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Exclusion by design: uncovering systems of segregation and 'ghettoization' of so-called NEET and 'disengaged' youth on an employability course in a further education (FE) college

Carlene Cornish 

School of Social Work, University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK

ABSTRACT

At first glance, the physical design of a setting ostensibly seems routine and neutral. However, it tends to powerfully govern who goes where and who can access certain places. Much of the literature on exclusion within education settings often overlook this significance. This paper therefore seeks to rectify this by examining exclusion by design and allocation of physical space at The Site, a fictional name used for the large general further education (FE) college in England's East Region. Adopting a case study approach over two academic years (2013–2015), qualitative research was undertaken with seven tutors and twenty-six so-called NEET and disengaged youth. Drawing on Wacquant's theoretical concept of the ghetto, my key findings demonstrated territorial exclusion by design: this employability course was delivered in Q-Block, a temporary prefabricated building positioned out of sight and primarily used to deliver programmes for disabled, mature and disengaged youth on the fringes of education. This article concludes that, whilst existing research on policy and outcomes is useful in understanding the negative educational outcomes of stigmatised youth, a sharper focus is needed on wider social processes and exclusionary continuities in seeking to elucidate how governance processes contribute to their social and spatial marginalisation in education.

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Introduction

At first glance, the physical design of a setting ostensibly seems routine and neutral. Architecture certainly provides a concrete focus (Jones 2006), but it tends to powerfully govern who goes where and who can access certain places. Exclusion thus frequently has a spatial dimension (Madanipour, Cars, and Allen 1998). According to Beck (1998, 115) 'architecture is politics with bricks and mortar' (Beck 1998, 115). Much of the literature on exclusion within education settings often overlook the spatial dimensions of exclusion and the repercussions on those excluded. This research context is under-investigated. However, there are a few studies that highlight the significance of place in shaping young

CONTACT Carlene Cornish  c.cornish@uea.ac.uk  School of Social Work, University of East Anglia, Room 1.06, Elizabeth Fry Building, Norwich Research Park, Norwich NR4 7TJ, UK

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people's identities, life opportunities and intergenerational relationships (Farrugia 2014; Woodman and Wyn 2015). Moreover, scholars such as Foley and Leverett (2011) discovered that a spatial focus illuminated educational inequalities and underpinning dynamics of power, control and resistance which shape children's lives.

More recently, Brown (2017) conducted research which focussed on pupils assigned to lower 'ability' groupings and their spatial orientations within the broader school environment. Key findings identified how educational policy drivers contributed to the exclusion of disadvantaged children, limiting their spatial agency. Brown's research has significance, because it likewise focussed on students who had marginal positioning within the school setting. However, in my study, research was conducted with post-16 RPA youth attending a further education (FE) college, fictitiously named The Site based in the East Region of England. The aim of my study was to examine exclusion by design and the extent to which the allocation of physical space at this college governed the educational experiences of so-called NEET and disengaged youth enrolled on the Level 1 Achieving Skills employability course. Were they able to access college resources and higher levels of education and training at The Site?

This paper recognises that youth, as category, tend to have a subordinate position and because of this marginality, researchers have a responsibility to work with, rather than on youth (Harlan 2016). In my study, I carefully considered how power over the inquiry was shared with the young people, ensuring that I conducted research alongside student participants. This paper recognises that youth have the capacity to identify problems relevant to their own lives. Therefore, influencing key decisions over the research design chosen to maximise students' participation and amplify their voices in the presentation of data. Nevertheless, the marginal position of youth has been established in research and social policy, evident in the use of policy terms such as 'NEET and disengaged youth'. These terms were rooted in a language of deficit, risk and social problems on the part of young people. Firmly opposed to the use of labels, I use the words 'so-called' NEET and disengaged youth, to challenge labelling and avoid further marginalisation in my writing.

Young people, supposedly on the margins of education are framed by popular imagination, being impacted by the way institutions and adults position themselves in relation to youth (Harlan 2016). Dominant discourses, such as youth subcultures in the 1970s which positioned youth as disruptive, have evolved over time and were accepted as truths (Harlan 2016). So-called NEETs and disengaged youth are often stereotyped, their marginal position underscored in Charles Murray's (1984) discourse on the 'underclass'. They also closely resemble Cohen's conceptualisation of 'folk-devils' (1972), being construed as the young 'feckless', 'lazy' and 'dangerous' individuals, part of a 'problem population' who give rise to moral panic. Already positioned as 'hardest to reach' in official discourse (Department for Education and Skills 2004), youth who are not engaged in education, employment or training (NEET) for sustained periods and leaving school with low GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) grades or no school-leaving qualifications (Tomlinson 2013) are at particular risk. Consequently, a range of government policies, including the Raising of Participation Age (RPA) policy were introduced to drive a sense of purpose and duty. RPA, established through the Education Skills Act 2008, extended compulsory education to 17 and 18-year-olds in the belief that participation in post-16 education and training facilitated the attainment of higher

qualifications and in turn, contributed to youth becoming members of a skilled, qualified workforce boosting the national economy.

Notwithstanding, the route to inclusivity and improved life chances announced in RPA is not straightforward. Especially for so-called NEET and disengaged youth who, in the context of Atkins' (2009) study in England's Midlands, were mostly drawn from working-class backgrounds. They tend to be enrolled on low-level provision which hardly provides opportunity for improved social and economic positioning (Simmons and Thompson 2011; Wolf 2011). What's more, RPA is based on an overriding assumption focussed on individual shortcomings, blaming youth for their lack of qualifications and reduced levels of participation. However, complex and wide-ranging structural and institutional factors within an increasingly competitive education sector are overlooked (Cornish 2017). Consequently, key responsibility was squarely placed on so-called NEET and disengaged youth to address any individual deficiencies, including previous academic failure. On this basis, RPA re-engagement provision such as the Level 1 Achieving Skills Course was promoted as a critical opportunity for students to acquire qualifications. Supposedly, the employability qualifications should enable students to progress towards higher levels of study, but what were their educational experiences?

This article starts with a focus on RPA and how in principle, the employability course could offer young people with low school leaving grades a second chance to gain improved academic outcomes. Following this, the background context provides conceptual details around the NEET concept and the 'ethics of competition' dominant within a competitive educational landscape. Thereafter, the research methodology is described, followed by the presentation of three key empirical findings. The emerging data punctuated the manifestations of stigmatisation and dimensions of exclusion. Resulting in the use of Wacquant's theory of the ghetto (2004) as an analytical framework. The paper concludes with key arguments for consideration.

Background context

NEET youth

Concern about so-called NEET youth is not a new phenomenon. The acronym 'NEET' is synonymous with terms previously used to describe experiences of youth with education and employment issues (Nudzor 2010). The changing nomenclature includes: 'Getting Nowhere' (Bynner, Ferri, and Shepherd 1997); 'Status Zero' (Williamson 1997); 'High Risk Category of Non-college Bound Youth' (Worthington and Juntunen 1997); 'Generation Z' (Pearce and Hillman 1998); 'Off Register' (Bentley and Gurusurthy 1999); 'Wasted Youth', 'Disengaged', 'Disaffected', 'Disappeared Young People' (Holroyd and Amour 2003; DfES 2007); and 'At Risk' (Conrad 2005). In 1996, a Home Office official suggested that the term 'Not in Education, Employment or Training', (NEET) (Williamson 2010) should be used to refer to 16–19-year-olds not engaged in any form of education, employment or training (Nudzor 2010). Whilst the term NEET was originally created to describe 16–18-year-olds outside education, employment and training, these days it is also often used in relation to youth up to the age of 24 years (Simmons, Thompson, and Russell 2014). However, given the purpose of my empirical study, I am reclaiming the NEET concept by re-focussing attention on the

original 16–18 years age category in relation to the educational experiences of so-called NEET youth on the employability course.

Other than the changing use of the acronym NEET, there were conceptual difficulties with the term highlighted in the literature. Popular culture and representations of so-called NEET youth portray a negative stereotype of a homogenous group with common personal characteristics including: poor educational attainment, teenage pregnancy, use of drugs and alcohol, looked-after care status, persistent truancy, disability, mental health issues and criminal behaviour (Coles et al. 2010). In comparison, most academic literature suggests a more complex and diverse conceptualisation of so-called NEET youth as a heterogeneous group consisting of individuals from a wider range of backgrounds (Simmons 2008). The spectrum of circumstances therefore includes those with social and behavioural problems, youth from families with a culture of worklessness, others considered to be ‘floating so-called NEETs’ who alternate between periods of being NEET and phases of participation in further education (FE) courses, or phases of employment with no training (Simmons 2009), and individuals in transition or on a gap year before progressing onto further or higher education (Coles et al. 2010).

There are therefore many different conceptualisations of the term NEET, with several possible implications. Not least, conceptual ambiguity may arguably give rise to misconceptions. For instance, although many of my research participants displayed characteristic social, academic and behavioural issues, they were a heterogeneous group in that a substantial minority of them had higher GCSE grades, D and above but had enrolled late or were home-schooled. A few reported experiences of social anxiety and therefore also enrolled on the employability course as a transitory step towards mainstream provision. There is also the possibility that negative stereotypes could influence the educational experiences and outcomes of students enrolled on employability courses within a competitive education setting.

Competitive education environment

The introduction of the *Further and Higher Education Act 1992* has been one of the most influential changes, inasmuch as this reform established neoliberal principles impacting FE operational systems and work practices within settings. Consequently, colleges operated as large-sized businesses driven by market principles, centrally placed to meet students’ consumer rights and demands. It also meant that colleges were opened to the free market and could compete for students, funding, and resources. This ideological change created an ethics of competition, which transformed the educational landscape into a highly competitive enterprise. From the government’s perspective, an ‘ethics of competition’ primarily yields positive results; these competitive conditions help to promote choice, raise quality standards, and strengthen attempts to build a highly qualified and suitably trained workforce to compete in a global economy.

However, although unstated in government rhetoric, the literature suggests that the ‘ethics of competition’ produce challenging and negative outcomes in education settings (Apple 1996, 2001, 2004). In particular, the literature shows that it gives rise to a performance culture within the post-16 education sector. The performance culture, by which I mean the monitoring of educational services and staff performance through inspections and accountability measures, is furthermore seen in performance indicators and

standardised testing of pupils. Institutions compete for students, especially those considered good' and 'promising' as well as the recruitment of the 'best' teachers (Webb 2007). In this way, the existing academic literature highlights an increasingly competitive bureaucratic education system that prioritises performance and accountability measures, calculated to enhance quality standards of teaching and learning.

Central to these governance processes, is the increasing involvement of regulatory agencies such as the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted), an inspection agency that conducts institutional evaluations on the quality of education provision within a setting. Consequently, placing institutions in direct competition with one another. Various studies reveal that these regulatory conditions often disadvantage youth considered to be on the margins of education, contributing to traditional social inequities, hierarchies, and segregation (James et al. 2010). Researchers such as Simmons and Thompson (2011) suggest that so-called NEET and disengaged youth are more likely to face challenges in gaining access to popular courses. They are placed in direct competition with students who have had a stable period in education and acquired GCSE C and above qualifications. Given their previous academic failure, so-called NEET and disengaged youth are less likely to be considered as favourable students as there is greater uncertainty whether they could help institutions achieve their performance goals and funding targets.

Current academic conditions reproduce social division and establish marginalisation of some students in contemporary education settings. This is evident in the way settings use stringent educational processes, such as raised entry requirements and a prioritisation of academic qualifications to regulate access, but at the same time disqualifying those with no or low school-leaving qualifications. Thus, the rising competitive culture within academic institutions gradually constrains the extent to which youth who are lacking credentials, can upskill and acquire qualifications to become skilled, qualified workforce members as echoed in RPA rhetoric. On this basis, there is doubt because although RPA promotes the idea of greater availability of post-16 options, however, researchers such as Mirza-Davies (2014) and Allen (2016) have discovered that in actual reality, there are limited RPA provision. There is thus uncertainty as to whether there are actual available and meaningful educational opportunities in FE colleges, particularly for youth considered to be the margins of education. This exploratory focus consequently influenced the methodological framework of this study.

Research methodology

This article draws on qualitative research conducted with seven course tutors and twenty-six students from the 2013–14 and 2014–15 cohorts enrolled on the fictitiously named Level 1 Achieving Skills Course. The Site, a pseudonym for a large general FE college, was situated in the East Region of England and provided a wide spectrum of vocational education, apprenticeships and university education. Reportedly, the Level 1 Achieving Skills Course provides a highly supportive learning environment and it is expected that so-called NEET and disengaged youth will benefit from improved qualifications. A detailed report was submitted to the Research Committee at The Site to gain approval for the study and permission was accordingly granted. Participants were sampled 'purposively', using criterion sampling as the chosen sampling strategy as it enabled

predominant focus on participants that have direct involvement with this employability course. Adopting a case study approach, multiple methods of data collection were used, including classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, focussed group discussions and document analysis.

Two staff members from the Level 1 Achieving Skills Course participated in the staff survey on student behavioural issues, designed as part of the pilot study. They left their contact details on the questionnaire for further discussion and when we met, they both agreed to participate in my main research project. The course team, comprising of seven tutors consented to participate in the research. I also visited the Level 1 student groups on the course to introduce myself and the project, followed by a flyer capturing project details. Classroom observations were conducted with one class per year and their tutor that volunteered: the tutor, Hope and her class of fifteen students agreed to participate in the study during March 2014 till July 2014 and in Gina's class, her fourteen students participated in the study from September 2014 till July 2015. Everyone gave informed consent. A total of 130 classroom observation hours were conducted over the two academic years. During these observations, I soon discovered that although some students felt comfortable speaking with me on an individual basis, several others seemed a lot more vocal and confident in a group with their friends. For this reason, I decided to also include focus groups as one of the methods for the main study. The students who participated in the study were predominantly White British, except for two black female students and one white male student of Polish origin. These students were aged 16–18, the majority having low or no GCSE grades. However, a few students did have higher GCSEs grades, but were too late to enrol on vocational courses. Several students were referred by the NEET intervention team¹ whilst others self-referred or were signposted by mainstream vocational courses. A large proportion of students had wide-ranging academic needs and previous school expulsions.

Staff interviews were planned for the later stage of the study once the student interviews were completed. It was hoped that this time delay would build trust and enable staff to feel comfortable and able to provide a candid account of their practice and operational systems in the college. All seven staff interviews were conducted in their respective offices providing privacy. The challenge throughout the data collection and analysis stage was to make sense of large volumes of data with the aim of reducing it. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) suggest that researchers ought to make data analysis and data collection a simultaneous activity in order to avoid the risk of repetitious and unfocused data. I adopted a 'manual thematic coding procedure'. This involves the use of an interview schedule and classroom observations to elicit descriptive and explanatory accounts of government policies and institutional practices impacting the students' levels of participation and achievement. The interviews and focus groups were transcribed in full and then each transcript was read alongside a framework of all major themes and sub-themes that were outlined within the interview keys and coded. Whilst reading the transcripts, new themes and sub-themes that emerged during interviews were listed together with the original interview keys. This created a complex index of all the major sub-themes that arose throughout the fieldwork and data analysis. For instance, the ghetto theme started to emerge from the students' focus group discussions and its transcriptions. The idea of the ghetto was strengthened as a recurring theme emerging from tutors' narratives, elaborated in the next section of this article.

In accordance with the British Sociological Association ethical guidance, all research participants were asked for full consent prior to the classroom observations, interviews and focus group discussions. Pseudonyms were used for all participants and the college setting. And all respondents were offered full anonymity but accepted that staff identity could be revealed due to the small scale of the research project. They indicated that this would not create an issue, which became evident in the frank and open accounts from nearly all staff members. This study has limitations, some of which relate to common critiques of qualitative research and some of which are inherent in this study's research design. One of the key limitations pertains to the fact that the researcher is an employee and therefore a colleague of the staff members that participated in the study. Though we did not know each other, staff members may have had difficulty adjusting to me taking on the role of an interviewer, leading them to be restrained and guarded in their responses. Likewise, these issues were possibly also experienced by the students participating in the study. Recognising these limitations, the entire research process, including the findings and coding of the data were discussed and scrutinised by two peers. A further limitation of the study was that the research sample was restricted. Generalisability was not the intended goal of the study, but what I address is the issue of transferability (Lincoln and Guba 1985) as similar processes might be taking place in other further education colleges in different parts of the country.

Key findings

The emerging research findings revealed three key themes: Exclusion by design; Incidents of vulnerability, ghettoisation and securitisation in Q-Block; Representation of exclusion within the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF).

Exclusion by design

Based on my fieldwork data, it exposed the profound way in which The Site's use of physical space, mirrored the stigmatisation and marginal position of students on the fringes of education.

Illustrating this argument, the Level 1 Achieving Skills Course was delivered in Q-Block, a temporary prefabricated building positioned out of sight on the outskirts of The Site. This temporal space was primarily used to deliver programmes for so-called 'non-traditional' students, i.e. so-called NEET young people, disabled students, ESOL (English for speakers of other languages), Access to HE and adult learners on Welfare to Work programmes. Q-block thus represented the spatial location for 'outsiders' and non-traditional learners on the fringes of education, seeking access to formal education and training.

Geographically distanced, a sizable car park created a vast physical space that distinctly segregated Q-block from the rest of the various brick-buildings more centrally positioned within The Site. Symbolising permanence, these buildings were allocated for a wide range of mainstream vocational education provision and apprenticeship training, designed to enfold conventional students into the main operations of this college. Possibly, because students on these courses attracted the required 16–18 government funding pivotal to the running of college operations. Underpinned by the performance culture, my data revealed how The Site used the allocation of space as a powerful governance

system of ordering, categorising, and confining marginalised students in a temporal location on the outskirts of this FE college. On this account, structurally enforcing segregation amongst student groups and therefore exposing the way power is exercised within this college. Highlighting one of the key arguments that buildings are not neutral spaces.

Moreover, institutional decision making around the use of space amplified the stark academic and ideological divides that exist between students with GCSEs grade D and above, and those who have not, but are trying to accrue qualifications within the setting. Academic prestige was esteemed, especially evident in the way that university education was positioned in a newly designed building at the entrance of the college gates. However, given its location, this modern higher education (HE) building was the furthest from Q-Block and more specifically, the students on the employability course. Firmly segregating students considered to be on the margins of education from physical structures embodying desirable credentials and higher levels of study within The Site. Augmenting the spatial and symbolic representations of exclusion by design.

In theory this college could ideally offer youth considered to be on the margins of education the chance to progress from their pre-vocational course to university education (if this was their academic goal). However, besides the existing evidence of exclusion by design highlighted in this paper, there are other empirical data which likewise discovered various systems of marginalisation which obstructed the participants' capacity to acquire essential academic credentials necessary for higher levels of study within the setting. For instance, social exclusionary discourses and practices manifested in the gatekeeping function of GCSEs (Cornish 2017), warehousing practices (Cornish 2018) and welfare-orientated teaching (Cornish 2019). Thus, although new RPA opportunities have been created, there was doubt whether the students enrolled on this employability course were indeed able to benefit from this second chance provision advertised in marketing brochures and RPA discourse.

Incidents of vulnerability, ghettoisation and securitisation in Q-block

Unprompted, both tutors and students on the Level 1 Achieving Skills employability course remarked on the building's 'separateness' from the rest of this large institution. However, apart from this shared observation, there was a distinct difference in their felt experiences of this enforced spatial divide. The course tutors mostly reported strong feelings of frustration, evident when Hope, one of the tutors on the course determinedly stated:

We are not a dumping ground! We are a college course. Lack of resources and the inability to tap into college facilities can be another challenge. Like, we struggle to get access to the sports hall, kitchens for students to do practical stuff that will help their learning on the course. (Interview with tutor, Hope, July 2014)

During the staff interviews, all of them emphatically stated that the Level 1 Achieving Skills employability course was not a 'dumping ground'. Citing what they believed was a perceived stigma that was apparent in The Site. This phrase 'dumping ground' not only described the course's marginal positioning, but Hope also explained its impact, shown in their inability to access desirable educational resources located in other parts of the college. Access to popular college resources, for example, the sports hall and kitchens, inevitably were non-existent to students on this employability course. Perhaps these

difficulties could be attributable to the course's lowered academic positioning on the QCF, discussed in the next section of this article. However, there was a strong possibility that stigma associated with the learners, could be a contributory factor too. Exemplifying this point of stigmatisation, the Faculty Manager Nina stated:

The concern that I have, always, is that the course is seen as a bit of a 'dumping ground' and I don't like that kind of term, but I can't think of another way to describe it. There is a risk of students being deemed a little bit too challenging or too complex, so they might be referred to our course. This idea that 'we can't deal with them, but they will be able to' ... (Interview with the Faculty Manager, Nina, December 2014)

Nina's narrative likewise cited the 'dumping ground' phrase, but it also echoed a commonly expressed belief amongst the course team that there was a stigma attached to the learners and the course. Aggy, another tutor likewise believed that their students were marginalised in the setting, when she claimed:

But why aren't these kids given a choice? They are being treated like second class citizens and they're not! Just because they're not able to achieve or to come out with these amazing A-C grade GCSEs. They're put on the waste "dump and are not provided for". ... (Interview with Tutor, Aggy, June 2015)

Drawing on powerful language, Aggy's narrative used words such as 'second class citizens', 'not able to', being 'put on the waste dump', and 'not provided for', to firmly underscore the students' marginal positioning within this college. Based on Aggy's interview, it constructed the idea that because the students have lower GCSE grades, it thus contributed to their apparent second-class status within the setting. However, here it must be acknowledged that a small minority of students had C and above GCSE grades. Which therefore raised the argument that the described treatment may not necessarily be only due to the students' academic grades. Quite possibly, it could be linked to the stigma attached to the course and students. Nevertheless, according to Aggy, all students on their course were relegated to the 'waste dump' where they were 'not provided for'. By implication, supposedly forgotten and conceivably written off. It may well be that this negative discourse about the course and students was dominant within The Site and therefore explained why the tutors and students struggled to gain access to other educational resources beyond Q-Block.

The student participants likewise recognised that the building which they occupied, was markedly separate from the rest of the college buildings. This observation was further elaborated in the subsequent focus group discussion:

- M: Our building is on its own. I find it distracting and hard to learn when there are outside stuff going on.
- Me: What do you mean outside stuff? Do you mean issues around family or friends?
- M: No, I mean outside the classroom, like you'll hear someone running past or ... (interrupted by D).
- D: In Q-block there are always people running, shouting, hitting walls. It's entertaining to be fair. (*Other students laughed and agreed to this and D continued*). Oh yeah definitely. Have you ever before been in Q-block for more than a day?
- Me: Why do you ask?
- D: Because there are regular fights and always entertainment.
- L: Someone is always kicking off around the corner.

- E: Yeah. Oh my god though, we sound like we're talking about a mental home. (Student focus group data, June 2014).

Evidently, the students' narratives held strong undertones of 'us' versus 'them', displaying a strong sense of affinity. Drawing on their collective experiences in the building, the participants knew that Q-Block 'housed' certain types of students who provided daily 'entertainment'. Jokingly, they described everyday student misconduct in the building; behaviour, which others could easily find distressing. However, for these participants, the daily fights, shouting, running, hitting walls and someone always 'kicking off', provided moments of entertainment. The described behaviour prompted one of the female students to remark that Q-Block resembled a 'mental home'.

Hope, one of the course tutors acknowledged difficulties with challenging behaviour in the classroom when she described:

I told the Learning Support Practitioner, you look after the five or six that want to work, and I will field this end of the room. It was that constant thing of Facebook, Youtube, not wanting to work, throwing things at each other, sitting on the tables, are on their mobile phones. But I think it was the volume, 50% of that group was girls and it was just that continuous, persistently poor behaviour and that classic girly-bitchy behaviour. "You've slagged me off on Facebook", "You've slept with my boyfriend". It was like East Enders² in the classroom! (Interview with tutor, Hope, July 2014)

My classroom observations likewise recorded an unexpected outburst (04th December 2015):

At 10am three students arrived one hour late (which sparked conflict in the class).
 Lindy: "Why do you let them in"? Lindy challenged Gina, the tutor.
 Gina: "There are different reasons why students are late, Lindy. This could be due to the train ..."
 Lindy: "... but they don't take the train!"

Gina ignored Lindy, told the students to come into the class, partly because she was trying to have a discussion on their lateness, but also to assess whether they have completed previous tasks. Regardless, Lindy became agitated, swearing loudly and hurling abuse at the late comers. She was immediately joined by fellow pupils causing further disruption by slamming folders on their desks. The anger outburst seemed mostly directed at the two female students, which probably influenced Gina's decision to send them to the library to finish course work, whilst the male student joined the lesson. The disruption and outburst lasted between 10–15 minutes.

Taken together, the above accounts illustrated the frequent, unexpected nature of classroom conflict which the tutors faced in their regular practice. Gina, one of the tutors commented:

I think we, uhm where our college is set up, we ... as in our course, are in the far corner away from all the amenities. So, that can sometimes be a reason why we feel unsafe, I suppose being so far away. So, I think if we were more in the hub of the college, not only would the student benefit because they can use all the facilities that we have around. But it would make staff, I suppose feel safer if we have more support. (Interview with tutor, Gina, July 2014)

Gina was aware that their geographical location was on the outskirts of this college. She identified how this enforced spatial divide created exclusion, preventing their students

from accessing college resources as previously mentioned by Hope. However, this enforced geographical divide also impacted the tutors: they were physically segregated from wider college support and because of their regular dealings with student behavioural issues, this spatial exclusion intensified the tutors' sense of vulnerability.

My fieldwork data found that it was common practice for the course team to contact and involve security guards in their teaching practice. According to the tutors, this practice was necessary. The security guards were stationed at the entrance of the college gates. In other words, the guards were positioned near the HE building and other college facilities, but far removed from Q-Block. Uncritical of the use and reliance of security personnel on the course, Gina stated:

There is always some sort of disruption, nearly on an everyday basis ... Yeah, I have actually had security in and called them over, whenever I needed help. (Interview with tutor, Gina, July 2014)

The security personnel were considered as a key resource which the tutors relied on for security support in their everyday teaching practice. This paper recognises that security guards ostensibly personify discipline, control and regulation of student behaviour which perhaps explain why most of the tutors felt they could benefit from the regulatory gaze of security personnel near their building. Gina's narrative illustrated how the tutors' perceived need for protection, have established the securitisation of education on the course. Making it common practice for tutors to invite security personnel into an educational space to supposedly enforce discipline, maintain order and regulate student behaviour. However, in so doing, the tutors' practices potentially created a hostile classroom environment, perilously placing some students at risk of expulsion and academic failure. At the same time, also reinforcing any stigmatising attitudes about the students and employability course at The Site. Given this work culture, this paper argues that the tutors have overlooked key opportunities exploring alternative, pedagogical solutions dealing with the students' challenging behaviour in the classroom.

On the part of the students, the security guards hardly got mentioned, except near the end of the focus group, stated below:

- Me: Please complete the last sentence: Studying at this college is ... ?
 D: Well it's better than Sixth Form.
 E: We have Security. Security here oh my gosh, its actually so good.
 D: Our security's on hot lock down.
 E: It is. It's way better than Sixth Form, where you can just walk in there.
 (Student focus group data, June 2014).

Not once did the students mention security guards entering the classroom space, a distinct difference to that of their tutors' narratives. Could it be that the presence of security guards in education settings has become normalised for students on this employability course at The Site? Especially, considering that the students claimed that the FE college was a 'better' institution than Sixth Form college, which did not have any private security on their premises.

This paper recognised that amongst the students, there was an oblivious acceptance of the presence of security guards, characteristic of the securitisation of education on this course and within The Site. The effect, further shown in the way it constructed the

participants' perception of educational experiences and the significance of security guards in education.

Representation of exclusion within the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF)

Further evidence of exclusion by design, was likewise noticeable in the academic divide integral to the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF). This structured framework clearly depicted the unit- and credit-based qualifications, whilst at the same time, amplified the academic and ideological divides between pre-foundation learning and mainstream courses. For instance, in England, the QCF comprises eight different levels of education that indicate the rating of notional difficulty, ranging from entry level up to level eight. Entry level courses such as the Level 1 Achieving Skills employability course is a pre-vocational course and usually provides an introduction into education for those looking to enter formal education. However, this pre-vocational course is positioned outside the formal rung of mainstream vocational qualifications and therefore has lowered academic positioning. Reportedly, once students on this employability course attain their pre-vocational qualification, in principle they could access mainstream Level 1 qualifications, the first formal rung on the numbered system of qualifications that lead to access to vocational courses in college.

Yet, when it comes to so-called NEET and disengaged youth, there is a growing body of academic research which recognise that access to higher educational pathways was not straightforward. For instance, researchers such as Atkins (2009) discovered that youth considered to be on the margins of education tend to be enrolled on courses on the lower rung of the qualification's framework instead of higher-level study programmes which can promote enhanced academic and financial prospects. Therefore, when so-called NEET and disengaged youth engage in education, researchers identified that they were often restricted access to higher-status modes of knowledge (Russell, Simmons, and Thompson 2011). Consequently, they did not have the educational opportunities to develop a stronger knowledgebase that met academic requirements for higher levels of study and training. Accordingly, raising doubt over the extent to which the positioning of this employability course was likely to offer youth with low school-leaving qualifications the opportunity to progress through the different qualification levels within the QCF.

Critical discussion

There is compelling evidence that The Site's governance system powerfully contributed to the segregation and marginal positioning of students on this employability course. So-called NEET and disengaged youth were spatially and academically confined to Q-Block, a temporal building located on the outskirts of this college. They were stigmatised, which limited their capacity to access educational resources within the setting. Loïc Wacquant's theory of the ghetto (2004, 2008) has significance because it provides a strong focus on spatial marginality of sites used as a weapon of confinement and control for the dominant. His theory also acknowledges how the longstanding stigmatisation of socially excluded groups contributed to an exclusion, which was at once symbolic, social and spatial.

Wacquant conceptualised that a ghetto is an ethnically homogenous area that hold all members of a subordinate group and their institutions 'and prevent them from fanning into the city' (Wacquant 2008, 114). He made specific reference to the black American ghetto, characteristic of 'ethnic homogeneity, spatial confinement, shared cultural identity, mutual distancing, a retreat into the sphere of the family, the loss of economic function, the development of parallel institutions and the state retrenchment' (Wacquant 2008, 114). In terms of my empirical data, Wacquant's theory of the ghetto has importance because so-called NEET and disengaged youth on the employability course, likewise, could not 'fan into the city' (Wacquant 2008, 114), but were segregated from the hub of college life. They were spatially confined to Q-Block, a temporal prefabricated building positioned on the margins of this college. Construed as 'second class citizens', former so-called NEET and disengaged youth were reportedly relegated to the 'waste dump' where they were 'not provided for', conceivably forgotten and written off. This paper argues that The Site's governance systems and the tutors' work practices have created academic conditions which constructed Q-Block as the ghetto of this college: it embodied a place of conflict; spatially constraining learners seeking access to qualifications and resources; students and tutors experiencing enforced physical segregation from wider college facilities; the classroom space being frequented by security personnel; it was considered a provider of 'entertainment'; described as a 'mental home'.

Although Q-Block was not an ethnically homogenous area as conceptualised in Wacquant's theory, however, it was the temporal space assigned for non-traditional learners and underachievers requiring second-chance provision. Arguably, students in Q-Block were considered as 'outsiders' and although they shared this cultural identity and spatial confinement, they were a diverse group, comprising students who were disabled, adult learners and so-called NEET and disengaged youth. More specifically, so-called NEET and disengaged youth were likewise not a homogenous group but were reportedly viewed and treated as such in this setting. Through the analytical framework of the ghetto, it aids the identification of longstanding stigmatisation of socially excluded groups. The participants were 'othered' and faced continual stigmatisation in this college. It resembled the way they were viewed in popular culture, which demonstrated the existence of well-established stereotypical conceptions being reinforced in this college. Consequently, reflecting social policy, historical continuities and wider social processes which contributed to their social and spatial marginalisation (Powell and Lever 2017).

In drawing on the concept of the ghetto, it amplified the disjuncture between policy and practice. For instance, even though new government and educational opportunities were created to promote RPA re-engagement education for youth considered to be on the margins of education, participants on this employability course had minimal chance at re-integration. Quite possibly, the dominant stereotypical view of the young 'feckless', 'lazy' and 'dangerous' individuals, perhaps had bearing on the situation. Seemingly, some students lived up to this reputation of displaying problematic behaviour, triggering the tutors' call for security intervention. However, through the analytical framework of the ghetto, it exposed the underpinning prejudice and discrimination which participants faced in their struggle to access educational resources beyond the remit of Q-Block. In this competitive educational landscape, essential and desirable educational resources were positioned in the hub of the college, easily accessible to 'conventional'

students who were part of the dominant culture within the setting. It was therefore no coincidence that the participants and tutors could not access facilities and desirable resources such as the sports halls and kitchens. On this basis, I agree with Wacquant (2004) that the ghetto was an instrument of power wielded by dominant groups as a device of confinement and control for the 'established' group.

Wacquant recognised that 'enforced isolation from the outside leads to the intensification of social exchange and cultural sharing inside' (2004, 3). This issue of enforced segregation provoked a mixed response between the students and tutors. On the part of the students, the enforced isolation established a sense of affinity. This was evident in their shared collective experiences of conflict or 'entertainment', whichever preferred. They cited conflict in the building, but there was no mention of the involvement of security personnel in the classroom context. However, from the tutors' perspectives, enforced segregation triggered intense feelings of vulnerability and resulted in them often contacting security personnel conceivably to help regulate behaviour, enforce discipline, and maintain control during classroom conflict. The data indicated that it was common practice amongst the course team to regularly contact security personnel. Consequently, establishing the securitisation of education on the course, but at the same time creating a perilous teaching environment which could escalate conflict, cause expulsion, and jeopardise academic outcomes. The presence of security guards has become normalised amongst the students. They appeared uncritical of why their college had private security but not the local Sixth Form College. It meant that for participants on this employability course at The Site, problematic student behaviour was regularly managed by security operations in the absence of alternative pedagogical solutions being explored during the research period. This paper argues that such practice reinforced stigmatising attitudes and contributed to the marginalisation of their students within the setting.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to explore exclusion by design and how the allocation of physical space governed the educational experiences of so-called NEET and disengaged youth enrolled on the Level 1 Achieving Skills in college. This college provides a wide spectrum of vocational education and in principle, could provide second chance provision for youth seeking educational opportunity for improved qualifications. However, in applying Wacquant's conceptualisation of the ghetto to my data, the paper exposed how this college's governance systems led to exclusion by design. Participants were confined in Q-Block, a temporal building positioned on the outskirts of the college. Symbolising the ghetto in this college, Q-Block signified the place of mixed emotions, confinement, exclusion, struggle, social control, contest, and security operations.

Instead of permanence and re-integration, this paper demonstrates how a prefabricated building was used for RPA re-engagement provision, keeping so-called NEET and disengaged youth on the periphery of this setting. Academic exclusion was further revealed in the structure of the QCF, which established and reinforced the lowered academic position of this employability course. Through the analytical lens of the ghetto, it exposed the dominance of longstanding stigmatisation impacting the educational experiences of former so-called NEET and disengaged youth participating in my study. The findings highlight concern over the securitisation of education and the repercussions

for students on this course. This paper accentuates that buildings at The Site were not neutral places. It argues for equal access and a more inclusive college environment, drawing all courses and students into the hub of the setting. This inclusive ethos should extend to the QCF structure, being modified to bring pre-vocational courses into the formal rung of mainstream vocational qualifications. Therefore, bolstering its academic positioning with the aim of these qualifications leading to higher levels of study and improved employment prospects.

Notes

1. A service to support young people aged 14–18 believed to be at high risk of NEET and unlikely to achieve full potential without additional support.
2. A British soap opera set in Albert Square in the East End of London, broadcasted on BBC One.

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ORCID

Carlene Cornish  <http://orcid.org/000-0003-3488-7968>

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