmatisation, or they can submit and reproduce it (which includes mutual distancing within territories through elaboration of micro differences) (Ibid). Tyler (2015) and Tyler and Slater (2018) draw on this work within the current context, arguing that neoliberalisation has intensified stigmatisation, especially in the issue of welfare, and that stigma is a key tool in the reproduction of social inequality. Structural forces, they argue, activate stigma to influence behaviour and attitudes in micro-level interactions where stigma arises and is enacted (Ibid).

Lamont and Pierson (2019) have taken this further by advocating for interdisciplinary and multi-level analysis that takes account of temporality and the multi-faceted nature of inequality so that we might better understand the cultural processes of meaning-making that reproduce inequality. In her work, Lamont (2018, pg.419) describes stigma as ‘recognition gaps’, “disparities in worth and cultural membership between groups in society” which need to be reduced through removing blame and drawing equivalences in order to reduce inequality. Whilst recognition is about affirming the positive qualities of individuals or groups, stigmatisation is its mirror opposite, negatively qualifying identities and differences (Ibid). Neoliberal scripts at the macro-level, she argues, feed growing recognition gaps by making competitiveness, self-reliance and socio-economic success the criteria of worth, thus stigmatising large proportions of the population (Ibid). Institutions, cultural repertoires and resources

at the meso-level moderate responses to stigmatisation experienced in micro-level interactions (Ibid). By drawing our attention to stigmatisation as a cultural process, Lamont and colleagues emphasise that inequality is not just about the distribution of resources but also about what people can and cannot do with them and how individuals and groups make sense of and respond to these distributions in their society (Lamont et al, 2014; Lamont and Pierson, 2019). This literature on stigma is yet to be fully incorporated into understandings of who can and cannot be involved in voluntary activity in schools, how and why. I hope to address this gap in the literature in this thesis (see Chapter 6).

Beyond the Parents

Whilst understanding parental involvement in neoliberal education systems is crucial, much of the literature discussed so far has ignored a key group of individuals who effect and have a fundamental stake in education – children themselves. Edwards and Alldred's (2000) study interviewing children from Years 6 and 10 from three contrasting locations representing a range of ethnicities, socio-economic backgrounds and family forms found that children exercise both activity and passivity in ways that encourage or restrict parental involvement in different aspects and sites of their education and, indeed, they may not want their parents involved at all. Consequently, "parents may be 'missing' because of their children's own activities around parental involvement, and this 'absence' may only be in terms of involvement in the school setting and in ways that the school can recognise" (Ibid, pg.450). Thus, assuming that a lack of 'visible' involvement on the part of so-called 'missing' parents translates to a lack of interest in their child(ren)'s education is not only incorrect, but it also ignores the agency of children themselves and how their perceptions and preferences shape parental involvement within neoliberal education systems.

Edwards and Alldred (2000, pg.452) also emphasised that "a focus purely on 'parental' involvement in education marginalises and devalues... [the] wider familial involvement" their study found. This was especially the case for ethnic minority children whose older siblings were often the ones who took on 'traditional' parenting roles in education when their parents did not speak good English or were absent. Moreover, childcare arrangements today frequently involve grandparent care (Arber and Timonen, 2015; Kanji, 2018), and this is a group whose involvement (including voluntary activities) in schools is also understudied. Thus, depending on the family types and familial relationships children experience, other family members may be more involved in a child's education (and voluntary activity for schools) than their parents. The absence of extended family in the literature is not merely a reflection of reality, but (again) a reflection of the white middle-class norms inherent in neoliberal understandings of 'family' and thus a narrow focus in the literature on mothers and fathers, as parents and volunteers.

3.3. Conceptualising Work, Boundaries and Voluntary Activity

The Total Social Organisation of Labour

Section 2 explored how women's increase in paid employment in the public sphere, extended our definitions and understanding of 'work'. However, analysis of the work (paid or unpaid) done to make education possible can be further extended if we move beyond the conceptual framework of a division of labour including only public/private or paid employment/domestic and emotional labour (as

discussed above). Understandings of work have been usefully extended by Miriam Glucksmann's (1995) conceptual approach of the Total Social Organisation of Labour (TSOL). Using this approach allows us to conceptualise and analyse the "connections between or interdependencies of work across differing socio-economic modes... where labour is undertaken on different socio-economic bases (market and non-market, formal or informal, paid or unpaid and so on)" (Glucksmann, 2009, pg.880). Work, Glucksmann (1995, pg.65) argues, "is embedded in, entangled with, conducted and expressed through other activities and relations which may be social, political, kinship, sexual or familial" as well as traditional economic relations. Within any society, labour is "divided up between and allocated to different structures, institutions and activities" (Ibid, pg.67) and the structural relations and internal organisation within spheres of activity can change in different places, and over time. The TSOL approach advocates a wider definition of work and helps us conceptualise how all this work is organised within and between spheres. At an even higher level of analysis, Glucksmann (2005) argues that there are 4 dimensions through which we can analyse and understand the interconnections between different work activities; across the processes of production/provision, distribution, exchange and consumption (PDEC), across the boundaries between paid and unpaid work, market and non-market, formal and informal sectors, through the articulation of work activities and non-work activities and relations, and the differing temporalities of work and how temporality runs through and connects the other three dimensions (Ibid). Changes in these dimensions and in the internal organisation of spheres effect the interdependencies and interconnections and thus, the TSOL itself.

Rebecca Taylor (2004; 2016) has extended the TSOL framework to focus on volunteer work. She argues that the traditional dichotomy of (male) paid employment in the public sphere versus (female) unpaid domestic labour in the private sphere cannot accommodate the prevalence of voluntary work in society (Taylor, 2004). She conceptualises work as existing on a continuum from paid to unpaid and from highly formalised roles in institutions, through to community and family settings and networks (Ibid; Taylor, 2016). Along this continuum there are 6 forms of labour: formal paid employment, formal unpaid voluntary work, informal unpaid work, informal economic activity, paid labour within the family and unpaid domestic activity (Taylor, 2004). Within these 'zones', there exist different orientations, resources, priorities and understandings of the activities being undertaken (Ibid). Although work can be fitted into one of these 'zones', the boundaries between them are blurry and the interconnections and interdependencies of different forms of work are of vital importance to understanding the implications of different TSOL configurations (Ibid). Through developing the TSOL framework, Taylor (2016, pg.495) positions "volunteering firmly within sociological debates about work" and attempts to provide "a concrete theoretical basis for research into voluntary work" (Taylor, 2004, pg.45).

Finally, Williams (2002a; 2002b; 2011a; 2011b) has further extended the TSOL approach to look at the informal economy (or the fourth sector) – the labour carried out outside the public, private and third sectors. In particular, he focuses on the socio-spatial distribution of informal work and different forms of community self-help. He identifies "ten labour practices with fuzzy boundaries" on a continuum from wholly non-monetised to gift exchange and in-kind labour to wholly monetised exchanges (Ibid, pg.367). Analysing survey responses, Williams (2002b, pgs.255-6) found that whilst participation in formal voluntary groups was common amongst the middle-class to socialise, such groups were alien to the working-class, who tended to rely on informal one-to-one aid "as a source of material support".

The TSOL approach to conceptualising and understanding work as developed by Glucksmann, Taylor and Willaims fundamentally underpins this thesis.

Boundaries

The TSOL is “concerned with connections between work across *boundaries*, the shifting character of such *boundaries*, and with the formation and dissolution of *boundaries*. As a relational concept the TSOL focuses on modes of linkage and connection, articulations, intersections and configurations” (Glucksmann and Nolan, 2007, pg.97, emphasis added). A focus on ‘boundaries’ has become increasingly common in the social science literature, especially that of symbolic boundaries (conceptual distinctions) and how they can manifest as, maintain and contest social boundaries (stratification and inequality) (Lamont and Molnár, 2002). Thus, the study of boundaries links closely to the study of processes of stigmatisation discussed earlier in this chapter. Indeed, it is in understanding the properties, mechanisms, and content of boundaries that enable an exploration of the foundations and implications of boundary recognition (Ibid; Lamont, 2018; Lamont and Pierson, 2019) boundary-work, boundary crossing and boundary maintenance within and between fields of activity. Stigmatisation as part of the cultural process of identification involves the creation of group boundaries and hierarchies that are given inter-subjective meaning through their recognition and enactment (Lamont et al, 2014). Shared categories and classification systems are a collective accomplishment which, whilst not necessarily intentional, are drawn upon and enacted to make sense of everyday interactions (Ibid). A consideration of boundaries encourages an understanding that work undertaken informally, or unpaid, nevertheless relates to, depends on, and contributes to paid employment, but is not reducible to or lesser than paid employment (Pettinger, 2019). Work is “what gets done to make life possible” (Ibid, pg.5), so we must consider work in all its forms, how it is organised, how activities relate to and are embedded within one another and the implications of these interdependencies on society, social groups, and individuals. Voluntary work is key to the TSOL (Taylor, 2016) and is the primary focus of this thesis. Thus, it is important to next review the literature on voluntary activity.

Voluntary Activity

Voluntary activity can be defined as the unpaid and uncoerced giving of time, talent, money, and resources to benefit those other than (or in addition to) your family and friends. It includes the fundamental concepts of volunteering, donation and fundraising, and can take place within or outside organisations. Increasing interest in voluntary activity in both policy and academia in recent decades (Rochester et al, 2009; Rochester, 2013) has produced a significant body of quantitative and qualitative literature which attempts to understand *who* gives voluntarily. Central to these questions has been the concept of ‘capital’ (tangible and intangible resources possessed by individuals) (Bourdieu, 1986; Putnam, 1995; 2000; 2002), especially ‘social capital’ which refers to the “actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network” of relationships, i.e. membership in a group (Bourdieu, 1986, pg.248). It is argued that volunteers are more likely to both possess and create social capital (Putnam, 1995). Key theorists of volunteering, Musick and Wilson (2008; Wilson, 2000; Wilson and Musick, 1997) have conducted extensive statistical analyses of US data on volunteering and have argued that, alongside social capital, human capital (individual

attributes) and cultural capital (attitudes, values, knowledge and preferences) are also important determinants of volunteering. They also concluded that the demographic traits of age, race, and gender, “determine how much of the capital important to volunteer work people can accumulate” (Ibid, pg.709). They found that older people are less likely to volunteer, women are more likely to volunteer than men and Black people are less likely to volunteer than White people (explained by lower levels of human and social capital) (Ibid). Both religiosity (cultural capital) and higher socio-economic status (human capital) increase levels of volunteering, as does the amount of informal social interaction in which an individual engages (social capital) (Ibid). Such findings are replicated in the UK by Mohan and Bulloch (2012, pg.1) whose analysis of 27,000 respondents to three waves of the Citizenship Survey (2007-10) attempted to uncover ‘the civic core’; “those groups in the population that account for the largest share of three dimensions of civic engagement” (volunteering, participation in civic associations and charitable giving). Their analysis found that those in the civic core were more likely than the rest of the population “to be middle-aged, have higher education qualifications, actively practice their religion, have lived in the same neighbourhood for at least 10 years, and be in managerial and professional occupations” (Ibid, pg.10). The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) continues to trace trends in the nature and extent of civic participation in the UK regularly (Hornung et al, 2017).

As well as understanding who is most likely to engage in voluntary activity, researchers and policymakers have been keen to understand *why* people get involved. Psychological theories of volunteer motivation argue that people volunteer because it fulfils a functional need they possess, e.g. to express values, to learn a new skill or to escape ‘negative feelings’ such as guilt (Clary et al, 1996). However, sociologists stress the importance of social context on volunteering (Rochester et al, 2009). Membership of social groups, class position and marital or parental status all influence the likelihood of volunteering, as does simply being *asked* in the first place (Musick and Wilson, 2008). However, the likelihood of being asked is also linked to the kinds and amounts of capital one possesses (Ibid). Thus, it is not just motivations that explain volunteering, but also ‘triggers’ which occur in a social context. Taking an important longitudinal approach to the study of volunteering, Brodie et al’s (2011, pg.7) ‘Pathways through Participation’ project which consisted of 100 life story interviews developed this concept of ‘triggers’, identifying an experience or emotion (e.g. anger at a decision and wanting to take action), a life event (e.g. having children), or an outside influence (including being asked) as the main triggers of participation. They also found that individual choices, access to resources and opportunities for involvement influenced engagement (Ibid). Hogg’s (2016, pg.176) life story research with 26 older volunteers supports this focus on context, finding that “stability of volunteer engagement is supported by stability” in family life, and in employment. The interaction of different roles, circumstances and motivations produce different pathways through volunteering (Ibid). Thus, the motivation, recruitment and retention of volunteers depends heavily on social and organisational context *and* individual circumstances (Haski-Leventhal and Bargal, 2008). Such understandings are beginning to feed into macro-scale research attempting to understand volunteer ‘experience’, that is the meanings, feelings and relationships involved in voluntary activity (McGarvey et al, 2020).

Part of this literature also aims to understand why people do *not* engage or *stop* engaging in voluntary activity. Brodie et al (2011) found that practical (e.g. new responsibilities at work or home) and experiential (e.g. negative participatory experience) factors led people to stop participating in voluntary activity. Willems and Dury’s (2017) large-scale exploratory factor analysis found that the

most common barriers to volunteering were social boundaries (negative image, experience or interactions), physical boundaries (health-related), stress from volunteering, not feeling a responsibility to volunteer, (perceived) lack of skills, lack of (awareness of) opportunities or not being asked, lack of benefits (or incentives), and lack of time. They also found that whilst these categories correlated with certain demographic groups (for example, retired people experiencing physical boundaries), any individual was likely to have multiple reasons for not volunteering and so a holistic strategy would be needed to overcome these barriers (Ibid). An appreciation that decisions *not* to volunteer, just as reasons to engage, are the outcome of continuous and episodic balancing of advantages and disadvantages is also important (Ibid). Haski-Leventhal et al's (2010) third party model of volunteering, focuses on both the supply and demand side of volunteering by exploring how third parties (the government, corporations and education institutions) can increase both the 'volunteerability' of individuals at the micro-level (their willingness, capability and capacity to volunteer) and the 'recruitability' of voluntary organisations at the meso-level (the accessibility, financial and human resources, and networks and co-operation with other voluntary organisations and third parties) to reduce barriers to volunteering and encourage individuals to become and stay involved.

Another important part of this literature is a focus on geographies of volunteering. This literature recognises that volunteering is situated in context, in place and in collective and individual life stories (Smith et al, 2010). In the context of increased third sector involvement in state welfare, Milligan (2007) highlights that voluntary activity is not evenly distributed geographically and so at best can only complement the state and should not be a substitute for it. Indeed, the areas of highest need are not necessarily where the most voluntary activity takes place, and the physical location of a voluntary organisation is not necessarily the area that benefits (Ibid). Local cultures, philanthropic histories and socio-economic profiles, as well as the availability and accessibility of physical infrastructure and the presence of individual champions driving local causes all factor into geographical variation of voluntary activity (Milligan, 2007). In addition, Smith et al (2010, pg.264) found that different areas have "complex, unwritten rules and practices surrounding the pace, extent and nature of involvement in volunteering" and this can be difficult for newcomers to an area to access. This is relevant for understanding volunteering for a school, where new parents may need to learn the 'rules' and hierarchies of volunteer involvement before they can engage or decide (or have decided for them) how they can and cannot be involved.

Work on geographies of volunteering can be expanded when work on conceptualisations of rurality are drawn upon. Halfacree's (2009a; 2009b; Halfacree and Rivera, 2012) work on rural migration and counter-urbanisation highlights how 'rural' is a popular category imbued with quasi-utopic imaginings of the good life, community spirit and natural surroundings. Even when the reality of rural life does not live up to these expectations, rural migrants are embedded in relations and the life-course of the place which can lead to a refocusing of individual lives, priorities and post-hoc rationalisation of a move to the rural (Ibid). Engaging in local, place-based voluntary activity can be an important part of these ongoing processes of performing (representing) and living the rural, where individual biographies intertwine with shared histories of place (Warren, 2014; Ward and Greene; 2018). Through voluntary activity, places are made, redefined, and become part of individual life stories, giving enhanced meaning to the activity for the volunteer (Ibid) and contributing to the representational and performance of the rural, lives of the rural, and the rural space itself (Halfacree, 2009b).

Hustinx and Lammertyn (2003) have attempted to theorise how voluntary activity has and continues to change by developing a sociological modernisation theory (Hustinx, 2010; Hustinx et al, 2010) which argues that both collective and reflexive styles of volunteering co-exist under current conditions of late modernity and in relation to individual “biographically embedded patterns of behaviour” (Hustinx and Lammertyn, 2003, pg.170). Their typology of styles of volunteering acknowledges both structural and motivational factors, multiple forms of volunteering and multiple dimensions that affect volunteering decisions. An individual’s life situation interacts with the institutional/organisational settings of volunteering. Whilst a service ethic and sense of obligation to the community still exist (collective), personal interest and needs also matter and have led to more self-interested, flexible, transitory and detached forms of involvement (reflexive). Heley et al’s (2022) identification of the rise of ‘micro-volunteering’ forms part of this more individualised/reflexive style of volunteering, as does Stebbins (2015) exploration of ‘project-based leisure’, one-shot or occasional projects, and ‘casual volunteering’. The increasing use of technology and rise in digital forms of voluntary participation (Heley et al, 2022) is also a crucial development in current trends in voluntary activity. To end this section, I return to the concept of ‘boundaries’. As voluntary activities become more formalised and embedded in non-voluntary organisations, such as private companies or public services, so the volunteer role overlaps more often with those of paid professionals (Haski-Leventhal et al, 2010) and can cause tensions and boundary confusion between individuals and between role expectations and actual practice (Dixon, 2017; Johnson et al, 2023). Of specific relevance to this thesis, schools are an important public service where voluntary activity takes place alongside the work of paid staff and informal labour. So, let us now move on to explore what is known about the role of volunteers, donations and fundraising in schools.

3.4. Voluntary Activity for Schools

Voluntary activity has always had a part to play in education in the UK, with religious charity and independent philanthropy often founding and operating schools prior to the 1870 Elementary Education Act (Kendall and Knapp, 1996; Morris, 2011; Ball, 2021). The continuing role of voluntary activity in education can also be seen in the diversity of school structures across the UK, from academies and free schools (both charities) to church schools, voluntary-aided and -controlled schools (Ibid; Morris, 2011). Moreover, national surveys find that children’s (particularly primary) education and schools has consistently been one of the most popular fields of volunteer involvement in the UK (Hornung et al, 2017; McGarvey, 2020). Unsurprisingly, statistics reveal that *parents* of school-aged children are the most likely to volunteer in schools (Hornung et al, 2017; Musick and Wilson, 2008) and longitudinal studies show being a parent is an important ‘trigger’ of volunteering (Brodie et al, 2011; Hogg, 2016; Muddiman, 2020). Whilst parents have a long history of involvement in education (Morris, 2011), with the Education Reform Act 1988 forcing schools to compete for parental preference in an education market where funding follows the pupil (Ball, 2021; LeGrand and Bartlett, 1993), parents are now expected to play an increasingly dominant role as ‘active citizens’ in education (Ranson et al, 2003). Indeed, Haski-Leventhal et al (2017, pg.690) argue that “a concept close to parental volunteering is parental involvement in school” which helps explain why the literature on voluntary activity in schools is dominated by studies focusing on the role parents play and how this has changed over time.

The most comprehensive study of voluntary activity in primary schools in England has been conducted by Body and colleagues (Body, 2017; Body et al, 2017; Body and Hogg, 2018) who used mixed methods (financial analysis, questionnaires, and interviews) to explore voluntary activity in primary schools in Kent (with varied levels of deprivation, school sizes and types). In terms of the content of voluntary activity, Body et al (2017) found that the most common activities regular volunteers were involved in in primary schools were PTA membership, fundraising, governance, classroom support (reading), management and leadership, events and educational trips, extra-curricular activities, and the donation of goods and resources. Let us explore some of these voluntary activities in more detail.

Governance

Governors are volunteers who give their time (and skill) to provide independent strategic oversight, scrutinise practices and ensure accountability of the school(s) they govern. Schools must have a governing board, though governing arrangements can differ between school types, with federated schools sharing a governing body, for example. James et al (2010, pg.93) refer to school governors as “the hidden givers” due to the vast amounts of time and effort these volunteers give to the education system in England but who are largely hidden from public view. Not only do schools struggle to function well without a capable governing body, but an effective one is linked clearly and positively to pupil attainment, in both advantaged and disadvantaged settings (Ibid). James (2014) has traced trends in school governance since the mid-1940s. Historically, local politicians and church representatives governed schools. However, from the 1980s, governing boards began to include local education authority (LEA) representatives, parents, school staff and local community representatives, all of whom have various and diverse roles and interests. The LEA has had its role and powers scaled back since the late 90s and the trend towards local management of schools (LMS) has meant that governing bodies have significantly enhanced responsibilities. Thus, James (2014) argues governance has moved from party politics to the politics of management, where performance (attainment) of schools is the central concern. Governors are now expected to take responsibility for oversight of specific areas, e.g. health and safety or finance, requiring increased expertise and training, and accountability to stakeholders has shifted more towards accountability to external performance criteria (Ibid). Consequently, there is conflict between a ‘stakeholder model’ of governance where equal representation aims to promote inclusion on governing bodies and community participation, and a ‘skills-based model’, where governors are recruited for the ‘capital’ (skills) they can bring to the role (above representation concerns) (Ranson, 2003; Ranson et al, 2005). Baxter and Wise’s (2013) study of federation governance found confusion around what governor functions were and that governors experienced a discord between their actual and perceived roles, whether that be as resource allocators and financial custodians, representatives of the school community or surveillants of teachers and school staff (Thody, 1994).

So, who are these ‘hidden givers’? Ranson et al’s (2003; 2005) interviews with 626 parent governors across 5 Local Education Authorities in the UK found that the majority were white, middle-aged, middle-class, middle income, public or community service workers. Although many were female, they found that “typically, chairs, vicechairs, and chairs of sub-committees were male” whilst women, ethnic minorities and disadvantaged classes were under-represented (Ibid, pg.361). The studies discussed in Section 3.2 exploring why ethnic minority parents struggle to support their children in their schooling can also explain their under-representation amongst school volunteers (Bhopal, 2014;

Crozier, 2005; Lareau, 2003; Vincent et al, 2012). There is also the factor of time; retired or middle-aged professionals tend to be able to fit in governance around other responsibilities (James et al, 2012) when compared to the working-class who might have to take on multiple jobs. Moreover, schools actively sought to recruit governors from higher social classes, aware of the benefits their capital could bring to the school (Ranson et al, 2005), rather than trying to be more inclusive of the communities they serve and represent (Ranson, 2003). Thus, schools were opting for the skills-based model of governance, rather than the stakeholder model. Whatever the profile of a school's governing body, however, James et al (2010; 2012) found that the relationships between a school's headteacher and their chair of governors was vital in positive functioning and outcomes of governance. Governance, then, is a particularly formal volunteer role which confers a great deal of power but also high levels of responsibility and workload. Indeed, recent debates around the remuneration of governors question whether this role can continue to be unpaid with the current workload and responsibilities and to encourage greater representation from marginalised groups, but also the consequences to independence and accountability if the role were no longer 'voluntary' (Forrest et al, 2023).

Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs)

Let us now move on to look at Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs). PTAs are groups that structure parental involvement and represent parents within their school communities. They can be formally registered as charities or exist more informally and have long been recognised as important voluntary associations (Putnam, 2001). Their predominant roles are parental representation, community-building and fundraising. Recent Parentkind (2018; 2019; 2020; 2021; 2022) data show that school fairs, raffles, food and uniform sales and parental donations are PTAs main sources of income and spending on educational materials, leavers trips, and outdoor equipment are their most common outcomes. Interestingly, Body et al (2017; Body, 2020) found that fundraising practices in schools included both 'traditional' methods of school fairs, non-school-uniform days, competitions, and raffles but were also incorporating increasingly 'strategic' methods such as corporate sponsorship, asking parents for donations and approaching charitable trusts. Body and Hogg (2018) also found that PTAs were increasingly being asked to fund more fundamental educational resources and activities, rather than or alongside the extra-curricular enrichments they used to fund. This is attributed to government funding cuts necessitating schools to plug gaps in budgets with fundraised income. Whilst PTAs have been around long before policy agendas like the Big Society, their practices and the use to which fundraised income is put, has and continues to change.

The above explored what PTAs do and how this has changed, but who forms their membership? PTAs used to be referred to as PTFAs, including 'friends' who were not parents or staff as part of their membership. However, the use of this term is declining in favour of PTA which seems to reflect the decline in wider involvement beyond that of parents, or perhaps intensified involvement of parents as active citizens who are expected to be involved in their child(ren)'s education in multiple ways, including volunteering (Ranson et al, 2003). As of 2022, 45% of PTAs had no staff in their groups (Parentkind, 2022). This could reflect the increased workloads of staff in schools who have less time and capacity to be involved in formal groups and activities beyond their formal job roles. Recent data from Parentkind (2018; 2019; 2020; 2021; 2022) shows that PTA numbers have remained steady over the years, with drops in funding and volunteering hours during COVID-19 which are now recovering. However, about half of these PTAs have only female members, with almost two thirds not working, or

working part-time. As might be expected, these are usually mothers as PTAs are often seen as an appropriate gendered arena in which to exercise intensive mothering (Hays, 1996; Bagnall et al, 2003; Vincent, 2017) and to gain and exercise emotional capital (O'Brien, 2008; Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2013). So, whilst PTA numbers have remained stable over the years, with female-dominated membership, staff and non-parent 'friends' involvement in these groups are declining. Moreover, PTA activities are predominantly focused on fundraising, with increased pressure to provide fundamentals in the current policy context.

Boundaries in School Voluntary Activity

The gendered division of labour is as visible in voluntary work for schools as it is in paid employment. However, there is a strange contradiction when it comes to male volunteers in primary schools. Whilst men are viewed as positive assets to a school – providing good role models (especially for boys) and part of being a 'good dad', school-based volunteering does not fit with stereotypical gender ideologies of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2000). This can explain why male volunteers confine themselves to formal roles outside of the classroom (such as governance), linked to their profession or linked to 'male' interests (such as sport) as this legitimises their involvement in a feminised sphere and does not threaten, but rather confirms their masculinity (Bagnall et al, 2003). Furthermore, whilst women are expected to be found in PTA groups, these can be considered more *informal* organisations when compared to the 'serious' business of school governance, where males hold dominant positions (Ranson et al, 2005). Thus, just as in the wider public sphere, women's work is more likely to be 'invisible' (Daniels, 1987; Hatton, 2017; Pettinger, 2019) or disregarded as simply an extension of their motherly duties (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2013). However, governance is an interesting category of volunteer as whilst it is considered more formal, it is not necessarily more *visible* (Hatton, 2017). Indeed, much work of the governing body is not well-known amongst the wider school community when compared to the more visible work (or at least, outcomes of that work) of PTA members. This is interesting as it suggests that PTA volunteering can offer women a form of work where their efforts are publicly (at least within the school community) recognised and experienced as meaningful (Daniels, 1988; Bagnall et al, 2003; DeVault, 2014).

As well as being seen on a spectrum of formal to informal (Taylor, 2004; 2016) and with varying degrees of visibility (Daniels, 1987; DeVault, 2014), primary school voluntary activity is both multi-sited and not time-bound. Some of the work is done at school e.g. reading with children and so can be viewed as formal unpaid work. Some formal work might be done in a different location but on behalf of the school e.g. governors meetings at a village hall. And at the other end of the spectrum, work can be very informally carried out at home but on behalf of the school e.g. making posters for the school fair. Thus, not only is voluntary activity in schools gendered, classed and undertaken in different socio-economic modes (Glucksmann, 1995), but it also involves spatial and temporal variations (Williams, 2002a; 2011a; 2011b). Whilst the literature often talks about voluntary work *in* schools, this work does not just happen within the school itself (or its opening hours), but also in the homes of teachers, students, and their families, in community buildings and public places and, increasingly, online (Head, 2020; Heley et al, 2022). Thus, it is more helpful to talk about voluntary activity *for* schools to encompass the vast range of settings and times in which this work takes place. With this wider conceptualisation of how voluntary activity takes place, and particularly absent in the literature so far, is a focus on resource or goods donated to schools which are *not* monetary. Body and Hogg (2018)

recognised that data they had collected on school donations failed to capture 'donations-in-kind', such as play equipment, and so much goods-donation remains hidden in statistics. An understanding of the nature and role of resource donation to schools represents a key gap in the literature which this thesis addresses.

The dominance of parents in studies of school-based voluntary activity, as with the literature on parental involvement, has resulted in a lack of focus and thus, a lack of understanding of the role and experiences of non-parent volunteers in schools. Indeed, just as siblings, grandparents and other family members are involved in a child's education journey, they are also involved in voluntary activity for their schools. For example, Muddiman et al (2020) and Hampton and Muddiman's (2020) mixed methods work found that grandparents not only perform vital voluntary work supporting and surrounding their grandchild(ren)'s school, but they also have a crucial role to play in their grandchild(ren)'s own development of civic mindedness and activities. Body et al's (2017) mixed methods study also found that alongside parents, individuals from the local community, extended family members of current and former students and members of staff and their family and friends also volunteered in schools. However, a qualitative exploration of their experiences was absent. Whilst parents are important volunteers, they can be very transient as they tend to volunteer only for the length of their children's schooling (Ranson et al, 2003) and it is difficult for schools to retain them (Apps et al, 2019). Understanding the impacts of this transient activity on these parents, the children and their schools is vital. But we also need to expand our understanding of volunteers beyond parents to fully appreciate the nature of voluntary activity for schools, the overall configuration of all forms of work (TSOL) that make education possible and the motivations and impacts (both positive and negative) of those undertaking this work. This thesis aims to do this.

Voluntary Activity by Primary School Children

A key yet often overlooked group undertaking voluntary activity in schools are the children themselves. PSHE (Personal, Social, Health, Economic) education (required provision in all schools) (Formby, 2011) and citizenship education (advised in primary schools, and compulsory in secondary schools) both incorporate voluntary activity into their curriculums, modelling a response to Westheimer's (2015; 2017) question: what kind of citizens do we need? The aim of 'community involvement' in both PSHE and citizenship education directly relates to voluntary activity, encouraging students to go out into the community and help others as active citizens who learn by doing (Kisby, 2007). However, schools lack the time and flexibility within the rigid National Curriculum to include all the elements of PSHE and citizenship alongside academic subjects, and as it is children's success in these subjects which are formally judged, this is where time and resources all too often get devoted (Holden, 2003; Formby, 2011). Perhaps due to the overlaps with daily pastoral care and school ethos, PSHE and citizenship tend to be absorbed into other areas. Consequently, they currently do not receive the time, resourcing and status that might enable them to meaningfully impact on students future well-being, citizenship or indeed, their ability to care (Noddings, 2005).

Whilst PSHE and citizenship education are a formal part of the curriculum, supporting charity is also common in most schools and is encouraged from a young age. In fact, children appear to exhibit natural intrinsic charitable behaviours, viewing charity not only as money, but as being embodied in everyday acts of kindness, fairness, and empathy (Body et al, 2020). Every year, large-scale charitable

campaigns such as Red Nose Day and Children in Need successfully recruit and equip school communities to fundraise on their behalf, with such events becoming mainstream in most school calendars (Body et al, 2021; Power and Taylor, 2018). However, most children know little about the cause they are fundraising for, have little choice but to participate in fundraising activities and rarely get to decide which causes they support (Body et al, 2020). This is problematic as when adults impose these giving decisions on children, they encourage them to view giving as a passive activity, nothing more than an economic transaction, reducing any opportunity for critical enquiry into why charities exist, how they operate and what they achieve, and giving a limited view of the diverse activities that take place within the charitable sector (Ibid). Children's participation is trivialised, superficial and tokenistic as they are distanced from the very issues of society that they will grow up in and have the learning opportunities provided by charitable activity and the scope of means by which they may choose to support causes they deem worthy reduced (Ibid). Compulsory fundraising activities are also exclusive as families in poverty often struggle to afford to fundraise, resulting in stigmatisation (Mazzoli Smith and Todd, 2019; CPAG, 2022). Moreover, when charities are presented as the solution to social problems, other approaches, including government responsibilities and political solutions are downplayed (Power and Taylor, 2018). Such practices of charitable support are thus not only undemocratic, but they are also unethical (Ibid; Body et al, 2021).

However, this does not have to be the case. Body et al (2020; 2021) advocate a children's rights approach to fundraising which is both ethical and democratic. Children would be recognised as donors with the right to make decisions about what causes they support and how, and to engage critically and meaningfully in charitable giving and with the social problems charities seek to address (Ibid). Such an approach would encourage the development of philanthropic citizens by empowering children with the knowledge to understand, discuss and debate social issues and the means to address them. Children can be encouraged to address local issues in their own communities directly, as a counter to the distance from big charity campaigns and may well decide that fundraising is not the only solution. The children in Bell and Sigsworth's (1992) study, for example, decided that writing letters to the local council would be a more efficient way of addressing the litter problems in their village. If philanthropic citizenship were to be "meaningfully embedded as part of citizenship education in schools" as Body et al (2021, pg.8) hope, we might be one step closer to developing the kind of citizens our society needs (Westheimer, 2015; 2017). Expanding children's knowledge and understanding of charitable cause areas also supports the teaching of children to care that Noddings (2005) advocates. The diverse areas of care she identifies overlaps well with the huge variety of charitable causes that exist and by teaching children to care about these causes, they can learn to become more caring people, a fundamental aim of education. Returning to the issue of charity support in schools, however, whilst implementing the children's rights approach to fundraising activities advocated by Body et al (2021) will require schools to accept and value such changes to practices of charitable support and undertake efforts to make it a reality, this is easier said than done. Schools still must meet the requirements of the National Curriculum and struggle (especially in the current funding and policy climate) to find the time and resources to provide their children with all the learning opportunities they may wish to.

Impacts of Voluntary Activity for Schools

As well as a limited focus on *who* volunteers, studies of the impact of voluntary activity for schools often have a limited interpretation of what ‘successful’ outcomes are understood to be. In line with a neoliberal focus on academic success, a vast body of quantitative studies (especially randomised controlled trials) involving non-parent volunteers have tended to side-line the volunteer role to focus on the academic outcomes of the task or intervention programme with which they are involved. In the UK these have mostly been reading intervention programmes (Brooks et al, 1996; Elliott et al, 2000; Loenen, 1989; Miller et al, 2011; Torgerson et al, 2002; Williams et al, 2002). Beyond identifying the participants as ‘volunteers’ and distinguishing their level of training for their respective roles, their experience as volunteers is not explored (though this can be expected of quantitative methodologies). Nevertheless, their findings are valuable in attempting to understand the effect volunteers may have in schools.

Overall, the studies had mixed results regarding the impact of volunteer support on attainment, with most finding a minimal beneficial effect on the children’s educational outcomes. This suggests that where volunteers are being used in schools, there may be other reasons besides their capacities to support attainment (Brooks et al, 1996). Indeed, Elliott et al (2000), whose methodology included the completion of daily diaries by volunteers, did find some evidence of subjective impressions of success by participants, suggesting a gap between subjective and objective perceptions of the impact of volunteer support, which was not investigated in-depth, but which may suggest the value of volunteer support lies outside quantifiable attainment measures. Williams et al (2002) explored these non-quantifiable benefits from the perspective of participants in BT’s national ‘School Friends’ project, finding that volunteers raised children’s confidence, self-esteem and enthusiasm, developed warm and supportive relationships of mutual respect and trust, and improved behaviour and attitudes, especially in socially deprived areas. They also found that both male and female volunteers provided supportive and valuable role models to children, especially boys (for example, through challenging stereotypes). Indeed, more recently, charities have tried to increase the number of male volunteers in schools as positive male role models for children (Lunn and Tobin, 2018). Teravainen-Goff’s (2020) analysis of surveys conducted after a 6-week Bookmark Reading programme also identified interactions with adults from diverse backgrounds, especially for those who did not get opportunities to read with an adult at home as particularly beneficial for children’s social skills, self-esteem and overall well-being. Thus, quantitative studies conclude that, whilst value may not be easily ‘measured’, volunteers bring both general and meaningful benefits to children in schools. However, these studies did not explore the content of voluntary activity beyond reading.

Beyond reading, volunteers can often be found involved in activities which are extra or alternative to the curriculum, and which often involve a caring relation. Initiatives such as Forest School or Farm School, for example, often provide children with freedom from the academic pressures of the classroom, and volunteers can feel confident getting involved as it requires little to no expertise (compared to what might be perceived to be expected of engaging in curriculum support in the classroom) (Pimlott-Wilson and Coates, 2019; Saunders et al, 2011). Volunteers working with children often cite simply ‘being with the children’ as a key motivator and source of satisfaction (Bell and Sigsworth, 1987; 1992), often due to the relationships of care they can develop. Voluntary support in schools, therefore, can help fulfil a variety of purposes beyond (and including) academic attainment, especially through building and maintaining caring relations (Noddings, 2005). Indeed, Williams et al

(2002) argue that volunteers working regularly with small numbers of children would bring the most benefit, supporting Noddings (2005; 2012) argument that continuity of experience provides the time for trust to be built and care relations to develop. Yet, Calvert's (2009) concerns must be remembered here. Volunteers are not paid, professional staff whose continuity of presence can be relied upon. For caring relations to flourish schools must have the funding to be fully staffed with the trained professionals their students require and deserve. Volunteers should not be discouraged from these roles, but they should not be the sole source of care in a state-funded, public education system.

As highlighted above, the two fundamental activities of PTAs is to fundraise for their schools and to build school communities to improve the educational experience for the children. However, studies in both the UK (Bagnall et al, 2003) and US (Lareau and Muñoz, 2012; Posey-Maddox, 2014; Murray et al 2019; 2020) show that whilst PTA activities may bring many benefits to schools and volunteers, they can also be exclusive, cliquey groups (of largely white, middle-class mothers) who seek to improve their own child(ren)'s education through their involvement, and membership can lead to many conflicts. For example, Murray et al's (2019; 2020) ethnography found that affluent parents hoard opportunities through involvement in Parent Teacher Organisations (PTOs), by forming groups with other like-minded parents (of similar demographics, behaviour and status traits) to pursue their own goals (bonding capital), whilst blocking activities and funding for initiatives that promote wider inclusion (bridging capital). The way in which practices of PTOs were carried out also impacted their inclusivity/exclusivity. For example, PTOs that met only a few times a year during school time were less inclusive than those who worked to meet regularly at times that suited working parents (Murray et al, 2020). In Bagnall et al's (2003) study, 'doing' the PTA enabled middle-class mothers to perform 'belonging', meet people and find out useful information about the school and how things work (what Ball et al (1998) called 'hot' knowledge); it is an important means of gaining capital and 'getting ahead' (Bagnall et al, 2003). Thus, PTA membership by middle-class mothers can reproduce inequalities through exclusion and opportunity hoarding.

Alongside the reproduction of inequality, Lareau and Muñoz's (2012) case study found that other negative impacts of PTOs included conflicting priorities of schools and parents, battles of authority within groups, high levels of turnover, weak lines of communication and minimal training. To rely on such volunteers or such funders who may have a variety of different understandings of educational purpose, bring certain agendas to their role, or conditions attached to their donations, which could conflict with the school's purposes and values would be a disservice to the inclusivity and fairness expected of the public service that is education. Thus, motivations behind voluntary activity, whether that is conducted through formal groups like PTAs or undertaken informally, must be carefully considered in the field of education. Intentional activities to promote bridging (bringing diverse parents together across social distance) *and* bonding social capital are needed for inclusive and equitable school communities (Murray et al, 2020). As is recognition of the myriad ways in which parents can be involved with schools (Smith, 2021), and through the school creating the opportunities and invitations for this involvement which fits with parents skillsets, knowledge, and other demands on their time and energies (Apps et al, 2019). This approach recognises difference and prioritises support for families with the highest need whilst also offering a variety of ways to contribute whatever their circumstances, recognising every parent's right to have a say in their child(ren)'s education (Packman, 2020).

Perhaps the most important findings from Body et al's research were that voluntary activity in primary schools is increasing (Body and Hogg, 2018), it is often becoming a necessity "to help address budget shortfalls, increase teacher capacity and support the desire to continue to offer extra-curricular activities" and, schools in less deprived areas attract much more volunteer time (and skills) and fundraised income than those in highly deprived areas (Body et al, 2017, pg.267; Body and Hogg, 2018). Consequently, increased dependence upon voluntary activity is potentially exacerbating inequalities between schools and compromising the quality of education they can provide (Ibid). Therefore, whilst on the surface, increased voluntary activity in primary schools seems to have positive impacts, Body and colleagues research problematises this assumption, highlighting the negative impacts of increased dependence and uneven distribution of voluntary support. However, whilst this research suggests real differences in voluntary activity are occurring between schools, it lacks the qualitative understanding of how these differences play out in practice and how these are perceived and experienced by those involved in different settings. Of specific relevance to this thesis is the setting of the small rural primary school. Thus, I now move to review the literature on voluntary activity for small rural primaries.

3.5. Small Rural Primary School Voluntary Activity

Body et al's (2017) analysis identified small primary schools as most likely to attract volunteers and fundraised income. However, this may not be surprising, given the special histories of small school-rural community relationships. Indeed, Ribchester and Edwards (1999) and more recently Hargreaves (2009; 2017) have argued that an educational policy framework is not enough to understand changes in rural school provision. It cannot simply be assumed that the political environment in which these schools find themselves is the cause of the voluntary activity that can be found. Schools have their own histories and communities of stakeholders and do not simply react to policy changes independent of their contexts. Therefore, there must also be an understanding of previously existing "locally-based support strategies including inter-school co-operation, anti-closure campaigns... voluntary fund-raising" (Ribchester and Edwards, 1999, pg.49) and vital school-community relationships (CofE, 2014; Cade et al, 2018; Hargreaves, 2017) which have helped sustain the availability of rural education provision and significantly shape the learning experience in these schools (Hargreaves, 2009).

Voluntary activity is a fundamental and enduring aspect of small rural primaries since their founding, often many hundreds of years ago by voluntary organisations or individual philanthropists. The religious character of these schools should also be considered here. As Ball (2021) highlights, it was church societies and voluntary organisations that provided education (for the working-classes) prior to the passing of the Elementary Education Act 1870. To this day, "much of the faith-based sector in both England and Wales actually consists of small, rural, Anglican primary schools" (Hemming, 2018, pg.805) with 26% of all primary schools in England being Church of England schools (Ibid, pg.139). This has important implications for these schools voluntary activity. CofE schools have foundation governors who are volunteers specifically tasked with ensuring the school maintain and encourage a Christian distinctiveness (Holmes and Pratt-Adams, 2021). Voluntary activity and strong school-community links are also directly encouraged by the church and explored and celebrated in SIAMS (Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools) inspections which church schools must also undergo in addition to Ofsted (Hemming, 2018). Thus, the religious character of many small rural primaries provides them with close associations to voluntary activity.

Bell and Sigsworth (1987) recognised the importance of community voluntary activity in contributing to the distinct nature and learning experiences of small rural primary schools. Their interviews and observations in such schools emphasised the significance of volunteer helpers who listen to children read, who teach them French, needlework, cookery and piano, and who give their time and private cars to take children to the museum (Ibid, pgs.266-7). Similarly, Ribchester and Edwards' (1999) postal survey of headteachers from 12 rural counties across England and Wales also highlighted the role of volunteers in providing vital funding, logistical support with school trips, reading and general classroom support as well as a wide variety of extra-curricular activities for the children. MPs in a recent House of Commons debate on small and village school funding also discussed the inspiring work of local charities, PTAs, parish councils, local businesses, friends, teachers, and parents who hold weekly cake raffles and provide resources in response to schools wish list websites (Hansard (HC Deb), 2019, col. 429). Thus, voluntary activity is a recognised and vital part of the day-to-day educational experience of small rural primary schools.

Small rural primaries are also particularly interesting environments to consider the practices of providing care and interpreting and implementing national policy around citizenship and engagement with voluntary activity. Noddings (2015, pg.82) argues that "smaller classes provide greater opportunities for teachers and students to develop relationships of care and trust", thus small rural primary schools already have ideal conditions, by virtue of their size, to enable caring relations to flourish. Indeed, much of the qualitative literature (Bell and Sigsworth, 1987; 1991; 1992; Bottery, 1991; Chadwick, 2012; CofE, 2014; Cade et al, 2018; Francis, 1992) on small rural primary schools supports this idea that they have a familial atmosphere, 'happier', caring, and supportive learning environments, respect and high standards of behaviour, and mutually beneficial relationships between schools, parents and their local communities. Their unique surroundings also enables students to gain first-hand experience of caring for plants, animals, and the environment (Noddings, 2005) through initiatives such as Farm schools (Saunders et al, 2011), Beach schools (Mackintosh, 2017) and Forest schools (Pimlott-Wilson and Coates, 2019).

The small-scale nature of these schools can also influence how educational purpose is conceptualised and experienced. Small rural primaries tend to occupy a special place in their communities, both symbolically as 'the heart of the community' (Bell and Sigsworth, 1992; Bagley and Hillyard, 2011; 2014; 2019) and socially as a meeting place and institution around which community action is built and mobilised (Bell and Sigsworth, 1992). Indeed, ethnographies have found that headteachers in small rural primaries see school-community links as a key part of their role (Ibid; Bagley and Hillyard, 2019). This was so much so for the schools in Bell and Sigsworth's (1992, pg.67) study that their very purpose (and thus the education they provided) was directed towards the "[making of] community" through reciprocal support by and for the school and its volunteers. One volunteer in Bell and Sigsworth's (1992, pg.30) study highlighted a very child-centred view of educational purpose here – the children "are the future" and so there was a communal obligation felt towards the next generation, one that could be realised through volunteering with and for the children. This was not a one-way relationship either but rather involved the children themselves being an active part of their communities, bringing a variety of benefits to themselves and to others (Ibid). Such a broad conceptualisation of education goes well beyond narrow qualification purposes through simply transmitting the curriculum, thoroughly encompasses socialisation for citizenship beyond the confines of the school and even makes progress towards subjectification by engaging children meaningfully in the real local contexts of their lives.

Considering the above literature, it may be tempting to attribute the increase in voluntary activity in small schools (Body et al, 2017) to their being particularly well-placed to draw on social capital embedded in their local communities and are working from a base of already loyal local support. Indeed, rural policy in England is keen to promote this view (CRC, 2010; Hargreaves, 2009), drawing on the kind of romantic pastoralism Murdoch et al (2003) argue is a dominating narrative in how England's countryside is perceived. Yet, research has highlighted that this 'rural idyll' is often misconceived (Kvalsund and Hargreaves, 2009), indeed, it is even a myth (Bagley and Hillyard, 2011; Hargreaves et al, 2009; Walker, 2010). Where voluntary support is common it is now far from 'idyllic' as it is increasingly used to deliver core educational activities, rather than the extra-curricular 'luxuries' it used to provide (Body, 2017; Body et al, 2017; Body and Hogg, 2018; Body, 2020) or for occasional anti-closure campaigns, rather than a consistent practice of ongoing support (Bagley and Hillyard, 2014; Hargreaves et al, 2009).

Furthermore, Bagley and Hillyard's (2011; 2014; 2015; 2019; Hillyard and Bagley, 2013; 2015) extensive 2-year ethnographic study in two contrasting rural villages (one a previous agricultural and farming village in South England and the other a previous mining village in the North-East) emphasises that the local contexts in which small rural schools exist vary greatly in England's "highly differentiated countryside" (Bagley and Hillyard, 2014, pg.63; Murdoch et al, 2003). Drawing heavily on Bourdieu's theory and concepts throughout their work, they argue that a stable community 'core' from which social capital can be expected to flourish is difficult to promote in village schools where there is a mix of long-standing working-class residents and middle-class newcomers (Bagley and Hillyard, 2014; 2019; Hillyard, 2015), and where the children are increasingly being drawn from outside the local community (Moser, 2004; 2005; Walker, 2010) thus changing schools' demographic profiles and effecting its sense of 'belonging' to the village in which it is located (Corbett, 2014; 2015; Hillyard and Bagley, 2015; Hillyard, 2020a; 2020b). They also found that the contextual history of school-community relationships continued to either obstruct or facilitate efforts to promote close engagement by rural headteachers (Bagley and Hillyard, 2019). Moreover, demands on headteacher's time, and professional pressures associated with managing a small rural school in the current policy context focused on education's qualification function made it difficult for the promotion of social capital and maintenance of beneficial connections to occur (Ibid). Consequently, schools in rural areas have access to different levels and types of voluntary activity (and social capital) and realising the skilled, supportive communities envisioned by government policy may not be a realistic option for many. Bagley and Hillyard's ethnography fills an important gap in our qualitative understanding of the perceptions of and experiences in rural village schools and their communities, especially in the context of marketisation and the Big Society. However, an explicit focus on the nature, role, and experience of voluntary activity in these schools is still absent. If increases in voluntary activity become an important means through which small rural primaries can continue to deliver education (Body and Hogg, 2018), understanding how this happens in practice, and the experiences and consequences for those involved, is vital.

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed a range of literature on the purposes of education, parental involvement in education, stigma, the sociology of work, boundaries and voluntary activity, voluntary activity for schools and voluntary activity for small rural primary schools. Drawing on this literature, the

conceptual and theoretical stance that underpins this thesis is a combination of theories of educational purpose, the TSOL framework (Glucksmann, 1995; 2005; Taylor, 2004; Williams, 2011a; 2011b), theories of boundaries and stigmatisation (Lamont and Pierson, 2019) and understandings of rurality (Halfacree, 2009b; Corbett, 2014; 2015) which work in synergy with each other. The TSOL conceptual framework advocates a wide definition of work, which fits with the understanding that education has a wide variety of purposes which are addressed through a variety of different socio-economic modes. The TSOL also focuses on boundaries, which works in synergy with Lamont and Pierson's (2019) argument that stigma arises from recognition gaps surrounding boundaries between individuals and groups. The concept of territorial stigmatisation (Wacquant, 2008; Wacquant et al, 2014) links back to the recognition and construction of spatial boundaries and their social consequences, especially inequality. Understandings of rurality are also key here, especially in how it is represented and performed (Halfacree, 2009b) but also in how differences between different geographical contexts contribute to and are influenced by social relationships (Corbett, 2014; 2015) and the role voluntary activity has to play in this (Williams, 2002a). And finally, the TSOL encourages us to look at changes over time within and between spheres of activity, thus helping to underpin a temporal approach which recognises social change in (inter)relationships of work and how the different levels of society (micro-, meso- and macro-) influence each other. The findings and contributions of this thesis will show that much more understanding is gained from a combination of conceptual and theoretical understandings than any one theoretical or conceptual framework would allow.

Throughout this thesis, voluntary activity is conceptualised as part of the TSOL which enables educational purposes to be achieved, but with a range of positive and negative consequences. For schools, voluntary activity overlaps with parental involvement but also encompasses wider family and community members, as well as the children themselves. And yet some parents are stigmatised, creating barriers to involvement and perpetuating inequalities. For small rural primaries in particular, challenges and opportunities related to school size and location have dominated the literature. However, since the 1980s, reviews of the literature on small rural schools (Dowling, 2009; Hargreaves et al, 2009; Hargreaves, 2009; Hargreaves, 2017; Kvalsund and Hargreaves, 2009) conclude that too many studies in Britain have been "macro-scale quantitative studies" with a policy-driven focus (Hargreaves, 2017, pg.233) neglecting the everyday local practices and experiences of the people involved in small rural schools (Kvalsund and Hargreaves, 2009). Even studies focused on small rural school-community relationships (including Bagley and Hillyard's ethnography) fail to make the role and experience of voluntary activity explicit, in both its positive and problematic outcomes. My research fills this gap in knowledge through an ethnographic exploration of the nature and practices of voluntary activity in two small rural primary schools of differing levels of deprivation in Southeast England. The next chapter details my methodology; how I went about conducting this study to answer my research questions.

Chapter 4: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter presents the development of my ethnographic methodology in this thesis. Whilst I introduced my research sites in previous chapters, this chapter details how my research was conceptualised and carried out in practice. The subsections that follow are presented in chronological order, but various parts of the research design and practice evolved simultaneously and inevitably informed other stages, when and how they were carried out. These complexities are explored throughout each section where relevant. The chapter begins with a discussion of my qualitative approach, including the justification for adopting ethnography and reflections on how I 'researched the familiar'. Following this, I detail my ethical practices. Ethics are, however, referred to throughout the thesis due to their central importance to my research from conceptualisation to write-up, dissemination and ongoing relationships with the field and participants. From here I explore (re-)entering the field of Applegood and Oakington schools as a volunteer researcher. I justify the selection of these schools, discuss access and sampling interviewees within school communities. The fourth section of this chapter explores how I deployed my ethnographic methods in the field. I explain how I planned to carry out the research, how the methods worked in practice, dilemmas I encountered, and how I overcame them to ensure my research was both ethical and meaningful to produce new knowledge. I finally explore the processes and emotions involved in leaving the field, and how I analysed and wrote up my findings (presented in Chapters 5-7). I conclude with a summary of my methodological decision-making, and a reflection on my (ongoing) relationship to the research field and participants.

Qualitative Approach

Voluntary activity is notoriously difficult to gauge through quantitative methods such as surveys and questionnaires because people struggle to (consistently) define activities as voluntary and so frequently do not recognise their own voluntary activity, or that of others (Rochester et al, 2009). Moreover, whilst quantitative analysis shows that small schools attract the highest levels of voluntary activity (Body, 2020), what happens in practice or the experiences of those involved remains unexplored in the literature, especially through an appreciation of gender and capital, and the views of children. To address the questions left unanswered and issues unexplored requires a qualitative approach (Gillham, 2000) which allows engagement in a search for meanings, gives participants the opportunity to discuss their subjective experiences and beliefs, and, in the case of my research, gave me the chance to gain an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the practices and relationships in the specific contexts and cultures of small rural primaries and their communities.

Ethnography

The specific qualitative approach I adopted in this research was an ethnography of two small rural primary schools of differing levels of deprivation. Ethnography aims to understand in-depth the beliefs, conventions, social dynamics and culture of a particular context or specific community of people through extended immersion and close observation (Atkinson, 2015). Ethnography is

particularly suited to educational research (Mills and Morton, 2013; Wellington, 2015) because immersion gives a deep understanding of the routine actions, interactions, and patterns of social life surrounding schools, especially through participating in these contexts, which is difficult to achieve with any other qualitative method. Ethnography is also valuable for exploring voluntary activity understood through the lens of the Total Social Organisation of Labour (TSOL) (see Chapter 3) as it enables the access, observation, and forms of understanding necessary to consider work in all its forms, how it is organised, how activities relate to and are embedded within one another and the implications of these interdependencies on society, social groups, and individuals. It also appreciates the context-dependent nature of voluntary activity within the wider TSOL (Williams, 2011a; 2011b) of small rural primaries. Extended periods in each school enabled me to compare between them, drawing out the significance of the differences or similarities and then seeking to understand them (Hillyard, 2020), thus helping me to answer my research questions.

In addition, the time-span of ethnography allowed me to build (on) rapport with research participants (Cunliffe and Karunanayake, 2013) (some I already knew before the research began). Rapport is vital in any qualitative research, not just to gain access to the site or to encourage co-operation once this access is granted (Reeves, 2010), but also (and especially in the case of ethnography) to ensure ongoing ethical practice. Any research, especially qualitative, effects the lives of participants in some way, and these relationships need to be taken care of by the researcher (Calder, 2020). Relationships were central to my research (and indeed to voluntary activity itself) and are reflected on throughout, not only this chapter, but my entire thesis.

The specific ethnographic approach I adopted was that of ‘volunteer ethnographer’ (Garthwaite, 2015). I became a volunteer at Applegood and Oakington throughout the duration of my ethnography to access and gain first-hand experience of the issues I aimed to understand at the deeper level required in ethnographic research (Ibid; Collins and Gallinat, 2013). As well as benefitting the schools as an additional human resource, becoming a volunteer involved in the daily routines and practices of the schools allowed me to build (on) rapport with other volunteers, staff, children, and parents/carers, improving my ability to answer my research questions and care for the relationships I built. Being a volunteer *researching* voluntary activity also gave me the unique opportunity to reflect on my own experience *as a volunteer* which was invaluable in identifying and exploring emerging themes and how I was experiencing them, and whether and why this was different or similar to other volunteers. Consequently, my own autoethnographic accounts and reflexive autobiographical writing appear throughout my empirical findings chapters. My role as volunteer ethnographer thus contributed significantly to my understanding of the field and subject of study, as well as giving me access to both. However, I also recognise that my voluntary role was not neutral. In different contexts and with different people, my status as a volunteer and a researcher (ethnographer) required careful negotiation and explanation as to my presence and motivations. Indeed, uncertainties around my positionality may well have prevented me from accessing certain environments, conversations or individual opinions and understandings (Pole and Hillyard, 2016). This too required critical consideration of the impacts on knowledge production (the findings and their implications and contributions) and what I could claim to have understood from my fieldsites through my positionality as volunteer ethnographer.

O’Reilly (2009, pg.3) describes ethnography as a ‘family of methods’ used in direct and sustained contact with individuals and groups “within the context of their daily lives (and cultures), watching

what happens, listening to what is said, and asking questions". Indeed, ethnography enabled me to undertake multiple methods including observations, interviews, autoethnography, documentary analysis and research with children as and when they were the most appropriate to answer a research question, investigate a particular issue or engage with certain groups. Again, this allowed me to both address my research questions through understanding the perspectives of those in the school communities and participating in their activities, and ensured ethical practice in what method I used, how I deployed it, and with whom. Ethnography is also flexible, which enabled me to adjust my approach based on what I found, who I spoke to, the changing day-to-day rhythms of the field, and ethical considerations made throughout the research process.

In addition, the ability to use different methods allowed me to access more facets of an issue than achievable with a single method (Mason, 2018). For example, whilst I was unable to attend governors' meetings in-person to observe (due to the confidential nature of such meetings), I interviewed the governors and asked non-governors about their understanding of governance. Self-reported data gained from interviews (inevitably influenced by the social interaction created within that specific interview context) (Marvasti and Tanner, 2020) could also be helpfully supplemented by my own observations and analysis of related documents. Alternatively, what I observed in the field could be explained and explored in both informal field conversations and more formal semi-structured interviews (Ibid), improving my understanding of voluntary activity from the perspective of individual participants and their experiences. Ethnography gave me the time and space to be able to do this.

Ethnography is an inevitably time-consuming and labour-intensive process (Atkinson, 2015; Fine and Hancock, 2017). Indeed, I spent up to three days a week in each school over two 7-month periods (14 months in total), with school holidays and the gap between in-school phases being taken up with interviews, transcriptions, documentary analysis and early coding, analysis, and writing (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1997). However, as a PhD student I was in the fortunate position to dedicate an extended period to my research (Fine and Hancock, 2017; Hammersley, 2018). And, as outlined above, I believe extended immersion was crucial to meaningfully understanding my subject of study, which is what made ethnography an attractive approach to begin with (despite the intensity of the fieldwork). Extended fieldwork also helped to prevent an ahistorical perspective developing (Hammersley, 2005) as I was able to explore and consider the local history of the schools and their communities (including short-term and long-term patterns of change) and the biographies of participants when collecting and analysing data and presenting my findings.

Due to the inevitable role played by relationships in the field, ethnography is also an emotionally intensive approach (Mills and Morton, 2013; DeLuca and Maddox, 2016). I was committed to the relationships developed in the field and aware that ethical dilemmas were likely to arise throughout the research. Where they did, I have highlighted them and given a full account of their impact on my research practice and findings. Indeed, for me, many relationships in the field existed before my research began and they (and those initiated in the field) will exist long after. I was already emotionally invested in these schools, which leads to another (perhaps the fundamental) criticism of ethnography; cultural (observer) bias. Because I was researching the familiar, I have ensured to establish my framework of understanding, commitments and positionality from the beginning, reflected on their implications throughout the research, justified decisions made and critically confronted the data (Hammersley, 1990; Brewer, 1994). Hammersley (1990) argues that this explicitness is necessary if readers are to be able to accurately judge the academic rigour of ethnographic work.

Whilst researching the familiar undoubtedly had its benefits in terms of accessing and understanding my field sites (Hockey, 1993), I sought to improve the rigour of my analysis by regularly reminding myself of my researcher role and engaging in efforts to ‘keep the familiar strange’ by regularly questioning and critiquing everyday practices (Mills and Morton, 2013; Hockey, 1993; Brewer, 1994). By collecting data from a range of sources and individuals with different perspectives and experiences (Hammersley, 1992; 2005), I hoped to enhance the validity of my ethnography by ensuring any reader would not solely be relying on my interpretation of the field (through fieldnotes or autoethnographic accounts) or only the accounts of others, but a balance of both (Hammersley, 2018). I also aimed to present a range of perspectives in all their complexity and to write in a reflexive way so that any reader could clearly follow the construction of my arguments and how conclusions were reached (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1997; Hammersley, 1990; Brewer, 1994) and thereby judge for themselves the integrity and validity of my research practice and findings.

Whilst my fieldwork was carried out in two specific small rural school contexts, the findings have relevance and can contribute to our understanding of issues in their wider context, as well as providing theoretical and conceptual insight. I sought to uncover how voluntary activity happens, is experienced and is different in and between different school contexts. It is the context-specific nature of these schools and their communities which made them worthy of study. Hammersley (2005) argues that ethnographers too often fail to establish how the data in the setting studied relate to the larger population. I have sought to establish this relatedness by detailing the background of the schools I have studied in relation to the policy context and to the literature on voluntary activity and justifying the importance of this research focus (in terms of both setting and topic) (Brewer, 1994). Furthermore, when talking to others about my research throughout (Woodward, 2020), I found that many of the themes I was finding were not only relatable to various others (both with and without small rural experience) in primary schools, but they were able to explain and make sense of wider trends and changes in voluntary activity in the education system more widely. By physically detaching myself from the schools and their day-to-day goings on whilst completing the final analysis and write-up of my research (see ‘Leaving the Field’ below), I aimed to achieve analytical distance to faithfully and reflexively convey the findings that had arisen from my ethnographic work in two specific schools and, connect them to wider debates in literature, policy, and practice (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1997; Hammersley, 1990). This tension between trying to understand people’s perspectives from the inside whilst also viewing them and their behaviour more distantly (and in ways they may not expect) is what Hammersley (2005) sees as the very essence of ethnography. By engaging with this dynamism, ethnography as both a method and methodology (Brewer, 1994) can contribute to a wider understanding of voluntary activity beyond the bounds of the individual field sites studied (in this case, two small rural primary schools).

In summary, I contend an ethnographic approach was the best way for me to explore voluntary activity in these small rural primary schools. It gave me the time, relationships, and methods needed to explore voluntary activity meaningfully and ethically in these two small rural primary schools, and my findings and conclusions have much to contribute to small rural primaries themselves, but also the wider academic and policy field concerned with voluntary activity (and its intersections with other forms of labour, gender, stigma and inequalities) in primary education.

Researching the Familiar

Examining a culture with which one is familiar is a long sociological tradition (Hockey, 1993). Having worked (paid and unpaid) in and attended both small rural primary schools I researched in (and living only a 3-minute walk from Oakington), I was uniquely situated to access, empathise, ask relevant questions of relevant people, and understand the daily routines and practices that occur within and surrounding these schools and their voluntary activity. I was researching the familiar. Whilst this brought huge benefits to my research, I also appreciated that my complex relationships with these schools necessitated a constant and ongoing reflection of the impact my positionality may have on the research (Cunliffe and Karunanayake, 2013; Hockey, 1993; Marvasti and Tanner, 2020) as well as careful consideration of who I was likely to encounter throughout the research, the nature and history of my relationship with them, and how I would respond to them in the field (Hockey, 1993). I held multiple roles and identities within these school communities and my positionality was different between the two schools. At Applegood, I was an ex-pupil and now adult volunteer researcher. At Oakington, I was an ex-pupil and ex-staff member and now a volunteer researcher. Initial volunteering at Applegood before data collection began was crucial for me to (de-)familiarise myself with the school (by which I mean differentiate how it was now to how I remembered it as a child) and get to know its staff and pupils. At Oakington, I already had familiarity with the school, staff, and children due to previously working there. However, as one Reception child succinctly worded it in July 2023, I now had “two works” (by which she meant my university-based work, and my ‘work’ in her school). Whilst I still looked and behaved like a TA (especially to the children), I was no longer in school every day, and my research work took place both within and outside school. I thus had to be alert to and manage (the perception of) my multiple roles and identities and their impact on my research findings (this was particularly revealing for how children understood ‘volunteers’, for example) and ethics (regularly ensuring people knew I was researching) throughout (Hockey, 1993).

It became apparent early in my research at Applegood that my age was a key factor in my relationships within the schools. I was closer in age to some of the children in these schools than the staff. Whilst I believe this enabled me to empathise with (especially the older) children, different adults treated me differently. Some of the adults in these schools had known me when I was a child in these schools and so had those memories of me, alongside my now adult presence in their workplaces. This felt slightly different in Oakington where I had worked as a TA because staff there already knew me in that capacity, compared to the staff at Applegood who were adjusting to my presence throughout my initial volunteering and research. For many of the adults in this research (whether they knew me before or not), I felt I had to do a lot of invisible ‘boundary work’, either to prove to them I was ‘capable’ of being in the classroom alongside them, or to differentiate my now researcher role from my previous TA role (Ibid). There were particular staff I found it very difficult to connect with and even experienced micro-aggressions from (I reflect more on this in Chapter 5).

LeGallais’ (2008) discussion of *degrees* of insiderness and outsiderness was useful in helping me to reflect on these relationships and their impact on my research. She described a reflection tool whereby she considered her attributes, attitudes, and identity in relation to that of her participants in a field site where she considered herself an insider, and in another where she considered herself an outsider. She found that, depending on what factor she looked at (gender, family background, status in the organisation, attitude to IT), she could relate to or was dissimilar from both her insiders and outsiders to different degrees and her insider or outsider positioning changed over time (Ibid). I

considered myself an insider at Oakington, but more of an outsider at Applegood. As discussed above, age was a key dividing factor, as was my background and status in each school (trusted former TA at Oakington and new volunteer at Applegood). In both schools I was rarely recognised by parents/carers as a volunteer (many saw me as a TA). Whilst the staff knew I was a volunteer, at Oakington I felt more of a necessity (helpful but taken-for-granted), whilst at Applegood I felt more of a scheduled extra (even sometimes a nuisance). However, this depended on the space in which I was helping, who I was helping and changed over the course of data collection. At Applegood, as I became a more regular face around the school, I became more accepted and trusted by staff – more of an insider. At Oakington, however, it became clear to staff as my research progressed that I was no longer a TA in the same way as them (I recall a difficult discussion with Samira over the unfair difference in salaries between a TA and a funded doctoral student, for example) – I became more of an outsider (DeLuca and Maddox, 2016). Reflecting on my positioning in this way impacted on both my research practice (placing myself in classrooms at Applegood where I was of least nuisance and most help, for example) and my research findings (developing my understanding of how volunteers were perceived and used differently in each school and why). Reflexivity was thus a necessary and valuable practice throughout my ethnographic research.

As well as reflecting on how my positionality impacted the research, I also had to carefully manage myself throughout the research (Garthwaite, 2015). Due to my physical proximity to Oakington in particular, the research often encroached on both my personal time and spaces (I had to carefully consider, for example, when it would be ‘safe’ to walk my dog in my pyjamas so that I would not be seen by research participants!) Some relationships in the field also pre-existed (and exist after) my research, and some participants are close to members of my own family too. The work of Günel et al (2020) on developing “a new methodological and theoretical approach to ethnography”, called ‘patchwork ethnography’ was eye-opening in this regard. They argue that, especially after the pandemic, research needs to accommodate “recombination’s of ‘home’ and ‘field’”, the complexity of researchers lives (and multiple commitments) which shape knowledge production and the lives (and commitments) of and relationships with research subjects” (Ibid). My research definitely involved a (re-)combination of home and field for me, and I felt I had multiple commitments to research participants and my relationships with them. I had to be very careful when discussing my research with family, emphasising how my day had gone, rather than discussing the research participants individually to make them less identifiable. I also carefully considered how to talk about findings pertinent to specific individuals who, even though they are anonymised, would nevertheless be identifiable within the school contexts (Hockey, 1993). They had been made aware of this beforehand, but I also conducted follow-up visits (see ‘Leaving the Field’ below for further discussion) to gain their feedback on my presentation of their stories (in Chapter 7) as I felt committed to honouring the trust they had given me. I also discussed with the executive head what she wanted the schools to ‘get out of’ the research so I could understand how my research could positively impact them directly, as well as having a wider contribution to the field. Thus, carefully managing the multiple commitments I felt to my participants through reflection and subsequent research practice was key to my ethical approach.

In addition, my membership of the village community of Oakington (and physical proximity) meant that I was often asked to be involved in voluntary activities for the school (Ibid). This included delivering invites to locals for school events, tracking down email addresses from my contacts for the

school to communicate with key groups in the village, feeding the school guineapigs at weekends, sharing my knowledge on PTAs with Oakington staff, and even attending a parish council meeting on behalf of the school. I discussed the latter two with my supervisors where we agreed that so long as I did not perform an active role in setting up Oakington's PTA and the parish council meeting attended was a 'one-off' occasion, I could ethically support the school without compromising the integrity of my research. I also took this opportunity to discuss my research with residents, getting an idea for their views on the school, which was directly helpful to my own research, as well as the schools' commitment to (re-)building its relationship with locals (which I also personally care about). Thus, these instances involving my own voluntary activity were beneficial for my research in multiple ways; giving me access to (the views of) local community groups, and an understanding of what certain volunteers (such as those with connections and insider status) (Ibid) might be asked to do and why (see Chapter 6). Many of these activities took place outside of school premises and times, involving "working with rather than against... constraints, partial knowledge, and diverse commitments" and sometimes fragmentary data collection across multiple sites and media, which provided me with a rich and insightful ethnography (Günel et al, 2020) drawing on my own unique relationships and experiences in the field.

Indeed, when researching the familiar, autoethnography was a key part of my ethnographic approach. My position as a volunteer ethnographer provided an autoethnographic account of the experience of being a volunteer in these different contexts and thus a valuable data source for reflection and analysis (Hockey, 1993; Garthwaite, 2015; Gannon, 2020). As one component of my wider ethnography, my autoethnography focused on my *own* experience, feelings, attitudes, and perceptions (as distinct from fieldnotes which have other people as the central focus) as a volunteer in Applegood and Oakington, thus investigating the 'autobiography' of my research questions (Ibid). Autoethnography provided helpful insights and angles on voluntary activity and, when used with other sources helped to "enrich and complexify" the picture of voluntary activity I was able to access, understand and communicate (Ibid, pg.324). Autoethnography also provided a space "for excess and escape" from research demands (Ibid, pg.325). It enabled me to record and later explore my own feelings and emotions as they arose, and reflections made throughout the research (Mills and Morton, 2013). This included how I felt about certain participants, and how I perceived they felt about me, how the schools felt different from what I remembered or expected, and my own insecurities and uncertainties about my positionality and research practices in the field (Sampson et al, 2008). Thus, autoethnography acted as a method of self-care, an ethical practice, a method to generate new questions and topics and a data source in itself.

It should be stated here, however, that there are ongoing debates within the methodological literature on the definitions and status of autoethnography. For example, Delamont (2009, pg.58) defines autoethnography as the self-obsessed introspection of the researcher with no analytical mileage, whereas ethnography analyses social settings to which the researcher has access and is acutely aware of their interrelationships role in and impact on fieldwork. Key to this important discussion is the concept and practice of reflexivity (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1997). One can engage in reflexive autobiographical writing, where the researcher's reflections are followed by reflexive analytical accounts which "open up academic issues which are a legitimate focus for social science" (Delamont, 2009, pg.57). Indeed, such writing is "central to the progress of ethnography" (Ibid, pg.51). Thus, when I draw on my autoethnographic accounts in this thesis, these are written as reflexive autobiography

where I connect my experience as a volunteer to my research questions and focus on analysing the issues these open up for social science. For example, in Chapter 5 below where I discuss my boundaries within the two schools, I reflect on my own introspective thoughts and feelings in an encounter with Sue, a TA. However, I then seek to go beyond this by analysing what this encounter revealed in terms of answering my research questions and connecting to the literature. Thus, I seek to engage in reflexive autobiographical writing beyond reflection to focus on legitimate social science issues surrounding my research topic of voluntary activity. The focus of this thesis is not me as the ethnographer, but the nature, experiences and practices of voluntary activity within and between two different school communities. But by thinking, analysing and writing reflexively about my autoethnographic experience of the research topic, I can develop and contribute a greater understanding of the social science issues that surround it.

Ethics

Ethics is an ongoing process which began at the very first stage at which this study was conceptualised and continued to affect every part of the research through to write-up and future presentation and publication. Ethics are both a complex and persistent part of qualitative research (Mills and Morton, 2013) and so interpretation of ethical principles in the real-life contexts and situations with which I was presented were a key part of my ethnography. Ethical principles often interacted with (data) quality considerations and practical constraints throughout the research process (Webster et al, 2014). Reflections on these issues and the decisions made are discussed in more depth in the sections that follow but are also summarised here.

This research followed the guidelines and principles for ethical research as detailed in the ESRC Research Ethics Framework and the British Educational Research Association. I gained ethical approval for my research through my School ethics approval committee at the University of Kent. In addition to following 'regulatory' ethical guidance, my research ethics also focused on 'relationships' and being 'reflective' (what Calder (2020) refers to as the three R's of ethics). Qualitative research creates and depends upon relationships, and I ensured that everyone in my research was comfortable with their involvement and my presence, and that I considered any power dynamics at play and the contexts in which relationships were built and played out (Ibid). In addition, being reflective involved me clearly stating how I interpreted ethical rules and regulations and how I then enacted my ethical principles in practice (Ibid).

The considerations made in this ethics process were communicated to my research participants verbally through informal conversations, and through introductory emails and documentation before my research took place. Such considerations included clearly stating what the research would involve, emphasising that participation was voluntary, and that participants could withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and assuring them that all responses would be anonymised for confidentiality and recorded and stored securely throughout the research. I made it clear to the schools and participants that I was a researcher; this was not covert research, and I provided my contact information should they wish to know more about various aspects of the research process going forward. I was also at the schools daily before and throughout the research for people to talk to me in-person should they wish to. Communicating these considerations both verbally and through documentation helped me ensure informed consent before my research began (Webster et al, 2014).

Additional information sheets for interviews were provided, along with consent forms to be signed before any interviews took place (Marvastri and Tanner, 2020).

Initial meetings were undertaken with key senior staff members and the chair of governors within the schools before the research took place, to explain what my research would involve, and to give them the opportunity to ask any questions they may have before agreeing (or declining) to be involved. This also gave the heads of school, executive head and chair of governors the opportunity to suggest any ethical and practical considerations they wanted me to make before the research began so that they were comfortable with my practices, trusted me to act ethically and made my presence as useful and least disruptive for the day-to-day running of the schools as possible (see 'Access' below for further discussion). School staff are extremely busy, and I did not want to add unnecessarily to their workload (Webster et al, 2014). Gaining their input and ideas about how the research and my presence would work in their schools at the earliest opportunity limited this. I also ensured my research participants were kept fully informed about the progress of my research throughout. Indeed, my ethical considerations were part of an ongoing process of ethical research which I reflected on throughout the study and communicated to participants either verbally or in written form at each stage (Ibid).

Whilst I anonymised all schools and individual participants, there is the potential that the schools will nevertheless be identifiable by their characteristics and geography, especially as there are only a certain number of small schools in the Southeast. I made this possibility clear to the schools to ensure they were aware of this before agreeing to be part of my research. Moreover, whilst I did not show any transcripts to participants throughout the research, if reading the final PhD text, there is the possibility that the various research participants will be able to identify each other within the school contexts (Ibid). This could raise potential conflicts where negative views are expressed and harm relationships within the school. To ensure I caused no harm, I discussed the possibility of within-school identifiability with each participant, especially when conducting interviews and recording their responses and excluded any data that participants wished to withdraw. For certain controversial comments, I did not attribute them to a specific individual at all to reduce the risk of identifiability.

There was also the ongoing pandemic situation to consider. Having worked in schools throughout the COVID-19 pandemic (early 2020s) I was fully aware of the safety measures, guidance and procedures in place and was able to understand and comply with them and, if necessary, adapt the practicalities of data collection accordingly.

Children's Participation

I followed all due processes relating to the involvement of children in my research. From my job as a TA, I already had the DBS check necessary for being in schools and had read and was familiar with federation policies and procedures around the safeguarding and protection of children. I adhered to these first and foremost throughout my time in the schools. I sought permission from the schools and parents/carers for the children to be involved in my research (Wellington, 2015). I also created child-friendly information sheets (Clark and Moss, 2011) to explain my presence and my research (detailing the methods I intended to use to engage the children in the research and all ethical considerations made). These were sent to parents/carers and displayed around the schools throughout the data collection phases (see Figure 5).

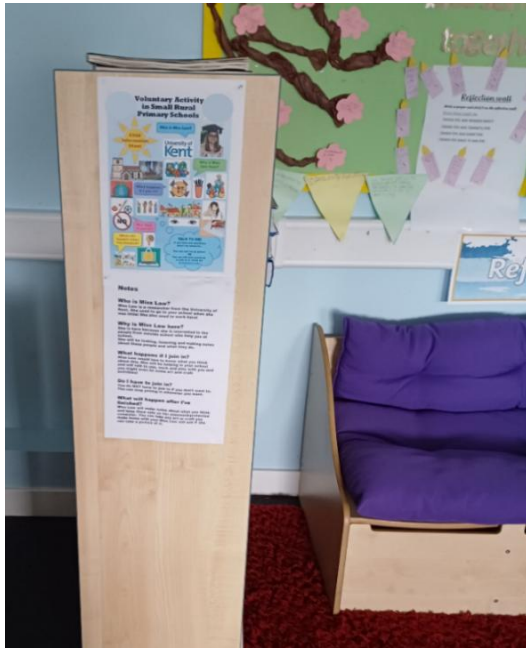


Figure 5 - My child-friendly Information Sheets displayed in an Oakington classroom

To respect children's voices and ensure my research was conducted 'with' them (as opposed to 'on' them) (Lundy et al, 2011; Bradbury-Jones and Taylor, 2015), I introduced the research in child-friendly terms to the children in their classrooms at the beginning of each data collection phase, using my child-friendly information sheets (aware that their parents/carers may not have shown them or explained them), and gave them the opportunity to ask me questions about the research. I also reassured the children that they did not have to help if they did not want to (Ibid). This ensured the children themselves had a say in their participation (Ibid). At the very minimum these processes ensured that my research caused no harm to the children involved. However, I also wanted my research to be a positive experience with the children. I emphasised the importance of their views and their role in the research (Clark and Moss, 2011; Lundy et al, 2011). This was vital

not only because, in their experience at school, children have invaluable perspectives on and insights into voluntary activity (which could also reveal important knowledge about what children are learning from this and what is being normalised in their schools) but also because these children are the focus of (and indeed, are involved in) much voluntary activity in their school communities and, as such, have a vested interest in the outcomes of my research and deserve to have their opinions heard (Clark and Moss, 2011; Lundy et al, 2011). Any documents produced by children throughout the research were photographed (with their permission) for later analysis so that the children could keep the originals (Clark and Moss, 2011; Breathnach et al, 2018). Further details on how my research with children happened 'in the field' are discussed later in this chapter.

A key ethical dilemma for me was the realisation that the duality of my role as a researcher and volunteer was often only apparent to me (DeLuca and Maddox, 2016). As the research progressed, I was aware that many participants thought and engaged with me as if I were another TA and had all but forgotten about my research. Even in interviews where participants had read my information sheet and signed a consent form, they were still confused about the purpose and background of my study (Lorna thought it was a research project as part of a teaching qualification, for example). Whilst this was interesting from a research point of view (see Chapter 5), it was important to regularly remind participants of my research role. Seeking signatures for parent/carers and child consent forms were good opportunities to remind parents/carers and their children of my research and ensure they were giving informed consent. I also engaged regularly in conversations with staff about my research to remind them I was collecting data through my volunteer (TA) role. I formally ended the data collection in each school (see 'Leaving the Field' below), informing the staff and children I would be going away to write-up my research. I also sent a research poster to all participants four months after leaving the field to visually communicate how my research was coming along, and to ensure they did not forget about my study or their role in it (Ibid).

Data Storage

Ethnographic research inevitably results in vast amounts of data. This included observation fieldnotes (recorded in my notebook and/or password-protected journaling app and later typed up in full) (Carspecken, 1996; Mills and Morton, 2013), autoethnographic reflections, “ideas and hunches” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1997, pg.205) (recorded in my journaling app in real-time), interview audio (recorded on my password-protected phone or via the secure ‘record’ features in video-conferencing software Microsoft Teams) and transcripts, documents, screenshots of social media, field photographs, photos of children’s artwork, and art group observation notes (recorded in my notebook and later typed up in full). For both practical and ethical reasons, it was vital that these were organised effectively and stored securely. I used the NVivo software (on my password-protected laptop) to organise, manage and store my data, as well as aid my analysis and writing by having all data types in audio, written or visual format in one place. All interview recordings were deleted from my phone and Teams once they had been transferred to NVivo. All physical documents and my laptop were stored in a locked room.

(Re-)Entering the Field

Selecting the Schools

I selected two small rural primary schools with differing levels of deprivation within (and around) which I based my ethnography of voluntary activity. The rationale for selecting these *types* of schools to study were that small primary schools are the most likely to attract voluntary activity (Body et al, 2017) and these schools are most likely to be rural (Kvalsund and Hargreaves, 2009). In addition, whilst small rural schools have received attention in the literature, the voluntary activity occurring for them is a neglected (and taken-for-granted) subject in previous studies. Small rural primary schools therefore represent an important and relevant environment in which to study voluntary activity in-depth. I chose to look at schools with differing levels of deprivation because Body and Hogg (2018) identified significant differences in voluntary activity depending on the level of deprivation of the area in which schools are located. However, they did not find out what this voluntary activity ‘looks like’ or the experiences of those involved day-to-day and the impact this has ‘on the ground’. I hoped to address these gaps with my ethnography.

My research adopted the following criteria:

- Small is defined as less than 100 students.
- Rural is defined based on schools’ inclusion on the DfE’s list of local authority maintained rural primary schools.
- Levels of deprivation is identified using the index of multiple deprivation (IMD) ranking of the school and its catchment area postcodes combined with school-level data on the percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM).

Whilst I had these criteria in mind, I also needed to consider practical and logistical issues of researching in and around the schools I selected. Access to schools can be notoriously difficult (Mills and Morton, 2013) and permission to access and research in these schools was more likely to be granted than in schools where I had pre-existing levels of trust and rapport, rather than those where I was a complete stranger. In addition, the schools needed to be close enough to me that I could travel

to them daily in a reasonable time. Applegood and Oakington were both interesting and appropriate schools in which to base my research as they met many of the selection criteria (see Appendix 1), were physically close to me, and I had both personal and professional contacts with these schools who could act as gatekeepers (Wanat, 2008) and support my access and permission to conduct my research.

One point of contention with my selection criteria is that the IMD ranking of a postcode does not always reflect the individual circumstances of the families living in those postcodes. There can be very affluent families living next door to relatively deprived ones (Murdoch et al, 2003). In addition, schools can have mixed intakes and draw pupils from further afield than their local catchment postcodes (Walker, 2010). However, once I accessed the schools, I was able to improve the 'picture' of their 'level of deprivation' based on their own data and knowledge of the circumstances of the families and communities they serve. This formed a more accurate basis on which to draw conclusions on the schools and their communities' deprivation levels. Thus, the selection of Applegood and Oakington was a carefully balanced compromise between access and practical considerations *and* how accurately the schools fit the selection criteria to provide meaningful data for analysis in the context of the literature and my research questions.

Access

When I first asked to research in these schools, I was a TA at Oakington. As a federation both schools have the same governing body and executive headteacher which had the advantages of providing a perspective on both schools based on their knowledge and experiences and providing a single point of contact for permission to access and base my research on both schools. I had informal discussions with Richard [then Federation Head] and Katherine [then Oakington Head] about my research in May 2021 and an official meeting in September 2021. They were worried about my research adding to staff workload, to which I assured them that my approach meant I would be doing most of the work, and that I would only ask staff for interview time, but I would emphasise that they would not be pressured or required to interview. Richard also asked what the schools were going to get out of my research. I explained that I was planning to be in the schools up to three days a week for a 7-month period as a volunteer to conduct my research (thus also helping reduce staff workload). I also explained that my research proposal would be going through an ethics review process prior to any data collection taking place. Reassured, they agreed to my research taking place across the federation (subject to ethical approval). In March 2022 I had an official meeting with Crystelle [Applegood Head] and Katherine [by then Federation Head] to finalise the details of my research. I also had a meeting with Brendan, the chair of governors in March 2022 to address his concerns about my research. These were mainly to do with the fact that he thought I would not find much to write about and that I may not find what I expected to find. I explained my research approach meant I did not have any specific hypotheses and aimed to be guided by what I did find. After addressing his concerns and explaining the ethical procedures I had undertaken, he was also happy for my research to take place.

As well as seeking approval from senior leadership, I sent emails (via school offices) to staff and parents/carers to explain my presence, my research (especially the ethical considerations made) and invite any questions before my research began. As with the initial discussions with senior leadership, these were intended to give participants the opportunity to raise any issues or concerns and give me the chance to address them and work with participants to find solutions. The emails included copies

of ethics documents (information sheet, child-friendly information sheet, parent/carer consent forms and interview consent forms). My contact details were also included so that participants could contact me at any point throughout the research. I also created a participant information video which verbally detailed the above information in April 2022 but by July 2022, after many attempts to circulate it, the video was abandoned in favour of follow-up emails and physical copies of consent forms. Reasons the video failed included the file being too big to share, Wi-Fi issues at the schools, and privacy policies surrounding the schools YouTube account.

I engaged in volunteering in each school to (re-)introduce myself and build (on) rapport and relationships with the staff, children, community members and parents/carers before fieldwork began (Reeves, 2010). This was particularly important in Applegood where I was a relative stranger to most participants and where I began volunteering in April 2022. At Oakington I mostly volunteered with their (then new) woodland nursery, Hatchlings rather than in the main school where I was already well-known as a TA. Being involved in Applegood's woodland nursery, Seedlings was invaluable in getting to know some of the mums from school (two of whom I later interviewed) and thus, through them signalling my credibility to other parents/carers (who I needed to sign consent forms for their children to be involved in the research). I was also around in the mornings and after school on the playground to get to know parents/carers, explain my presence and research, answer any questions they had, and gain informed consent in-person. Access was thus an ongoing process (Reeves, 2010) with informed consent sought from a variety of sources and in several ways.

Sampling within School Communities

My decisions of who to interview were in many cases based on purposive sampling where, from my own observations early in the research, and the knowledge of school staff (Reeves, 2010), I selected a range of individuals involved with voluntary activity in these schools (including staff, parents/carers, governors, other volunteers, and community members) who could provide rich, in-depth accounts of voluntary activity from different perspectives (Yeo et al, 2014) and who could answer the questions that had arisen from the field (or their own activity and practices in the field). The initial circulation of ethics documents at the start of my research introduced my study and myself formally to the school communities and asked anyone interested in being interviewed to contact me. However, no one came forward without being personally *asked*. Most of my requests to interview staff and parents/carers were made in-person (often on school premises). As interviews were being conducted in the context of my ethnography, I had already met most of my interviewees prior to their interviews and so had built rapport with them and many agreed when I asked them to interview (exact arrangements were often made over the phone or email as they were happy to share their contact information). Kim agreed to interview only after I had assured her that her son (with SEN) would not also be interviewed. Governors were approached either in-person (Holly and Kate) or via email (Brendan and Charlotte). Lord and Lady Spencer were initially approached through a mutual friend, with later communication via phone and email. Interviewees were sent an email reiterating the aims of my research, the ethical considerations made, an accompanying information sheet and consent form to sign and my contact information.

Data collection took place in two stages corresponding to the same extended period in each school: June-December 2022 in Applegood, and June-December 2023 in Oakington. These dates were chosen

to enable data to be collected on key school events involving voluntary activity including the Summer Fair, school play, Sports Day, parent induction and information events, Harvest Festival, and the Christmas nativity, Fair and pantomime trip. Scheduling data collection in this way enabled me to commit my time and energies fully to one school at a time (Mills and Morton, 2013) which was both ethical and practical, and aided later comparison. My research (as with voluntary activity itself) took place during and outside of school hours and term times (including weekends, evenings and school holidays) and was multi-sited, with many activities taking place off school premises (including online) throughout the two stages. However, despite the multi-method and multi-sited approach of ethnography, there is always a constant suspicion that something more interesting and important is happening elsewhere (Pole and Hillyard, 2016). Indeed, despite considered scheduling and sampling, I feel that there were some parts of these school communities that I was not able to access. For example, I did not have access to the personal messages that occur between staff and parents via Facebook at Oakington and was not permitted to join the staff or parent WhatsApp groups at Applegood. Moreover, and despite concerted efforts (repeated follow-ups, rearrangements, format adaptations), there were some individuals I did not manage to conduct interviews with during the research, including many parents who were less 'physically' involved. However, I took opportunities to have conversations with these parents whenever I felt it appropriate, and this reflects the character of voluntary activity in these schools in the current climate; namely many parents have a peripheral relationship with their child(ren)'s schools, and this was evident in the fieldwork as well as being communicated through the research findings (see Chapter 6).

In summary, my ethnography involved repeated visits to the field over two 7-month periods (14 months in total), research carried out at different times and across multiple sites, using multiple methods and with a variety of participants. I now move on to detail in-depth the methods I used in the field.

In the Field

As discussed above, ethnographic research encompasses a collection of methods and sources of data. The methods and approaches I chose were adapted over time to the contexts of the schools and participants as well as ethical and practical considerations as and when they arose (Webster et al, 2014). In line with my holistic research approach, I attempted to gain as much data from as many sources as possible during my extended immersion in the school communities of Applegood and Oakington. The following section details the methods I used and how data was gathered in practice, processed, and the practical and ethical decisions made in the field.

Table 2 – Descriptive Overview of Ethnographic Tools

Ethnographic Tool	Detail
Observations	63 Daily Fieldnotes at Applegood 57 Daily Fieldnotes at Oakington
Interviews	25 semi-structured interviews (13 from Applegood, 8 from Oakington, 4 from across the Federation) 27 interviewees (2 interviews conducted in pairs) 23 female and 4 male
Art Groups with Children	21 in total (10 groups in Applegood, 11 groups in Oakington)
Documents	205
Visual Material	40 Field Photos from Applegood 51 Field Photos from Oakington 23 Pieces of Artwork from Applegood 27 Pieces of Artwork from Oakington

Observations and Fieldnotes

Observations are central to any ethnographic methodology, both as a source of data in themselves (recorded as fieldnotes) but also to get a ‘sense’ of the field early in the research to aid in the generation of questions to ask people in interviews or to ‘look out for’ in future observations (Mills and Morton, 2013; Corwin and Clemens, 2020). Emerson et al (2011) argue, researchers should enter, get to know, and participate in the settings they study and write down regularly everything learnt whilst participating. As I was conducting my ethnography *through* my role as a volunteer (Garthwaite, 2015), observations day-to-day were almost always participant observations of this kind. Forsey (2010) argues that ethnographic observation is as much (if not more) about listening as it is seeing, and so I tried to pay attention to both the visual and the aural throughout my time in the field. I endeavoured to make “keen, detailed and reflective observations” (Corwin and Clemens, 2020, pg.409) of the schools’ settings, (voluntary) activities, people, and relationships in my fieldnotes. In line with my qualitative research approach, I made ‘thick descriptions’ (Geertz, 1973) of what I observed about voluntary activity (in all its forms, practices, and relations) in and for each school, as well as including my own impressions and interpretations (Mills and Morton, 2013, pg.83). I followed Carspecken’s (1996, pg.47) suggestions for “thick description” in educational settings by including speech, body movements, contextual information, and even simple diagrams. I also used low-inference vocabulary such as ‘appears to be’ or ‘it seems’ to help ensure I was not assuming too much and could distinguish between empirical ‘facts’ and my own speculations about meaning (Ibid). These speculations could then be followed up in future observations or through other methods.

Fieldnotes also enabled reflection on practices of voluntary activity whose impact were not immediately evident. For example, I would notice items being donated to the school on one occasion (such as a train set) and later observe whether and how the staff or children had used them (e.g. as a reward, or as a source of arguments). From these observations, I could then ask the children and staff what they thought of these items (e.g. positive for the children, or more trouble than it's worth for the staff). This enabled me to chart the ongoing impact of voluntary activity before and beyond the

initial act itself, greatly improving the depth of my understanding of these practices and their consequences in different contexts (Shah, 2017).

The key strength of participant observations is that they do not rely on participant self-reporting but explore the “total social context” in a holistic way across time and space (Ibid, pgs.52-3; Hammersley, 2018). Fieldnotes of observations enable the researcher to “provide a portal from the reader to the research setting”, building a keen and detailed picture (including reflective observations) which improves the understanding of the research site and topic of study and the ‘trustworthiness’ of the research in the eyes of the reader (Corwin and Clemens, 2020, pgs.410-11; Shah, 2017). However, I was never a ‘detached observer’ as I do not believe it is possible or desirable for a researcher to remove themselves (their own interpretations, understandings, and values) from the contexts they study (Ibid). Indeed, ongoing fieldnotes helped chart the evolution of my own thinking in relation to practices, participants, and contexts (Mills and Morton, 2013). As Corwin and Clemens (2020) argue, fieldnotes are both a process and a product and so it was equally important that I detail how they were made in practice, but also to reflect on their making and analyse them for what they can reveal in answer to my research questions.

Indeed, reflecting on how my note-making itself may have impacted the research was crucial in considering how my presence and practices may have impacted the research (Ibid). At Applegood, for example, Alice (a class teacher) was uncomfortable with my note-taking early on and would often ask if her lesson had been okay when she would see me making notes. I realised she thought I was making notes on her and somehow judging her (understandable as a new teacher in a performative culture). I assured her that I was only ever making notes related to voluntary activity and not on her directly or her teaching practices (Hockey, 1993). After this encounter, however, I would try and make notes outside of the classroom if possible and I worked very hard to be of use in Alice’s class and make her feel at ease. Recognising my more outsider status at Applegood (LeGallais, 2008) I had to make greater efforts to blend in and allay suspicions than I did at Oakington (Hockey, 1993). However, I believe this was successful and beneficial to the research because towards the end of my research, Alice and I had excellent rapport, and she was much more comfortable with my presence, even suggesting things for me to make note of unprompted (Shah, 2017). Thus, adapting my note-making practices were both an ethical necessity and crucial to observing and understanding authentic practices in the field.

In addition to day-to-day fieldnotes, I selected specific events which typically involved voluntary activity to observe in detail. As discussed previously, these included school fairs, school plays, Sports Days, parent induction and information events, Harvest Festivals, Christmas nativities, as well as activities run and supported by volunteers (such as Farm School or the Woodland nursery’s). Whilst these ‘events’ take place in a specific place and timeframe, the organisation and voluntary activity leading up to the event was also recorded (through fieldnotes) for later analysis. And whilst I participated in the ‘build-up’, organising and delivery of events and activities, I would also make more ‘unobtrusive observations’, such as walking around the fairs to observe and note down characteristics, behaviours or social interactions. I also engaged with people in the moment and the very things I observed often raised questions I wanted to ask participants in real time, as well as in later interviews. These events were also vital in seeking consent form signatures from parents/carers. Therefore, observations for a single event were multi-sited, multi-purpose and carried out over a longer period than the event itself.

Interviews

Informal interviews as conversations took place throughout the research (Marvasti and Tanner, 2020) and were recorded in fieldnotes. I made it clear in ethics documentation and in the moment that participants did not need to engage with or answer my questions in the field if they did not wish to. I also checked in specific circumstances that participants were happy for me to note down our conversations. More 'formal' semi-structured interviews also took place to build on or more deeply explore observations from the field, or to access individuals not often in the field (e.g. governors). I had previously constructed interview topic guides for different groups of interviewees (including staff, parent/carers (non-)volunteers, community member (non-)volunteers) informed by my research questions and the issues (and gaps) raised in the literature (Mason, 2018). However, from my observations, I started making notes of specific people I wanted to interview, ways to ask or access interviewees, and the topics and specific questions I wanted to explore with each individual. Questions and topics thus emerged and evolved from being in the field and could vary depending on the individual interviewee.

I began carrying out interviews at Applegood during the school holidays in August 2022. This was a time when I believed staff and parents/carers would not be restricted by hectic school schedules and so might have more time to interview and enabled me to ask about particular events and activities I had observed (and questions that subsequently arose) prior to interview, giving focus and tangible examples of voluntary activity to discuss. Interviews continued throughout the first data collection phase, during my first 'break' from in-school phases between January and June 2023, and again from August 2023 at Oakington. Interviews took place in a variety of locations including the schools (classrooms and offices), Applegood tearooms, Oakington playpark, interviewees homes or workplaces, or online. Whilst I preferred for interviews to be conducted in-person, I gave interviewees the option of whether they would prefer to be interviewed online over Teams (it was also necessary to conduct interviews online when I was COVID positive). This was easier for some interviewees who were short on time, who lived at greater distances from me, or had work or caring responsibilities which meant they had little time and availability to interview in-person. Remaining faithful to my wish to accommodate my interviewees needs, I allowed them to choose the time and place of the interview. Most took place outside of school hours in the evenings, at weekends or during school holidays. Lord and Lady Spencer's interview, and Liv and Nat's interview were conducted in pairs at their request.

Building on ideas and questions raised by earlier observations and those raised by the literature, I used interviews to "probe an interviewee's thoughts, values, prejudices, perceptions, views, feelings and perspectives" ('experience') (Wellington, 2015, pg.137) of voluntary activity. The semi-structured nature of my interviews allowed them to be guided by the interviewee in ways that were relevant and meaningful to them and afforded a flexibility that allowed me to ask new and probing questions in response to topics raised which I had not anticipated or wanted them to elaborate on (Bryman, 2016; Gillham, 2000; Mason, 2018; Yeo et al, 2014). Whilst the structure of interviews varied, I ended each one by inviting interviewees to talk about any other aspects of their experience of voluntary activity which they felt had not already been discussed, thus ensuring my interviewees had the opportunity to say everything they would want me to know about them and their experiences (Gillham, 2000; Mason, 2018). Background information on each interviewee was also collected to provide useful data for the analysis phases of my research. I did not, however, make assumptions about connections

between interviewees background characteristics and voluntary (in)activity but asked questions in a way that got the participants to explicitly articulate and explain any connection they believed may exist (e.g. the relationship between being a SEN parent and voluntary activity).

I was aware of the potential for social desirability in who agreed to interview, and in their responses (Bryman, 2016). I hoped my informal volunteering prior to the research period and my formal volunteering prior to interview stages would build relationships with potential interviewees that would make them feel comfortable with me and that they could trust me. From this, I hoped they would be more likely to agree to interview. To reduce the potential for social desirability bias in interviews, I made it clear to interviewees that I didn't want them to feel they couldn't reveal their honest opinions and reminded them that I would ensure their responses were anonymised and that no-one else would hear or see their full responses. This reassured participants to disclose, especially negative aspects associated with voluntary activity, which was as important for me to understand as the positive aspects. There were individuals who did not come forward to interview, or who I could not access. However, as these interviews were part of my ethnographic approach, I was able to collect data about many participants and talk to them in the field, and so I believe I have a good picture of the voluntary activity at each school from a range of individual experiences.

The interview interaction enabled me to build (on) rapport (Wellington, 2015), encouraging interviewees to disclose things they may not have done in the field, improving the insight and understanding gained from the research (Gillham, 2000). I was polite and friendly in every interview and ensured I thanked every interviewee for their time (Marvastri and Tanner, 2020). However, some interviews were more difficult than others. [REDACTED] Whilst I found the interview difficult, I did glean useful information and was able to reflect on this situation, giving me insight into relationships within and between the governing body and the schools.

By the end of data collection, I completed a total of 25 interviews with 27 individuals across both schools. As most school staff and parent/carer interviewees were female, there is a gender bias in this sample (23 female and 4 male). However, I reflected on why this bias existed, asked participants about gender difference, and observed how this played out in practice to supplement my interviews (such is the benefit of an ethnographic methodology). Interviewees ages ranged between 26 and 'over 65' and came from a range of occupational and educational backgrounds. All identified as White British. This was the major ethnicity in both schools, with a minority from the GRT community also present at Oakington (and who were included in observations and field conversations).

Interview recordings were transcribed by me throughout data collection as and when interviews were conducted. This ensured a closeness to the data whilst transcribing as the event was still recent and ensured I did not have hundreds of hours of transcription to complete in one go by the end of each data collection period. Although transcription was an extremely time-consuming process (Hammersley, 2020), I knew it (and the process of re-listening to recordings multiple times) was vital to familiarising myself with my data and, most importantly, with the viewpoints and own words of my participants (Watts, 2014). This process assisted in the later coding and analysis phases by highlighting interesting comments, differences in opinion and repetition as data collection progressed (Ibid; Gibson and Brown, 2009; Hammersley, 2020).

Research with Children

Before beginning any research with the children, it was vital I consider my relationship with them and how this might affect the research. In different contexts and with different children, I may have been considered a helper, friend, mediator, and teaching assistant (Breathnach et al, 2018, pg.395). All children initially oriented to me as an authority figure, but I hoped to disrupt this “generational adult-child social order” by taking a stance as a ‘learner’ (Ibid, pgs.397-8) during research activities. Breathnach et al (2018, pg.399) found that by doing this, the researcher can create “interactional space for children to take up stances as the expert insiders and informants about their school practices”. However, I found all the children in these schools continued to see me as a TA even though I had explained my role as a volunteer researcher to them. Because I was in school on a regular basis, staff encouraged children to call me ‘Miss Law’ and my activities resembled almost exactly those of a TA, the children did struggle to see me in any other way (Gristy, 2015). Interestingly, however, some of the disruption techniques suggested by Breathnach et al (2018) such as sitting on the floor with children and playing with them, I already did and so I felt the children had a good rapport with me, and some developed (or already had) particularly close bonds. Indeed, some research with children occurred spontaneously in that I was observing events and activities they were involved in day-to-day and asking them their knowledge and opinions about them. I was also making careful note of how they interacted with me as a volunteer. Nevertheless, when engaging the children in clearly designated research activities such as art groups (see below), I did still aim to adopt the stance of ‘learner’ by listening intently, asking them about their artwork, probing their knowledge and opinions and emphasising that I found everything they said interesting.

When researching with children, I gave every child (unless specifically requested not to) the opportunity to be involved (Lundy et al, 2011). I had sent parent/carer and child consent forms home to all families in both digital and physical form repeatedly throughout the research process and sought consent form signatures in-person too. However, before any research activity began, I made sure to ask the children if they wanted to take part and assured them that they did not have to if they did not want to. If children wished to be involved but their parents/carers had not consented for them to do so (or had not yet consented), I still allowed the children to participate in activities, so they did not feel excluded (Bradbury-Jones and Taylor, 2015). Any children for whom I was not able to gain consent by the end of the research process had their data removed from the research. In addition, if parents/carers had given consent for their child to be involved, but the child did not want to be I respected the child’s wishes and did not involve them. I made it clear to the children that they could leave the activity at any point if they no longer wished to participate. I checked-in verbally with the children throughout to ensure they were comfortable and happy (Breathnach et al, 2018). I was also sensitive to children’s non-verbal (as well as verbal) cues throughout any research activity as to whether they were comfortable with their involvement (Ibid). Thus, consent was sought from several sources and at several levels.

I adopted Clark and Moss’s (2011) Mosaic Approach when researching with children by recognising that children are not a homogenous group but have different strengths and ways of communicating and expressing their views and experiences and so different methods are required to give all children a range of opportunities to think and explore. This approach gives status to children’s knowledge and details ways (multi-method approaches integrating the visual and the verbal) in which “the complexities of [their] lived experience” can be revealed (Ibid, pg.6). With this approach in mind, I

ensured my methods and approaches to researching with children matched individual children's ages and competencies so that no child felt overwhelmed or excluded from the research (Clark and Moss, 2011; Bradbury-Jones and Taylor, 2015). Initial observations in each school helped me to judge what methods might be best for different children before any research with them began. As mentioned above, 'informal' individual and group discussions were conducted with children of all ages and occurred especially during activities or events where voluntary activity was present or visible but also arose naturally in day-to-day interactions. This method thus overlapped with observations, serving as a 'springboard' for further "talking, listening and reflecting" (Ibid, pg.8). For example, when listening to James (Year 1, Applegood) read a book about jam muffins, he mentioned that his mum made them. Knowing his mum was a regular and well-regarded contributor to school cake sales, this interaction allowed me to ask him about his mums voluntary activity (and his opinion on it) in more detail.

Art groups employing different mediums (collage, drawing, colouring, playdough, clay etc.) (visual methodologies) were the main research activity I conducted with the children in both schools, and so I reflect on these in more detail. Art activities both elicited children's views and depicted them (Clark and Moss, 2011). Thus, they acted as both a method and data source. I did not use the schools resources for my art groups but instead brought my own colouring pens and pencils, different sized and coloured paper, tissue paper, glue sticks, scissors, modelling clay and playdough. I also brought physical copies of the parent/carer and child consent forms. I used my phone to take photos of their artwork (with their permission and showing them the photo afterwards) and made notes in a small notebook. Using a notebook gave a credibility to the activity and the seriousness with which I took their views. It also encouraged children to ask questions about what I was writing. I allowed the children to guide the discussions but, in all sessions, I started by asking if they remembered what my research was about (many did not and so needed reminding). I also encouraged them to suggest what the concepts of volunteering, fundraising and donations meant to them and prompted them to discuss examples in their school and from their experience and memories. I explained the consent forms in terms the children would understand and was pleased when they embraced the space to make their own mark or sign their own name on the forms, taking ownership of their role in the research:

I asked if I could take pictures of their art work and they all agreed (although one child seemed confused why I wanted to, so I had to further explain for him). I gave them the consent forms and said they needed to get their parents to sign too, so that I could use their artwork. Danielle said, "can't I just say yes because I know my mum would say yes", I said "I still need it signed but there is space for you to sign too". Ada and Danielle were very excited by this, and I showed them both where they could write their names and do a signature. I explained a signature was like a special squiggle that meant them. Danielle said, "can I do a squiggle?", I said "of course you can". It seemed to make them feel quite grown-up and responsible to have the opportunity to sign the consent forms, not just their parents so I'm really glad I included this.

[Oakington Art Group 6 Observations, 2nd October 2023]

I believe the timing of the art groups during the year impacted on children's memories and the art they subsequently made. For example, art groups with the Year 6 children were conducted in the summer months towards the end of term as they would be moving onto their secondary schools by September. This meant summer fairs and reflections on their last months at primary school were foremost in their minds. In contrast, the groups with the younger children were conducted between October and December. Sometimes the children could not think of examples of voluntary activity and required prompting but if certain events had happened or were going to happen around the times the art groups were conducted, they found it easier to remember. This included events such as Harvest Festival, Applegood school's wellie walk, spooky discos, cake sales, nativities, the pantomime trip, or Christmas fairs. At Applegood the art groups were planned for lunch times but often overran into collective worship which took place after lunch (and which the children were often quite happy to miss. I had asked permission for the children to remain in the art groups during collective worship). Towards the end of my data collection in December, Alice allowed me to take her class for art groups in the afternoons when there was not too much curriculum work going on at the end of term. At Oakington the art groups took place in the afternoons after (or before) collective worship. In both schools I sorted the children into groups based on my knowledge of the children who would work well together (and those who would not). I sought advice from staff in both schools on the groups I had put together and made changes according to their suggestions. In both schools some children asked to take part more than once, either to assist others (often younger pupils) in subsequent groups or because they enjoyed the sessions so much, they wanted to do it again. Where possible I allowed this.



Figure 6 - Applegood: The Hub

It was important that the spaces used to conduct the art groups were separate from their classrooms as much as possible to signify this was not a school-related activity that they were compelled to engage in, but something that they could engage in only if they wanted to. The Hub at Applegood (Figure 6)



Figure 7 - Oakington: Woodland Classroom

is a separate space often used for interventions or therapy and nurture sessions and so is a calm place that the children generally enjoyed using. The woodland classrooms at Oakington (Figure 7) are used for woodland sessions in bad weather and the schools' woodland nursery, Hatchlings. They had previously been used as temporary classrooms during building works and when I used them for art groups with the older children, they enthusiastically entered their old classroom, warmly shared their memories of being in these spaces and explored the nursery furniture, toys and resources that are now kept there (this provided a useful springboard for discussion on donated resources). The Rainbow Room at Oakington (Figure 8) was used with the youngest children. It is now a separate classroom space but at the time I conducted my art groups, the children excitedly declared it was the first time they were getting to use that room. It was trickier at Oakington to achieve this separate space, however. Some art

It was important to me that the children *enjoyed* the art groups and didn't feel pressured to 'work'. Not only does this contribute to better-quality research outcomes (Lundy et al, 2011) – reducing the likelihood of social desirability bias, but it also ensures I am caring for the children's emotional well-being in a research situation with which they may be unfamiliar (Bradbury-Jones and Taylor, 2015). Enjoyable art sessions suited to the children's needs, help reduce barriers to participation and placed the children at the centre of the research activity. This ensures any knowledge produced comes from a range of children who have chosen to take part and feel happy doing so. Art Group 5 at Applegood which included four Reception children (4-year-olds) provides a good example of my primary concern for the children's well-being. The children had limited knowledge of voluntary activity but enjoyed using the art materials, especially the playdough, and chatting with me about their first months at school. They asked repeatedly if they could stay with me doing art rather than going to collective worship and whether they could do art with me again. I enjoyed spending time with these children as I did not know them as well as the other year groups, and this gave me the chance to get to know them more.



I was also pleased they enjoyed the activity itself, even if I did not gain much 'related' artwork from this session. In all sessions I engaged in off-topic discussions the children pursued to put them at ease and further emphasise this was not 'school work'. The children were asked if they wanted to take their art home with them (except where playdough or clay needed to be re-used, in which case they were offered a photo of their art to keep). When all art groups had been conducted in each school, I donated the art materials to the schools as I knew how valued these resources were by the children and staff (see Figure 9).

'Documents' in my research included any written, graphic, or pictorial communications which transmit or store information or meaning (Grant, 2019). Documents come in both paper and electronic forms (Grant, 2020). There was a wealth of data contained in public documents on and about these schools including government data, school websites, newsletters, and social media posts. I also created my

own drawings, sketches, and maps (Grant, 2019; 2020; Mills and Morton, 2013) to be used in the analysis phases of the research, and in the presentation of findings (see discussion of my visual mapping methods below).

Photos were key to my ethnographic methodology, for both the analysis and communication of findings (Allen, 2020). I used publicly accessible photos on the school's social media and newsletters, and asked permission to take my own photographs of key events, scenes or objects relating to voluntary activity throughout the research. As discussed above, the art groups acted as both an elicitation method but also produced artwork which were excellent data sources in themselves (Clark and Moss, 2011). Inclusion and analysis of the children's art is included throughout my thesis³ and forms a vital part of my ethical practice in ensuring children's perspectives are communicated through this research (Ibid).

Leaving the Field

From the planning stages of this research, the 'end' of each data collection phase was clearly scheduled – I would leave after the Christmas term in each school (Pole and Hillyard, 2016). Whilst I continued to volunteer in between in-school phases and conducted interviews too, I felt it was necessary to physically distance myself from the schools and cease my volunteering whilst in the final write-up stages of my research to give myself the intellectual space to step back and away from the continued influence of daily interactions to see the bigger picture and adopt a critical voice (Hockey, 1993). However, physically leaving the field sites is not the same as emotionally ending the connection to the field and its participants (or the impact each has on the other) (Ibid). And so, this section details the ways in which I 'left' my field sites, and, in keeping with my reflexive approach, I reflect on how leaving impacted myself, my participants and the research itself.

I first 'left' Applegood as a research field in December 2022. However, I continued to volunteer in their reading scheme until September 2023 when staffing issues at Oakington necessitated I be based there. I never had the opportunity to recommence reading at Applegood after this. Thus, I felt I had not formally ended my connection there but rather, through circumstance and research necessity, had become focused solely on Oakington. In contrast, when I left Oakington, I knew I would not be continuing to volunteer and so I made more precise plans for leaving than the circumstances at Applegood had allowed (Ibid). This involved preparing Oakington for my exit (so that the staff were aware I would no longer be around to stand in as a TA, and the children were prepared for my no longer being in school after Christmas). This was particularly important for certain children who had (formed) a particularly close bond with me. Another important part of my finishing the data collection and *formally* leaving the field was thanking the staff and children in *both* schools for being involved in my research. I wrote thank you cards and bought gifts of books and small toys for the children and staff in each school. Thus, whilst my initial exit from Applegood was experienced as beyond my control, I made sure to plan and formally end the data collection before commencing my final analysis and write-up stages (Ibid).

³ All the children's artwork (for which consent was received) is included in Appendix 9.

I went back to Applegood in December 2023 with my gifts and cards, intending to go round each class and check in with the children and staff and say my 'thank yous' and 'final' goodbyes. As chance would have it, however, on the day I went in, Alice (the teacher with whom I had become very close) was due to lead collective worship and invited me to be a part of it:

Worship was taking place in Hedgehogs class today. Alice was talking about the concept of surprise, she said "Lola surprised me by making me jump earlier today and Miss Law gave me a lovely surprise when she came to the classroom because I hadn't been expecting her". Then she said, "Miss Law has another lovely surprise for everyone" and could they remember what they had done with Miss Law when she was here? Two children said "reading", one said "we made sculptures", someone said "arts and crafts", another said "drawing". Lola said "at Oakington I remember Miss Law doing free play with me". I smiled fondly at all the kids memories. I was so amazed the kids remembered all this and happy to think their experience of research has been memorable and, it seems, fun for them. Alice said, "it sounds like Miss Law has helped a lot of you". She invited me to take over and explain what I had brought in. I said, "I finish my research in the schools on Friday, so I wanted to bring each class a thank you present for taking part". Alice said maybe someone from each class should take their class bag. I handed them out [...] The kids kept hold of their bags and others around them tried to peer in whilst worship continued. They finished with the school prayer, 'blew out' the candle and started to get ready to leave. The older kids went first. Mark thanked me for the gift as he put his chair back. I smiled and said, "you're welcome".

[Applegood Daily Fieldnotes, 12th December 2023]

I was delighted with this opportunity to formally end the research at Applegood, and that the children had remembered so much about their involvement despite it being a long time since they had taken part. I felt I had fulfilled multiple obligations to my participants by properly ending the research, thanking them for taking part and explaining that I was now embarking on formally writing up the research. Alice gave me a big hug and said it had been lovely to see me as I left, and I felt very satisfied with how I had now 'formally' left the field at Applegood. Oakington, however, was a different story.

My last day at Oakington was also in December 2023 and I gave my gifts and cards out in each class throughout the day. The children were thrilled with their gifts and the staff were very grateful too. Without my knowledge the staff had also arranged a leavers assembly for me, where I was presented with a card (see Figure 10) and gift of a fluffy hoodie and socks:

Greg asked if there was a message I'd like to give everyone, I said "thank you so much for helping with my research and I can't wait to go and write it all up and for anyone who reads it to know what amazing schools you are". They all said "ahh" again and Dan called out "I want you to use my Coors bottle!". I laughed and promised him I would [see Figure 14]. Greg said, "Miss law will you come back and visit us?" I said "absolutely", and they cheered. Greg said "three cheers for Miss Law" [...] I went back to my seat and looked at my card. Every child had written a little message for me and drawn a picture of themselves. It was absolutely beautiful, and I was so moved that they had taken the time to do this for me. Freya was crying as she didn't want me to leave so she went and sat with Kayleigh. I felt guilt creeping up again as Orla sat on my lap and looked through my card with me. I very nearly cried as I was looking at these

adorable messages the kids had written for me, knowing I would not see them properly for a long time.

[Oakington Daily Fieldnotes, 15th December 2023]

I found leaving Oakington more difficult than Applegood as my sense of guilt was strong (DeLuca and Maddox, 2016). The children here had known me long before my research began and had had to cope with several staff leaving the school. I felt like I was letting many children down as they saw me as another staff member who they perceived was also “running away” (Rosie, Year 5). I also felt guilty that Oakington’s woodland nursery, Hatchlings could no longer run without my involvement and the school were having to put it on hold until they could come up with a solution to the staffing issues. This was becoming a vital feeder into the school, and I knew how volatile pupil numbers were. Consequently, I experienced leaving Oakington as a much harder process than leaving Applegood.

How I left the field caused me to reflect on the difference between physically leaving the spaces and emotionally leaving the relationships I had made behind. Whilst I knew and agreed with the methodological arguments for ceasing daily interaction with the schools in the write-up phase, I still felt emotionally connected to the schools and my participants and felt a sense of loss at being apart from them, especially the children (Pole and Hillyard, 2016; Sampson et al, 2008). Sampson et al’s (2008, pg.927) research found that leaving the field could be “problematic and sometimes heart-wrenching” for researchers. For me it was both. Still living within walking distance of Oakington made physical distance difficult and I felt a commitment to honouring the promise I had made to visit. However, I believe my visits, continued contact with various participants in both schools, and the sending out of a research poster to visually communicate my research progress in April 2024, were necessary ethical practices which ameliorated the feeling that I had only been ‘using’ the individuals in these schools for my research (Ibid; DeLuca and Maddox, 2016). I wanted my participants to know and to feel they still had a stake in the outcomes of my research, and that I still cared about these schools futures. Thus, I agree with Pole and Hillyard’s (2016, pg.110) conclusions that “the researcher never entirely leaves the field” and “the field never entirely leaves the researcher”. Whilst I did initiate a ‘break’ with my research fields to write-up my research, my continued emotional commitment to my participants inevitably impacted the writing process and required careful consideration in how I presented and communicated my findings. This was especially so when I was being critical of a certain practice or revealing the inequalities within and between the schools. As DeLuca (and Maddox, 2016) found, guilt pervaded this process as I was ultimately criticising the practices of individuals who I knew well. I attempted to balance these competing demands of accurately presenting my critical research findings and avoiding blame or judgement on any specific individual by ensuring I considered and presented multiple perspectives on an issue so that readers could follow the arguments I had made and how I reached my conclusions (Hammersley, 2005). Further detail on how I wrote up my research is discussed below.

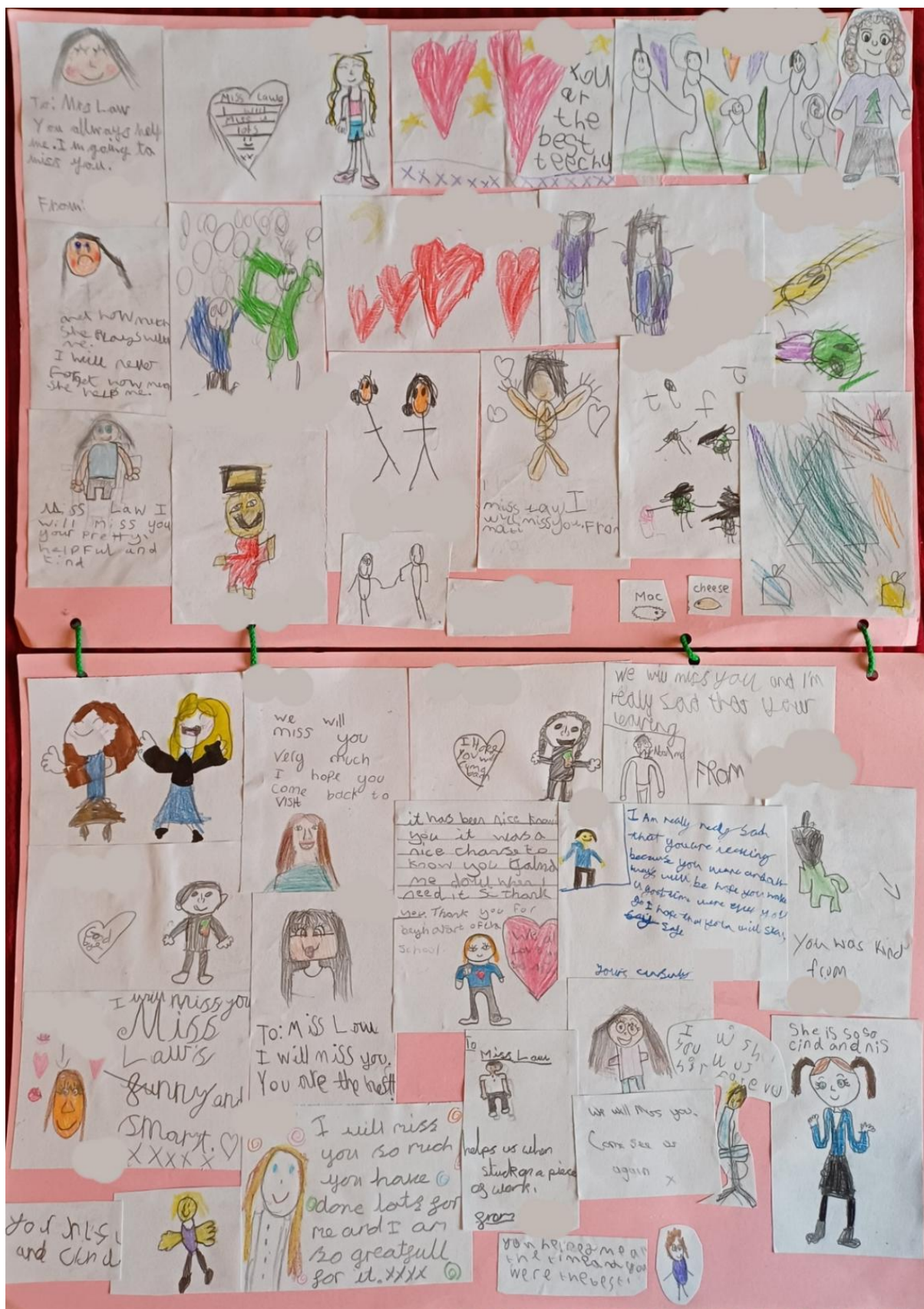


Figure 10 – The card I received from the children at Oakington Primary, presented to me in a farewell assembly on my last day of data collection in December 2023.

Analysis, Writing and Follow-ups

In line with the qualitative approach taken to collect data in this research, a qualitative approach to data analysis was also adopted (Terry and Hayfield, 2020). Thematic analysis was chosen as it can be used effectively for the different sources of data my research involved and was therefore a good method for analysis of ethnography (Ibid). It is also a method which allowed me to usefully explore, interpret and convey insights into participants experiences (Gibson and Brown, 2009) of voluntary activity, thus helping me answer my research questions effectively. My thematic analytical approach was influenced by Langdridge (2004), Braun and Clarke (2006) and Watts (2014) and included the stages (not necessarily sequential) of transcription (in the case of interview data), reading the data, three levels of coding, choosing extracts for detailed analysis, and the final analysis and discussion of findings. These stages were conducted through an inductive and iterative approach (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1997). Visual analysis of children's artwork was also undertaken (in addition to thematic analysis) and is discussed further below.

Between January and May 2023 when I had left Applegood (as a research field for data collection) and before entering Oakington, I began an extensive reading of all data sources I had so far, as an essential step of familiarising myself with my data (Atkinson, 2015; Watts 2014). At this first stage of reading, Braun et al (2018) advocate a relaxed immersion in the data but also to read with research questions in mind (Terry and Hayfield, 2020). The next phase (coding) was completed through NVivo (by me, *not* the software) (Ibid; Pole and Hillyard, 2016, pg.128). Langdridge (2004) and Watts (2014, pg.5) suggest three levels of coding with the aim of identifying "key themes, issues and meanings within the data set in a thorough and systematic fashion". The first is descriptive coding (simple labelling). This involved studying all data sources to find out *what* is being said, especially where issues or concepts have been repeated (within and across participants and data sources) as this could indicate a potential theme (Ibid, pg.6). The second level of coding is interpretative and involved looking at *how* certain issues had been discussed, constructed, framed, and understood (Ibid; Bryman, 2016; Gibson and Brown, 2009; Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2010). At the third level of coding, *theming* started to occur, and I began some early analytical writing (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1997). Codes were highlighted in multiple colours to visually distinguish between them (Bryman, 2016) and were constructed in NVivo through coding hierarchies.

Whilst I undertook initial analysis of Applegood's data first (with ideas for themes emerging), after I began researching at Oakington in June 2023, I was able to analyse this new data in the same thorough and systematic way whilst simultaneously collecting data, with the benefit (and necessity as driven by my research questions) of Applegood as a point of comparison. At this stage it was also necessary to amend codes previously constructed and introduce new codes considering the emerging data from Oakington (as my understanding and interpretation of Applegood data also evolved considering comparative data). Thus, the three levels of coding occurred as an iterative rather than sequential process and were returned to throughout the research. Indeed, after completing data collection at Oakington in December 2023, it was particularly important to explore my coding across *both* schools and re-engage with all the data again in its totality (Pole and Hillyard, 2016) for comparative purposes to see where differences and similarities had emerged and how they had been (or could be) explained (returning to all three levels of coding again). At this stage, I synthesised my codes into final themes and sub-themes (Watts, 2014; Braun et al, 2018). I then decided which themes I would include in my

thesis and began writing my thematic chapters, building on, and amending my earlier analytical writings.

In addition to thematic analysis, I also conducted visual compositional analysis of the children's artwork in terms of their content and production (Rose, 2016). This began with physically sorting printouts of the artwork into various sections on the floor to visualise the themes that were present and how the children's artwork differed between the schools (Ibid; Woodward, 2020). Photos were taken whenever printouts were re-positioned to aid visual analysis. Some images were chosen for closer analysis (seen throughout the main body of this thesis) based on their evocative (giving a feel for the social world of participants) and exemplary (reflecting and contributing to thematic understanding) qualities (Rose, 2016). I explored the content, colours, spatial organisation, lighting, and expressive content of each image (Ibid). However, it was also important to consider the context in which this artwork was made including the tools and equipment used, the visual qualities and reception, and the social relations and practices that produce, saturate and enable interpretation of the images (Ibid). Each of these aspects are reflected on for how they contribute to the meaning of the artwork included, especially in the context of other ethnographic data and the themes discussed.

There are as many ways to write ethnography as there are ethnographers (Mills and Morton, 2013). My approach (including the structure of my findings chapters) emerged from my experience of being in the field over time (Ibid) and attempting to understand what the data was telling me in response to my research questions (with analysis and writing informing each other). Adopting the lens of the TSOL, the first theme that emerged in the field was boundaries (how and when they were crossed and maintained) and the invisible labour taking place for these school communities (hence Chapter 5). Within this exploration of boundaries, and as I began to compare the voluntary activity between the two schools, the specific importance of geography and social networks emerged as deserving of a dedicated analysis chapter of their own (hence Chapter 6). In both Chapters 5 and 6, the focus was predominantly on the meso-level analysis of the schools, with insights from the micro-level experiences of individuals, and connections made to macro-level trends in voluntary activity. However, temporality also emerged as key to the character and experiences of voluntary activity in these schools due to discussions and reflections on how it has changed over time, for individuals, their schools and communities, and at a societal level. My final findings chapter (7) therefore brings these threads together by focusing on trajectories at the meso-, micro- and macro-level, again utilising the TSOL framework, with a focus on how these interact over time and the consequences at all levels. Thus, the organisation of my findings chapters reflects how I made analytical sense of the data. Whilst I considered different ways to tell this story, I choose to retain the live process by which I came to understand the data and to remain faithful to the fieldsites, my participants and the analyses. Moreover, the order of the findings chapters are cumulative, with each providing conceptual and theoretical foundations which build upon each other as the thesis progresses. Their structure is therefore crucial to both the narrative telling and development of understandings and arguments of the research.

When writing, including participants own words was vital in understanding and communicating their experience of voluntary activity in their school communities. However, it was also important not over-rely on words spoken only in interviews and to consider the social context in which interviews took place, recognising them as social accomplishments in and of themselves (Atkinson and Silverman, 1997; Silverman, 2017). When using interview transcripts or participants words from fieldnotes, I

sought to give background to the discussions that took place and indicated where participants backtracked, repeated or sought to clarify (warrant) their words, and position themselves as well as when pauses occurred and where I, as the interviewer, spoke too (Silverman, 2017). This was done to communicate as faithfully as possible the situational knowledge gained from talk, and to improve the robustness of analysis (Ibid). With these words, I hoped to “provide a portal from the reader to the research setting” (Corwin and Clemens, 2020, pgs.409-10) and connect them to the research in meaningful ways (Woodward, 2020). Alongside words, I also included visual data to enhance the tangibility of the research to the reader (Allen, 2020) and to reflect the ‘atmosphere’ and ‘feeling’ of the schools’ and their voluntary activity (Rose, 2016). This included photos from the field, screenshots of social media posts, and crucially the children’s artwork. I had promised all children who had consent that their artwork would appear in my final text and so any not included in the main body are included in Appendix 9.

A key methodological contribution lies in the mapping methods I employed throughout this thesis. Various forms of mapping (social network, life-course, biography, and trajectory) played a vital role in both my analysis (helping me to understand and visualise my data, coding, and themes) and the presentation and communication of my findings (Woodward, 2020). Mapping was also a reflective tool that enabled me to re-engage with and re-animate my data (Ibid), explore both regular and surprising data, inconsistencies and contradictions, and grasp how the interpretive meanings were inter-bounded with their contexts (Pole and Hillyard, 2016). Analysing and presenting the research in a visual way helped me convey the complexity and vibrancy (Rose, 2016) of voluntary activity in these schools, that words alone could not do justice. I discuss the specific mapping methods used in more detail in the context of my findings chapters, including how I developed them to analyse and communicate my data, and their benefits and downfalls.

Due to the vast amount of data I had by the end of my research, it was necessary to choose extracts (from a variety of data sources) for detailed analysis (Watts, 2014). In the first instance, it was vital that the extracts chosen were faithful to the themes participants’ had raised and which best represent their first-person perspectives and experiences (Ibid; Hesse-Bibber and Leavy, 2010) and, for this research, reflect the differences and similarities between the two schools. Thus, Watts (2014, pg.7) advocates “*a purposive sample of extracts drawn relative to the themes*”. The extracts chosen should be able to answer my research questions and connect to the literature in a meaningful way (Ibid; Braun et al, 2018; Bryman, 2016; Hesse-Bibber and Leavy, 2010). It is at this stage that a ‘third-person perspective’ of the “knowledgeable and theoretically informed” researcher was adopted to “consider each extract in terms of its capacity to support, qualify, question or outright contradict some accepted aspect of the relevant literature” (Watts, 2014, pg.7). However, as with every phase of my research, ethical consideration for my participants was also vital in the extracts I selected and how I chose to present them.

A specific example came when I was writing the analytical chapter on trajectories (Chapter 7). Exploring trajectories enabled me to answer my research questions and connect to the literature exploring voluntary activity across the life-course. I had selected four individuals whose histories with their schools I explored in further detail through biography and trajectory maps (Woodward, 2020) I constructed to highlight key factors shaping individuals voluntary activity over time. As these were particularly personal stories to tell, I sought feedback and further consent from these participants to present their stories in this way, giving them the opportunity to clarify and further explain key

milestones in their histories and how they were depicted. For this chapter, although data collection in the schools had 'finished', I conducted an interview with Kayleigh as my knowledge of her trajectory through observations, informal discussions and other interviews suggested she would be a good example to include as someone who represented key demographics of relevance and interest in these schools and the literature (an ex-pupil, SEN parent and staff member) (Watts, 2014). This decision shows how leaving the field is a flexible process that is never quite achieved (Pole and Hillyard, 2016). I felt it was important to return to a participant from the field even though I had 'ended' data collection because I believed the inclusion of her story was vital to ethically conveying the complexity and vibrancy of voluntary activity as had emerged from the data as I simultaneously analysed, wrote, and thought about my research questions and participants. Following up with participants in this way reflects my commitment to ethical research practice, the robustness of the data collected, and my desire to improve the communication and understanding of my findings through visual as well as verbal depiction.

In the final stage of my analysis, my task was to "go beyond" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, pg.94) the words, implicit meanings, and understandings of participants to explicitly draw out and articulate them and to demonstrate how the particular findings of my research impact and contribute to the theoretical and/or substantive literature (particularly the gaps in knowledge that my research questions aimed to address) (Watts, 2014). I hope I have achieved this throughout my empirical chapters and especially in my overall thesis conclusion (Chapter 8). I believe the methodology I adopted enabled me to research ethically and reflexively, producing findings to contribute not only to the literature and debates in my field, but also the everyday practices of those in small rural primary schools.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have detailed the ethnographic methodology I adopted in my research. I have argued that my topic focus and literature gaps necessitated a qualitative research approach and justified my ethnographic methodology. Ethnography enabled me to use multiple methods to explore voluntary activity first-hand as a volunteer ethnographer. Through my reflection on my positionality (researching the familiar) and the ethical practices I adopted, I have shown how a commitment to regulations, relationships, and reflection (reflexivity) have underpinned every aspect of my study. I next presented a reflective account of entering the field (school selection, access, and interview sampling), and of being in the field. The latter included detailed discussion of how I adopted different methods, with examples given and decisions justified throughout. Finally, I discussed how I left the field to complete the final analysis and write-up of my research.

Throughout the research I have been committed to my participants and the schools in which they learn, work, care, and struggle. By being honest and open about my positionality within these school communities I have sought to think and write reflexively about how my presence may have impacted the research, and how the research has impacted me. I believe my autoethnographic reflections in particular, when written reflexively and incorporated into the research findings and discussions, provide detail on how I exercised ethical reflexivity in the field, but also provide invaluable insights into the experience of voluntary activity that other volunteer ethnographers without my specific background and relationships with these schools would have been unable to reveal or understand. It

was, however, necessary to think critically about my research sites and the practices of the individuals there (including myself) to gain as full an understanding as possible of how voluntary activity happens in these schools, how it is experienced (both positively and negatively) and how and why this differed between contexts. Only then could I hope to meaningfully contribute to both the schools work going forward but also to the wider literature and debates on voluntary activity in primary education. And so, the next three chapters detail and discuss my empirical research findings, organised into the themes of boundaries and invisible labour, socio-spatial networks and stigma, and trajectories of voluntary activity. These themes represent how analytical sense was made of the data in relation to my ethnographic experience in the field, the arguments I seek to develop in answer to my research questions and considering the literature, conceptual and theoretical stance of the thesis.

Chapter 5: Boundaries and Invisible Labour

Introduction: The Work of Education

Work is “what gets done to make life possible” (Pettinger, 2019, pg.5). It is not confined to the realm of economics but rather it “is embedded in, entangled with, conducted and expressed through other activities and relations which may be social, political, kinship, sexual or familial” (Glucksmann, 1995, pg.65). Within any society, labour is “divided up between and allocated to different structures, institutions and activities” (Ibid, pg.67) and the structural relations and internal organisation within spheres of activity can change in different spaces, and over time (Ibid, pg.71). Conceptualising work in this way is what Glucksmann (1995) has termed the ‘Total Social Organisation of Labour’ (TSOL) approach. She advocates for considering work in all its forms, how it is organised, how activities relate to and are embedded within one another and the implications of these interdependencies on society, social groups, and individuals. Voluntary activity has so often been ‘invisible’ (Daniels, 1987; Pettinger, 2019) in the sociology of work but it is recognised and valued within the TSOL approach. As well as recognising ‘invisible labour’, the TSOL draws our attention to the concept of ‘boundaries’ – a concept which has become increasingly common in social science. Boundaries can be symbolic (conceptual distinctions), manifesting as, maintaining and contesting social boundaries (stratification and inequality) (Lamont and Molnár, 2002). Thus, understanding the properties, mechanisms, and content of boundaries (Ibid) enable investigation of the foundations and implications of boundary recognition (or non-recognition – which I conceptualise as invisible labour), boundary-work, boundary crossing and boundary maintenance within and between fields of activity.

This chapter will explore the significance and implications of the themes of ‘boundaries’ and ‘invisible labour’ in the work that takes place to ‘get education done’ at Applegood and Oakington. I begin by presenting two contrasting ethnographic extracts, one from each school, to show how boundaries are crossed in order to achieve certain aims through the use of voluntary activity as part of the TSOL in these schools. I then present my adapted TSOL typology for Applegood and Oakington to further contextualise this chapter’s exploration of boundary crossing, invisible labour (including emotional labour’s invisibility), and boundary maintenance (including gendered boundaries) applied to voluntary activity within primary education. I emphasise children’s understanding and role within their school’s TSOL. I end the chapter with a reflexive autoethnographic account that reflects on and further extends the understanding of boundaries and invisible labour in these educational contexts.

The Total Social Organisation of Labour in Applegood and Oakington

The literature on boundaries and invisible labour applies to work in primary education, whether paid or unpaid, formal or informal. The work of education has many purposes, going well beyond classroom teaching and learning as well as providing the fundamental foundations for it. Children are socialised, they care and are cared for, and they learn about themselves and others. They learn inside the classroom, and they learn outside it. They take part in curricular and extra-curricular activities. They fundraise and they donate and, in the age of marketisation, they promote their school. All the work that is undertaken to make education (in its many forms and purposes) possible, takes place in many socio-economic modes, by many different people and involves ‘boundaries’ of many kinds. It is also

undertaken at different times, across multiple sites and, consequently, much voluntary work is only visible to varying degrees. Voluntary work is a key part of the TSOL of the small rural primary school. And so, to begin this chapter, the following extracts (one from each school) illustrate key examples of instances where the TSOL enabled the work of education to 'get done'. The first details the people and practices involved in the Applegood Summer Fair in 2022, an annual event that fundraises for the school and brings the community together:

Arriving at school through the main gate onto the currently deserted playground, I saw gazebos and tables (stalls) had been set out in a horseshoe shape. Entering school through the 'Hogwarts' door I found Nancy sitting in the hall (now the refreshment area) putting sweets into bags. I said "Hi, how are you?" (I knew she had not been very well this week). She had a hoarse voice and seemed really fed up (which, I thought did not bode well for the rest of the day) ...

Walking through school I noticed a huge, filled hamper from the local farm shop in reception and saw Sophie's youngest son, Charlie, playing outside...

Back on the playground I found Sophie with her husband Steve and their eldest son George setting up some stalls. She was extremely enthusiastic to see me; "Taylah! Thank you so much for coming in!" I asked what she would like me to do, and she asked me to set up some colouring in Star class as a free activity for the kids...

On the hunt for colouring sheets in Moon class, I met Val [village resident and grandmother of Amanda, Year 5] setting up a bric-a-brac stall. We chatted briefly about my research and her voluntary activity before another member of the village hall committee came in to help Val set up their stall (which they are given free of charge in exchange for the school's free use of the village hall for events)...

After setting up the colouring I went to Sun class to help Steph and Laura [both TAs] wrap and tie tombola prizes. Steph seemed very flustered. I asked whether all the prizes had been donated, and Steph said they had which was very good, but she lamented that they didn't have anyone to help with 'this bit' (the co-ordination of donations, wrapping of prizes and setting up of stalls). She said that her and Laura had been in town by 8:15 this morning buying extra stuff for the fair and getting the sports shields engraved and that they hadn't even had time to eat yet. Natasha [parent] came into the classroom and asked what she could do to help. Laura asked her to sort wrapped prizes into kids and adult sections and make them look nice. Candice then came in carrying bags and smiling enthusiastically. Steph pointed to a table saying, "you're over there, Candy". Candice sells her own handmade jewellery and has a stall at the summer fair....

On my way back to the playground I saw Joy [parent] with her daughters setting up a stall in Star class. They had brought a game that their own family had made...

Back on the playground, Sophie said "Taylah! You're on the beanbag toss" and explained the rules. I hadn't been expecting to run a stall, but I put my bag down and took up position. It was very hot, and I was relieved they had tarpaulin and gazebos set up for those of us running stalls. Natasha was there, Claire [TA] and her daughters, Luke [trainee teacher], George and his friend and Steve. Sophie, her mother-in-law, and Lucy [parent and PTA treasurer] were running the tombola, raffle, and 'barrel of drink' stall together...



Figure 11 - Outside area of Applegood Summer Fair 2022

Danny [Crystelle, head of schools' son] and Charlie spent more money than anyone else on the beanbag toss...

Violet came to my stall and asked "am I allowed to hug you today because it's not school?" and I smiled and gave her a hug... Karen [ex-parent and ex-PTA member] turned up and hugged Sophie before coming to chat with me (her children had gone to Applegood at the same time as my sister and I)...

When the raffle was drawn, Crystelle's husband [and Sophie's boss], Rob, was drawn out multiple times and his tickets were put back in so that someone else might be chosen...



Figure 12 - Clearing up after the fair with Sophie's family

At the end of the fair Candice, her daughter and I helped Nancy, Sophie, and her family pack up. I heard Nancy tell Sophie there had been comments that the tombola prizes looked 'rushed'. Sophie seemed really annoyed and huffed "well no one came to help did they!?" Nancy said to me that her and Sophie had stayed 2 afternoons of their own time, and she had stayed late on workdays to sort stuff out. She said no one had stayed behind on the Friday to help set up. Sophie said that she had been there since 7 that morning and that her kids and Steve had been there helping since 8am. She said it was 'tradition' but was still angry at comments Nancy had overheard...

In the kitchen, I asked Nancy what would happen to the leftovers from today. She said it would all go in for the Christmas fair, she had checked the (best before) dates and it would all be fine. She said Sophie's family kept all this stuff under their stairs as Steve had made a special cupboard for PTA stuff.

[Extracts from Fieldnotes at Applegood School's Summer Fair 2022, 16th July 2022]

In the next extract from an interview conducted with Greg, the senior teacher and SENCo of Oakington in September 2023, we discuss a more mundane but nevertheless necessary aspect of keeping a school running – maintaining the staff toilet:

So, like, you know, the toilet was just gross. Like the, you know, it was just like, gross in there. Hadn't been painted in ages. The seat broke. So, it ended up. I painted the toilet on a Saturday. Katherine bought the toilet seat. Um, I went to fix the toilet to, to fix the toilet seat on and went "Oh, hang on. This is a bit more complicate", because I just thought it would be like, unscrew the other one. Put the other screw on it. But it was like oh, no. You had to like, drill this extra hole into it. You had to measure it. And you had to, I was like oh gosh, it's a bit complicated, I'm gonna mess this up. And so, I said to Liv "Oh, I'm really sorry, I haven't put that on yet, it looks a bit fiddly. I might get [caretaker] to do it". She was like "Oh, no, don't worry". So, she just rang one of her lads. And the next thing I know, two hours later, one of her boys has just like come in fixed it, yeah, put the new toilet seat on. Then [caretaker] later put the towel holder in the next weekend. So, you know, now toilets really lovely. We've got a new seat, new towel holder, its, you know, it's all lovely in there. And we've got a new air freshener. It's like all painted. But it was about four different people. You know? One of which doesn't even work for the school. Just their mum works for the school. All like did it together. As opposed to just it's the site manager, site manager job. Site manager will do it, so it's a very different way to operate.

The work that made the summer fair and the maintenance of the staff toilet possible blurs boundaries of all kinds. By its boundary-crossing nature, much of this work can also be called 'invisible' as it is rarely recognised (or appreciated) as work by both those who are doing it, or those who are benefitting from it (Daniels, 1987). At its simplest, these instances highlight simultaneously that not all the work of education is 'academic' and that many members of a school (and often wider) community are drawn into work for a school's benefit. So, how might this work be understood?

Crossing Boundaries

Glucksmann's TSOL framework, extended by both Taylor (2004; 2016) to include voluntary work and Williams (2002a; 2002b; 2011a; 2011b) to include informal work (or the fourth sector) and different forms of community self-help, conceptualises work as existing on a continuum from formal to informal and as paid or unpaid (including gift exchange and in-kind labour). Although work can be fitted into one of these 'zones', the boundaries between them are blurred and fuzzy and the interconnections and interdependencies of different forms of work are of vital importance to understanding the implications of different TSOL configurations. I have adapted this framework to illustrate how the work of education is organised at Applegood and Oakington (see Figure 3 below). Adapting existing TSOL typologies was necessary in the context of small rural primary schools to accommodate for the overwhelming prevalence of different forms of unpaid, voluntary activity (sections 4 to 9 of Figure 3) including the giving of time, talent, money and resources. However, whilst the work undertaken in these small rural primaries may be fitted into one of these nine 'zones', the interconnections, and interdependencies between them are of vital importance to understanding the implications of this TSOL configuration for the school, and for the members of its community.

PAID					
1. Formal paid job in school		2. Reimbursed provisioning for school		3. 'Gift' exchange within the community	
Paid staff working to job descriptions and contracted hours		- Staff reimbursed for provisions bought for school - PTA chair and staff reimbursed for provisions for fundraising and enrichment events		Staff clothes swap bag	
FORMAL		- Fundraising/ Community events (organisation and delivery) - Farm School - Woodland Nursery		INFORMAL	
- Volunteers and staff at fundraising/ community events - Volunteers at promotional events - Volunteer readers	Governance	Monetary donations	- Staff provisioning their classrooms - Resource donations - Donation of woodland use by local landowner	- Staff working beyond job descriptions and contracted hours - Parents word-of-mouth promotion of the school - Children selling raffle tickets	- Parents' carpooling - Space exchange between school and community - Sharing of experience and emotional support
4. Formal unpaid work in school	5. Formal unpaid work for school	6. Fundraising in school	7. Resource-provisioning for school	8. Informal unpaid work for school	9. Informal exchanges within the community
UNPAID					

Figure 13 - TSOL typology adapted for Applegood and Oakington

I have placed the organisation and delivery of fundraising/community events as spanning all sections of my TSOL typology. As stated at the beginning of this section, an event like the summer fair at Applegood crosses boundaries of all kinds. It includes the formal, unpaid work of Nancy (school business manager, PTA secretary and village resident), Sophie (former TA, current parent, PTA chair and village resident), and Crystelle (current parent, teacher and head of school) (all of whom have positions which cross boundaries) to organise the event, which takes place both in and outside (but for) the school (sections 4 and 5). Staff (predominantly TAs and other support staff) and parents also give their time to run stalls at the fair (section 4). It is, predominantly, a fundraising event where, although those donating do receive something back (a raffle ticket, time on a game, potentially a prize) and could therefore be categorised as section 3, this is ultimately at a lower value to what is originally donated, hence providing fundraised income (section 6). In some cases, as Holly (a parent and governor) reflected, parents end up buying back what they had originally donated in the first place, often at a higher cost. Tombola and raffle prizes are donated by parents, staff (at all levels) and external businesses in the months leading up to the summer fair (section 7). As well as providing their formal unpaid labour by running stalls, school staff and their families also spend their own time setting up the fair and clearing it away (section 8). Both Steph and Sophie lamented to me that whilst the parent community were very generous in their donations of money and goods at fundraisers, there is always a lack of bodies (time) for the more 'informal' work (see 'Invisible Boundaries' section below and Chapter 6). Val from the village hall committee is allowed a table at Applegood's fairs for free in exchange for the school's free use of the village hall for events (section 9). Indeed, whilst the summer fair is predominantly a fundraising event, Sophie is keen for the links between the school and the local community to be strengthened, and she sees this informal exchange as one way of doing so. Multiple and overlapping purposes are discussed further below.

It is worth noting here that Oakington's fundraising/community events are organised and delivered slightly differently due to being led by staff and taking place during schools hours. Oakington's sports day and summer fair, for example, are held on the same day, towards the end of term, during the school day. Sports day is usually in the afternoon, following a picnic, with the summer fair straight afterwards. As Katherine explained:

it works really well on sports day because you've got captive audience... and actually, if you want, if you want to get to as *many* people as possible, there's an ideal opportunity. Hopefully, you know, if the weather's good. It's, it all works out.

Events such as sports day and summer fair, often have many purposes, including fundraising, enrichment, parental involvement/community development, and marketing. Indeed, many activities within the TSOL cross boundaries in terms of having overlapping purposes. In particular, events which are run for the enrichment (and enjoyment) of the children at Applegood, usually have some sort of fundraising element. For example, tickets are sold for school discos and film evenings at Applegood to raise funds for the school. In contrast, Oakington put these events on for free (paid for through previous fundraised income), knowing many of their families could not afford a ticketed event. At



Figure 14 - Models by Dan (Year 4, Oakington) showing the ice lollies a parent brings for the children at Sports Day, and the Coors Beer his family donated as a prize for Summer Fair

Oakington, events involving external people often always have a marketing (reputation-building) element, whereas Applegood focus more on community interaction. The combination of purposes was even reflected in the children's artwork. Figure 14 shows how, for Dan (Year 4, Oakington), summer fair and sports day represent the 'same thing' as they happen on the same day. His model, made in response to discussions about what fundraising for school and donations to school were, shows his families donation of (specifically Coors) beer, and the ice-lollies another child in his class's mum usually brought for all the children to enjoy on what was (hopefully) a hot sunny day. Thus, for Dan, the same event was both fun for him and his friends, whilst also involving resource donation for his school.



Figure 15 – Me (left) on a farm trip with Year R and 1 at Oakington (counted as ‘staff’ on this visit). Kate, a governor and local farmer and her daughter (right) lead the visit

Other boundary-crossing activities in both schools are Farm School (Saunders et al, 2011) and Woodlands (Forest School) (Pimlott-Wilson and Coates, 2019). Being in rural areas enables students to gain first-hand experience of caring for plants, animals, and the environment (Noddings, 2005) through these initiatives and they are a fundamental part of the curriculum at both Applegood and Oakington. Farm School is run by Kate (a farmer and Applegood village resident) who is funded through government to provide farming experiences for local schools. For the schools, Farm School is a free educational activity. Kate herself offers it to many schools and other educational groups – more than she is funded to provide –

volunteering for many hours to do so. Thus, some of her work can be considered unpaid and voluntary. Kate also happens to be a governor, thus is a formal unpaid volunteer for the federation in this capacity too. Indeed, many individuals could be placed in multiple categories at once, for different activities they undertake, when they undertake them and how. Farm School is formal in the sense that it is a planned part of the curriculum and is led by a professional who delivers the activities. Yet it has an informal feel due to the nature of learning outside and the inclusion of Kate's two children in the activities who are home-schooled by their mum and support her by further explaining and demonstrating their practical knowledge and skills to their school-educated peers. Their education represents a stark contrast to that of Applegood and Oakington's pupils and is highlighted by their involvement in the same activity but in very different capacities.

The woodland area at Applegood is a good example of the importance of (the use of) space and temporality (when space is used) when exploring the place of voluntary activity in changing TSOL configurations. The woodland area was donated by the local landowner, Lord Spencer, for the school's use and a 'working group' of volunteers (mostly male relatives of school staff and pupils) came to clear the area and build the mud kitchen and treehouse. It is used both by Applegood pupils and the Seedlings woodland nursery group. When Seedlings was first set up it was run voluntarily by Kate and Crystelle (who came to run it one morning a week whilst on maternity leave) and was free. Although people now pay to attend Seedlings, the labour involved to run it still crosses boundaries. It is staffed

by Steph, a paid HLTA who is given time out of the classroom to lead it, and Kim, a parent volunteer, who helps come up with ideas for activities, sources materials and takes photos for the school's social media (promotion). Thus, over its history, Seedlings has been a free activity staffed and resourced solely by voluntary labour, to a paid-for activity, staffed by a combination of paid and unpaid labour and resourced through donation (of land), the school and reimbursed provisioning. Changes in the organisation of work activities across boundaries and the processes of provision and consumption over time (Glucksmann, 2005) with Seedlings effect the interdependencies and interconnections and thus, the TSOL itself. Farm School and Seedlings are thus provided through a combination of both paid and unpaid labour, with formal and informal elements. This is important because it is the crossing of these boundaries, that enables these activities to take place but also take on their unique characteristics.



Figure 16 - Applegood woodland area mud kitchen, built by a predominantly male volunteer workforce of dads and husbands

Whilst the interconnections and interdependencies between the different zones of labour are what enable the work of education to 'get done', within these zones, there exist different orientations, resources, priorities, and understandings of the activities being undertaken (Taylor, 2004, pg.39). For staff, Seedlings and Hatchlings are vital feeders and promotion spaces for their respective schools. Indeed, many reception starters each year have come through the woodland nurseries, confirming the importance of this marketing which makes use of rural 'performance' spaces to represent the kind of idyllic, natural childhood experiences these schools can claim to provide (Halfacree, 2009b; Hemming and Roberts, 2018; Pimlott-Wilson and Coates, 2019). Kate chooses to go beyond her funded hours to provide Farm School due to her passion that children should learn about their local area, food production and experience outdoor education. Kim had, up until September 2022 been benefitting by bringing her own daughter to Seedlings as well as helping to run it but now her daughter has started in reception and so Kim comes alone. Kim explained her reasons for getting involved in woodlands as a way of 'giving back' to the school who had supported her son (with SEN) after a difficult start to his education (Preece and Lessner Lištiaková, 2021). But she also admitted that being involved in school enabled her to know how things worked 'on the inside', to keep an eye on her son, and to allay her own concerns (Hays, 1996; Gillies, 2006). Indeed, beyond the promotional work of Seedlings, Steph reflected that the mums who come are often seeking reassurance, support and "someone to talk to". On the first of many Wednesday morning walks through the school side gate and down the lane to the woodland, Steph said Seedlings can become a bit of a therapy session for the mums who turn up (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2012; Barnes and Nolan, 2019). This again reflects how events and activities can have multiple purposes, and the vital role of emotional labour that diffuses so many of these purposes in the (small rural) primary school. Emotional labour is discussed further below.

In both schools, voluntary activity is moving towards a more donation-centric model of giving, where goods and resources are requested, rather than monetary donations. Goods donation is a way of

reducing cost and labour as it saves staff time having to go and buy prizes, but it also means parents can recycle items, they already have rather than spending more:

I think it's *easier* for people doing donations of items. Because a lot of the time it's... for tombola's, or raffle prizes. It's things you've got in your cupboard. Or... you donate things and then you can make up a hamper out of it or, so, it's, it's anything isn't it you've got 'em in your cupboard. So, people, then parents aren't pressured. Because of like the cost-of-living. And when you've got a few children, it works out *a lot*. [...] Yeah, so I do, I *do* think people would *prefer* items. I find it easier. Cos it, you know, people don't really have change laying about and that anymore its, so and then you get presents that you don't *want*. And you can, you know, gift sets and things, *people don't use 'em*, so it's like 'yep!' and someone else can make use out of that. (Zoe)

Parents really value this form of giving because it is easier, cheaper and more inclusive than traditional monetary donations.

In summary, exploring the work that is undertaken to make education possible in these schools reflects the blurring of physical, temporal, and conceptual boundaries between paid and unpaid, formal and informal work. It also shows how the work of education is not always academic; fundraising and marketing are key areas of work which the school are required to dedicate time, talent, and resources to. The next section of this chapter explores how this crossing of boundaries involves invisible labour, and some of the consequences of this invisibility.

Invisible Labour

Much of the unpaid work undertaken voluntarily at Applegood and Oakington is often invisible (Daniels, 1987). It is invisible in the sense that it cannot necessarily be 'seen' as its happening, but also because the volunteers themselves don't recognise their activity as volunteering. Hatton's (2017) three-fold conceptualisation of the cultural, legal, and spatial mechanisms through which work is made 'invisible' can be used to explain this further (see Figure 17). Interestingly, volunteer work in this model is confined to the subcategory of 'love & service' within 'noneconomic work' which is made 'socio-legally' invisible. Indeed, outside academia, volunteering is rarely considered 'work' and so even when volunteer work is 'visible' it is often not recognised as 'work' due to its noneconomic nature. This is also the case for the voluntary activity at Applegood and Oakington. In addition, much of the voluntary activity undertaken is also made 'socio-culturally' and 'socio-spatially' invisible. The remainder of this section will examine how this happens.

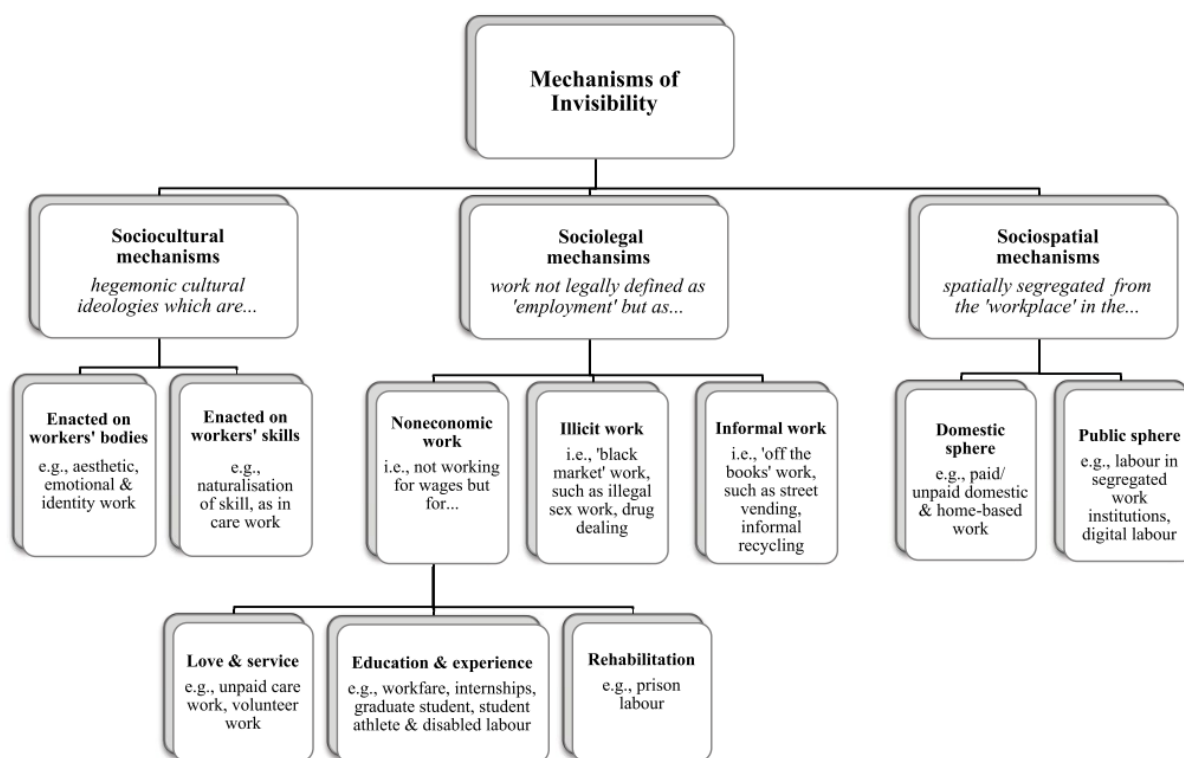


Figure 17 - Mechanisms of Invisibility (Hatton, 2017, pg.339)

Whilst statistical data suggest that teachers are the least likely group in society to volunteer, this fails to appreciate the amount of unpaid, voluntary work they undertake in and for their schools. Once this is considered, teachers emerge as some of the most civically active members of society (Body et al, 2023). In the case of the schools in this research, it is not just the teachers, but (current and former) staff at *all* levels, who undertake the most voluntary activity for their schools, giving time, talent, money and resources, above and beyond their job descriptions and paid hours every day. Nancy, Applegood's business manager, is a very active and integral member of the PTA and regularly steps in to run after school club when staff are absent. Gemma, Oakington's business manager, often steps in as a one-to-one TA when needed, even though this is not her job. In response to requests from Applegood pupils Candice supported in nurture group, she set up a jewellery club after school, sharing her skills, knowledge, and passion in her own time with her pupils and providing a further space for them to talk. As discussed above, Crystelle set up and ran Seedlings in her own time during her maternity leave. Staff (especially TAs and other support staff) are also vital 'bodies' at fundraising events where parents cannot necessarily be relied upon to turn up and help. Almost all staff in both schools have provided and prepared food for their pupils, and often top-up the resources in their classrooms and buy or make pupils gifts with their own money and in their own time:

Angela had crocheted all the children in her class a little character each to give them tomorrow as an end of term gift – she has carefully considered the children's interests and personalities when deciding which character she would make.

[Oakington Daily Fieldnotes, 20th July 2023]

These examples show not only the vast amount of time, expense, and skill which underpin school staff's voluntary activity, but also that it is imbued with an ethics of care, fitting well into Hatton's

(2017) categorisation of volunteer work as ‘love & service’. The importance of emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983) therefore deserves further attention here. School staff’s work is never always academically focused. Care is a crucial part of their role, especially in schools like Applegood and Oakington which cater for some very vulnerable children. This work is also becoming even more important post-pandemic and during the cost-of-living crisis when children and families have additional pressures and worries as a result (Rio Poncela et al, 2021; Lucas et al, 2023). As well as caring, primary school staff also feel the need to ‘be fun at work’ (Vincent and Braun, 2013) to create the ‘atmosphere’ or ‘mood’ (Taylor and Highmore, 2014) expected in a primary school classroom. However, in this feminised environment (Skelton, 2012), this work is made socio-culturally invisible through its naturalisation. Interestingly, staff motivations for undertaking unpaid, voluntary work in and for the school and their pupils, are similar if not the same as those given for entering the education profession in the first place; to make a difference and to improve children’s life chances. Ultimately, staff feel that if they didn’t undertake this extra work voluntarily and unpaid, it just wouldn’t get done and the children would miss out or ‘suffer’ as a result. It is therefore unsurprising that the motivations for teaching, which is considered a vocation, closely align with the altruistic motivations prevalent in the literature on voluntary work (Hustinx et al, 2010; Clary et al, 1996). Thus, the totality of their work may cross boundaries, but these are largely invisible boundaries, especially as perceived by the staff themselves whose voluntary work is seen as an extension of their formal paid roles. Invisibility of emotional labour and care, however, is a problem as it minimises the importance of this work which should underpin all elements of education for every child (Noddings, 2005; 2012) and thus it fails to get the policy attention it deserves.

Not only do school staff themselves fail to recognise their own voluntary activity, but so too is the everyday ‘work’ of school staff devalued by a socio-cultural rhetoric that suggests they only work between the hours of 9am and 3pm and get school holidays ‘off’. This has never been the case. Teachers and senior leaders always start work before 9am, remain after the children leave and work through holidays. Teaching assistants often run breakfast clubs before school starts, come in early to set up their classrooms and stay late to tidy their classrooms and support after school clubs to provide vital wrap-around care and support for the families they serve (Barnes and Nolan, 2019). Whilst this work is often (socio-culturally) invisible, it is also expected for staff (at all levels) to work beyond their contracted hours and job descriptions (whether this is publicly recognised, or not). In a system where there is chronic underfunding and poor pay, expecting (and necessitating) staff to engage in unpaid voluntary labour both in and outside school normalises this labour and makes it an invisible extension of educators paid work (as legally defined in their contracts). Those who do not (or cannot) undertake this additional work are seen as bad and uncaring, failing to conform to the expected identity of one who works in education. And yet, the implications of the socio-cultural rhetorics which require increased staff workload (poor recruitment and retention, burnout and high turnover) damages children’s education and the mental health of staff (Ovenden-Hope and Passy, 2019; Walker, 2023). The more it is normalised, the more difficult it becomes for this work to be properly recognised and remunerated, feeding back into and intensifying issues associated with workload. Crucially, these workload issues extend beyond teachers and senior leaders (as often discussed in the literature and policy debates), to the work of teaching assistants too (Weale, 2024):

But *again*, when I was in the classroom *last* year. Um, and obviously [Greg’s] teacher for 3 days out of the week. You know, he used to come out of the classroom 3,4,5,6 times a day. So, then I used to, well one of us, or whatever TA was in there at the time would pick up from

where he was left off or... you know so if Liv come and say to him “look I need you for such and such”. You know he’d go, “Can you take?”, “Yeah, not a problem”. You know, we took over. But *that* could happen. *Not at all. Or* up to 6-7 times a day, you know? So, it does have an impact on the class. (Nat)

Nat’s discussion of the teaching work she had to take on, outside of her job description, due to limited staff capacity (a senior teacher who is also SENCo) reflects how, especially in the small school, teaching assistants have intense workloads which are often unrecognised and invisible outside of the school – it is both socio-culturally and socio-spatially invisible. And yet, this extra work is vital to the day-to-day running of the small rural primary school – and to schools of all sizes (Ibid; Hartland et al, 2024). Whilst teaching assistants willingness to fill these gaps keeps schools running, many are often unqualified and untrained, resulting in a poorer educational experience for all children (Lewis, 2023). If this happens on a regular basis, it raises serious concerns for the long-term effects on children’s educational experience, as well as the status of the teaching profession itself.

Due to the multiple and varied examples of voluntary activity undertaken by staff discussed above, it could be argued that staff represent the ‘civic core’ (Mohan and Bulloch, 2012) of these schools. However, whilst the ‘civic core’ concept can be reflected in terms of staff being an identifiable group who account for the largest share of a variety of dimensions of giving (time, talent, money, and resources) in these schools, the concept does not really work in terms of an identifiable demographic group. Whilst almost all staff are female, they vary in terms of their ages, educational and occupational level, and religious practices. Therefore, this thesis argues that Body et al’s (2023) terminology of ‘most civically active individuals’ better categorises the staff in these schools than the ‘civic core’ concept. Conceptualising school staff in this way contrasts with much of the literature which finds the voluntary workforce of schools to be made up predominantly of parents (Musick and Wilson, 2008) and is a crucial original contribution of this thesis. Moreover, recognising and appreciating (making visible) the complex and varied nature of the work school staff, at all levels, undertake is vital if we are to understand how we could better support staff to achieve the best outcomes possible for children. These findings contribute to this recognition by making visible the extensive voluntary activity of school staff at all levels.

Exploring the mechanisms by which the voluntary activity of staff is rendered invisible raises the important question; ‘invisible to who?’ Through my ethnographic approach I have been able to uncover much invisible labour but, in doing so, recognised that (depending on the activity) it *remains* largely invisible to staff, parents, governors and children. Kim’s voluntary work, for example, can be divided into her support at Seedlings, and her role as a reading volunteer. Her Seedlings activity is visible to Steph who she directly supports and the parents who attend. However, it is (socio-spatially) invisible to other staff members, the parents who do not attend and the school children. In comparison, her work as a reading volunteer is visible to most staff, to the parents of the children with whom she reads (via comments in their reading records) and most of the children within the school who, even if they do not read with her, see her in school carrying out this activity. To each of these groups however, she is first and foremost, a mum, rather than a volunteer. But it is important to

recognise that Kim is a middle-class mother⁴. Gillies (2006) observed classed differences in mothers' involvement, finding that middle-class mothers are more involved 'physically' (i.e. visibly) in school, which is true of Kim. However, 'giving back' is not always (socio-spatially) visible. Mary-Anne, a working-class mother, explained that she is very invested in her son James's education because she wanted him to do better in school than her and her husband had done. However, because she works full-time as a nurse, and her husband is currently undertaking unsalaried teacher training, she could not afford to commit to joining the PTA but 'gives back' by baking cakes for school and PTA events. This highlights what many parents have said: that they cannot give time but will gladly donate goods and money when asked (and where they can). See 'Peripheral/episodic Volunteers' in Chapter 6 for further discussion on this.

Another group of invisible volunteers are the federation's governors. Many of the parents and children often do not know who they are or what they do. Whilst governors do undertake monitoring visits in school, they are rarely present in the school as meetings take place outside of school hours and, since the COVID-19 pandemic, they tend to take place online. Thus, their work is socio-spatially invisible to most members of the school community. This is not to say that all the governors are invisible in school. Frances does art with the children at Applegood, Kate runs Farm School, Holly is an Applegood parent, and Crystelle is the head of school and teaches Star class at Applegood. Whilst they are visible in these roles, however, their work *as governors* remains largely invisible. Governors are an unusual category of volunteer as the governor role carries a great deal of responsibility and accountability (James et al, 2010). In fact, Kate expressed that she did not believe the role of governing could continue as a voluntary role as it has become very demanding and time-consuming (Forrest et al, 2023). This is a problem for schools and governing bodies who seek to be diverse and representative of the communities they serve because the role currently attracts predominantly white, retired, middle-class, professionals as it is this demographic that can 'afford' to commit to the role. This distance between the everyday workings of the schools and their governors was evident when Brendan told me he didn't know why I was researching these schools as "nothing happens here". Not only was this an incredulous statement, but it further reflects a lack of appreciation for the day-to-day voluntary activity of staff (at all levels) and parents which is rarely recognised for the important role it plays in education provision.

Sophie, the Applegood PTA chair (former TA and parent) is one of the most civically active individuals at Applegood. Whilst she is no longer a staff member, it is this experience, alongside being a parent, which has both enhanced and diversified the voluntary activity with which she engages for the school's benefit, crossing boundaries in order to do so. She is highly valued for her role within and for the school, with many parents and staff easily identifying her as synonymous with voluntary activity at Applegood, discussing her in both her current PTA and parent capacity, as well as her former TA position. However, whilst she is visible in this sense, much of her work takes place outside of school; in her own home, in supermarkets, at her own workplace, in the pub, in school but outside of school hours, rendering it socio-spatially invisible. Indeed, whilst staff and parents can identify (the *outcomes* of) Sophie's work, they cannot as easily articulate exactly what it is she does (the *labour* that makes outcomes happen). Whilst Sophie is no longer a staff member, she is the registered chair of Applegood School Fundraisers (ASF) and so has some legal visibility here. Interestingly, Sophie discussed the need

⁴ Class is defined using background information from participants, including their education level and occupation.

for a fundraisers email address to be created for her after she ceased being a staff member to lend authority to her requests for support from external businesses and the management of these relations as she was being ignored or not taken seriously without this authority. This again reflects the invisibility of voluntary labour when it comes into contact with paid work (Dixon, 2017; Johnson et al, 2023). Because it is publicly perceived as a noneconomic activity, requests for voluntary support can be treated with suspicion by paid workers.

The extent to which the work of the organisation and delivery of enrichment events is invisible to parents is summed up by Sophie: “I think parents think it just happens”. This invisibility makes the work itself more difficult as parents do not realise what is paid for through fundraised income (e.g. Easter eggs, Christmas presents, Year 6 leavers gifts) and fail to appreciate that whilst fundraised money might pay for resources, it does not pay for the time that is voluntarily donated by PTA members. Whilst Sophie did not mention feeling the need to be publicly acknowledged for the voluntary work she does, she does feel the lack of knowledge and appreciation leads to less voluntary labour, making her work harder. Thus, issues of invisibility are important to consider because they relate to issues of satisfaction, communication and understanding, which further negatively impact volunteer recruitment and retention.

The Children and the TSOL

How much voluntary labour is visible to the children in these schools? Supporting charity is mainstream in most schools (Power and Taylor, 2018). Indeed, many children did refer to major charity fundraising campaigns in the art groups, when asked about voluntary activity, including The Poppy Appeal and Children in Need. However, voluntary activity is also playing an increasingly dominant role in the funding and day-to-day running of primary schools themselves (Body et al, 2017). Interestingly, after we had defined voluntary activity in art groups, when asked about volunteers in their schools, children’s first suggestions were often their TAs, or specific teachers. This further reflects how natural the blurring of boundaries is in the work of school staff, as children see even their voluntary work as a normal part of the teaching assistant role. Despite some confusion, at Applegood children could identify what various volunteers did in school when prompted with their names, and older children could often recognise external volunteers unprompted, such as Maggie, a local church volunteer who runs collective worship, Frances, a local governor and artist who gives lessons in school and helps with



scenery for school plays, Jane, a reading volunteer, and Peter, a local gardener and parent who hosts the children at the gardens for science lessons and visits. With fewer external volunteers at Oakington, it was the *staff's* fundraising and event organisation that was (more accurately) identified as voluntary by (especially the older) children.

Figure 18 - Drawing by Lizzie (Year 3, Applegood) depicting a range of voluntary activities she is aware of at her school

Indeed, whilst many adult participants during the research expressed their beliefs that the children would not recognise activities as voluntary or people as volunteers (as opposed to staff or parents), my research with the children evidenced that they had a more diverse awareness and understanding of a range of volunteers, voluntary events and activities *for* their school than adults assumed. Figure 18, drawn by Lizzie (Year 3, Applegood) depicts Poppy Day, Christmas Fair, the Wellie Walk, Woodland nursery and herself helping two children with high levels of SEN need on the playground. She places herself in her caring role at the centre of her picture, with other aspects of voluntary activity surrounding her, drawn as and when they occurred to her. Lizzie's colourful picture shows her extensive knowledge of voluntary activity, which she was keen to explain to me in depth when she had completed her picture. Figure 19, made by Eve (Year 1, Oakington) depicts the Aladdin pantomime trip paid for by fundraising, a mug she created to sell (and buy back) at the Christmas Fair and a school cake sale she had recently attended (and her mum had baked for). Following discussions in her art group, she conceptualised voluntary activity as fun things they get to do at school (conflating fundraising and enrichment events together). She organised her artwork into three sections representing three different activities and outcomes as they occurred to her. This art group was conducted in December and the Pantomime was coming up soon, so Eve was particularly excited about this, and we chatted a lot about it. Whilst influenced by discussions in the session, Eve had a lot of knowledge of voluntary activity at school and explained each element to me in detail. These children thus identified fundraising, volunteering, and resource donation through their artwork and discussions, reflecting a varied understanding of voluntary activity and that it was a normal, everyday part of their school experience that they (largely⁵) enjoyed.

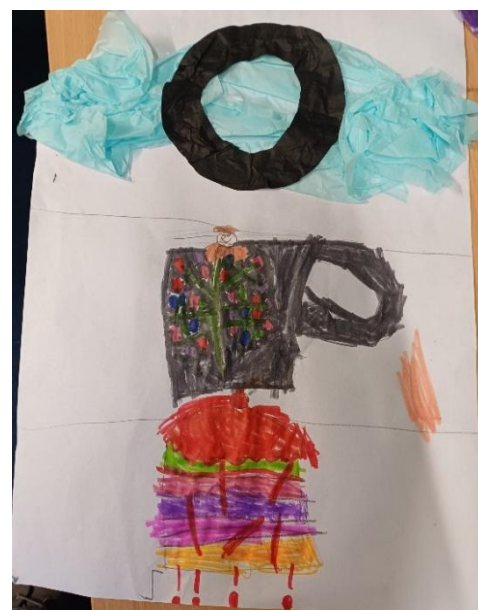


Figure 19 - Artwork by Eve (Year 1, Oakington) depicting a range of fundraising activities and outcomes she is aware of at her school

The children themselves were also involved in voluntary activity for their school but much of this was invisible to adults. This invisibility often resulted from voluntary activities being perceived as just a

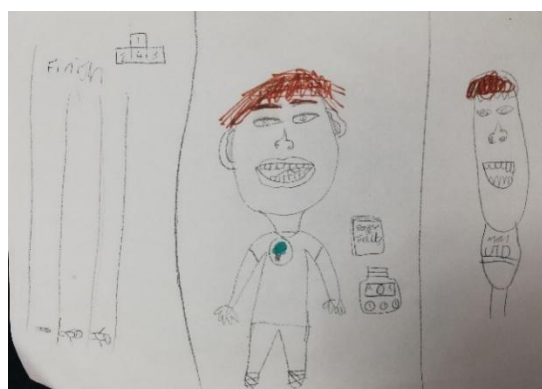


Figure 20 - Drawing by Jack (Year 6, Oakington) showing (left to right) his role as sports captain, selling raffle tickets for school fundraising, and taking part in non-school uniform day

regular part of school life that children were expected to engage in. Ironically this was also how much voluntary activity of staff was also rendered invisible by children and other adults (see above). Figure 20, drawn by Jack (Year 6, Oakington) after discussions in his art group depicts three distinct activities he is involved in and which he volunteered for. The art group took place in the summer term and so these activities were also fresh in his mind: being a sports captain, supporting sports day, selling raffle tickets before and after school for the summer fair, and taking part in a non-school uniform day where he donated a prize for the summer fair tombola. Indeed, when I asked what they did for

⁵ Some found the pantomime 'too loud' and 'too crowded'

their school without asking or by volunteering themselves, multiple examples were mentioned. These included helping with fundraising (discussed further in Chapter 6), setting up and clearing away after events, managing the school library, becoming school council members, sports captains and caring for other members of their school community.

Focusing on this last example, Body et al (2020) argue that children view charity not only as money, but as being embodied in everyday acts of kindness, fairness, and empathy. I found this to be pervasive in these schools, especially in terms of the care older pupils had for the younger children, and in terms of the level of awareness and care for pupils with SEN. Many adult participants across both schools highlighted how proud they are of the caring and inclusive ethos of their schools and how this socialises the children into being understanding individuals:

The children, the more vulnerable children, they are really protective of them. [...] they really nurture them. Its lovely. [...] I think that they probably have better people skills, and like erm acceptance of people that are different. We talked about that earlier, we see that a lot. They just *get* it. It's not really tolerance. They have just more of an *understanding* of other people's needs and things. (Laura)

Whilst the children are explicitly taught these values through collective worship and religious education (Holmes and Pratt-Adams, 2021), the school staff and students also implicitly teach these values through their everyday embodiment of the school ethos (Ibid; Keddie, 2018). The small size and numbers were seen as particularly important here as every child in these schools spend break and lunch time together on the same playground (see Lizzie's picture in Figure 18 again) which exposes them regularly to every other member of the school community in a relatively small space. SEN children are also educated in the same classroom as their non-SEN peers. This closeness meant that friendships occurred naturally, without the need for a formal 'buddy system' to be in place. Children are aware of and volunteer to look out for others, and this benefits both them *and* those they care for (Kalambouka et al, 2007). I identify this as voluntary activity as the children perform this care work without being asked. And yet it is often invisible to both adults and children due to its naturalisation as an everyday practice in-keeping with the inclusive and caring ethos of the schools. Nevertheless, this is a valuable voluntary activity for children to engage in, contributing to their philanthropic citizenship (Body et al, 2021) and everyday understandings and practices of care (Noddings, 2012) that benefit themselves and others.

Maintaining Boundaries

Whilst the boundaries between work practices in these schools are blurry, there are significant efforts made to maintain them (Lamont and Molnár, 2002), which has significant consequences. For example, Sophie, Applegood's PTA chair, spoke about the need she feels to keep the boundaries between the school budget and PTA funds in place to ensure PTA funding is used only for enrichment purposes and is not subsumed into the general school budget. Although Sophie has started allowing the class teachers to put forward 'wish lists' for their classes, Sophie reviews these lists and decides what can and cannot come from the PTA budget. Interestingly, whilst a request for new furniture for the Year 3&4 class was not allowed, new books for the Year 5&6 class was. Thus, differing interpretations and a blurring of boundaries remains in negotiations over what is understood to be a school budget resource or enrichment resource. Moreover, these negotiations have become more common in recent

years as increased funding cuts mean that the school struggle to fund core resources from their budget and Crystelle feels the increasing need to turn to the PTA for help. The introduction of wish lists was a response to this struggle. However, this highlights a fundamental inequality between Applegood who have a PTA and Oakington who do not, in that resources and capital are already unequally accessible between the two schools. Crystelle at Applegood has the option of turning to her PTA, whilst Oakington staff have no such resource to draw upon. Thus, funding cuts by government which necessitate schools to find other sources of income exacerbate inequalities between schools with PTAs and those without. This does not only put extra pressure on staff (especially TAs and other support staff who are most often involved in PTA activity), but it also negatively impacts the children in these schools who should not have to rely on the availability of voluntary support to receive a good education.

Asking the question ‘what could you not do without voluntary activity?’ in these schools, led to honest reflections and discussion on what participants believed should and should not be provided by voluntary activity in education. Whilst there was a distinction (conceptual boundary) between fundamentals being paid for by school budget and enrichments being paid for by fundraised income and delivered through voluntary effort, certain enrichments were conceptualised as fundamental, especially at Oakington where there are more deprived families:

The money we receive from the school should be... on things that we need for our SEN children, for staffing and things like that. For the events that we do... I think for the Christmas fete should be done regardless. Whether that's through donating or the school funding it. I feel like *that* is a big part, because not all children receive presents at home. *That's* a big part, I think. But everything else, you know, we do off our own backs. I would continue to do that. Whether the school received the money for it or not. (Kayleigh)

Kayleigh saw the Christmas Fair as a necessity that should be provided regardless of school budget problems due to the socio-economic backgrounds of some families at Oakington where their children would not otherwise receive presents. There is therefore a conception of a minimum standard of enrichment that is fundamental to the inclusivity of the school ethos. Whilst Oakington can provide this through voluntary activity, it raises the question of what would happen if they could not, or in other schools where the voluntary activity does not exist to provide such enrichment. Inevitably, some children would miss out. That voluntary activity is needed to promote this inclusivity is a concern in a public education system where every child should be provided for in school budgets.

Furthermore, whilst children knew that a lot of their fundraising went on school trips and other fun enrichment activities, many also brought up spending on fundamentals such as books, stationery, fixing the school roof, and even SEN resources:

I asked, “what about fundraising we do for school though, what do you think, or do you know what the school spend the money on?” Loreia [Year 5] said “new pencils and rubbers”. I said, “ah interesting” and wrote this down. Then she said, “and for people with ADHD like me, they get like sensory stuff”. I was amazed by this insight and knowledge from Loreia, and touched that she noticed and valued this support her school and the staff provided for her

[Oakington Children’s Art Group 11 Observations, 24th November 2023]

Whilst there was an agreement across these schools that funding for fundamentals like SEN resources should come from the school budget, staff spending on, and donations of these resources were pervasive. Sadly, they were also deemed necessary due to small school budgets. Whilst key equipment such as sensory circuits were provided, ‘smaller’ things like snacks, stickers, weighted blankets, sensory toys, and toys linked to the child’s particular interest were the extras which improved these children’s experiences at school, and which staff felt emotionally motivated to provide at their own expense:

Walking round the local boot fair, I met Liv and Nat. Between them they were holding a range of items, including dressing up clothes and cuddly toys. After exchanging “hellos”, I commented: “you’ve done well”, indicating their buys. They laughed and Liv said they had been looking for ‘under the sea’ themed stuff for Orla and Rosie who would both be in Liv’s class in September. Orla and Rosie both have SEN [I thought how sweet it was that Liv and Nat were spending their own time and money to source items for their classroom that would make Orla and Rosie feel more comfortable at school – I know they both love mermaids!]

[Oakington Daily Fieldnotes, August 2023]



Figure 21 - SEN area created for Orla and Rosie with toys and dressing up clothes sourced and bought by Liv and Nat (TAs) at Oakington

Whilst examples like this no doubt show SEN children that the adults in their school care about them, if SEN children think the things they need to support their inclusion in mainstream classrooms are always provided through fundraised income or donation, this might socialise them not to question or consider alternative ways they could be provided (e.g. political decisions and spending priorities) (Power and Taylor, 2018). As these children grow up in an education system dominated by neoliberal policies, they are being given the message that citizens should provide for themselves, and that the welfare state will not always meet their needs. This can lead to wider questions about the inclusivity of the education system. If certain special educational needs are not provided for in mainstream education, or are only accessed through fundraised income or donations, this risks the ‘othering’ of children who need additional support in their schools, creating a conceptual and sometimes even a physical boundary (see Figure 21) between SEN and non-SEN. Constantly

having to rely on voluntary activity to provide for SEN children, sends a message that government does not value their education enough to ensure they can access it on a level playing field with their non-SEN peers. Thus, whilst voluntary activity can benefit children, it can simultaneously (and unconsciously) perpetuate signals of exclusion resulting in SEN children feeling that they do not belong in mainstream settings.

Whilst boundaries can be strict when it comes to fundraised income, they appear to be more flexible when it comes to gifts-in-kind (resources). Whereas Sophie prevents fundraised income being spent on ‘core’ (budget) resources, she is keen to encourage teachers to ask parents for donations of, for example, arts and crafts resources for curriculum activities. The formality of monetary donations compared with the informality of gifts-in-kind appears to mediate between different purposes (academic or enrichment) when it comes to donations so that if donated items are given informally,

the purpose to which it is put is not so strictly monitored. Arguably, however, if donations are specifically asked for, this may seem more formal to parents than if they donate unasked. Indeed, if parents were to feel they were being “coerced [into] collective co-production” of core services by resourcing curriculum activities it is likely to produce negative experiences and unequal outcomes (Body and Hogg, 2021, pgs.12-13). Not only would this be an unreliable source and place unethical pressure on parents, but there is also the risk that tensions could arise between those parents who can and do donate and those who cannot and do not. Thus, whilst Sophie feels that teachers may pre-judge the willingness and capabilities of their parent community (Ibid; Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2012; Barnes and Nolan, 2019) and that a lack of asking inevitably leads to a lack of giving from parents, schools cannot and should not (need to) depend on donations from parents for core activities in a free and public education system.

Voluntary labour is an interesting category because the *purpose* to which it is directed can be flexible but *how* it happens can be very controlled. Volunteer readers, for example, are directed to the core curricular activities of phonics and reading progression. In contrast, for the parents and staff who run stalls at the school fair, their labour is directed towards the purpose of fundraising for enrichment activities. Despite the multiple purposes to which voluntary labour is put to use, however, voluntary labour itself is no longer as free or informal as it used to be in decades past (Bell and Sigsworth, 1987). There are many more formal rules and boundaries in place now. All volunteers in direct contact with children must be DBS checked. Not all volunteers are willing to go through this formal process which potentially reduces the number of volunteers the schools could benefit from. Indeed, DBS came up in many interviews as a barrier to voluntary activity. Sophie spoke of ‘Grandad Norman’, a father of one of the previous governors, who would come into school to ‘fix things’ free of charge. However, issues raised around insurance meant that this practice had to stop. Nevertheless, many agreed that increased formality was positive and necessary to keep everyone safe, even if it makes recruiting and facilitating voluntary support more difficult. Oakington had found a solution to this problem by having staff members relatives come into school when the children are not there (evenings, weekends, school holidays) to perform maintenance tasks (as with Liv’s son, discussed by Greg in the extract at the beginning of this chapter).

In both interviews and observations, references were made to the need to maintain boundaries between (certain) parents and the school, and how participation in voluntary activity by parents can complicate this relationship. For example, when Applegood have parent volunteers in school, they keep them to defined roles and prescribed physical locations to maintain both spatial and social boundaries (especially keeping parent volunteers separate from their own children whilst they are volunteering). The complexity of managing (and consequences of mismanaging) these boundaries is clear in the relationship Oakington school have with Lisa, a parent volunteer, who often fails to appreciate the boundaries she cannot cross in school. Gemma discussed with me an occasion where [REDACTED] had turned up in the middle of the school day wanting to go up to the woodland classrooms to hang up some bunting that she had made for the Hatchlings woodland nursery. Gemma had explained that whilst the bunting was lovely and she was very kind in her offer, she could not let her on the premises alone whilst the children were in school (she is not DBS checked). She said [REDACTED] got angry about this. Such encounters are frustrating for staff who must balance the need to maintain boundaries and keep children safe, but at the same time do not wish to discourage voluntary support and donations and, more crucially, good relationships with their parent community.

However, the situation with [REDACTED] escalated and, in the end, Oakington had to go to the extent of blocking [REDACTED] from the schools Facebook page due to mounting conflict and damaging comments being posted:

In the staff room, there was a big conversation going on about how awful [REDACTED] was at the Harvest Festival today... Liv said she was slagging the school and Katherine off to Liv in front of other parents, saying she wasn't going to be bringing her youngest daughter back to Hatchlings as it was rubbish and she didn't think she was going to send her to Oakington anymore... Gemma said she might need to block her from Facebook... Liv asked if [REDACTED] had collected all her stuff from the office yet. Gemma said [REDACTED] had sent [REDACTED] [her husband] in to collect stuff, but he didn't know what he was looking for... Liv said there was still stuff of hers in there so she said she would take it over to her tonight, so she doesn't come back to school.

[Oakington Daily Fieldnotes, 29th September 2023]

The decision to block [REDACTED] from the Facebook page is an example of a way staff could police the boundaries between (difficult) parents and the school in order to prevent damages to the schools reputation and sabotaging of their promotional efforts. However, such boundary maintenance also extended to Liv taking on the additional voluntary work of driving Lisa's belongings over to her house outside of school hours and in her own time so as to prevent [REDACTED] physically coming back to school and causing further tensions. Thus, the voluntary work of staff is not always aimed directly at the education or enrichment of the children in school but can also be utilised to manage relationships with parents. Indeed, the relationship between [REDACTED] and Oakington fluctuated throughout the research between the difficult behaviour discussed above to her being one of the schools' strongest supporters (see Chapter 6 for further discussion of this). She would often discuss with me in field conversations how much she loved the school and would engage in voluntary activity to improve the children's experiences (including her own daughters'), such as providing gardening resources for Hatchlings (which her youngest daughter attends) and helping to organise the end of term leavers celebration (which her eldest daughter attended). This shows that boundaries in these schools are 'live' with the constant need to carefully manage relationships when they are breached, especially when staff are aware of not only the dangers of upsetting parent volunteers, but also the benefits of their support.

A key aspect of this boundary management in primary education, is that volunteers are often *affectively* committed (Ward and Greene, 2018). Voluntary activities in schools are often emotionally motivated, with satisfaction derived from interactions with the children (Williams et al, 2002). However, even if a volunteer and a staff member have the same motivations for wanting to work in a school, and are exposed to the same situations, there are different rules which govern their activities. This can be difficult for both the staff member and the volunteer to navigate and so can lead to conflict and confusion, especially when volunteer expectations do not match with the reality of their practice (Dixon, 2017). Volunteers are not bound by *employment* contracts and cannot be rewarded or disciplined in the same way as staff (Ward and Greene, 2018). Instead, volunteers are bound by *social* contracts where they are committed to the success of an organisation (in this case, the school) (Ibid). This is further compounded in schools when volunteers are parents as their affective relationship is

linked to their child(ren), whose needs will come before the needs of the school more widely. Ward and Greene's (2018) ethnography found that managers are reluctant to challenge volunteers for fear that they would lose their labour and negatively damage the reputation of the organisation and so volunteer-staff relationships required careful and complex navigation. The situation with [REDACTED] above is evidence of this. In the context of the small rural primary school, who feel the ever-present threat of closure and are particularly vulnerable to fluctuating pupil numbers, the risk of upsetting affectively committed volunteers (especially if they are also parents) can be catastrophic to the reputation and very existence of the school. Indeed, some of the complexity in managing (especially parent) volunteers was attributed to the schools being small, as a small school means less people to manage voluntary activity but also the greater likelihood of conflict occurring when a small amount of people work in close proximity to each other with emotionally-motivated purposes. When parents have an issue with some aspect of the school or their child's experience, voluntary activity can be a site where these tensions play out. This can help explain why staff seek to strictly control the activities of (especially parent) volunteers and shows that ultimately, for parents, their children will always come before their commitment to the wider needs of the school. Such competing interests motivating affectively committed parent volunteers thus require careful ongoing management of live and unstable boundaries within primary education.

Gender

Another key aspect of maintaining boundaries is the gendered dimension of boundary maintenance. Even where mothers and fathers are both involved in voluntary activity, their roles are segregated by gender. Stereotypical gender ideologies of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2000) are very much present in the allocation of voluntary tasks, with male voluntary participation very much linked to their 'masculine' employment. This included football coaching (Amanda's dad), gardening (Peter – Lavender's dad), maintenance (Liv's sons) or construction (Steve, Rob, and Luke). In contrast, women were involved more actively and physically in school hours and on school grounds. This included helping at school events, going into school to donate, hear children read, engage in classroom activities, or just to talk to staff. This reflects both the feminisation of the primary school environment (Skelton, 2012) and that volunteering for school is an appropriate gendered arena in which to exercise intensive mothering (O'Brien, 2008; Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2013).

Interestingly, however, boundaries between females and males volunteer work was not only conceptual and social, but it was also temporal and spatial. The primary school can be seen as a feminised environment due to the predominantly female staff composition (Skelton, 2012). Beyond picking their children up from school, fathers did not tend to venture onto school premises or into the school itself. Where men were involved in activities and events, these were outside of school hours and/or off school premises. For example, Steve's involvement at Applegood referenced at the start of this chapter took place outside of school hours during the Summer Fair at the weekend. Steve's construction of games for the fair (see Figure 30) took place at his home, not at school. The development of the Applegood woodland area by male relatives of



Created by Liv's husband, Luke, a highways worker

staff and pupils took place during the school holidays. Similarly, at Oakington, Liv's sons and husband, will come in outside of school hours to perform maintenance tasks. Liv's son fixed the school toilet at the start of this chapter, and Figure 22 shows the temporary early years play area constructed by Luke using materials from his job as a highways worker. Nathan, a father at Oakington, is involved in Hatchlings, which takes place on the school field, but is separate from the main school's activities. Thus, male voluntary work was made spatially invisible as it is undertaken largely outside of school premises and/or hours.

What was also clear, however, was the significant influence of female relatives in initiating, facilitating and maintaining their male relative's voluntary engagement. Liv will ask her sons and husband to come into school (Oakington). Joy asked her husband to come with her to form part of the volunteer working group who developed the woodland space (he used his skills as a carpenter to build the treehouse and a bench) for Applegood. Thus, in the feminised environment of the primary school, Finch's (1983) exploration of women's incorporation into men's work is reversed – it is the male partners who find themselves incorporated into their female partners' work. Just as women's work remained hidden from view in the male-dominated world of professional paid work (Ibid), so male involvement in the feminised profession of teaching and female-dominated activity of volunteering has been largely unseen.



Figure 23 - Playdough models of 'volunteers' (both female) by Jasmine and Maisie (Year 2, Applegood)

As discussed above, whilst not all children were aware of who volunteers in their schools were, what was abundantly evident in discussions *and* artwork, is that when they thought of volunteers, they were thinking of the *female* adults they knew (whether that was staff, parents, (both) or other volunteers). Only some children whose fathers had volunteered at school discussed male involvement. Figure 23 depicts models made by Jasmine and Maisie (Year 2, Applegood) after discussions about their mums who came into school to volunteer. This included

running stalls at fairs and being reading volunteers. Similarly, Figure 24, drawn by Loreia (Year 5, Oakington) in response to discussions about how the school fundraised, shows two females running a tombola. When I asked who they were she said, "you and Samira" (a TA) but I think she came up with this on the spot, feeling it was a 'correct' answer to give. Nevertheless, it was still interesting that she identified females as involved in voluntary activity and felt this was what she was expected to identify. Thus, children themselves identify the gendered division of voluntary labour in their schools. But what effect might this gendered socialisation have on the children?

Sullivan (2004, pg.209) argues that day-to-day interaction is "simultaneously constituted and constitutive" in nature and so the performances of gender (by staff and volunteers) that children may see in their day-to-day schooling can shape their ideas of how



Figure 24 - Drawing by Loreia (Year 5, Oakington) showing a female teaching assistant and female volunteer at the summer fair (and the cake and perfume this pupil donated)

gender should be 'done'. Thus, if most volunteers in schools are women, and if much of the work they do may be classed as 'caring', this reinforces in children's consciousness that schooling and caring are the domains of women and feeds into gender role socialisation (Hochschild, 1983). This is already evident in the caring the children do in school. Whilst some of the boys in these schools cared for their younger peers and those with SEN, it was overwhelmingly the girls that did so:

you've always got the year five, six girls. They're straight there looking after them "oh, she's fallen over", like mothering them and nurturing them. (Laura)

Laura's use of the term 'mothering' reflects exactly the kind of socialisation these girls are receiving, and the care they are expected to show (Ibid). Incidentally, it was always the girls in art groups who wanted to come back again to help the younger children (and who helped me tidy up!). Whilst Laura did mention Mark (Year 5) who always helped care for her one-to-one Joey, he was the only one mentioned. And when I asked Mark about his caring role in his art group, he seemed bewildered and keen to distance himself from the notion of 'caring'. Similarly, at Oakington, when I gave examples of the care Caleb (Year 6) showed to the younger pupils, he shrugged and changed the subject. Whilst I was saddened by these reactions, it did highlight the continued strength of gendered stereotypes in a community where 'everyone cares for each other'.

Whilst Fenstermaker and West (2002, pg.211) argue that the situated conduct in which difference is accomplished is not pre-determined and that social interactions provide the potential for subversion, resistance and "conscious and consequential opposition" to the prevailing social structure, stereotypes around those involved in voluntary activity are not effectively challenged in these schools by staff or parents. Where male volunteers are involved in school, they usually help when the children are not in school. Thus, the children rarely see them, further limiting the opportunities to challenge stereotypes. Indeed, it actually reinforces the idea that men should not be *seen* to be involved in school and if they are it is linked to their employment or practical skills (rather than emotional caring skills, for example). Joy even referred to her husband attending the school fair as being there to 'babysit' her youngest so that she could get on with running the stall. This somewhat diminished the important role of childcare (within the TSOL of the school fair) when it is being undertaken by the father rather than the mother and reflected the gendered division of labour between Joy and her husband (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2013). These gendered divisions were very visible, even if not always vocalised, and they serve to perpetuate stereotypes around who can and should be carrying out voluntary work in these schools.

My Boundaries

I have been faced with the significance of boundaries throughout my research and have noticed others seek but struggle to categorise me. This has required me to reflect on my differing positionality within the schools and with different people.

Crossing Boundaries

Whilst always maintaining my role as a researcher, I easily fell back into work practices I had learnt as a TA whilst in my volunteer role for the schools. Indeed, I was seen and treated as a TA by the children

and most parents even though I had explained my role as a researcher and volunteer. Even after many research discussions, and an interview with Kim, she still thought of me as a staff member. At Applegood's Open Day, which we were both volunteering at:

Kim and I began discussing our roles in school, she said "well, you're staff". I said, "I'm not, I'm a volunteer" and she joked "but you live here!" We laughed and she clarified, "do you *choose* to be here?" I said, "yeah but I'm also doing my research so I kind of have to be here too". She said "yeah, well I think of you as staff"

[Applegood Daily Fieldnotes, 13th October 2022]

This interaction was interesting because it highlighted Kim's conceptualisation of the difference between 'staff' and 'volunteer' as depending on the amount of time spent in school (the longer the time, the more like a staff member you are) and whether you choose to be there (the freer you are to choose, the more like a volunteer you are). This suggests that it is normal for staff (at all levels) to spend so much of their time in school they are considered to 'live there' (a collapsing of spatial boundaries) but that they have little choice in doing so (the normalisation of blurred boundaries between staff's paid and unpaid work). It also further reflects how the invisibility and blurring of boundaries are embedded in Applegood, yet attempts are made to maintain boundaries to conceptualise and understand people's motivations and working practices in this environment.

As far as the schools were concerned, I was legally categorised as a volunteer. However, whilst spatially my work took place in school (and was therefore visible), it was never related solely to the schools purposes, as I was always observing and regularly note-taking and engaging in conversations for my research. Because the staff knew I was doing research through my voluntary role, this may have made some of the staff at Applegood (where I was less well known) suspicious of my motives for volunteering and therefore devalue my voluntary work. Indeed, some of the staff who were completely new to me seemed confused by my positionality and how to categorise me. I was a volunteer, not a TA, yet I was in the classroom alongside them, and the children related to me as a TA (I was crossing boundaries). In addition, some staff appeared to assume a lack of experience and knowledge on my part (of course, in relation to those with decades of experience I am relatively naïve). They were therefore surprised by how comfortable I was in the classroom, and how much I was willing to get involved with. I often felt like I was being a nuisance if I offered to help with things beyond what might 'normally' be expected of a volunteer. Indeed, my status as a volunteer was brought up to distinguish my work from that of a paid TA on multiple occasions at Applegood. For example, when helping tidy up Star class, Steph said she was "sorry, this [wasn't] a very exciting job". I was intrigued by this comment as it suggested the school might usually direct volunteers to more 'interesting' rather than 'mundane' roles (Dixon, 2017). In a different situation, whilst supporting a child with SEN, Alice often asked if I was okay with this as she knew I was "only a volunteer". Again, this suggests the differences between paid TA work and voluntary work in that volunteers would not normally be used for difficult and complex tasks (Johnson et al, 2023) such as supporting SEN children. Thus, in crossing these boundaries through my positionality, I had uncovered and was then able to explore and deconstruct taken-for-granted 'facts' in Applegood's voluntary activity.

Invisibility

When I consider the ‘invisible to who?’ question for myself, I recognise that I was seen much more as a volunteer in Applegood (where I was formally inducted and given a timetable) than in Oakington where I was seen as another TA (and where I had been formally employed previously). Indeed, my prior relationships and the current circumstances in each school affected how I was used as a volunteer. At Oakington I had been a TA and was well-known to the staff and the children. As such my voluntary activity continued as if I was still a TA (boundaries were invisible). Interestingly, however, Greg (who had not known me as a TA) discussed the effect of current pressures on my volunteering at Oakington in his interview:

Greg: well, I mean, you've only got to look at yourself, because, you know, like actually like *you are*, you know, that the highest qualified person, one of the highest qualified people here... *really* what I would *like* is I would like, but we've got someone off sick, we've got an advert out that we can't fill. So, *all* we're using you do is “*Taylah, please, can you be TA in here?*”

Me: Yeah, it's fine. I love it. [laughs]

Greg: which is great. And you're a great TA, but *actually* imagine, you know, [if] we *had* those, you know, the position filled, and the other position filled, maybe I could ask you to do something really interesting. You know, like, because actually, you're so intelligent and so well qualified. If the classes were all *manned*. If you could take children out and do phonics interventions, that would be *so* much better. And you'd be *more* than capable of doing that.

Me: because I think that's obviously at Applegood I was, I do just reading there, so

Greg: *Yeah*. And you do, you do it to a really high standard. [Yeah, we got trained]. Yeah. But, but then we can't do that. Because it's just literally like “Oh, okay. We really needed two people in there, because [SEN child's] got one to one. And then so Amy doesn't have a TA. Oh, and now, Sally's not there. So, well we'll have Taylah in there three days, and then Samira in there two”. But *yeah*, like... but then that's just covering the, what should have been there anyway. As opposed to oh, what should be there is *here*. So, “Taylah, can you do these?”, you know, “target these children for their reading?”, “Can you target these children for their phonics?” you know? “Can you do some? This really cool maths intervention programme that's great for building their understanding” which, all of which you'd be like, super capable of doing

There was very much a sense that I was a necessity at Oakington (with staff absence and increased SEN need) and whilst staff were grateful for me being there, senior staff wished they could put me to a different use that was even more beneficial to the children's education (Johnson et al, 2023). This situation highlights that, in the current financial climate for small schools, even when they do have access to highly qualified volunteers, they are not always able to use them to the children's educational advantage. Due to a lack of staff and high levels of SEN, Oakington do not have the capacity to train volunteers to deliver academic interventions (as Applegood did), or to allow time in the curriculum for this to happen. They also need bodies in classrooms first and foremost. However, whilst I was happy to fulfil whatever role the schools needed at the time to conduct my research and be useful, there is the danger that other volunteers, if unsatisfied with their role, would fail to be

retained. Thus, despite espoused policy aims that schools should use volunteers to enhance pupils' education, this ignores the day-to-day realities of small rural primaries existence (Bagley and Hillyard, 2014) and fails to consider personal motivations and satisfaction of volunteers (Nichols and Ralston, 2012). Considering specific educational contexts like small schools, reveals how policy principles are not realisable in practice, further exacerbating inequalities between schools of differing levels of deprivation, and between large/urban and small/rural schools.

In keeping with the feeling of more formality at Applegood, whilst most of my voluntary work closely resembled that of a TA, Crystelle did later ask me if I would be willing to take part in a more formal voluntary role; listening to the children read in a targeted volunteer reading scheme she wanted to set up. Jane (an external volunteer) and three mums from Comet class and myself each came in on a different day to hear specific children read. This is a role I continued beyond my data collection phase at Applegood to maintain contact with the school, and because I really enjoyed it! I felt the children opened up much more in a one-to-one situation outside of the classroom. There were some children that I had only ever heard a few words from in class who chatted to me for ages when they had the chance in a one-to-one setting. I loved getting to know them more and discussing their books (and how the stories and characters relate to real life) with them. The satisfaction I derived personally from this reflects findings in the literature on volunteer reading interventions which emphasise the relationship building element of volunteering (Williams et al, 2002).

Maintaining Boundaries

Despite the blurring of boundaries, certain staff tried to keep those boundaries between volunteer and staff member in place. Indeed, there were things I noticed I could not do as a volunteer that I could as a TA, such as taking the children onto the playground on my own (at Applegood):

Sue asked if I could take kids out for break. I started to take them out of the classroom, but Sue ran after me saying "no I didn't mean on your own, someone has to come with you". I had to get kids to come back inside. I apologised profusely [and was mortified that I may have over-stepped my role as a volunteer but also upset that Sue had made such a display in front of the children]. The kids asked why I couldn't take them outside and Sue said "Miss Law isn't a member of staff, she's a volunteer" [kids don't 'see' the difference between volunteers and staff]. Violet (Year 6) said, confused, "so that means we don't trust Miss Law?" And Sue said "no, no its just regulations"

[Applegood Daily Fieldnotes, 22nd June 2022]

Reflecting on this scenario, I got the impression that Sue did not much like how I could relate to and engage with some of the children she supported, and this may have influenced her reaction and behaviour towards me. However, she was also very vocal in the staff room about her union and the rights of school staff and so rules may be very important to her. Either way I had to work hard to build a rapport with Sue and, on reflection, decided to limit my activities much more when asked to support in her class. Encounters such as this indicate how, within the education profession, although there are many overlaps (crossing of boundaries) in the tasks that paid staff and volunteers do (Dixon, 2017; Johnson et al, 2023), this can cause tensions and attempts to redraw professional boundaries (Lamont and Molnár, 2002, pg.178) by (predominantly) TAs who wish to differentiate their work (identity, skills,

and expertise) from that of volunteers through boundary-marking and boundary-maintenance (Ibid, pg.187; Johnson et al, 2023). Moreover, this boundary-maintenance differed between the schools (Ibid), with Applegood being much more formal than Oakington, where I was often treated as another TA (see above). This is further evidence that boundaries are live and ongoing constructions, as they are negotiable within and between contexts.

In response to my unintended transgression of boundaries, there was a lot of identity work I was required to undertake and careful balances to be struck between my research activities and being useful to the schools (to make my research activities ethical and easier to facilitate). Nevertheless, the fact that I had to reflect on how to strike these balances, position myself, and maintain boundaries has been revealing in terms of how different 'work' and 'workers' are embedded and understood in the school environment, and the boundaries which they are allowed to or are prevented from crossing, how and why. No boundary is stable. Indeed, between contexts, and over time as positions and positionality changes, so too do boundaries – their crossing, maintenance, or negotiation – become apparent. This was not just the case for me, but was also something discussed with other research participants:

Me: So, what are in terms of sort of like on a daily basis, your relationships like when you go into the school?

Sophie: *Ohh, what, as a parent?*

Me: As, well, how do people see you? Do they see you as a parent first or?

Sophie: well, *no* [laughs] I mean, it's funny you should say that I went in to pay some breakfast club money and Nancy was trying to do something on the computer. And Crystelle was just [laughs] like "Sophie. Can you just go in there and *do* it for her? Because I need it now". Like "*Okay!*" I don't know. I suppose it is a hard transition to make. It was. It was really weird walking into school, not being a member of staff. [...]

Me: Yeah. Yeah, ahh that's interesting. Yeah, because I found it. Yeah. It's really, like, nice to hear you say that because I found it. Like, exactly the same going from being a TA to then being a volunteer. I was like, "I don't know what I'm allowed to do anymore"

Sophie: [laughs] No!

Me: Like, I don't know. And it's really like, difficult.

Sophie: it's *hard* isn't it!?

Me: It's so difficult.

Sophie: *Yeah! it's hard!* [...] And yeah, I'm like, "*am I allowed in your office?*" [Yeah]. *Am I allowed in the school? Am I!*" [yeah] I don't know [laughs] I'm gonna ask. "*Can I go and see Nancy?*" They're like, "*why are you asking?*" [yeah] "Well, because that's the normal parent thing to do is to *ask*".

For Sophie, when she changed position from being a TA at Applegood to being a 'normal parent', she suddenly had to contend with boundaries she had never considered before, whether that be thinking about how *conceptually* she is categorised by the school community, where *physically* she is allowed to be within the school now, or *socially* where she stands in relation to Nancy and Crystelle when, although they are still her friends and feel they can ask her for help with school matters when needed,

this is not technically her responsibility any more. Within school, Nancy is the business manager, Crystelle is her son's (head)teacher, and Sophie is a parent, albeit one with privileged knowledge and access. However, it is precisely because of Sophie's experience and relationships (see Chapter 6 for further discussion of this) that she is permitted to cross boundaries even though her official role has changed. Thus, when an individual has pre-existing relationships, experience and skills, boundaries are much easier to negotiate than they are for others without this privileged positionality.

Maintaining boundaries was also important to consider in the context of volunteering with SEN children. Historically, SEN children's inclusion in mainstream schooling has led to the huge increase in TAs in education (Lewis, 2023), as many SEN children require one-to-one support (Sharples et al, 2016). As a volunteer I was also used to fulfil this role. However, some of this labour at Applegood was 'invisible' to certain staff. For example, my one-to-one support of Adam (Year 1), in Alice's class was valued and vital 'in the moment' in the classroom. As she explained to me in her interview:

There's been days this term when we couldn't have survived without you being in the classroom. I mean... in a way, like, that's really *good*. For like, for me *now*. And for the children here. But on a flip side, in a way... maybe children like Adam wouldn't get the, you know... higher up they wouldn't recognise that actually more support's needed in the classroom. Because we're managing. But then again, he has you know, it's proof that actually, he is much more [if he has someone, he does]. Yes. Yeah. So, you can prove it [the need for more support] by having it. (Alice)

As this labour was only visible in that specific classroom, it potentially means that issues with Adam were not being flagged to senior leaders often enough and so the needs and issues he faced and provision required was not known or understood by senior staff who could action consistent, paid provision – a fundamental that should be provided by school budgets. Indeed, Calvert's (2009) concerns must be remembered here. For caring relations to flourish schools must have the funding to be fully staffed with the trained professionals their students require and deserve. Volunteers should not be discouraged from these roles, but they should not be the sole source of care in a state-funded, public education system. There is a tension here, however. If I were to withdraw this invisible labour on a day-to-day basis, it could still be months until Adam got the support he needs and, in the meantime, he would be struggling in the classroom and disrupting others. This situation highlights issues with the invisibility of labour, how emotional tensions are felt by paid staff and unpaid volunteers alike (Johnson et al, 2023) and how voluntary activity can have a dual positive and negative consequence, which speaks to the wider debate about not assuming voluntary activity is inherently positive (Body et al, 2021). Thus, considering boundaries in the work of education is vital if we are to understand their consequences for children, staff and volunteers.

Conclusions

In conclusion, conceptualising voluntary activity as a vital part of the total social organisation of labour in the small rural primary school context, enables exploration and understanding of how labour crosses boundaries by being undertaken in a variety of socio-economic-modes, by many different people, in diverse spaces and for a multitude of purposes to deliver education. Donations of goods is increasing within these schools' TSOL to reduce workload and provide inclusive opportunities for people to get involved in voluntary activity. A discussion of the invisibility of voluntary activity, led to

staff (current and former) being identified as the most civically active individuals in these schools (Body et al, 2023) due to the amount of time, talent, money and resources they give beyond their contracted hours and job descriptions to ensure the best educational experience possible for the children. Staff (at all levels) feel it is *necessary* to do this extra work and provide resources, but it can lead to teacher burnout, recruitment and retention issues and raises moral and social justice issues around the responsibility for and purpose of education provision, and how to ensure fair access. Moreover, children's current perceptions of the voluntary labour in their schools risk socialising them into gendered stereotypes and acceptance of voluntary activity as the solution to social problems (including SEN provision). Maintaining boundaries also emerged as a key theme in the schools' voluntary activity, especially between fundamental resources and enrichments, and with affectively committed parent volunteers. The context in which these schools operate, however, often make boundary crossing a necessity, especially considering educational purposes around qualification (having enough adults to 'teach'), socialisation (ensuring children have a holistic educational experience) and inclusion (ensuring all children can participate in educational experiences, regardless of background or SEN).

Whilst these themes of boundaries and invisible labour were apparent in both schools, their differing contexts and catchments meant that boundaries also played out differently. This was especially so in terms of the resources each school could access, including people (volunteers), but also the geographies of the two schools. These findings would thus apply beyond the confines of the small rural primary context as all schools differ in the resources they can access and the geographies in which they exist. Moreover, boundaries can be conceptual, with their social meanings and manifestations contested and negotiated (Lamont and Molnár, 2002) in different circumstances, as has been shown in this chapter, but they can also be physical and spatial, with social and sometimes stigmatising consequences (Lamont et al, 2014; Lamont, 2018). This chapter has laid the conceptual foundations for the understandings of boundaries and arguments of their significance which underpin the subsequent findings chapters. Whilst the significance of physical boundaries was alluded to, the next chapter develops this further by exploring how voluntary activity plays out through different socio-spatial networks (interpersonal connections/community rooted in space) and the consequences this has for those involved in Applegood and Oakington.

Chapter 6: Socio-spatial Networks and Stigma

Introduction: Socio-spatial Networks

The local contexts in which these schools exist vary greatly in England's "highly differentiated countryside" (Bagley and Hillyard, 2014, pg.63; Murdoch et al, 2003). Schools in rural areas have access to different levels and types of voluntary activity (and social capital) and realising the skilled, supportive communities envisioned by government policy may not be a realistic option for many in deprived neighbourhoods. In any case, it is unclear how the voluntary activity schools can attract plays out in practice in these schools, and what the consequences of this might be for those involved (Kvalsund and Hargreaves, 2009). During this research, I began using the concept of 'socio-spatial networks' (interpersonal connections/community rooted in space) to understand how voluntary activity in small rural primaries is facilitated, organised, and hindered. Williams (2011a; 2011b) used this concept when developing Glucksmann's TSOL approach to explore how informal, community self-help varies geographically and socially. Similarly, I use the concept to explore the influence of the intersection of social and geographic capital on voluntary activity within and between Applegood and Oakington. This chapter builds on the significance of physical/ spatial boundaries, the crossing and maintenance of boundaries and the invisible labour that underpins education discussed in the previous chapter, which also provides the conceptual framing for how socio-spatial networks are configured, how relationships are managed and the consequences of this for individuals involved.

To analyse the significance of socio-spatial differences between the two schools voluntary activity, I turned to Social Network Analysis (SNA). Although deriving from mathematical graph theory, SNA can be used to qualitatively understand ethnographic network data (Crossley, 2011). A particular strand of SNA closely aligned with qualitative approaches is Visual Network Research (VNR). VNR uses visualisations (network maps) as both a data collection and presentation tool, and (as with TSOL frameworks) a means of structural analysis of social relationships (Lelong et al, 2016). The attractiveness of this method arose from its ability "to analyse the (mutual) influence of space on social structures and vice versa" (Ibid, pg.6) and its capacity to represent complex webs of relationships and their attributes via different symbols, lines, and colour (Scott and Stokman, 2015). This provided a useful way to visualise the positioning, linkages, and character of the socio-spatial networks of the schools. Concepts such as density (number of connections), intensity (multiple positions and types of connections) and 'bridge figures' (those who provide links between (otherwise unconnected) individuals and groups) were also relevant for constructing and analysing these network maps (Donath, 2020). From this, the influence and consequences of networks (on individual members *and* their effect on the overall network) could then be explored and compared. Thus, I chose to construct qualitative network maps to illustrate and ground the exploration and comparison of the significance of socio-spatial networks in small rural primary voluntary activity. This chapter presents the comparison and analysis of these maps. Beginning with an overview of the schools geographies, I then present the social network maps and my categorisation of volunteers within them. I then explore the constellation of voluntary activities that take place within each category, analysing the impact of socio-spatial networks *on* these activities. Finally, I explore the stigmatising practices that emerge and reinforce socio-spatial differences within and between the schools and discuss the potential direction and consequences of the development of the schools' social networks in the future.

The Schools Within Their Villages⁶

Before delving into the network maps, it is useful here to highlight (building on the context presented in Chapters 1 and 2) some key points of similarity and difference between Applegood and Oakington in terms of their geographies, social histories and communities.

Applegood Primary is at the centre of its small rural village whose population is concentrated in a small area and where the main road into the village ends at a country estate. The population size of Applegood has ranged between 390 and 486 during the 1800s and early 1900s and currently is around 392. The 'lord of the manor' erected Applegood Primary in 1835. The principal landowning family, now the Spencer's, has supported the school financially since then and still owns the land on which the school is situated (and most of the village too). The family also donate use of the woodland area, land for parking, and its local gardens free of charge to the school. Applegood Primary also has long-standing connections with its community (many of whom attended, and whose relatives attended the school). Local amenities and facilities in the village include the local estate house, gardens and café, village hall, church, and pub. As the village is small, facilities in Applegood are very close to the school. This makes it easier for the school to access and use these facilities and forge links with the people within and around them. It also means the school and its children and staff are visible to the local community on a daily basis as they move between and within these spaces. Indeed, the school is performed through the children's engagement with local spaces and people, with impressions being formed based on these interactions. These impressions then influence the school's reputation, and even its subsequent pupil numbers.

Many volunteers (including governors) and some staff live in Applegood village. Katherine explained the relationship between the school's geography and its (historic) sense of community:

[A]t Applegood, the school sits in the middle of what is a quite *tight knit* local community. The school has historically been involved within the community, the governing board, *mostly* are people who live in Applegood. And I think, you know, just geographically the location of it, it's right, literally, right in the village you know, three doors down from the local pub!

⁶ Contextual information on the villages and their histories was collected from the University of Leicester Special Archive which includes parish records and directories for Southeast England throughout the 19th and 20th centuries.

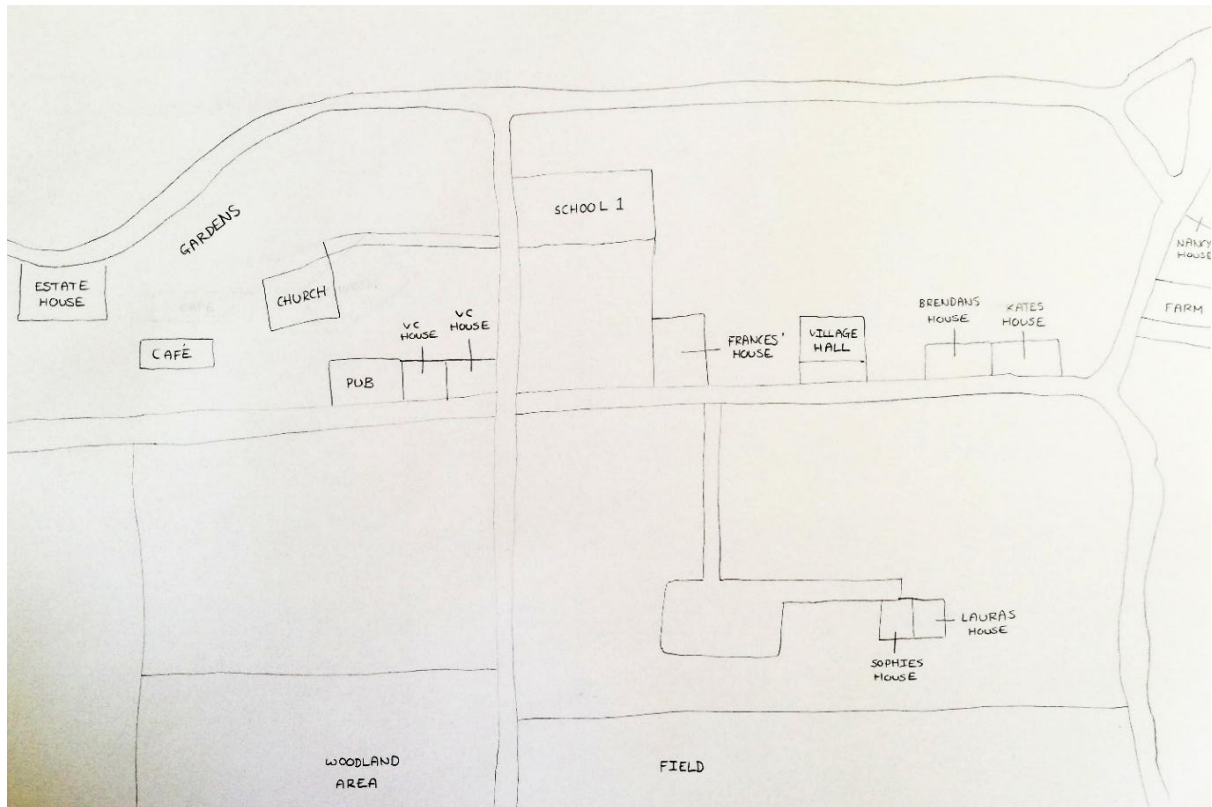


Figure 25 - Aerial drawing of (part of) Applegood Village, *VC = Village Hall Committee members

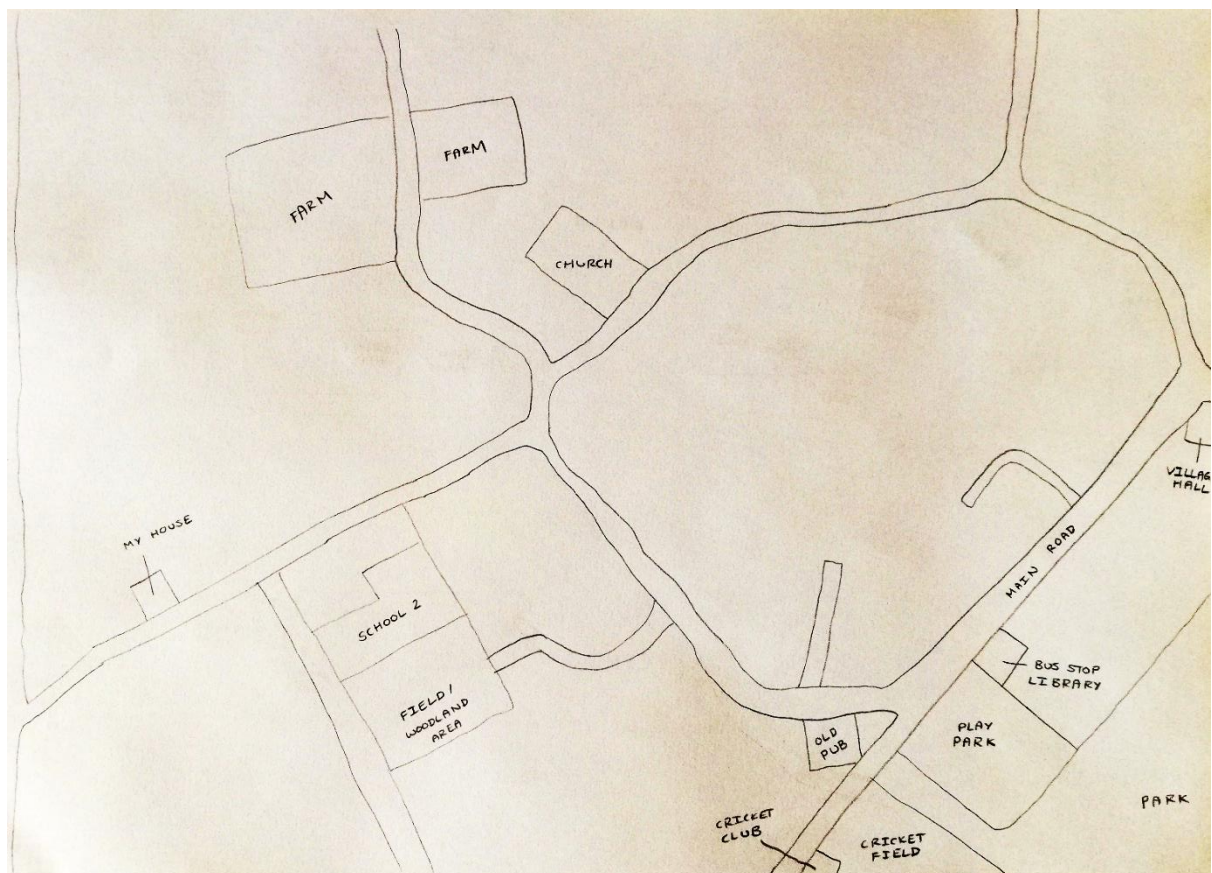


Figure 26 - Aerial drawing of (part of) Oakington village

In contrast, to Applegood Primary's fortunate geographical positioning, Oakington Primary is on the outskirts of its large, scattered village, with its population dispersed across a larger area (4567 acres) than Applegood (1845 acres). Oakington's population has risen from around 562 in 1801 to around 800 in the 1800s, 774 in 1911 and is currently about 920. In 1801 there were six principal landowners (including the lord of the manor for Applegood at the time and the Spencer family who took over the lordship at Applegood in 1890), of which the Spencer family supported Oakington Primary (erected in 1820). Whilst the Spencer family still own the land on which Oakington Primary is situated, they do not exercise as much influence in Oakington as they do in Applegood (where the title-holding branch of the family live and where their commercial interests are focused). Oakington Primary also do not enjoy the historic connections with village residents that Applegood Primary do, with many former pupils having moved away, and with no staff or governors living in the village itself. Relationships are not helped by the school's poor reputation locally (linked to a behavioural unit on the school grounds which, whilst separate from the school and now closed earned Oakington an enduring local reputation as a school for 'naughty' children). Oakington has a village hall, play park, cricket ground and church. The village pub has been closed for many years. The main road through Oakington passes nowhere near the school and so it feels like they are "not *in* the village!" (Katherine). Consequently, the school, its staff, and children are not visible to the local community, making connections difficult to forge: "it's like the school's here. And Oakington exists around it. But we're not *part* of it." (Katherine). Whilst the farm and church are relatively close to the school (and links have been made with them), the village hall, local sports ground and a local religious community are further away and not easily accessible, making links difficult to establish and maintain. Not only does this lack of visibility inhibit voluntary activity, but it also makes reputation-building (or in Oakington's case, reputation-changing) difficult to achieve.

Both Applegood and Oakington, as Church of England schools, have links with their local churches and are physically close to them. However, the churches do not have any incumbents (priests' resident in the villages), meaning "there's no priest whose kind of bringing everything together" (Katherine) and there is no *local* church representative on the governing body. This means it is down to the local church members in each village to maintain links with their schools. Applegood have a more consistent connection through regular collective worship in the church once a week, facilitated by Maggie, a local church volunteer. Whilst Oakington use their church for key events, they do not (yet) attend weekly for worship and do not have *as* consistent a link with local church volunteers, like Caroline.

Thus, despite a shared history of similar (and then the same) philanthropic landowning families, Applegood and Oakington have evolved into quite different villages and have very different geographies and socio-economic profiles. As a result, the schools within these villages have access to different socio-spatial network configurations; the people and groups they have and can maintain connections with and their location in space. I now move on to discuss my findings on the significance of these socio-spatial differences.

The Socio-Spatial Networks: 'It takes a village to raise a child. It takes a village to raise money'

Proximity to the schools *and* the social links of their communities both serve to facilitate or hinder (different forms of) voluntary activity through individuals' positions and connections in the socio-spatial networks. Figures 27 and 28 below detail the social network maps of voluntary activity for each

school. The social connections in these networks include formal connections, informal connections (friendships), familial connections, and work relationships (colleagues)⁷. Multiple connections can exist between individuals simultaneously (such as friendships existing alongside formal and work connections) and individuals can occupy multiple positions within the socio-spatial network (as a relative, village resident and/or staff member, for example)⁸.

⁷ Of course, all staff members (purple shapes) are colleagues, but I chose to illustrate work relationships (green lines) between individuals who work particularly *closely* in school (e.g. in the same classroom).

⁸ See Appendix 2 for details of who is who in each school and across the federation.

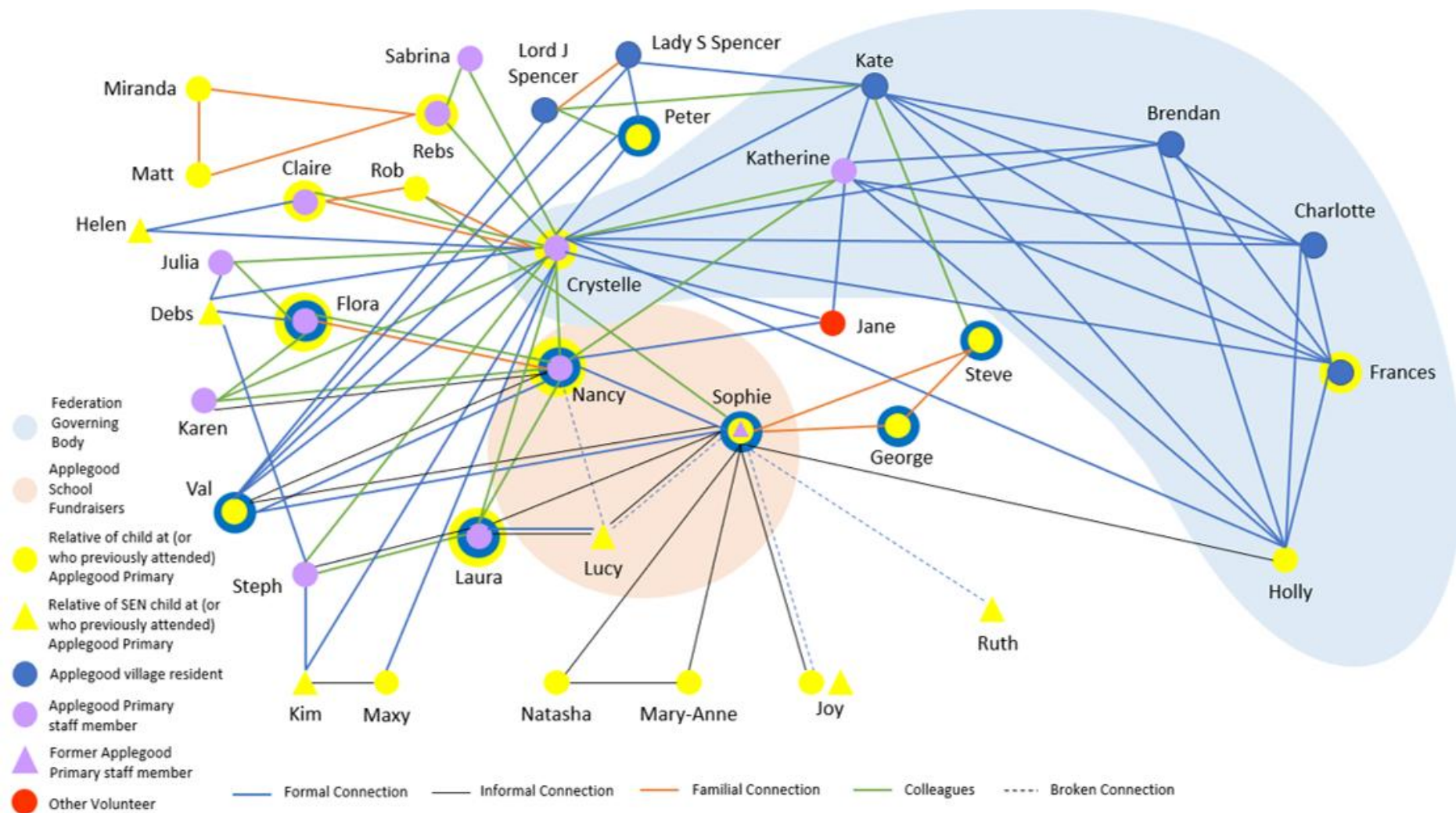


Figure 27 - Social network map of voluntary activity at Applegood Primary, 2022

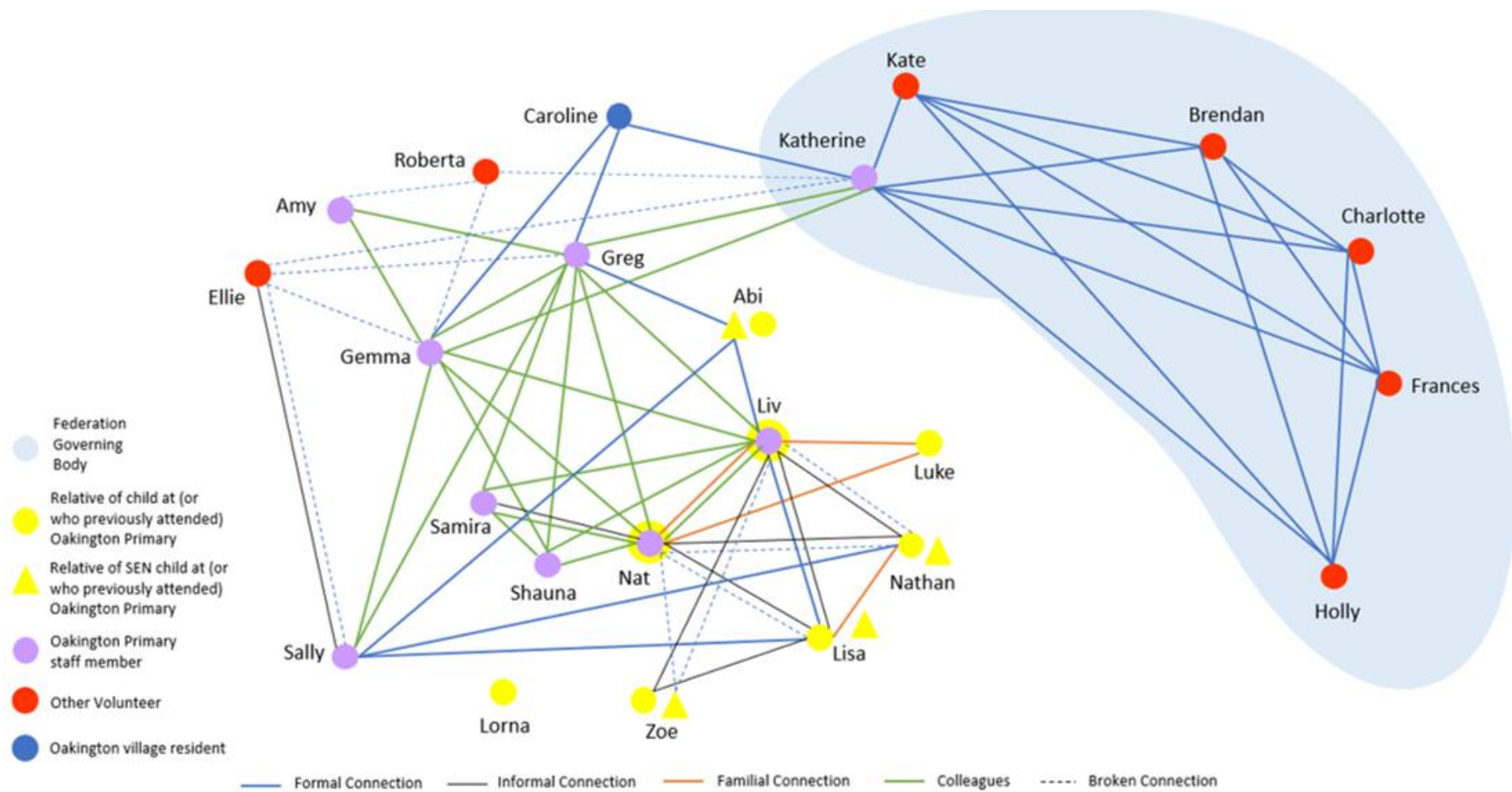


Figure 28 - Social network map of voluntary activity at Oakington Primary, 2022

An initial comparison of these network maps shows a smaller network at Oakington than Applegood, with fewer individuals involved overall. The networks at both schools each have areas of *density* (the number of links individuals have), but Applegood have more individuals holding multiple positions and types of connections in their network (signifying more *intense* involvement). Oakington have only one local resident as part of their network, whereas Applegood have many.

I have categorised individuals within the networks as either bridge figures, core volunteers, or peripheral/episodic volunteers. Bridge figures are those people who hold multiple positions and have the largest number *and* type of connections but also tend to live *close* to the school and have *personal* and/or *longstanding* connections and *intense* involvement. They are key to the flow of information and organisation of activity within their networks. Core volunteers are those who have personal and/or longstanding connections and intense involvement but do not necessarily live close by (many staff, governors and some parents fall into this category). Bridge figures and core volunteers are the most civically active individuals in these school communities. Peripheral/episodic volunteers are those with less intense involvement, and/ or who tend to live further away from the school (most of the parents and some community members fall into this category). Individuals may change category throughout their trajectory of involvement with their school, depending on changes to their position and connections within the socio-spatial network over time.

The rest of this section will explore the constellation of voluntary activities that take place in these networks from the point of view of the actors within each category and considering the significance of geographical and social capital to the voluntary activity.

Bridge Figures: Connecting Individuals to their Schools

Sophie is a very important bridge figure in Applegood's socio-spatial network, having been a part of it for many years and holding multiple positions. She used to work as a TA at the school but could not afford to remain due to the low salary. However, Crystelle, the head of school, 'found' her a job (admin position) with her husband, Rob's company, which pays more than Sophie's previous TA role but also means she has the flexibility to devote time to her role as chair of the ASF (she was allowed to have the morning off to support open day, for example). Thus, social capital within the school community facilitated a reorganisation of the TSOL so that Sophie's voluntary activity could continue even though her paid employment ceased. Sophie also *lives* in Applegood, and her husband, Steve, works in farming along with Kate (the governor who also runs Farm School) and so she has a close connection to the local area. Sophie is also the parent of a child in Year 1 (her eldest son also attended the school) and is a key member of the parent Whats App group for the Year 1 and 2 class cohort. This gives her ready access to parents she can call upon for voluntary support, whether that be donation drives or running stalls at fairs. Indeed, digital communication is vital in this network (Donath, 2020). As Sophie is not often around at pick-up time to talk to other parents in-person, many turn to her online with their questions and concerns. Being able to communicate this way is crucial for a parent cohort who live at a significant distance from the school and from each other (Walker, 2010), and whose differing work patterns mean they cannot all meet in-person simultaneously. Sophie's multiple positions mean she is not only a bridge figure between the school and its local community, but also between the school and many of its parents. Her prominence was cemented throughout the research by the amount of

people who, when I began to discuss voluntary activity, immediately said it was Sophie I would need to speak to.

Living in the village has significant implications for Sophie and Nancy's (another key Applegood bridge figure) capacity to be involved in voluntary activity for the school. They both regularly meet in school during and outside of school hours, in each other's homes, or in the pub. Their proximity to each other and the school makes the organisation and completion of voluntary work much easier to manage, fit in around, and combine with their other familial and work responsibilities. Sophie even joked that if she ever left the ASF, she would have to leave the village, emphasising the strength of proximity as a factor in her voluntary activity. Both Nancy and Sophie are also members of the village hall committee giving them access to and connections with prominent local residents (such as Val) and the village hall itself. These links enable them to gain support from and coordinate school-community events with locals and use of the hall is free or discounted for the school thanks to these links. It also means that they are 'the face of the school' in the village, making the school constantly 'visible' to residents through their embodiment of their ASF roles. These various and multiple connections thus embed Nancy and Sophie in networks where their social and geographic capital are successfully combined in ways which are extremely advantageous for the school in attracting labour, talent, space, and resources for its use. They are also in specific socio-spatial positions which enable them to ask for support from other residents in-person. Indeed, it is harder for people to turn down requests for support when they are in such close proximity and frequent contact with those who asked (and can keep asking!).

Key bridge figures at Oakington are Liv and Nat, two sisters who live in a nearby village (2 miles away), are both long-serving TAs (15 years+), and whose children (7 between them) all attended the school. Liv and Nat have an historical connection to the school and, crucially, to its parent community, having grown up in the area themselves, alongside many of the schools' current parents, and supporting their children. They utilise the social capital they have within the parent community to gain support for school events and activities. Indeed, although Oakington do not have a formal PTA, Liv and Nat (alongside Gemma) are vital 'informal fundraisers' due to the amount of time and effort they put into organising and running events outside of their contracted hours and job descriptions. Gemma's voluntary activity, in particular, is key to the schools marketing work. She makes and distributes posters and leaflets promoting the school and its woodland nursery, Hatchlings, to attract new pupils in her own time, and has cultivated a connection with the parish magazine to promote the school further within the village. In addition to their own voluntary work, Liv, Nat, Sophie and Nancy's families are also a key part of their schools social networks through their voluntary activity. Thus, staff (current and former) can also act as bridges between their school and their own families, drawing even more people into voluntary activity to the school's benefit. Family volunteers are categorised as 'core volunteers' and are discussed further below.

I also consider children bridge figures here as they are vital mediators between their school and their own networks of friends and family, spreading knowledge and awareness, and gaining support. Children are invested with emotional capital by their families, and this can be converted into voluntary activity if influenced effectively. For example, both schools 'recruit' children every year to sell raffle tickets and it is the children's persistent pleas at fairs that encourage relatives to pay (and thus contribute to school fundraising). However, the children are not actively engaged in these processes and practices of fundraising (Body et al, 2021) equally in each school. At Applegood, the children



Figure 29 – Daisy's (Year 6, Oakington) artwork depicting her role in selling raffle tickets for school fundraising

unquestioningly put the raffle ticket books in their bags and spend their (relatives) money without really considering why or where it goes. In contrast, at Oakington, children (especially the eldest) are more actively engaged in fundraising practices, selling raffle tickets on the gate, and setting up school fairs. They also have a greater interest and understanding of how fundraised income is spent and communicate this to their families. They communicated their knowledge through their artwork during this research. Figure 29, for example, was drawn

during the summer term, with Summer Fair fresh in the minds of the pupils. Daisy (Year 6, Oakington) chose to depict her role selling raffle tickets for this event in response to discussions around what voluntary activity children in their school were involved in.

When exploring the mainstreaming of charities into schools, Body et al (2021) found that most children know little about the cause they are fundraising for, have little choice but to participate in fundraising activities and rarely get to decide which causes they support. This encourages passive giving, reduces any opportunity for critical inquiry, and distances children from social issues and learning opportunities (Ibid). Body et al (2020; 2021) advocate a children's rights approach to fundraising where they can make decisions about the causes they support and how, engage critically and meaningfully in charitable giving and with the social problems charities seek to address. Such an approach, they argue, would encourage the development of 'philanthropic citizens' by empowering children with the knowledge to understand, discuss and debate social issues and the means to address them (Ibid). Whilst the children in these schools have little choice in fundraising for their school (the cause) (one Oakington Year 6 questioned, "is it not on the curriculum?") or how this is done, Oakington have gone some way to giving their children ownership and choice over their school-oriented fundraising *outcomes*:

our whole school trip. They knew where the money came from. They knew it was them and their parents that raised it. And they got to choose where we went. So, there was two slideshows one for the Rare Breeds Centre and one for [Entertainment] Park. And we did a PowerPoint slide show on *each*. So, they could show *exactly* what happens there, what they'd get to do. And then during worship, we divided the hall. Rare Breeds that side. [Entertainment] Park that side. And we did a vote. So, we had a vote. (Kayleigh)

However, as discussed in Chapter 5, children are also aware that voluntary activity can be directed towards more fundamental causes in school, such as basic resources or maintaining buildings. Their involvement in voluntary activity can become learning opportunities for children to question how social problems (such as education under-funding) are addressed and reflect on their own priorities as citizens. For example, in a discussion with Year 6s at Oakington about how fundraised income is spent on fundamentals, one child questioned:

“why don’t the government just give schools more money?” [...] she then reflected “it’s probably because they don’t have enough money and have to give it to hospitals and stuff as well”

[Oakington Art Group 1 Observation Notes, 17th July 2023]

Thus, she was starting to think about alternatives to fundraising for core education provision (government funds) but also starting to critically reflect on what competing priorities there might be, recognising hospitals (health care) as another vital social service, alongside education. If discussions like this could happen more regularly and be developed beyond the limited confines of a research art group, children’s critical understanding of how their education happens and why could be enhanced (Ibid). This critical engagement is an important skill and learning experience which could be better developed through both schools’ voluntary activities if children’s roles were better acknowledged and capitalised upon. Oakington are more successful at this currently, than Applegood.

However, whilst the children at Oakington have begun to have some say in how fundraised income is spent, they also have ideas of how fundraising could be done differently:

Orla [Year 6, Oakington] asked Liv if there could be a children’s fete this year, Liv said “what do you mean darling?” Orla said, “a children’s fete where the children do what the adults do”, she said she wanted to do facepainting [...] Orla asked me “can I paint your face?” I said, “yes you could paint mine, what would you paint?” she said “fruit!” and indicated her A3 paper which was now covered in different types of fruit [see Figure 30]. I said I would have a pineapple [...] Orla was still talking about her imagined children’s fete, she said, looking round at her classmates, “we need someone to do the tattoos, who wants to do the tattoos?”

[Oakington Art Group 8 Observation Notes, 3rd November 2023]

By engaging in discussions of fundraising events like the summer fair, the meaning of her picture changed for Orla as she drew and coloured. Initially the fruit was ‘good for people’ like ‘volunteering’ was. This was in response to discussions about definitions of charity, volunteering, and fundraising. Then when she discussed her ideas of the children overseeing the summer fair, the fruit signified what she wanted to face paint. She allocated herself to face-painting, then began considering the other tasks that would be involved and proceeding to allocate them. Not only did Orla know a lot about the work that went into the summer fair, but she also wanted to take on greater responsibility in organising and leading the event. Thus, currently, children are conceptualised as ‘helpers’ in voluntary activities but are not given the responsibility or opportunity to shape how fundraising happens. Further development of a children’s right approach (Body et al, 2021) could incorporate some of their ideas, empowering the children and enhancing their learning experience in the process.



Figure 30 - Drawing by Orla (Year 6, Oakington) representing fruit that is 'good for people' (like charity) but also inspiration for the face-painting she would like to do at the Summer Fair

*Core Volunteers*⁹

Where Applegood and Oakington are very similar is in the voluntary efforts of their staff (current and former) who, in both schools and in various positions, are the most civically active group (Body et al, 2023)¹⁰. This is because they go beyond their job descriptions and contracted hours to provide voluntary support (time, talent, money, and resources) for their schools (see Chapter 5), making them core to voluntary activity. Whilst this is particularly the case for those who live nearby (as at Applegood), the factor of proximity can be overcome if staff members are long-serving and have intense connections (as at both schools). The relationships between one-to-one TAs and the parents of their one-to-one child, for example, are particularly vital in both Oakington and Applegood's socio-spatial networks of voluntary activity. Laura, for example, lives opposite Applegood Primary, making it easy for her to walk her one-to-one Joey and his little sister, Ginny, back to her home and care for them after school until their mum, Lucy, can pick them up. She also regularly buys snacks for Joey and resources for him out of her own money (a common practice amongst *all* staff in both schools). Laura's commitment to her vocation and to Joey motivates her to provide him with consistency of care, forging a close relationship between her family and his. Both families meet up in the school holidays and Laura's daughters often babysit for Joey and Ginny. Thus, Laura's social connection with Joey's family (social capital) combined with her proximity to the school (geographic capital), facilitate her voluntary activity. This relationship worked both ways, however. Although she could rarely be there in-person, Lucy showed her gratitude to Laura and the school by becoming the ASF treasurer, utilising her cultural capital (accounting skills) to help the school with their fundraising efforts. Indeed, both Kim and Joy discussed in interviews how their voluntary support for the school came from a feeling of gratitude for what the school had done for their children. Both of their children's one-to-ones, Steph and Sophie, being involved with particular areas (the Seedlings woodland nursery and the ASF, respectively) meant that having formal connections which had turned into friendships drew Kim and Joy into various voluntary activities:

I think because of her [Sophie] being in the, the committee and I think because we had such a good bond with her being with my Sadie. I think because we're quite laid back together. She was just, a nice approach: "do you fancy, fancy helping out?" I was like "yeah! we'll help out" (Joy)

Steph and Sophie's social (and emotional) connections with Kim and Joy fostered a friendly context in which approaching them for support (or them offering support) was made easier. Moreover, this support did not just take the form of volunteering time. Joy brings her own family games to school fairs for fundraising purposes, donates prizes and informally donates the use of her gazebo at events.

These relationships are not unique to Applegood. At Oakington, Lisa and Nathan's eldest son (with SEN) had been taught by Nat (and Liv) many years ago and they have retained a strong connection since. This connection motivated Lisa and Nathan to send their other children to Oakington and they are two of the regular supporters in Oakington's social network (Lisa was previously a PTA member before the group folded). This is especially significant as they live at a considerable distance away from the school but still make extensive effort to be involved as often as they can, in both special events

⁹ All bridge figures are also core volunteers

¹⁰ This includes Sophie whose experience as a TA at Applegood is a key factor which continues to impact on her intense civic engagement with the school even though she is no longer a staff member.

and day-to-day activities. They volunteer their time, donate resources, are both key advocates for the school¹¹ and Lisa informally organises and supports events through her informal connections with Liv, Nat, and other parents. Thus, intense personal connections with the school (such as those of SEN parents) can motivate parents to become core volunteers. The strength and warmth of connection can overcome issues of distance, with a significant number of core volunteers (in both schools) living outside the school's village but still making the time and effort to be there in-person, or to donate talent and resources to show their support. Capitalising upon and investing in these connections which already exist between specific individuals (initially) for the sake of a small number of children can thus lead to extensive and varied voluntary activity which benefits the rest of the school community too.



Figure 31 - Beanbag toss game at Applegood's Summer Fair 2022

Family volunteering is also a key factor (even a 'tradition') in both Applegood and Oakington's voluntary activity in the extent to which family members of (current and former) staff are drawn into voluntary activity for their school. Indeed, whilst the family members of school children are often spoken about in the literature (Body et al, 2017) this research emphasises that the relatives of *staff* deserve greater consideration as part of these networks of voluntary activity. At Oakington, family members make play equipment, unblock drains, climb onto the roof to retrieve lost footballs, bake goods for events, donate resources and care for the school guinea pigs during holidays. At Applegood, partners of staff have developed the early years outside area and woodland space, encouraged their businesses and employers to

support the school financially and attended and supported school events. The beanbag toss game in Figure 31 was made by Steve, Sophie's husband who spent many evenings and weekends leading up to the summer fair sourcing all the materials and making many games himself. Crystelle's husband, Rob's business, funded the sponsorship of the raffle tickets at the fair, and he bought many himself. Interestingly, there was a tacit acceptance on the day of the summer fair that once Rob's name had been pulled out of the raffle twice, any further wins would be donated back so that others might have a chance of winning a prize. This means that he not only donated money to the school, but also the gains (prizes) this donation provided. This is interesting as although families of staff get involved in much voluntary activity for the school, they do not want to be seen as benefitting excessively from this. Relatives of staff are thus a vital group of core volunteers in these schools socio-spatial networks, drawn into an extensive range of voluntary activities through their personal connections to family in the school.

The children of staff also form part of this tradition of familial voluntary activity. They help at home day-to-day with the preparation of learning resources, donate their own toys to the school and even run stalls at fairs themselves. Claire's (TA) daughters ran a stall at the fair (and do a lot of laminating and cutting out for their mum at home), as did George, Sophie's eldest son. Ironically it was also the children of staff who seemed to spend the most money at the fair too (see summer fair extract in Chapter 5). Thus, these families weren't just donating their time and labour to the school, they were also donating money. This cements their position as 'core volunteers' for the school as they contribute in multiple ways, through multiple socio-economic modes. Thus, whilst families of staff have been a

¹¹ Though this relationship between Lisa and the school is fragile and unstable [REDACTED]

neglected and indeed ‘invisible’ (Hatton, 2017) group of volunteers in research on voluntary activity in primary education, their work is extensive and unconsciously expected and so deserves greater attention in the literature.

Katherine occupies an interesting position as the executive head of the federation. Whilst she can be considered a bridge figure between the two schools, she lives at a considerable distance from both. Though the lack of proximity is a challenge for her, she overcomes this due to her extensive commitment (she is most certainly a core volunteer) and strong links with the parents, particularly those at Oakington where she was head of school before taking on the executive headship (and where she increasingly takes on the role of ‘de facto social worker’ (Walker, 2023) for the families). This heavy workload necessitates long hours (beyond what she is paid for), and she often comes in at weekends to catch up on work. Katherine also discussed the ‘little things’ she does such as buying food for and feeding the school guineapigs and buying stickers with her own money. This is prompted by her reluctance to use school budget for ‘small things’, preferring to spend on larger, ‘more important’ projects and resources. Indeed, school staff ‘filling in the gaps’ in school budget with their own money was a common and extensive practice, at *all* levels from TAs to the executive head, in *both* schools. That staff feel they need to do this speaks not only to their commitment to their vocation (and cementing their categorisation as core volunteers), but to the limits of government funding for (small) schools. Indeed, Alice, a class teacher at Applegood went so far as to say she thought teachers (not TAs) got paid enough but that schools themselves needed more funding. It was plugging these gaps that was costing staff money and time and contributing to retention issues. It is unfair that the public service of education is being held up by the goodwill and resources of staff in these schools, especially in a cost-of-living crisis, when they are struggling to support themselves and their own families (Postlethwaite, 2023). Indeed, Applegood lost two TAs during my phase of data collection due to them being unable to reconcile the cost of travel to the school with their wages. Thus, these schools are not only struggling to cope with the impact of budget cuts on educational provision but also face losing staff (exacerbated by their schools geographies) at a time when they (and their voluntary activity) are needed most. This emphasises that schools cannot and should not be expected to rely on voluntary activity.

I have classified the Federation’s governing body as core volunteers due to their strategic importance to the school’s functioning. However, some members are more intensely involved than others (Frances, a local artist and village resident, is involved in art activities at Applegood and her daughter is an ex-pupil, Holly’s sons currently attend Applegood, and Kate runs Farm School and lives in Applegood). An interesting feature of Applegood and Oakington’s governing body is that, although they govern both schools, none of the governors are drawn from the community of Oakington – they are all linked to Applegood (many live there). Governors have been largely recruited via word-of-mouth, with the informal ‘bumping into people’ resulting in the dominance of Applegood residents (and Applegood parents) on the governing body. Thus, geographic capital is crucial for this particular aspect of the socio-spatial network of voluntary activity. Yet there is a detachment between the governing body and the school communities they serve, in terms of accurate representation, physical presence of governors within the schools (I saw Brendan, the chair of governors at Applegood more often than Oakington during my research) and a lack of social connections between them (Ranson, 2008; 2012). This disconnect is problematic as there is a lack of knowledge amongst the school community of who their governors are and what they do (many parents and TAs could not even name the governors in interviews or conversation). Thus, the long-term strategic plans governors seek to

make are not widely known, making their realisation a difficult task. This is especially ironic when governors discuss plans for community development.

Peripheral/Episodic Volunteers

Whilst parents form the core of voluntary activity in many schools, this is not always the case for most parents at Oakington and Applegood. Many of these parents work long hours, many have children with additional needs, and many have three or more children to care for (especially at Oakington). These factors combine to make these parents extremely time-poor. Speaking to parents, many saw roles like PTA or governance as big commitments which they were daunted by or did not feel morally right in taking on if they could not dedicate the time. This suggests parents had a keen awareness (or assumption) of the realities of formal voluntary involvement and chose to avoid the heavy workload and associated responsibility (with it falling to TAs instead). In addition, where children in small rural schools are increasingly being drawn from wider catchment areas (Walker, 2010), parents are increasingly living at further distances from their children's schools, restricting their physical capacity to be involved:

the thing is a lot of like, a lot of what goes on in Pitford. We get involved in that. But anything that happens here [Oakington] we don't get involved in even, I know we have done once before [...] when they do like the fireworks. A lot of Pitford come down for that. That's nice. But yeah, that's about it. And I think because people are *out*. Out of the way. They don't. (Zoe)

When families do not live in the village in which their children go to school, they are less likely to be involved in events there. Instead, they engage in activities where they live and where their *local* community are. I have therefore classified these parents as peripheral/episodic volunteers due to their less intense involvement in voluntary activity, and greater physical distance from the schools and their villages. Sophie calls this cohort of parents 'a new breed' as they are time-poor but resource-rich (at least at Applegood). But, whilst Sophie is thankful for the resources received, she said that the lack of bodies is becoming a real problem for the functioning of the PTA. During my research, the ASF was made up of only three members: Sophie (the chair), Nancy (the secretary), and Lucy (the treasurer). Lucy has two children at Applegood. However, due to her family's finances requiring her to take on a third job, Lucy had to give up her role on the PTA. This caused huge issues for Sophie and Nancy as a PTA must have a minimum of three members (a chair, a secretary, and a treasurer). To maintain its charitable status and thus remain a separate entity to the school itself, Sophie and Nancy were willing to share the increased workload between the two of them, with Crystelle (head of school) made a member in name only to fulfil the legal requirements for the PTAs constitution. A reconfiguration of the TSOL of the PTA enabled through social networks was thus necessary in response to a change in membership and subsequent rebalancing of responsibilities. Whether and how the ASF will be able to continue to function with such a heavy (unpaid) workload divided between two volunteers remains to be seen, especially in a cost-of-living crisis.

With both schools having time-poor and geographically dispersed parents, their voluntary activity reflects many of the characteristics of 'micro-volunteering': activity that is "limited in duration and require[s] little or no lasting obligations" (Heley et al, 2022, pg.77). Micro-volunteering encompasses speed and convenience with tasks usually taking between 5-30 minutes either in-person or (more often) online (Ibid). The examples given can be applied to voluntary activity for the small rural primary school. For example, campaigning and communication (school promotion by parents, organising

support via WhatsApp), fundraising (parents asking and collecting on behalf of the school) and practical help (parents baking a cake or sourcing and donating prizes). However, micro-volunteering is similar to episodic volunteering, the difference being, the latter is defined more by its repetitive nature (Ibid). The voluntary activity undertaken by parents in these schools falls somewhere between the two, as whilst most parents engage in more micro-activities, they are often repetitive (School Fairs are expected every year, with much the same work required each time). Thus, voluntary activity within these small rural primaries parent communities has a distinctive *micro-episodic* nature due to a lack of geographic (and time) capital.

Smith (2021) argues that we must appreciate that engagement will vary depending on the context of parents lives, and the context of different schools. Thus, instead of decontextualising the practices of parental involvement, we need to “better consider and value... diverse subject positions” of parents and ask what different parents *could* do, not what they *should* do (Ibid, pg.190). My research shows that both schools are making efforts to do this. Sophie touched on this during her interview:

There's like three or four of the *new* reception mums who were just like “*nope!*” One of them said “I cannot *bake* to save my life!”, which is a little bit like me, because when they when they came and first approached me and I thought they were asking me to bake *cakes*, I was just like, “I cannot bake to save my life. I will go and *buy* you cakes, as many as you want. But I *cannot* bake them”. And they were like, “no, can you face paint?” and like “Well, yes I can”. So, the, yeah, this woman was like “I can't bake. But I can stand behind a table”. Like that works for me. It yeah, I'm, I'm a firm believer. It takes a village to raise a child. It takes a village to raise money. Like it doesn't matter. We will put you to good use wherever. You know it's almost like a case of know, your, your *strengths* like Nancy and Laura are like the *Queens* at refreshments. I'm like “that's it, you two go in there”. I love the raffle tent so I'm like, “I'm on the raffle tent”. I will get parents coming up buying tickets. You know, it's, it's almost a case of know your strengths [laughs]

Whilst smaller acts of voluntary activity may be common for most parents in these schools it does not mean they are any less valuable to those involved (Heley et al, 2022). Indeed, parents are often grateful for the limited demands on their time and money but nevertheless being given the opportunity to be involved (donation drives are particularly relevant here – see Chapter 5), and TAs and other support staff can reduce their own voluntary workloads by dispersing some tasks across their parent population. In addition, parents at Oakington spoke about how the PTA which had folded years before had become a toxic and controlling environment of in-fighting and bickering (Lareau and Muñoz, 2012; Posey-Maddox, 2014; Murray et al, 2019; 2020), putting them off wanting to re-form it. The preference is to support events and donate informally (passive voluntary activity). Furthermore, parents and staff spoke about the excellent job Sophie and Nancy at Applegood and Liv, Nat, and Gemma at Oakington did to organise and deliver events (through their active voluntary work). There was a sense that others were happy to ‘leave them to it’ (though see discussion of the role stigmatising practices play in this below). Thus, time-poor parents engage in passive micro-episodic voluntary activity due to their distance from school to balance competing demands on their time and to avoid tension. But this leaves TAs and other support staff to take on the bulk of voluntary work due to a catch-22 situation in which they are successful at organising and delivering events but are also required (due to less active parental support) to do so. Whilst this can be positive for parents, it can have a negative impact on staff, potentially leading to burnout.

Socio-spatial Stigma: 'Goody Applegood' and 'Naughty Oakington'

Whilst federation has had positives for the schools in terms of cost savings, logistics, workload reduction and shared CPD (Muijs and Rumyansteva, 2014), participants from each school say there is still very much a distance (both geographical and social) between Applegood and Oakington:

Because we didn't really see a lot of the other school. Although we were federated. I think when we first federated, I think we all went over to Oakington for a day, the staff, the children, we all had a day there. And then they were going to come to us, but I don't think that ever happened. Really, apart from perhaps a couple of school trips. We don't. I don't really see a lot of them (Laura, Applegood)

we are *very*, we, no, we are very, *we are very separate*... But I just think that's how it's always. That's how it *is*. I think kids don't know each other. So, I just think they're not gonna gravitate towards. I think they just go into their own sort of. You know, I just think that's *normal* (Nat, Oakington)

Whilst both schools are similar in having time-poor and geographically dispersed parent populations, there is, nevertheless a material difference in the economic capital these parents possess. Many of the families in both schools live in the same large village; Pitford. This is a former mining village of mixed socio-economic demography. However, the children are materially divided into those that are more well-off and those that are not and spatially streamed in this way through the schools they attend. Katherine summed up this division by saying "Applegood get Pitford [children]. Oakington get *pupil premium* Pitford [children]". Applegood parents tend to be wealthier than Oakington parents, but these material inequalities extend to, and indeed are underpinned by, symbolic differences constructed through stigmatising practices (Tyler, 2015). Tyler (2015) used the concept of 'stigma' to explore the classificatory struggles that occur when groups seek to distinguish themselves from each other through symbolic and spatial articulations of class difference. She links increased stigmatisation to neoliberal governance where "class inequalities [are] rescripted... [as] individual choices" (Ibid, pg.505). Parental choice of school, for example, is regarded as an individual choice but in reality, has been shown to be affected by socio-economic and ethnic inequalities (Ball et al, 1995; 1996; Ball 1993; 2003; Reay, 2004a; Vincent et al, 2012; 2013; Hall and Pulsford, 2019). Thus, in 'choosing' where their children go to school, parents have socio-spatially differentiated themselves from each other (Bourdieu, 1991) and made the schools symbolically representative of their classed differences (inequality).

Social-spatial divisions are perpetuated by this streaming, and by other forms of neoliberal education governance, alongside parental choice. For example, Greg mentioned the symbolic effect of Ofsted ratings:

I think then it's particularly unfortunate because obviously given like [Applegood's] Ofsted was 'good'. And then [Oakington's] was 'requires improvement'. Then I think, you know, sometimes there's a bit of a, like a feeling maybe amongst the staff like, oh, kind of like, "oh, you know, Oakington, not quite as good". But actually, like we're really, really skilled. There's lots of really good things here. We've got some really, really skilled staff, and a lot of really expert people. And we deliver a lot of really great education and great nurture... Yeah, it's just tricky.

There is very much a socio-spatial stigma between the schools where Oakington feel they are perceived as 'lesser than' Applegood. In her work Tyler (2015) talks predominantly of the middle-class as wielding stigma and the working-class as having to deflect and contest it. Oakington engage in these practices of deflection and contestation by dismissing 'official measures' (where Applegood are more successful) as invalid indicators of how good their school is, discuss the skills and expertise Oakington staff (at all levels) have of caring for SEN children (leaving the comparable skills and expertise of Applegood unacknowledged), and use their informal day-to-day relationship with the executive head as evidence that their school is 'better' than Applegood:

[REDACTED]

[Oakington Daily Fieldnotes, 20th July 2023]

There is thus rivalry and low-level animosity between the schools and multiple, varied attempts to articulate distance and difference between them. Socio-spatial divisions played out most acutely when joint excursions between the two schools were planned. It had been common practice that when the schools federated, they would go on joint trips to reduce costs. However, where Applegood parents are able and willing to pay for their children to have something 'exciting' and 'different' (have the economic and cultural capital), they are often unwilling to compromise for Oakington pupils whose parents often cannot afford similarly expensive trips. Applegood school pulled out of the traditional 'Federation Big Day Out' in June 2023 (and for the foreseeable future too) to a (*free*) local park and gardens. As well as not costing the schools anything to access, the school sports coach was to deliver fun activities on the day (at no additional cost), and ice creams were purchased by staff (using fundraised income) at the local supermarket in the afternoon, rather than on-site (where the cost would be unaffordable) to add to the children's experience. The decision of Applegood not to attend was attributed to it being 'not good enough' for 'snobby' parents (according to Oakington staff) and not dissimilar to what their children already had access to (Applegood regularly make use of a local estate gardens in their village). Existing perceptions of school-based division meant that certain stigmatising classed meanings were attached to this decision (and action) taken by Applegood parents (whether accurate or not) not to join the federation trip by staff at Oakington. Thus, in a neoliberal context of needing to both collaborate and compete, voluntary activity can become a site of classificatory struggle (Tyler, 2015) in small rural primary schools with differing levels of deprivation where families have differing access to multiple forms of capital.

The socio-economic differences between their families demographics are also reflected in how fundraising for external causes happens in each school. Screenshots from the school's social media show how Children in Need, for example, is organised differently between the schools (see Figures 32 and 33). Applegood staff do not question whether their families can afford £1 for a non-uniform day fundraiser, whereas Oakington staff know many of their families would not be able to. By not putting a price on the donation, Oakington ensure all their families can take part, no matter what they can afford to give. Such differential organisation of fundraising activities between the two schools further highlights the impact of children's different socio-economic backgrounds on the character of voluntary activity within primary education.

Children In Need is Friday 17th November. This year, we would like everybody to donate £1 to wear something spotty or yellow - or both if you are feeling daring!

In addition, we will be taking part in the "Bearpee" challenge, which is a live event on the day. So get practicing those burpees in preparation.



Figure 32 - How Applegood fundraised for Children in Need: Families donate £1 per child and take part in national live events as a school

Thank you to our children and families for bringing in their loose change for Children in need. Every penny counts and the charity will be very grateful.



Figure 33 - How Oakington fundraise for Children in Need: Families asked to bring spare change, the children have fun working together to arrange into the face of Pudsey bear

The children have picked up and internalised these socio-spatial symbolic and material divisions between each other. Loreia [Year 5, Oakington] distinguished this in the classroom during my last week of data collection. When she learnt I had also volunteered at Applegood, she said in disgust "you've been to goody Applegood", then said gleefully "and we're naughty Oakington". I was amazed but not surprised by this distinction she made as it had come up in previous discussions I had had with the children (generally and in the art groups). Indeed, some pupils at Applegood also said they did not like the children from Oakington and described them as 'weird' and 'childish'. Thus, from a young age, these children are recognising symbolic stigmatising practices that serve to differentiate them from their peers from different socio-economic backgrounds, further exacerbating inequalities that may already exist between them. Furthermore, they are not challenged on or invited to question these beliefs, and so stigmatisation is normalised for them. As voluntary activity can be a site where these stigmatising practices play out, it raises concern that socio-spatial differences in how voluntary activity happens and is experienced can exacerbate material and symbolic inequalities. Not only does statistical evidence show that the schools are different in terms of material deprivation but so too does evidence from the day-to-day language and beliefs of certain staff and children in these schools reflect symbolic stigma (labelling and distancing) based on socio-spatial difference *between* the school communities. This plays out when the school communities are brought together but is also highlighted in decisions and actions that keep the two apart, with voluntary activity a key site of difference and, therefore, of inequality.

Despite inclusive framings of community, stigmatising stereotypes can also exist *within* the school communities (alongside those identified that exist *between* them). Staff, whilst being an invaluable source of support to families in these schools and professing to 'know' their family's needs, could also

hold certain views, and make certain assumptions about parents (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2012, Smith, 2021), distancing themselves from the parents through the elaboration of micro differences (Wacquant et al, 2014). One example occurred in the staff room at Oakington when a cake sale was being organised. When the question was posed of what price should be charged for the cakes, I suggested we just ask for donations so that people could give what they could afford. One response I received was “ah yeah but Taylah the ones that’ll give 20p are the ones walking round in Nike trainers and hoodies”. This staff member was making a judgement on how people chose to spend their money, the implication being parents were in moral deficit if they chose to buy designer clothing rather than contribute to a charity cake sale (and that this staff member would never have made that decision). And so, a certain price would have to be charged to ensure those parents contributed their ‘fair share’ (as defined by the staff organising the event).

These assumptions of how families ‘choose’ to be involved in voluntary activity extended to control over who was asked to participate and *how*. Liv and Nat told me in their interview that they ‘knew’ which parents would help at events and would ask them for support whilst there was no point in asking others. Assumptions were made about certain parents capacity to be involved and so they were not asked to participate (beyond donation requests). Thus, research findings that staff expect less of parents from lower income backgrounds in terms of supporting their children’s education (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2012; Barnes and Nolan, 2019; Body and Hogg, 2021) is also reflected in this research in terms of certain parents capacity (but also crucially, their *suitability*) to be involved in voluntary activity. This has potentially negative implications in terms of making certain parents feel (further) excluded from the social life and community of the school, but also in reducing the scope of activity and subsequent benefits that could be achieved for the children.

Indeed, for some children in these schools, voluntary activity can be a source of upset when they know their families can’t or won’t attend events or cannot afford to enable them to take part. The following extracts from fieldnotes at Oakington on the day of the Christmas Fair (2023) show how prevalent this concern is for some of the children there:

I chatted to Bonnie [Year 6] about the fair, she was happy as her dad had given her £8 to spend, she said she was going to use £5 for raffle tickets but save £3, I said that was a good idea, I asked if her parents were coming and she shrugged and said she wasn’t sure as [her brother, who has SEN and requires a lot of attention] is at home, I said “hopefully one of them will come”, she gave a small smile and said “yeah” uncertainly...

Freya [Year 2] was crying... I tried to cheer her up by talking about the fair, but she said her mum didn’t have much money, and “if she’s had to buy petrol that will be expensive so she won’t have any”, she cried harder and I felt really sorry for her, I thought about giving her some money but knew that wouldn’t be fair on the others...

[REDACTED]

In all three cases, the Christmas Fair at Oakington, whilst intended to be a fun enrichment event for the children (as well as having a vital fundraising purpose), had contributed to anxiety and upset for these particular children either because they did not know if their parents would be there, did not think they would be able to participate due to lack of funds, or both (CPAG, 2022). In such a small school, it is noticeable if children do not take part in events and thus results in their parents being stigmatised as ‘letting their children down’ (whilst for some this may be accurate, there are also

extenuating circumstances of which some staff may be unaware (or 'forget' to acknowledge) as to why parents do not participate) (Ibid; Mazzoli Smith and Todd, 2019). Whilst the school are mindful of the timing and frequency of events where they ask for donations and are as inclusive as possible for those children whose parents are not present, it is nevertheless an awkward social environment for those unable to donate to be part of, and so one they may choose to avoid (CPAG, 2022). A decision for which they may then be stigmatised (Mazzoli Smith and Todd, 2019). Consequently, events involving the expectation of some monetary donation can bring negative experiences for children and families who struggle to take part due to the social stigma attached to those who do not participate. This is especially so when much voluntary work at Oakington is school-led and so the way in which parents can be (*seen to be*) involved in events on the day is largely limited to (monetary) supporter who is physically in attendance. Even if they have previously donated resources for the event, if they do not or cannot participate on the day, their absence is (easily) noted and stigmatised by those who *are* present. Thus, socio-spatial stigmatisation within the school community as played out during fundraising/community events can have multiple negative consequences for more deprived families.

How does this socio-spatial stigma play out in community as opposed to school-focused voluntary activity? Interestingly, although the key focus of both Applegood and Oakington's events were given as 'community', this was framed and interpreted differently in each context. At Applegood, references to community often meant the local village residents, thus constituting a spatial category. However, for Oakington, community often did not mean their local villagers, it meant the families of pupils, thus a more social category. When Oakington staff and families did refer to the 'local community' of village residents, it was in reference to a category of people not socially connected to the school but whom the school are working to (re-)initiate beneficial connections through 'community' events *in* the village. These different framings of community led to different interpretations of the purposes of 'community' events. At Applegood, they were about *bringing* the community together (i.e. the residents, the pupils, and their families) to fundraise. At Oakington, it was more about the school *supporting* their families, as evidenced for example by parents being able to sell their own goods at school events so that they could make money too, and to *engage* them in positive school experiences alongside their children when so many of these parents may not have experienced schooling in a positive way before (Gillies, 2006; Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2013). Oakington also have the additional aim of improving the schools reputation locally and so seek to invite village residents to events where they can show who these children are and how the school operates, with the hope of improving links between them. Thus, currently differing socio-spatial networks between the two schools and their geographic communities of village residents mean that voluntary activity involving 'community' have different purposes. Whilst Applegood already have a positive school-community relationship so that events can focus on fundraising, Oakington must focus on (re-)building a positive school-community relationship in the first place before purposes such as fundraising can be realised from those other than their pupils and families. Thus, different socio-spatial networks are also exacerbating inequalities between these schools in terms of what community-focused voluntary activity can achieve.

The Future: Developing the (Social) Networks?

Whilst the core volunteers in these schools are the (especially TA and other support) staff, their families, and the parents (families) of some pupils, Katherine sees the community (here conceptualised

as local village residents) as the “natural source of volunteers” for her schools. However, the current relationships each enjoys with its neighbours (influenced by their geographies and social histories) are very different. Whilst the variances can be partially accounted for by spatial differences (which cannot be helped), social connections need to be initiated and managed carefully and consistently for benefits to result. It is here that the two schools also differ. Applegood school benefits from a willing community who offer their support and local bridge figures who ask for support from their networks and manage these relationships (Sophie with her parent cohort *and* neighbours, for example). In contrast, Oakington school has fewer willing community volunteers (not helped by its local reputation), bridge figures and parents who live further away (and who are unconnected to local residents) and does not do enough asking (Musick and Wilson, 2008). Whilst Katherine has made attempts to forge links in Oakington, for example, by attending parish council meetings and getting the school involved in church events, this has not been enough. They need to capitalise on these links by *communicating* regularly and meaningfully with potential volunteers to find ways that they can (continue to) volunteer effectively for mutual benefit, and by increasing the school’s presence and activities *within* the local area.

This is easier said than done, however, because, as the executive head of *two* schools (which, although having small numbers, nevertheless, require the same level of management as any other primary school) Katherine lacks the time to focus on community development, even though she sees it as vital (Bagley and Hillyard, 2019). As she explained:

it's *hard* because when there's only me, I *can't* get to the parish council meetings every month and I *can't* go and do this and this and this. So that's the one thing that I haven't quite managed to crack yet in terms of getting the school back... in its rightful place within the community

Katherine’s language here appeals to the sense of idyllic rural nostalgia surrounding small rural schools as the symbolic ‘heart of the community’ (Bell and Sigsworth, 1992; Bagley and Hillyard, 2011; 2014; 2019). As she is not local and has not been at Oakington that long, she does not know about historic community links but ‘imagines’ there was a stronger sense of community previously. Whilst she does not doubt its existence (however accurate or not), in not understanding what this ‘sense of community’ looked like or how it worked, she struggles to envisage what it *could* look like and how it *could* work. She only has Applegood as a point of comparison. Yet Applegood’s social history, geography and socio-spatial network are very different to that of Oakington and so borrowing ideas from them will not necessarily work in practice in a different context. In trying to form long-term, meaningful connections with its local community, Oakington is, in many ways, having to start from scratch, with significantly less pre-existing capital from its socio-spatial network to draw upon than Applegood. In fact, Oakington must work on re-establishing their reputation within the community of their village, before any more tangible benefits can be realised (or even contemplated).

Moreover, people have different conceptions of what a ‘good’ level of community involvement looks like and where it should come from. In-keeping with Oakington’s tendency to frame ‘community’ as the families they serve, Gemma made a lot of references in her interview to an imagined future situation where the school has expanded so there are more children and more parents who (hopefully) have more money, and a greater pool of skills for PTA or governance roles – an imagined community with high levels of capital. Of course, the implication of this is that the *current* parents are deprived in multiple ways: of time, money, and skills. These expressed wishes for greater parental involvement, however, conflict with Gemma and Liv’s ‘control-freak’ (their words) personalities where they

dominate school fundraising. It seems unlikely that even if the pool of potential parent volunteers was to grow (as it looks like it is as of September 2023), that Gemma and Liv would want to relinquish their control over school fundraising. [REDACTED] Interestingly, when discussing the possible re-formation of the PTA at Oakington, Lorna (a parent) conceptualised a new PTA as a mediator between parents and the school. She saw its purpose as communication and advocacy rather than fundraising. Not only does this show differing understandings of the purpose of voluntary activity between parents and staff, but it also suggests parents would like to have more of a say in how things happen at school, potentially pushing back against staff control (Packman, 2020). Thus, whilst staff control of fundraising is seen as the easiest and most efficient way to organise things from the school's point-of-view, it also results in the continued exclusion of (certain) parents from specific areas and forms of voluntary activity where there is evidence that they would like to be more involved. As long as this organisational structure continues unchallenged, the scope for more innovative voluntary activity with more wide-ranging benefits is limited (see Chapter 7).

During discussions about the ongoing struggles both schools have with managing federation activities, the idea of a federation PTFA was raised as a potential way to mitigate the conflicts arising due to the socio-spatial differences between the schools. However, immediately there were complications around how this would work fairly as Applegood families would (perhaps inevitably) donate more than Oakington could. This could then exacerbate conflicts that already exist around federation activities like joint trips. Ultimately, parents are voluntarily giving due to their personal link to the school through *their* child(ren) because they are happy to give and support when their children benefit. However, if parents can no longer see the 'benefit' for their own children in a voluntary endeavour, they may withhold or withdraw their support. Thus, ongoing classificatory struggles in a neoliberal context prevent a more inclusive and equitable fundraising arrangement at federation level. One area that could be improved is greater representation for Oakington on the federation governing board in the future in order to achieve more understanding and attention for their school. However, when parent vacancies do come up, they are often filled by Applegood parents, most recently a parent whose wife is also a teacher at Applegood. Whilst Greg knows this parent well (they are friends outside of school) and said he will be a great governor and will care about both schools, he nevertheless conceded that he will inevitably care more about Applegood, as that is where his family are. So long as the federation governing board continue to be dominated by those with socio-spatial connections to Applegood, Oakington will likely continue to receive less attention, exacerbating already existing inequalities.

Ultimately, however, in the current context in which these schools are operating, voluntary activity and the related work of community development have not been the highest priority. Low intakes and associated lack of funding, as well as accommodating increasing numbers of children with additional needs, continue to be the most pressing issues facing these schools (Fargas-Malet and Bagley, 2021). Indeed, when community events were spoke of at Oakington, they were spoke of in terms of reputation-building, marketing, and promotion, revealing the current priorities driving community events there. In addition, from a governance (strategic) point of view, Brendan discussed in his interview that currently, improving the community feel between parents, schools and governors was of greater importance than that of building links with residents. Whilst he recognised the benefits that could come from this eventually, he emphasised the schools were in "the early stages of any such journey", and that greater local involvement was "very much blue sky thinking at the moment". However, developments in school-community links through children's increased involvement in the local community are discussed further in the next chapter.

Conclusion

In conclusion, (and in answer to my research question about the relationship between deprivation and voluntary activity) it is not so much the level of deprivation of the schools' which influence their voluntary activity, but rather the socio-spatial differences between the schools and their communities which constrain and produce the levels and shape the different forms of voluntary activity. Proximity to the school (and the school's visibility in the community) influences both the level and forms of voluntary activity. Relationships can emerge from proximity, and can be experienced as more intense, with a small village like Applegood containing many interconnected individuals and layers of relationships, whilst the scattered village of Oakington contains many who are unconnected to one another or to the school. Living closer, also tends to translate into more diverse giving, with the donation of time, talent, money, *and* resources common, whereas living further away tended to result in donation of resources and money, *rather than* time. Indeed, living close made access to the school easier. However, social connections (Hustinx and Lammertyn, 2003) also influence the level of voluntary activity in all its forms and can overcome the issue of physical distance if the connection is of significant strength and warmth (as with SEN parents and (especially long-serving) TAs). Importantly, it is the initiation of support (via *asking*) (Musick and Wilson, 2008) and continued *management* of relationships that is key to forging and maintaining beneficial connections. However, small numbers, heavy workloads and unfavourable geographic positioning of small schools (like Oakington) can make some networks difficult to access and maintain. This finding extends Bagley and Hillyard's work on the social relationships within and between rural communities and their schools, by bringing the geographical aspect of schools and their villages into the picture too.

The concept of socio-spatial networks facilitates an understanding of the character of voluntary activity in small rural primaries, how and why this differs between contexts (Williams, 2011a; 2011b) and the implications of this (also addressing my research aims of understanding how voluntary activity happens and how it is experienced by those involved). In particular, how the intersection of social demographics and geography constrain and facilitate different levels and forms of voluntary activity. Furthermore, social network maps (Lelong et al, 2016; Donath, 2020) can be used as a tool for understanding and comparing voluntary activity within and between contexts. Whilst changes to the network cannot be explored through a static map, using the methodological and conceptual tools of socio-spatial network mapping has shown how social and geographic capital combine to enable and hinder different voluntary activities. This has important implications for schools (of various sizes) in understanding who the various actors in their socio-spatial networks are and where they are positioned, how they are connected (to the school and each other), the nature and strength of these connections, and how these connections can be managed and utilised to the schools' advantage. They can therefore be a useful overview tool, highlighting areas of a network that are functioning well, which can be better developed and to understand the potential impact of any changes. Whilst socio-spatial networks are key to the character of voluntary activity in these schools, the current form they take may not be desirable for all members of the network. Indeed, some may wish to increase or reduce their involvement, to be involved differently, or to withdraw completely. Consequently, future work should focus on identifying and understanding issues associated with voluntary activity as an important counterbalance to the often-uncritical view of voluntary activity as inherently positive. Considering the nature and consequences of changes to peoples positions in these networks and with the final section of this chapter looking ahead to the schools seeking to develop their social networks in the future, changes over time were key to the stories of voluntary activity in these schools. And so,

it is to a more temporal, longitudinal perspective that this thesis now turns in the final findings chapter, bringing together the themes of socio-spatial networks, boundaries and stigmatisation developed in both this and the previous chapter, and considering the significance and consequences of their inter-relationship over time at meso-(school), micro-(individual) and macro-(societal) levels.

Chapter 7: Trajectories of Voluntary Activity

Introduction: A Longitudinal Perspective

In the previous chapter, the significance of socio-spatial networks of voluntary activity were explored. However, these were only able to capture the networks at a single point in time. And yet, throughout the research, participants were discussing the importance of temporality, changes over time, and different life events impacting their voluntary activity. It was therefore important to take a longitudinal perspective to understand the voluntary activity taking place in these schools, the experiences of those involved, and the consequences in each context. Research has shown that participation in voluntary activity differs between individuals and contexts over time (Brodie et al, 2011; Hogg, 2016; Haski-Leventhal et al, 2017). Parenthood is an important ‘trigger’ of volunteering but so too are other life events, experiences, emotions or outside influences (including being asked) (Brodie et al, 2011). Individual choices, access to resources and opportunities for involvement also influence participation, whilst practical (e.g. new responsibilities at work or home) and experiential (e.g. negative participatory experience) factors can lead people to stop participating (Ibid). The interaction of different roles, circumstances and motivations produce different pathways through voluntary activity in different social contexts (Ibid; Hogg, 2016).

Inspired by this work, in this chapter I select key figures from my social network maps presented in the previous chapter to look at their experiences in detail and from a more *longitudinal* perspective to better understand the factors that shape the nature and extent of voluntary activity in these schools. These individuals are some of the most civically active in these schools, having long histories of involvement in which they have held multiple positions in their schools’ socio-spatial networks, and crossed boundaries through their roles. First, the different forms of mapping I used is presented, including trajectories for the schools themselves which provide context to the individual biography and trajectory explorations that follow. Through the stories of Liv, Kayleigh, Val and Joy (all of whom represent key demographics in these schools) I then discuss the key factors that shape the nature and extent of voluntary activity in these schools by exploring the interaction of individual’s (micro-level) TSOLs, the school’s (meso-level) TSOLs and broader (macro-level) societal changes over time. The consequences of how voluntary activity in these schools has been organised – staff-led or co-led – are then discussed. Finally, I explore how children’s voluntary activity has changed over time in these schools.

School-based Volunteering over the Lifecourse

To explore voluntary activity in these schools longitudinally, I first adapted the lifecourse mapping Hogg (2016) used in his life story research with 26 older volunteers identifying constant, serial and trigger volunteers, to create ‘lifecourse maps’ of some key individuals in Applegood and Oakington (see Figure 34). In line with the adoption of the TSOL (Glucksmann, 1995; 2005) perspective for this research, this form of mapping can look at different forms of work simultaneously (paid, emotional/domestic, volunteering) and how they influence and overlap with each other. They also take differing contexts into account and can explore the interrelationships between the individual’s activities, and that of the

individual within their context. Constructing these maps highlighted the significant overlap between being a staff member, parent, and volunteer, but also ‘gaps’ in volunteering.

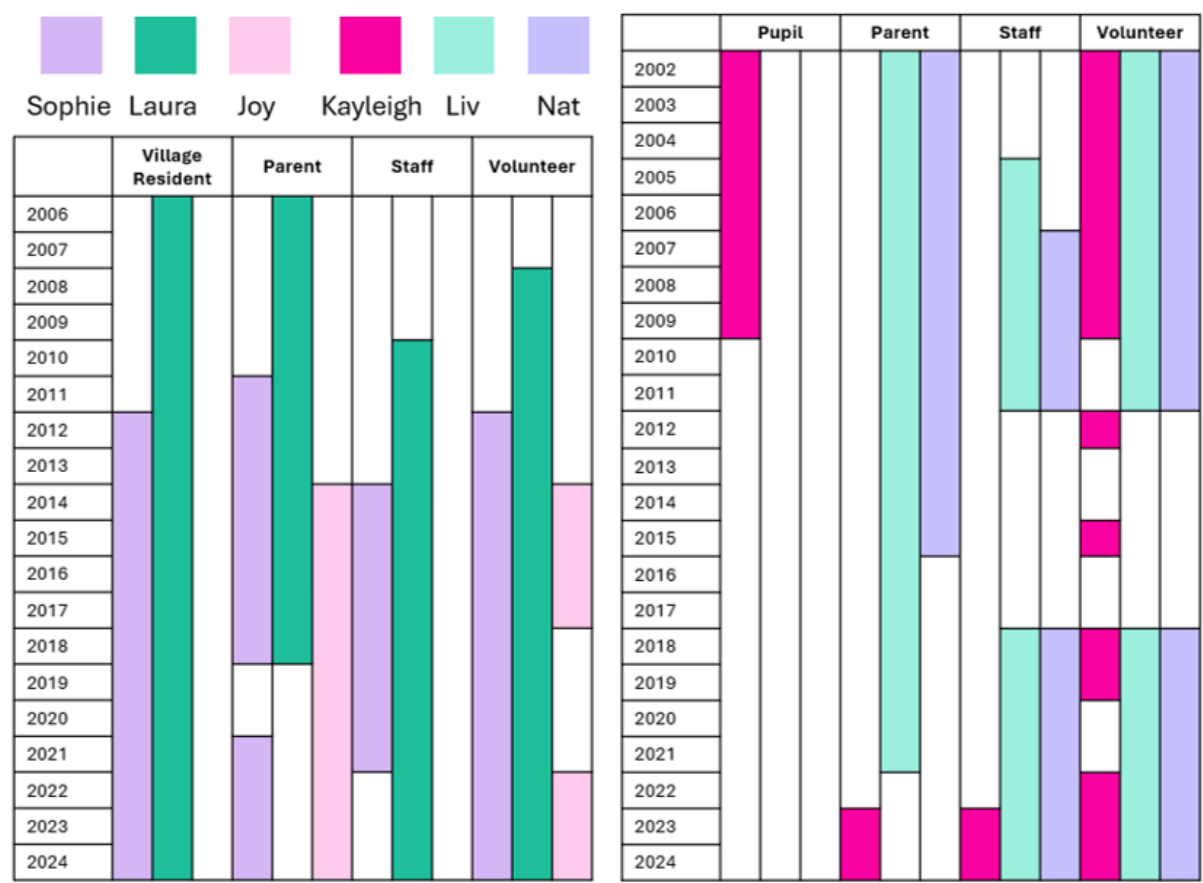


Figure 34 - Lifecourse Maps for key individuals at Applegood (left) and Oakington (right). The categories of Pupil, Parent, Staff and Volunteer refer to the relationship with the schools, i.e. parent at the school

However, Hogg’s research (and lifecourse maps) focus predominantly on formal volunteering. This made it difficult to capture other forms of voluntary activity through these maps. Informal volunteering, for example, was prevalent at both Applegood and Oakington, alongside paid work and overlapping with familial relationships and responsibilities. Donation of money and resources was also a key voluntary activity, which lifecourse maps failed to capture. Thus, I needed a method of mapping that would enable me to account for different forms of voluntary activity *and* the influence of key life events over time. Inspired by Brodie et al’s (2011) ‘Pathways Through Participation’ project, I constructed trajectory maps as a means of depicting and discussing the importance of and relationships between voluntary activities and critical incidents over a lifecourse.

School Trajectories

I began by creating a trajectory timeline for both schools (see Figure 35). This incorporated key policy developments and critical moments in the schools histories, including the different headteachers the schools have had in recent years, as their differing leadership styles, personalities and relationships significant influenced the culture and character of voluntary activity within their schools (see table below) (Holmes and Pratt-Adams, 2021). The priority and purpose of voluntary activity has changed

over time. It is important here to distinguish between *community-oriented* voluntary activity (i.e. activities and events which have a local purpose and involve local people) and *school-oriented* voluntary activity (i.e. activities and events which are for the children and their families). Different events and activities have different (often overlapping) purposes (see Chapter 5), and these have been differently prioritised over time in these schools and by different headteachers (see Table 3 below). The trajectories of voluntary activity at Applegood and Oakington have been and continue to be shaped by both the events of the past *and* current circumstances.

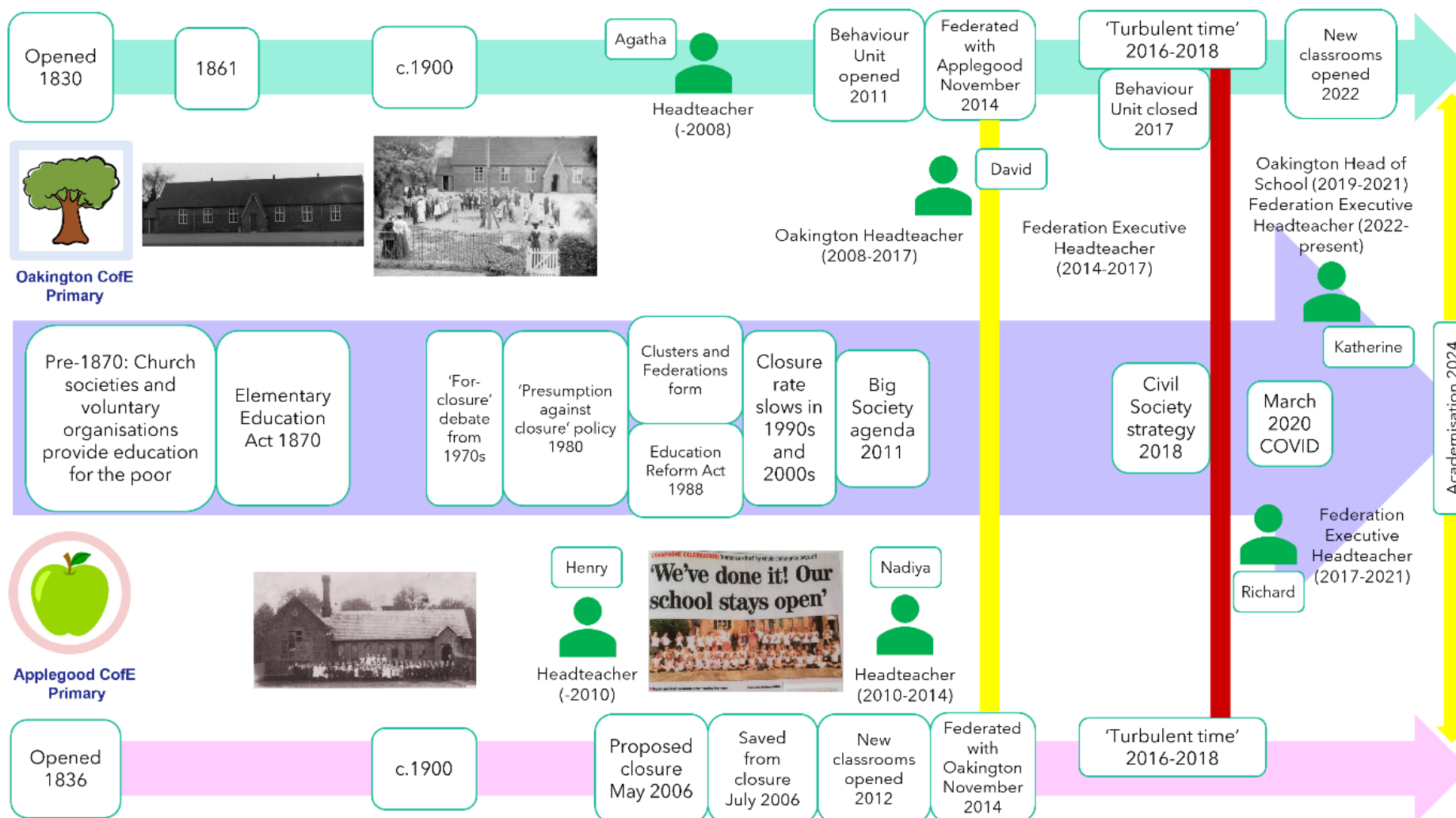


Figure 35 - Timeline for both schools with headteachers

Table 3 - Analysis of School Trajectories

School Tenure	Headteacher	School-Oriented VA (including PTFA)	Community-Oriented VA
Oakington (-2008)	Agatha: Member of local church community	“Poets, writers, puppeteers and theatre groups” visited the school and the school raised money for a school in Gambia through internal fundraising efforts [Oakington Ofsted, 2003] Parental support was praised. Parents “help with transport to sports matches and other events in which their children are taking part. Some help in the classroom with reading, for example... The Friends of Oakington School is struggling to find enough people willing to organise events to raise funds for the school or provide social activities for the children, but when such events are organised, they are supported well” [Oakington Ofsted, 2003]	“Although the local community is small, the school is central to village life and has a role in most events” [Oakington Ofsted, 2008] ‘Bill (a village resident)... praised Agatha for her encompassing attitude to school community links’ [Oakington Daily Fieldnotes, 14th December 2022]
Applegood (-2010)	Henry: Head when the school was saved from closure	School- and Community-oriented voluntary activities flourished. “The wide range of activities provided is possible because the school develops very effective partnerships with a number of organisations and the local community” [Applegood Ofsted, 2007] Parents, staff and locals working together were crucial in saving Applegood from closure in 2006.	
Applegood (2010-2014)	Nadiya: Difficult relationship with parents	Sophie suggests the PTA saw a need to keep their funds separate from school budget as Nadiya tended to spend on things they would not have considered ‘enrichment’.	Community-oriented events like the village summer fair continued throughout her headship.
Oakington (2008-2017) and Applegood (2014-2017)	David: ‘He was very religious [which put me off a little bit]... but he was fine. He had a good approach and atmosphere’ (Joy)	Oakington’s PTA formally registered in 2012 (with David as the trustee). The Charity Commission lists the PTA activities as “raising money through fetes, bonus ball, non-uniform days, dinosaur racing etc. Money is spent on buying new resources for children, paying for coaches for school trips, paying for treats for children when on outings, leavers books and any resource that is requested by the staff that would benefit the children”. From the financial records of the charity, the PTA did particularly well in the academic year of 2014/2015, raising £4,580 (compared to the previous year’s £715).	Pupils “regularly asked to attend community events both within the village and further afield” [Applegood Ofsted, 2014]. The local community visit the school and contribute to the curriculum [Oakington Ofsted, 2013].
Turbulence (2016-2018)		“The school endured a period of turbulence in leadership... [and] significant turbulence in staffing” [Oakington Ofsted, 2018]. “There [had] been considerable disruption in the leadership of the federated schools” [Applegood Ofsted, 2019]. During the turbulent times in these schools, voluntary activity was limited or absent.	

Oakington and Applegood (2017-2021)	Richard: Brought in 'to save the school[s]' (Liv) Richard's "determination, skills and highly effective leadership" attributed to significant and rapid improvements in both schools [Oakington Ofsted, 2018; Applegood Ofsted, 2019]	A group of Oakington parents who had run the PTA left the school in 2017 and the PTA folded. With no one to drive it, school-oriented voluntary activity diminished significantly at Oakington during this period. Liv described the fun being 'zapped out of the school' but acknowledges the difficult job Richard had. At Applegood Sophie continued to drive the PTA. However, Richard's leadership style (and personality) meant that he had different ideas to previous heads (and to the PTA) on how income should be raised and spent, which meant she had to challenge him, or adapt her school-oriented activities: 'Uh, Richard you know, he, he wasn't really a fan of... the pantomime. He was just like 'can you not find something a bit more educational for it to be spent on?' and I'm like 'No, not really. This is an enrichment, a fun enrichment'... [he] wasn't a big fan of Frozen Friday cause he said it wasn't healthy, it was sugar and all of this so I, I went and found fruit lollies. They were a little bit more expensive and so we charged like 25p instead of 20 but I was just like it's, it's an ice lolly. Like really!?' (Sophie)	During the turbulent times, there was a feeling that the schools retreated behind their gates as a protective mechanism which meant that community-oriented events were all but non-existent: 'It was at a time when, when they were stressed and stretched, and you know... and when, sometimes when you're stretched, and when you're anxious, it's very easy to become diminished. Isn't it? [Yeah]. And I think that happened. And to a certain extent, it was a diminishment of, of, of... qualities, but also, it was perhaps a protective barrier... The children seemed to stop having fun' (Caroline, Oakington) Many participants agreed that Richard's headship had been vital in bringing the schools out of the 'sad' and 'dark' times.
Oakington and Applegood (2022-present)	Katherine: Committed to improving links with the local community in Oakington	As the schools emerged from various lockdowns, school-oriented voluntary events and activities re-started. Brendan emphasised that he wants to build a stronger community feel between the parents, schools, and governors before considering local involvement.	For Oakington, marketing, reputation-building and promotion are fundamental drivers of community-oriented voluntary activity. 'Bill said he felt the school were getting much better at communicating and it was really working well, Liv said that's so lovely to hear [as] the school were working really hard at getting that back, that link with the community and the school' [Oakington Daily Fieldnotes, 14th December 2022] Applegood focus more on maintaining and developing community links that already exist.

Analysing the trajectory timelines for these schools reveals that their contexts and critical moments have affected the purpose and priority of voluntary activity with which they engaged at different points. This included the different headteachers they have had, the federation of the two schools, internal turbulence, changing trends in parental involvement in schools, and the COVID-19 pandemic. But how do different individuals in each school experience these changes? And how has this impacted their own individual involvement in different forms of voluntary activity over time? To address these questions, I now move on to explore four key individual trajectories of voluntary activity within (and influenced by the histories of) the schools.

Individual Trajectories of Voluntary Activity: ‘Chapters in Life’

To depict individual trajectories, I began by selecting key individuals from each school whose experiences represented a range of key factors shaping the nature and extent of the voluntary activity with which they had been involved in their schools. I then re-listened to interviews and reviewed fieldnotes and visual data to map the

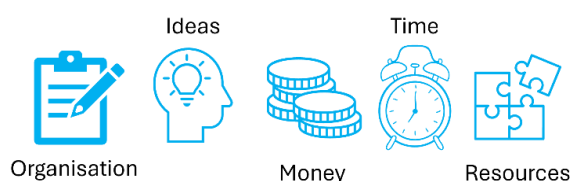


Figure 36 – Image key for different types of voluntary activity depicted on trajectory maps

biographies of these key individuals (Woodward, 2020). From these biography maps (see Appendix 10), I then proceeded to create trajectory maps detailing the different ‘critical moments’ individuals have encountered throughout involvement with their school, and the voluntary activities with which they have been engaged at different points; organisation (of events and activities), ideas (talent and innovation), money, time (organising and/or supporting events and activities) and resources (see Figure 36). I gave individuals the opportunity to review their biography and trajectory maps to check they were accurate and that they were happy with how it had been presented. These checks also gave additional opportunity for me to seek clarification of my analysis and further detail on the influence of key critical moments on the individual’s voluntary activity.

Voluntary activity in its various forms emerged from trajectories as integral to individual identities. For some, the activities themselves were directly identified, whereas for others they were seen as an extension of other aspects of their identity e.g. as a parent (mother) or school staff member. Voluntary activities were also inherently relational (Hustinx and Lammertyn, 2003; Smith et al, 2010), embedded in personal biographies, the biographies of those in their social networks, and of the schools themselves. I now move on to discuss the trajectories of two key individuals from each school to illustrate the importance of trajectories to the level and nature of voluntary activity at different life stages. Each individual discussed in this chapter is female. The gendered nature of both volunteering and school involvement is prominent in the literature (see Chapter 3) and has already been identified in Chapter 5 as a key dimension of the TSOL of education in Applegood and Oakington. Whilst these individuals did not explicitly discuss their gender in relation to their voluntary activity, that they emerged as key figures in these schools due to their involvement, reflects the ongoing socialisation of females into caring and giving roles, including volunteering.

Oakington: Liv and Kayleigh

Liv and her niece Kayleigh are both TAs at Oakington. Before they became staff members, however, they began their trajectories as a parent (Liv) and a pupil (Kayleigh) in 2002. Their trajectories represent those of parents or pupils who have become staff members. Staff members who are former parents or pupils can be found in both schools, thus representing a key demographic.

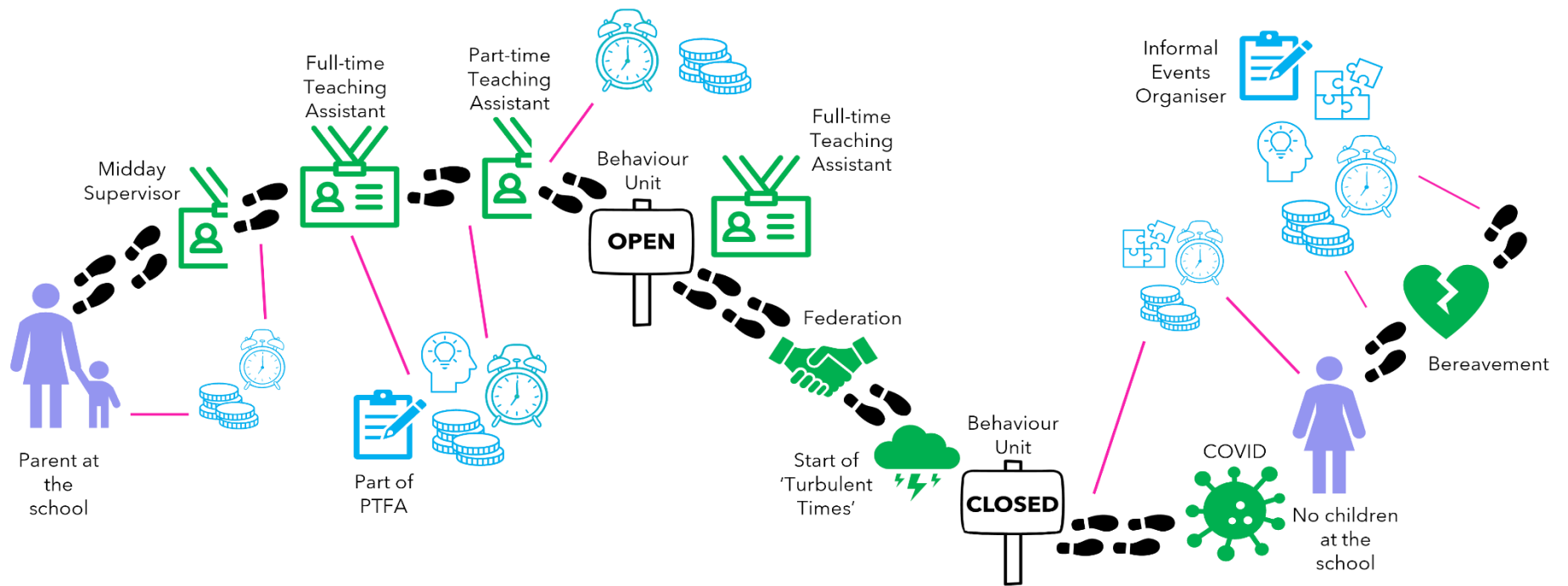


Figure 37 - Liv's Trajectory Map

Liv began her trajectory with Oakington school as a parent when her eldest son started Reception in 2002. In 2005, she was asked by Agatha (who Liv “thought the world of”) to fill the role of midday supervisor. Liv’s voluntary activity was limited to giving money, attending events and supporting school trips at this time. In 2007, Liv was asked to take on a full-time TA position. It was from here that her voluntary activity started to become more intense as she became a formal part of the PTFA and contributed ideas and time to the organisation and delivery of events and activities, alongside other parents. The trigger of being asked was crucial for Liv’s voluntary activity (Musick and Wilson, 2008; Brodie et al, 2011). As a parent, she was at school in-person on a frequent basis and well-known to the headteacher. This social context encouraged Agatha to ask her to become involved as a staff member. A side effect of this request was that Liv was further enabled to intensify her voluntary activity now that she was part of both the inside (as a TA) and outside (as a parent) of the school.

Being a TA at the school which her children attend enabled Liv to combine her family and work responsibilities, motivating and enabling (intense) voluntary activity for the school. Her children benefitted from the enrichment activities which she helped to plan and organise and so she could simultaneously be a ‘good mother’ (Hays, 1996; Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2013) and a good employee, going above and beyond her contracted hours and job description. Her husband, Luke, was also encouraged further into voluntary activity for the school (beyond his parent role) when Liv began working there as a large proportion of his children’s lives, and now his wife’s revolved around it. Thus,

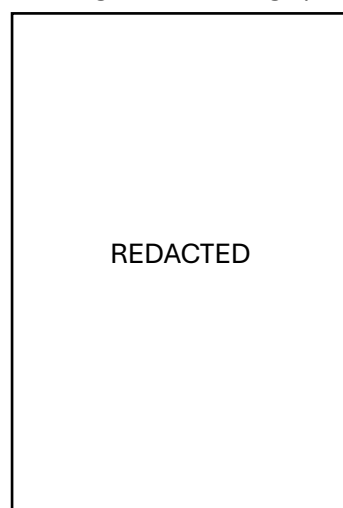


Figure 38 - Liv sorting out her classroom during school holidays

it was becoming a TA that intensified voluntary activity for Liv (and Luke) as the school became the focus of both her work and family. Voluntary activity also became a way in which Liv could manage the time bind created when work becomes home, and home becomes work (Hochschild, 1983; 1997). By investing her emotional capital in voluntary activities for the school, Liv took on a ‘fourth shift’ (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2013) which enabled her to focus her efforts inside the same physical space, but for multiple purposes. Whilst this involved considerable emotional complexity, time poverty and physical exhaustion (Ibid), the school became “central both to... self-identity and to the identity others ascribe to [her]” (Leidner (2006, pgs.434-6). Indeed, for many participants in this research, Liv’s long history, intense involvement (including voluntary activity), and multiple positions and connections at Oakington over time mean that she is synonymous with the school. Liv is Oakington and it would not feel the same without her.

Whilst having a long history with Oakington, Liv’s employment status has changed over time. She went down to a part-time position in 2009 following the birth of her fourth son, Eddie. Although she took a step back from her PTFA role after this, she continued to donate her time and money to the school. However, her employment context changed again in 2011 when she transferred to the newly opened behavioural unit (separate to the mainstream school). During the years she was based at the unit, her focus of voluntary activity transferred there. The closure of the unit during the turbulent times led to Liv transferring back to the main school. However, David had left Oakington by this point and Richard was now the headteacher. Voluntary activity (community- or school-oriented) was not a priority under Richard’s headship. The formal PTFA also folded in 2017, but Liv continued to work beyond her contracted hours to organise and run events and donate where she could (as a parent and a TA). Even

when school events had to stop completely during COVID-19, Liv's care for the children in her class motivated her donations of goods and resources to continue, alongside support for the pupils and their families during this difficult time.

Since 2022, Liv has taken on a very active role in the school's voluntary activity, identifying herself as Oakington's 'event's organiser'. She is extremely passionate about this role as it is emotionally motivated. Whilst Liv's employment context changed over the years, she remained a parent throughout this time. Despite being happy with her boys' education, she also describes a negative parental experience throughout the turbulent times, and then through COVID-19 where she felt Eddie had missed out on the full primary school experience her other three sons had enjoyed:

I think pretty much everything we do here is what I organise, the, we do the summer fetes. We do the Christmas bazaar. We do a 'scary' party around the 31st of October... you know, and all things just all the way down to, you know, *leavers* service, we had ABBA the musical, you know, we had afternoon teas and stuff like that because it is. I *want* the children and the parents to have back what I feel I missed out on with Eddie. (Liv)

Even though her children have all left the school (as of 2021), her parental experience (both positive and negative) has motivated her more intense voluntary activity as she seeks to "bring the fun back" to school for the current pupils, filling the gap she perceives (Brodie et al, 2011). Liv has a further emotional motivator. Following a bereavement in 2023, she described the support she received from her friends and colleagues and the children at Oakington as 'saving her'. This further motivates her to want to give back to the school. It also motivates her desire to improve the school's presence and links within the local community. She remembers the early days when the school and community had a mutually beneficial relationship which was driven by the then headteacher Agatha. Liv acknowledges that the current federation head, Katherine and SENCo, Greg have limited time to dedicate to re-building the links that were damaged by the unit, turbulent times, and Richard's headship. She has therefore taken it upon herself to drive these links (Milligan, 2007), planning and delivering a range of community-oriented events which she hopes will show the locals "how amazing these kids are" and change the reputation of the school as a result. Thus, a combination of strong emotive factors linked to her past personal experiences and her self-identity as inherently intertwined with voluntary activity, explains the intensification of Liv's voluntary activity in recent years. The ability to combine various spheres of her life into the school itself has also facilitated, intensified, and diversified her voluntary activity over time.

Whilst she has no plans to leave the school, Liv has had negative experiences which have *changed* her voluntary activity (Brodie et al, 2011; Willems and Dury, 2017). The 'McDonalds incident' at the federation residential trip in 2021 is a key example:

I found it really upsetting because I'm very much like. I, *42-degree heat*, we had give up our own time. I hadn't seen Eddie. I hadn't been *home*. We were *camping out*. You know, I had to sit and do a food course to be able to cook and *prepare* for them. We'd brought them. You know, as per usual. Same as this residential. I buy them treats. I buy them sweets. I buy them *nice* things. You know, I make sure every single one of these children *get the best of the best*. And *then* you know as staff who are giving up their own time [...] sit there and have a McDonald's and you get one horrible parent, which started at *Applegood*... And then it just

turned out that she went and had, done, to one of our parents. And. And they were. They're horrible... because we dared to have a McDonalds... But the biggest issue apparently turned out to be. It wasn't for the fact of that, it was because I dared to answer back... how dare and I'm one of these, Taylah, I'd lose my job over it. (Liv)

Despite a huge amount of staff voluntary effort that had gone into the Year 5/6 federation residential, some parents complained that staff had 'abused their position' by having a fast-food meal brought to them. Liv received abuse online for this by parents from both schools (who were not aware staff are not paid for taking the children on the residential) and, whilst other staff 'brushed it off', she was profoundly upset and angry about the comments, perceiving them as a personal attack. As a result of this negative experience, Liv (and other staff members) no longer offer to stay overnight for residential and since 2022, these events have been organised as two separate day trips rather than a 'stay over' or 'camp out'. Thus, a negative participatory experience impacting Liv's voluntary activity has changed the residential experience for all children at both schools. Remembering the relational element of volunteering (Hustinx and Lammertyn, 2003; Smith et al, 2010) raises the issue of relying on voluntary activity for these kinds of school events. If conflict arises, not only can voluntary support be freely withdrawn, negatively impacting future events, but ongoing tensions can be created between certain staff and factions of parents. This is especially damaging when so much of children's education relies on the positive relationship between staff (school) and families (home) (Olmedo and Wilkins, 2017; Apps et al, 2019) and when there are already limited numbers in small schools. Furthermore, children have little say in these decisions yet can nevertheless be negatively impacted by them and this is profoundly unfair. Conflicts arising from voluntary activity, can thus damage other areas of education beyond extra-curricular activities, negatively impacting children's experiences in multiple areas and in multiple ways, which is unjust in an education system that is intended to be inclusive for all.

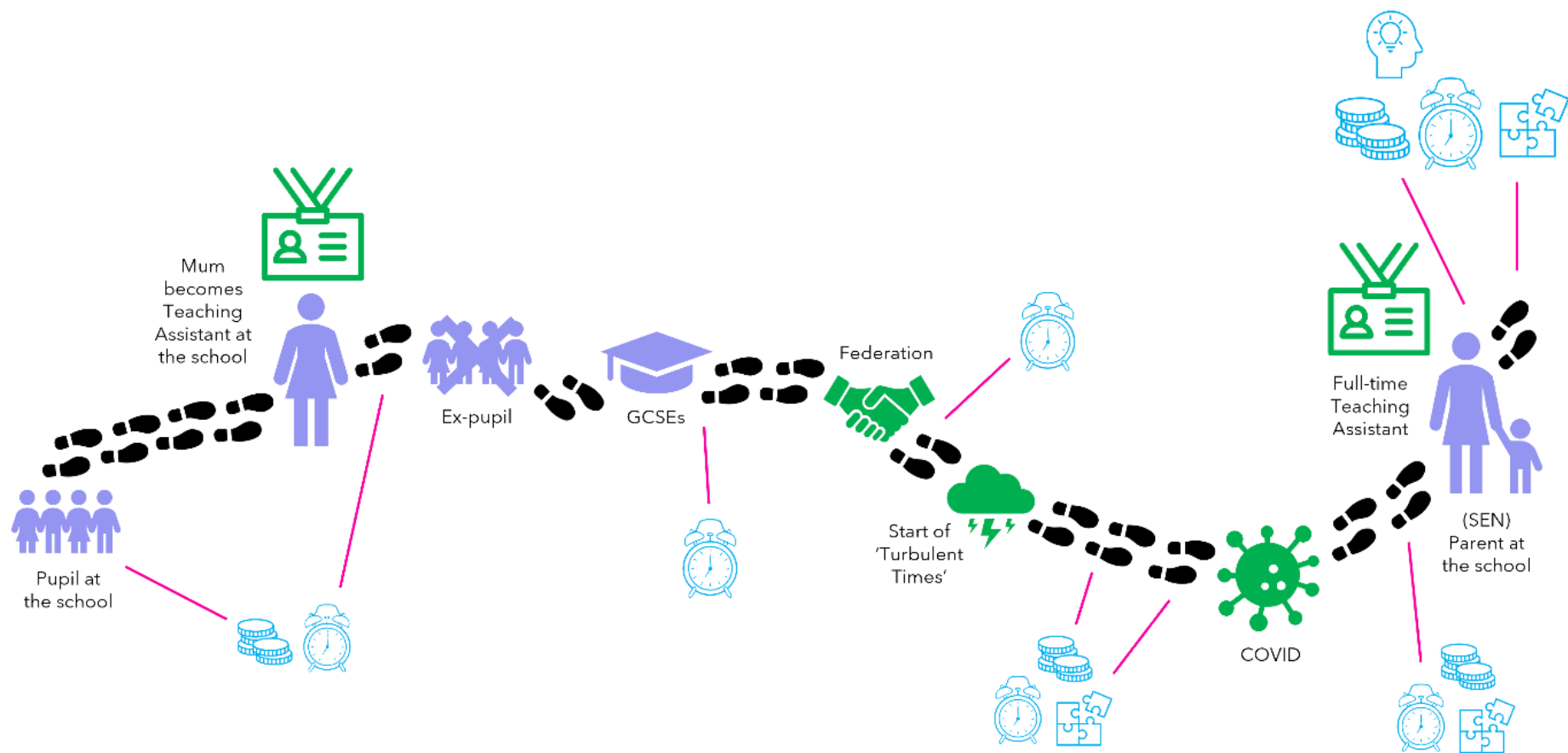


Figure 39 - Kayleigh's Trajectory Map

Kayleigh began her trajectory as a pupil at Oakington in 2002. As a pupil, Kayleigh remembers donating and being involved in various events from big charity fundraising days, to school summer fetes. Kayleigh's mum (Nat) and auntie (Liv) became TAs at the school in 2007, but Kayleigh does not recall this changing her impression of what they did for the school, as she never saw them in a classroom environment but continued to see them as parents who helped the school in a variety of ways. Indeed, parental involvement was very common when Kayleigh was a pupil, and she vividly remembers the PTA and all the mums who were part of it (who she recalls either did not work or worked part-time). The staff who were involved were also parents, and so voluntary organisation was very much co-led (with staff parents having the benefit of 'insider' knowledge and perspectives). School-oriented voluntary activity was a regular occurrence. Kayleigh also remembers much community-oriented voluntary activity when she was a pupil, especially with the church and with locals visiting the school and reading with the children. She attributes this to the headship of Agatha and David who both had church backgrounds, and with Agatha living in Oakington enabling them to build and maintain strong connections with the local community. She feels the school lost these links during Richard's headship because they were not a priority for him. Whilst she acknowledges that the school are trying to rebuild these links now, she highlighted that Katherine is not from the local community and is not particularly 'churchy'. Thus, Kayleigh identifies the personalities, relationships, and leadership priorities of different headteachers as impacting community-oriented voluntary activity.

Kayleigh says that when she left the school in 2009, she would have had no reason to maintain a connection but for her mum and auntie continuing to work there (and her siblings and cousins still attending). These bridge figures (see Chapter 6) continued to connect her. During her GCSE child development course (2011/12), she volunteered in the reception class of the mainstream school, and for her college health and social care course (2014/15) focusing on challenging behaviour, she volunteered in the pupil referral unit. Thus, her familial connections to the school and her need to undertake work experience encouraged Kayleigh to volunteer her time. Indeed, both schools identified having teenagers volunteering for work experience (Dean, 2014; 2016) and this did tend to be the children of staff (I observed this in both schools during my research).

During the turbulent times, Kayleigh does not recall being involved with the school at all (Nat and Liv's voluntary activity also diminished during this time). But the end of the turbulent times coinciding with the birth of her daughter Olivia changed her involvement. As school events were starting up again, Nat would ask Kayleigh to bake things or donate things the school needed, and Kayleigh would offer Olivia's old toys and books to the school. She says that she would never have thought to donate to a school but having Nat and Liv at Oakington gave her knowledge of things the school could use, especially considering how little their funding is. Interestingly, Kayleigh reflected how she recalls no resource donation when she was a pupil and only remembers donating money. She sees this as a significant change in how voluntary activity is organised in these schools now. Because parents and staff in small schools are aware of how small school budgets are, they will often donate to schools in the first instance, rather than, for example charity shops. Thus, it is important to reflect that whilst parental involvement in terms of volunteering *time* may have declined, the donation of resources is an increasingly common practice which benefits both the school, who receive resources for free, *and* the parents who can get rid of unwanted items and contribute to school fundraising without having to necessarily spend money or time. This is especially important in the current economic circumstances where schools are struggling for funding, but families are also experiencing both financial and time constraints.

Throughout COVID-19, which also coincided with a deterioration in her nan's health and needing to care for her, Kayleigh was not involved in voluntary activity for Oakington at all. Thus, factors external to the school reduced her capacity to be involved (Brodie et al, 2011; Hogg, 2016; Willems and Dury, 2017). As the schools began to emerge from lockdowns and Liv and Nat took more active roles in organising voluntary activity, however, Kayleigh began to donate her time, money, and resources again. And then, in 2023, a week before Olivia was due to start school, Kayleigh made the decision to send her to Oakington. Olivia has special educational needs, and Kayleigh became concerned that the school she had been allocated was far too big to accommodate her. Whilst Kayleigh had not wanted her daughter to go to a school where her family were for fears that she would struggle to develop her own personality and staff would feel they had to censor their opinions around Olivia's relatives (who would also be their colleagues), her need to know what was going on 'on the inside' motivated her to enrol Olivia at Oakington.

A week after Olivia started school in September 2023, Kayleigh interviewed for a TA job with the federation. Her motivation for applying, she explained, was that she needed a job that would fit around Olivia's schooling. Kayleigh was offered and began to work as a one-to-one TA at Oakington in October 2023. She also runs the breakfast club and an after-school Lego club. Extending her working day was primarily motivated by the need for more money (the salary of a TA represents a significant cut to her finances) but also fits round Olivia's needs, enabling support from her husband in the mornings and allowing her to spend quality time with Olivia in the afternoons and evenings. Kayleigh and Olivia's presence in school prompted key changes to Oakington's TSOL. Whilst Kayleigh can work alongside Liv or Nat, she would not be able to work in the same class as Olivia as she acknowledges that she would be distracted from her work and this would not be fair on Olivia, Olivia's one-to-one TA or any one-to-one child Kayleigh was responsible for. Thus, the family members need to be kept as separate as possible within school.

Kayleigh and Olivia's presence at Oakington also impacted on Kayleigh's voluntary activity. By combining her parental and work responsibilities in one place (as Liv did), she had the time to be involved in voluntary activity alongside and as part of her other obligations. In fact, for Kayleigh, her voluntary activity is only possible *because* she is a staff member. She reflected that if she was not working in the school, she would still be doing 12-hour carer shifts and would have no time to be involved beyond the school run. Thus, the combination of spheres of life within the one context of the school enables her voluntary activity to take place. This speaks to Hustinx and Lammertyn's (2003) focus on both the institutional setting and individual interests. The school, as the institutional setting, enables Kayleigh's need for flexibility and her self-interest as a parent first to be combined with the needs of the school, facilitating voluntary activity. Kayleigh also acknowledges that she is "more in the know now" that she is staff and so she offers resources, ideas, and time without being asked. She is now on the 'inside' and from conversations in the staff room she knows what the school and children need and can make suggestions when events and activities are planned. Thus, not only did becoming a TA intensify Kayleigh's voluntary activity, but it also changed her triggers from asking to offering and diversified the contribution she is able to make. Voluntary activity has thus become a key part of Kayleigh's identity as a mother and staff member.

As a SEN parent, Kayleigh could not be happier with how Olivia has progressed at Oakington in the short time she has been there and is touched by how accepting and kind the other children have been. This is especially so, as she reflects that when she was at school there were no SEN children (that she

was aware of). Now, mainstream primary schools are full of SEN children, especially small schools like Oakington and she feels these children grow up with much greater understanding of SEN, which is beneficial for all. As well as being a SEN parent, Kayleigh is a one-to-one TA for Orla. Prompted by her understanding of SEN and awareness of Orla's needs, Kayleigh often uses her own money to provide her with resources to help her in school. Kayleigh thus has a range of emotional motivators which are also linked to her current knowledge and previous experiences at Oakington:

we [her and I as pupils] did so much that I want [Olivia] to have the same school experience. I want the children at the school to have the same experience. And if me donating and giving my time and my money and my energy into allowing them to have those same things. Then, you know, that's all I want for 'em. Because *that* is what they'll remember in years to come.

Kayleigh's positive memories of voluntary activity when she was a pupil, motivates her to want the same experience for the current pupils, including her own daughter, which prompts intense and diverse voluntary activity so that this experience can be provided.

In summary, for Liv and Kayleigh, intense personal connections to Oakington school, built up over many years, and involving multiple positions and connections, translated to intense and diverse voluntary activity. Motivator triggers where emotional and included being asked and seeking to fill perceived gaps (Brodie et al, 2011). Voluntary activity positively impacting the children's education is experienced as inherently satisfying. However, the leadership style of the headteacher, internal turbulence, negative participatory experiences and external factors such as COVID-19, and personal life events significantly impacted their voluntary activity (as part of their individual TSOLs) at different points. The ability to combine various spheres of their lives into the school itself facilitated, intensified, and diversified voluntary activity for Liv and Kayleigh. Thus, the institutional setting of the school in accommodating the reflexive volunteering styles (Hustinx and Lammertyn, 2003) and individual TSOLs of their staff is a significant factor in facilitating the voluntary activity that enables the work of education to 'get done'. But how does this work in other settings and for other individuals? I now move on to explore individual trajectories at Applegood, highlighting similarities and differences between the trajectories in these two educational contexts.

Applegood: Val and Joy

Val's trajectory reflects that of both a grandparent and a village resident. Grandparents are key to childcare arrangements in both schools, and relationships with village residents are particularly vital (though different) too. Joy's trajectory represents a SEN parent who has not been a staff member (in any capacity), another key demographic in both schools.

Val began her trajectory with Applegood through her work for the local authority from the early 2000s where she arranged work experience placements. She placed many students in Applegood during her career and so was familiar with the school, though she did not volunteer with them at this stage.

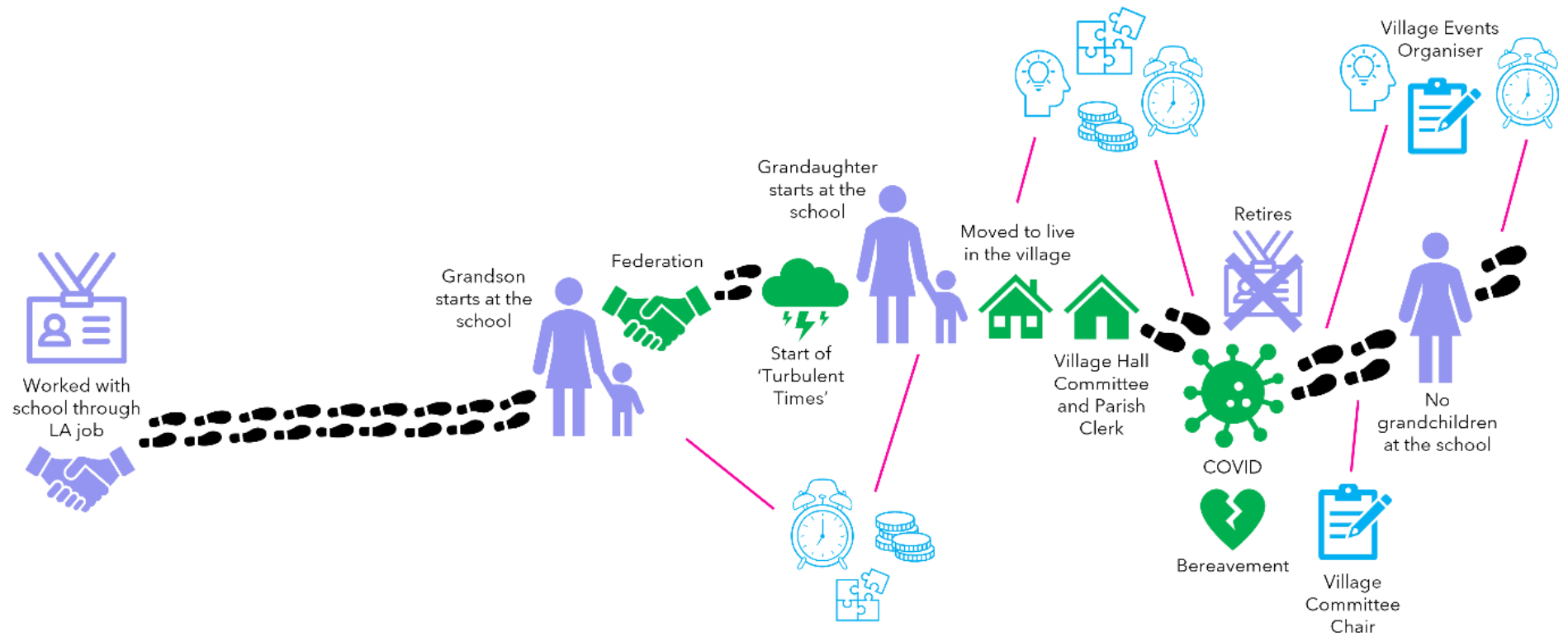


Figure 40 - Val's Trajectory Map

In 2013, Val's grandson started at Applegood as a pupil. Having moved from Denmark, he did not speak any English and Val praised the school for how well they supported him. It was from this point that Val began donating her time (hearing children read and attending events), resources and money to the school (contributing to fundraising and donation drives). In 2017, Val's granddaughter, Amanda, joined the school and her grandson left. Val said she stood in much more as the 'parent' for Amanda as her son and daughter-in-law (Amanda's parents) were working full-time and could not attend many school events. This reflects the trend towards greater need for and use of grandparent childcare (Arber and Timonen, 2015; Kanji, 2018).

In 2018, Val's voluntary activity increased in frequency and intensity when she moved to live in Applegood village. She became part of both the parish council and village hall committee and began suggesting ways the school and village could be more 'joined up', especially through running activity days for the pupils in the village hall itself. Thus, as well as being a grandparent at Applegood, Val's new position as village resident and prominent community member (through voluntary memberships) intensified her involvement and diversified her voluntary activities with the school. Whilst voluntary activity did decline during the COVID-19 pandemic, Val also retired in 2020, so she had time to focus on keeping communication levels up amongst the village and ensured the survival of the village hall by applying for government funds. The combination of retirement from paid work and the external factor of a global pandemic restricting movement meant that Val had much more time to dedicate to voluntary activity for her village (Hogg, 2016). She engages in local, place-based voluntary activity, where her individual biography intertwines with shared histories of place (Warren, 2014; Ward and Greene; 2018). She is passionate about the village and working voluntarily within the local community gives enhanced meaning to her activities and is a crucial part of her identity (Ibid). Indeed, whilst Val acknowledged the importance of time and place to her voluntary activity, she also emphasised how volunteering was part of who she is. She explained that her whole family had always been community-minded:

sometimes you're just born that way that you like helping communities... I'm quite a dedicated, and as I said, my brother was the same. So, we come from a family, my mum worked in a school. So, it comes from a family trait, if you like, to volunteer and help. And it is what I've done most of my work, I've always worked in local government. So, I've always been a community person... I think it's in me to do this and be part of, it's, it's my work

Val thus conceptualises volunteering and community as intertwined and sees her identity as a 'community person' as both a trait she was born with but also something she has been socialised into by her family (Muddiman et al, 2020). She has continued to embody this identity throughout her working life (paid and unpaid) and now into retirement. In recognising that individual biographies are intertwined with the biographies of others (Hustinx and Lammertyn, 2003), a bereavement Val suffered gave further emotional motivation for volunteering. Val's brother passed away from COVID-19 in 2020. Similarly to Liv, however, this bereavement spurred further voluntary activity as Val set up a charity in her brother's honour (which supports local disadvantaged children to pursue sport). Applegood has directly benefitted from grants from this charity for sports equipment. This charity represents a further extension and reflection of Val's identity as a community volunteer, but also as a loving sister honouring her brother through voluntary activity for a cause he cared deeply about.

Whilst emphasising the importance of the school and community working together, Val said that "it still takes somebody to get that moving and roll that along". In other words, an individual is needed to

drive and champion causes (Milligan, 2007) and keep them going. Indeed, as Applegood have emerged from COVID-19, and since Val has become the chair of the village hall committee (since 2022), there is a renewed focus on school-community links which Val is the driving force behind. A key manifestation of this was Val's work on re-establishing the Applegood Village Fete in 2023 in her role as village events organiser. An entirely voluntary and unpaid position, Val was pivotal in putting forward suggestions for this event, organising the location, stall holders, food, entertainment and other volunteers, and ensuring the school were involved. This event was very important for the school as they did not host their own summer fair that year, pooling all their efforts instead into the village fete. Whilst the fete was a success, Val explained that in 2024 the event would change location again. This was due to difficult relationships with the Spencer's not allowing their land to be used for the fair. Thus, negative relationships within the village leading to a negative experience in 2023 (Brodie et al, 2011; Willems and Dury, 2017) has meant that, instead, the village fair in 2024 took place in the street, linked to the school fair happening in school and on the playground at the same time, and with community facilities such as the village hall and pub taking part. Again, Val was the driving force behind these proposed changes and the organisation of the event. This reflects the importance of the institutional/organisational setting, availability and accessibility of space and local culture, interacting with Val's individual drive to continue the village fair resulting in a change to the nature and location of the event, and the organisation of involvement (Hustinx and Lammertyn, 2003; Milligan, 2007).

As of 2023, Amanda has left Applegood and so now Val has no grandchildren attending the school. However, she still lives in the village and believes it is her duty to contribute to keeping links going (Hustinx and Lammertyn, 2003). She also explained that now she is both retired and will have fewer childcare responsibilities, she believes she will have greater flexibility and more time to dedicate to her voluntary activity. She has even offered to help run (unpaid and voluntary) the school breakfast club in the village hall so that the school continue to take advantage of this community space. Indeed, whilst Val emphasised that her voluntary activity is focused on the village, she saw the school as an integral part of Applegood's community and so the links were of great importance to her:

it's more about *the village* as opposed to *just* the school, and I just see the school as an integral part of *the village* picture... [and] I think by being in the school on occasion, or doing stuff in the village hall with them, keeps me in touch. Keeps me involved.

Val embodies both the collective and reflexive volunteering styles identified by Hustinx and Lammertyn (2003). She combines a strong service ethic and sense of obligation to her community (collective volunteering) with her own biography, where she is now retired, living in the village in which she volunteers, and her grandchildren no longer require a lot of her time giving her greater capacity and flexibility (reflexive volunteering) (Ibid). Indeed, Val herself was very reflective of the part she played in voluntary activity in Applegood, emphasising both her own personal life trajectory, but also wider temporal trends and the trajectories of others:

I see life very much in chapters anyway [...] So, you know, we're lucky to live here. But as you say, Applegood, you know, is also I suppose lucky that we're here right now [...] Chapters in life. You know, we'll *move on*. You know, we're getting older. New people come in, like we've had the new people come into the village have now become governors. When you look at it, *most* of the *active* people are *new* people into the village. But that's how it works.

Val's volunteering behaviour is thus embedded in her own individual biography and self-identity, but also in the collective biographies of her village and the others who live there (Ibid; Warren, 2014; Smith et al, 2010). Val's trajectory speaks to wider temporal trends in voluntary activity. Her reference to "chapters in life" links to the literature that finds certain voluntary activities to be more common in different life stages, and for life events themselves to trigger voluntary activity (Brodie et al, 2011; Hogg, 2016; Haski-Leventhal et al, 2017). Thus, when trying to understand voluntary activity for primary schools, one must consider the factors of time and place. The individuals who exist at one point in time will not always be there, but their individual biographies will form part of the continued shared history and culture of a school and its community. Taking a long-term, lifecourse approach reveals key factors that shape voluntary activity over time and highlights the likelihood that there will always be times in life when people are more likely to volunteer. Understanding the context and lifecourse of a school and its potential community of volunteers is therefore vital in attracting volunteers and in the nature of the voluntary activity that takes place.

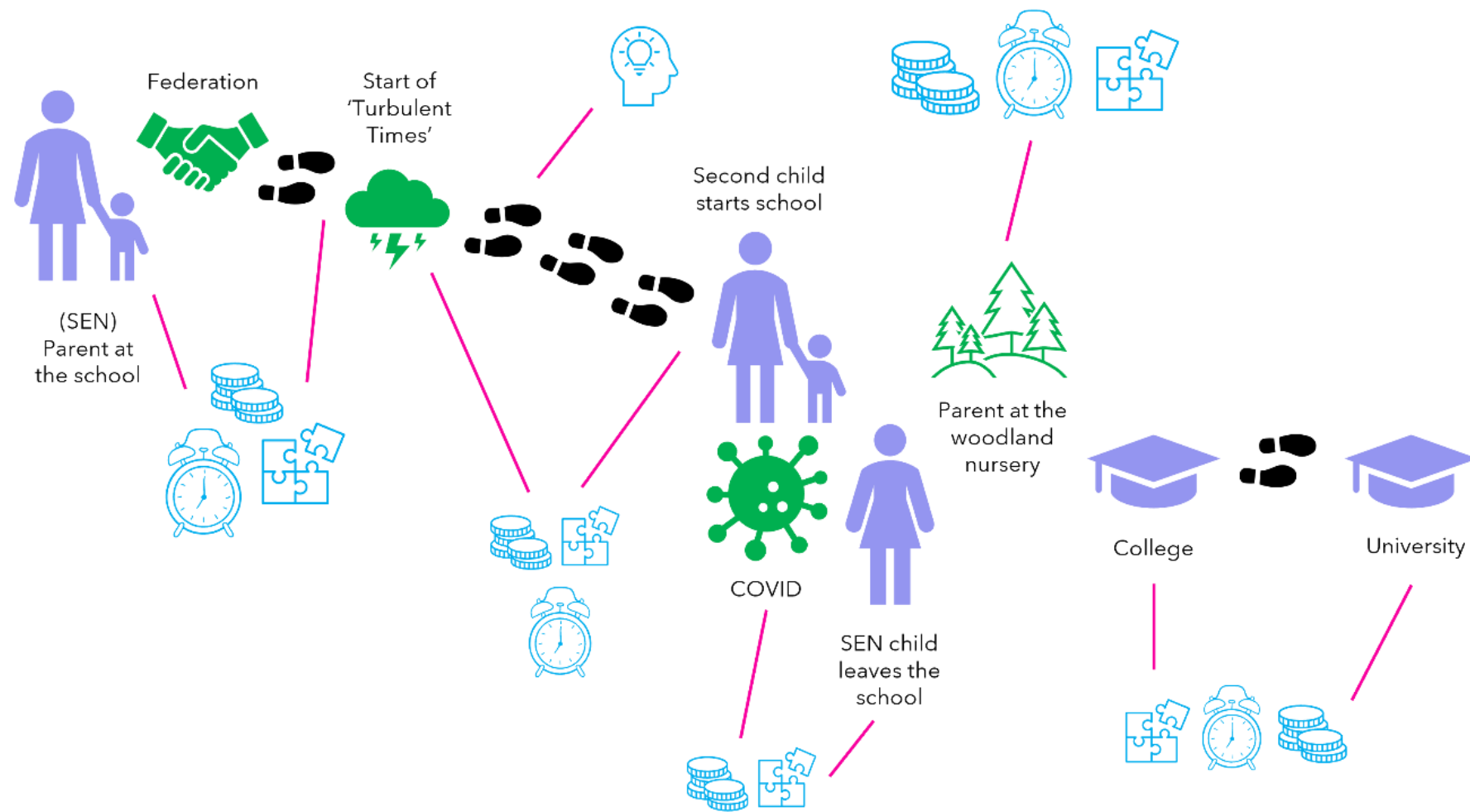


Figure 41 - Joy's Trajectory Map

Joy's trajectory began when her first child, Sadie started at Applegood school in 2014. Sadie has a physical disability, and Joy had selected Applegood due to her confidence that a small, familial environment would be the safest and most appropriate for Sadie's needs. Joy explained that she was heavily involved with the SENCo early on, making sure she knew the staff and surroundings and sorting out the equipment the school would need to accommodate Sadie. At this time, Joy had started working evenings at a local leisure centre to ensure she could be around in the day and for drop offs and pick-ups. In changing her work schedule to fit around Sadie's schooling, Joy also had the time to be involved in voluntary activity in and for the school. Thus, her employment context facilitated her involvement. It also meant that she would engage in playground conversations with staff about ways she could help at school. Thus, in these early days of high involvement, Joy would offer her support rather than being asked. Her voluntary activity at this time included coming into school to hear children read, advertising the school online and in-person by engaging in leaflet drops and donating money and resources to the school. She was also a regular stall runner at school fairs. As a result of Sadie's disability, Joy would also support events like school parties to enable her daughter to attend. Whilst this was motivated by her daughter's needs, Joy's attendance nevertheless benefitted the other children, and she would often make food donations too. Thus, Joy's high involvement in diverse forms of voluntary activity at the beginning of her trajectory was very much linked to her daughter but also enabled by her TSOL configuration of childcare and employment.

Whilst Sadie's particular needs were linked to a *physical* disability, the needs of other SEN children (and their parents) can be somewhat different, and this can affect the voluntary activity of SEN parents. Abi, whose daughter, Orla, has severe autism and ADHD, discussed how she could not possibly be involved in the organisation of events and activities at Oakington due to Orla requiring all her attention and 24/7 care (Brook, 2011; Preece and Lessner Lištiaková, 2021). However, she could donate to and attend events and activities, provided these were *in* school (where Orla feels comfortable). Thus, the particular needs of SEN children in these schools shape the nature and extent of their parents voluntary activity. This is an important reminder that even when parental voluntary activity benefits the wider school community, the needs of their own child(ren) will always come first. Schools must always ensure that the foundations of relationships between the school and its families are strong before any voluntary activity can hope to emerge from these connections. Not only is the strength of these relationships often an end-in-itself for schools, but staff are also acutely aware that a child's success in education has much to do with the nature of the connection between school and home (Olmedo and Wilkins, 2017; Apps et al, 2019). The nature and extent of voluntary activity has much to do with this too.

Furthermore, these relationships form an important part of the culture and context of these schools, and this can influence voluntary activity. Joy kept Sadie at Applegood throughout the turbulent times, even when other parents were removing their children. This was difficult as she recalled:

It just felt a bit sad, a bit dark and a bit empty. It was like, just, just felt really like "oh my god, where's everyone gone?"

Whilst she considered moving Sadie, she was thriving at Applegood and Joy didn't want to disrupt her education. Joy acknowledged that her voluntary activity in terms of physically being in school did decline at this time (especially with the birth of her second child, Jasmine), but she credits Sophie with continuing to push for parents involvement and the continuation of seasonal events. Joy had a close relationship with Sophie as she was Sadie's one-to-one and so Sophie would often call on her for

support which Joy was happy to give. Sophie and Joy's relationship continues to influence Joy's voluntary activity for Applegood to this day (see previous chapter).

Despite this continuation of school-oriented voluntary activity, community-oriented voluntary activity did decline during the turbulent times and under Richard's headship, especially the link with the church (which David had always been passionate about). Indeed, whilst she explained she is not a religious person, Joy had loved going to the church for school events and activities as she felt it really added to the community feel and caring atmosphere of the school:

it was so lovely. It was so cute, and it overrun sometimes because someone would talk a bit too much, but I thought it was so lovely. It brought like, I dunno, it's hard because *I'm* not so religious. But it brought that Church of England, that sort of religious aspect from the school into the church, and that part was so lovely. And then when it got to like Christmas time. And you were like "oh my god" [excited squeal] the lights and stuff, it was so nice, but yeah, *I used to love that!*

When Richard became head and the link with the church was lost for a time, celebration assemblies, worship and other events moved into the school itself. This is similar to what happened at Oakington, with the school withdrawing into itself and losing its wider community links. Both schools credit losing David as contributing to this decline.

As Richard was trying to turn the school round, Joy discussed the role parent input played:

I remember we had to, were involved a lot with on how, our views of how we could bring it back to life sort of thing... my input was like, "just bring the love back a bit" like back then it, it got a bit too numbery, if that's even a word... like *attendance*... and they put posters in the school and I was like, "look, I've not come here to be told about absence. I want the love back in this school. And right now, you're not making the love, you're putting all these numbers around. We don't want to know that".

Joy's previous positive experience of being a parent at Applegood motivated her to make suggestions of ways that Richard could 'bring the love back' and a lot of this had to do with her knowledge of both school- and community-oriented voluntary events and activities that she had been part of. Thus, for Joy, voluntary activity is a vital feature of Applegood that contributes to its unique family feel. This motivated her to want to see it brought back (similar to Liv) and so she engaged in voluntary activity to make this happen.

However, just as the school was coming out of "the dark patch" (Joy), COVID-19 hit. Throughout the pandemic, and despite Jasmine also starting school in 2020, Joy's voluntary activity was limited to donations due to parents not being allowed into the school and no events being able to take place. Sadie left Applegood in 2021, but Joy continues to be connected through Jasmine and now through her son who attended Seedlings, the school's woodland nursery. Thus, Joy's role as a parent continues to impact her involvement, although she admitted this is to a lesser extent now because Jasmine doesn't require the same intense support that Sadie did (Brook, 2011). The woodland nursery was able to start up again quicker than other voluntarily organised events and activities during COVID-19 because it was outdoors, and people could still socially distance. Observing the woodland nursery, Joy was one of the more active parents, contributing to the smooth running of activities and engaging

with new parents interested about the school (word-of-mouth advertising is a vital service mum's like Joy perform for the school).

By 2022, Applegood was very much trying to get 'back to normality' again and this included the return of school fairs, to which Joy returned to run stalls. When observing the summer fair in 2022, Joy, Sadie and Jasmine all ran the stall together, which Joy later told me was common. By engaging in the fair as a family activity (Muddiman et al, 2020), Joy can combine her desire to support the school, contribute to its fundraising, show her children that she cares and spend time with her daughters engaged in a fun activity which they really enjoy (Gillies, 2006). Thus, this kind of voluntary activity satisfies multiple motivations for Joy and fits around other demands (Apps et al, 2019). In 2023, the school fair at Applegood was replaced by a village fete of which the school are a part. Whilst this is making steps towards developing community-oriented voluntary activity, it has necessitated a change in scheduling so that the fair now happens in the summer holidays (rather than at a weekend during term-time). Joy and her family, however, were on holiday for the 2023 summer fair so could not attend or help deliver it. Thus, changes to the organisation of voluntary activity can prevent some people from participating and so need to be carefully considered for their impact.

As of 2023, Joy returned to college and is now planning to start university in September 2024. Alongside studying, she will also be juggling three children and a part-time job. She expects that this will limit the time she has to be involved in voluntary activity for Applegood. Whilst she still hopes to be involved as much as possible, this will inevitably be less than at the start of her trajectory when she only had one child, and everything revolved around her specific needs. Thus, factors external to the school including education, employment and familial responsibilities have resulted in a lower level of participation (Brodie et al, 2011; Willems and Dury, 2017). In this regard, Joy is grateful for the chance to continue to contribute through donations. Indeed, as Kayleigh at Oakington also reflected, donation-centric voluntary activity as a way for parents to support their school is both easier and more inclusive, reflecting staff understanding of the current circumstances and demands of time-poor and socio-economically diverse parents (Apps et al, 2019; Packman, 2020; Smith, 2021).

In summary, Liv and Val's voluntary activity form an integral part of their identities. For Kayleigh and Joy, voluntary activity forms part of their identities as mothers; it is part of their 'fourth shift' of parental involvement (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2013), intensified by their children's special educational needs (Brook, 2011; Preece and Lessner Lištiaková, 2021). Voluntary activity (collective and reflexive) (Hustinx and Lammertyn, 2003) at the micro-level forms part of an individual's TSOL over their lifecourse, as well as forming part of the school's (meso-level) and societal (macro-level) TSOL (Glucksmann, 1995) over time. The identity one constructs through their TSOL during their lifetime incorporates relational and emotional motivations or triggers of voluntary work which overlap with other socio-economic modes. Thus, voluntary activity cannot be considered in isolation from other dimensions of a person's life and identity. Taking a lifecourse approach encourages us to understand the impact of the factors of time and place on voluntary activity in different educational contexts, especially the significance of life events and transitions and how they trigger and shape the nature and extent of voluntary activity for schools that enables the work of education to 'get done'. So how do these individual trajectories relate to the collective biographies of their schools and villages (Smith et al, 2010), and what can they tell us about the wider trends and consequences of the organisation of voluntary activity in primary education?

Organisation of Voluntary Activity

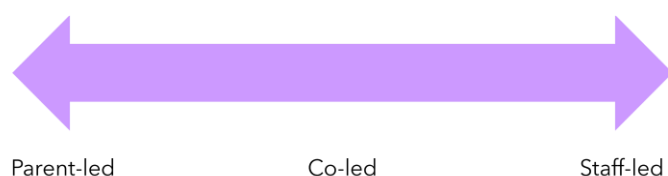


Figure 42 - Different Modes of Voluntary Activity Organisation

The organisation of voluntary activity (VA) in these schools can be characterised on a spectrum from parent-led to co-led to staff-led. VA at Applegood before 2015 was predominantly parent-led by a group of mums. When Sophie became chair in

2015, she was both a parent and a TA, meaning organisation shifted to being co-led, especially with Val and other community involvement. To this day, VA organisation continues to be co-led at Applegood as whilst Sophie is no longer a TA, her and Nancy (Applegood business manager) organise VA together, with input from Val on school-community activities. Thus, VA organisation at Applegood has moved from being parent-led to co-led. At Oakington, VA organisation was parent-led until Liv became a TA in 2007. At this point she came to be more involved with the PTFA so that VA organisation could be characterised as co-led. However, when she took maternity leave in 2009-2010, and then began working at the unit full-time in 2011, she was no longer involved in VA organisation for the school and so it went back to being parent-led. The school saw a gradual decline in parental involvement throughout the turbulent times. Liv took up the role of informal events organiser in 2021 and at this point VA organisation shifted to being staff-led. Thus, VA organisation at Oakington has fluctuated between both ends of this spectrum. Whilst parental involvement has been extensively studied (see Chapter 3.2), the impact of staff-led and co-led VA is poorly understood, so this will be the focus and contribution of the rest of the chapter.

Staff-led Voluntary Activity

As a result of a decline in parental involvement in voluntary activity, staff (at a range of levels, though predominantly TAs and other support staff) are increasingly taking on the role of organising and delivering voluntary events and activities. However, just as parent groups can be exclusive and cliquey (Murray et al, 2019; 2020), staff leading voluntary activity can also exercise control over who is allowed to be involved. As discussed in the previous chapter, this forms part of stigmatising practices:

Me: Do you have certain [parents] that you *know* you could turn to and ask for things?

Liv: Oh, *certain ones* but then I think that's the same in any school.

Nat: Oh yeah only certain ones. Yeah...

Me: So, like do you think if you were to *ask* them to do stuff, *would* they do stuff?

Nat: *Again*, a selected few...

Liv: It's always the same few. Some you *wouldn't* ask, Some you would.

Nat: Yeah. Some you wouldn't even think of asking anyway but yeah

Me: Is that cause you know they'd say "no"?

Nat: Yeah, they wouldn't do it.

There may be several parents who could contribute skills, knowledge, attributes, and connections to the organisation of voluntary activity, but staff seeking to remain in control, do not ask for, or sometimes reject offers of support. Liv very much controlled who could be involved (herself (TA), Nat (TA), Gemma (Oakington business manager), Samira (TA) and Amy (teacher) (staff who are her relatives or friends) and certain mothers (Zoe) only). When I would offer to help, I would be brushed off and told they didn't need help. Other staff (TAs and teachers) are also excluded as they are 'needed' in class to be with the children. This can lead to a lack of appreciation for the 'invisible labour' of other staff not directly involved in voluntary activity organisation, but whose work (child supervision) nevertheless enables it to happen. Thus, even when activity is staff-led, it is only led by *certain* staff (who bring their own personalities and preferences into their organisation) which can exclude others. Indeed, at Oakington, bonding activities based on personality matches between the staff who lead voluntary activity and the parents they allow to take part (Murray et al, 2019; 2020), can be perceived as alienating, with other TAs, teachers and parents relegated to the positions of 'supporter' or 'attender' only. Moreover, even when discussing the (re-)development of a PTA at Oakington, staff wanted to make Kayleigh's husband the parent member instead of advertising out to parents as they worried some might actually want to join! The implication being that if the PTA was to develop, (specific) staff would still want to retain control of it and limit parental involvement, at least to those they could influence and who would be unlikely to challenge them (like Zoe). This raises multiple issues around equality of access, fair representation and power relations within the field of school-oriented voluntary activity that is staff-led. Indeed, whilst many of these issues come up with parent-led voluntary activity (Lareau and Muñoz, 2012; Posey-Maddox, 2014), this research shows that similar issues can arise with staff-led voluntary activity too.

Another problem with staff-led voluntary activity organisation is that staff are having to balance this with their formal work. During the lead up to events and during busy periods, voluntary activity organisation does take TAs away from their day jobs which can be a problem for teachers when TAs are constantly popping in and out or are absent from class for long periods. And even when TAs do ensure they are prioritising their formal work over their voluntary activity, this then limits the capacity of what can happen. This can mean fewer events and activities, but also that staff stick to tradition rather than being able to innovate and increase the scope of what their voluntary activity can achieve. This is especially the case when thinking of local community members. When voluntary activity organisation is staff-led, there is limited time for those staff to connect with those beyond the school gates (especially if they do not live in the communities of their schools or their pupils). Volunteers who work outside of the school (including parents) may have wider networks to draw upon which could increase the opportunities for more innovative and wide-reaching voluntary activity. So long as staff lead and most of their lives and interests are focused inside the school itself, the capacity of voluntary activity will likely remain limited.

A further danger of staff-led voluntary activity organisation is that if schools go through turbulent periods where staff turnover is high, and/or where staff (at all levels) are absent, this negatively impacts on events and activities. The schools have experienced this in the 2023/24 academic year where the woodland nursery's at both Applegood and Oakington have had to be put on hold due to lack of staff to run them. Whilst volunteers supported these nursery's, they cannot run them alone due to lack of training, qualifications, and legal protection. This is a real source of concern as these groups are vital feeders to the schools and without them, they risk a falling roll and thus, a decline in associated funding. The loss or absence of staff (and the need for remaining staff to cover) can thus

lead to the loss of activities they ran voluntarily, negatively impacting on the children's educational experience, and even the future of the schools themselves.

It should be acknowledged, however, that staff-led voluntary activity organisation has been a necessary solution to a decline in parental involvement at Oakington. Staff-led voluntary activity organisation ensures any tensions or misunderstandings around the appropriate purposes and ways of behaving at school are minimised as staff know what the school needs and the rules that must be followed. This was something Abi valued as she was worried about powerful parents seeking to further the interests of their own children if VA were to be more parent-led:

I think there would be parents who... would want preferential treatment for their children or get a bit above themselves. And I think they handle the funding quite well at the school. And everything they do, from the fetes goes to different things. But it's *all* for the school. *Nothing*, it's. The PTA would have a say in what happened *with* that funds, but they don't have that say. Which I think is good, because it's not. Say if there was a PTA and one parent was, "well, I want to do this because my child likes it". There isn't any of that, they take *everyone* into consideration. And I think it's a better way to work it. I *know* they do, do a lot of extra work. But they do so well at it, I think it would just destroy. And you, I don't think you'd have much of the community spirit as well. If you had a PTA... I think it would [exclude people?] yeah. I do think it would.

Thus, there is a preference for staff-led voluntary activity in terms of inclusivity for the children at Oakington. However, not all parents always agree with staff decisions and the danger lies in the potential break down of relationships, as occurred in 'the McDonalds incident' discussed above, and with Lisa, discussed in Chapter 5. Damaged relationships can have a negative impact on the school and the children who benefit from voluntary activity. Indeed, whilst Parentkind, the organisation that represents PTA fundraisers in the UK, emphasise how important a PTA's relationship with their school is in the success of fundraising ventures (Apps et al, 2019), this also applies to the relationship between staff and parents outside of formal organisational structures. The literature often discusses parental conflict amongst themselves, or the school (Lareau and Muñoz, 2012), but this research emphasises the importance of individual staff members relationships with parents too.

For Oakington's current cohort and in its current context and circumstances, staff-led voluntary activity works (Voorberg et al, 2015). Nevertheless, as the parents change, staff may need to be willing to sacrifice some of their control over voluntary activity. By considering and valuing the diversity of their parents and asking what they *could* do (Smith, 2021), they could expand the capital they have access to and enable innovation. In addition, as the schools relationship with the local community improves, locals may be able to contribute to the schools benefit, but this would require giving them a say in the organisation of (especially joint) events and activities and caring for the relationships they create in order that they can be delivered successfully. It remains to be seen, however, whether certain staff in these schools could relinquish control over voluntary activity organisation in the future, or whether this would lead to further tensions.

Co-led Voluntary Activity

Having voluntary activity that is organised by staff *and* parents might overcome some of the problems associated with either parent- or staff-led VA. If parents were more involved, the burden could be taken off staff (especially TAs and other support staff) and both could contribute important knowledge and understanding from their different viewpoints within and outside the school. Priorities could also be better balanced. It should be acknowledged, however, that the example of co-led voluntary activity organisation in these schools involve parents who have also been staff (or vice versa). This means these individuals have knowledge and experience of being both a parent and staff and so understand the needs and priorities from *both* points of view. For example, Sophie, knowing the curriculum from her previous TA role was able to ask parents in her cohort to save toilet roll tubes and sweet wrappers for upcoming art and science projects Alice would be teaching. Thus, her experience helped co-led voluntary activity to flourish as there is a sense of shared experience and shared goals, contributing to improved educational experiences for the children through engaging parental donations to save staff time and money.

The sharing of labour in co-led voluntary activity organisation also means that there can be more time to explore innovative ideas. Applegood were trialling fundraising discos and film nights, for example. Again, however, the differing contexts and circumstances of the schools families need to be considered here. School-oriented voluntary activity at both schools is done for the children's enrichment (seen as fundamental by all). But at Applegood, their fundraising is more extensive than that achieved at Oakington, and they can 'afford' to test out new ideas such as film nights and discos. Applegood can charge their families for these events and hence contribute to their fundraising. Whilst Oakington run similar events, they do not charge their families for them as they know (or expect that) most would be unable to afford it (Body and Hogg, 2021). Thus, schools in affluent areas like Applegood may feel confident in asking parents for help and receive it, whilst schools in deprived areas like Oakington may feel it is unfair to ask or there is no point in asking and so do not. Consequently, Body and Hogg (2021, pg.3) conclusion that "collective co-production exacerbates inequality in primary education" seems to hold true for Applegood and Oakington. Thus, the context and capacity of the school communities need to be understood and carefully considered to see whether co-led voluntary activity is feasible or even desired in the first place (Steen and Brandsen, 2020).

Indeed, co-led voluntary activity organisation, might not be a viable option for schools like Oakington where parents do not have (or are not perceived to have) the time, economic freedom, knowledge, or skills to plan events and activities and, crucially may not *want* to. And forcing co-led voluntary activity organisation would likely raise many of the problems Body and Hogg (2021) found with coerced co-production. If co-production is directly encouraged or deemed a necessity it is likely to produce negative experiences and inequalities in outcomes based on an already unequal distribution of resources and capital among social groups (Ibid). At Oakington, there is a fear that if voluntary activity were to become co-led or parent-led now, events and activities would become more exclusive. In contrast, for Applegood, co-led voluntary activity works now because the two members currently involved in voluntary activity organisation (Nancy and Sophie) have both, at different times, been staff *and* parents. They have the benefit of both perspectives when planning and organising voluntary activity and so can minimise any negative problems that might arise, especially around exclusivity. The importance of strong relationships between parents and staff if voluntary activity is going to benefit the school and its children has long been emphasised (Apps et al, 2019; Packman, 2020). This research

argues that co-led voluntary activity organisation as part of the TSOL of primary schools can maximise the benefits of volunteering and donation, and minimise negative consequences around exclusion, power-hoarding and conflicts. However, this depends on the context and circumstances (trajectories) of individual schools.

Children's Trajectories of Voluntary Activity

Voluntary activity for primary schools is (supposedly) undertaken for the purpose of improving children's educational experience. As discussed in previous chapters, children know a lot more about voluntary activity than might be assumed, even though there might be confusion over boundaries in terms of who is a volunteer and what is paid for by fundraised income. Children themselves are not merely passive recipients but also take part in fundraising, donation and volunteering for their schools. And yet, in both schools, children are viewed as helpers rather than decision-makers. If voluntary activity organisation is to be truly 'co-led', the children need to be recognised as philanthropic citizens (Body et al, 2021) who can and should take an active role in voluntary activity for their school. Ofsted reports for these schools have long recognised the voluntary activity of school children:

Pupils were identified as "effectively organis[ing] activities to raise money for the school and charities" (Applegood Ofsted, 2007) and doing "things for others through fundraising for charities [and] by taking a superb part in local village events" (Applegood Ofsted, 2010).

"these include pupils raising money for the restoration of the war memorial and taking part in remembrance services. Pupils are also involved in outreach work to housebound parishioners and to residents of almshouses in [the city] who value contact with the school" (Oakington Ofsted, 2011)

"with children visiting elderly residents throughout the year, including the giving of annual harvest gifts" (Oakington Ofsted, 2013)

These extracts evidence that pupils have been involved in fundraising and volunteering for their schools and charities for many years. However, exploring this between 2021-23, the children at Oakington were more involved as volunteers in events and activities themselves (see previous findings chapters). Whilst they are often asked if they want to help, Liv and Nat suggested that Oakington children were naturally more involved in volunteering due to their own close relationships with them:

Liv: Do you know what though we're actually gonna take a little bit of credit for that because we have such fantastic relationships with our kids that actually if I'm in the hall, or miss, or Nat's in the hall, putting up tables and doing stuff, because you *do* have such good relationships with you, they actually want to be with you.

Nat: they want to be with you, yeah. *That is* the difference isn't it.

Liv: you know, they *want* to be with you, they *want* to spend time with you. And *absolutely*, they're *such fantastic kids*, you know?

As well as these feelings of comfort in volunteering alongside certain staff, there were various positive impacts attributed to children being involved in voluntary activity in their schools which echoed literature on 'good citizenship' and 'civic character' (Biesta et al, 2009; Kisby, 2017). This included

benefits such as building social skills and relationships, taking on responsibility, growing confidence and self-esteem, exposure to different experiences, inclusivity, and pride (Biesta et al, 2009; Dean, 2014). Whilst schools tend to be regarded as undemocratic environments, minimising the potential for citizenship learning, freely engaging in voluntary activities in an environment where they feel safe, respect, and trust the adults and can collaborate, take responsibility, and form relationships with them which are more equal and democratic may well bring many benefits



Figure 43 - Artwork by Maeve (Year 5, Oakington) reflecting her knowledge of school fundraising

in terms of experiencing 'being a citizen' and developing their attitudes, dispositions, and self-conceptions of citizenship (Biesta et al, 2009). Indeed, Maeve (Year 5, Oakington), whose work is depicted in Figure 43 (in response to my questions about how voluntary activity happens at school and how pupils are involved) was very proud of the part she played in school fundraising. Her depth of knowledge about the tombola is emphasised by her colourful, expressive and interactive artwork (you can actually lift the lid of the bucket to see the raffle tickets inside) using a range of materials to communicate how the different aspects of fundraising relate to each other: raffle tickets are sold, put in a bucket, picked out in the tombola, resulting in fundraising. Interestingly, whilst Ofsted's discussions seemed to refer to community-oriented voluntary activity and a sense of obligation and service (Hustinx and Lammertyn, 2003), now the focus appears to be more on school-oriented voluntary activity and children's citizenship, skills and responsibility (Kisby, 2017; Dean, 2014). The framing of voluntary activity for the children in these schools has thus evolved over time from a collective, caring understanding to a more neoliberal, individualised conceptualisation (Ibid). This is concerning for the wider socialisation and caring purposes of education, if children are socialised to see voluntary activity as purely a means-to-an-end, without considering alternatives, or valuing the collective benefits of engagement.



Figure 44 - Oakington Mini Cadets litter-picking in the village

Fundraising and donation are not the only forms of voluntary activity, however. A key part of philanthropic citizenship is encouraging children to address local issues in their own communities directly, as a counter to the distance from big charity campaigns and fundraising as the only solution to social problems (Body et al, 2020). This often takes the form of volunteering. Arguably, most of the charitable activity with which these schools are already engaged is for their school or their local community. And this is only increasing. Children from Oakington now take part in 'mini police cadets' where they learn about the social issues facing their local area and engage directly in voluntary activity to tackle them, such as litter picking (see Figure 44). Children at Applegood continue to visit their local gardens to learn about the wildlife and how to take care of it (see Figure 45). Both schools visit their local farms to learn about local agriculture and food production. Thus, as small rural primaries, these schools can learn a

lot from and contribute to their local areas, developing their pupils knowledge and traits of 'good citizenship' through locally-based voluntary activity. Not only is this an important educational aim (and encouraged by these schools SIAMS framework), but it is also important for these schools continued survival. As Caroline, an Oakington resident, emphasised:

I think from a community, it's a community feel. These schools have *got* to be community schools. You know, else they won't survive. They've *got* to find some way of getting so bedded in the community. Parents want their children to come there. Because there's something good about community... And I think and I think especially in a church school, they should find that easier to do maybe than, than some other and sometimes because it's small. What was it? Small is beautiful... And I think a small school should take advantage of those sort of principles. Because they are *not ever* going to be, you know, [big] as it were.

Indeed, the schools in Bell and Sigsworth's (1992, pg.67) study saw their very purpose (and thus the education they provided) as the "[making of] community" through reciprocal support by and for the school and its volunteers. This involved the children themselves playing an active part in their communities, bringing a variety of benefits to them and to others (Ibid). More recently, Bagley and Hillyard (2019) found that headteachers in small rural primaries continue to see school-community links as a key part of their role. However, the contexts and circumstances within and outside these schools have changed and so understandings of (community-oriented) educational purpose is changing too. The elderly residents who used to visit school and read with the children are now retiring later, engaging in more active retirements, and may be caring for their own grandchildren (Arber and Timonen, 2015; Kanji, 2018), leaving limited time to be involved in their local school. Schools have also become much more formalised in terms of their DBS procedures and with limited space in the curriculum for community activities. This is even more complex in small schools with less staff. Whilst both schools are seeking to develop mutually beneficial connections with their local communities, Applegood are in a better position than Oakington to do this (see Chapter 6). Nevertheless, this is a very important aim for these schools (even if the underlying purposes are different) and engaging children in local voluntary activity brings many benefits to them and their local communities.



Figure 45 - Reception class at Applegood visit the local gardens, led by Peter (local resident, ex-parent, gardener)

Conclusion

In conclusion, by focusing on the trajectories of the schools and key individuals within them, this chapter highlights (addressing my research aims of understanding how voluntary activity happens and how this is experienced) the key factors that shape the nature and extent of voluntary activity in these schools. This includes volunteers employment context, parental experience, needs of the child(ren),

the ability to combine personal relationships and responsibilities, leadership style of the headteacher and the school culture, organisation, and context (including connections with the local community). By distinguishing between school-oriented and community-oriented voluntary activity, this chapter further emphasises that voluntary activity has multiple purposes which must be taken into account when considering how they are and can be influenced. This chapter also explored how various changes over time both unique to individuals and their schools' contexts but also wider societal and policy changes, have led to different modes of voluntary activity organisation and associated consequences. It reveals the decline in parental involvement (across a range of deprivation levels) in schooling beyond their own child(ren)'s education (Ranson et al, 2003; Goodall and Montgomery, 2014). In its absence the voluntary activity of staff, at all levels, and in various ways (giving time, talent, money and resources), has become of vital importance, making them the most civically active individuals in these schools (Body et al, 2023) and contributing to trends towards staff- and co-led as opposed to parent-led voluntary activity organisation. Indeed, even for parents like Sophie, it was her experience of being a TA that was key to her continued voluntary activity even when her paid position at the school ended, cementing her categorisation as a bridge figure, core volunteer and one of the most civically active individuals within the school community, and showing that those with the longest trajectories in these schools, also tended to be those who have held multiple positions and crossed boundaries (thus building on the findings of both Chapters 5 and 6). Therefore, retaining committed and dedicated staff also retains vital voluntary activity (especially where this can combine with their work and family lives, with staff parents a key demographic in these schools). However, where voluntary activity is heavily dominated by (especially TA and other support) staff, they can become controlling and exclusive, prioritise tradition over innovation (and more extensive benefits), risk compromising their formal job role, and risk events and activities having to stop completely when curriculum or welfare needs take priority and/or when staff (in any capacity) are absent. Thus, there are issues when either parents or staff dominate voluntary activity.

Co-led voluntary activity where both staff and parents involved have experience and respect both viewpoints (staff have been parents and parents have been staff) appears the most beneficial way for voluntary activity to be organised in these schools. Moreover, extending the category of co-led to include the children, as this thesis has advocated, acknowledges the significant role they have played in voluntary activity throughout their school's histories and how they can be key actors in (re-)building mutually beneficial links with their local communities through philanthropic citizenship (Body, 2024). This does not only apply to small rural schools. Co-led voluntary activity which recognises the multiple and varied skills, knowledge and connections of every member of a school community and promotes diverse ways of giving (Ibid; Apps et al, 2019; Smith, 2021) is more likely to bring benefits for all involved and spread the workload so that the risk of burnout is diminished. This suggests that co-led voluntary activity can be an effective and inclusive organisational approach that all schools could adopt to minimise the risk of negative consequences, whilst maximising the impact for realising the educational purposes they want to achieve for their children and their school communities.

Using various forms of mapping throughout this chapter enabled in-depth exploration of how voluntary activity is influenced by different factors over time (building on the social network maps presented in the previous chapter). Life-course maps (Hogg, 2016) enable a depiction of how roles overlap in the context of engaging with voluntary activity over time (as part of the total social organisation of labour). However, they are limited in focus to formal volunteering as one form of voluntary activity, and neglect other crucial moments in both the individual and schools histories, with

'gaps' in volunteering left unexplained by these maps alone. Biography mapping was a crucial tool in extrapolating information from various ethnographic sources (such as interview transcripts, fieldnotes, photos, and social media) (Woodward, 2020) as a foundation for constructing trajectory maps (Brodie et al, 2011) which fill the gap in understanding left by the life-course maps. Trajectory maps enable an in-depth look at critical events of the individual *and* their context that impact voluntary activity over the lifecourse, contributing to our understanding of how the various forms of voluntary activity can be facilitated or hindered at different points in time (Ibid), and the impact this has for diverse individuals in different educational contexts.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

Voluntary activity for primary schools is a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon with multiple implications for those involved. In a neoliberal education framework with increased funding cuts to schools and the services for children and families that surround them, voluntary activity for primary schools is increasing (Body and Hogg, 2018). However, this increase is not even, with small schools, and those with the lowest number of free school meal (FSM) eligibility experiencing the highest increases in volunteer time and money donated (Ibid). This is potentially exacerbating inequalities between schools with affluent catchments, and those who serve the most deprived (Ibid). Furthermore, schools are increasingly finding they are having to direct voluntary activity to core needs and curriculum fundamentals, as opposed to wider educational purposes served by enrichment activities (Ibid). Thus, increased use of voluntary activity raises moral and social justice concerns surrounding what the purposes of education are understood to be, who has responsibility for ensuring they are achieved, and how a level playing field for all children can be realised in education. In this context, I aimed to understand what voluntary activity looked like in small rural primary schools, how it was experienced by the volunteers, staff, and children, and if there was a relationship between deprivation level and character of voluntary activity. To fulfil these aims, my thesis has explored the character, experiences and consequences of voluntary activity in two small rural primary schools of differing levels of deprivation in Southeast England through an ethnographic approach. The previous chapters have set out the wider context in which this research is situated, the gaps in the literature it addresses, the methodology employed and the substantive findings. This conclusion chapter first synthesises the findings of this thesis, addressing my research aims, considering the key themes, and exploring their implications for wider debates, policy and research. I then move on to reflect on what the future holds for Applegood, Oakington and schools like them in relation to the themes and further research. I finish by detailing the contributions of this thesis and how this could shape a future research and policy agenda on the relationship between voluntary activity and primary education.

Findings and Implications

Voluntary activity is key to the delivery and experience of education in the schools studied in this research – Applegood and Oakington – and more broadly. However, it forms one part of the total social organisation of labour (Glucksmann, 1995; 2005) in schools and cannot be understood in isolation. As explored in the discussion of boundaries and invisible labour (Chapter 5), volunteering, fundraising, and donations of money and goods crosses boundaries with the paid formal labour of staff, the unpaid work of volunteers (including staff and parents), the domestic and informal labour of parents, and the contributions of the children themselves that enable the work of education to get done. Moreover, this work is not just educational. It includes important fundraising, marketing, community development and care work too, all of which overlap and interdepend on each other (Chapter 5). Indeed, voluntary activity, as with education itself, has multiple purposes, is conducted through a variety of socio-economic modes, and involves a range of individuals, who bring their own personalities, histories, skillsets and motivations to their roles (Chapter 7). However, different schools and individuals have different levels and types of resources available, especially considering the different socio-spatial networks they are part of (Chapter 6) and (the interactions of multiple) trajectories over time (Chapter 7). Moreover, stigmatising practices within and between schools effect the experience of voluntary activity for staff, parents/carers and children (Chapter 6) and the overall character and organisation of voluntary activity for the schools. This is discussed further below.

Whilst boundaries in these schools were regularly blurred, there was a clear distinction (in principle if not always in practice) between fundraised income being spent on enrichments and school budget being spent on fundamentals. However, staff at all levels would often buy extra resources for their classrooms if they knew budget would not cover them. This included SEN resources, which risks signalling that additional needs are not catered for in school budgets, potentially excluding SEN children from feeling they belong in mainstream education. There is also concern around the use of voluntary labour to support children with SEN. Whilst teachers valued volunteer support in the moment, they were concerned children's needs were not being flagged to senior leaders often enough so that the professional and consistent support children needed was not being provided as a result. Thus, voluntary activity is not perceived as positive when it is necessary to fill gaps in state funding and provision that children are entitled to.

The purposes of voluntary labour were variable, but (non-staff) volunteers could be strictly controlled, with boundaries maintained by clearly defining roles, and locations (especially with affectively committed parent volunteers). However, these boundaries were also live and unstable, often being breached and requiring ongoing (re-)negotiation and management, adding layers of complexity to relationships within these schools. Taking a reflexive autoethnographic stance, I explored my own boundaries within these schools. Crossing boundaries enabled me to deconstruct taken-for-granted facts in how voluntary activity usually occurs in these schools. My status as a volunteer was more often brought up at Applegood, where I was inducted and managed more formally and treated as an addition to staff. I sometimes felt I was even a nuisance, especially where there were tensions around expectations and realities of my role (Dixon, 2017) in school (as a volunteer researcher with TA experience). In contrast, at Oakington I was treated much more as a staff member and as a necessity due to staff absence and high SEN need. Whilst I derived satisfaction from the variety of roles I undertook in these schools, my differential experience between the two highlighted the issue of exacerbating inequalities through use of voluntary activity. Applegood, a more affluent school could use volunteers to further the academic development of pupils, whilst Oakington, a more deprived school could derive no such benefit, needing bodies in classrooms. This finding relates more to the schools deprivation level rather than its size and thus can apply to other educational settings too. Whilst the use to which voluntary activity is put can address short-term issues and contribute to long-term benefits, this depends heavily on a schools' circumstances and can exacerbate existing inequalities between those who are more affluent and those who are more deprived.

My analysis reveals that it is the staff (current and former and at all levels) who are the most civically active individuals in these schools (Body et al, 2023) due to the amount and variety of voluntary work they engage in beyond their job descriptions and contracted hours, and the amount of their own money and resources they donate to support the children in their schools. TAs and other support staff in particular, also give vast amounts of their *time*, to both core and enrichment activities for children. However, this giving is largely invisible due to a range of socio-cultural, legal and spatial mechanisms (Hatton, 2017). The issue of visible outcomes but invisible labour meant there was often a lack of appreciation and understanding of the amount of work and money required for different educational purposes to be achieved. The consequences of emotional labour's invisibility in particular were investigated in relation to staff burnout and turnover. Indeed, if the voluntary activity of staff continues to be experienced as a necessity due to gaps in government provision, the recruitment and retention of staff will continue to suffer and may even get worse. This finding applies to a variety of educational settings beyond the small rural primary school and thus feeds into policy issues surrounding staffing in primary education (Ovenden-Hope and Passy, 2019), as well as developing our understanding of how school staff (at all levels) experience voluntary activity as an integral part of their role that deserves greater recognition and consideration in policy.

Whilst staff are vital, they are not the only volunteers. This thesis proposed a categorisation of school volunteers as bridge, core and peripheral/episodic. In the context of wider societal changes to parental involvement (particularly mothers' participation in the labour market), the category of peripheral/episodic volunteers includes those individuals (mostly parents) who engage in *micro-episodic voluntary activity*, which I define as repetitive, short-term, convenient acts of giving. These are clustered around particular events, such as Summer and Christmas Fairs, and is resource-dominant – donation of goods is the most common method of engagement. Donating resources enables time-poor and geographically distant parents to contribute to the schools through voluntary activity, even if they cannot be there in-person. Donation of goods is also more inclusive for parents from different socio-economic backgrounds as those who can afford to can buy a more expensive item to donate, whilst those who cannot, can donate something they already own but do not use. Indeed, many parents experienced this form of giving as a positive and manageable means of engaging with their children's school, suggesting it would be both a useful and inclusive practice that other schools could adopt.

In terms of how children experienced voluntary activity for their schools, my findings show that whilst they struggled to distinguish volunteers from staff (further confirming the normalisation of staff's voluntary work), they were aware of a range of voluntary activities that took place in their schools and were also involved in voluntary activity themselves. Indeed, I identify children as bridge figures (and core volunteers) due to the role they play in connecting their families to their schools, as families would have little reason to support a school but for their relatives being pupils there. And yet children's role in voluntary activity is often invisible to (or unacknowledged by) many adults, and often themselves. If children were recognised and valued for their role, school fundraising could be improved, and children's critical understanding and engagement with voluntary activity overall enhanced (Body et al, 2021; Body, 2024). Currently, this differs between schools. Whilst in both schools children have little say in how they take part, Oakington pupils have some say in and greater knowledge of how school-oriented fundraised income is spent. Nevertheless, both schools could do more to involve children *critically* in voluntary activity. This is easier said than done, however, as (especially small rural) schools have limited time and capacity to enable this learning to happen. Moreover, boundaries of voluntary labour were gendered in these schools, with male voluntary activity linked to employment and often outside of school hours and/or premises, whilst females voluntary activity took place in school, with the children. With limited attempts to challenge gender stereotypes, children in these schools perceive and are socialised into gendered roles (Hochschild, 1983; West and Zimmerman, 1987) through the division of voluntary labour.

As well as adapting and extending the theoretical and conceptual framework of the TSOL to understand and explain how voluntary activity happens in small rural primaries, this thesis also developed the concept of socio-spatial networks to facilitate an understanding of how the intersection of social demographics and geography (Williams, 2011a; 2011b) shape the character of voluntary activity in small rural primaries, how and why this differs between contexts and the implications for everyone involved. A crucial finding was that it is not so much the level of deprivation of the schools' which influence their voluntary activity, but rather the socio-spatial differences (and subsequent stigmatising practices) between the schools and their communities which constrain and produce the levels and shape the different forms of voluntary activity. Living close to the school makes access to the school easier and the schools' activities more visible on a regular basis, hence the more common involvement tends to be. Indeed, relationships can emerge from proximity, with a small village like Applegood containing many interconnected individuals and layers of relationships, whilst the scattered village of Oakington contains many who are unconnected to one another or to the school.

Proximity also tends to translate into more diverse giving, with the donation of time, talent, money, *and* resources common, whereas distance tended to result in donation of resources and money, *rather than* time. However, the *relational* element of volunteering (Hustinx and Lammertyn, 2003; Smith et al, 2010) and the importance of maintaining mutually beneficial associations remains crucial (especially as poor communication can lead to the dissolving of potentially valuable connections). Indeed, I use the concept of bridge figures to show how social connections between individuals linked to the school and their wider circle of friends and family are vital for drawing people into voluntary activity who would otherwise have not motivation to engage with these schools. I also found that, alongside staff, many core volunteers were either family members of staff or SEN parents. Both groups have strong, emotional links to the school which can overcome the issue of distance. Close relationships also diversified voluntary activity and blurred boundaries within school's TSOLs.

Even if volunteers are connected to individuals within these schools, the initial ask for voluntary activity remains vital (Musick and Wilson, 2008). Whether this ask is in-person, via word-of-mouth, or through online communications, people (often) cannot and do not engage or give unless they are asked to do so, or made aware of how they can contribute. And yet, asking is hindered in these schools by practices of stigmatisation (Lamont et al, 2014; Tyler, 2015). Stigma is attached by certain staff to certain parents and between schools (Applegood being regarded as 'snobby' by Oakington, and Oakington seeing themselves as 'not as good' in the eyes of Applegood parents). Competition and low-level animosity between the schools is influenced by and reinforces symbolic difference and socio-material divisions. Staff's stereotypes can influence those they ask and allow to be involved in voluntary activity, and how (i.e. maintaining boundaries) (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2012, Smith, 2021). This has problematic implications as when parents are rarely asked to be involved, it is the confident parents who come forward, whilst the less confident parents, who may indeed have skills and experience they could offer, do not (feel they can). Thus, in this way, inequalities between parents are further exacerbated through voluntary activity. Worryingly, children are also internalising these stigmatising practices, identifying 'Goody Applegood' and 'Naughty Oakington'. Moreover, activities involving voluntary activity can become a source of upset for children whose families can't be there in-person or can't afford to take part (Mazzoli Smith and Todd, 2019; CPAG, 2022). Thus, voluntary activity, despite its benefits for schools can also reveal and further entrench socio-material differences between families. Schools therefore need to carefully consider the inclusivity of their practices, not just for the children, but also for their families (Smith, 2021; Apps et al, 2019). As the home-school link is vital to children's educational success, families (passive or active) exclusion from fundamental areas of school life, including voluntary activity, is likely to have a negative impact on the children these schools are aiming to serve. Thus, including parents in voluntary activity can lead to greater involvement in their child's education in the long-term, supporting multiple educational purposes and enriching children's lives (Ibid).

As well as identifying differences between the schools' geographies and subsequent social networks, I also explored how both understandings of who the 'community' *is* (families or local residents) and what the 'right' level of involvement is, differs between the schools. In the current climate and looking to the future, whilst developing community links are important, the schools face more pressing issues related to staffing, pupil numbers and funding. Consequently, their approaches to voluntary activity outside of the school are passive, waiting for the community to offer (rather than asking) and struggling to manage and maintain external relationships due to limited capacity and an inward-looking attitude. Moreover, Applegood have more community members who offer to be involved and

are in a favourable geographical position for this to happen and develop. In contrast, Oakington have a poor reputation locally and, being on the outskirts of their large, scattered village makes it difficult to challenge these judgements and improve school-community links. The rural idyll is indeed a myth for these schools as both the parent community and local residents are not involved in the ways and levels envisioned by government policies espousing romantic pastoralism and social capital ideals (Bagley and Hillyard, 2014). Thus, it is vital that the impact of a school's geography and history on its current circumstances is considered when attempting to understand the experiences and consequences of current TSOLs (including voluntary activity) and socio-spatial networks on the work of education.

Taking up this issue of temporality, this thesis also took an important longitudinal focus to understand how and why voluntary activity has changed, and how this is experienced by different volunteers and schools (Brodie et al, 2011; Hogg, 2016). Chapter 7 concentrated on the trajectories of the schools and key individuals within them, highlighting important factors that shape the nature and extent of voluntary activity. I distinguished between community-oriented and school-oriented voluntary activity and explored when and how these were prioritised under different headteachers these schools have had in recent decades. This emphasised the role powerful individuals' personalities, attitudes and leadership styles can have in shaping understanding of educational purpose, school ethos, culture and organisation, and associated voluntary activity and community relationships (Keddie, 2018; Holmes and Pratt-Adams, 2021). Other factors explored included volunteers employment context, parental experience, needs of the child(ren), the ability to combine personal relationships and responsibilities, (self-)identity, and place (geography). Analysis of individual trajectories revealed how the total social organisation of labour at the micro-(individual), meso-(school) and macro-(societal)level interact with and depend on each other, leading to particular manifestations of voluntary activity. It also highlighted the role of (self-)identity, emotional motivations and different styles of volunteering in how voluntary activity becomes a part of individual's TSOLs, and how these change through different life events and critical incidents over time.

Building on these explorations, the interaction of school and individual trajectories led to particular configurations for organising voluntary activity: parent-led, co-led, and staff-led, with positive and negative consequences to each arrangement in different contexts. Formalisation of volunteering (DBS checks) and changes in parental involvement (across a range of deprivation levels) in schooling beyond one's own child(ren)'s education (macro-level trends) has meant that the voluntary activity of staff has become of vital importance, contributing to a trend towards staff- and co-led as opposed to parent-led voluntary activity in these schools. Consequently, retaining dedicated staff also retains vital voluntary activity (especially where this can combine with their work and family lives, with (current and former) staff parents a key demographic in these schools). There were, however, issues associated with staff-led voluntary activity, including exclusivity, prioritisation of tradition over innovation (and more extensive benefits), compromising formal duties, and the risk that events and activities must stop completely when curriculum or welfare needs take priority and/or when staff are absent. The most beneficial organisation of voluntary activity in these schools appears to be co-led, with the caveat that both the staff and parents involved in this configuration have experience and respect both viewpoints (staff have been parents and parents have been staff). This can encourage greater understanding, reduced conflict and tension, and a fairer balance of responsibilities.

Finally, and to bring this discussion back to the children, I explored how children's trajectories of voluntary activity have evolved in these schools over time. Whilst document analysis shows that children have always been involved in volunteering for their schools and communities, this has become framed much more in terms of skills and responsibility (individual benefits), as opposed to serving and

engaging with the local community (collective benefits) (Dean, 2014). Moreover, if Ofsted continues to focus on the qualification purpose of education, schools are unlikely to be able to address other educational purposes they, and their communities may value. However, church schools have the benefit of also operating within the SIAMS framework, which encourages voluntary activity and local community connections and legitimises this focus. Indeed, both schools are engaging their pupils in local volunteering to address local issues, potentially contributing to their philanthropic citizenship by going beyond narrow concepts of fundraising and connecting their learning actively to their own everyday realities within their communities. I argue that for voluntary activity to truly be understood as co-led, children need to be recognised and appreciated for the active role they can take in organising and delivering voluntary activities within and through their schools (Body et al, 2020; Body et al, 2023; Body 2024). Such activities contribute to wider educational purposes beyond qualification that will have a lasting impact on these children and the communities they go on to be part of. Voluntary activity can go far beyond resourcing fundamentals that should be provided by the state. And if we are truly to address widening gaps in education, it is vital that future policies enable the relationship between schools and voluntary activity to be complementary and enriching if it to have a transformative impact for children, their families and their school communities.

The Future of Applegood, Oakington and Small Rural Primaries

As I approached the end of data collection, I was made aware by senior leaders within the federation that the schools would be looking to academise in 2024. This led me to wonder what voluntary activity for these schools would look like under academisation, and to reflect on the continued salience of my themes.

I expect academisation will shift boundaries in these schools even more, with new characters entering the field, and new reconfigurations of the TSOL likely to occur. The role voluntary activity will have to play in this would be a fruitful direction of future research for schools in a new, complex, and ever-evolving educational landscape. Moreover, the socio-spatial networks will change with academisation. Whilst the schools plan to form a trust with other local schools, these will be at greater distances and require enhanced relationship management by an already overburdened staff body. Networks will increase but will also likely become more diffuse. What this means for individual school communities on-the-ground is uncertain. Academisation will be yet another critical event in the trajectory timelines of these schools. How their past histories and present circumstances combine in this new situation remains to be seen.

Small schools are in a unique position to know their communities well and to know who to ask for certain things, how and when. They do not however always make the most of this power. The rural idyll is indeed a myth (Bagley and Hillyard, 2011; 2014) as these schools have very different histories and current socio-spatial configurations which influence their capacity to draw on their communities for support. In any case, even when small rural schools can turn to their local communities, there is a clear understanding of when voluntary activity should or should not be used. This is especially the case with SEN and basic classroom resources. Moreover, the small size of these schools mean there are small numbers, limiting the capacity for staff to manage voluntary activity. When the community is drawn upon, a specific ask, clear direction, relationship building and management are all necessary for voluntary activity to be successful, but this also takes time and resources which schools so often *do not have*. Thus, voluntary activity, whilst bringing benefits, cannot be relied upon to provide a public education system. Policy based on the myth of the rural idyll is misguided and unhelpful. Small rural primaries need proper funding and full consideration in policy-making processes. Government need

to recognise the role these schools play in supporting inclusivity through a child-centred approach in England's highly differentiated countryside, fund them fairly and learn from them. Voluntary activity has an important complementary role to play in education, but it should not be used or needed for fundamental education provision as this exacerbates already existing inequalities between schools and compromises the educational purposes they are able to achieve for their children. Future research must pay attention to the contexts, trajectories, socio-spatial networks and TSOLs of schools if the consequences of voluntary activity are to be fully understood, so that problems can be avoided or reduced, and benefits increased for the sake of all those involved in education.

Contributions

This thesis has multiple contributions. Firstly, this research contributes to conceptual and theoretical development by working with the total social organisation of labour framework and complementary theoretical understandings of boundaries, stigmatisation, rurality and voluntary activity applied to the field of education. By moving beyond volunteering to explore 'voluntary activity' (including the giving of money and resources) and by conceptualising voluntary activity as one part of the TSOL that gets the work of education done, this research works with inclusive definitions, addressing multiple areas of the field and enabling a wide range of educational purposes to be explored. This thesis is also unique as it brings previously separate fields of literature on educational purpose, parental involvement, gender, capital, stigma, the sociology of work, boundaries, voluntary activity, trajectories and rurality, into dialogue with each other in the small rural primary context, shedding light on multiple forms, dimensions and consequences of voluntary activity in education. Current understandings of the work of education are extended to fully appreciate and explore the complexities within our education system, crucially recognising the multi-faceted role of voluntary activity. The concept of boundaries used within the TSOL approach worked in synergy with the concept of stigmatisation as stigma is conceptualised as recognition gaps surrounding boundaries and contributing to social inequalities between individuals and groups. The concept of socio-spatial networks and stigma developed in this thesis draws on understandings of both social and geographical boundaries, and territorial stigmatisation. The temporal approach adopted towards the end of this thesis develops, in line with the TSOL approach, an analysis of the inter(relationships) of the micro-, meso- and macro-levels of society over time so that we might better understand the nature and consequences of changes to voluntary activity. The conceptual framework developed through this thesis could also be applied to other areas of society where voluntary activity is a critical socio-economic mode through which work 'gets done'. This could include, for example, youth work and hospice care where fundraising, volunteering and the donation of resources, alongside paid work and provisioning has long been vital for achieving a range of purposes in these fields.

Secondly, this thesis contributes to substantive and policy debates around education and voluntary activity in the current climate. In terms of teacher recruitment and retention, increased need and expectation for voluntary activity beyond their job descriptions and contracted hours (in the context of changes to parental voluntary activity) is contributing to intense workload pressures and leading to burnout, turnover and poor staff recruitment. That staff feel the increased need to contribute reflects debates around what are fundamentals and what are enrichments in primary education and how these are to be funded in the context of increasing budget cuts. Schools cannot and should not be expected or need to rely on voluntary activity to provide education as a universal right for children. This speaks to wider issues around inclusivity, especially of children with SEN and those from more deprived backgrounds whose families may not be able to contribute in the way their more affluent peers' families can. Expecting voluntary activity to bridge gaps in education provision exacerbates inequalities

between schools and children of differing levels of deprivation, effecting the quality of education provision and ideals of inclusivity. Whilst this was found in the context of small rural primary schools, where effects of education policies are often intensified (Ovenden-Hope, 2024), it is reasonable to assume that this would apply to other educational settings as they all grapple with funding and service cuts, and the increased need to turn to voluntary support to fill gaps, with some schools having greater capacity to do so than others. So long as schools must continue to rely on the goodwill of volunteers to provide education, governments will consistently fail to deliver an equal education for all.

Thirdly, my unique positionality and development of my holistic and thorough ethnographic approach has important methodological contributions. It has allowed me to access and understand voluntary activity in different small rural school contexts. I have been able to uncover invisible labour, disentangle power relationships, and explore the multi-faceted nature of voluntary activity. My unstable identity, whilst bringing challenges, was also a virtue because it revealed aspects I would not otherwise have seen or understood the relevance and significance of. Another vital contribution of my methodological approach has been to include children's voices and input. Children are so often absent in the literature and yet they are the ones who are most often impacted by the phenomena being researched, and have important knowledge, insights and opinions about it that deserve to be listened to (Lundy et al, 2011). Having worked in Oakington and taken the time to build rapport as a volunteer in Applegood, the children knew me well and I had close relationships with them. Including their words and their art was a research commitment I have honoured throughout this thesis to ensure the children are present, recognised and valued within debates about voluntary activity in their schools.

Specific methodological contributions include my development of comparative geographies of voluntary activity through different forms of mapping: network, lifecourse, biography and trajectory. Social network maps can be used as an overview tool for understanding and comparing voluntary activity within and between contexts, highlighting areas that are functioning well, and which can be better developed. This can enable schools to understand who the various actors in their socio-spatial networks are and where they are positioned, how they are connected (to the school and each other), the nature and strength of these connections, and how these connections can be managed and utilised to the schools' advantage, as well as what changes to their networks might mean. Whilst network maps are static, lifecourse, biography and trajectory maps enable an in-depth look at critical events of the individual *and* their context that impact voluntary activity at different points in time, and for diverse individuals in different educational contexts. Thus, the mapping methods I have developed through this research furthers our ability to conceptualise how complex phenomena such as voluntary activity are embedded within social relationships and inter-related trajectories, and to understand the consequences at micro-, meso- and macro-levels.

Final Reflections

Future research and policy that pays attention to the total social organisation of labour that enables multiple educational purposes to be addressed in different educational contexts, has the potential to better understand the experiences and consequences of voluntary activity in primary education. For small rural schools in particular, who exist on the periphery of education policy in a climate where their very nature makes them vulnerable to closure (Ovenden-Hope, 2024), such a research and policy agenda would contribute to greater understanding of how they provide child-centred, inclusive educational experiences, and how this could be embraced in other educational contexts to ensure the best possible education for every child, regardless of background or need, and to support the staff and wider school communities that enable this education to take place. As of 2024, a new Labour

government is pledging increased education funding and promising to focus on children's feelings of belonging in school to address issues of pupil absence and SEN inclusion (Phillipson, 2024). Ofsted too are beginning to show signs of adapting their judgements of small schools to consider more fairly the impact of place and size (Ovenden-Hope, 2024). This represents a promising departure from previous neoliberal policies which would allow schools to focus on educational purposes beyond qualification and for context to be fully appreciated in the way schools can operate. This thesis has shown that voluntary activity can have a vital role to play in qualification, socialisation, inclusion, care, and equality, especially in the small school environment, but this varies greatly between different school contexts. And yet, considerations of voluntary activity remain absent from current policy debates around education. So long as voluntary activity fails to be fully accounted for in the way education is delivered and experienced in different school contexts, governments will fail to achieve equality for all in education. I hope that increased funding, support and debate around educational purposes beyond attainment, will enable a reorganisation of the TSOL in schools so that educational fundamentals no longer depend on the voluntary goodwill of individual school communities, which can instead be directed to enriching the educational experiences in different contexts, in a fairer and more socially just education system in which every child can thrive.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Research School Characteristics

Characteristic	Applegood (less deprived)	Oakington (more deprived)
No. of children (2021/22)*	48	52
No. of children (2023/24)*	53	38
Rural School Designation	Rural village	Rural hamlet and isolated dwellings
Population of parish (approx.) (2023)	390	920
IMD Ranking of school**	top 50%	bottom 40%
% of pupils eligible for free school meals (2021/22)	10.4%	45.7%
% of pupils eligible for free school meals (2023/24)	9.4%	57.9%
% of pupils from GRT backgrounds (2022/23)	0%	13.2%
% of children reaching the expected standard in Reading, Writing and Maths (2023)***	25%	33%
% of children with SEN support (2023/24)	16.7%	15.4%
OFSTED Rating	Good (2019)	Requires Improvement (2022)
Catchment area	3.8 square miles (2020/21)	1.9 square miles (2020/21)
* It should be noted that pupil numbers in both schools fluctuate frequently <i>during</i> academic years. Both usually have around 40-50 pupils, with Applegood usually having more than Oakington. ** The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) ranks every small area in England from 1 (most deprived area) to 32,844 (least deprived area). Exact rankings are removed to protect the schools' and postcodes anonymity. *** School performance data for the 2022/23 should be used with caution given the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, which affected individual schools and pupils differently.		

Appendix 2 – Dramatis Personae

The Federation			
Katherine	Executive headteacher of the Federation of Applegood and Oakington CofE Primary Schools, formerly Oakington Head of School	Frances	Governor, art lecturer, runs art sessions at Applegood, Applegood village resident
Brendan	Chair of governors of the Federation, Applegood village resident	Holly	Parent Governor, Applegood parent, social worker
		Sabrina	Teaching assistant at Oakington, then trainee teacher at Applegood
Kate	Governor, farmer, runs Farm school for the Federation, Applegood village resident	Charlotte	Governor, former tech CEO, Applegood village resident
Richard	Former executive headteacher of the Federation	Crystelle	Head of Applegood CofE Primary School, Year R,1,2 Class teacher, Staff Governor, left Applegood in March 2023
David	Former headteacher of Oakington and (after November 2014) Applegood.		
Applegood CofE Primary			
Nadiya	Former headteacher of Applegood	Henry	Former headteacher of Applegood
Lord John Spencer	Landowner, Lady Elizabeth’s grandson	Lady Elizabeth Spencer	Former landowner, deceased, Lord Spencer’s grandmother
Grandad Norman	Former volunteer	Steve	Sophie’s husband, agricultural mechanic, Kate’s colleague
		George	Sophie and Steve’s eldest son, former Applegood pupil
Sophie	PTA chair, former teaching assistant, parent volunteer, Applegood village resident, village hall committee member	Charlie	Sophie and Steve’s youngest son, Year 1-2
Nancy	School business manager, PTA secretary, former parent, Applegood village resident, village hall committee member	Jane	Volunteer for the reading scheme

Flora	Nancy's daughter, former volunteer, Teaching assistant, former nursery worker with Karen, former Applegood pupil	Val	Volunteer, Applegood village resident, village hall committee member, parish council member, Amanda's grandmother
Karen	Former volunteer, Teaching assistant, former PTA member, former parent, former (parent) volunteer, former nursery worker with Flora	Amanda	Val's granddaughter, Year 5-6
Alice	Year 1,2,3,4 Class teacher	Peter	Parent volunteer, head gardener of local gardens, Applegood village resident
Ian	Year 5,6 Class teacher, acting co-head of school with Rebs	Lavender	Peter's daughter, Year 5-6
Sue	Teaching assistant	Maggie	Volunteer, Applegood village resident, church community member
Steph	Higher level teaching assistant	Kim	(SEN) Parent volunteer, volunteer for the reading scheme
Rob	Crystelle's husband, Danny's dad, and Sophie's boss	Danny	Crystelle and Rob's youngest son, Year 1-2
Claire	Teaching assistant, higher level teaching assistant, Crystelle's sister-in-law	Lucy	Former PTA treasurer, (SEN) parent volunteer, Joey and Ginny's mum
Laura	Teaching assistant (Joey's one-to-one)	Joey	Lucy's son, Year 3-4 SEN pupil (Laura's one-to-one)
Beca	Former teaching assistant	Ruth	Beca and Violet's mum, parent volunteer
		Violet	Year 6, Ruth's daughter
Rebs	Year R,1,2 Class teacher, SENCo, acting co-head of school with Ian	Miranda	Rebs mum, Grandparent volunteer
Candice	Well-being teaching assistant	Matt	Rebs husband, Parent volunteer
Julia	Teaching assistant (Flo's one-to-one)	Joy	Parent volunteer, former (SEN) Parent volunteer, Sadie and Jasmine's mum
Maxy	Parent volunteer for the reading scheme, Bella and Maisie's mum	Sadie	Joy's eldest daughter, former Applegood SEN pupil (Sophie's former one-to-one)
		Jasmine	Joy's youngest daughter, Year 1-2
Bella	Maxy's eldest daughter, Year 4-5, Maisie's sister	Natasha	Parent volunteer
Maisie	Maxy's youngest daughter, Year 1-2, Bella's sister	Debs	(SEN) Parent volunteer, Flo's mum
Lola	Year 3-4, former Oakington pupil Year R-2	Flo	Debs' daughter, Year 1-2 SEN pupil (Julia's one-to-one)

Mary-Anne	Parent volunteer	Lizzie	Will's sister, Year 4-5
James	Mary-Anne's son, Year R-1	Will	Lizzie's brother, Year 2-3
Mark	Year 4-5	Adam	Year 1-2
Oakington CofE Primary			
Greg	Senior Year 3, 4 Class teacher, SENCo	Gemma	School business manager
Sally	Higher level teaching assistant	Samira	Teaching assistant
Nat	Teaching assistant, Liv's sister, former parent	Amy	Year R,1,2 Class teacher
Liv	Teaching assistant, Nat's sister, former parent	Shauna	Year 5,6/3,4 Class teacher
Luke	Liv's husband, former parent, volunteer	Caroline	Oakington Village Resident, lay preacher
Eddie	Liv and Luke's youngest son, former pupil	Kayleigh	Teaching assistant, former pupil, Nat's daughter, Liv's niece, Olivia's mum
Angela	Teaching assistant	Lisa	Parent volunteer, Nathan's wife
Abi	SEN Parent volunteer, Orla and Ada's mum	Nathan	Parent volunteer, Lisa's husband
Ellie	Volunteer	Zoe	Parent volunteer, Jack's Mum
Dan	Year 3-4	Lorna	Parent volunteer
Freya	Year 2-3	Roberta	Volunteer
Rosie	Year 4-5	Caroline	Oakington village resident and church volunteer
Orla	Year 5-6, Abi's daughter, Ada's sister	Bill	Oakington village resident and church volunteer
Ada	Year 3-4, Abi's daughter, Orla's sister	Loreia	Year 4-5, Maeva's sister
Bonnie	Year 6	Maeva	Year 5-6, Loreia's sister
Eve	Year R-1	Danielle	Year 3-4
Jack	Year 6, Zoe's son	Olivia	Year R, Kayleigh's daughter, Nat's granddaughter
Daisy	Year 6	Caleb	Year 6

Appendix 3 – Research Timeline of Key Methodological and Ethical Milestones

Working as a TA at Oakington Primary (since October 2020)		2021	MAY-AUG	Initial discussions about my research with executive head and Oakington head		
			SEPT	Meeting with executive head and Oakington head to address concerns		
Start PhD			OCT	Follow-up meeting with Oakington head		
Ethics approval sought from university		2022	JAN			
Ethics approval granted by university			MARCH	Meeting with chair of governors	Meeting with new executive head and Applegood head	
Participant Information Video created	Ethics documents circulated at Applegood		APR-MAY	Started volunteering at Applegood (and Oakington’s Woodland Nursery)		
Data collection at Applegood			JUNE-JULY	Year 6 wellbeing walk	Participant Information Video abandoned	Art Groups with children
			AUG	Begin Interviews		
			SEPT-DEC	Art Groups with the children		Interviews
Continue volunteering in both schools		2023	JAN-APR	Interviews		Analysis
			MAY			
Data collection at Oakington			JUNE-JULY	Art Groups with the children		
			AUG	Interviews		
			SEPT-DEC	Art Groups with the children	Leaving the Field	
Final Analysis and Write -up		2024	JAN-DEC	Follow-ups		

Appendix 4 – Information Sheet

Information Sheet

Research Title: An ethnographic exploration of voluntary activity in small rural primary schools in Southeast England.



Hello, my name is Taylah Law, and I am a PhD student in Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Kent. As a member of the school community of Applegood/ Oakington C of E Primary, I would like to invite you to be a part of my PhD research. I would be grateful if you could take the time to read this information sheet to find out what my research is about and how you could be a part of it.

University of
Kent

What is the research about?

My project is about all the different volunteering that goes on in small rural primary schools. This might include people giving their time to read with children, run or support activities and events, or be a governor or PTA member, or people fundraising for or donating money or resources to the school. I want to understand the experiences of those involved in these activities and the impact they have. I am also interested in the differences between these activities in the two schools in your federation and the impact Covid-19 has had.

Why has my school been chosen to take part?

I have chosen to base my research in Applegood and Oakington because I attended both schools as a child and worked as a Teaching Assistant at Oakington. I have the DBS check necessary for working in schools and have read and am familiar with your schools policies and procedures around the safeguarding and protection of children. I will adhere to these first and foremost throughout my time in your schools. The well-being and safety of children will always come before my research.

How will the research be carried out?

I will become a volunteer in your school and participate in daily activities and events. I hope to begin volunteering in each school a couple of months before my research to get to know everyone, but I will start collecting data between June 2022 and December 2022 in Applegood and between June 2023 and December 2023 in Oakington. Whilst participating, I will be looking for instances of volunteering, donated resources, and fundraising and talking to staff, children, volunteers, parents/ carers, family members and community members. I will make notes on these observations and conversations, as well as my own experience as a volunteer in a small notebook which I will always carry with me. I will also look at public documents about the school, and, with permission, school documents and any photos taken of events or activities involving volunteering. I will carry out arts and crafts-based activities with groups of children, and I will talk to them as they are engaged in these activities (or others run or supported by volunteers). I will also conduct interviews with selected staff, volunteers, parents/ carers, and community members. You do not have to participate in interviews if you do not wish to (you can still be a part of the general research but decide not to interview). However, if I have not asked you, but you would particularly like to share your experiences and opinions, please let me know!

What will happen if I agree to the research?

During my time in your school I will observe, ask questions, and engage in conversations with you about volunteering. I will regularly check you are happy for me to make notes on my observations and our discussions. You do not have to talk to me or answer my questions if you do not want to. If you are invited (in person or via email) to interview, you will be sent a consent form to sign (which will include some background information for you to fill in), and we will arrange a time and location which suits you. If you prefer, the interview can take place online via Teams. With your permission, I will audio-record and transcribe (type up) the interviews. You can review and give feedback on a copy of your transcript if you wish.

Parents/ carers will be sent a separate consent form for their child(ren) to be involved in the research and a child-friendly information sheet for them to share with their child(ren). This information sheet will also be put up around school and on the school website. If parents/ carers do consent to their child(ren) being involved, I will also ask the children themselves if they want to help with my research or not, explaining my research methods in terms they will understand and reassuring them that they do not have to help if they do not want to. All parents/ carers will be kept fully informed about my research through updates in newsletters, or discussions with me in-person at school throughout the research.

What are the benefits of this research?

I hope the benefits of my research will be a greater understanding of voluntary action in small rural primary schools which can be used in practice. I hope to build close and ongoing relationships with research participants (including the children) and continue my volunteering after my research has ended.

What are the risks of this research?

Having worked in a school throughout the Covid-19 pandemic I am fully aware of the safety measures, guidance and procedures in place and will be able to understand and comply with them. I will regularly check I am up-to-date with these policies to protect myself, and you as participants.

Whilst I will anonymise all schools, villages and individual participants using pseudonyms, there is the potential that the schools will nevertheless be identifiable by their characteristics and geography. There is also the possibility that you will be able to identify other participants, or they will be able to identify you within the context of the full findings. To reduce this risk, I will use pseudonyms throughout and will discuss with you how you would like to be further anonymised. For example, you may ask me to discuss certain issues in general terms rather than quoting directly.

What if I do not wish to be involved?

Participation in my research is voluntary. If you do not wish to be involved you can let me know in person or by email (tr19@kent.ac.uk). If you do not wish to be involved (or do not fill in the parent/ child consent form), I will not make any notes about you (or your child(ren)) or our conversations and will not invite you to interview.

What if I wish to withdraw my involvement?

You can withdraw from this research (without giving a reason and without consequences) by telling me in person or emailing me (tr19@kent.ac.uk). If you wish, any notes made, or interviews conducted prior to your withdrawal will be removed from the research. No notes will be made after your withdrawal, and you will not be invited to interview. Once the analysis

phase of my project has finished, it will no longer be possible to withdraw. If you wish to withdraw, please do so by January 2023 (School 1) or January 2024 (School 2).

GDPR: How your information will be used

(Privacy Notice)

I am the only researcher in this project and so all information will be collected by me. Any information collected or provided will only be shared with my supervisors and kept confidential and stored securely.

Background information on age, ethnicity, gender, highest level of education, occupation (full-time or part-time), and family composition will be collected. This data will be obtained alongside your interview consent form or through discussions. I will make notes from documents and observations on participants, contexts, settings, activities, and events throughout the research period. Personal information about perspectives and experiences will also be provided by participants during interviews and discussions. Interviews will be audio-recorded for transcription and analysis. This data will be used to answer my research questions. All data will be accessed and stored on my personal password-protected computer or in a locked room only. I will be very careful when describing the characteristics of the villages, schools, and will use pseudonyms throughout to reduce the risk of identifiability. I will also seek your suggestions on how you would like to be anonymised.

At the end of my research, data collected will be written up in the form of my final PhD. The final PhD text will be read by my supervisors and examiners and will be kept confidential and stored securely. I will provide participants with a summary of my findings. There is also the potential that my PhD could lead to further publications. I will check participants are happy with how they have been anonymised in these publications before they are published. In addition, my funder requires I make my data available for potential re-use by other researchers and so I will seek your permission for anonymised versions of my data to be stored in the UK Data Archive.

Who has reviewed this research?

I am funded by the South East Network for Social Sciences (<https://senss-dtp.ac.uk/>). The Student Research Ethics Committee of the SSPSSR-LSSJ department to which I belong at the University of Kent has given ethical approval for this research.

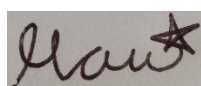
How can I ask questions?

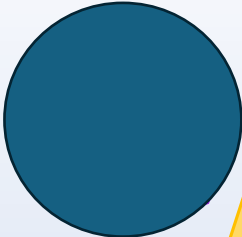
If you have any questions about the research please contact me by email: trl9@kent.ac.uk.

My PhD research is supervised by Dr. Alison Body and Dr. Dawn Lyon who both work at the University of Kent. If you have any questions about the research or your rights as a participant that you do not want to direct to me, or wish to know who to contact in the event of a complaint, please speak to Dr. Alison Body (a.m.body@kent.ac.uk) or Dr. Dawn Lyon (d.m.lyon@kent.ac.uk).

Thank you so much for taking the time to read this information sheet. I hope you will consent to be part of my research and I cannot wait to start volunteering in your schools and meet you in person.

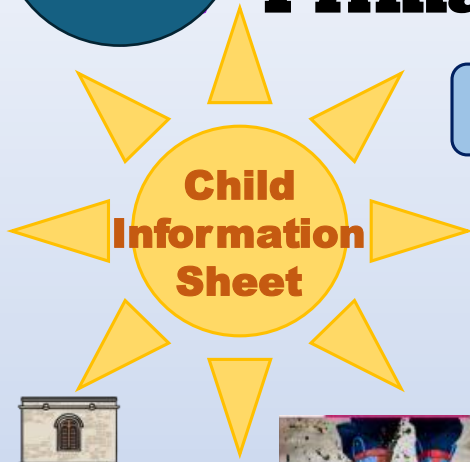
Taylah Law





Voluntary Activity in Small Rural Primary Schools





**Child
Information
Sheet**

Who is Miss Law?





Why is Miss Law here?



What happens if I join in?







Do I have to join in?



What will happen when I've finished?



TALK TO ME!
If you have any questions about my research...
You can ask me at school
OR
You can ask your grown up to talk to or email me
(tri9@kent.ac.uk)

Appendix 6 – School Consent Form

SCHOOL CONSENT FORM

Title of project: An ethnographic exploration of voluntary action in small rural primary schools in South East England.

Name of researcher: Taylah Law

School Identification Number for this project:

Please initial box

1. I confirm I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand that participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw the school from the research without giving a reason and without consequence. I can withdraw by contacting the researcher by email at trl9@kent.ac.uk. I am aware that I cannot withdraw after January 2023 (School 1) or January 2024 (School 2).
3. I understand that any data collected will be anonymised before analysis, and I can have a say in how this is done. I give permission for the researcher and supervisors to have access to anonymised data. I give permission for anonymised data to be used in the final PhD text which will be seen by examiners.
4. I give permission for the researcher to analyse school photos and I understand that she will seek further consent to include any photos in her final PhD text.
5. I give permission for the researcher to use anonymised data in her future publications.
6. I give permission for the anonymised data to be deposited in the UK Data Archive for potential re-use by other researchers.
7. I agree to take part in the above research project.

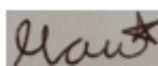
☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

Name of participant

Date

Signature

Taylah Law



Researcher

Date

Signature

A copy of the completed form is to be retained by the researcher and the participant

Appendix 7 – Parent/ Carer and Child Consent Form

PARENT/ CARER and CHILD CONSENT FORM

Title of project: An ethnographic exploration of voluntary activity in small rural primary schools in South East England.

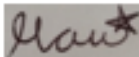
Name of researcher: Taylah Law

Participant Identification Number for this project:

Please initial box

1. I confirm I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have discussed this with my child. I and my child have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand that my child's participation is voluntary and that they are free to withdraw from the research without giving a reason and without consequence. I can withdraw my child by contacting the researcher by email at trl9@kent.ac.uk or my child can withdraw themselves verbally. I am aware that I cannot withdraw my child's data after January 2023 (for School 1) or January 2024 (for School 2).
3. I understand that any data collected will be anonymised before analysis, and I can have a say in how this is done. I give permission for the researcher and supervisors to have access to my child's anonymised data. I give permission for this anonymised data to be used in the final PhD text which will be seen by examiners.
4. I give permission for the researcher to take photos of my child's art/craft work, and I understand that she will seek further consent to include any of these photos in her final PhD text.
5. I give permission for the researcher to analyse school photos, and I understand that she will seek further consent to include any photos in her final PhD text.
6. I give permission for the researcher to use my child's anonymised data in future publications.
7. I give permission for my child's anonymised data to be deposited in the UK Data Archive for potential re-use by other researchers.
8. I agree for my child to take part in the above research project.

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

_____ Name of participant (child)	_____ Date	_____ Signature/ mark
_____ Name of parent/ carer	_____ Date	_____ Signature
Taylah Law		
_____ Researcher	_____ Date	_____ Signature

A copy of the completed form is to be retained by the researcher and the participant

Appendix 8 – Interview Consent Form

INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

Title of project: An ethnographic exploration of voluntary activity in small rural primary schools in South East England.

Name of researcher: Taylah Law

Participant Identification Number for this project:

Please initial box

1. I confirm I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the interview without giving a reason and without consequence. I can withdraw by contacting the researcher by email at trl9@kent.ac.uk. I am aware that I cannot withdraw after January 2023 (School 1) or January 2024 (School 2).
3. I give permission for my interview to be audio-recorded and transcribed.
4. I understand that my responses will be anonymised before analysis, and I can have a say in how this is done. I give permission for the researcher and supervisors to have access to my anonymised responses. I give permission for anonymised direct quotations to be used in the final PhD text which will be seen by examiners.
5. I give permission for the researcher to use anonymised responses and direct quotations from my interview in her future publications.
6. I give permission for my anonymised data to be deposited in the UK Data Archive for potential re-use by other researchers.
7. I agree to take part in an interview for the above research project.

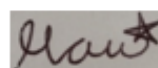
☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

Name of participant

Date

Signature

Taylah Law



Researcher

Date

Signature

A copy of the completed form is to be retained by the researcher and the participant

Background Information

Please complete along with your consent form.

Age: _____

Ethnicity: _____

Gender: _____

Highest level of Education: _____

Occupation: _____

Full-time or Part-time: _____

Family composition: _____

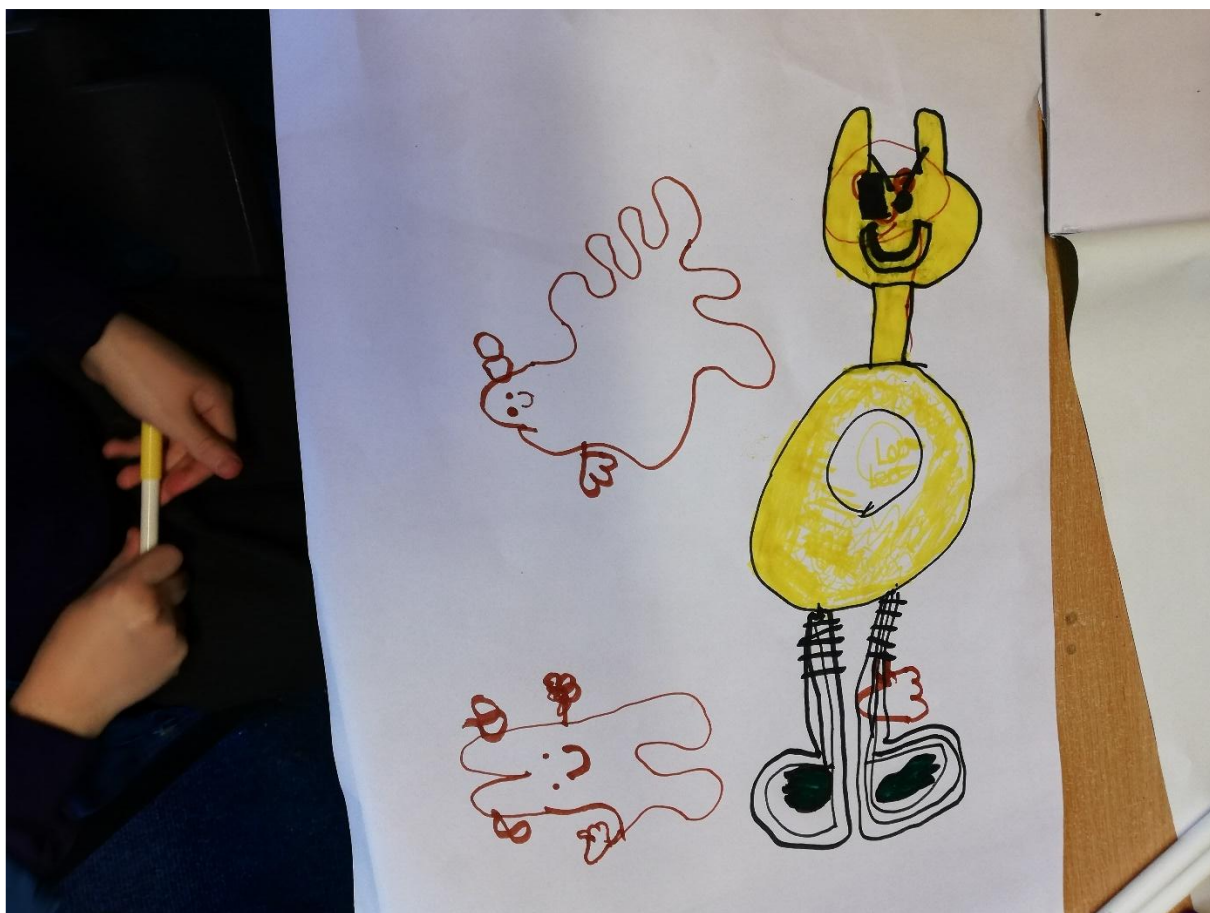
Appendix 9 – Children's Artwork





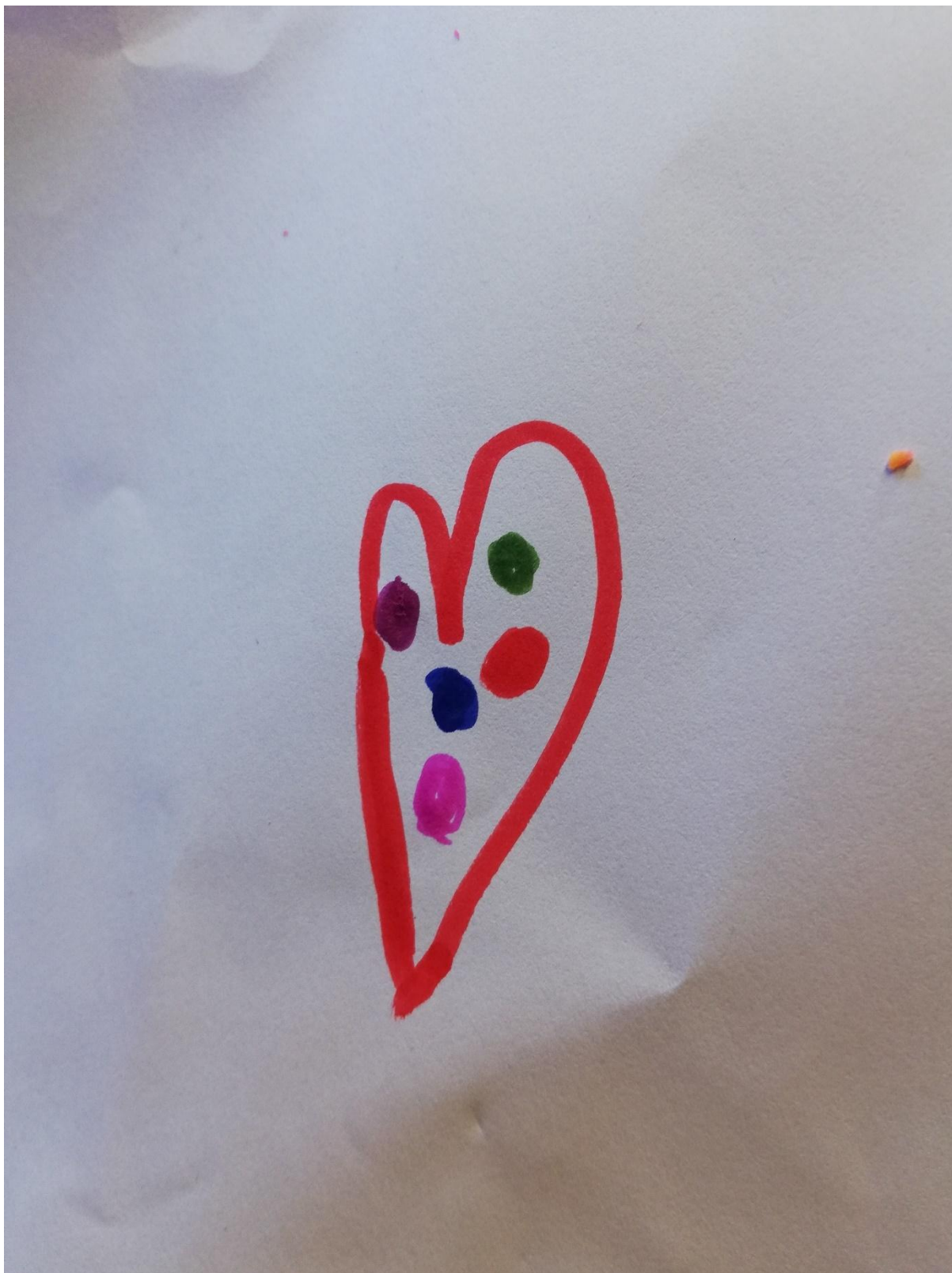












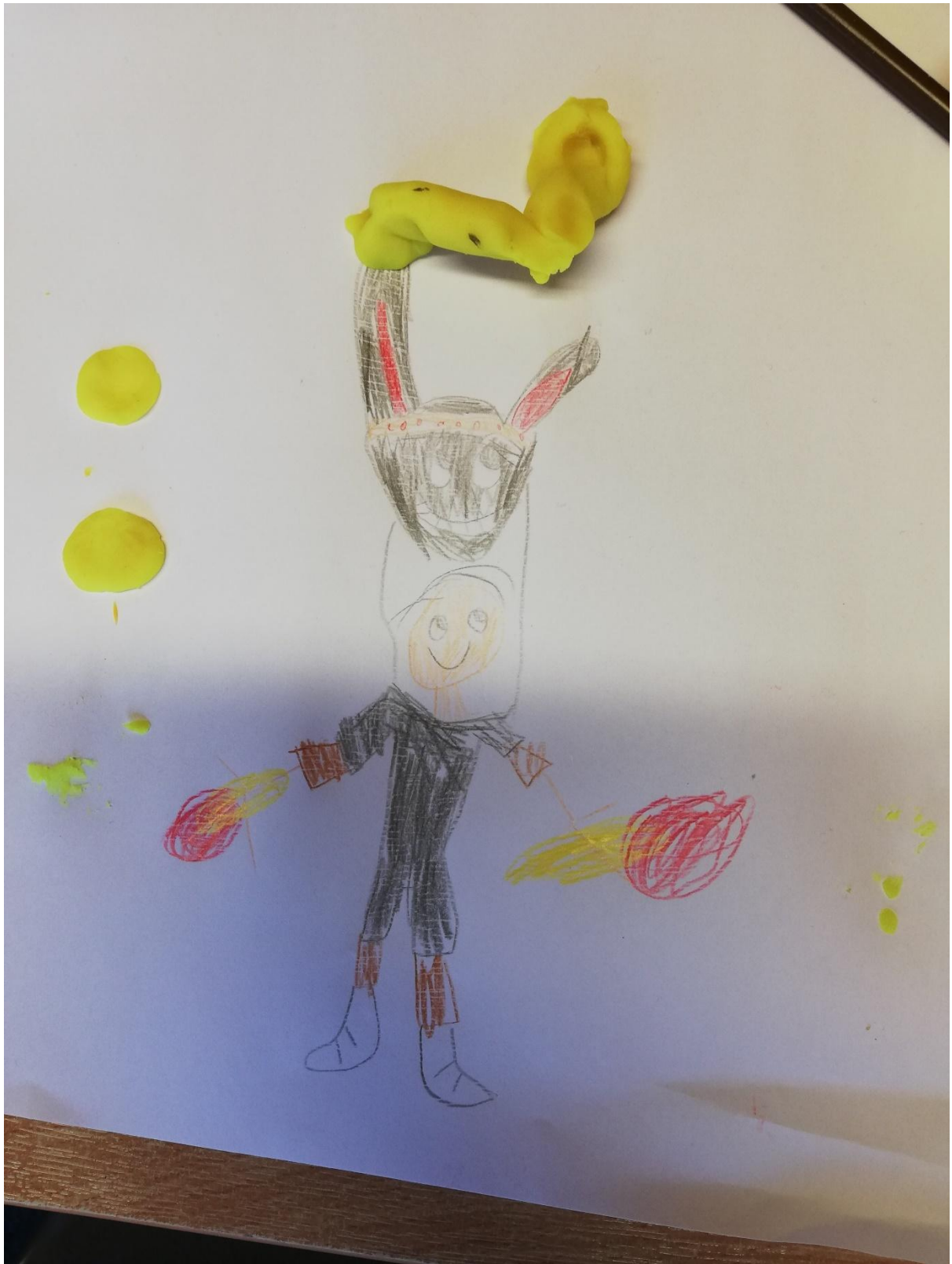


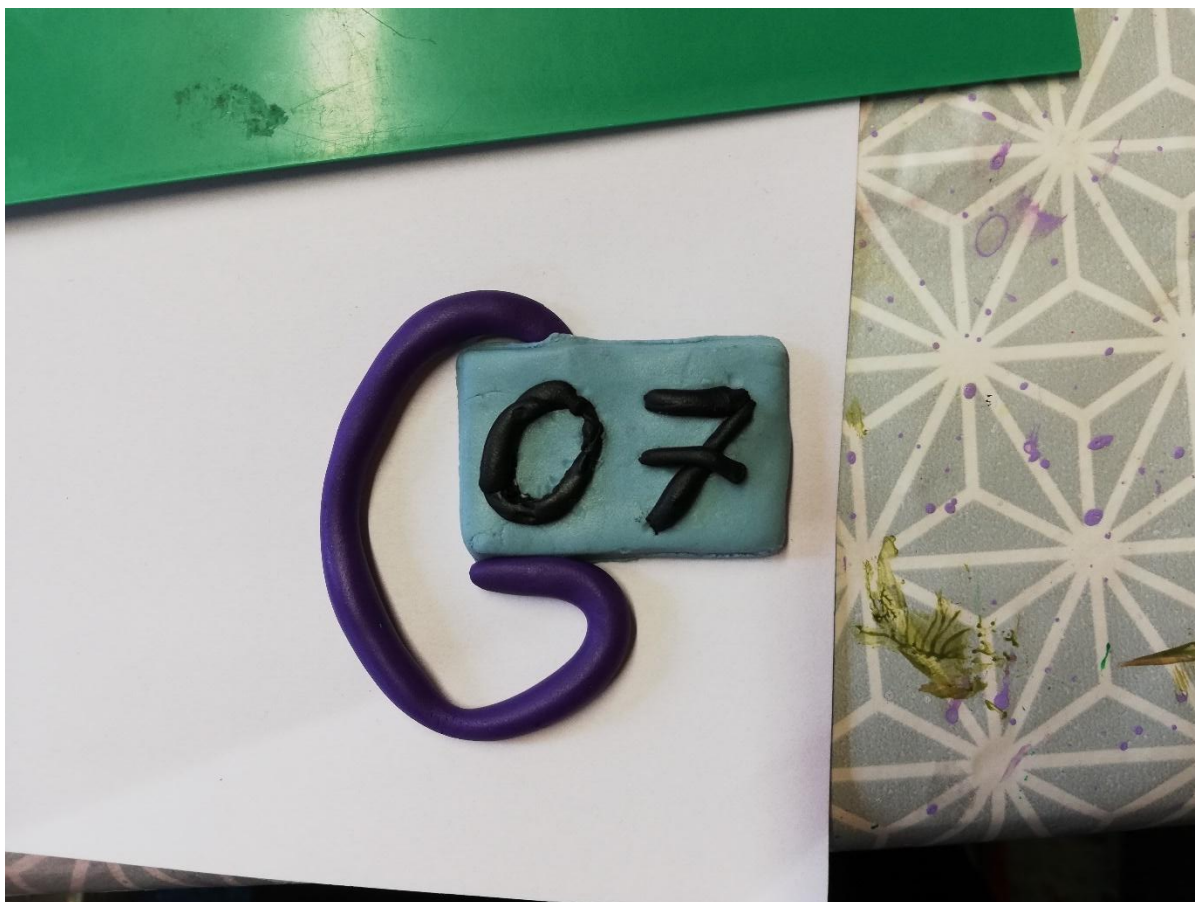
















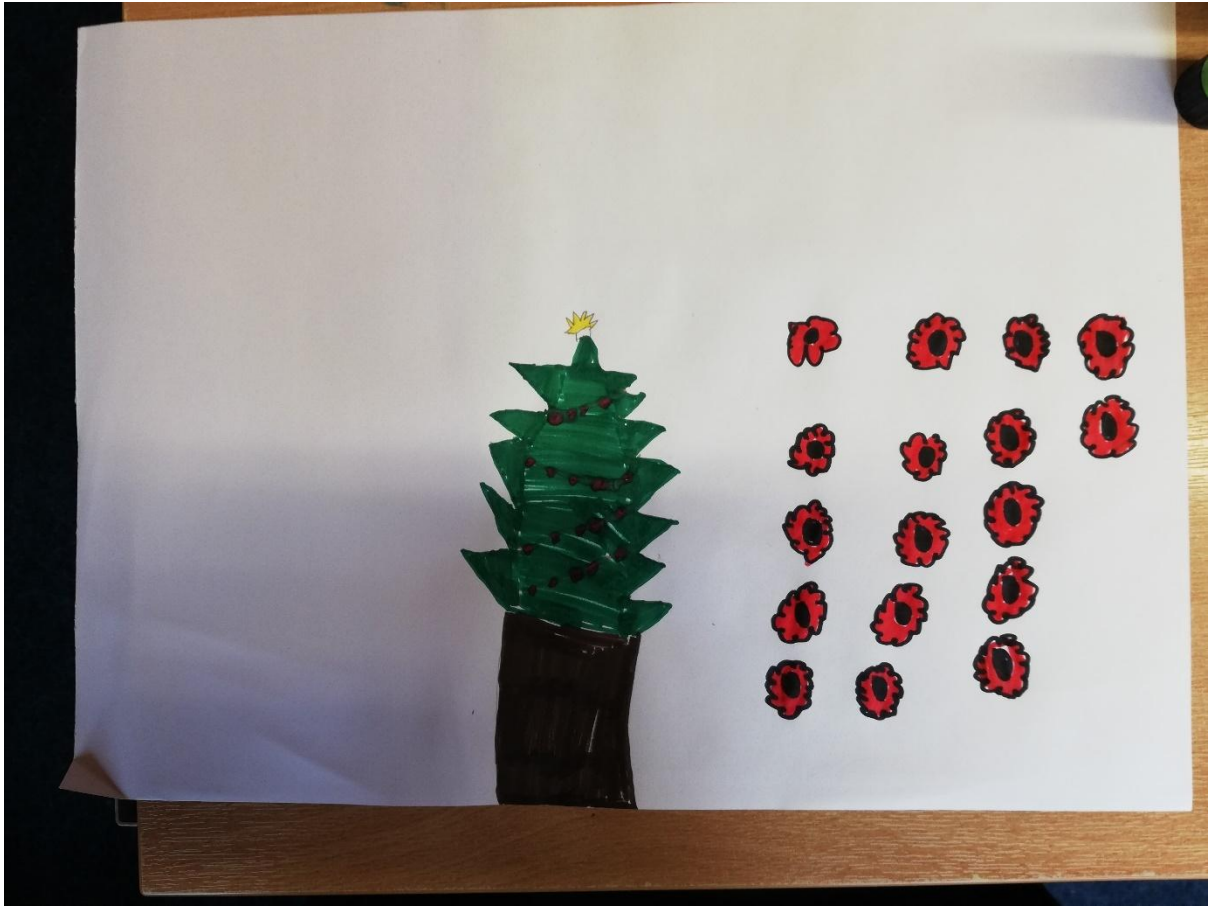




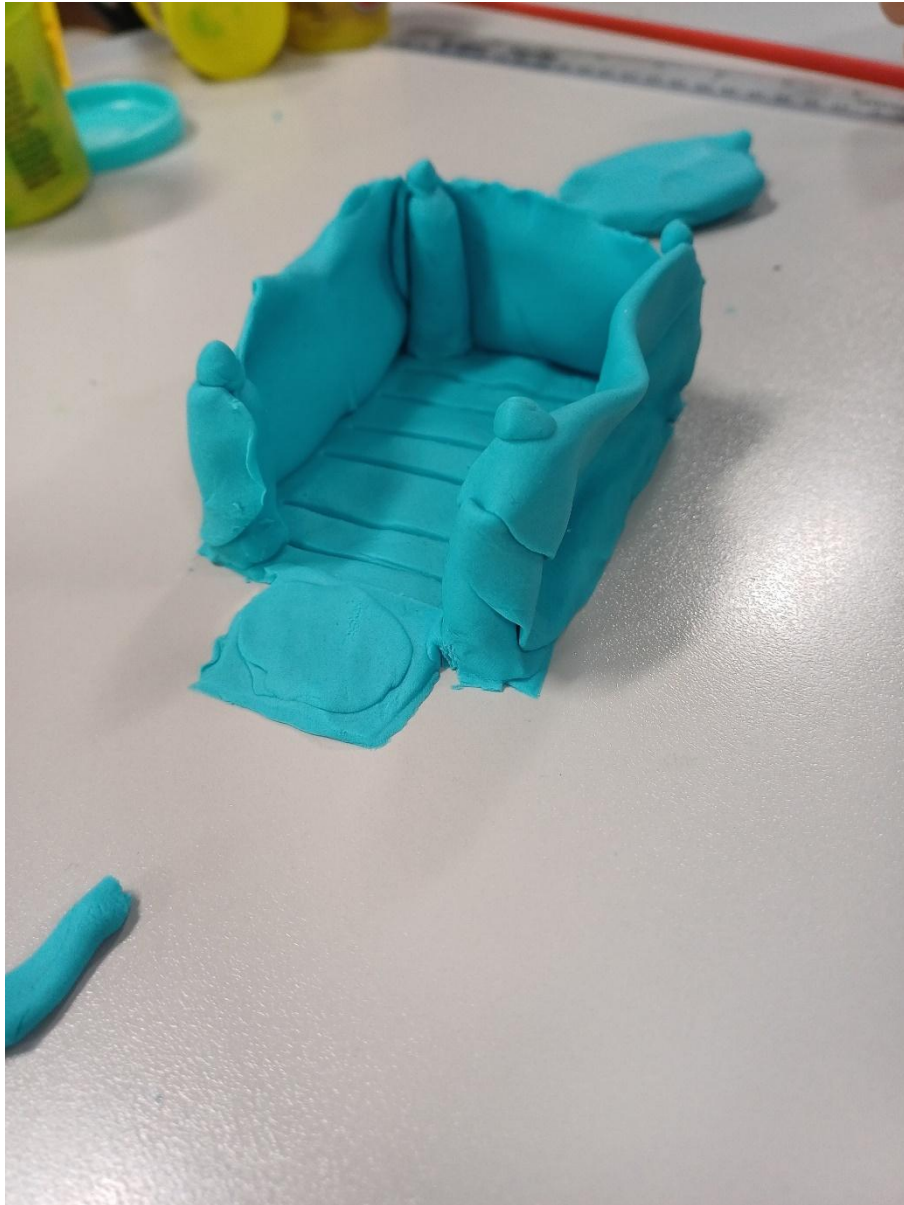












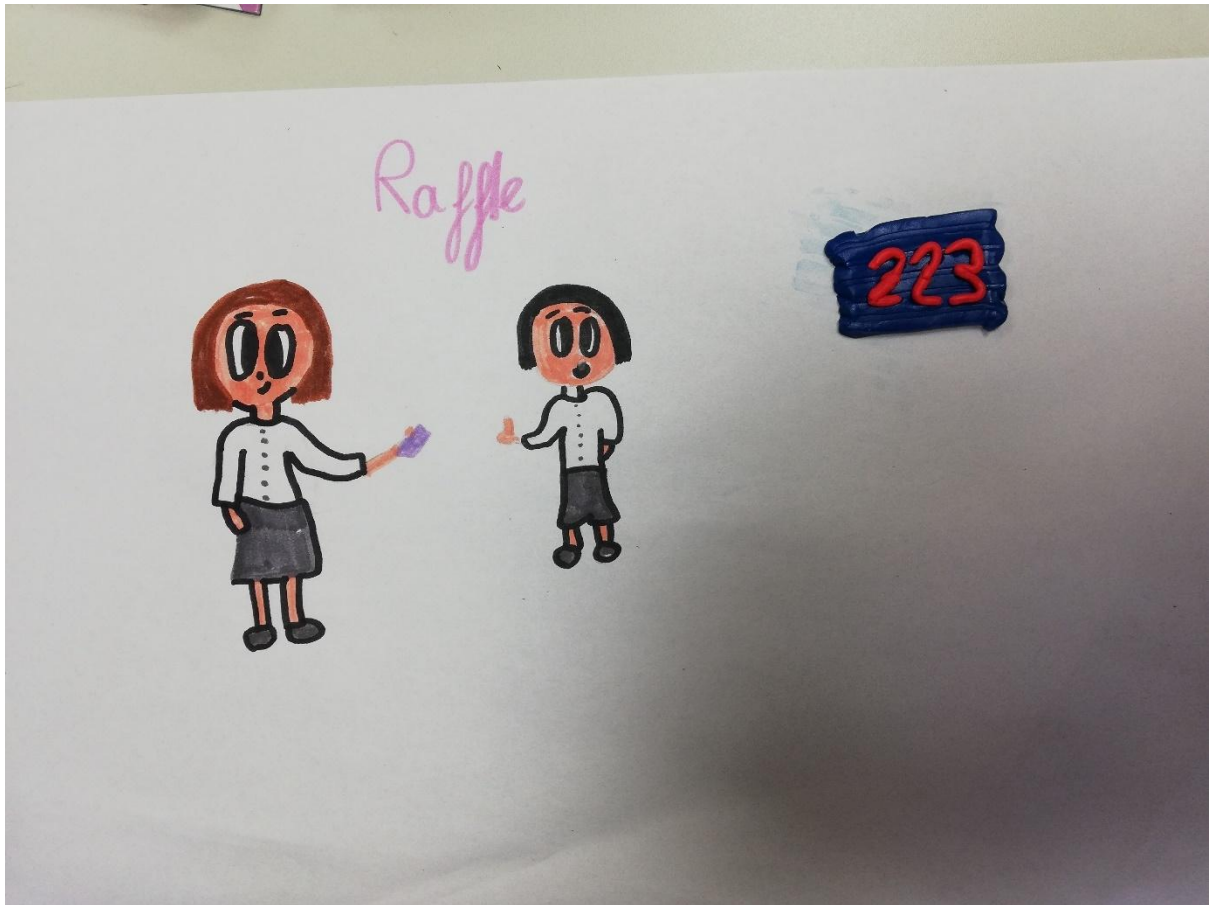


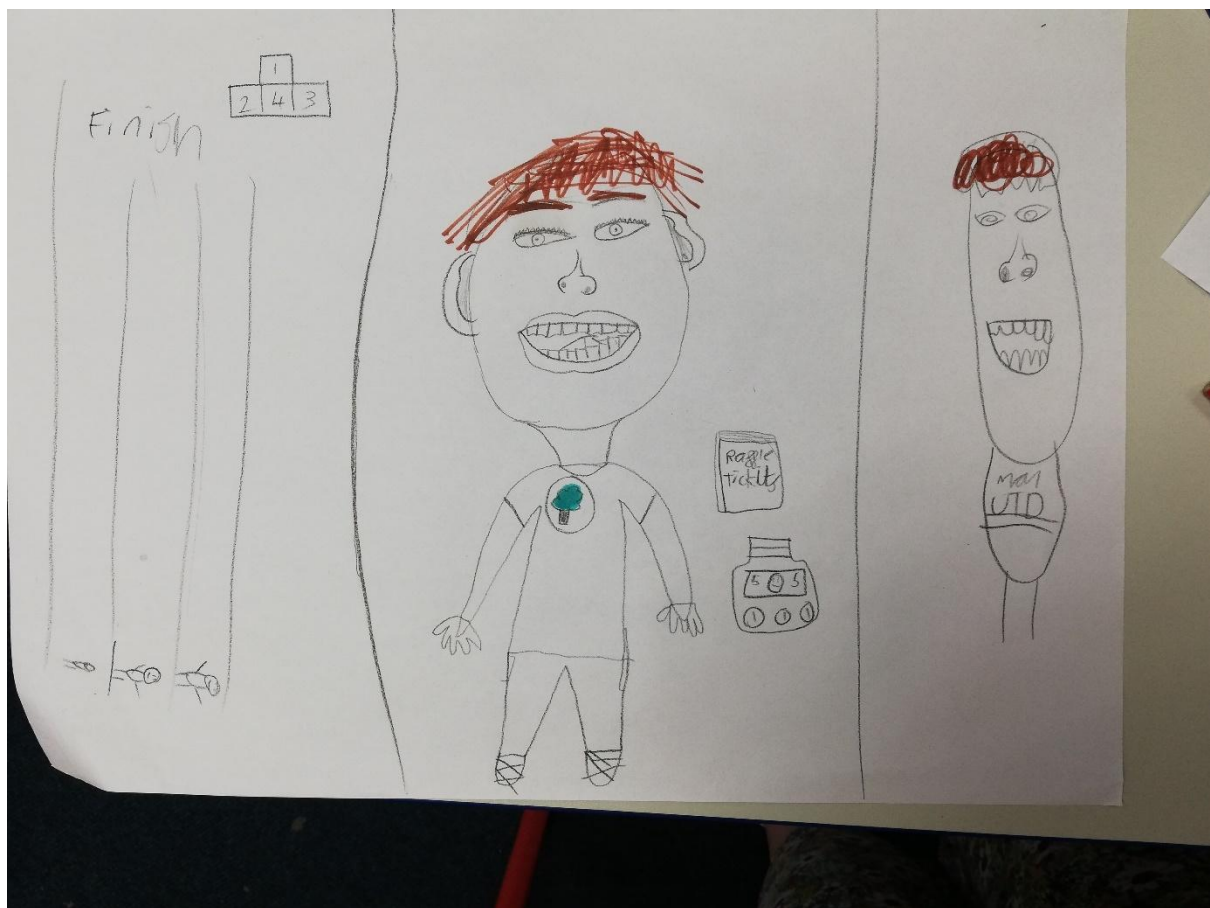












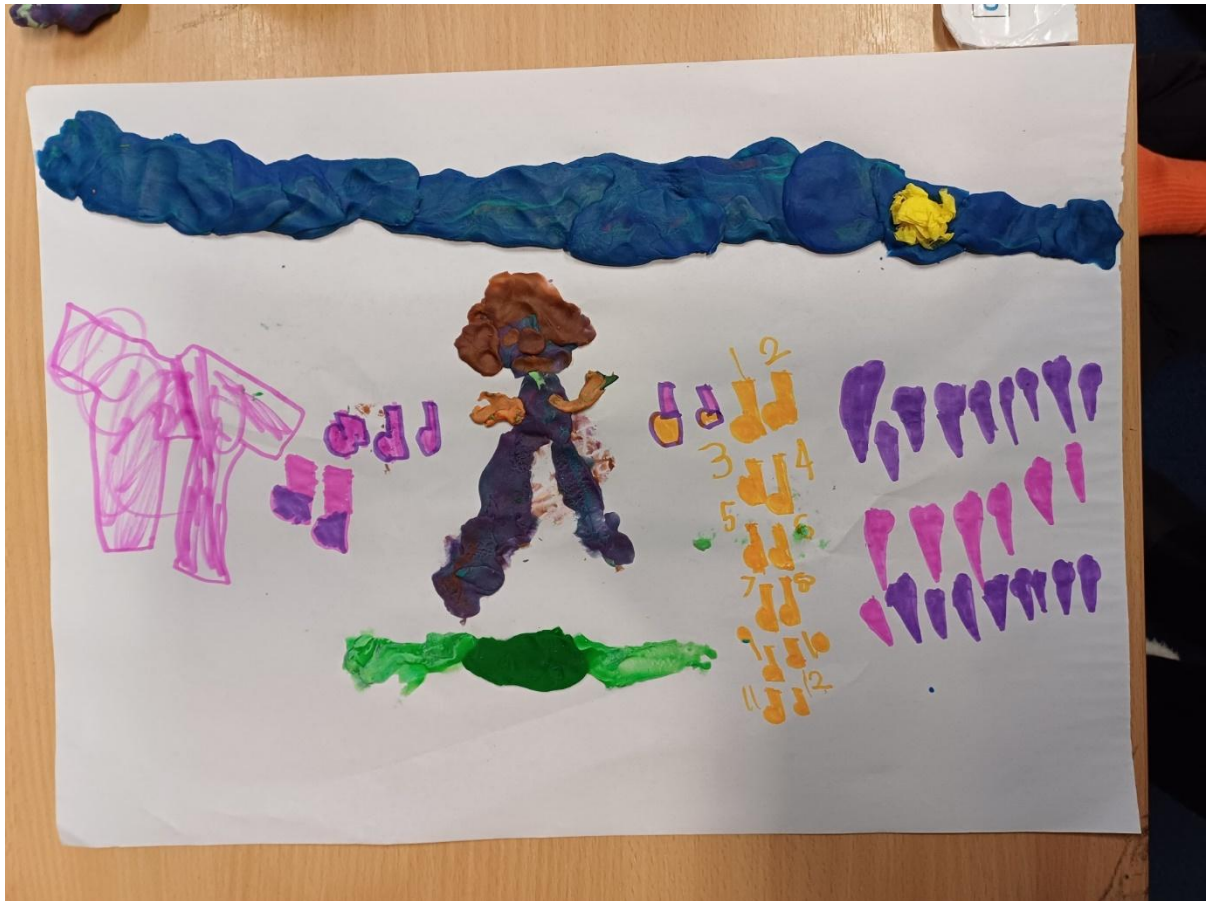


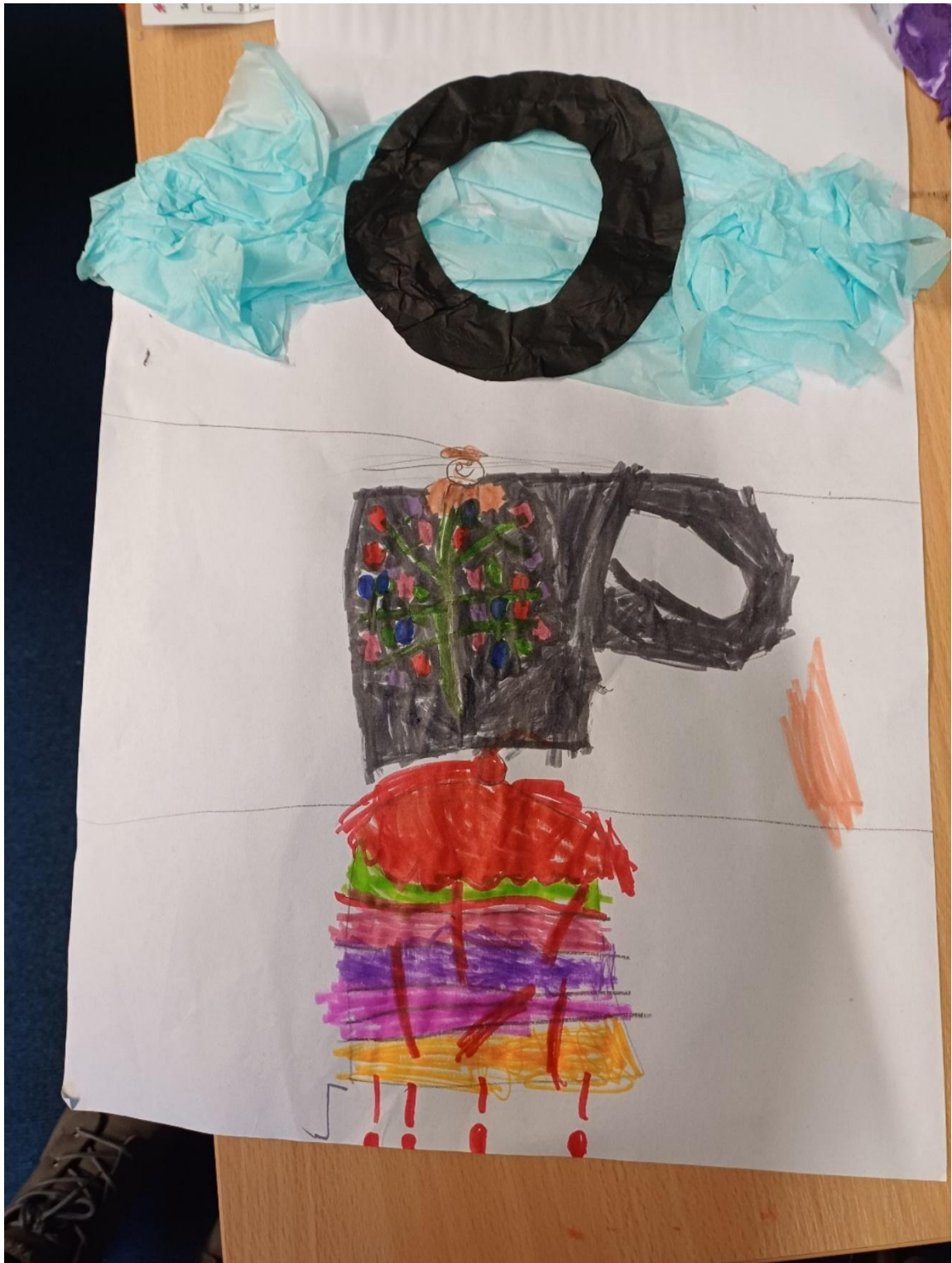










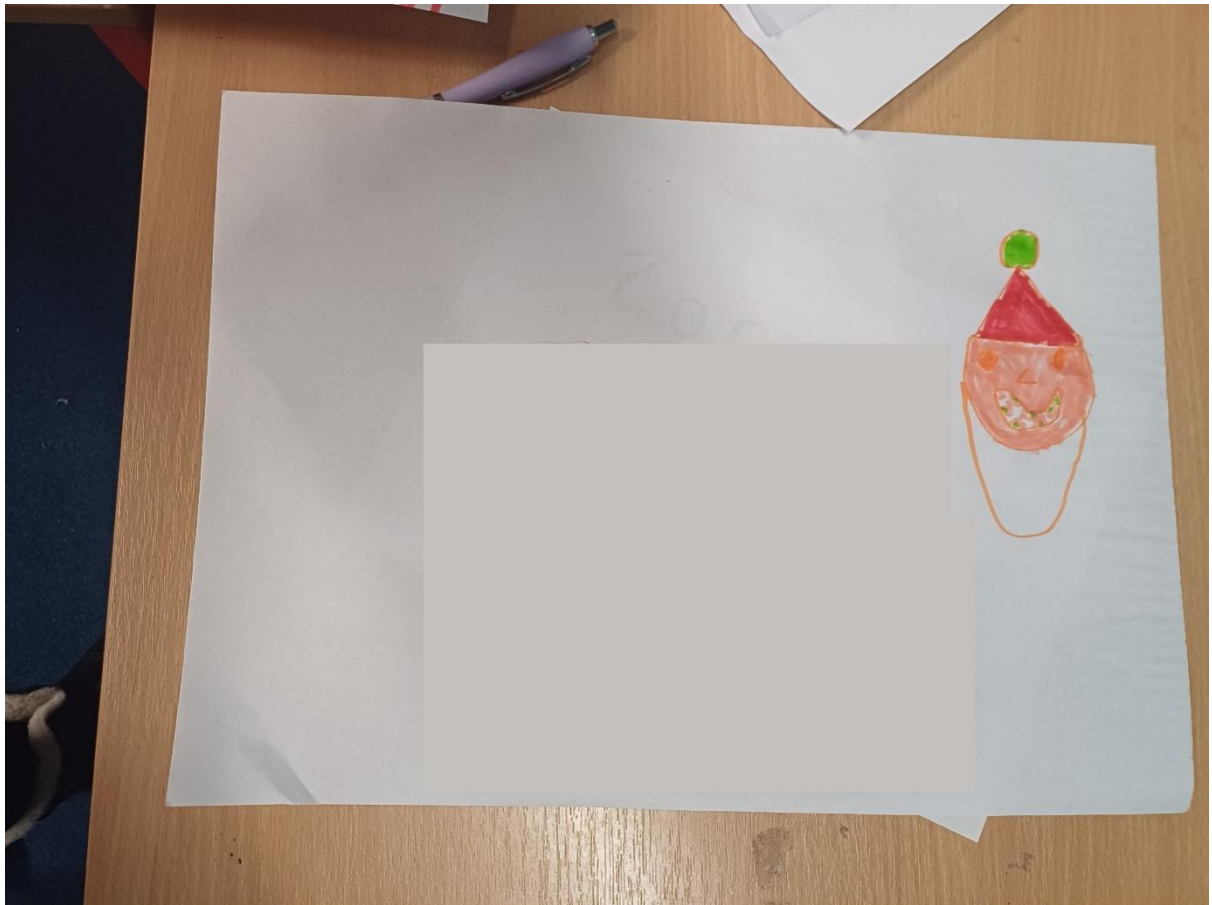




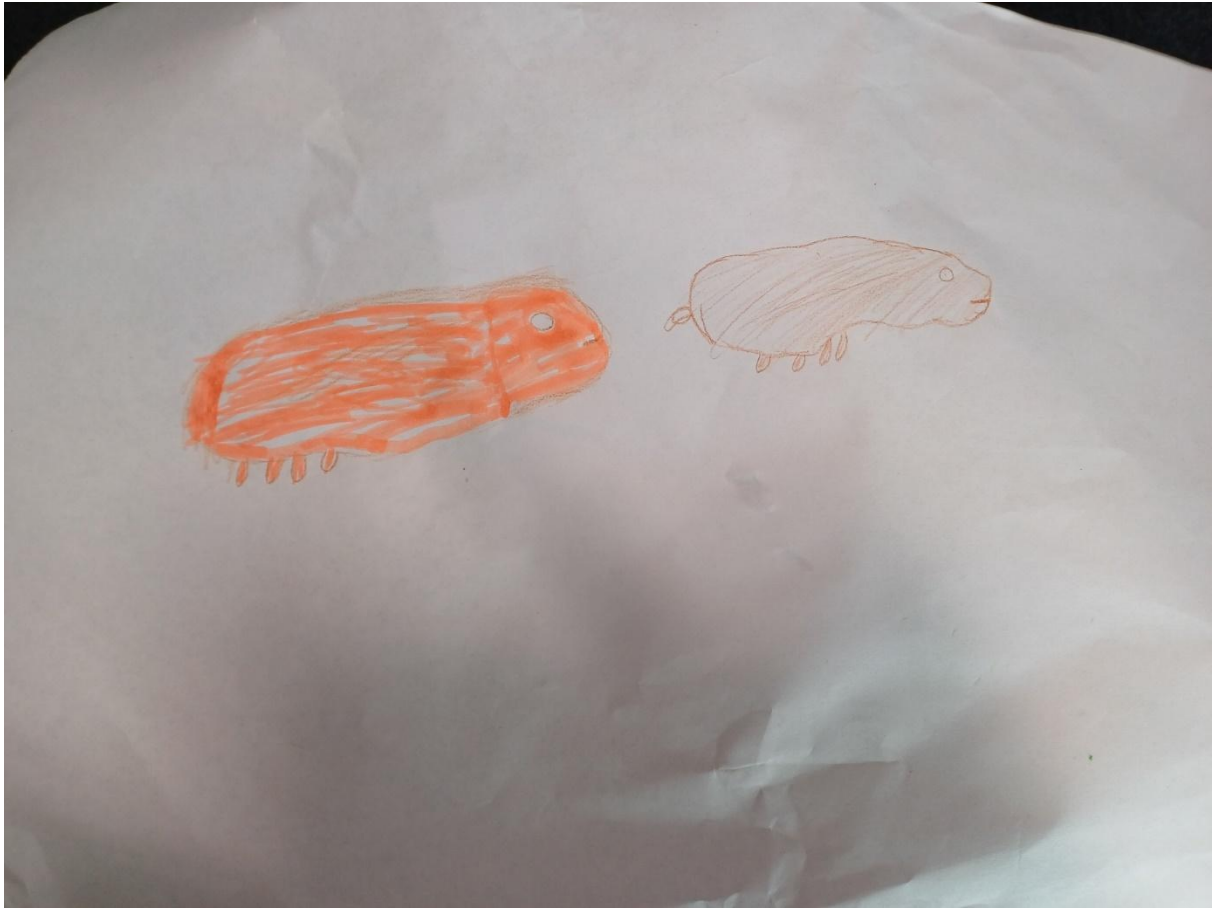










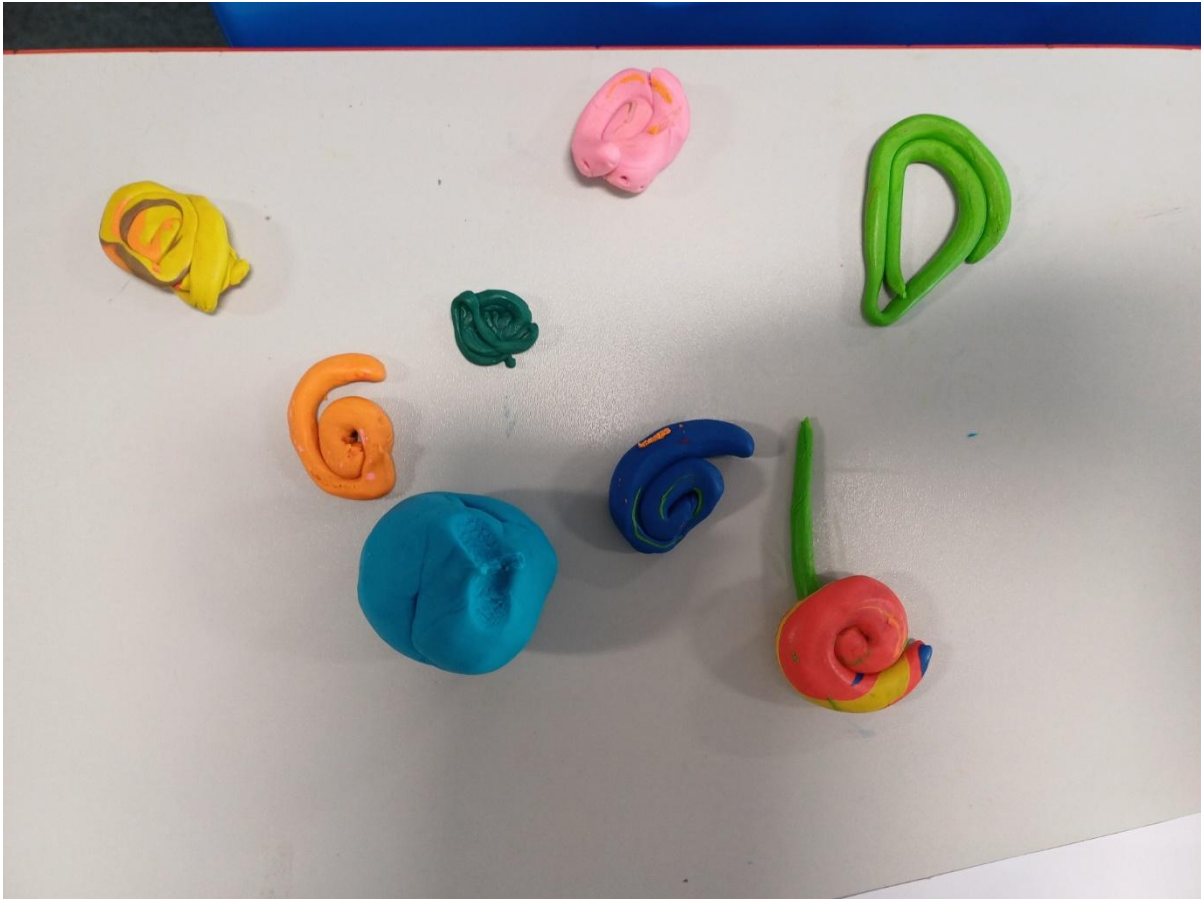












Appendix 10 – Biography Maps

