Doing Relationships in a More-than-Human Learning Environment: A Posthumanist Inquiry

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Abstract

This thesis explores the 'doing' of relationships within a more-than-human learning environment and the learning generated in that context. Research evidence indicates that building supportive and trusting relationships between adults and young people leads to positive learning outcomes for young people. However, what elements constitute the 'doing' of relationships and how they are enacted is less evident. This thesis explores how relationships are constituted or 'done' on a day-to-day basis and how learning is generated through the assemblage of human and more-than-human elements.

This thesis combines a critical posthumanist framework with an ethnographic methodology to examine relationships and learning within the National Citizenship Service (NCS), a government sponsored, community-based programme. This study attempts to demonstrate how thinking with posthuman practices pays heed to the relationality and interconnectedness of the world, drawing attention to the more-than-human in messy, dynamic entanglements. A cohort of 68 young people, aged 16 years and 11 staff, aged 18-25 years, were followed as they participated in the four-week NCS programme across a range of learning contexts that included an outdoor education centre, a university campus, a college classroom and sites within the local community. Whilst research on relationships and learning predominantly focuses on the human-to-human interaction, posthumanism troubles the anthropocentrism of this approach. This posthuman ethnography moves across these times and spaces to analyse how learning and relationships emerge in these material-discursive iterations.

The substantive chapters focus on the materiality and temporality of learning moments during the programme. By using encounters between young people, adults and the material elements in specific times, the thesis demonstrates the vibrancy and agency of a chair, of noise and the use of mobile phones, and their implications in personal or group learning. Doing this challenges the many binaries of adult-young person, material-human, teacher-taught, individual-environment, thinking-doing, that permeate educational research. This thesis attempts to demonstrate that the promise of posthuman, post-qualitative inquiry may lie in the new/alternative perspectives and insights they offer to practice education in less anthropocentric ways.

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Chapter One – Introduction

"*When she thought it over afterwards it occurred to her that she ought to have wondered at this, but at the time it all seemed quite natural"* (Carroll, 2016, p.7)

1.1 The curiosity that started it all

First words…, first words are difficult. What if they do not capture you? What are they the first words of? Where will this go? Where do I start? Maybe it is better to pay heed to the words of Deleuze and Guattari. I am not at the start. I am in the middle. I am always in the middle. This is where I start.

"Of course they do well with you, you do fun things with them"

How many times have I heard variations on these words from other professionals working with young people? Every time, I heard them I would feel frustrated and angry, ruminating on the unfairness of the comments made about young people and myself. How dare the professionals dismiss our efforts to build relationships as merely 'fun things'? How did they not see how hard both young people and I worked to achieve positive relationships? How did they not see how tough some of the 'fun' activities were for the young people – requiring problem solving skills, perseverance, mutual co-operation and reciprocity in learning together?

My background is in working with young people aged 11-18 years in community settings – across a range of environments, both formal settings (e.g. schools) and informal settings (e.g. youth clubs) and everything in between. I had held a number of roles in charities as well in local government which included delivering over 300 residentials with teenagers, delivering change programmes, training, advising and supporting voluntary organisations in their safeguarding responsibilities. Over a period of fifteen to twenty years I had built extensive experience of working with teenagers excluded by society.

I worked with some of the most vulnerable teenagers, the young people that come attached with labels: 'young offender', 'looked after child', 'close to exclusion' from school, 'NEET'[1], 'ADHD'. They came with different labels but one thing was

[1] In the UK, NEET was a term previously used for under 18's, and it signified that the child was Not in Education, Employment or Training.

common: their referral to the services I worked in would include a reference to their 'challenging behaviour'. Their behaviour was the problem and yet each and every young person had something to give to society, if only people took the time to find 'it'. Over several decades of working with young people, I saw little change in the practices of supporting some of the most vulnerable people in the U.K.'s systems of education and welfare. What I observed in my work is young people being 'othered' by adults or systems, their experiences not heard or recognised and having very little agency in making important decisions in their lives. More importantly, despite individual efforts, many of our institutions employ structures and practices that are often neglectful of the most vulnerable children and young people. Young-Bruehl (2012) conceptualises this phenomenon as 'Childism', that is, society's ongoing prejudice against children, particularly vulnerable children.

However, after many years, I realised my anger and frustration about more mainstream practices were not helpful. Instead, I became interested and curious as to what 'truth' lay behind the statements that young people behaved better with me because they were having fun. What made this so difficult for others? Did this help build better relations? What was being achieved through such relations? Was I inadvertently making it more difficult for them when they engaged in institutional environments such as school? These were hard questions to answer and made me reflect on my role as possibly an unknowing object in the production and reproduction of powerful hegemonies (Page, 2018).

Was this unfair on me, perhaps? However, my reflections led me to recognising my fundamental belief in the difference relationships of quality and equity can make for a young person. I can't change institutions and entrenched practices but I do recognise that change can happen in the everyday habits and practices that make up the social world (Pedwell, 2021). My aim has always been to build and maintain supportive relationships with whoever I work with, to give them the foundation that may enable them to flourish in the future. This reflection awakened my curiosity in thinking about relationships in learning environments. What do we already know, and can we know relationships and learning in new ways? These questions initiated and oriented my PhD research.

1.2 Introduction to key concepts in this study

This thesis is an exploration of relationships and the everyday practice of 'doing' relationships. The existing relationship literature overwhelmingly emphasises the importance of relationships between adults and young people for better outcomes e.g. good/healthy relationships lead to increased academic achievement (Crosnoe, Johnson, and Elder, 2004), well-being (Holfve-Sabel, 2014) and improvements in behaviour (Stager, 2005). There is also consensus on what qualities are needed for a positive relationship, a central tenet being trust. Trusting relationships enable the child's voice to be heard (Bell, 2002), facilitating their involvement in decisions about their own lives. There is, sometimes, a sense in the relationships literature that 'doing' relationships may be a simple endeavour. However, as is frequently seen in areas of work such as Serious Case Reviews (SCR) and Safeguarding Practice Reviews (SPR)[2], relationships are difficult to build. Our preoccupation has been on identifying where things go wrong and less about evidencing instances of how to build and sustain relationships between adults and young people. This thesis attempts to look closely at how relationships get constituted and how learning occurs within a specific context.

1.2.1 Relationships

"Relationships are our natural habitat" (Cozolino, 2014, p.4)

As humans, the prevalence of 'I' in our lexicon often locates us as individuals, but we may come by this understanding precisely because, as Cozolino (2014) writes, positive social interaction allows us to thrive. Whilst attachment theorists have helped to recognise the importance of early caregiver/child relationships (Schneider, 1991), other relationships also have a significant impact. I started this research because I was interested in the complexity of the relationship between adults and young people in a learning context. Often the focus is on the interplay of behaviour, communication and emotions (Duck, 1998) between individuals and the impact that this has on subsequent behaviour, communication and emotions.

[2] SCRs and SPRs are the legal mechanisms in England and Wales that seek to understand and learn from the devastating incidents of serious harm or deaths of children and young people where abuse is known or suspected. It encompasses all agencies that work with children, including social care, health and education.

Further to the role of individuals, the research consistently and robustly acknowledges that relationships are contextual (Pianta, Steinberg and Rollins, 1995; Roffey, 2010; McLaughlin, Aspden and McLachlan, 2015). In professional environments, the contexts are often defined through the lens of human-directed activities, e.g. school and organisational cultures (Klem and Connell, 2004; Ferguson *et al.*, 2021), the community and families (Crosnoe, Johnson and Elder, 2004; McLaughlin, Aspden and McLachlan, 2015) and institutional or political structures (Rodd and Stewart, 2009; Holfve-Sabel, 2014). Whilst these are helpful conceptualisations, they are anthropocentric, in other words, they signal that the world exists/should be known from a human perspective.

As Vanessa Watts (2013) writes, the Euro-Western approach of demarcation between humans and other objects/life-forms in the world is not indicative of the way all peoples theorise and in turn, understand the world. Watts reminds us that different understandings can bring a different praxis. This idea of differing praxis is echoed by Barad (2007) who proposes that acknowledging that humans are within the world requires refuting individualism and committing to the relationality of the world. As I will explore further through the thesis, understanding the connectedness of the world leads to a rethinking of relationships, both what is a relationship and what impacts a relationship.

The recognition of the relationality of the world opens up a wealth of other areas to explore, to understand what else might be implicated in the 'doing' of relationships. Relationships are a complex interaction of different aspects: not only feelings, behaviours, cultural or societal norms but also the world around us in all its physicality. An exploration of these alternative ways of knowing relationships may offer new insights into the nature of relationships between young people and adults in learning contexts. This study explores relationships as iterative, dynamic and involving (re)actions as they move in and with the world – they are a 'doing', not an end result. In addition to the exploration of the 'doing' of relationships, the complexity of interaction implies a dynamism to relationships that belies a linear sense of temporality, which may also offer new insights.

1.2.2 Learning

This study takes a broad view of what is meant by learning. Uta Papen (2012) asserts that much of the academic literature examining learning concentrates on the child,

locates learning within individuals and focuses on formal environments such as schools. In addition, there is often a clear distinction made between the teacher and the taught, particularly within the learning relationships of adults and young people. In this dyadic relationship, the focus of efforts is often on the cognitive development of the young person or child, for example, exam success. The adult education and international development fields trouble the aforementioned conceptualisations by recognising both the importance of informal learning and the social features of learning (Tough, 2002; Wenger, 2010; Robinson-Pant, 2020). This wider view of learning also tends to be found in the youth work literature, where due to the voluntary nature of engagement for young people, the focus is on learning through experience (Ord, 2012).

Instead of thinking about different types of learning, Vadeboncoeur (2006) proposes that we ask "How does a particular context contribute to learning?" (p.272) and this begs the further question, what does context entail and where might relationships be situated in this? Just as relationships are enacted as being part of the world, examining context suggests that learning happens as part of being in the world. This gives complexity to the nature of learning and relationships that brings a new perspective that does not focus on the binaries of teacher/student, adult/young person, school/community and instead embraces the fluidity and indeterminacy as to who or what is the teacher/the learner and what is being learned in any context. Embracing fluidity and indeterminacy allows for understanding movement of learning and relationships not as defined outcomes but as ongoing processes in which they make each other, or as Donna Haraway writes, as "sympoietic arrangements" (Haraway, 2016, p.58), an idea which I will explore further in this study. Therefore, in this study, learning is recognised as a dynamic, multi-faceted, multi-connected aspect in a wider context.

1.3 How and where to study the 'doing' of relationships and learning?

In exploring relationships and learning, my interest lies in the 'doing', that is, exploring the day-to-day world of practice and praxis. Relationships are not about a defined future but about the moment; this perhaps suggests that learning is also of the moment. In this vein, as I explore in the methodology, being with and part of the relationships-building process lends itself to an approach that allows openness to the experiences of others and of myself, which is why I embraced an ethnographic approach. Ethnography

is widely used in educational contexts (Cottle, 2022), is a relationship-based practice (Campbell and Lassiter, 2014) and a method of inquiry that calls for proximity to the area of study (Markham, 2016). These characteristics provide a rationale for choosing an ethnographic approach.

However, the approach has traditionally tended to recognise relationships as primarily between humans, although with new approaches such as digital and sensory ethnography, this is changing. Typically, the significance of the context may be explored with the role assigned to it is as object of interest or even backdrop, rather than as being implicated in the dynamics. In this regard, Lincoln & Denzin (2018) call for ethnographies to be "reimagined, repurposed, refunctioned…to unravel the complexity of the milieu" (p.927). Part of this challenge is to consider how we might better pay attention to all our sensory experiences, not just to sight (Pink, 2015) and how we might understand the other-than or more-than-human. For instance, Lien & Pálsson (2021) review past ethnographic studies through the lens of the more-than-human, exploring other social and relational practices that were not centred on the human and conclude that this line of exploration can "meaningfully integrate the affective and the ecological, the individual and the relational" (p.16). I have drawn on these provocations and posthuman concepts of inquiry in this study.

With the 'how' decided, the 'where' remained to be negotiated – ideally an environment in which adults and young people had to build learning relationships or relationships for learning. In thinking about what may be implicated across contexts, it was important to consider opportunities to engage in both a 'learning' programme and one which is delivered in a variety of environments. This led me to the National Citizen Service (NCS) programme, a programme I had loosely been involved with since its inception in 2010/11. I will explore my involvement, my views, the aims and the contextual factors of NCS in the next chapter. NCS has defined outcomes of expected learning and would fall within the non-formal learning category. Whilst definitions of non-formal learning vary, the general features tend to include structured programmes of learning with intentionality on the part of the learner but lack of certification (Rogers, 2014a). Alternatively it has also been proposed that it is better to consider "learning in informal [non-formal] arrangements" (Straka, 2009, p.141), thereby drawing attention to the importance of context as much as of the learner.

A second reason for choosing NCS is that it is a time-limited programme and neither the staff nor the young people tend to have prior knowledge of each other. They are building new relationships and they have to do it very quickly. Finally and most crucially, when thinking about what else gets implicated in the building of relationships, NCS, as it was in 2019 when I did my fieldwork, was a programme that varied in constitution every week for four weeks– with changes in location, hours, aims of learning, intensity and even some activity delivery staff. The only constant is the teams of adults and young people who move together throughout the 4-week programme. The peculiarity of temporal and spatial contexts, unlike that of any other national, open-access programme for young people, meant I was able to consider relationships from different perspectives.

1.4 Research questions

My overarching research question was:

How are relationships 'done' in the context of non-formal, community-based programmes like NCS?

In particular, a programme like NCS offers an opportunity to understand what is involved in the daily practice of building and maintaining relationships, due to its changing programme and environment. The first sub-question, as it relates to this is:

a) *What factors are implicated in the practice of 'doing' in learning relationships in this context?*

This relationality recognises that 'doing' relationships may not be straightforward and that the negotiation of these relationships will involve learning. To consider what this may look like, the second sub-question that guided this research is:

b) *How does the assemblage of factors generate learning for young people and staff in this context?*

1.5 What do I mean by….?

1.5.1 The framework of posthumanism

The title of this thesis includes the phrase "a posthuman inquiry". I have made hints to the approach of posthumanism in referring to connectedness, relationality, more-than-

human, materiality, entanglement and indeterminacy. These are all concepts that I explore further in Chapter 3. However, for the introduction, I wish to state that posthumanism is not a cohesive movement in which scholars all take the same stance as to what it is and is not. Rosi Braidotti in her book *Posthuman Knowledge* (2019b) offers an exploration of the narratives that have arisen as scholars have departed from hegemonic humanism. Humanism is replete with binaries; for example, depictions of what it means to be human start with being defined as human or not human, mind as opposed to body, nature versus culture. Braidotti writes that in moving away from these binaries, different and convergent lines of thought have emerged that implicate the world in a construction of what it means to be human. However, Braidotti moves beyond what it means to be human to give consideration to "what kind of subjects are 'we'" (2019b, p.43)?

In its consideration of subjectivity, posthumanism posits a wider understanding of who or what gets to act or speak. Zalloua (2021) depicts this as a 'flat' ontology. The ontology recognises immanence: there is no outside of the world, only being in the world and that the world is relational; everything is connected to something else (Haraway, 2016). In recognising the transversality and movement in these connections, Braidotti (2019b) refers to a 'relational' ontology in which there is always the capacity to affect or be affected.

In terms of this research, posthumanism is an approach that opens up the dynamism of the world and which pays attention to the 'other'. In thinking with posthumanism, I am called, as the researcher, to consider the more-than-human as much as or instead of the human, in considering how relationships are built and what learning is generated from this multiple and complex assemblage. In Chapter 3, I explore in more depth my approach to and understanding of posthumanism and in particular, what this may open up in thinking about relationships and learning in the NCS context.

1.5.2 What is a young person?

Posthumanism is a provocation to consider the other; it invites one to consider what else might be happening and to shine a light on other stories and other ways of being. It is with the backdrop of this provocation that I want to examine terminology around young people and more importantly why I refer to young people as I do in this thesis. Within this introduction, I have tended to refer to young people when discussing children or

students. ‘Young people’ is the term I feel most comfortable with, particularly when referring to the age range of the children in this study. NCS is targeted at 16 to 17 year olds; therefore, the institutionally defined learners in this programme are in their mid to late adolescence. This is a complex age. For a start, for the purposes of certain aspects of UK law, they are defined as children, for example, in safeguarding, while in other legal frameworks they are recognised in the same way as adults, for example in cases of domestic abuse. Crucially, they are in the midst of physical and neurophysiological changes (Blakemore, 2018) that mean they are transitioning from children to adults. International law also defines under 18s as children, most notably the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Unicef, 1989). However, there is no legal definition of a ‘young person’ either in the UK or internationally, although the United Nations has conceptualised ‘youth’ as people between the ages of 15 and 24 years old (Clark-Kazak, 2009).

My working experience has been predominantly with teenagers across the full span of 13-19 years old. My colleagues and I never referred to them as teenagers but always as young people. Young people, as a terminology, was directed by policy; all government bodies and funders used the phrase when referring to the adolescent age group. There are good reasons for the use of the descriptor, not least that it recognises members of the age group as part of society and not as separate from the rest of the community (even if practice did/does not always follow this).

1.5.3 What about the adults?

In NCS, there is a feature of the programme that further troubles the distinctions between learners and teachers, and that is the short delivery window. Again, I will explore the implications of this in more detail but NCS tends to be delivered during the summer break; it is a seasonal job. Therefore, the types of individuals who are available to work on this are people between jobs or people who have longer summer holidays such as school staff or students at university. This typically means that staff teams are fairly young. For instance, the cohort I joined only had two staff members out of a team of 11 who were over 23 years old. Considering the age range given by the UN as to what they conceptualise as ‘youth’, this puts the majority of the staff team I worked with as ‘youth’ alongside the young people.

An alternative might be to refer to them as young adults. However, in contrast to the young people, the staff are there for more than voluntary or altruistic reasons. They are in a paid roles with responsibilities and therefore my determination of them recognises this. Therefore, I have opted to describe the staff either as 'staff' or to refer to their roles, as in 'Team Leaders' or 'Assistant Team Leaders'.

1.6 The structure of this thesis

The next chapter provides an overview of NCS and the contextual features that characterised each week of delivery during fieldwork. In providing this, I will also illuminate possible co-constituting agents that have shaped the research findings. I will follow this in Chapter 3 with an overview of the philosophical and conceptual ideas that have informed my approach to the research. I will explore relationships and learning in more detail, with a particular exploration of what a posthuman perspective may offer in adding to existing knowledges. I then build on posthuman approaches and what it may offer for the practice of research within the methodological considerations in Chapter 4.

The second half of the thesis consists of my research findings; Chapters 5, 6 and 7 present my analysis that was carried out using post-qualitative inquiry. The presentation of findings focuses on events, materiality and moments of wonder which are explored in tandem with theory and other research. In Chapter 8, I bring together the individual chapter analyses and discussions in a short overarching discussion showing the threads simultaneously as part of complex and multiple assemblages. I draw my conclusions in Chapter 9, paying particular attention to the contribution of this study and the implications for future research.

Chapter Two - What is NCS?

2.1 Introduction

The fieldwork context and site of research are a vital element of any empirical research and, as I explored in Chapter One, the National Citizen Service (NCS) provides the backdrop for my research. Although NCS is reasonably well-known, its origins, policy context, legislative and funding contexts are less well known. In addition, I have a strategic and operational relationship with NCS that predates this PhD research. This chapter will detail this wider context and my relationship with the programme. It will also outline the legislative and funding context for NCS, the deliverables of the programme and what the staff and young people are required to do as part of their programme. This thesis takes a posthuman approach which asks for attention to be paid to the materiality of everyday life, the role of the more-than-human in the entanglement of the world. With this in mind, the chapter will paint a picture of the overarching structure of the programme, signalling the spatial and temporal characteristics of the context. In the methodology chapter, I describe the specific four-week programme that I participated in for my fieldwork.

This is not a chapter that sets out neutral or objective 'facts' about the fieldwork context as I recognise that I am entangled in the world both as a researcher and a person. I have a relationship with NCS that dates back to the inception of the programme. I have been affected by NCS, have a history and a future based on this programme and the people involved. Therefore, I will contrast dominant understandings of the NCS programme alongside critical readings, including my own history and feelings regarding the programme.

2.2 NCS Aims and the wider context

The NCS is a government supported programme, established by the then Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government of 2010 and first delivered in the summer of 2011. In December 2016, the introduction of the NCS Bill saw NCS put onto a statutory footing, with overall responsibility for the programme given to the National Citizen Service Trust (NCS Trust), a Royal Charter body, in April 2017. At the time of writing, the legislation means the NCS is now under central government oversight and control, with a legal framework that includes reference to functions and financial

alignment to the government's objectives (UK Government, 2017). It was a programme championed by the then Prime Minister David Cameron as a key pillar in the "Big Society" policy initiatives and Mr. Cameron, at the time of writing, is the Chair of Patrons for the organisation.

The "Big Society" was central to the Conservative party election manifesto in 2010 and remained a key policy driver in the coalition government. Critically, it was an amorphous term that enabled the government to have flexibility in its application, which was advantageous to both coalition parties (Szreter and Ishkanian, 2012) in terms of satisfying both groups of supporters. In some respects, the 'Big Society' was a call to philanthropy through the giving of time, physical and emotional labour for the benefit of others, a sense of being part of something. Despite the rhetoric, the reality of initiatives that were promoted or developed, such as NCS, were not free of neo-liberal principles, with individuals and community groups encouraged to take responsibility for their own communities and move away from reliance on services provided by state-funded institutions, e.g. local government authorities or national charitable organisations. Not only is neo-liberalism rightly critiqued for its individual-focused ideology, it is also problematic in expecting action/change to be driven largely by individuals.

The implications of social policy driven by placing expectation on individuals, not collectives, to take responsibility, can be read/seen through my own experience at the time of the change in government. When the coalition government came to power, I was Chief Executive of a small, county-wide infrastructure charity supporting community groups and voluntary organisations who worked with young people. As a membership and advocacy organisation, there were a few member charities on a (fairly) secure financial and professional footing. However, approximately two thirds of the 500 strong membership were very small groups that existed on goodwill and limited funding. Many of the groups were embedded in specific geographic areas providing a service that was open to all young people in a particular age group, e.g. a village youth club for one or two nights a week for 11-16 year olds or a local advice drop-in for 16-18 year olds. The volunteers were exactly the type of individuals Mr. Cameron was targeting – members of the local community who volunteered their time and effort to varying degrees, a prominent and long-lasting feature in youth work provision (Jeffs and Smith, 2010). However, the capacity to volunteer was in addition to other

commitments, including jobs and families. Consequently, most people could only spare limited time and effort of perhaps a few hours per week. In terms of working with adolescents, many of them served most young people quite well. However, with regards to any young people who were vulnerable, or faced a number of challenges and/or displayed 'difficult to manage' behaviours, most of the volunteers were not equipped or skilled enough to understand, support or offer an appropriate service. More importantly, many did not want to, as it was not what they had volunteered to do. This is where organisations like mine would provide assistance to build capacity in supporting young people in need. This was achieved in two ways – where possible with advice and skill development for the volunteers and where this was not possible, by working alongside the local authority (local government) youth service to ensure all young people received the support they needed. The staff of the youth service were usually professional, trained, skilled and knowledgeable and a vital part of provision for a significant proportion of young people. The community provision led by the volunteers needed the support and help from experienced and skilled professionals. The two strands complemented each other, not always perfectly, but as a model, it ensured provision across the spectrum of needs of young people.

The changes in national policy were problematic in terms of a practice context for two reasons. Firstly, relying on well-meaning but unskilled and untrained people to undertake some quite complex work is at best naïve and at worst dangerous for all involved. Secondly, this background should be placed in light of the other major policy driver of the time. The Coalition government also ushered in the era of "austerity", in which huge funding cuts were made to many government departments, including budgets for local authorities. The result of this cut to funding decimated the provision of non-statutory functions across local government. This hit the local authority youth work service particularly hard because much of what was delivered was not required by statute. Whilst in terms of youth work practice, this had previously allowed a comprehensive, open access, locally-led service to flourish, now it meant that central and/or local government funding could be withdrawn without legal implications. For example, in Norfolk all youth centres were closed and the youth service disbanded after a cut of £4.8 million in funding (Williams, 2011). In effect the central government reduced monies for local communities and then asked the individuals in those same communities to make up the shortfall with their time and local fundraising. It was in

this context that NCS was introduced and heralded as the national youth work programme. I was very much against what it stood for, how it was being implemented and at what cost, both financially and operationally. It would seem incongruent given this objection, that I would go on to become involved in the NCS programme which I will detail a little further in this chapter.

NCS is aimed at 15-17 year olds, with the majority of young people accessing the programme in the summer after Year 11 has finished, therefore about sixteen years old. There is also an Autumn delivery with a much shorter programme which tends to be delivered in partnership with colleges and other sixth form provision. NCS had reached approximately 600,000 young people by 2019 according to the evaluation report (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2021). In the year I conducted my field work, 2019, 81,000 young people took part in the summer programme (Matthews *et al.*, 2021) across England. Whilst these participation figures seem impressive, NCS has been criticised for failing to reach its recruitment targets (Davies, 2019). Each year, providers are set targets for how many young people they should reach and despite the significant overall budget (detailed in the funding section of this chapter), the recruitment and retention targets are missed. This is in contrast to the amount of provision that young people have lost since austerity cuts began. Whilst the figures are not always clear, the Local Government Association stated that more than 600 youth centres had been closed since 2010 (Walker, 2018), whilst an earlier journalistic piece highlights that between 2012 and 2014 around 350 youth centres were closed, losing approximately 41,000 year round, open access places for young people (Shanks, 2017). This provision would have been a universal service with little to no barriers to attendance and open to a wider age range, typically 11-25 years old. Therefore, whilst the recruitment figures of NCS (above) are impressive, the service is actually very narrow in its reach, leaving gaps in services for other young people. The narrowing of services also restricts choices for young people in accessing the support that they feel they need, when they need it.

As stated in the Charter, the function of the programme is:

- *to provide or arrange for the provision of programmes for young people in England with the purpose of*

    i. enabling participants from different backgrounds to work together in local communities to participate in projects to benefit society, and

ii. *enhancing communication, leadership and team-working skills of participants,*

iii. *and*

- *to promote the programmes to*

  i. *young people in England,*

  ii.. *parents and carers of young people in England,*

  iii. *schools and other educational bodies, and*

  iv. *local authorities and other public bodies*.

The functions and what this means are expanded in other documents. For example, the three stated aims on the current public website are:

> **"*Social Cohesion* -** *Cultivating stronger, more integrated communities by fostering understanding between young people and their neighbours from different backgrounds…*
>
> ***Social Mobility*** *- Building essential skills for work and life, making sure young people can get ahead and are prepared for whatever the future holds – think of it as investing in our country's future talent…*
>
> ***Social Engagement*** *- Engaging young people in social action in their community as well as the democratic process, creating more understanding of their responsibilities as a citizen and their potential to affect change…*" (wearencs.com, 2021).

This, in 2019, was further supported by the NCS Programme Quality Framework which sets out the ethos of the programme and is designed to assess quality and assist in developing the specific delivery timetables. It contains five core components which young people should be experiencing on the programme (Fig.1).

These are supported by the 'Enabling Conditions' which:

> *"underpin quality and impactful delivery, detailing how programme set-up, staff*

training etc create programme environments that support young people's development" (Seasonal Staff Guide - fieldwork document).

Core Components		Enabling Conditions	
Connecting with new people (C1)	Making a difference (C2)	A coherent programme (EC1)	Strong, safe and trusting teams (EC2)
Reflecting on experiences (C3)	Experiencing Challenge (C4)	Well-supported and prepared staff (EC3)	Effective and empowered staff (EC4)
Feeling part of something bigger (C5)		A shared vision (EC5)	

Figure 1: Core Components and Enabling Conditions

2.3 Critiques of the programme and framework

The framework of NCS, as contained in these documents, is the structural underpinning of the programme. On closer examination of the Charter and the National Citizen Service Act 2017, there are a number of factors that could problematise the 'voluntary' nature of the programme. The Act makes provision for HMRC to send out information of the programme directly to homes where an eligible teenager resides (UK Government, 2017). In this respect, there is little choice as to whether you receive the information of the programme or not, thus blurring the 'voluntary' emphasis. This is further compounded by another feature of the Charter: it not only allows for the delivery of the programme but also specifically makes provision for the promotion of the programme through various statutory bodies, including schools. Therefore, educational institutions must allow the NCS to come into their schools and promote their service. This may seem fairly benign, but to my knowledge there is no other youth work provision that is afforded the same privilege of access to young people. Awareness of all resources/services available allows informed choice, whereas privileged promotional activity directs and perhaps limits choice.

These texts and contextual background matter. The Act and Charter are an active construction that works to compel/impel what comes next (D'Agnese 2020) and the aims of the programme (social cohesion, mobility and engagement) illuminate what is intended. This is a contextual framework that privileges some knowledges over others,

with a method that directs an expectation of learning framed in a particular way. The three aims emphasise the individual contribution to society, where the onus is on the young person to 'understand their responsibilities as a citizen' so that they 'can get ahead and are prepared for whatever the future holds' whilst 'fostering understanding between young people and their neighbours'. The aims do not call for community responses nor place an obligation on adults getting to know young people. They do not signal a reciprocal arrangement. Instead, the value of a young person is related to what they can give or contribute to others without a reciprocal arrangement of having the community hear their voice. It is for such narrowing of the scope of citizenship that the NCS programme has been critiqued as embodying a neoliberal view of social change (De St Croix 2017). It can be seen as potentially promoting a neoliberal tenet by facilitating an expectation that individual endeavour trumps communitarian efforts, with the programme facilitating learning to comply uncritically, as opposed to promoting social justice or participatory learning as citizenship (Mills and Waite, 2017). These peculiarities can also be seen as more impactful in a context where young people may struggle to alleviate the precarity of living and need to focus on maximising their employment potential through personal effort (Butler, 2015). This outcome has been evidenced elsewhere whereby motivations of young people to volunteer have been claimed to be driven by personal skill accumulation rather than for social betterment (Brooks, 2007). Therefore, the notions of citizenship within this framework are seen as being linked to learning to enact a neo-liberal, individual citizen rather than a citizenship that is cultivated for the wider, interdependent collective.

Whilst NCS has similarities with other youth work provision, such as learning outside of formal opportunities, enjoyable activities, building relationships with others and the community (Jeffs and Smith, 2010), there are fundamental differences in the practicalities of delivery. The aims and charter of the programme sit within a prescriptive framework that sets its intent as more than an informal learning opportunity for the young people, establishing the programme as a non-formal education opportunity. However, in considering what-is-happening with regards to learning, the programme offers rich contextual spaces in which to explore learning events that are different from both school and youthwork contexts. It is a targeted, compressed programme with a limited time of access, negating an important part of youth work provision in offering a place that is locally accessible, safe, with times that are flexible

to meet the needs of young people, for example, held in the evenings. The youth work flexibility means that relationships can be built predicated on a space that allows work with where the young person 'is' and where they are choosing to go. In contrast, NCS starts from having to build relationships in order to get the young person to a defined end point, a relationship based on achieving a programme's (monitored and evaluated) outcomes. It is this contained, defined and tight delivery framework that is both convenient and curious for my fieldwork. NCS is a bubble of 'doing' relationships, reaching high numbers of young people in the community whilst engaged in different, timetabled learning activities. This raises a question that is pertinent to my research: in what way does the operational delivery parameters (i.e. a 4 week programme) impact the relationships and learning for young people and staff?

2.3.1 Citizenship Education vs Character Education

Whilst the critique here is focused on the programme as a citizenship education programme, the values being 'taught' are often aligned with the values taught within 'character education' that enjoyed a resurgence in the English education system in the 2010s. The resurgence was supported by policy initiatives and financial incentive schemes initiated by the Conservative Government in power during this period (Bates, 2019). The two terms, character and citizenship education, are often problematically conflated (Boyd, 2010) but given the overlap, it may be useful to consider what is meant by both terms and what the implications are for learning within the context of this thesis. A distinction made by Sarah Mills (2022) is that 'character education' is related to "values and virtues" (p.1) that encourage an individual to develop the desired inner moral workings whereas 'citizenship education' is related to both individual character and societal values that aim to produce the desired citizen (Guérin, van der Ploeg & Sins, 2013). Citizenship is about education that moulds individuals to the dominant norms of the society in which one lives, which as argued above, means citizenship within the UK is linked to the ideologies of neo-liberalism. This relationship can be seen within the NCS framework, where the values and virtues aimed for are connected to the ideological notion of what a good citizen looks like. It is in this notion of a good citizen and the requisite characteristics, that most of the critique is drawn to, as outlined in the previous section. In Chapter 3 I will explore this further in relation to what this means for learning and learning spaces.

2.4 Administration and Operational Oversight

The programme is administered by the NCS Trust (the Trust) who set the expectations as to what the local delivery should contain – the aim of each of the weeks that comprise the programme, the types of activities each week should contain, how recruitment of young people should be conducted and guidelines for staff recruitment and support. They are also responsible for the overall marketing of the programme, and in 2017 the Trust spent £100 in promotion for every young person who signed up to participate (not actual participation) (Public Accounts Comittee, 2017). The Trust is also responsible for contracting partners for delivery. Contracts are awarded to several large regional, management partners who in turn commission smaller organisations to deliver local programmes. These local programmes vary in size from 60 to 700+ young people and are awarded on geographical areas loosely based on the positions of schools. It is not clear how the geographical areas are decided but they do tend to follow local authority boundaries and/or depend on the number of schools within these boundaries.

Despite what seems to be a definitive national framework, the delivery at the frontline is fragmented not just amongst a number of providers but in the guise of regional oversight. This disparity was recognised in 2020 when new contracts were tendered. There were wide variations in performance across the country and so the number of management partners was reduced from ten, operating across 19 regions (Sharman, 2014) to five partners, one of which is now the NCS Trust itself, covering larger boundaries of nine regions (NCS Trust, 2022).

2.4.1 Funding

The programme is predominantly funded from central government budgets, the largest amount coming from the Department for Culture, Media and Sports. Monies worth £1.2 billion were allocated for the period 2017-2020/21, in line with the Royal Charter. According to the 2019 Summer Evaluation report, the spend per young person for 2019 was £1,709, of which £365 was attributable to the NCS Trust and £1,344 was for actual delivery of the programme (Matthews *et al.*, 2021). By way of comparison, the average spend per high school pupil in England for 2018/19 was £6000 (Britton, Farquharson and Sibieta, 2019). It is important to note that not all the delivery money goes directly

to the organisation working with young people, as the regional providers will take a portion of this in order to support and monitor delivery, acting as the mediator between the management (NCS Trust) and the doing (local delivery partner) of the project.

It is acknowledged that the programme is expensive to run. Questions over value for money have been raised by the National Audit Office and a parliamentary scrutiny report highlighted lack of transparency, high operational costs and variable safeguarding arrangements (Murphy, 2017). This criticism is magnified by the accusation that funding for NCS has been at the expense of a decimated youth work service (De St Croix, 2016) and of the values based on consistent (i.e. year round), local, youth centred practice (Pozzoboni and Kirshner, 2016). In August 2018, the Local Government Association asked ministers to reconsider this funding and instead to divert the monies back to local year-round schemes as reported in The Guardian (Walker, 2018). This same article highlighted that in the four years between 2014-18, the central government spent a total of just under £668m on youth services in England, of this just £34m was spent on youth services other than NCS, while the NCS accounted for £634m.

The programme is therefore an expensive one with a narrow target group that has been developed at the expense of youth provision on a more local and responsive basis and with a lot of expectation for achieving long term, measurable outcomes. It would be pertinent at this point to elaborate further on my entangled role within this whole context.

2.5 My involvement with NCS

As I detailed in the introduction, my background is in working with young people on provision outside of formal education curricula. Delivery environments ranged from fields in the New Forest to school classrooms. Working within the voluntary and community services with young people means limited funding to run projects. Often monies had to be applied for as a grant or tendered for as a contract, with both avenues having time restrictions attached to them. There would occasionally be some community fundraising and donations that would add to the overall pot. This lack of funding was often coupled with work that tended to happen with young people who are most marginalised by society, and this required increased resources.

I became involved with NCS tangentially during the programme's first year of delivery in 2011. I was a member of the steering group for the local delivery partnership in my local authority area. My role had included helping to steer and plan local delivery for the pilot year, as well as giving advice and guidance to the organisation's local delivery partner. Given my role at the time and my previous experience, I was asked to deliver the training for their first group of staff. The provider I delivered the training for subsequently had a more successful summer in terms of managing incidents with their young people, with no serious incidents occurring, as compared to others overseen by the regional partner. This came to the notice of the regional contract holder and so the following year I was asked to train all the providers in that region. This has gradually been built upon and for the last decade, I have been delivering training to a number of providers and all their seasonal staff. I should note that this is done in conjunction with a training colleague and with help from local providers. In 2019, I led training for approximately 400 staff before the summer programme which whilst a big number, is just a fraction of the number of staff employed during the summer period. It was through these relationships that I approached an organisation to be my research partner. My initial choice fell through due to a change in management, but this was far enough in advance for me to partner with another local deliverer who was incredibly generous and helpful.

My thoughts on NCS are in no way straight forward or even consistent. At its inception, I was very much against the programme and the way it was implemented. At a time of austerity and working with young peoples' organisations, I was witness to the devastation the cuts in funding did to services for young people. I agree with all the critiques of the programme that it is expensive, takes a neo-liberal view of citizenship, and is delivered at the expense of a properly funded, locally delivered youth service. I still stand by this view: I think the money would be much better spent on a youth service that responds to local need and demand, one focused on early intervention and support, rather than an annual short-term programme with a certain kind of citizenship at its heart.

However, there was a dilemma for me in that while I did not like the ideology or the short-term nature of the programme, I did/do believe that if there is going to be any service at all for young people, then it should be the best it can possibly be. The staff should be as well prepared as they can be, in order for them to provide the right kind of

support at the right time of need, for the young people in their care. At this point, the most important consideration for me was that some provision was better than no provision. And over the years I have seen young people come through the programme and progress to become staff, and the value and self-worth the programme has given them cannot be discounted or negated. I have visited delivery sites over the years and spoken to young people who were obviously enjoying NCS and getting much from it.

These contextual details highlight my entanglement with the wider field I am studying. As the methodology chapter will explore, I cannot be isolated from my story or their story, as our stories are together. It is important to acknowledge in writing this context, that I have an ethical responsibility to recognise my history as it affects how I approached and conducted this study. I am not seeking to bracket my experience but rather, am aiming to be accountable within and as part of being and becoming in the world (Barad, 2003, 2007).

2.6 Operational Context

2.6.1 Programme Design

The NCS Trust defines the parameters of what the programme should look like each year. There have been experiments with different formats but there has evolved a consistent summer and autumn programme, and now a graduate programme offered year-round. The summer programme is approximately three months from start ('keep warm' events) to finish (graduation) with an intense period of three/four weeks, full time contact in the middle.

Given that I am interested in how different contexts, spaces and environments impact relationships and learning, it is important to describe the spatial-temporal characteristics of the programme in detail. Each part and each week of the programme has a different focus, located in different environmental settings. A typical four-week (week of Mon-Fri) programme such as the one I joined for my fieldwork, will look like the following:

Keep Warm Events: A series of informal events taking place after school or at weekends/half term designed to begin to introduce the young people to each other and some of the staff, and more importantly, retain the initial sign-ups so that they start the programme with a full cohort, i.e. that recruitment targets are met.

Week 1: Residential at an outdoor centre located away from the home area . This must be at least 50 miles from the hometown of the leading organisation. Activities include typical outdoor education activities and are dependent on the centre attended. The types of activities may include climbing, abseiling, canoeing, archery, orienteering etc. All activities are designed to build character, such as perseverance and self-efficacy, and to create the opportunity to build teams and relationships.

Week 2: Residential living in a local university hall of residence in the home area, within fifty miles of the organisation base. The activities are often more classroom based and are designed to help the young people think about community and social issues. These are delivered as workshops or lectures and cover topics such as First Aid, Mental Health and Substance Misuse. When not in formal activities, young people are engaged in activities to help with independence, sociality and individual resilience, including cooking, budgeting, and living with others in shared flats.

Week 3: Work days. The cohort are based in a classroom environment (typically local schools or colleges) and attend on a daily basis, following a work day pattern, i.e. 9am-4pm. Each team is now autonomous with little contact with the other teams in the cohort. The classroom-based activities include researching and agreeing a 'social action' project that will be delivered the following week. They plan, budget and organise fundraising activities. They project plan the specific community support they will provide to their chosen or assigned charity/community group. The groups will be required to understand and implement basic logistics and planning, understand and talk about the role of their chosen charity and why it is needed, communicate with businesses and prominent individuals in the community, and enact and follow procedures for safe working, e.g. risk assessments and money handling.

Week 4: Work hours - 30 hours for the week completed according to the nature of activities undertaken. The week is spent doing the Social Action Project for the partner charity/community group. Activities are dependent on the nature of the partnership but can include sponsored activities, quiz nights, garden renovations, distributing second-hand school uniforms, raising awareness of an issue, and much more. It must all be deliverable within their budget and must be completed during this week

Post programme: The final event as a whole cohort involves a 'graduation celebration' where all their achievements are enjoyed and certification given. The certificate demonstrates completion of the programme, which is useful for individual CVs.

There is some degree of flexibility within the curriculum for each provider organisation; however, all timetables have to be centrally approved to ensure the product meets the quality assurance framework for learning outcomes. Each cohort is made up of teams of up to 15 young people with two staff attached, and cohorts vary in size from two groups up to 12 (ranging from 30 to 180 young people at a time) and as illustrated above, each week takes place in a different social environment.

The programme is a mix of formal adult-led activities, non-formal learning opportunities and the informal learning in everyday practice, and as such, NCS illustrates the complexity of defining learning parameters and in measuring learning outcomes, although the official evaluations attempt this. As is increasingly common in the space of character education, the distinction between types of learning is blurred (Mills, 2021) which potentially problematises the value and attribution given to the learning achieved (Rogers, 2014a). However, the range of activities does give the young people specific instances that they can reflect upon and use later as examples for processes such as university or job applications. Reflection is a common thread through the programme, as identified in the Core Components, and the staff are encouraged to engage the young people in informal reflection after each activity, with a formal, daily timetabled reflection session during the residentials. The 2019 NCS Summer Evaluation states that the formal sessions "intend to improve self-expression, emotional regulation and a sense of well-being." (2021, p.32).

2.6.2 Staffing

The NCS Trust retains a staff base that sets the operational requirements of the programme and monitors the delivery contracts. Delivery is further overseen by the regional partners who sub-contract the work to local community organisations, e.g. existing youth work providers, schools, sports clubs etc. This is a large infrastructure that sits behind the delivery that not only tells the delivery organisations what is expected, but then monitors this through extensive quality assurance frameworks, statistics and the national evaluation programme.

Delivery organisations are managed to tight deadlines, with little flexibility for missing milestones and little room for negotiation based on local circumstances. The delivery organisations retain a core staff base, the size of which depends on the size of contract delivery (numbers of young people they are expected to recruit and retain). For many organisations, at the most, this tends to be no more than six people. The core team is responsible for making sure the programme happens; they recruit the summer staff, book venues and activity providers, plan the timetable, chase young people and liaise between different services where needed, for example with safeguarding issues. They maintain partnerships with local charities and community groups, populate the databases, liaise with parents and carers, complete risk assessments and so much more. They can also step in when needed on the programme and some may have to take up the Cohort Leader role for a cohort of teams.

The delivery of the programme reaches from 60 to over 700 young people for each provider, and so the numbers of temporary staff swell considerably for the summer delivery. This results in some providers recruiting more than fifty sessional staff for just a few weeks each year. The implications of this work pattern are that the providers rely heavily on university students and/or staff who can work flexibly for a short period of time. This is quite a time intensive and unstable way of working. Recruitment takes time every year, the core team having to spend time finding suitable people. When the possible seasonal staff are found, there are a number of processes to go through, even once they have been interviewed and offered a role, including various legal checks such as 'Right to Work' and 'Disclosure and Barring Service' checks. These seasonal staff then have to attend training and possibly some Keep Warm events. Staff may get paid a bursary as opposed to a wage because of the hours of work involved (this means issues around minimum wage are navigated), indicating an implied vocational aspect to the summer work. This can mean that they decide not to return the following year when they understand the challenge of the work or move onto other work. However, many of them do return, particularly university students who continue to return during their degree programmes. Once in a full-time job, returning to work for NCS is very difficult. This means that sessional staff teams are in a constant state of flux from one year to the next, with little opportunity to build organisational knowledge and learning, and more importantly, to retain some organisational memory. There is always a great deal of learning happening, as often teams are having to start afresh in terms of

collective knowledge and practice. This has implications for the service and support that young people receive, and for this study.

Within each cohort of seasonal staff, the lack of experience and knowledge is compounded by numbers of staff who can be both young and/or delivering to young people possibly for the first time, particularly as NCS encourages former participants to return as staff once they reach 18 years of age. In England, many services are set up around specific age boundaries, with youth work itself based on age specificity (Jeffs and Smith, 2010), and services for the young person/young adult transition are delivered to 16-25 year olds. This means that the staff can be in receipt of the same type of services as the young people on NCS, which in itself is not problematic and may even be helpful at times. However, these factors can blur the distinction between adult and young person on NCS, and a casual observer may be hard pressed to discern a staff member from a participant, which opens up questions about learning – who is learning, how are they learning, what are they learning and who or what is doing the teaching?

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has detailed the contextual nature of the NCS programme as the fieldwork site of my research. In doing so, I wanted to pay heed to all the material, policy and financial conditions that shape the programme. I have shown how the ideological starting point for the programme is woven throughout the delivery framework and started to explore the implications of this in relation to learning and learning relationships. I have attempted to describe my entanglement with the research environment and be accountable for how this entanglement has influenced my thoughts and actions with regards to NCS and its delivery. From this, it is also possible to see the rich environment that NCS offered in considering relationships and learning for the young people and the staff.

Chapter 3: The Offer of Posthumanism in Understanding Relationships and Learning in Learning Environments

"Well I guess I kinda worked it out. If there's no great glorious end to all this, if nothing we do matters….., then all that matters is what we do" (Angel TV Series).[3]

3.1 Introduction

The quote above is spoken by the protagonist 'Angel' in the TV series of the same name. I have used it at the start of the chapter because I was struck by how the themes of friendship/relationships and learning (about the self and others) have much in common with this thesis (and because I absolutely love the TV show). I am also struck by the simplicity of this particular statement which seems to me to capture the essence of posthumanism. What posthumanism offers is perhaps a different way of knowing and coming to know the world. Posthumanism makes us consider that we can know the world beyond just humanist ontology. This knowing is entwined with the ethical implications of 'what comes to matter'. For me this means that what matters is made up of what we do every day without a big grand ending, even when the world feels meaningless at times. Instead of a final outcome, what there is, is a constant movement towards what comes next, where little things (often seemingly inconsequential) are the means by which we continue to progress into our futures. Another way of grasping this is to understand that social change often happens within a 'minor key' (Pedwell, 2021), in the refrains and tendencies that happen incrementally, that grow into habits and generate new relations for change. In short, posthumanist approaches encourage attention to everyday, minor scales of action and being, within a framework of ethical responsibility related to the interdependencies of human and more-than and other-than-human.

My aim in this chapter is to bring the quote from *Angel* to life. The terrain of this chapter is multiple and interconnected but I will attempt to give this a form that can be followed:

- I will begin by setting out my understanding of posthumanism, covering the ideas of thinkers who have been influential in how I have learnt and applied this

[3] Said by the character Angel from the TV Series Angel, Episode 'Epiphany', released 2001.

approach, thus also foregrounding posthumanism as a philosophical perspective that is useful to the field of learning. Key terminology and ideas will be explored as they relate to my research.

- I will then look at the importance of relationships in learning environments, firstly by examining what positive relationships enable for children and young people before considering the role of the adult/educator in the dynamic, highlighting how relationships are difficult to do well.
- This leads to an exploration of engagement or connectedness, facilitating the relationships and learning, with a focus on the 'ecology' of engagement.
- I will then provide an overview of literature on the status afforded to learning in different learning environments, troubling the relationship between types of learning and the spaces of learning, and recognising that learning spaces are multiple and complex.

The research will demonstrate that relationships, engagement and learning are closely related but that direction of causality is not discernible. The complexity of the associations will highlight the dynamism and reciprocity in building relationships and the richness of experience in both the everyday and assigned learning space, whilst acknowledging that these spaces influence both relationships and learning. I will conclude the chapter by considering what a framework of posthumanism might offer for a deeper understanding of what happens in the 'doing' of the day to day, moment to moment activities.

3.2 Making sense of Posthumanism

What follows is my understanding of posthumanism and in particular, critical posthumanism. This is very much influenced by key thinkers such as Karen Barad, physicist and feminist theorist; Donna Haraway, ecologist and feminist theorist; Rosi Braidotti, philosopher and feminist theorist; and a cast of other exciting, hopeful and liberating researchers and writers. Posthumanism is more than one approach, its philosophical underpinnings embracing a diversity of thought and difference in research (St. Pierre, 2016a; Ulmer, 2017). The lack of a singular definition is not necessarily problematic (MacLure, 2017) as it offers growing and multiple paths of opportunity for both thought and action in research (Ulmer, 2017). Equally the diversity multiplicity can feel bewildering, with some basis in physics and in particular, in the bizarre and

fascinating world of quantum physics (Rovelli, 2021). And while posthumanism offers a different approach built on a diversity of thought, it is not without its critics.

I am conscious of the critique that many posthuman ideas are not new to the world just new(er) to the academic fields in the Global North. Many posthuman ideas overlap with indigenous knowledge and practices or are conceptualised in similar terms. For instance, posthumanism is partly a response to the critique that liberal Western knowledge has a blind spot in not recognising that the world can and does exist outside humanist onto-epistemologies. It is also a response to the realisation that humanist approaches do not valorise all humans equally. Posthumanism attempts to address these flaws by centering an ontology of the world beyond just the human. This is similar to a tenet in many indigenous epistemologies that recognises sources of knowledge as multiple, more-than-human and relational (Kovach, 2017). In following posthuman approaches, however, there is a danger that traditional and indigenous knowledge is either discounted or not acknowledged or mis-appropriated or superficially used, and in doing so, posthumanism may simply repeat a Eurocentric approach to understanding or generating alternative knowledge (Million, 2009; Ravenscroft, 2018). A critical posthuman approach sits at the conjunction of indigenous approaches to knowing and critical theories that critique Euro-centric, Enlightenment humanism, such as queer, disability and race theories (Braidotti & Jones, 2022). In adopting a critical posthumanist approach, I will endeavour to be mindful of potential criticism of misappropriation, not least by using and citing indigenous and other scholars appropriately whilst acknowledging that my experiences in academia and life in general have been within the Global North.

3.2.1 De-centring the human

As Karen Barad wrote, 'Posthumanism does not presume that man is the measure of all things' (2007, p.136). The essence of posthumanism is to displace the prominence of the 'human' in how we understand and live, and indeed, to think about how the 'more than' human world is enmeshed with and constitutes the human. This is partly in recognition of the epoch in which we live having come to be known as 'The Anthropocene', characterised by the idea that an entire geological epoch can be defined by human impact, often resulting in ecological devastation and the attendant evils of species extinction, global warming, etc. Rosi Braidotti (2019b, 2022) refers to this

current era as positioned between two great forces that are happening simultaneously, that is, the force of advanced capitalism with its accompanying technological advances and structural inequalities alongside climate change and advances in life sciences. These developments trouble what it means to be a human now and recognises that the earth is not a passive recipient of the extractive demands of humans and its response in the form of climate change is itself decentralising the primacy of humans. The speed of technological advancements also posits the question of what it means to be human in an age when human-techno hybrids are becoming the norm. Posthumanism, in response, looks to a post-anthropocentric future and considers what that might look like and the actions and behaviours that may take us in new directions. This is a shift in both ontology and epistemology that I will explore in more detail but it resolutely decries human exceptionalism, and positions humans as in and part of the world, entangled in the moment, in which "Humans are characters in a cast of many" (Ulmer, 2017, p.833).

Posthumanism encompasses a range of perspectives with diverse values and hopes for how posthumanism ought to manifest itself. Although the boundaries between them are not always distinct, Braidotti (2019b, 2022) and Braidotti & Jones (2022) describe three prominent approaches. One of these strands is based in science and technology often known as transhumanism and critiqued by Braidotti (2022) as firmly within the capitalist tradition driven by tech-utopianism, individualism and profit. The second, Braidotti describes as "a neo-humanism…an updated form of liberalism" (Braidotti & Jones, 2022, p.28) in which equality is the aim but the approach still firmly embedded within humanist perspectives. The third strand is critical posthumanism which questions assumptions about the universality of human experience and instead considers how humans are situated and immanent with the world. In doing this, Braidotti (2022) advocates for a practice of affirmative ethics that recognises "that 'we' are in this together, but we are not one and the same" (p.9).

Critical posthumanism therefore problematises what it means to be human, and who gets to be considered human in the world. Feminism and postcolonial theory have demonstrated that the construct of human has been predicated on a very particular human, often affording power and privileges (Braidotti, 2016) to the constituency of white, heterosexual, European (wealthy) males. The notion of 'human' emerged from the Enlightenment as defined by De Vinci's Vitruvian Man (Mycroft and Sidebottom, 2018), a definition based on ideas of rationality, certainty and predictability (Nisbet,

2005). In its hegemonic application and replication, it confers privilege to certain ways of being and knowing which exclude other ways of knowledge production and along with it, vast swathes of the world. This is the inheritance of much formal Western education which fails to acknowledge the embodied and felt experience or knowledge of others (Ahmed, 1998; Million, 2009), including the more-than-human – the animal and the material that constitute our world.

3.2.2 What is the human in relation to the more than human?

The assumption that 'public' life is human and that everything needs a human spokesperson (Blue, 2016) is being challenged. In its simplest form, the more-than-human acknowledges the capacity of everything other-than-human to not only be affected but affective (Coleman, 2020), bringing to the fore the agency and vibrancy of the non-human and material world. As Barad (2003) comments, "matter comes to matter" (p.801); but in what way does it matter?

To consider this, it is necessary to think about the ontological and epistemological perspectives of posthumanism and in particular critical posthumanism:

"an approach that understands humans as part of nature and practices of knowing as natural processes of engagement with and as part of the world" (Barad, 2007, p.331).

This posits that we come to know the world by being in the world. It is an approach of relationality, encounters and immanence. Understanding relationality is understanding that ontologically, there can be no claim for separate entities that can be observed by an all knowing individual (Barad, 2007, 2017a; Braidotti, 2019b). This is not a call for epistemology that relies on meaning-making through language and culture as representation or of individual constructed realities, both of which can hold materiality as passive, with a separation between object and subject (Rosiek and Snyder, 2020; Sheridan *et al.*, 2020). Posthuman approaches question this way of sense-making as the only way of knowing. In particular, Barad critiqued how (human) culture and language have been taken to be understood as **the** way to represent the world and asked:

"*Why are language and culture granted their own agency and historicity while matter is figured as passive and immutable?*" (Barad, 2003, p.801).

Barad argues, in their development of an ethico-onto-epistemological position called agential realism, that rather than thinking about entities as pre-formed and observable, "entities, space and time exist only within and through their specific *intra-actions*" (Barad, 2017a, p.G111, emphasis in original). The term intra-action refers to the entanglements of the world in which entities emerge through agentic and affective encounters (Barad, 2007). However, it would be wrong to suggest that Barad gives primacy to matter in place of language and culture; rather, they are 'mutually implicated' (2007, p.152) as 'material-discursive practices' (2007, p.141) that come to be constituted and re-constituted.

The question posed by Barad, above, acknowledges that Western science – physical or social, has privileged ways of knowing that have traditionally ignored non-white knowledges/bodies and elevated culture over nature. Barad's provocation invites other ways of knowing, ways which are also similar to Indigenous scholarship and understanding. While there is a danger of homogenising 'indigenous' knowledges, there are shared values and commonalities important to ways of living in relationship with nature (Harris and Wasilewski, 2004; Wall Kimmerer, 2013). Learning takes place through being with the world. Here, values of relationality, encounters and immanence are not new ways of thinking. They counter a way of seeing 'truth' in science in a way that loses accountability to the world (Wall Kimmerer, 2013).

This ontological and epistemological shift acknowledges the active role of the materiality of the world. But what does it mean to attribute material things agency? Barad (2007) is clear that agency is not about power as a trait inherent in the material, instead it is the dynamism available in phenomena, that open up a collaboration or assemblage with human and nonhuman actors. Jane Bennett writes of the vitality of things as part of 'tableaus' (2016, p.8). Vitality enlivening the capacity to affect and be affected, happening within and as part of assemblages. In this sense, it is not just human but the more-than-human that are actants in the composition of the world (Latour, 1996). 'Things' have vibrancy, a liveliness that goes beyond the meaning and representation imposed by humans (Coleman, 2020). By way of an easy example that is often used to illustrate material agency, I will refer to the mobile phone. The mobile phone and its usage have become ubiquitous but whilst numbers in circulation are worthy of note, what is of interest here is the way in which mobile phones and humans intra-act. In a scenario that may be familiar to many, consider the pull of a mobile

phone, particularly when not (sufficiently) focused on anything else. How often do you find yourself reaching for your mobile phone, when you are drawn to 'look' at it even though it has not made a sound or a movement? Are there contexts when this is more or less likely to happen? The claim is not that the phone exerts power but within particular configurations, the vibrant agency of the phone is more affective and compelling than the intensity of other potential encounters.

The resulting reconfiguration is another familiar sight, that of human/phone hybrid or a holobiont (Haraway, 2016) which is an assemblage of a symbiotic, dynamic intra-action. The concept of a holobiont further troubles the notion of human-centredness by questioning the idea of discrete, recognisable boundaries of distinct objects. For example, scientists studying bacteria in the human gut have found that the microbiome is peculiar to you, the individual (Enders, 2017) and without microbes, life as we humans know it would not be possible (McFall-Ngai, 2017). The microbes are essential to an individual; they will not be present in another individual in the same mix and this same microbiome will flourish differently if placed in another human. Therefore, are the microbiome and human separate entities or are they in fact part of a whole? Where does the microbiome start and finish? If the microbiome is taken out, is the human still recognisably human? These scientific discoveries emphasise the porosity of boundaries of entities, and in doing so, the ontological or epistemological positions either based on distinct, boundaried objects or meaning making in the world largely through (human) culture and language are troubled. This different ontological or epistemological position means that familiar areas of study can become unfamiliar and open to different understandings. In my study, this perspective has led me to notice and acknowledge materiality, focusing on chairs, rooms, phones, etc as key actors in both building relationships and learning.

3.2.3 Matter from Meaning to Becoming

The idea that there are no pre-formed objects has been critiqued for failing to account for how humans experience themselves (Tobias-Renstrøm and Køppe, 2020). However, I would counter that perhaps an alternative way of thinking with this is that being human/non-human is dynamic and porous. There is a historicity that is embodied and felt but what comes next is always different, therefore never complete. Immanence is about being within and part of something, being part of the essence, boundaryless,

which suggests that the future is unknowable/indeterminate until encountering an intensity (St.Pierre, 2021a). The encounter transforms understanding and experience and in doing so, creates change. This complexity and indeterminacy is the result of an assemblage of multiple lines of flights that vary in speed and movement, as in rhizomes, a network of connections (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) coming together in a phenomenon (Barad, 2007). In these moments, the encounters of all that are present are in the process of making with each other. The world is a sympoietic system that is always in the process of transformation or in a process of becoming world, a worlding (Haraway, 2016).

Sympoiesis relates to bodies evolving together, making with other bodies and within this constant negotiation of interactions, pathways for learning and relearning open (Le Guin, 2017) which has/have the potential for transformational being and thinking (Ulmer, 2017). In this way, it is not what is intentionally produced but what is emerging, what is being done in the worlding. Within this understanding, individuation arises out of differentiated material-discursive arrangements within the phenomena (Barad, 2007). Subjectivity is relational and collective, 'both post-personal and pre-individual' (Braidotti, 2019b, p.42), in which we may be connected but there is difference. It is the shared nature of subjectivity that imposes a re-working of ethics into the ontological and epistemological grounding of posthumanism.

3.2.4 The ethics of becoming-with

"It matters what matters we use to think other matters with;…It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories" (Haraway, 2016, p.12).

These are the words of Donna Haraway that, for me, underpin the ethical values of posthumanism, that align with more established social justice perspectives such as Critical Race Theory and Queer Theory. A critique of posthumanism is that it fails to account for political and social relations and the link between the macro and micro level (Rekret, 2016). A critique that leads to questions around the enacting of social change. However, I suggest that the quote from Haraway counters this criticism of posthumanism. Fundamental to understanding the collective nature of subjectivity within phenomena is that it offers a position of hope in its relational (Barad 2007), its multiplistic (Strom *et al.*, 2018; Barad, 2019) and affirmative (St. Pierre, 2013; Braidotti, 2019b) characteristics. Therefore, posthumanism may not offer macro-

theories for overturning institutions or hegemonic structures but it offers opportunities to see the world differently which I believe holds potential for newness and alternative formations.

Returning to the Haraway quote, posthumanism, in its invitation to honour and embrace other ways of knowing and being, invites other stories and in doing so, creates opportunities to build different worlds. Haraway reminds us to 'stay with the trouble', that whilst the world emerges as part of the sympoietic entanglements, there is a role for the situated human in understanding that the present 'doing' affects what comes next and if we fail to pay attention to the now, different futures can be included or excluded. This ethics and accountability are crucial to posthuman practice. It encourages an attitude to 'think and do' that aligns with a responsibility for communication and reciprocity in relations with the land and the non-human (Watts, 2013). This is not to re-centre the human but rather to highlight that encounters create response-able opportunities (Haraway, 2017) that must be noted and acted upon. In 'making-with' the world for different futures, it requires attention to the accountability and the distribution of capability to respond (Murris and Bozalek, 2019a). The practice of ethics is not about an individual doing for 'others', it is about accountability as part of the relationality of the world (Barad, 2007). It is understanding the affect and the capacity to be affected in this entanglement in which ethics is brought to the fore (Strom and Mills, 2021) because knowledge carries responsibility (Wall Kimmerer, 2013).

Braidotti understands this as 'potentia' (2019b, p.136) which moves from motivation or intentionality to empowerment through forces and affect, an affirmative doing that is accountable to the different speeds and trajectories in the relational entanglement (Braidotti, 2019a). In thinking of ethics in this way, it is not just about a one size fits all manifesto or politics but an openness and responsiveness (de Freitas, 2017) to difference and ways of being, and an obligation to that difference. The inseparability of knowing, being and ethics is thus central and requires moving from traditional ontological and epistemological (and political) approaches and towards embracing an ethico-onto-epistemology (Barad, 2007) for understanding the world.

3.2.5 Paying Attention

As has been explored, posthumanism is about relationality, immanence and encounters in which the world in all its materiality has agency as part of sympoietic emergence.

The ethico-onto- epistemology has implications for the researcher and requires embracing other ways of doing and knowing, new ways of producing knowledge. What does paying attention to the more than human entail, what does paying attention to other knowledges encompass and what does paying attention to the world in its becoming mean for a research study?

New knowledges can be created by paying attention to affect. According to Massumi (2002) affect should not be confused with feelings. Feelings are personal and biographical while emotions are social and affects are pre-personal. Affect is understood as prior to or outside of consciousness. It is not held within bodies and is not solely individual; rather, it can be collective, emerging through relationality (Braidotti, 2019b). Affect in this sense is an intensity or the coming together of many intensities that circulates within and between bodies, leaving traces (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; Massumi, 2002) and as affect moves, it can accumulate or dissipate intensity (Ahmed, 2004). These traces can mark bodies or compel bodies and it is in the embodied experience of intensities that emotions may be experienced (Springgay and Zaliwska, 2017) and individualised (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). Of note here is the entangled nature of affect and emotions. They are not interchangeable but there may be some overlap. Affect and emotion do things. Affect moves but is sticky and has potentiality to compel emotion. Ahmed (2014) tends to play down a too clear distinction between emotions/feelings/affect because of how they interact. A body that is affected or is affective, changes what comes next. This has implications for both relationships and learning in my study. Paying attention to affect/emotions and what it is doing was something I aimed to do through practices such as wonder and attunement, which I explore in more detail within the methodology chapter (Chapter 4).

Both wonder and attunement are also important practices for paying attention to difference. Haraway (2016) reminds us that what stories we tell matters in becoming-with the world and as a counterbalance to anthropocentric practices and knowledge, difference matters. Alongside this, non-Western ways of being and knowing demonstrate that there are ways to move beyond the bounds of conventional knowledge production. This is not to say that the aim is to look for difference for difference's sake but instead to note that difference allows us to recognise the world in its complexity and multiplicity. As Barad writes, it is not about 'othering' but about 'making connections

and commitments' (Barad, 2007, p.392) and understanding how thinking through different knowledges may construct new worlds.

In paying attention to difference, posthumanism does not name or seek to represent difference, instead it seeks to pay attention to what the difference is doing. This is a move away from reflection and a move towards diffraction, a term first used by Haraway and built upon by Barad (Murris and Bozalek, 2019b). Diffraction concerns interference patterns. Barad (2007) devotes a whole chapter to both the physical phenomena as seen in quantum physics and the manifestation of diffraction as part of the ethico-onto-epistemological approach. The methodology chapter will explore diffraction as part of the 'doing' but it is important to note that diffraction is about heeding the detail, about what happens when the entanglements change, about what emerges and what does not.

Paying attention to what is being done opens up a response-ability to pay attention to what is included and what is excluded. An assemblage has a multiplicity of potential lines of flight, not simply to be understood as actions yielding reactions. The action/reaction dualism can hide the complexity of what is happening; it implies linearity of cause and effect, whereas 'doing' is more nuanced and intricate. This is a useful way to consider how relationships are 'done'. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) play with the concepts of rhizomes and territorialisation to illustrate the connectedness and involvedness of the world. Rhizomes are root structures that do not grow up in one direction; instead "the rhizome is an acentered, non-hierarchical, non-signifying system" (p.22). As an analogy, rhizomes emphasise the connections and reconnections of paths; movement is inherent as the rhizome spreads. There is territorialisation. However, crucial to the potential of the root is that it diverges from itself which both simultaneously creates new opportunities for growth and blocks others. So its future becomes not uncertain in that we know roughly where it is not going; rather, it is indeterminate or determined differently (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) with other paths ahead.

This is a useful analogy for paying attention to issues of what gets included and what gets excluded, highlighting patterns of power and structural privilege. For example, as explored earlier, the Western academic experience privileges knowledge based on rationality, versions of objectivity and replicability. In this way, it creates a platform for

who is more likely to be heard and whose experience is more likely to be validated. Thinking and acting in this humanist discipline increases opportunities to be heard and validated whereas diverging from this accepted path increases the risk of not being heard or valorised. This is not just a theoretical consideration; there are real world implications to negating knowledge, as seen in the destruction caused by colonial projects and the damage they wrought over indigenous and colonial lived experiences and knowledges (Smith, 2021). The line of flight that privileges some knowledges over others both creates and shuts down worldings, that is "the challenge of learning how to live well together" (Taylor, Blaise and Giugni, 2013, p.56), thereby reinforcing the value of some humans over others and the other-than-human.

Being mindful of what gets included and what may be excluded calls for approaches that pay attention to the world in all its vibrancy. This means paying attention to other ways of knowing, what is affective and what traces may be visible. It means asking how relationships have emerged and been sustained over time; how all bodies are accounted for and attuned to in practice (Springgay, 2021). The capacity of the body as a site of learning is a practice enacted by Indigenous women, used to highlight the realities of colonialism (in Canada), in which 'feelings are theory' (Million, 2009,p.61). Here feelings are not just a subjective experience of individuals; they constitute knowledge predicated on social conditions and mediated within culture. This is a move to reconfigure what can be considered as theories and concepts whilst recognising that theories are animate, they do things (Barad, 2012). Within the methodology chapter (Chapter 4), I will explore how thinking with theories is a practice that can support paying attention to difference, inclusions and diffraction.

Finally, it is important to pay attention to the materiality of the world, the more-than-human in all its vibrancy. Understanding perspectives other-than-human constructs knowledges that can cause provocations, further problematising representation, ontology and epistemology. For instance, the biological make-up of an octopus means that it does not live with the typical brain/body distinction, (Godfrey-Smith, 2016). Even my use of 'it' in the last sentence can be challenged. Many objects ontologically classified as 'things' in the English language are not manifest in the same way in other cultures. As indigenous scholars have written, the geographical and topological world is suffused with spiritual and animate resonance that does not correspond with ways of understanding/knowledge-making in much of the industrialised economies of the Global

North (Smith, 2021; Wall Kimmerer, 2017; Watts, 2013). However, it is in the recognition of the animacy of the more-than-human that it is possible to understand learning and teaching differently (Wall Kimmerer, 2013).

In this section, I have introduced my understanding of some key ideas and concepts inherent within a posthuman approach. Whilst this is in no way a comprehensive account of the approach, I have drawn on the ideas that have influenced me and framed this study. In presenting the key areas of consideration, I have examined diverse notions of ontological and epistemological understandings which have implications for how we do research and understand the world. I will come back to these ideas at the end of the chapter to pay particular attention to what this might mean for relationships and learning – the central units of study. It is in this troubling of how we come to know the world, where agency is situated and whose knowledge gets privileged, that there may be areas to build on to contribute to our understanding of learning and relationships.

3.3 Relationships in Learning Spaces

3.3.1 The Young Person

It is not controversial to say that the relationships in learning and for learning are a key factor in the development of young people. There is a wealth of research that evidences that good relationships lead to better outcomes for the individual student/learner, including increased academic achievement, well-being and an improvement in behaviour for learning (Crosnoe, Johnson and Elder, 2004; Stager, 2005; Holfve-Sabel, 2014). Generally, outcomes related to relationships are defined in line with the current trend in UK governmental policy to focus on education in terms of potential futures of productivity and employability (Arthur, 2015). However, the recognition of good relationships for alternative, less quantifiable measures is evident when we turn to literature in other fields such as youth work.

Youth workers recognise that developmental and practical goals for the young person cannot be achieved without a positive relationship (Rodd and Stewart, 2009) and that learning takes place in the everyday (Yardley, Teunissen and Dornan, 2012). As a fundamental outcome for youth work, learning is predicated on dialectical relationships (Ord, 2012), that is, relationships in youth work are viewed as a vital source of learning

(Jeffs and Smith, 2010). The stability provided by constructive relationships is crucial for managing risks and minimising harm both within and outside of the home (Firmin and Owens, 2021) and it is through safe relationships that children learn to trust and look to ways to change their situation. For example, a child is more likely to disclose harm as a result of building safe relationships (Cossar, Belderson and Brandon, 2019). The current drive for relationship-based practice across professions is precisely because research shows how important it is for young people to have secure, safe relationships with adults that support a whole range of outcomes.

Outcomes are important but there is 'something' that happens before this and the way in which the theory and practice of relationships is understood can vary considerably (Hingley-Jones and Ruch, 2016). This mismatch between the theory and practice is a praxis gap around what 'doing' constructive relationships looks like. It seems that as professionals, the difficulty in building positive relationships starts early if children are labelled as 'a problem' or as 'naughty'. These moments have been analysed as manifesting class-based assumptions and discourses (MacLure *et al.*, 2012; Priyadharshini, 2011) about what is appropriate learner deportment, behaviour and attitudes. These perceptions affect relationships throughout the school years and beyond (Pianta, Stuhlman and Hamre, 2002). So how do we recognise what a good relationship looks like or feels like? What makes a good relationship? How can it be established and maintained?

3.3.2 The Qualities of a Positive Relationship

The literature concerning relationships and learning is consistent that one quality – trust - is essential for positive relationships. No matter what the environment, trust between people in that environment is crucial (Bell, 2002; hooks, 1994; Holland, 2015; Peters, 2017; Cossar, Belderson and Brandon, 2019; Firmin and Owens, 2021). It is perhaps an unsurprising finding. In order for young people to feel they are having their voice heard and to be involved in decisions about their own lives, they need to be able to trust in the adult(s) they have relationships with (Bell, 2002). Trust in relationships is facilitated by meeting the mutual expectations of roles between adults and young people in their day to day interactions (Holland, 2015), aided by the familiarity of contexts we may find ourselves in (Pink, Ferguson and Kelly, 2021). Successful relationships are characterised by warmth, interest and guidance (Bell, 2002), feeling safe but able to

express freedom (Holfve-Sabel, 2014) with care and support, both emotional and academic (Klem and Connell, 2004; Allen *et al.*, 2021).

Experience can tell us that constructive relationships are hard to gain and fairly easy to lose. Mutuality and exchange are fundamental; the power of communication is evident in how students describe positive relationships with teachers as a connection that arises from talking with adults (Bernstein-Yamashiro and Noam, 2013) and as a means of being heard (Baroutsis *et al.*, 2016). Both in and outside of the classroom, students want to feel like they are being emotionally supported (Pianta, Stuhlman and Hamre, 2002) and academically supported (Allen *et al.*, 2021) as in practices such as scaffolding, proposed by the theory Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978). Evidence from large scale survey studies found students tend to like school more when they feel the adult (teacher) cares, is fair and uses praise appropriately (Hallinan, 2008). This is supported by research that demonstrates what approaches work, for example, a democratic approach; listening, understanding, ownership and creativity amongst actors (Smyth, 2012) can be used within schooling to support the concepts of agency and voice, and to enable the active participation of students in their own learning (Baroutsis *et al.*, 2016).

It may be expected that the absence of the positive qualities leads to poorer relationships. However, findings with wider school populations indicate that it is not just the absence of positive qualities that hamper relationship building. There are other factors that can actively damage learning relationships, such as boredom, particularly when it is read by the adult as a reflection of their own failures (Belton and Priyadharshini, 2007). Actions or absence of actions also damage relationships, such as failing to learn names (Bernstein-Yamashiro and Noam, 2013). There are many opportunities in which connectedness is not achieved and/or where damaging connections are made that highlight difficulties in power imbalances (perceived or otherwise) and can be characterised by conflict (Clarke, Boorman and Nind, 2011) or failure (Lumby, 2012), particularly when it involves disengaged or disempowered youths. This is where theories such as attachment theory may help by describing how previous experiences of relationships (starting with the initial primary caregiver) can have an impact on later relationships and have practice implications for working in schools or with young people (Moore, Moretti and Holland, 1997; Geddes, 2003). There is a temporal aspect to how relationships are formed in the now. Understanding ideas

such as attachment theory also opens up the possibility that relationships do not always lead to positive learning outcomes for the young person or child, and that not all informal learning is positive (Rogers, 2014a). This brings us back to the praxis gap – whilst what young people need from their relationships is identifiable and possibly quantifiable, what does the 'doing' of relationships actually involve, what gets in the way, what helps?

In addition, the focus so far has been on what young people need, how young people might benefit, but what of the adult? Primary responsibility for building relationships tends to be assumed by the adult in defined learning spaces. What is their role and how are they impacted? For example, the embedded assumptions made about children's pasts, histories or experiences not only affect the child but also the adult. Doing relationships is not just about the children's but also about the adult's capacity to form relationships. What is happening for the adult in these contexts/spaces? How do they enact relationships in their day-to-day functioning?

3.3.3 Where is the adult?

Adults in different learning environments have different aims in building relationships due to the different outcomes that they may be trying to achieve. Much as I have lamented that there remains a knowledge gap in what the 'doing' of the day-to-day looks like, when encouraged to talk about the everyday, teachers do identify many 'little things' that show how they build relationships, including gestures such as giving high fives, making eye contact or giving verbal comfort. MacLaughlin et al. (2015) identified these everyday practices between teachers and nursery aged children in New Zealand and these practices are similar to those of people working with youth in urban classrooms in the United States (Emdin, 2016). The range of role identities expected of adults who work with young people means that there is a balance in how they have to approach each situation. For instance, in a study with youth workers, they were invariably described by young people as professional friend, parent-like, as a mentor and as a teacher (Walker, 2010). This suggests that learning environments require relationships to be built in a variety of ways with a myriad of responses expected of the adult. Building relationships is complex, with multiple moments that could present challenges to the adult and the young person as they negotiate the boundaries of the relationship (Jaynes, 2020). This is even more difficult for the adult as the expectation

is on the adult/educator to facilitate the conditions that make positive relationships possible.

The onus on the adult to facilitate the relationships is particularly difficult to achieve in the case of young people who may need these relationships the most, for example. children living in local authority care (Schofield and Brown, 1999). The very need for a secure base for a relationship can result in the behaviour that makes this difficult for adults to know how to respond to or deal with it (ibid). Positive relationships within learning environments require the adult to attune to the needs of what each young person brings (Kern and Taylor, 2021) and to understand peer group dynamics (Hamm *et al.*, 2011). The work requires a pedagogy of care and well-being (hooks, 2014). This understanding does not just happen, there is a need for continual learning for the adults as much as for the young people.

In addition, management literature suggests that what adults need from relationships in the workplace is very similar to what young people need. For example, Taylor (2007) proposes that transformative learning for adults is facilitated by relationships in which dialogue is central. Other management literature often takes a developmental perspective in which relationships are cultivated in a motivational and supportive framework that encourages the learner to flourish (Douglas, McCauley and Bierema, 1999). This demonstrates the importance of the line manager but given how adults can be affected by the reactions of young people, it also posits a role for the negotiations of relationships between adult and young person. A review of the wellbeing of teachers concluded that from a teacher perspective, their well-being can be affected by the quality of their relationships with the student and that there are similar drivers to want the relationship, such as the need for connection (Spilt, Koomen and Thijs, 2011). Perhaps also of note is the concept of 'psychological safety' within workplaces, which is a sense that someone feels free to be themselves, where others are interested in them, and where they are respected and heard, supportive and reciprocal relationships being integral to this (Newman, Donohue and Eva, 2017). How can the support needs of the adult be managed within a work environment in which the adult has certain responsibilities and expectations of presentation?

Relationships have to be built and sustained by adults in learning environments in complex conditions which will rightly require the adults to attend to a wide variety of

factors, situated in physical and structural environments they have little control over. Therefore, relationships are a balancing act with a number of affective components that impact the future potential of the relationship trajectory. The 'doing' of relationships in learning environments is complicated not just by the human factors but the complexity of the environment in which connections have to be built and maintained.

3.3.4 Connecting for relationships

Research consistently highlights the importance of reciprocity and agency in the student-teacher relationship (Elmore, 2005; Krauss *et al.*, 2014). This suggests that it is about how people connect or engage with each other in a learning relationship. There are some useful and well researched ideas for how to achieve connectedness, including: positive communication and feedback; fostering a sense of belonging; using peer support; social and emotional learning activities; and listening (Robinson, 2000; Roffey, 2011, 2012). Whilst these lists are helpful, it could be assumed that these are easy to do and therefore, that it is just a matter of putting these into practice. To get a connection, there has to be something that spurs engagement, a hook that sparks interest for the individual to want to make a connection. However, the literature around engagement in learning would suggest that there are many difficulties in putting this into practice.

The concept of 'engagement' in educational research literature has tended to focus on the engagement of the student with lessons or the subject or even with the wider school, with attendance often seen as a proxy for a student's engagement. The rationale for exploring engagement (i.e. the engagement of the student with the lesson or the school) has been that it can be used as a proxy for measuring the classroom or school excellence (Groccia, 2018). Definitions of engagement tend to encompass one or all of three positions: a behavioural element, e.g. is the child on task; a cognitive lens, e.g. how deeply the child thinks about the lesson; and/or an affective element, e.g. a child's sense of belonging with the school (Lawson, 2017). The three positions all have a requirement and a role for the adult in which relationships are central. There has to be familiarity with the young person and their behaviour, their cognitive capacity and their wishes and feelings. This means negotiating and managing a connection between the young person and the adult. This is particularly pertinent in voluntary attendance programmes, where after all, attendance is the choice of the young person.

More recent research in schools has moved away from quantifying engagement to thinking more carefully about what impacts engagement and in particular, environmental factors that influence outcomes. Shernoff et al. (2016) refer to this as environmental complexity, recognising that there is a dynamism to engagement that reflects changes in the local environment. In their exploration of what is most influential - environmental support or environmental challenge - it was the environmental support that had the most impact. In a follow-up study, the key to the environmental support was motivational supports and a positive relationship with the teacher, both of which influenced engagement and had a positive impact on learning (Shernoff, Ruzek and Sinha, 2016). The duality of the teacher's role as crucial in both building the relationship and facilitating motivational supports is a consistent finding (Opdenakke and Minnaert, 2011; Furrer, Skinner and Pitzer, 2014). In fact, psychological based, motivational research, using the lens of Self Determination Theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000) emphasises the need for teachers to facilitate intrinsic motivators - competency, relatedness and autonomy - rather than extrinsic motivators, as a way to maintain engagement (Furrer, Skinner and Pitzer, 2014). These tenets of engagement are focused on the actions of the teacher but similar findings have been found in youth work environments in that "young people learn best when they are interested, engaged and agentic" (Walker, 2005, p.11). Therefore, this suggests that relationships and engagement are closely entwined and that in order to build relationships, one has to facilitate engagement but in order to facilitate engagement, one has to have a relationship. Relationships and engagement are about making and keeping connections that do not necessarily follow a linear progression; what impacts these in learning spaces?

Research shows that how a child engages is not only impacted by the actions of the adult but also by wider environmental factors, which include school leadership as well as school structures, network and culture (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2000). A child's engagement and academic competence is also related to parental attitudes to and communication with the school (Demirtaş-Zorbaz, Zorbaz and Kızıldag, 2018). In higher education, the institutional expectations regarding teaching and learning impact students' willingness to engage (Kuh, 2009). Ecological factors, as referenced in research with young people in education, youth work or social work, often draws heavily on the work of Bronfenbrenner (1976). Bronfenbrenner was driven to move

educational research away from the laboratory and to recognise the contexts and spaces in which education is delivered. He conceived the environment as a "nested arrangement of structures, each contained within the next" (ibid, p.5). Within the nests were factors related to social, cultural and institutional structures, with a focus on the child and the dynamic relationships the child has with others. Here, the definition of 'environment' is very much about humans interacting with either other humans or human shaped institutional/cultural factors. There is a gap in considering other non-human factors that may impede or promote engagement, relationship-building and subsequent learning. From a posthuman perspective, this appears as a significant gap in thinking about the minutiae of learning experiences in the everyday ecology.

Engagement and relationships are not static. They are dynamic as they are affected by both the sociocultural and ecological contexts in which they are situated, and learning is impacted by these context (Zepke, 2015). Engagement can be conceptualised as part of the process of learning, and can be seen as a democratic and relational act linked to agency and reciprocity (Elmore, 2005) as a dynamic connection. With the emphasis on management of dynamic relationships, an alternative view positions engagement as 'critical democracy', as a relationship-based practice in which engagement is discursive and active (McMahon and Portelli, 2004) and one in which the quality of relationships are a key factor in transformational learning (Taylor, 2007) for both the young person and the adult. Therefore, relationships and engagement are fluid connections, characterised by movement in and around them; in learning environments, they are intertwined.

Relationships, engagement and learning as seen through connections are about flow between people, ideas and things, and about investing in other people and the task or subject. The next question is not just how they are interacting but how they work together and what impacts the flow of connectedness. How do the young person and the adult move in the space, what are their encounters, and what of the materiality of the spaces they move in (Barad, 2003)? How do all these elements interact to make the spaces and experiences of learning?

3.4 Learning and a Learning Space

What is meant by learning? In this section I will endeavour to provide an insight into the conceptualisation of 'learning' as it relates to context, and in what way it might manifest in my chosen research context of non-formal learning environments. What is meant by learning is not straightforward. Any discussion with a lay audience will almost certainly include references to educational institutions such as schools or formal courses or programmes. And if the discussion is with professional educators, it may involve different approaches within the classroom. For example, currently in the UK there is a heated debate in social media (see #edutwitter) about cognitive versus social and emotional approaches amongst educators. In these examples, learning invariably involves identifying the teacher and the 'taught', the one with knowledge and the one who will gain this knowledge through a process of learning. There is, also, a start and an end point/goal/outcome.

However, the educational literature encompasses much wider definitions of learning, showing a move away from teacher-led to learner-centred understandings (Rogers, 2014a). In this perspective, learning is acknowledged as enacting a change upon the individual, transforming knowledge, skill, perspectives and/or attitudes (Mezirow, 2003; Lundgren and Poell, 2016; Maiese, 2017). Within this, it suggests a progression, not necessarily with a defined end point but a progression of an 'increased' something. It is important to note that the role of the educator has traditionally been confined to the knowledge/skills that they impart; consideration of a learner-centred approach, by contrast, opens up the possibility to also consider the learning of the educator within this dynamic.

Whilst the definition of learning has expanded, a key feature of the learning literature for young people is its focus on formal learning, that is learning that takes place inside formal educational institutions. Whilst there is a plethora of literature that covers the student, the teacher, the school, the outcomes and the policies across different educational landscapes, learning is generally conceptualised from the psychological perspective of something happening within the individual learner (Papen, 2012). To complement this, there is also an emphasis on contextual/environmental factors that help the learner to learn more, for example, how teachers give feedback for improvement in learning outcomes (Nicol and MacFarlane-Dick, 2006) or leadership

practices and organisational learning cultures (Silins and Mulford, 2004). With so many isolated variables and generic themes, it is not clear how the assemblages as a whole contribute to the learning and the practice of learning in different spaces.

3.4.1 Traditional theories of learning

The conceptualisation of learning as an individual endeavour has its roots in psychological research with Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development often a starting point, particularly when considering how children learn (Genovese, 2003). The seminal theory focuses on developmental stages of the individual, a progression of knowledge that assumes distinct stages from birth through to adulthood. This notion of development is embedded in dominant notions of time; it is linear, discrete, progressive. This allows children to be tested and ranked at artificial times (Gavin, 2022) which whether intended or not gives rise to the narrative of pass or fail in which either a child has the capacity to be a productive member of society or not. However, in developing the theory, Piaget (1976) recognised that it is in our interactions with the world that we learn. This may have resonance with the concept of 'encounters' in posthumanism but coming from a cognitive science perspective it does not acknowledge/consider what kinds of learning may be happening other than for the individual concerned. In fact, in Piaget's theory, the subject and object are separate. The object (non-human or human) is fixed and boundaried, ready to be found by the learner when they enter the space in which the object is present. In its most recognised form, the theory under explores the potential and possibility of collective learning.

This collectivity of person and environment was recognised by another key theorist for child development and education. Vygotsky (1978), a Russian theorist posited the importance of cultural tools e.g., language in learning. Whilst still taking a cognitive based approach to learning, Vygotsky does emphasise the social aspect of learning. The environment, both human and non-human, provides the context in which learning is not only happening but also shaping the potential outcomes. Key to progression in this social context is having someone who is more proficient either at doing the task or in terms of knowledge and is readily available to show and support the not-so-able learner. In identifying, what Vygotsky (1978) described as the Zone of Proximal Development, he acknowledged both the individual learner and cultural/environmental influences for learning. Bruner (1986) recognised this interaction and considered the role of both

student and teacher in influencing what was being learned. In a process of scaffolding, each step of progression is facilitated by the teacher but one in which the learner is actively participating and in doing so, opens up the world of potentials. Different futures are possible, learning does not have to be discrete and/or described as concrete milestones that are reached at certain times in a person's life. However, what might this mean when both student and teacher are either considered peers or close in developmental stages?

3.4.2 Different types of learning

The theories above consider learning and teaching as predominantly individual activities, where context is important but as distinct from the learner, and mainly acting as a backdrop for the human learner. This is not the only perspective from which to consider learning. Learning has been categorised in many different ways, but a common distinction being made is the difference between formal, non-formal and informal learning. The work of Alan Rogers (building on the work of Alan Tough, 1979) provides an excellent background for understanding different aspects of learning and in particular, the complexity in capturing definitional boundaries of types of learning and the environments in which learning happens. In Rogers' 2014 book *The Tip of the Iceberg*, he explores the importance of informal learning and argues that there is a need to change the discourse from 'education' to 'learning'. In this way, it is recognised that whilst education (largely understood as a planned programme for gaining credentials for learning) is essential for learning, learning does not always need education. By way of illustration, Tough (1989) concluded that in adulthood, 80% of learning undertaken is either self-directed or self-planned.

In addition, while categorisations of learning such as formal, non-formal, informal are beneficial in some circumstances, these categorisations can hide the fact that there is considerable overlap and interplay, and that informal learning takes place in the everyday 'doing', in addition to underpinning the learning in more recognisable educational environments. The informal is the large, hidden base of the learning iceberg and Rogers posits that understanding this configuration allows an examination of the context in which learning takes place. The context will influence the learning that takes place and "**what** is being learned has significant effects on **how** learning takes place" (Rogers, 2014a, p.27 emphasis in the original). I would suggest that the follow on from

this position is that the ‘how’ would then also influence the context and therefore the ‘what’ of learning; in other words, they are intertwined with each other in reciprocal social and contextual relationships.

By way of illustration, a mathematics lesson being taught in a school classroom begins with the ‘how’ - a teacher-led activity with instructions on how to complete the task, and clear guidance and support being provided, although minimal peer discussion. If the group/young people are ‘on task’, they will be participating in formally learning ‘what’ to do for the maths task. They may also be learning to individually solve problems, informally learning how to overcome obstacles and manage time in task management. However, a small group of young people may start to struggle as the ‘how’ may not allow them to discuss with friends/teachers if they are having difficulties, thus possibly provoking different behaviours. The behaviours displayed will incite reactions in others, including the teacher, which impacts the ‘how’ of learning, as now the teacher has to change from instructing to dealing with the behaviour. With the teacher now focused on a smaller group of young people, this affects the ‘what’ being delivered and so now the rest of the cohort may be doing much more informal learning as they watch the management of relationships play out in front of them. They may also be learning about themselves, reflecting on what may be happening and how they feel about it. Or they may try to keep focused on the formal task but their concentration may be affected. It is not until the teacher returns to focus on the rest of the group that the ‘how’ of the learning may be stabilised for the majority. However, in doing this, it may again cause challenges for the minority and so on. The process is not linear but messy, fluid and oblique. These processes include not only what is happening in the now but also the histories that are brought into the environment - we come to each moment with previous experience and emotions as part of us. These affect responses and the reactions to the teaching/learning change the context within that classroom. Every time the context changes, the affective nature of all the bodies changes the dynamics and the potential for learning. Therefore, understanding learning may be better understood as a what-is-happening rather than as a pre-set definition.

This dynamic aspect of learning has a rich history, as discussed in educational literature. As explored above, the work of Vygotsky emphasised the influence of the cultural and social environment for learning for children (Morin, 2012). John Dewey recognised the interdependent nature of learning between the student and the environment. He noted

that individuals are always within a situation, enmeshed in it, passing from one to the next opening or closing down paths in this movement. This means that whatever learning happens in one situation is carried to the next, and in doing so, gives coherence to experience (Dewey, 1997). More recent work in learning environments away from schools have highlighted the importance of learning with and from others. In other research, it has been shown that the situatedness of learning as part of social practices, facilitates communities of practices (Lave and Wenger, 1991) in that learning a skill or technique necessitates the learning through working with others. This learning is not necessarily about the explicit conscious transfer of knowledge from the skilled to the unskilled but about the learner progressing to the embodiment of a competent member of the community in the everyday practices and language, achieving the central identity of that community. In doing so, there emerge demarcations between the community and others, through the practices that inevitably exclude those who are not able to or do not participate (Wenger, 2010). A shared and inclusive space offers opportunities to engage in dialogue and to reflect with others, facilitating learning (Walsh and Li, 2013). The importance of responsive dialogue in a safe space was evident in an exploration of how youth workers acted as mediators for young people navigating everyday literacy practices (Papen and Thriault, 2016). Key to the effectiveness of learning was the youth workers' abilities to respond to the negative emotions of the young people when faced with institutional bureaucracy.

However, in a case study that explored how people experienced the transformation of the rural areas they lived in, learning emerged from their interactions with the other-than-human (Robinson-Pant, 2016a). It was found that informal learning was pivotal in adjusting and responding to the changing environment they lived in; the transformation of the environmental space facilitated the learning to survive or thrive. Learning takes place in different contexts whether recognised or not as spaces of learning. These spaces of learning become defined and redefined through the social practices, not just through the physical space inhabited and what we learn may be predicated on the space (Bayne and Ross, 2013). In this way, space is not just physical but heterogeneous and entangled with practices and situations (Massey, 2012).

3.4.3 Spaces of learning

Thinking about space as amorphous and entangled invites a consideration of what learning means in the context (Rogers, 2014a), particularly identifying what is being privileged in terms of learning and knowledge (Robinson-Pant, 2020) as part of the space. As with types of learning, the spaces in which learning takes place have been categorised in the literature as formal, non-formal and informal. Again, there is complexity in the conceptualisations of the different environments, with boundaries blurred rather than sharply defined. The factors that define the boundaries include the nature of what is being learned, the achievement of certification, the institution itself, pedagogical practices and curriculum (Sefton-Green, 2012; Rogers, 2014a). Schools tend to be defined as formal environments, whilst programmes outside of school where other certification is offered and learning is intended/intentional, may be classed as non-formal; this would be where NCS fits. Informal learning environments are boundaryless – informal learning can happen anywhere. As a contested area, there are many questions as to how to define the environments and even if definitions such as 'non-formal' are beneficial in furthering our understanding of learning (Rogers, 2005). When the types of environments are conjoined with the types of learning, there is no absolute synergy, as even within formal environments, informal learning is taking place. For example, we can pick up information about predominant social norms and the culture of the environment even within a formal classroom that is overtly about learning a more formal curriculum. Nor do you need to be in a specific building/physical building any longer to engage in formal learning, as on-line learning provided by accredited educational institutions was and is commonplace, even before the impact of Covid-19.

I have somewhat simplified my explanation in order to highlight the contested nature of the conceptions, and to suggest that what the terms mean are not necessarily of significance for learners. This is particularly pertinent at the individual level. For example, if one wants to learn to knit, one could consider classes or other ways of learning such as engaging with YouTube videos or attending a WI group. One may not necessarily think about the definitions of their decisions/actions but rather, on how they might access the necessary skill/knowledge and what process of learning might suit them best, what they might respond to and enjoy the most, etc. However, definitions and conceptualisations are significant for researchers, policy makers, practitioners and

also learners in terms of what learning is valued and what funding may be attracted for the work that they justify as important (Rogers, 2005; Vadeboncoeur, 2006).

The learning that is privileged is based on the values of the social and cultural paradigms that are paramount and dominant, namely, the traditional notion of schooling. Katherine Firth (2021), in her highly entertaining and incisive article, highlights that schools in the UK are designed for a specific function. She uses the world of "Harry Potter" stories to apply the writings of Foucault and in particular, his ideas around 'docile bodies' to show how the school space has a purpose to be enacted on others who do not hold institutional power. Schools in the Global North are spaces crafted to achieve a universal way of being (Ball and Collet-Sabé, 2021) which by the use of timetables and rewards for work completed individually (Gee, 2004) privileges individual over collective learning (Hjelmer, Lappalainen and Rosvall, 2010). The space, as defined by the institutional requirements, also creates hierarchies of privileges, with some individuals valued more than others. For example, there is a debate in UK school policy about inclusion. The dominant discourse is about including everyone in school spaces and yet for many children, educational spaces in schools remain inaccessible and/or are hostile places (Runswick-Cole, 2011).

These ideas are not confined to the UK education system. Applying colonial governance systems led to the prominence of formal schooling across the world not just to create colonial subjects but also, influenced the priorities in subsequent international aid and education development programmes (Robinson-Pant, 2016b). It is noted that it is only in recent years that indigenous learning and the right for indigenous peoples to define what is valued as their learning, has entered international education policy (Acharya, Jere and Robinson-Pant, 2019). Previously this was underpinned by the ideological model of literacy (Street, 2011) by which local and indigenous learning was seen as 'other' and therefore, lower in the hierarchy of knowledges and learning practices. Learning structures can 'other' anyone who does not fit the privileged identity that dominates that space. This problematises the 'doing' of relationships for learning further. It opens up the question of how people feel in the learning space, what affect it has on them and what learning emerges in the particular assemblages.

Spaces are therefore important for learning. What is learned may depend on the space inhabited and the types of learning valued may be dependent on the space defined. Not

all spaces are inclusive, whether due to professional boundaries, lived-in locations or dominant ideological barriers; **but,** all learning spaces hold cultural, historical, social and material factors, belying any simplicity of geographical location and making spaces multiple and complex (Massey, 1999). Recognising the multiplicity of learning spaces can help to de-familiarise the familiar; that is, by asking different questions, being curious about what else is happening, allows a focus into not what is represented but what is emerging. Programmes such as the National Citizen Services with multiple learning environments, offer opportunities to ask how spaces can play a role in facilitating or hindering learning. What co-constitutes the entanglement that makes a learning space - people, places, noises, material objects, digital spaces, non-human beings? The materiality of space not only affects what is being learned but how it is being learned and by whom.

3.4.3 NCS as Citizenship Education – An assemblage of spaces and learning

In Chapter 2, there was a brief exploration of what is meant by the terms 'character education' and 'citizenship education' and how they relate to the NCS as a programme. In this section, I will consider NCS, alongside the two conceptualisations in relation to learning and learning spaces. As Massey (1999) writes, the complexity of spaces is not just about the place, and the NCS programme is indicative of this complexity. A cultural and historical ideology influences its proposed delivery and defines the parameters about the types of places that would suit delivery. NCS brings materiality, cultural norms and values to the assemblage. Of space, it co-constitutes the space whilst being co-constituted by the space. NCS is a citizenship programme but as identified in Chapter 2, the values being taught are closely aligned with the teachings of 'character education'. The word 'taught' is important as it suggests that knowledge is being passed from teacher to student as in formal education settings, but the programme is considered non-formal as defined earlier in this chapter. Indeed, it is in this ambiguity of this programme and other similarly positioned programmes that the increasing porosity of boundaries between formal and informal learning has been noted (Mills 2022). The programme is indicative of the issues in definition highlighted by Alan Rogers.

Chapter 2 also considered the conflation of the terms of 'character education' and 'citizenship education'. I would suggest that one of the reasons for the conflation

between the two terms is that pedagogically the approaches may look very similar within Eurocentric systems. The curricula purporting to instil character values are also conducive to encouraging the required values that are redolent of a good citizen e.g. team-building and problem-solving activities. In England, 'character education' activities aim to develop characteristics that "improve national economic competitiveness and increase social mobility" (Bates, 2019, p.1) and as Mills (2022) writes, this is illustrative of a global movement in promoting citizenship and character education. However, in drawing on post-colonial challenges and by considering other spaces of learning, the assumption of universality that underpins this movement problematise the notions of a/one global citizen.

The concepts of character and citizenship are not uniform across the world. Different pedagogical and philosophical approaches exist both within and between countries (Nieto, 2018; Mills, 2022). Linked to globalisation more generally and in particular the globalisation of education, there is the promotion of a global citizen that aligns more closely with the hegemonic narrative of a productive, economically viable individual. As Nieto (2018) states, this conceptualisation is culturally problematic in that it ignores and subjugates the local culture whilst simultaneously drawing upon the notion of a universality of values that excludes other knowledges and ways of being. Producing the global citizen engenders another method of colonisation. Therefore, understanding what learning arises out of 'character education' and citizenship education' is more than acknowledging disagreements in academic conceptualisations and practical application of learning. Instead, there is an epistemological issue (Boyd, 2010; Nieto, 2018) which challenges what it means to be human and the fundamental differences of thought and tradition inherent within different cultures and a diverse society.

An illustration of the tensions can be found in examining attributes that are often listed as important to 'character' or 'citizenship'. For instance, one attribute often identified is 'responsibility'. What does it mean to learn (or teach) 'responsibility'? The word gives meaning and represents ways of being that we assume means the same to everyone. In fact, in some papers there is often not a definition, just a tacit acknowledgement that the reader knows what is meant by the term. However, in moving beyond the Eurocentric literature the precarity of this assumption is more clearly illustrated. What does it mean to have responsibility or to be responsible? As has been highlighted in the critique of NCS (Chapter 2), the idea of responsibility is about taking personal responsibility, being

able to behave in a manner that means you are responsible for yourself and your own actions. The political and community context is only invoked in emphasising the conformity to norms, and not to encourage reciprocity for each other or to be an active participant in shaping futures (Garratt & Piper, 2011; Nieto, 2018). The conception is also human centric – it is about the individual in an anthropocentric world. Harris & Wasilewski (2004) identified a contrasting understanding of responsibility in their synthesis of common core values across North American and Southern Hemisphere indigenous peoples. Here responsibility is to both the community and to preserving a future way of being. Community is defined through relations and 'relatives':

> "*Our relatives include everything in our ecological niche, animals and plants, as well as humans, even the stones, since everything that exists is alive.*" (ibid, p.492)

I would suggest that the two different understandings have an influence on what this may look like in practice. In this sense, the enactment of the understanding, how the values come to be 'done', is not only an epistemological issue, it is also an ontological issue. This begs the question, what does this mean for relationships and learning in this study? Does it matter that the intended notion of learning citizenship and desirable character traits may have different understanding of what this looks like? In the complexity of the NCS space, what learning emerges?

3.5 The potentiality of critical posthumanism, relationships and learning

The academic literature highlights the importance of relationships and the implications for different levels of learning in both educational and other learning environments, whilst the consideration of engagement highlights the importance of connections. The flow of relationships, the dynamism and the movement are not easy to manage with many factors impacting constructive relationships between individuals. Whilst ecological factors have been explored, these have been from the human perspective and fail to account for the little things, the moments in 'minor key' (Manning, 2016) that facilitate relationships and subsequent learning. Rethinking with a posthuman approach and paying attention to affect, difference, other knowledges and materiality, may open up understandings that go beyond the interaction between two people to consider the

entangled connections of mutual implication in a learning environment (Wall Kimmerer, 2013).

Haslam (2017), by means of a social psychological lens, makes explicit the shared nature of learning and in doing so, conceptualises relationships and learning as inextricably linked, echoing the social and reciprocal nature of learning recognised as far back as Dewey (1916). Whilst transformational learning is defined as a reframing of personal beliefs and expectations (Mezirow, 2003), there is a role for understanding the affective and embodied component within a reflective process (Maiese, 2017). Similarly, the dynamism and movement inherent in posthuman thinking means that learning is entwined with the entanglement. Posthumanism not only offers a way of thinking about learning as a social activity but as an activity that depends on the assemblage. Looking at learning through a critical posthuman approach sets the relational, reciprocal nature of relationships within a sensory, social and environmental context, where the boundaries are not defined and meaning is determined as time progresses (Barad, 2003) and the relationship is always becoming (Guattari, 2000). This allows the vulnerability of relationships and the fallibility of interdependence to be recognized in that a shift in one part of an ecosystem can have crucial effects on the future of the relationship (Swanson *et al.*, 2017). In turn, relationships are evolutionary with the possibility of change always present (Haraway, 2017) as they are constantly renegotiated as learning takes place.

3.6 Conclusion

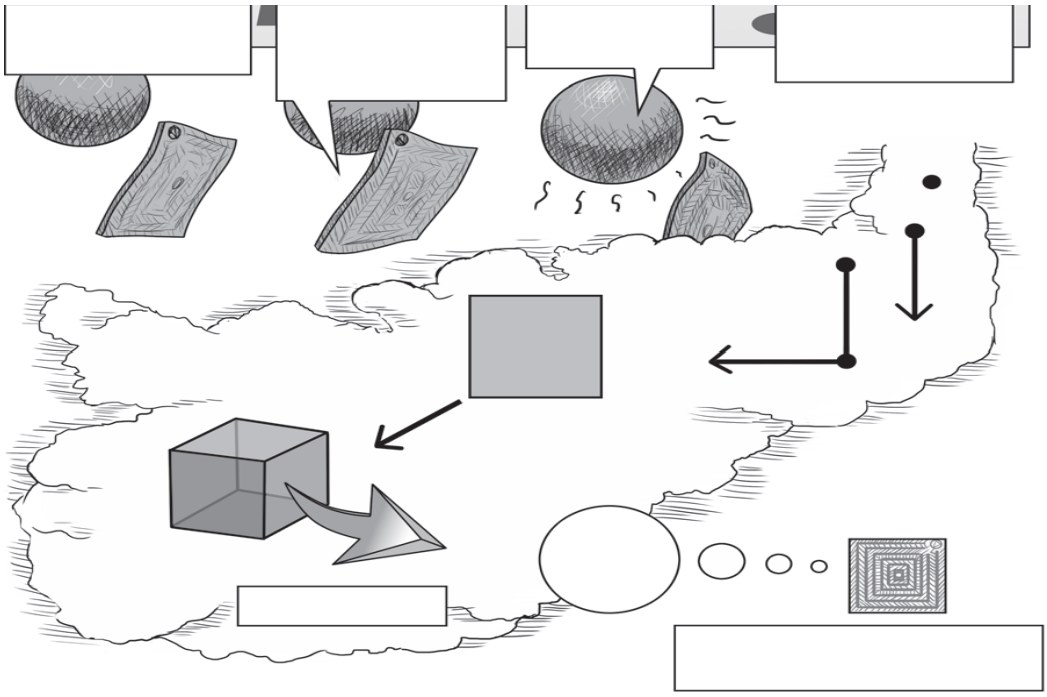
In this chapter I have explored my understanding of posthumanism and in particular critical posthumanism. In doing this I have explored how a critical posthuman approach may offer further insights into learning and learning relationships. In reviewing the literature, I have demonstrated the fundamental importance relationships have to learning, for young people and for the adults that teach them, but recognising the difficulties in navigating relationships in a complex social and physical environment. In consideration of learning, I have reviewed literature that focuses on the child as learner and the adult as teacher before troubling this by looking at other conceptualisations including categorisation of learning, learning as an adult and learning from different knowledges. Finally, I have drawn this together to show the relationship between types of learning and the spaces of learning, and exploring the multiplicity and complexity of

learning spaces. Critical posthumanism offers an opportunity to consider the dynamism, fluidity and reciprocity in building relationships in designated learning spaces, recognising that the spaces co-constitute both relationships and learning. Paying attention to affect, to sensory experiences within social and environmental contexts opens up the potential to understand how relationships are 'done' and what comes to matter in that doing, what is learned and by whom?

Chapter Four: Methodology and Inquiry: How do you explore what comes to matter in relationships for learning?

4.1 The Dilemma

"Returned to his flatland, a square spent his days trying to convince his countrymen to escape the confines of limited dimensionality"



(Sousanis, 2015¸ p.23)

Embracing difference and the new is problematic and exciting. It is challenging and exhilarating. It can lead to questions, doubt, confrontation as well as creativity, belief and new conceptions of social. The above quote and artwork from Nick Sousanis (2015) capture the journey of the 'square' as it learns about new spaces and therefore different ways of seeing whilst fellow 'flatlanders' remain within their known borders. When I sit and read the PhD thesis/comic book of Sousanis, I do so with wonder at the inspiration and bravery shown in his choices against what can seem like heavy and constricting academic traditions. In doing this thesis, I wanted to embrace the freedom and creativity exhibited by Sousanis but I am/was, also conscious of the edifices and conventions with academia that cannot be swept aside. Attempting difference or newness, involves change not just for yourself but also on the part of others to accommodate or adapt to your change. Change is not always welcomed, understood or

supported and therefore I have wrestled with how to straddle the fine line connecting future potential and past conventions.

The Methodology chapter traditionally gives structure, rigour, and offers reassurance that conventions have been followed (Trafford and Leshem, 2008). There are whole textbooks on enabling the student to decide on their own ontological and epistemological stances, and it was not until I started my PhD that I realised how liberating and exciting this could be if one uses these texts to consider the differential positionings of researchers, as well as approaches to research that fall outside conventional frameworks. This proliferation of ways of 'how to do research' also places expectations as to what comes to be recognised as 'rigorous' research. If you deviate from the conventional paths, do you risk becoming unrecognised for your rigour? As a researcher, you are supposed to be discovering new insights but conversely the endeavour is hampered if you leave the boundaries of what is taught (St. Pierre, 2019) or what is expected of you in terms of academic conventions. And yet the premise of posthumanism is exteriority within. It pushes against defined processes, the approach encourages no one way of doing something. There is not a textbook that will dictate or define what posthumanist methodology 'should' look like. Instead, proponents of posthumanism encourage event-oriented propositions (Springgay and Truman, 2018), to imagine and invent (Taylor, 2016), to have more wonder (MacLure, 2013a), and to work with concepts as or instead of methods (Taguchi and St Pierre, 2017). Indeed, prominent advocates such as St. Pierre refute "methodology" as a term and as a practise in posthuman terms and instead argue for '*post qualitative inquiry'* (St. Pierre, 2019) as a means of thinking and doing.

This chapter details how I tried to embrace post qualitative inquiry whilst still being respectful of academic traditions. I will explore the way in which I have approached my research as entangled and immanent within the field I am studying, referring to concepts explored in previous chapters, looking at what I have 'done' in writing this thesis and considering appropriate academic ideas of rigour and process in research.

4.2 What is methodology?

Defining a methodological approach for any social science enterprise is about making explicit a series of choices. Whatever decisions are made can be accompanied by

uncertainty and tension for early career researchers (Mills and Birks, 2014) and not just because of the newness to the field but also due to power differentials within institutions. The tension can be exacerbated as you learn how choices of how you conduct your research and the methods used will both open up and obstruct types of knowledge gathering and production.

Methodology is often presented to researchers as a process involving transparency of decision making to achieve rigour in findings (Trafford and Leshem, 2008). Central to these stances is that rigour is achieved by removing the researcher from the data being collected using various techniques e.g. critical reflection or the bracketing of prior beliefs. This is in contrast to writers such as Barad (2003, 2007) who write of being accountable as opposed to achieving rigour. It is about acknowledging the role of the researcher as immanent to the research and not set apart. I, as researcher, am part of the reconfiguring of the world, a transforming/knowing of myself and the world through the process of research. That is, I am accountable to what materialises through my engagement and encounters with the world. Therefore "...this requires a methodology that is attentive to, and responsive/responsible to, the specificity of material entanglements in their agential becoming" (Barad, 2007, p.91) moving beyond breadth and asking what else is happening? This position reflects the reality (not always acknowledged) that doing research may be a little messier and not quite as clearly defined from an intellectual perspective than is suggested (Bryman, 2012).

Methodology is perceived as the engine that 'drives' the investigation of the research questions. It elevates matters that will be explored and indicates more, or less, appropriate methods and this in turn shapes the 'data' that are seen to 'emerge' and thus influences the conclusions drawn. Yet my research questions emerged from how I have experienced the world; what I have seen, felt, known; what I am curious about; how I understand the world to be or to become; and where I wish to direct my attention. Even before I started the research I was inquiring and wondering about my life as a practitioner, inquiring and trying to make sense of what was happening around me, what might work, when, where and how. The nature of me, the research area and the methodology are entangled even before the 'research' begins. My iteration to this point is a 'mutual constitution' (Hohti, 2016, p.5) through all encounters leaving behind marks which motivated me to embark on the PhD because I wanted to find explanations to experiences that troubled me. I carry a residue that is part of my ongoing becoming;

what comes to matter is a reconfiguration of then, now and potential. I am and have always been inquiring about the world.

As a researcher and practitioner, the concept of entanglement within posthumanism has intuitive appeal as I am conscious of how I am starting from the middle of 'doing'. I am not an objective or even subjective participant, as reflection cannot take me out of the phenomena I am studying. I am marked by the before and changed in the future by the now in continual intra-actions. I cannot be exterior to the research because of my enfolded historicity in the field as a practitioner but also as a researcher, interiority eludes me because my role differs from that of both the staff and young people. Accepting this can also help with meeting requirements expected of me. Instead of struggling with the dichotomies of transparency vs opaqueness (Barad, 2003), I can acknowledge the middle. The middle is not a comfortable place but it is a place for agitation, growth and exploration (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; Taguchi and St Pierre, 2017; Springgay and Truman, 2018). My choice of inquiry is predicated on how I move, have moved, continue to move in the world, the iterations that have become and come to matter in intra-actions.

4.3 What about the research methodology?

My inquiry considers relationships for learning as they are 'done', thinking about how they come together. This requires moving away from framing relationships in terms of positive (or negative) attributes needed for 'successful' learning and instead examining how we move through the entanglement of relationships and what comes to matter within everyday living/learning. There is lots of advice and guidance and a recognition of cultural and power dynamics that impinge on effectiveness of relationships. However relationships are built and sustained not just as dyadic connections but as part of a whole group with a symbiotic and sympoietic connection with each other (Haraway, 2017). We rely on each other, and we evolve together as part of different phenomena. Therefore, to capture aspects in isolation (e.g. surveys defining variables) or with hindsight (e.g. interviews) misses the nuances of the 'doing' within a programme like NCS. We may fail to appreciate the little things, the little decisions, the little actions that are all part of intra-actions. To pay attention to them, we can explore how phenomena, as a unit of analysis, are constituted and re-constituted across space and time (Barad, 2007). It is about understanding life in all its liveliness.

This is more than using an ecological lens such as that of Bronfenbrenner (1976) to account for specific objects in an environment/site. It is about a 'doing', that is about dynamic relations within an assemblage. It is an attempt to capture how people actually 'do' the work of building relationships that moves away from preconceived ideology that privileges either the individual or the social (Carpenter and Mojab, 2008) and instead focuses on the messiness and the entanglement of living. This also allows exploration of learning and its relation to affect, materiality and embodiment which is an often underexplored aspect of learning (Mäkelä and Löytönen, 2017).

Being able to focus on the doing and the entanglement involved in 'doing' required me to move beyond a methodology that only allowed data capture at fixed points (for example, observations), or relied only on speech/language analysis (e.g. interview transcript analysis), and instead embrace a methodology that allowed me to think about life as it is negotiated and experienced (Dowling *et al*, 2018), observing learning not just in the measurement of 'what' but 'how', 'where','when' and 'by whom'. This agitates learning away from an abstract quantifiable concept towards an iteration, an ongoing potential for change or validation whether constructive or destructive. The methodology needed to embrace ways of being, doing and becoming whilst acknowledging that there is no pre-determined way of recognising what this may look like.

4.3.1 Thinking as methodology

One of the more challenging aspects of posthumanism is the reworking of the centrality of humanism and what this means in doing research. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, methodology has expected conventions, and each term e.g. 'data', 'representation', 'analysis' etc, is imbued with expectations and meanings (Jackson and Mazzei, 2018). These conventions are excellent examples of how the culture, in this case academic culture, has representationalism so embedded in its practices that it can seem like common-sense (Barad, 2003). What I mean by this and the problematic nature of it will be explored in the next section. Moving towards a post-qualitative inquiry that does not privilege these terms is both exciting and incredibly scary particularly when there are no defined strategies for how this is done (Jackson and Mazzei, 2018; Springgay and Truman, 2018; St. Pierre, 2019). Whilst there is no clear-

cut guidance on how to 'do' research using a posthumanist approach, it does not mean that it is bereft of anchors that may orient the researcher.

"I advise my students to read hard, write hard, and think hard…" (St Pierre, 2019, p.4)

Perhaps this is good advice for any researcher. The ethos underpinning posthumanism is not just about finding answers or solutions to old questions instead it is about provocation, noticing the ruptures and difference which pose new questions, indeed to ask questions that we perceive as unthinkable or forbidden (Weinstein and Colebrook, 2017) because they are part of world that does not yet exist. In learning environments, it is to consider how learning and relationships are enfolded and constituted through intra-actions. To do this there is a necessity to think and as St. Pierre remarks, to 'think hard'. The thinking takes place from the middle, it does not come from the outside (Jackson and Mazzei, 2018) and it opens up new lines of thought, creating different questions (Ulmer, 2016). I will illuminate my understanding of this further in this chapter, holding close to me that different configurations of the world (Barad, 2007) emerge through the entanglement of thinking and writing and engagement with fieldwork and theory.

4.4 How to 'do' methods?

4.4.1 Issues of data and representation

As stated above, the posthumanist approach to methodology poses challenges not least because of its insistence that ontological, epistemological and ethical stances are all entangled and cannot be differentiated. In line with post-structuralism, there is refutation of the assumption of fully formed objects ready to be studied but unlike in post-structuralism, the concepts of human culture and language are not given priority (Schadler, 2019). Instead phenomena are of ontological interest with semantic units evident within material-discursive practices (Barad, 2007). This ethico-onto-epistem-ological stance, explained in more detail in Chapter 3, contests the duality of objectivity and subjectivity. The shift in ontology and epistemology moves from an either/or binary to entangled, immanent and between, thus shaping concepts of 'data' and 'representation'.

If a stance, as taken in posthumanism, refutes defined entities as the starting of being and knowing in the world, and holds instead that there is continual iteration and re-iteration with phenomena in its becoming, then it also holds that data is no longer a 'thing' that can be captured. Data is no longer something that is waiting to be seen or held so that meaning can be attached to it by way of humanistic approaches (St. Pierre, 2013). Neither is it temporally or spatially bound to be put aside once the data collection is over (Koro-Ljungberg, 2013; Koro-Ljungberg, MacLure and Ulmer, 2018). There is a line of thought amongst posthumanist scholars that terms such as data are not helpful and ask that we remember that despite the self-evident 'truths' of terms, that what we have are constructed truths within academic culture (Jackson and Mazzei, 2018).These truths are predicated on the dominance of Enlightenment ideals, even in qualitative research (Davies, 2018) which holds the rational, masterful individual human at its core, preceding the knowledge production (Lather and St. Pierre, 2013; St. Pierre, 2016b). But as explored in the literature review, language is not separate from the world, words don't stand over the world, they collide and they are imbricated (Lather and St. Pierre, 2013; MacLure, 2013b). There is a dynamism and movement to the world that is not captured by words and signs alone, instead language just like any other force or affect precedes the movement and comes to be known through the intra-action as much as any other body within the entanglement (MacLure, 2013b). This dynamism proposes not representationalism as the foundation of research but performativity, moving the inquiry to practices as we directly engage in the world, moving and sensing (Barad, 2007) and recognising that research practices are part of the constitution of the phenomena being studied (Hayes and Comber, 2018).

Vannini (2015a) suggests that the difference of non-representational research lies in its focus on events, relations, affects, doings and backgrounds. The excitement in doing non-representational research arises in moving from capturing data towards enlivening the data to resonate with others in the now and future (ibid):

"By animating lifeworlds, non-representational research styles aim to enliven rather than report, to render rather than represent, to resonate rather than validate, to rupture and reimagine rather than to faithfully describe, to generate possibilities of encounter rather than construct representative ideal types" (Vannini, 2015a, p.15)

It is in this spirit or style that I have undertaken my research precisely because of its potential to animate how people do relationships in the learning environments, to move beyond description and to consider what happens and what potentials open up in the day-to-day practices of both learning and relationships. This helped me to trouble the concepts of what good relationships look like, think about how they are done and consider how learning emerges.

4.5 In the Field – what did I do?

I have titled this section with the indication that it is about the fieldwork. The reality is that I have lived and been affected by the fieldwork. Even on my return home, it has not left me, which perhaps run counter to the legacy of conventional approaches in which there is often a divide between home and fieldwork (Eichhorn, 2001). I still remain entangled in the then, aware of it in the now and thinking about the 'what next'. I will explore this immanence throughout this next section which details how I have lived my research over the last few years.

4.5.1 The Offer of Ethnography

Starting from the middle, and still being in the middle means that I have felt the pressure of our 'square'. The square was faced with the challenge of changing perceptions of its own experience and I needed to be uncomfortable again. I needed to guard against assumptions of what happens based purely on my past experiences. I also needed to be in a situation where new relationships were being formed which is why NCS appealed. It is a learning programme that is based on forming new relationships with different people for a final task to be completed. Given the nature of the programme which includes two residentials, it was possible that the full impact of the environment, both observational and affective, would not be experienced by me if I was not with the group as they went through the whole programme. Therefore my choice to undertake an ethnographic study was to allow access to phenomena amidst the everyday of fieldwork and it afforded me the means to not just capture observations of intra-actions and note patterns within the context in which it occurs (Street, 2001) but to do more than this.

Ethnography from a posthuman approach opened up different lines of thought and questions, in part due to the different ethico-onto-epistemological position. This

perspective provided different opportunities to not only be aware of cultural differences but also to be alert to other differences such as materiality and embodied/corporeal experiences. This 'ontological turn' (Heywood, 2017) in ethnography challenges the way we think about difference and in particular the way in which different people have diverse perspectives in understanding and living in the world. This recognises that it is not just different ways of viewing one world that is being represented but that there are many ways to conceptualise and live in the world that need to be accounted for (ibid). For example, Eduardo Kohn (2013) in his book "*How Forests Think*" researches beyond the human. He challenges us to understand how forests think, not just how humans think a forest thinks. In doing this, there is an amplification and exemplification of features offering a different understanding of the world. Similarly, Lien and Pálsson (2021) in a re-examination of existing ethnographic texts and artefacts, explore the more-than-human that had been side-lined in the original analyses and in doing so they demonstrate how the alternate approach adds to our understanding of the liveliness of the world. Ethnography is thus evolving with posthumanist approaches, in questioning the (human) culture centredness of anthropology and ethnography.

Our encounters with the world are not the same and the world becomes intelligible through those encounters. Ethnography, with its discipline of rich and thick description, offered the chance to observe relations as they unfold against the backdrop of the everyday and an approach based on posthumanism pays attention to the 'vitality, performativity, corporeality, sensuality, and mobility' (Vannini, 2015b, p.318) of the world in its becoming. Bringing posthumanism and ethnography together is about capturing the exciting and diverse number of relational possibilities, to welcome the messiness and creativity inherent in transgressive data (Hohti, 2016), and embrace the phenomena, acknowledging energy and the tension of fluidity and stickiness within the research area (Lorimer, 2008) whilst offering opportunities to capture the moment of 'wonder' (MacLure, 2013a) as I will elaborate further in the chapter.

4.5.2 The Field

The organisation I approached for my fieldwork was a charitable sports organisation in the North of England, I am calling it Happy Sports Inc. I had worked with the organisation and in particular the Manager of the NCS Programme for approximately five years. I had/have a good relationship with the Manager and their Chief Executive,

and they had been aware of my research before I approached them to work in partnership. They were typical of many NCS providers in the region, a charity that had previously focused on sports and branched into youth work type programmes as local youth work services disappeared.

The organisation has been recognised as a very good provider by their regional management partner and the NCS Trust, and as such their numbers had increased considerably over the years I had been working with them. In 2019, their target of young people was high and so delivery was divided into eleven programmes from June to August. Each programme in NCS parlance is known as a 'Wave' and each wave for this organisation had between 60 to 180 young people with corresponding staff members as the full cohort. The sizes of the waves are typical of the national picture as each cohort was divided into teams of up to 15 young people and sixty in the cohort would make four teams. Each team had an equivalent Team Leader (TL) and Assistant Team Leader (ATL) as staff (these positions are not always named the same across programmes but the NCS Trust stipulates that each group has to have two adult staff). Each wave also has a 'Wave Leader' who is responsible for the whole cohort managing the day to day running of the programme and liaising with the core staff and other partners, this position was known as Cohort Leader on the programme I joined. The ratios of two adults to 15 young people are good ratios for a general populace of young people and comfortably within the legal requirements.

4.5.3 The People

I joined 'Wave five' as a researcher but with the usual obligations that included due regard to safeguarding concerns. The staff on the wave consisted of one Cohort (Wave) Leader, five Team Leaders (TLs) and five Assistant Team Leaders (ATLs). There were 68 young people who turned up on day one, so the teams had 13 or 14 young people in each. This was complemented by a cast of other instructors, managers and support personnel dropping in and out of the programme at different times according to the different environments and activity timetable each week. For example, in the first week at the residential centre each team had an activity instructor assigned to them and they were always joined by a further activity instructor, either as support or leading the designated activity. In the second week, one member of Happy Sports Inc's core team was with the cohort to help manage the coming and going of the activity delivery

partners and there were a number of outside organisations that came in to deliver sessions.

The young people's demographics were reflective of the local area in terms of ethnicity and social background. In terms of gender, the split was two-thirds who identified as female and a third as male. Whilst the demographics of this cohort were generally reflective of the local population in its goal of achieving a social mix in cultural and social backgrounds, the National Audit Office identified this may not be typical in other geographical areas (Auditor General, 2017) with a question placed on how other areas are achieving a robust social mix particularly in and around London. Issues include achieving a balance of participants from across the spectrum of household incomes, an issue particularly pertinent in London. The balance of young people recruited from different backgrounds has implications for meeting one of the core components of the programme, that of connecting with new people. If the cohort is more homogenous, it is seen as liable to perpetuate existing habits, and not challenge thinking for new learning. It also has implications for achieving the 'social cohesion' aim of NCS in encouraging understanding of different backgrounds within the community.

The staff group was a young base, with an average age of 22 years, ranging from 18-34 years. However aside from the oldest member and the Cohort Leader, the rest of the staff were aged 23 years or below. At the time of the fieldwork, I was 47 years old, contributing to a massive age difference not just in terms of years lived but years worked - I had started working with young people before all but two of the members of staff had been born. Of the staff team, five were previous NCS participants (although not necessarily in their first year as staff) and for four of the team, it was their first time working with young people. Of the eleven members of the team, just three identified as male and the rest as female and the majority of the team were from the local area and knew it well. Eight of the group were in education or just leaving education in one form or another (university or college), the other three were in job roles that were school term based, so were able to do other work over the summer period. Their interests and background were varied. For example, there was a medical student, a theatre student, a mental health nurse trainee, a recently qualified teacher and a youth worker who was now studying for an outdoor education degree. Much of the group had hobbies that were centred around either the arts or sports, five of the staff were involved in fairly high-level football or rugby. These contextual factors in their backgrounds influenced

what each staff member brought to the learning environment and what skills and tools they already had at their disposal in terms of building relationships.

4.5.4 The Local Programme – our physical environment

This section gives some context to the materiality and locally specific features in which the programme took place as this has significance in exploring the data. I lived in the local area which was an ex-mining town in the North of England for the final three weeks of the programme. For the first week I was at the residential centre in Scotland.

The first week was set at an outdoor residential centre not far from the Scottish/English border in a beautiful, picturesque part of the world. It was remote, at the end of a dead-end road approximately one mile from the main 'A' road, we had travelled on. My first impression was unfortunately a little jaded, having been to so many outdoor education residential centres, and it seemed very typical in terms of my expectations. In fact, it turned out to be both worse than my expectations (accommodation) and better (the staff).

At a distance, the accommodation seemed idyllic. There were wooden cabins dotted about a fairly steep hillside surrounded by trees and slightly further afield rolling hills (Figs. 2&3).

Figure 2: Cabins at the top of the hillside

Figure 3: A view of the lake

However, on closer inspection, and as is my experience of outdoor provision in general, the cabins were old, basic, and as I wrote at the time, they were '*superficially clean. Look in the corners & under things & it is not so good*' (Notes from my little book, Week 1, Day 3). As a staff member, I was staying in a cabin with a kitchen and dining table. We had a shared space to sit and chat, unlike the cabins the young people were staying in. There were three bedrooms, sleeping two people in each so I shared the cabin with four other female staff members. My room had bunk beds but I was alone so I was able to make it homely, as I like to do when I am away (Fig. 4).

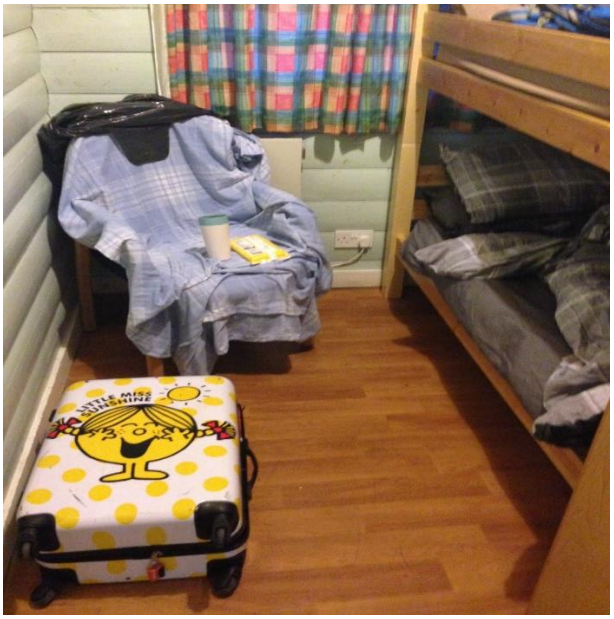


Figure 4: My bedroom on Week 1 residential

The young people were in cabins according to self-identified gender. It should be noted that there was a young person that identified as trans male and his needs regarding sleeping quarters were handled with sensitivity and practicality prior to going away. This meant he stayed where he felt comfortable and with a mind to his safeguarding needs sharing a room and cabin with a pre-existing, well-established friendship group. Each cabin's layout had two to three bedrooms sleeping between eight and twelve young people, each cabin sharing one or two basic bathrooms. Despite it being the height of summer, the air did get chilly but the cabins were warm and really quite cosy with heating throughout. The cabins were spaced out at approximately ten metre intervals, mapped out as individual communities of four to ten cabins in each. We were spread out on a hillside and if you look at Fig. 5 you can see a crude map. If this sheet of paper was laid on the hillside, it would cover a large, approximately 300m^2 area.

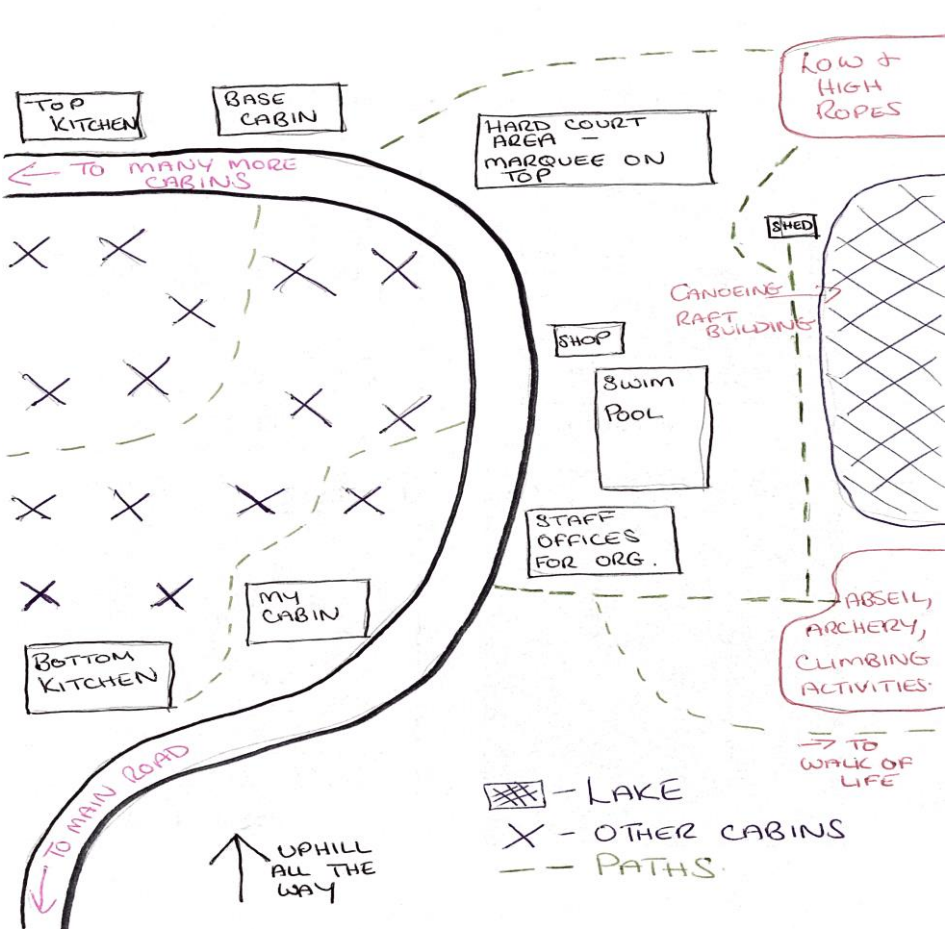


Figure 5: A hand-drawn map of the residential site in Week 1

The map shows that the top kitchen cabin was in the top left-hand corner, the bottom kitchen was the bottom left corner and in between these on the left-hand side were the

cabins. If you moved to the bottom right of the paper, this is where the climbing wall and archery area were situated and in the top right-hand corner were the high and low ropes activity areas. Along the right-hand side was the lake in which all the water activities were carried out. The 'Walk of Life' activity was the only activity that required walking further, this was situated about 750m up a steep hill further right to our square. I walked approximately three miles per day moving about the centre, this would be slightly more than the staff and young people, as I moved a lot between groups during sessions. It should be noted that the site was on the side of a hill and my cabin was at the bottom of that hill.

As a whole cohort we were allocated two kitchen/dining cabins, one at the top of the hill and one at the bottom. The bottom one was my nearest kitchen although I dined in both to ensure I was experiencing both of them. To accommodate the numbers in our cohort, the capacity of each cabin meant we had to split into two groups for dining. This also meant that there was not a warm area in which the group of eighty people could all be together. We did have access to a large marquee that was positioned on a hard court sports area (top, middle(ish) on the map). This simply allowed a dry area to congregate if we were doing cohort activities together. There was nothing to sit on except the floor and being outside, it was not the warmest of spaces.

As mentioned, despite it being summer when we were away, the weather was changeable. It was hot and humid when we first arrived but the following day it rained incessantly. This continued all week and got windier as the week passed. The evenings were cool to chilly, I always carried a hoodie, a fleece, and waterproof coat and trousers. One of my strongest memories was the effort it took to take all the outerwear off when entering the cabin and then putting it all back on when leaving. After a couple of nights with patchy sleep, it felt exhausting. The weather conditions and the number of trees plus a still body of water meant that the environment was ripe for midges. I have travelled all over the world including the Amazon jungle in Brazil, and I have never experienced the relentlessness of the midges that I experienced during this week. Luckily, I had planned and was prepared, I had brought my 'Avon Skin So Soft' moisturiser (the bug repellent choice of the British Army or so legend has it) and I wore long sleeves and long trousers at all times. Whilst good for insect bites, it got quite hot when the sun appeared. I did not get one bite all week however others were not so lucky, by the second day there were a lot of people experiencing a lot of bug bites. The

midges were a frequent topic of conversation, incredibly distracting, annoying and sometimes quite painful as this photo of a staff member's leg demonstrates (Fig. 6).

Figure 6: A staff member's leg covered in midge bites

This contextual information highlights that not only were the young people and staff predominantly meeting each other for the first time (there were some existing, small friendship groups of 2-4 people), they were also experiencing new challenging activities and they were learning to cope with new and arduous physical conditions.

Our second week, superficially, seemed to present a more conducive living environment. We were housed in university student accommodation at a campus on the outskirts of the town in which most of the young people lived. It was quite rural around us, surrounded by fields but only twenty minutes away in the car to the hubbub of the

town. The views were quite spectacular as we were perched on a hill with a clear view to the valley below as this photo taken at the campus entrance shows (Fig. 7).

Figure 7: The view from the entrance gate of the Week 2 venue

There were several large blocks of buildings housing a number of flats in each. Our cohort was placed in two blocks according to self-identified gender. There was a cohort from another organisation placed in the two blocks immediately next to us– all four blocks providing three sides to a square with the fourth side open. There was a grassy area and parking spaces in front of the blocks in which groups of staff and young people hung out during periods of down time. Inside the blocks, they were divided into smaller flats of six to seven single ensuite rooms and a shared kitchen, one room in each flat was occupied by a staff member. In each room, as well as access to their own bathroom facilities, there was one bed, a desk, shelving and a wardrobe – a typical student room, see Fig. 8.

Figure 8: Accommodation for the second week

These were blocks due for refurbishment, so the furniture was old, the mattresses looked saggy and sorry for themselves and the rooms were quite dark. However the general atmosphere was that many of the young people were really pleased at having their own rooms for this week. The kitchens were used for them to cook their own meals during the week, this was a team exercise which involved planning the menu and budgeting for their food. The staff members were included in this, so the quality of food was very much dependent on who was residing in the flat. Role was not a factor, but experience was important. For instance, there were a group of girls with Asian heritage who were together in a flat in order to ensure their dietary requirements were met. The food they produced was exceptional all week – flavoursome, varied, used lots

of fresh vegetables, good portions and always cooked well. Whereas another group of girls who also had a staff member who was not a great cook, ate what can only be described as 'beige food' – lots of carbohydrates and oven ready food. This meant in terms of nutrition and fuel for the body, the experiences of the young people and the staff were very different which has implications for both relationships and learning.

My own accommodation was separate from the cohort, I had my own room in a block used for hiring to the public. The décor was nicer and the rooms provided more comfort with items such as towels and a TV included. The alternate position of my room was because this room was my 'home' base as my actual home was a four hour drive away. Originally, I was supposed to be in this room for the final three weeks but there was confusion on the booking and so I spent my last week in a local Premier Inn. I was made a packed lunch and cooked a meal by a different flat each lunchtime and evening. I got to taste the range of food on offer, and I can verify the difference in quality and quantity. As with the previous week, hills featured in our daily walking pattern as the accommodation blocks were a walk up the hill to the activity venue, which under normal operating conditions was the Student Union building. It had several rooms that could be used for group activities, one large room that held all the group, an outside marquee with tables and chairs, and a number of informal areas including wooden tables and chairs outside. My average daily walking distance was not quite three miles as once we were at the activity venue, we tended to stay in and around there, only going back to the accommodation blocks for the evening meal and scheduled downtime.

For all of us in Week two, we no longer had the demands of the variable weather or having to deal with the midges. However as this was the summer, it was a period where the weather started to get very warm, hitting mid 20's Celsius. In addition, we were experiencing even longer days due to the demands of the programme. My earliest time of getting into bed was 12.30am and I was up at 7.00am each day. I know that this was typical for much of the cohort so consequently there were many very tired people by day 2/3 of the second week. The heat and the tiredness worked together to affect some of the activities, particularly during the afternoon. As Fig. 9 illustrates, taken during a mental health awareness session, many of the young people were either sat with their eyes closed or even had fallen asleep. Therefore, what learning may or may not be taking place that afternoon? And what role may have the lethargy played in the maintenance of relationships with others?

Figure 9: A snapshot from the Mental Health Awareness workshop

The third week was the final week in which the whole cohort was based together and as the programme had working hours of just 9.00-4.00pm, people generally turned up to the venue looking fresh(er) each day. We were based in a Further Education college building, a fairly new five storey building in the centre of the town. The build was typical of schools and colleges built in the last fifteen years, lots of floor to ceiling windows, high security measures, and an airy central atrium that ran uninterrupted from the ground floor to the roof. Due to the secure entry points (nicer versions of the London Underground gates) only the staff members with passes could allow entry to the cohort members. This meant that one staff member had to stay in the atrium entrance beyond the 9am start to ensure the latecomers could get in. Once past the atrium and the adjoining canteen, which was closed for the summer, we had to go to the fourth floor for the classrooms that were allocated to us. If you had a pass, then you could use the lift however as per the college rules, the young people were not allowed to take the lift, they were only permitted to take the stairs. A raft of rules were imposed on the programme based on the typical usage of the education building, a perhaps familiar distribution of power between the staff and the young people.

The classrooms were typical of modern English classroom design containing furniture that would be expected in a classroom such as desks and chairs alongside items such as

electronic whiteboards. Each group was assigned an individual classroom as their base and the layout of the classrooms were rearranged according to what the group wanted and as such every classroom was laid out differently. Team 1 occupied a classroom that had no windows onto the outside instead half of two walls were actually windows looking into the corridor, or alternatively, windows that looked into the classroom. The final space allocated was two computer rooms shared by us all, each room contained banks of computers approximately twenty in each room. This whole environment offered familiarity for the group, no matter what school attended, the college signified the boundaries and space of an education building.

The weather was even hotter this week, in fact temperatures were some of the hottest of the year, reaching into the 30s. We were told the classrooms had air conditioning, but didn't seem like it in the reality of cloying, humid heat sticking to bodies. The coolest places to sit were in the corridors and given the nature of the phone calls and small group discussions that were had, there were often a number of young people working in the corridors. Young people were given an hour for lunch, and they could leave the premises and go into the town centre. The staff typically ate together in a little on-site restaurant that was open to the public, sharing ideas and their experiences of the day, catching up on paperwork as well as relaxing a little. However, over a couple of lunchtimes, I took the opportunity to walk into the city centre and experience the local favourite and iconic eating spots, including a butcher's shop that did amazing hot snacks and a local bakery serving an array of fresh sandwiches. The young people were keen to know what I thought of their recommendations and it gave rise to a number of conversations about their hometown.

What occurred to me during this week was that the environment was familiar to the young people, its boundaries and expectations known but after the rigidity of the timetable and expectations placed in the first two weeks, this week was more flexible, and they seemed more comfortable. This surprised me as I had gone into the week wondering what effect being in a 'school' environment in the centre of town might have. But of course, the third week meant they now all knew each other much better and had established relationships with each other, so there was much more stability and familiarity within the context as a whole.

The final week was a smorgasbord of locations and places depending on what activity the young people were doing. I spent much of the week driving to different places including a local park full of people enjoying the hot weather, a local indoor football and play centre, a community centre, a home for the elderly, the highest natural point of the local area and the college which was in use as a central meet point, if needed. In this week, the next cohort had laid stake to the college as they completed their Week 3, so our groups would congregate in the atrium and canteen. I felt disoriented in this week as I had no secure base to return to, isolating me from really enjoying the successes of the groups in the social action efforts. There was a lot of learning for me during the fourth week and a time of reflection.

4.5.5 'Doing' Fieldwork

Fieldwork was conducted July-August 2019. This is not a case study of NCS, instead the choice of NCS presents a site that offers an empirical basis for my research questions. Despite my expectations going into the fieldwork, I think, that as with many researchers, the reality was more fluid and complicated as compared to the plan I submitted for the purposes of the Probationary Review and to the Ethics Committee. My probationary paper talked boldly about the situations I would find myself in and how I would collect 'the data' that would ensure I captured motivations, thoughts and emotions as strategies were enacted and learning undertaken. There was a bold simplicity to the strategies I had written that I would use, for example taking advantage of non-intrusive times such as walking between activities or mealtimes. And I did do this, but it was messier than I had envisaged; snatches of conversations at times, not always an immediate follow-up to situations that had sparked my curiosity, moments of intensity that were not always about talking.

There were actions I took to help me remember and inquire, not to help capture data, but to help me reproduce moments that would stay with me or come back to me at a later date. Once active at 7am on the first morning of the first residential, I very quickly remembered that any formal structure was going to be impossible. There were 11 staff and 68 young people ready to leave and to be joined at various points by a cast of supporting actors, human or otherwise. It felt like a whirlwind of organised chaos. I learned quickly to be opportunistic by taking photos (on an old iPhone taken for the purpose of this and to record video), taking audio recordings (I had two small USB

recorders, bright blue in colour and hanging on brightly coloured lanyards), jotting things in my little note-books (Alice in Wonderland themed as inspiration), typing up daily reflections (on my almost brand new and very light laptop) when I was not too tired, joining the various WhatsApp groups (through a work phone with the young people groups and a personal group with the staff on my own phone), taking occasional video recordings and mainly just hanging around with groups and staff members. I learned to 'just be', staying and moving, chatting and watching, walking and sitting.

Discussions and interviews were ad-hoc in the main, a 10-minute conversation with a small group of young people, recording of the reflection sessions for the young people, talking with groups as we ate our meals together. Sometimes a group would request me to be with them whether it was because they had things they wanted to say or they wanted me to see their work and even just because they wanted me around (which made me feel very much included and part of the cohort). Occasionally they would ask for my camera to take photographs, or ask me to take specific photos.

The materials I carried demonstrated the manifestation of agency as a co-constructed line of flight. It quickly became perceptible that the video recorder was only welcome when requested or during large, fun group gatherings, for example the disco. Other times, the videoing would change the intra-actions, closing off what might be. I was aware of the discomfort and self-consciousness it provoked and so I stopped using the video as a regular feature. However, when I return to the videos, I am always struck by their ability to convey something of how the room felt during these periods. The videos are affective moments, first hand produced by the actor(s) involved (Knudsen and Stage, 2015). The affect is felt both by myself with the camera as mediated by the requests to be filmed, but with further affective force when I was just sat at my desk watching, listening, absorbing. They made me smile, I felt the warmth coming through.

The audio recorder was easier to use, I felt it was less obtrusive and intrusive. I always announced when I was turning it on and if new people joined any discussions, I ensured they were aware of its status as either on or off. There were different individual relationships with the audio recorder. For instance, Saffron, who appears in Chapter 5 with the chair, would always ask me to make sure it was off when she wanted to talk to me on a one-to-one basis. Whereas Peyton would bound over to me and ask me to put it on so he could talk to me about whatever was on his mind.

The more basic and analogue recording technologies were not omitted from these curious relationships. There was inquisitiveness about my little Alice in Wonderland books:

> *"So as we were walking back from the block to Venue, Layla B asked what I have written about her in my book, I said what do you think, she said 'bad stuff'"* (Notes from my little book, Week 2, Day 1)

This exchange happened in the second week and the strange aspect of this was although Layla was very prominent within the whole cohort, when I looked through to see what I had noted, I realised that I had not written about her very much at all, just in passing when she was with other girls. This made me feel guilty. I asked myself why I had not written about her, maybe I was aware that I mainly saw her in circumstances where her behaviour could be interpreted as "difficult" and so I did not want to record it in detail. Layla was in a group that I had probably spent the least time with at the point she asked me this, so maybe the lack of a deeper relationship with the group was obscuring what I was recording and remembering. I became a little more conscious of where my attention was being drawn. The rest of the programme was punctuated with Layla wanting to know if I had seen any good things that she had done. I made a mindful effort to notice the good and write something so she could feel and re-live any positive interactions. This also illustrates how my role was blurry, that I was very much in the middle. I was writing the positive so that Layla could recognise the good. This recognition of the positive is an ethos from my youth work roles that I would not want to change.

Learning is not always immediate or visible (Rogers, 2014a) and directly asking what learning was taking place often drew functional, instrumental answers. However, I gave the staff little notebooks of their own to jot down any thoughts and feelings. Not all members used them, but a handful did, and they would give me the books on an ad-hoc basis for me to read. I would then write thoughts or questions and return the books. They allowed both a retrospective consideration and a feed forward reflection (Meijer *et al.*, 2017) which I found useful. In addition, the WhatsApp messages provided 'some in the moment but held across time' relations and communications, these I explore in Chapter Seven.

The timetable offered some more structured moments that allowed me to explore how staff were perceiving, feeling and being. Each week on the Thursday and Friday, I tried

to sit with each member of staff individually to explore the week with them. I did not have set pre-prepared questions, but I would ask about the week, using episodes as starting points to reflect on their practice. Episodic interviewing is often used as way to draw out "implicit knowledge and beliefs" (Trautwein, 2018, p.999) however thinking with posthumanism, episodic interviews interested me in their utility to remember, to draw out emotions, to recall the material-discursive practices and what traces were left with the staff member, one such episode that centred on an argument over a chair appears in Chapter 5.

I would also sit in on the team reflections held at the end of the day as the staff were waiting for the young people to settle for the night. These sessions were run by the Programme Manager/Cohort Leader. Alongside taking notes, I would often ask or answer questions and talk with staff members as they thought through events of the day. These were moments when the entanglement and immanence of my position were most difficult for me. In exploring issues, I was interested in their thoughts and feelings but they were also interested in my thoughts and feelings, a reciprocation in learning. The personal challenges I experienced are referred to in more detail in the section on ethics. I spent time with the Programme Manager just chatting. She liked to bounce ideas off me and offload some of her frustrations and we did this at least once a day.

In addition to this, I wanted to understand the different environments being utilised, as an ecological lens would suggest physical space would impact on the learning spaces and the maintenance of relationships. I wrote frequently about the spaces, the non-human and the materiality noting the physical, sensory and affective nature of the environment.

> *"*So what else happened yesterday? On wake up, it was spent dealing with bites in the cabin i.e. they all have bites that they are having to cope with so there was antiseptic cream, crossing bites and spraying insect repellent liberally – in my case I have loaned the use of Avon Skin So Soft as the bees knees of insect repelling. I don't want to speak too soon but I am relatively bite free – hurrah." (Reflection, Week 1, Day 3)

This is an entry from one of my reflections during the first week. The 'they' I refer to are the female staff I shared a cabin with. The mosquitos had been enthusiastically

feeding off my colleagues, my joy at not being bitten was a reaction to the pain I saw in them.

I, also, tried to pay attention to my body noting that embodiment is not just about time and place but about the dynamic relationality of being (Barad, 2007). It was how I was experiencing the demands of the programme as seen in this entry from Day 2 of the first week:

> *"I, also realised as I left the cabin earlier about how difficult and time consuming it is even getting out of the cabin due to the stuff I (others) need to carry, putting on waterproofs and boots, getting somewhere on time, again all energy and mind space and that's even before the kids have entered the picture."* (Notes from my little book, Week 1, Day 2)

I wrote down details such as how many steps it took to walk between various buildings and activities as a way of considering the physical toil in doing the relationships. In addition to how I felt about the physicality and embodiment of the programme, I talked to others about how they were experiencing materiality and affect. In doing this, I would ask about the environment, for example, what were the bedrooms like, what did they think of them or the weather, what did they think of the food, what about the equipment for the activities etc? The first week unsurprisingly, being in Scotland, I had lots of comments with regards to the mosquitos and rain and how people had learned to deal with it.

I took what I called atmosphere recordings on the audio recorder – just capturing the different noises as part of a soundscape. I was intrigued from the very first bus journey about the affective nature of noise, the different kinds of noise and what potentialities come to matter with this. I would leave the recorder in a room, just on a desk or a table or hanging somewhere, a young person would watch keep an eye on it for me and I would go off to another group to participate. It was not just the loud noises I recorded, as often my thoughts about noise would occur in quieter and stiller moments. I delve into this further in Chapter 6.

Whilst I did not take an institutional ethnographic approach, the awareness of power structures and how they are perceived in everyday actions were something I set out to be cognisant of, to balance the critique that non-representational ethnography can ignore

issues of justice and politics (Vannini, 2015b). I was keen to understand policy directives and legal obligations and was alert from the first morning as to the amount of paperwork that the staff had to deal with. I took photos, kept copies of blank paperwork, wrote in my little books and daily reflections, and talked to the staff about the paperwork. Smith (2003) highlights how the little things get lost in accounts of paperwork, that it makes workers accountable but can ignore the tasks that are about caring and the human encounters, a relevant point when considering the whole entanglement and phenomenon. This was a particular reference point for some of my discussions with the Programme Manager and I wanted to have some empathy for what working with the paperwork must feel like, here is an excerpt from one of my daily reflections:

> "….like I looked after Angie's admin box for a short while and it was so heavy and bulky. She has to have it close by all the time so she always has to have an awareness of it. That takes up mind space and energy. " (Reflection, Week 1, Day 2)

4.6 Me

On entering the field, I soon realised the challenge in being accountable as a researcher whilst being part of the research site. I wrestled often with 'me'. In the first week particularly I became mired in the '*leap to application'* (St. Pierre, 2016b, p.111, italics in original). I was conscious of wanting to do things 'right' as an ethnographer, being a 'good' researcher. Whilst concurrently struggling with comparing the actions of the staff with what I might have done as a youth worker. I write the following reflection in the first week:

> *"*So had an epiphany this afternoon - stop thinking about what I would do, this is non-representational research, come on and sort yourself out, Tash" (Reflection, Week 1, Day 2)

And yet despite this on Day 5, I found myself writing in my little notebook

> *"- <u>Strategic thinking</u> – eg getting on bus, Alfie told boys they were not to sit on back seat & Elvis had to sit at front. But he did nothing to prevent it – didn't even put girls to front of queue so I got on first & just stood in the*

way until girls allowed through. This is what I mean?!?!?!" (Notes from my little book, Week 1, Day 5)

However, what became apparent to me come the first weekend was the importance of reading, doing the thinking advocated by St. Pierre, and just 'being' within the research. As someone new to this research both in terms of posthumanism and ethnography, there was a lot of doubt about what I was doing. My primary supervisor was supportive; sending motivational emails and answering questions. I would talk to family members and friends hundreds of miles away, exchange texts and photos, all of which helped me to be me. Mostly though, I would find a way to read even if the tiredness consumed me.

4.7 Safeguarding

All safeguarding policies and practices were adhered to, although I would speak one to one with young people, this was always in sight and earshot of others. Often the general noise would offer a protective factor for young people who wanted to talk. It was in an instance like this that I received a disclosure that necessitated me following the necessary organisational safeguarding protocols to ensure the young person was appropriately supported and kept safe. All WhatsApp groups that included young people were conducted through the organisation phone that had been given to me for the research. This was overseen by the organisational personnel that I answered to. The WhatsApp groups also included at least one other staff member, and all young people were aware of me. In fact, sometimes the young people asked me questions directly or I was asked by a staff member to communicate on behalf of them.

4.8 Post fieldwork – Immediate

I was away with the cohort for just four weeks and yet the intensity is part of me, it has an affective power even now. The intensity was so much that when I first arrived home and for up to a month, I was unable to look at photos or listen to recordings, it was all too real even though it was a reproduction of the real (Koro-Ljungberg, 2013). Even though I could not inquire into the artefacts that would help me remember my experiences, my experiences were not static waiting for me to catalogue them and find meaning in them (Koro-Ljungberg, MacLure and Ulmer, 2018). Instead the traces were with me, memories finding me, curiosity was pulling me towards certain phenomena,

and I was living with 'ghosts' (Gan *et al.*, 2017), the past being felt very much in the present and the future.

I needed to hold onto the feelings and thoughts as they morphed and transversed into various directions. I took to writing with whatever I had at hand – the notes app on my phone, random sheets of paper, a notebook given as birthday present that makes me smile every time I open it. And hesitantly and slowly, I started to return to the little books, the reflections, the photos. I made connections and explored ideas that were making me 'wonder' (MacLure, 2013a). From this I started to do what some posthumanist scholars guard against (in the sense of creating a false impression of control/mastery over difference), that is I started to organise myself and all the information I had. This organisation was functional, it was to ensure I knew how to find moments that intrigued me; it was to prevent more feelings of being overwhelmed, (physically, emotionally and logistically) with all that I had gathered. These organisational tasks were not completed in any order, for instance the chapter written about the chair (Chapter 5) was the memory that would surface and resurface, it was affective and being affected (MacLure, 2013a) in its ongoing pull. I decided that I needed to explore this further and so I looked for any mention of this incident whilst all the time jotting down thoughts and reading about it. This is how the analysis started.

4.9 Paying attention or what analysis looked like

The starting point for the analysis was perhaps the most disconcerting time of the research, at least the moment when I first sat down to 'analyse', not least because this is where I felt the lack of prescribed routes to be most acute. However, as I started to listen to the audio, I realised I had been analysing throughout. Post-qualitative inquiry starts in the middle but there are ways in which provocation happens and difference becomes apparent. This next section covers the four main conceptual approaches I took to analysing the data.

4.9.1 Wonder

Maggie MacLure (2013a) wrote about the concept of wonder as the seemingly inconsequential but fascinating moment that affects. It is "a counterpart to the exercise of reason through interpretation, classification, and representation" (MacLure, 2013a, p.228). It is described as something that happens in the entanglement of researcher and

data, a ‘glow’ that resonates and causes curiosity. It is a relational way of being because wonder is the capacity to affect and be affected. Wonder within the entanglement pushes/compels an action, for the body affected to do something (Ringrose and Renold, 2014), in this case for the researcher to notice and follow the line of flight that the wonder takes you. It is not just about the events, wonder can illuminate the sensory aspects of the worlds of the researched and the researcher as they come together (Pink, 2015).

Wonder has been with me throughout the research and has led to more wonder and more questions. I learned to pay attention to the quieter moments of wonder, the ‘niggles’ that irritated me or a seemingly inconsequential moment that grew, recognising that wonder is not only about the positive moments but also the moments that were uncomfortable but still invited me in (MacLure, 2013a). Wonder is the potential of one moment, one experience, one action to influence all subsequent interactions as highlighted by Guattari (2000) and this means paying attention to the intricacies of encounters and engagements (Dowling, Lloyd and Suchet-Pearson, 2018). Integral to wonder is attuning to the world in all its vibrancy. Attunement makes the call to offer different ways of knowing and being, an invitation to follow the provocations of embodied and preconscious affect (Brigstocke and Noorani, 2016; Alarcón and Herrema, 2017). Attunement involves a shift in cognitive-affective alignments (Maiese, 2017) and therefore becoming alert to my feelings – emotional or physical were important signals that there was an invocation, a provocation to do something or to do more. I was aided in this endeavour by prior experience as a practitioner working with groups of young people where being alert to the tacit and having curiosity were important skills to nurture.

4.9.2 Thinking with theories

As written previously, thinking becomes methodology, and thinking with theories was one way in which I approached my analysis. Thinking with theory has been described as a process methodology (Jackson and Mazzei, 2018) or an inquiry that returns to the importance of philosophy (St. Pierre, 2021b). But given the refutation of prescribed method it has been difficult to conceptualise how this is different to other traditional approaches. The ethico-onto-epistemological positioning has been an important frame of reference for me, thinking about the entanglement and immanence of myself as a

researcher. With this in mind, it is a practice that is ongoing, "…we think *with* whatever we are reading at the moment" (Jackson and Mazzei, 2018, p.725, emphasis in original).

Thinking in this way is about ruptures and opening up new lines of flight, whereas in other qualitative methods the theory may be used to support, frame or refute the data analysis. In thinking with theory it is part of the entanglement with the data and the researcher. This means I read as much as I could, I delved into philosophy, education, art, physics, indigenous learning, geography. Lines of flight were generated by reading social media, comic books, even fiction. These encounters sparked thoughts that I then would explore alongside the data. I still don't feel that this is finished, perhaps it never will be.

A term used in posthuman analysis is that of 'diffraction' which sits alongside the thinking with theory as a way of thinking about difference. Diffraction as a term is often linked to the qualitative process of reflection however this is misleading. Reflection and the related reflexivity are means by which the thoughts and actions of an individual are analysed for capacity to change or in research as a means to acknowledge the influence of the researcher within the research (Bozalek and Zembylas, 2017). However, critiques suggest when something is reflected, there is a mirroring, it is not the actual 'thing'. It is a reproduction or a representation of what is already there (Barad, 2007). When reflection is used as a technique in research, it can fail to account for the production of positionality within the assemblage and perpetuate representationalism (ibid). Alternatively, diffraction moves away from replication to difference and more importantly the effect of differences. This does not map where the difference is, it looks at what the difference does (ibid) and involves looking at the changing patterns and the movement in an assemblage. Diffraction is a commitment to understand what differences come to matter. As was highlighted in the literature review, the stories we use to make worlds have significance (Haraway, 2016). In using diffraction, different knowledges come into focus which have consequences in how we understand the world (Bozalek and Zembylas, 2017). Diffractive readings move beyond the binaries to trouble dichotomies (Murris and Bozalek, 2019b) and involve a relational, not an oppositional approach (Barad, 2007). As a technique, Barad describes it as a conversation that pays attention to the finer details. In paying attention to the detail of difference, posthumanism refutes binaries, there is no 'either/or' but instead a

'both/and…and…and'. This has implications for analysis as it opens not restricts exploration, there is scope to ask 'what else'?

In some ways, when used alongside the thinking with theory, this became an unconscious or sub-conscious action. I found myself paying attention to boundaries and noting where there was complementarity in potential, where boundaries were enacted or not and what that was doing. It means paying attention to the vibrancy of concepts to activate thought and explore and expand or move or ebb and flow over contours of the phenomena (Mazzei, 2017). Throughout my research my books and analysis have sat side by side, always ready to be called upon. I read something, it agitated thought for a piece of work that may not be open, so I would open it and work on it. In writing this thesis, I would often have two or three different chapters open ready on my laptop, waiting not as inert documents but as live intra-actions in the development of research. I, also, jump(ed) about in the documents as I read, thinking about different pieces of writing, not following a logical sequence. Is this efficient? Probably not, but it has been exciting to see how different parts relate and become together.

4.9.3 Movement of Things

Another technique that became useful in my analysis was using movement. This movement was inherent in thinking with theory, but it was also a provocation in thinking about other aspects of the data. In particular, the movement and agentic force of 'things' as a way to understand what was being done and what potentials were being enacted. Jane Bennett (2010) wrote about the vital materiality of things questioning them as objects and positioning things as actants, with the capacity to affect and be affected. They have 'thing-power' (ibid, p.9). As a way of understanding thing-power, the invitation is to follow a thing to see what it does, what it provokes, how it gets used and what it may communicate as part of discursive-material iterations (Coleman, 2020). I gladly accepted the invitation to follow things and pay attention to the vibrancy and liveliness of the materiality and more than human in the world as will become more apparent.

4.9.4 Choosing the empirical events for analysis

The sections above highlight how I explored the data but do not detail what I chose to analyse. Whilst I go into this in more detail in each data chapter (Chapters 5, 6 & 7), it

is important to note that the word ‘choose’ is not indicative of the process as to how I, as an individual human agent, made the agential cuts necessary for analysis. Each vignette started from a place of curiosity, wonder and ‘glow’. This is not to say it was a delightful start, the wonder and curiosity came from moments that caused me to ask questions of myself and others. This quote from Maclure’s interview sums up the energy behind the ‘choice’ and ‘glow’:

“ …the glow is not there all the time. It’s there when, in Barad’s (2007) sense, the agential cut is made, and then something acquires an import or a sense that wasn’t “there” before the act of cutting. And the glow is always worth going with when that happens, even if it’s on an individualistic kind of basis. If some- thing starts to emerge and it builds up an energy, there’s probably something more going on there than we know. And it’s almost certainly about something like affect, or something non-representational, or something that would never really be picked up adequately within a coding scheme.” (MacLure 2023, p.218)

They were moments that I could not quite identify as why it was so interesting to me at first, but these moments of wonder/glow hung around me, kept returning to me through different avenues until I had to pursue them further.

The chair moment in Chapter 5 was an event that encompassed an argument between a staff member and a young person over a comfortable chair. When I returned home after fieldwork, it stayed in my memory as a brief but prominent moment. During fieldwork, I was conscious of my efforts not to focus too much on conflict. There was an ethical dimension to this in that I felt it was unfair to focus predominantly on difficult situations. In my experience, too many young people are defined by the negative experiences and not the positive ones. In addition, I was not sure what more learning I might get from conflict other than in the doing of relationships. However, this event kept coming back to me partly by way of memories and partly because it would surface in conversations. It was in the haunting of this data that I started to explore whether conflict could offer new knowledge about the ‘doing’.

In Chapter 6, I explore the role of noise in relationships and what learning emerges from this. My first encounter with wondering about the noise happened on the first day when I noticed sound was a way to observe if I could not see. I was sitting on the bus and it was quite difficult to move around so noise offered a way into the worlds of the young

people and staff. However, at the time it was merely a way for me to 'capture' events through audio. Over the four weeks, I became more attuned to the noise and it bothered me. At times, I found it very uncomfortable and this feeling stayed with me on my return from the fieldwork. It was this uncomfortableness that I questioned, it felt alien to me, as I go on to explore in the chapter. When I listed back to the recordings, I often interspersed this with further reading, and it was this combination that alerted me to the vignettes I used. The vignettes were from recordings that evoked memories and strong emotional, mainly positive reactions as I listened, whilst making me think as I read the academic literature.

Finally in Chapter 7, much like the previous chapter, I surprised myself by the inclusion of phones as an empirical chapter. I did have a prior interest in the use of phones and when I look back at my notes, there are numerous mentions of phones or interactions about/with mobile phones. It was in encountering Rebecca Coleman delivering a seminar on glitter that really gave me the impetus to analyse phones. I was struck by how she explored glitter from different perspectives, opening up worlds that were both dystopic and exciting. This made me question the use of phones in learning environments – was it all a negative? And as I explored the recordings, audio and written, the vibrancy of phones became apparent. In particular how the vibrancy and agency of the phone changed across weeks, which is where I start the analysis.

In each of these data events, I follow a post-qualitative approach to attending to affect (my own experience and those of others), considering how following these particular moments resonated with theory, literature and practices of other researchers, and how exploring them could lead to new ways of producing relevant knowledge that would otherwise not be visible or intelligible.

4.9.5 Presentation of Data

This thesis attempts to analyse the data in different ways – to resonate rather than represent, as explained earlier in this chapter. This means the thesis experiments with different ways of offering the data for consideration, as will become clearer through the chapters. This also extends to different formats depending on where the transcript has been drawn from. Therefore, the formatting is as follows:

- Audio that has been transcribed will be in bold Calibri font, 12 point.

- My reflective writings and thoughts will be in Arial font, 12 point.
- The notes I wrote down in my little book will be italic Arial font, 12 point.

4.10 What is ethics and/or ethical?

When I started my PhD in Education, one area I believed would be simple for me to navigate, was that of ethics. I have worked all my adult life with young people labelled as vulnerable, I believed that my (perceived) sensitivity to the realities of everyday living would mean that acting ethically would be easier for me than for most others, whether as a practitioner or researcher. I see now there was an arrogance to my stance. I had a lot to learn.

A research paradigm is enacted to open up knowledge and as explored earlier, a methodological framework imposes a way of doing things that necessarily excludes other avenues. It is a process of imposing discipline on difference and chaos to give a sense of mastery and control. This thought strengthens in considering claims that we in education, have moved away from our philosophical orientation in the quest for becoming a science (Colebrook, 2017). The pursuit of discipline can lead to competent researchers in terms of methodological expertise, but we may not be fully cognisant in terms of understanding the ontological and epistemological assumptions being made (St. Pierre, 2017). This has implications for ethics and an ethical approach.

Education research is about people and the world they live in, therefore the doings and enactments have consequences which I am required to live with (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008). I feel/felt that I must take this responsibility seriously at every step of the research process no matter at what point I am in. This becomes central as soon as a research idea is pursued – for instance what methodological approach may be the least oppressive and extractive in producing new knowledge? In working with cohorts such as young people in which the power differential is in favour of the researcher, what steps need to be taken to ensure a socially just approach to the knowledge that emerges? As a youth worker, I have tried to develop and enact a participatory approach to working alongside young people, a learning process that is still ongoing. This did initially lead me to consider methodological approaches that recognised the co-constitution of research with participants such as Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR). However, as explained earlier in the chapter, my interest lay in the 'doing' of

relationships and what happens in the everyday, the seemingly 'little moments' that make a difference. An approach such as YPAR, with its emphasis on reflection and impetus for change (Jere et al, 2021) would have taken the focus away from the everyday, seemingly inconsequential moments of doing and becoming within relationships and learning. In addition, PhD study is notoriously incompatible with approaches like YPAR as they are meant to be individual endeavours that are designed, executed and written up by a sole author who is then examined for this work. Ethnography on the other hand, offered the opportunity to experience and observe these little moments. It also is a field replete with historical and more contemporary criticisms that I needed to be aware of.

This section considers ethics from the instrumental requirements (of a PhD) alongside what this meant to me from a critical posthumanist approach that considers values as inherent with the immanence of the researcher and an understanding of the world as relational. Some of my thoughts have appeared as a reflection article (Rennolds, 2020). My reflections are indicative of not just safe curiosity (MacLure, 2013a) but also in how thinking about ethics, concerning incidents, can become a 'maddening rumination', like an itch that cannot be scratched.

I 'did' ethics within this thesis holding two lines of thought. There was the nature of passing or acquiring ethics clearance, as an academic requirement alongside the 'doing' of ethics within the research. This is not a comparison that sets up a false dichotomy with notions of power (Murris and Bozalek, 2019b) but instead a chance to read through them diffractively to see where difference opens up to break down the barriers (Mitchell, 2017) between institutional requirements and the in-moment decision making. I will pay particular reference to one incident from the fieldwork phase as well as referring to administrative requirements in the research process.

Throughout the process I have followed the university guidelines and BERA ethics guidelines as well as all English statutory safeguarding children's requirements (applicable up to the age of 18 years). The ethical considerations within the original Ethics Committee proposal were predominantly concerned with my existing role as a practitioner, the anonymity and protection of the young people and adults, their informed consent, the safe storage of data, ensuring that data collection is transparent to

participants and the challenges this presents. I ensured that these requirements were all followed and adhered to.

It can seem that ethics in one sense, is 'done' once the ethics committee has given permission for the research to go ahead. The guidelines offering generic principles can help to guide processual actions. For example, issues of transparency and consent are central pillars as seen in guideline no.27:

"Researchers should aim to be open and honest with participants and other stakeholders." (British Educational Research Association (BERA), 2018)

However, what does being open and honest with participants look like? The gap is in the praxis. A utilitarian approach is inherent within the guidelines, with the emphasis on procedures rather than moral values (Robinson-Pant and Singal, 2020). There is little support for unanticipated dilemmas during fieldwork or the ethics towards other-than-human (aside from actions related to university guideline and animal testing) as seen in the incident described below. Encountering and embracing the posthumanist perspective offered me a framework to better consider ethics because of the emphasis and acknowledgement that any action taken will, by the nature of complementarity, both include and exclude future potentials and happenings (Hollin *et al.*, 2017). Taking this one step further and thinking with a critical posthuman approach required me to consider situated knowledges; the subjectivities, the potestas and potentia (how power restricts or empowers) being produced within each encounter or entanglement (Braidotti, 2019a). This approach prompts and prompted me to consider different potentialities whenever faced with uncertainty.

The lack of guidance as to what to do is an issue I am familiar with as a practitioner working with young people. Different encounters bring different challenges and different possibilities. Regardless of role, whether I approach the encounters as a researcher or a practitioner, decision-making and attempting to respond well will always be paramount. The critical moment that illustrates this happened during a tough second week (out of four weeks). For that week only, we were staying in a university hall of residence, and the staff were not only managing their groups of young people but also often delivering activities. The days were long, from approximately 7 am to midnight. And I was in the middle of this.

Immanence as part of the entanglement were constant challenges for me, I remember thinking lots of times 'what if..' or 'should I help…', wondering what was right, what was appropriate. Issues of safeguarding were the only areas with clarity for me. In fact on the first night on the second week, I made the decision to step in and organise the whole cohort as the 'tacit mood' and 'feel' in the room indicated to me that the atmosphere was ready to 'blow' unless the group was given structure and purpose, a potential safeguarding incident. However, the event I wish to reflect on highlights the implications of entanglement and how different decisions/responses affect what comes to matter.

The Wednesday of the second week was particularly fraught, the staff and young people had experienced a number of combative situations during the day, some particularly explosive. Midway through the evening I was approached by two young people who asked me to talk to the staff team about a perception that the staff had changed their approach to the young people, a change they believed was damaging the relationships within the cohort. I agreed to convey this message to the staff only if and when it was right to do so. Across staff and young people there was a general sense of lethargy, boredom, irritation and tension exacerbated by the inconsistent timetables, and an oppressive heat. I, too, was experiencing the tension, the tiredness, the boredom. This awareness made me empathetic to the staff when we sat down to the end of the day meeting, at 11.30pm that night. We were all blanketed in dejection and weariness and my dilemma arose as to whether to broach the subject raised by the young people.

I did not want to add to the burden of the team, but the views of the young people had resonance for practice. The turmoil in my thinking was immense as I struggled to consider what I should do, what was the best course of action? The thinking covered a number of potentialities including - what if the words were too much for the staff, how would they take criticism, no matter how constructive I perceived it to be? Alternatively, how would the young people react if I went back to them and told them it had not been right to convey their messages? Whether I did or did not intervene, where does this leave me as a researcher, as acts of both commission and omission would influence future events? This troubled the notion of the adult-child binary, as either position had ethical implications that were more than just about that moment. In addition, if I give greater valence to a practitioner's priorities, what happens to the researcher's position, and vice versa? But are/were these in opposition with each other?

These questions bring issues of social justice to the fore and ask how I can enact my responsibilities (Giraud, 2019) response-ably? If I read between the juxtaposition of the arrangements, it is apparent how difference gets made (Bozalek and Zembylas, 2017) in that I could make things difficult for one or both groups, or cause resentment amongst one or both groups or even cause issues for me, and where would that leave the research? The concept of fairness is difficult to practice. Being response-able does not always give clear cut answers or a sense that justice will be achieved, I cannot know what the future will bring. As with 'situated ethics', posthumanism pays attention to the local and the present. However it also emphasises the future and the interdependence of realities emerging that come to matter, whilst excluding potential others (Hollin *et al.*, 2017).

The team meeting was hard, I pondered and tried to play different scenarios in my head reading through the seemingly conflictive positions. However, as I sat there, I realised these were my representations of their potential reactions. I was making assumptions. Instead of making decisions based on my assumptions, I needed to think about how differ-ance could be potentialised. I recognised that both groups had looked to me for advice and guidance as a practitioner previously. Could I build on this? As a researcher, acknowledging my entanglement would influence the future regardless of action/inaction, was it better to use the situation as a reciprocal learning opportunity if handled with sensitivity, empathy and care? With these values in mind, I did relay what the young people had said, to a mixture of responses from gratitude to self-recrimination to anger. One young staff member, who had had a particularly tough day, got upset and had to leave the room. But as a team we explored what this meant for all of us; were the sentiments justified, what were the young people taking their cues from, did we feel the approach had altered, what might be influencing this and ultimately what could be done differently? In this situation, it felt like a tangible example of what diffraction can offer as part of a praxis of caring pedagogy; thinking about everyday perspectives, recognising different viewpoints and reading them through each other to help with the sense-making (Taylor and Gannon, 2018) and future actions.

Values of justice, relationality and reciprocity are important to me as a researcher. In difficult moments considering the posthumanist interpretation of these values helped me move forward. The learning for me was productive and fruitful, it gave rigour to my 'doing'. Did I get it right every time? I am sure I did not. Did I try to take a thoughtful,

considered position from my entanglement within the programme and research? Yes, I tried. I am happy that I advocated for the young people. My memories hold that the following day was positive, productive and fun. Indeed, from my perspective it was one of the best and there were lots of positivity emerging within and between staff and young people. The young staff member involved spoke to me the next morning, apologised for vacating the room and then we talked. Once more this reminded me of the challenge in having staff who were so close to the age of the young people. I then spent the rest of the day with him and his group, and he had a blinder! Was it because I had relayed the messages? For me that would be too simplistic an answer.

Critical posthumanism as a lens has helped me to think about what happened that summer. Engaging in difficult conversations and in being accountable for our actions as a collective, we engaged in an affirmative praxis to bring about positive change (Braidotti, 2019b). The question is, would I act similarly at a different point? I cannot possibly say, as no moment is ever exactly the same and so cannot be repeated. What I am aware of is the time I have spent considering this incident; before, during and after; it is still present even though it has passed; it is still mattering. With this in mind, ethics cannot be a simple tick box, institutional exercise, as useful as this can be in prompting thought, consideration and care. A procedure will never capture the complexities of doing but that does not mean academic institutions should not try. This is where the thinking by reading and talking really helps, ethics does not finish at the ethics committee, ethics are always and forever in the becoming.

4.11 What of the small things – Covid 19?

There has been a strange worldwide phenomena taking place as I write this thesis, the effects of which will be felt for a long time. I am, of course referring to the impact of the coronavirus named Covid-19. Here is an illustration of the posthumanist idea that we need to move away from a human centric view of the world and consider the intra-action of all elements within the world.

These last two years have been bewildering, anxiety inducing, exhausting and incredibly sad. But they have also, at rare times, been hopeful, happy and a welcome respite from the norm. The UK experienced several societal lockdowns which restricted everyday movements, the most stringent being only allowed out to exercise once a day

or to go shopping for food. There have been a number of periods where I was not able to meet and hug my parents or family members, particularly difficult as my dad became more unwell over this time. I conducted a range of work and social relationships via the internet, and I embraced slow early mornings before starting work. The emergence of Covid impacted the space I can move in, the emotions I felt, the concept of time, and governed the nature of touch. And in the UK, there was briefly a reinvigorated natural environment as humans stopped travelling, paused industry and slowed their pace, resulting in the opportunity to notice the world and see clear rivers, a proliferation of butterflies (in my small garden), and fresh skies. In short there have been any number of adaptations both positive and negative that I, we, us, them have made, and all because a virus has emerged that can have devastating effects on humans. As this paragraph demonstrates, what can be destructive for humans can result in a number of benefits for non-human configurations. This recognition of human, non-human and material symbiosis highlights the need to recognise the sympoiesis of the relational, dynamic and evolutionary system that is our worlding (Haraway, 2017).

However, it is not just the macro-level assemblages or consideration of historicity that have been affected. As I sit here typing, I do so in the comfort of my house. Initially in the first lockdown, I sat in my kitchen working at the countertop, then for many months my dining room and finally a move to my spare bedroom upstairs, gradually secluding myself from the world. I have had to make each move because in the assemblage that included me, the chair, the IT equipment, and the tables, I found I have been subject to chronic pains in my back and shoulders, that have changed over time. Equally the disturbance around me provoking a failure to concentrate. The material world was affecting the way I worked, it was accompanied by the chatter and movement of my husband as he went about his business, whilst inside (what I know as) the boundary of my body came the pain. Each physical set up brought different problems. I have in this time developed a tender elbow which was accompanied by painful tingling in my fingers. With the aid of Google, and a phone call with an Occupational Therapist (OT) friend, and text messages with a nurse friend, I received an unofficial diagnosis of ‘tennis elbow’. My OT friend then advised, bought and sent me a giant exercise ball to use as a chair to help my posture and relieve the pain. It has worked in the main but every day I sit on this ball, I am conscious that I have to move with it, my body responds to its vagaries whilst concurrently the ball adapts to my movements, it is no

longer clear where the boundaries are. The ball and I are ‘me-ball’ an ongoing constitution and reconfiguring of material-discursive practices that have come to matter (Barad, 2007). And yet this has not been sufficient, as in this time I have, also, bought a stand that goes on my desk and allows me to stand and work, an ergonomic keyboard and mouse. I have taken up a stretching routine that now borders on half an hour every day. I have lived the affective agentic nature of the material around me.

The impact of Covid-19 has been significant on the doing of everyday living. What matters and what comes to matter has been shaken up by the non-human.

Chapter Five: The Chair-Doing relationships and traversing

5.1 The Drama

ENTANGLED CONFLICT

A ONE ACT PLAY

Cast of Characters

Adele: Team Leader, Team 3, a woman in her early 20s
Saffron: Young Person, Team 1, aged 16 years old
Raheem: Young Person, Team 1, aged 16 years old
Afra: Young Person, Team 1, aged 16 years old
Kath: Young Person, Team 3, aged 16 years old
Alan: Team Leader, Team 2, a man in his early 30s
Angie: Cohort Leader, the boss on site, a woman in her late 20s
Tash: The researcher, a woman in her late 40s

Scenes

Various rooms on a university campus.

Time

Summer 2019

Scene 1

Setting: *A BARE ROOM, DARK. THE ONLY ILLUMINATION IS FOCUSED ON A CHAIR IN THE MIDDLE OF THE FLOOR. THE CHAIR IS FAUX LEATHER, WITH ARMS, LOOKS COMFORTABLE. IT IS PADDED WITH ARMS AND SWIVELS.*

From the left: *ADELE ENTERS. SHE IS PETITE. HER LONG HAIR IS IN A PONYTAIL AND SHE LOOKS SPORTY. SHE IS WEARING A FITTED TRACKSUIT AND 'ON TREND' TRAINERS. SHE LOOKS HARASSED, TIRED AND HAS A SCOWL ON HER FACE.*

On the chair: *SAFFRON SITS ON THE CHAIR, ONE LEG UP OVER THE ARM. THE OTHER IS DANGLING BELOW REACHING FOR THE GROUND. SHE USES IT TO PUSH HERSELF AROUND. IF SHE WERE STOOD UP, YOU WOULD SEE THAT SHE IS LIGHTLY BIGGER AND TALLER THAN ADELE. SHE IS*

DRESSED IN A TRACKSUI TOO, IT IS A VELOUR FABRIS IN A LIGHT BLUE COLOUR. THE PURPOSE IS MORE FASHION THAN EXERCISE. SHE HAS LONG HAIR, LOTS OF MAKE UP AND OVER-SHAPED EYEBROWS THAT ARE ALL THE RAGE. SHE ALSO HAS A SCOWL AND IS CHEWNG GUM.

ADELE WALKS UP TO SAFFRON AND PLACES HER HANDS ON THE SPARE ARM OF THE CHAIR.

ADELE: *(FIRMLY IN A GEORDIE ACCENT)* I told you to get off the chair and focus on what, what is happening.

SAFFRON: *(SULKILY AND WITH A BROAD YORKSHIRE ACCENT)* I know you fookin' did but who the bloody hell do you think you are? You got up, I've sat down. *(HER SHOULDERS SAG)* I'm sooooo tired.

ADELE: *(STANDS UP, TAKES A DEEP BREATH AS IF TO REMAIN CALM. HER TONE IS AIMING FOR MEASURED)* We are all tired like, but we are not all, like, sat on our phones chatting to the person next to us. Jus' have some respect for the people running the session, will youse and listen.

SAFFRON: *(LOUDLY)* Nooo, why should I, it's shit, this is shit, I want to go home. Organise...They're not even very organised. There's fookin' too many of us, I can't hear an' I'm hungry.

ADELE: *(RAISING HER VOICE)* Like what makes you different to the others, like. Either get off the chair and focus or get out.

SAFFRON: *(GETS UP AND VILENTLY PUSHES THE CHAIR TOWADS ADELE. SPEAKS LOUDLY)* Have your bloody chair, I don't want the idiot thing anyway. There – happy?
(TURNS SO HER BACK IS TO THE CHAIR AND SITS ON THE FLOOR. SHE PULLS OUT HER MOBILE PHONE)

ADELE: And get off your phone! *(SHE TURNS AND WALKS OFF IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION. HER FISTS ARE CLENCHED, SHE IS HSAKING HER HEAD AND MUTTERING LOUD ENOUGH FOR OTHERS TO HEAR)*
Tha's so fuckin' rude and disrespectful.

SAFFRON: I can hear you.

ADELE: *(STILL MUTTERING)* Fucking awesome.

Scene 2

Setting: *THE CHAIR IS IN THE MIDDLE. SAFFRON IS SAT ON IT, TWIRLING ROUND ON IT, USING ONE FOOT AS PROPULSION.*
RAHEEM IS STOOD BESIDE HER. HE IS ATHLETIC, A FOOTBALLER ALSO DRESSED IN A TRACKSUIT. HE IS PLAYING WITH A FOOTBALL.
AFRA AND KATH ARE BOTH SAT DOWN ON THE FLOOR, BOTH DRESSED IN JEANS AND A CROP TOP. AFRA IS PICKING AT THE FLOOR. KATH IS PLAYING WITH HER HAIR.

RAHEEM: Don't go home, we can still 'ave a laugh.

SAFFRON: Yeah, but… she's a fuckin' bitch, so rude. I've had enough.

KATH: Beeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee! Stay, we have the disco tomorrow, freeeeeeeeedom!

RAHEEM: Sick. *(IN A SARCASTIC VOICE)* A couple of hours to get our moves on.

AFRA: What, so you can go wit' someone else?

RAHEEM: *(IN A SMOOTH VOICE)* Don't give me attitude, I said I wasn't sure where we are going? Don't expect too much from me.

KATH: Afs, don't be chasing that dog.

RAHEEM: *(LAUGHING)* I can't help it if the ladies love meee.

EVERYONE LAUGHS

SAFFRON: Not that they'll let ya do what you want. They've been well picky and in your face this week.

AFRA: I was well pissed off with Callum today, he gives it all that he is the same as us but he was a right little dickhead bossing us around 'n all that. He was sooo much better last week, doing the activities an' all that.

RAHEEM: It's just been really, really, like, unorganised this week, week one was better to be honest. We didn't know what we were doing this week, it's like we were sitting around or standing, not knowing what we were doing.

SAFFRON: They're not the same, it's pissing me right off, are they with us or not? Did you see Adele earlier and the grief she were giving me.

RAHEEM: I was really looking forward to that sesh, you know learning to defend myself. *(HE PUNCHES THE AIR FOLLOWED BY A ROUNDHOUSE MOVE)* But it were just…

KATH: I liked some of it but there's no way I'll remember it, take that you shit!

AFRA: *(LAUGHING)* That's cos you were on your phone the whole time.

KATH: I know Izzy kep' telling me to put it away but I could see Callum on 'is.

AFRA: Anyways, it weren't just you two, Maya right bollocked me when I went t' the bog.

KATH: You weren't going to the loo, you were doing your usual bunking off thingy.

AFRA: Yeah but you should've saw her, weren't listening or nowt. Right got arsey. I went straight to Angie and said I've had enough of this shit.

KATH: What she say back?

AFRA : *(LAUGHING)* That I 'adn't exactly been good, that she'd speak to Maya but she is seriously considering if I go the disco tomorrow. I've got to join in with everything, she says I have been sitting out all the time, not true, she's…, it's a lie, not all of them, I stayed when those mental health people came in yesterday.

SAFFRON: Errr, Jesus, can we get back to me? I'm the centre of attention right now, I'm the important one. I'm leaving because they're all shit. I'm bored (EMPHASISES LOUDLY NEXT WORD) and I pulled a muscle today.

THEY ALL LAUGH WITH SAFFRON

RAHEEM: No, you didn't, you just didn't want to do the rugby man session.

SAFFRON: *(STILL LAUGHING)* I did, my leg really *(DRAWS OUT NEXT WORD)* huuuurt when I got up. Bloody Alan just wouldn't leave us be, had to do something he said. And now with Adele being all Miss High and Mighty, that's over.

AFRA: Does your ma know you're going home?

SAFFRON: I 'ope they haven't bloody phoned my mum, I'll be right ragged about it. That's what really got me, you think Adele could have been nicer knowing about my mum, my home an' all that. I can't help it if I get really angry, I'm the one who has to do bloody everything, they better not stress my mum out. Anyway, I'm glad Adele is not my team leader. She's a bitch.

KATH : *(PRETEDS TO PLAY AN IMAGINARY VIOLIN)* Beeeeeeee! She's mine and she's proper mint, she's a right laugh. Her and Mae are *(DOES AIR QUOTES ON NEXT TWO WORDS)* totes amazeballs Beeeeee.

SAFFRON: Don't give a shit, I'm not apologising to her, that fucking chair. No different to school no-one listens, even at school when I was working hard in Year 11 cos I wanted to get my GCSEs the teachers said I was only doing it to go to the prom. Shows how little they know or care, never once asked me how I was getting on, now feels like it's the same.

RAHEEM: Nah man, they're much better here. Yeah they can be on you sometimes and stuff but at least you can have a laugh, and they talk to you, you know you can relate to them and all that…better.

KATH: Better than my school. At least you can chat about music and TV programmes.

AFRA: I really want t'see Love Island, I wan' t' know whats going on. They could do with a bit more, you know, being calm.

RAHEEM: Who? Love Island?

AFRA: No, the Team Leaders, they're too intense sometimes. It's just been, they're like, they need to be a bit like Tash sometimes, just a bit more chilled, listen more, stop y'know...

SAFFRON: I'm soooo tired, I just want to sleep.

AFRA: You not going home then.

SAFFRON: No I'll stay, we're going to town as well tomorrow aren't we, get to choose an activity, I'm doing that, spend a bit of their money.

THEY ALL LAUGH

KATH: I'm knackered too but that's what happens when you get woken at 7. And then do this activity, Kath, join in, stand up and get you to sit through all that drugs shit and never give you time to just have a fag.

RAHEEM: Easy day, except the sitting still and listening part. But man I need my bed.

ALAN: *(SHOUTS FROM OFF STAGE)* Raheem, get your butt back to the flat, I said I wanted to see everyone about the flat move cos of the leak.

Scene 3

Setting: *ADELE IS SAT ON THE SWIVEL CHAIR. SHE HAS AN ATHLETIC SPORTS TOP ON INSTEAD OF THE HOODIE AND IS FANNING HERSELF WITH SOME A4 PAPER. SHE IS OBVIOSULY TRYING TO COOL HERSELF.*
TASH IS LAID ON HER BACK ON THE FLOOR NEXT TO ADELE. SHE IS DRESSED IN JEANS, A T-SHIRT AND FLIP-FLOPS ON HER FEET.
ANGIE IS SAT A TABLE SURROUNDED BY PAPERWORK AND A LAPTOP OPEN ON TE DESK. SHE, TOO, IS DRESSED IN JEANS, T-SHIRT AND FLIP-FLOPS.

TASH: *(SPEAKS WITH A SLIGHT NORFOLK ACCENT)* Ok, I'm so hot, it's making me feel a bit lethargic, I'm sleepy.

ADELE: *(LAUGHS)* Err, I feel fresh this week, getting to sleep in my own bed and going home at the end of each day.

TASH: *(SMILES)* So despite this 34 degree heat, you are feeling perky?

ANGIE: *(HANDS A PIECE OF PAPER TO ADELE)* Can you just fill this in and have you got your register from last week? I haven't got everyone's yet.

ADELE: *(TO ANGIE)* Yes, I gave it t'you on Friday. Is this to fill in, cos of people not turned up today?

ANGIE NODS AND ADELE TURNS TO TASH

Yeah better this week, it's nice to like stay in my own bed and like cook my own food and, um, and not go to bed at like one.

TASH: Aah I miss home cooked food, just one week to go and my beige food binge will be at an end. Hurrah for a hubby who is a genius in the kitchen.

ADELE: *(SMILING)* Yeah, I feel a lot better this week and there is not, um, much temptation around as well, so not as many cakes and biscuits cos we don't have our classic group meetings at like *(LAUGHS)* half eleven at night and we're all there with cake and I'm like I really don't want cake, so yeah I feel a lot better.

ANGIE: *(LAUGHS)* Just wait until the end of the week and they all start having bake sales to get fundraising.

TASH: So I need to get some cash for the mountain of fairy buns I will have to buy. (LAUGHS AND TURNS TO ADELE) So do you think your energy levels are different? Like doing things like eating and sleeping makes a difference .

ADELE: *(TAKES OUT A FOLDER AND STARTS TO WRITE ON A FORM)* Um, I think it's a massive thing, like, um, *(PAUSES, TAKES A BREATH IN)* your brain uses a 100 calories a day, like on its own, but I feel like, in this situation, my brain needs about 1000 calories at times.

ALL THREE LAUGH

I wouldn't want to sit these young people down in a classroom and then for me to feel really sluggish because I haven't ate the right thing or ate enough, or ate too little, or I don't feel really well because of the heat or whatever. I definitely think in this

situation we are in now, hydration status is more important than what you are eating.

ANGIE: Oh god, you can see that in the groups, they are flagging in this heat.

TASH: So yeah, you can see it in the young people?

ADELE: I think that they just get to like a plateau point at certain times of the day when they're all just like shiny, like actually sweating. Erm, the heat can affect like, the conversations you can have with people. I know when I get hot, I get angry, not angry but I get more like hot headed than I normally would.

TASH: *(SITS UP, LOOKS CURIOUS)* Is that what happened last week with the chair?

ADELE: Oh my, the chair, that was my chair

TASH AND ADELE LAUGH TOGETHER

IS my chair! I went outside for 5 mins, 10 mins for some air and I came back in and my chair was gone.

TASH: It was so hot in the room for that session.

ADELE: And noisy. And it just got me so annoyed like, Saffron was just actively sitting there swinging around in a circle, not paying attention to me, not paying attention to any of the other member of staff in there and not being on task, and I think that, that's what started it all off – the chair.

ANGIE: I'm sorry I was having to deal with the other stuff, if I'd 'ave known I would have sorted something.

TASH: *(TO ANGIE)* You were gone ages, what were you doing?

ANGIE: Dealing with a parent who needed to pick Alina up for some sort of appointment. Remember Alina left for a bit on Thursday? And it was all complicated about how we would get her back to her team because you were all in town for the activity. More bloody paperwork to sort, phone calls with the core team, and a parent who was being not particularly helpful.

TASH: *(TO ADELE)* I did think it was weird for you, you have been getting on so well with your group and then boom.

ADELE: *(LOOKS UP FROM THE FORM SHE IS FILLING OUT)* Erm, I'm really fortunate to have the team that I am, I think they're one of the easier ones to manage, erm, not that I'm saying I couldn't manage one of the other teams, I think I probably could. But I just, I think that they don't see me as that like, really like tough, authority figure, I think they just look at me as like oh that's Adele, which I quite like.

TASH: That's why the Saffron moment surprised me?

ADELE: She's not in my group, she's in the group from hell.

BOTH LAUGH

It was not a great situation, there was only two self-defence instructors for everyone, it means it's not actually going through to everyone. And that room, I hate the sound in there, it just makes everything seem 'itchy'.

TASH: *(SMILES)* 'Itchy'?

ADELE: *(SMILING BACK)* Yeah, you know, it's just getting under your skin and you can't do anything about it, you get all edgy.

TASH: Yeah, I see that

ADELE: Then you've got more disruption happening on the outside of a circle with only so many members of staff to deal with it and that's why situations get worse because you've got one member of staff trying t'cool things down, another member of staff getting involved, like mediating the whole group and then you've got someone like me who's singled out one individual who I think is disrupting and then its cannon-balled and it's went wrong and I've had to go out. The second week was definitely the hardest so far. *(TURNS TO ANGIE AND HANDS HER THE FORM)* Don't you think? Have I done that right?

ANGIE: Ta! *(TAKES THE FORM AND LOOKS AT IT QUICKLY)* Yep all good. Second week always is, cos everyone just thinks cos the first week has gone well, the second will to. I did try to tell you all to be better at things like the phones, it's so frustrating.

TASH: What do you think now?

ANGIE: Who me?

TASH: No, Adele, where do you go from here with it?

ADELE: Nowhere really! She's not in my group so I don't really need to worry unless she starts being a pain around my group. Like I don't necessarily think that it is our fault, that week. I just think that it was like really full on and it was not, it wasn't unorganised but it wasn't as like routine as their first week. I felt really bad about it for the weekend when I went home and obviously what you and Angie have said about what has been going on for Saffron, personal life, home life, I felt awful about it.

ANGIE: It is tough for her.

TASH: Yeah like I said, she thought I had told you everything she confided, she thought you would take that into account and of course you didn't know.

ADELE: At the same time I don't think that there is any need for anyone to treat someone with so little respect and it kind of, almost made me feel like, ok so if you're this person in the house and you've got to do all this and you've got all this on your own back, erm, why are you still being horrible to people? I don't get it.

TASH: I don't know if she has thought about it from that perspective? Like if she was nicer to people, they would be nice back.

ADELE: I don't think she actually realised the effect she had on me. I don't really want to think about work at the weekend after I've been there twenty-four hours every day, I kind've like not to think about it and then it was like still subconsciously there so it was like hard.

ANGIE: That's rubbish, you should've called me.

THERE IS A KNOCK AT THE DOOR AND KATH STICKS HER HEAD ROUND IT

KATH: *(TO ADELE)* Hey Beeeeee! Mae says 'ow much longer you gonna be? She needs you back for the next bit.

ADELE LOOKS AT ANGIE. ANGIE NODS AND ADELE GETS UP

ADELE: C'mon then Beeeee, let's see what you've all done?

CURTAIN

5.2 Setting the scene:

The opening scene depicts an encounter between a member of staff, Adele, and a young person, Saffron in which they were engaged in an altercation over a chair. I witnessed this encounter on the afternoon of the third day in the second week. The second scene is an amalgamation of a number of conversations I had with the young people during the second week, as I feel it related to what I have now named as the 'chair' incident. These were informal conversations, one of which was instigated by Saffron and Raheem, who specifically asked to speak to me to discuss their unhappiness with the staff. The last scene is based on a tape recorded semi-structured interview that I conducted with Adele, at the end of week 3 and the general chats I would have with staff when I would sit with Angie, the Cohort Leader. My aim was to have a one-to-one conversation with each member of staff each week in my role as a researcher and I was able to sit down with Adele every week. Adele welcomed these moments; in her words they were 'a *chance to reflect'* and I was always affected by her articulation of what was happening from her perspective. Adele seemed thoughtful in terms of her own experience and as a consequence I really enjoyed our conversations. The interviews tended to last between twenty minutes and an hour depending on the demands of the programme and how long she was able to be released for. The comments from Adele in the third scene are extracted from a forty-one-minute conversation that took place in a quiet classroom whilst her group was in another classroom doing planning tasks related to their volunteer activities the following week. In pulling all three scenes together, I have also drawn from fieldnotes, other conversations, other interviews and my memories.

5.3 Introduction

This chapter focuses on one event, an argument between a staff member and a young person over a swivel chair – this will be referred to as the chair for the rest of the chapter. Except it wasn't one moment, it was an entanglement of many one moments

coming together in an explosion. If we consider any one moment, we can see trajectories, forces and affects coalescing in the moment. Some will be the fallouts or outcomes from things already in motion, and others will be constructing new emergences and events. Moments are lines of flight full of movement, haphazard and not always coherent. In order to get a sense of these, it helps to impose a boundary that helps make sense of what is happening in that moment. But how can one impose a boundary, one which retains a sense of the multiplicity and complexity without turning the data into a discrete list of events? To do this for this chapter, I chose to construct a dramatization. Drama invites intimacy through first person enactment, a moment that can cross temporal and spatial boundaries (Springgay, 2019). In this chapter, I have already presented the drama, a play in which the central point of wonder for me was an incident of the chair. How one sees and experiences the drama will depend on each individual, but I hope it at least gives a sense of the intensity of the interactions. For the rest of this chapter, I will first present an analysis of the events around this explosive moment, leading to a discussion about how relationships are 'done', in what way learning contributes to this and what learning emerges. I will finish the chapter with a reflection on the choice as a theatrical presentation.

5.4 Materiality – the agency to divert relationships

My memories of the event reflected in the drama, situates the chair within the centre of the room. On the day, I was sat on a stool to the left in Function Room Suite, a large room with tiles on the floor and a loud air conditioning unit that amplified and muffled noise at the same time. Chairs screeched against the floor and even with air conditioning, it felt hot and sticky. My back was to the wall looking into the middle. The incident took place about five metres to the left of me and about three metres from the wall. In this instance, with so much happening around me, I hold the chair central as it was where my focus was drawn. The situation played out around the chair was pivotal to various events. This focus is how I am imposing boundaries to the phenomena. This is a self-imposed cut that 'matters' from my experience of being bound within the event. Barad (2007) explains phenomena as the primary ontological unit in which boundaries and properties are determined by the intra-action of entangled agencies. Phenomena are not present as separate objects waiting to be measured, instead a phenomenon emerges through specific intra-actions. I understand this to be the

confluence of lots of moments in time and space that stick together. I sense an affective force that clings and provokes something to happen and a new intra-action emerges. But what phenomena is analysed depends on where the boundaries are imposed. Barad defines this practice as an agential cut and where the boundaries are enacted is where meaning becomes possible

Adele had been sitting on the chair until she left the room and Saffron, the young person had then taken the chair and was sat spinning on it. The sight of Saffron sitting and playing on the chair had affected Adele to the point where she then made an intervention. Adele had felt compelled to act. Such intensity suggests this was not an isolated moment. However, it was the brief moment that stuck and from then their relationship emerged as hostile, antagonistic and with hurt on both sides. The chair happened to be the 'vital' material object, a catalyst that provoked a response but why was it the chair that appeared to affect the protagonists? There was lethargy, heat and a sense of exhaustion in the room. At this mid-point in the second week, the tiredness in the room felt heavy, even oppressive. The chair as an object became a prized possession because it was set apart from the other less comfortable, less enticing seating objects. It was dynamic - it spun, and it moved on wheels suggesting the ability to escape (both physically and emotionally). It had padding and arms, representing a chance at feeling comfort, as well as the ability to aimlessly rock backward and forward giving a sense of comfort. It swivelled, hinting at the ability to have fun. Even now as a middle-aged woman, I find, on occasion, joy in pushing myself around on the wheels whilst making childlike noises of glee. It was bigger than the other seats – taller and wider, the type of chair that denotes power, the chair you observe in movies where the 'boss' sits behind a desk in front of a wide open window. It was unconventional as not only did it offer fun but it also offered a form of power. Spinning on the chair allowed Saffron to turn her back on the rest of the room, to not pay attention to the speaker and instead to focus on her phone. It offered an escape, also an act of rebellion

I do not know what motivated Saffron to take the chair once it was vacated by Adele – was it out of boredom, was it to frustrate and annoy the staff, was it comfort or was it just because it was there, unoccupied? However, by observing the events that followed, I became involved in what felt like a power struggle. The event was a physical manifestation of resistance that Saffron had shown on a number of occasions and the frustration that Adele had voiced when young people (like Saffron) did not follow

requests/norms of expected behaviour. The pushing and pulling of the chair between them was physical, emotional and psychological. Saffron was physically bigger than Adele and could be intimidating in her demeanour but Adele as the staff member held the authoritative position, the apparently more powerful role. Who would win the tug of war, who would exert primacy? Their words to each other were hurtful and psychologically they had the power to change the image of themselves and each other. The chair was the focal point exerting its agency as both reflected in their discussions with others that they would not do anything different because each believed themselves to be in the right. And yet Saffron did cede. Was this because of what she had learned from previous struggles with authority? As the drama highlights, even when she tried to conform to expectations at school, the change was not always valued, respected or accepted. She was used to conflict, used to fighting with adults and this is tiring. Arguments drain energy from the body, they require a physical capacity to continue. Was the ceding of the chair done as a way of getting out of the conflict whilst still being able to save 'face' with her friends?

Conflict and/or failure (Clarke, Boorman and Nind, 2011; Lumby, 2012) are often characteristics evident in the education literature where relationships are defined by notions of power. Young people talk, as in the case of Saffron, about not being heard or understood by the adults around them. I wonder at the chair altercation, not in its evidence of the conflict that can be present in learning relationships, but because it could hold some lessons to understanding how being attuned to the material and affective can enliven pedagogical events (Springgay and Zaliwska, 2017). The pedagogy here is in the potential for all – young people, staff, researcher – to learn from the event.

Affect (as explored in Chapter 3) is conceptualised in a number of ways with theorists concerned with the distinction or overlap of emotion and affect. Carolyn Pedwell (2020) offers an interesting conceptualisation that does not entirely separate the two but considers affect as a "sensorial relationality" (p.29) with intensities that shift. In the moment of the tussle over the chair, the compelling force of affect can be sensed. The affect is not attached to any one thing but instead flows and impacts the social world (Ringrose and Renold, 2014). The room itself felt heavy and the heat, the tiredness blanketed everything, adding to the atmosphere. Affect thus cannot be located in either Adele or Saffron, nor in the chair. Instead as the session continues affect seems to

accumulate in force/intensity the more it circulates (Ahmed, 2004). Affect leads to potential outcomes becoming reality, which changes trajectories (Massumi, 2002). In this case, affective forces splinter the relationship between Adele and Saffron, whilst opening up a different path for bringing Saffron closer to her teammates. There are any number of things that might be the lightning rod for a tense situation but it only takes for one thing, one seemingly inconsequential action to make a difference. The chair, in this instance, is the 'seemingly inconsequential' amongst the events of the day but its presence facilitated a trajectory that broke apart any reasonable working relationship Adele and Saffron might have had. A posthumanist framework obliges us to focus on the 'chair', (alongside the heat and tiredness) as a way of understanding how relationships can be done or undone in learning events.

5.4.1 It's not just me and you: relationships in context

We can see some of the ripples that emanate from that moment. But were other things also happening that contributed to the altercation? As I explored the data, it seemed to me that in 'doing' relationships, it might be naïve to identify only direct causes and it is impossible to say what combination of events might have prevented the argument. The day was difficult, the young people allude to a number of things in their talk including being 'made' to do lots of activities, being tired and the staff appearing to treat them differently from their experience of the previous week. Adele also makes reference to heat, hunger and hydration affecting the emotional and physical state of everyone. A number of incidents took place during the day that could all be considered to be contributory to the chair moment but defining the importance and relevance of each moment would be challenging. I am drawn to the overwhelming and haphazard nature of events and affective forces. The data illustrates so much happening concurrently and yet, also, elsewhere in time. It is not conceivable to think of this moment as cause and effect, hence I will always struggle to capture this in a linear and/or logical way. The mastery sought by researchers to offer explanations, even solutions keeps slipping away. It is hard to unequivocally name a cause or even a causal path; causes stubbornly refuse to show themselves. This again presents an issue as a researcher, as themes are supposed to 'arise' out of the data and fit into (or be made to fit into) ideas that explain the world. In this instance, the ruptures of the moment are rhizomatic, the nature of the incident fails to map onto any generative model or structure, there is no start or finish

point (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) and still the event that emerged, modified potential learning futures (Springgay and Truman, 2018).

An issue arises in that if there is no obvious causal explanation for the event, how can this be prevented in the future? Maybe this is the wrong question. A lack of identifiable cause troubles the notion of prevention. Instead of thinking about how to prevent a conflict, it is possible to think of what conflict achieves in this instance. The argument allows a release of emotion, a brief moment in which neither Saffron or Adele adhere to expectations of 'appropriate' behaviour or to ideas of being rational while in a learning event. In doing so, it challenges hegemonic ideas of order, power, and control; who (or what) gets to steer or impose their will on others, issues germane to behaviour management or behaviour control in many learning environments. The lack of explanatory routes are problematic if 'practice' requires clear answers. However, what the event is indicative of is the seemingly disparate nature of encounters and how we need to be alert to what might 'affect' relations. Following the rhizome down another root/route means playing with difference. Maybe the questions need to change. For instance, what is wrong with conflict in learning environments, or what does conflict in learning environments do and what can the protagonists learn from power struggles such as these?

Re-thinking power struggles as opportunities or even as inevitabilities offers a hopeful avenue for construction and re-construction. In this re-framing, it is possible to see both Adele and Saffron as learners and teachers, new identities or ways of doing are opened for exploration. Adele, in the third scene, reflects on how she has thought about the incident, how it played on her mind, how she was still thinking about the argument three or four days later, well into the weekend. Although Adele says she would not do anything different, learning about Saffron's home life offered a pause to consider what happened whilst also seeking to understand Saffron and her actions. Saffron becomes the teacher through her provocation. Acknowledging the pain that both Saffron and Adele experienced in different ways allows knowledge to be extricated and a new way of being to emerge, a practice of affirmative ethics (Braidotti, 2019b). Knowing the new information and putting it in play with the incident means that Adele is aware of others beyond what is immediately apparent, the experiences of others and what this may mean for everyday encounters. No encounter is ever the same but each encounter

leaves marks on bodies and in doing so, has the capacity to affect future acts and behaviours.

When considering relationships, paying attention to the traces left on bodies sheds light on how traces are carried with us in the now. They affect how we engage in the moment. One way to consider this is through the lens of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) in which the child develops mental representations of relationships based on responses given by their primary caregiver. These representations impact future relationships with other people depending on the new information that is assimilated. This is a useful lens to help understand what might be happening for Saffron particularly as she draws on the troubled relationships she had with the teachers at her school. The incident with Adele confirms her previous experiences. However, there is something more, when thinking diffractively by reading feminist theories with attachment theory. Saffron's previous encounters were not only thought, they were felt, they were embodied. It is not just encounters a long time ago but the encounters she has during that day. Her body aches, she moans about Alan making her do activities, she is tired, her leg hurts. Her body holds her hurt and she sits in a chair that offers something different. Her meaning-making is cognitive but also embodied and affective (Maiese, 2017).

From Saffron's perspective she observes others as not respecting her, while other adults, equally and consistently, observe her as rude and wilful. Her experience with authority figures has not changed, it is a familiar refrain to her, she feels emotionally and physically aggrieved once more. Refrains or patterns/trends mark territories and territorialise the functions within that territory. Refrains may not be not held within the subject but work to delineate bodies (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). I read this as a 'doing', the refrain does something about connectedness, for Saffron. The familiar refrain of conflict connects her to all the other poor relationships she has had with adults and simultaneously blocks a path to a less conflictual relationship. It is yet another illustration for Saffron that she does not get on well with adults or authority figures.

Her performative role is aggrieved and that of the victim, something she is familiar with, habituated to recognise if not accept. In this instance it could be proposed that Saffron is engaged in conformational (reproductive) as opposed to transformational learning. This is not to say it is just confirming a bias she has previously developed.

Instead, there is also a temporal aspect that refuses to be situated or confined to a particular time in history. Experiences are enfolding and infolding, a 'repetition', a pattern reinforcing a particular response to the singular (Deleuze, 1994). In this respect both the past and the future shape Saffron's experience, there is a queering of linear timelines. In the chat with her friends, she talks about the past and future as entwined, she talks about how Adele 'could have been nicer' because of knowing about Saffron's troubled home life. Saffron wanted Adele to be nicer on the assumption that Adele was also privy to information Saffron had shared with me. The patterns of topology are repetitive as Barad (2007) would suggest, due to the previous iterations and re-iterations of intra-acting. These have left historical marks and influence how Saffron evolves with the world. Whilst her response may look similar to previous behaviour, it takes place in a different time and space with different people, so the moment is always unique. With each new event, her reaction is a synthesis of past responses to similar moments but enacted in that confluence, changing form in relation to the environment and other affects. There may be repetition but always with the possibility that some element of the event may change the predictability of the outcomes.

I am, too, implicated in this intra-action and it is a reminder that an analysis of purely the event observed, maybe, would have hidden this entanglement. Saffron had an expectation that I would share information about her family/past with all the staff. But I had not done so, as it was her private information. I don't know why Saffron assumed I would share it widely. Perhaps her previous experience had been that her teachers had shared information on her background with each other, whether she had a say in it or not; or maybe she was expecting me to tell people as a way of helping them understand her behaviour. When she had disclosed information to me, we discussed who she wanted the information shared with and I had been clear about who did need to know and who didn't. And yet there was some miscommunication (a learning point for me). Or maybe, Saffron did understand me, but I surprised her by adhering to what I said I was going to do, maybe this was something she was not used to. Whatever the reason, our conversation was drawn in to inform her actions. These iterations leave marks on Saffron and each new encounter either gave her new learning or confirmed learning from her past. When learning is analysed it is often thought about as something that changes the future but what may be missed is that the past is fully implicated. Without the past being addressed in the now, how can the future change?

5.5 The little things

The dramatic sketch illustrates that each week of the programme was different and that this change brought further change to the relationships. The NCS programme consists of four different weeks in four different environments. This makes me wonder about how the change in environment may have contributed to a (perceived) change in expectations between the adult and the young people? With each new environment, there were new challenges to overcome, learning that had to happen for both adults and young people. The easy repetitions or habits of being with each other learned in the first week could not be so easily reproduced in the second week, or the third week, or the fourth. Being with each other had to be learned or re-learned. Relationality needed to be re-negotiated each time

The material contexts were thus key factors. In this second week not only were there different activities, but there was also heat to contend with, even longer days and less sleep, and cooking for themselves affecting their nutritional intake. These are factors that affect both the young people and the staff too. In the first week, a lot of organising and in some respects, group management was fulfilled by the third-party activity providers. They dictated times and schedules, they managed safety on activities, they facilitated group discussions and the young people often talked about them to me. The NCS team leaders and assistants were much more part of the group, following directions just as the young people were. Consequently, I observed lots of conversations between the NCS staff and young people about every day, popular things such as 'Love Island' (a popular reality TV show), music, films and video games. In addition, the activities were generally embraced by most, so there were lots of opportunities for fun together. The first week saw the adults and young people bonding in roles that whilst different allowed a shared commonality. They were learning together through the seemingly minor actions and gestures of being together as a group. In the terms of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), the intra-actions created smooth spaces, spaces for learning and changing together. However, with each passing week, new boundaries had to be re-constituted, the spaces became striated whilst they tried to find a new rhythm together. The striated space preserves organisation and order, it gives co-ordinates and set points in which direction is secondary. Smooth spaces are about experiences and where points of measurement are subordinate.

For instance, in the second week the team leaders and assistants had to fulfil much more of the organising and disciplinary duties, so they felt compelled to change their approach. They had to lead the schedule not just follow the timetable. They had to lead activities, some of which were group work-based activities, some of which they were perhaps less confident with, for example budgeting and cooking. They had to actively manage the activity spaces as well as the behaviour of the young people; health and safety was no longer overseen by the activity instructors. Whereas the first week, the TLs and ATLs were guests in the space of the Outdoor Education provider, in the second week any external instructor was the guest in the NCS space. The focus on tasks and logistics meant that the staff had less time, energy and capacity to focus on the young people as individuals or as a group. They had less time to just be part of the group, their role was not to join in but lead and they were managing a logistically difficult site. At times they were much more directive with the young people, sometimes short in their responses and had less time to have the important but seemingly inconsequential chats. The change in parameters alongside the other environmental factors served to hamper the active participation with the young people and contributed to much less collegiality and much more authoritative relations.

As the drama highlights, this one event of conflict over the use of the chair, has seemingly broken any perceptions of 'positivity'. The words by Adele suggest there is a breakdown in trust. The altercation has moved their relationship in a negative direction and had the potential to overshadow the overall experience of being on the programme, leading to Saffron, in her anger, going to her room to pack. This specific breakdown in trust is echoed by her peers who comment on the differences in how the staff are treating them over this week as opposed to the comradery felt in the first week. Here has been a divergence in the future potentials, the first week seemed largely positive but the second week has splintered and fractured into a messier entanglement. Each time there is a branching off, future potentials are both included and excluded.

One of the phrases that was often used by the young people, was about how 'relatable' the staff were. When asked further, the young people and staff struggled to explain this, what it looks like in practice. It in turn became an unreliable concept which continually slipped away from me. If you understand or feel sympathy for another, this implies you have some expectation in knowing what their actions might be. Trust in relationships is facilitated by meeting the mutual expectations of roles between adults and young

people, in their day-to-day interactions (Holland, 2015). Does the term relatable mean you have some trust in knowing how that person may respond?

The discussion that the young people had about the staff in the first week indicate that trust had been built and the relationships were seen as positive.

"I love Alfie, he's really approachable" (*Comment from Rachel, YP, Week 1, Day 5)*

This sentiment was expressed to me on numerous occasions about all the staff and the young people really did value their team leaders. As the drama shows, this does not mean there were no sticking points in the relationships or that all the young people liked all of the staff. But the comment by Rachel suggests a sense of time and capacity that may have been particularly available in the first week but was much more scarce in the second, thus exacerbating tensions and contributing to an unpredictability to the relationships perhaps, with a subsequent loss of trust.

Research, in both formal schooling and youth work arenas, has evidenced it is the little things or actions that students notice so that they feel they have a safe and supportive environment (Bernstein-Yamashiro and Noam, 2013). The little things and actions are the moments of intra-action that may go unnoticed but still leave a mark, for instance an adult saying thank you to a child or an adult turning their back on a child when the child goes to speak (not necessarily maliciously). My experience in practice is that the positive little things happen a lot less often than might be expected and the events that leave the negative traces (or moments interpreted as being negative), perhaps happen more than we might like. For little things to happen, it relies on a confluence of affective forces and intensities. Each week brought something different, not just the big, noticeable changes e.g. buildings but also a change in little things. This differing intra-action meant that relationships were always dynamic and always involved learning.

5.5.1 Taking Response-ability

Relationships are about doing, they are about movement, they are about the moment before the next moment. Relationships involve engagement in meaning-making and often this takes place after the event through rumination, post-event discussion as in the young people chatting amongst themselves or in the discussion between Adele and myself. Therefore, doing relationships becomes about understanding the present,

myself, consideration of others and what they are presenting, understanding all the movement in the space, attuning to the moment. The present is happening at all times, therefore there are always opportunities to change and influence the relationship trajectory. This has implications for learning, if there are possibilities for movement, then nothing is fixed and there are multiple opportunities to learn. This is hopeful because it allows mistakes to be integral to learning but also it does not fix physical or temporal boundaries on when or where learning can and should finish taking place. And it troubles the notion of responsibility because every moment becomes a response-able moment as part of learning.

In this instance, despite the reflections, there was no attempt to remedy the relationship. Saffron's thoughts are focused on her hurt rather than on the damaged relationship, particularly as Adele is not her team leader. However, neither is Adele interested in repairing the relationship. Her comments with regards to her own reflection on the incident echo that of Saffron's in that the 'other' is responsible for their behaviour and should have reacted in a more responsible manner:

"you've got all this on your own back, erm, why are you still being horrible to people?"

Through my working with Adele, I could see her hurt and bewilderment. Her need to make sense of this led her to conclude that she would not do anything different should the moment ever be replayed. In this moment, who takes response-ability, where does/should accountability arise? When does one person's struggle become more valued or override the experience of another? My natural instincts from a safeguarding perspective are to say the adult must always be the one that steps back and reflects to understand their own actions and reactions in the moment. However, this fails to recognise the hurt that is also felt here by Adele, she feels wronged just as Saffron does. Where is the degree of balance in the response-ability particularly given the closeness in their ages? We do not just enter adulthood fully formed and able to perform relationships flawlessly, with expertise, compassion and personal awareness. In this case both parties indicate that the relationship can only be restored through apologies on both sides, but this is an afterthought not an 'in-thought'. Neither of them in the moment was able to resist the pull of the conflict. Neither of them could find the space that would have allowed an evaluation of possible routes for alternative potentials and

futures. In the phenomenon, it is not just whose voice get privileged that needs challenging but how many voices get heard and in what way do they get heard?

With Saffron and Adele, it is not that transformational learning cannot happen in any subsequent interactions, but it does require either one of them to make a positive move towards the other, and they both indicate this is unlikely to happen. A relational approach, engaging in dialogue would perhaps have been beneficial to both of them. Saffron perhaps being recognised and acknowledged, whilst Adele receiving an apology maybe vindicating the guilt she initially experienced. However, this never happened and they remain estranged from each other. I did not observe any subsequent engagement between the pair of them.

5.6 Being dramatic

Why did I decide to attempt to turn the data into a drama? Why not just pick out themes or aspects from the data collection and analyse this as in 'Good Old Fashioned Qualitative Inquiry' (Brinkmann, 2014, p.620)? A focus on events allows an understanding of emerging relations of what is coming to matter in the entanglement (Taylor and Fairchild, 2020). However, events in all their multiplicity and complexity are challenging when attempting to follow all the trajectories, the boundaries that are constituted and reconstituted. These lines of flight cannot be apprehended in a simple 'capture' of the data, as it may not be apparent or observable in that moment. Instead, I wanted to invite others into the drama as a provocation to be affected in the moment, which here is a co-creation of understanding. As with any research, experiencing the events is not a one-off; every time a note is read and re-read, an audio recording is listened to and re-listened to, a photo is looked and re-looked at, a comment is remembered, re-remembered, the event is experienced once more and re-lived, it is not exactly the same. After all it is not just physical, inert 'data' I have collected, the data is lively with capacity to transverse across time and space (Koro-Ljungberg *et al.*, 2018). It is not just data fixed in moments waiting to be collected, these are moments of time that I lived through. I captured these moments both physically and emotionally, I have memories alongside the artefacts. Traditional anthropological ethnographers might refer to these as headnotes, the notes that continue to evolve once the fieldwork has come to an end (Sanjek, 1990). However, it was not just cognitive reflections I am/was engaged in, in my re-encounters with the data, embodied sensations are evoked

(Stevenson, 2014), ones that make me re-member the intensity of the event. Capturing this with snippets of notes or transcriptions would not do justice to the intensity of the emotions that permeated the day and so I turned to drama.

That is not to say that this was a straightforward, immediate decision, it was a process of engagement. On return to the 'real world', the episode continued to surface at a time when I felt overwhelmed by all the data and had an extreme reluctance to return to it. This hesitancy felt like more than prevarication. I was not sure I was ready to relive the experience. Even listening to recordings brought back the noise, tiredness and sense of being overwhelmed. The decision to turn the data into drama was predicated by my reliving the experience through my notebook, photographs, recordings and memories. It was apparent that whilst it was enmeshed in my memories, the recordings made at the time did not reflect the intensity of angst and emotion. The dramatization is not based word for word on what transpired. I wanted to illustrate the sense of frustration alongside the lethargy that seemed to hang over the incident. It was an episode that lived with me for many reasons, not least because it seemed to anchor what was an extremely difficult day in the middle of the residential. A day I found particularly exhausting. This moment amongst the busyness of this day haunted my memories, I kept coming back to it, wondering about the cause, curious about the build-up, intrigued by the two protagonists, interested in the repercussions and wanting to make sense of it.

The physical data, either as notes or as audio recordings, about the incident are sparse, there is very little reference to the actual incident. In fact, my notes at the time simply say:

"*Saffron has been asked to leave the room by Adele, it's getting heated because Saffron is being defiant. Tbf she has left & gone to Angie, but Adele had to raise her voice to get there*" (Notes from my little book, Week 2, Day 3)

The sparse detail here fails to capture that my recollection is of Adele leaving the room first. This (possibly inaccurate) memory was supported in Adele's interview at a later date. This discrepancy does highlight the issue with relying on just what is recorded. I am not sure why there is not more in my notes. My personal reflection written at 7.59pm that day may offer a glimpse as to why I had not recorded more:

"All noise is magnified and of course they had all been sat down all day and had a lot of pent up energy to release. The staff are also feeling tired and fractious, I am feeling this too. This is definitely my hump day, I feel pretty exhausted and it is still at least 4 hours before bed. Arrgghh!" (My Reflection, Week 2, Day 3)

This fragility in the timeline of physical data collection, the lack of what might be considered 'rigorous' data feels disconcerting as a researcher. It is perplexing that there is an absence of more concrete physical recordings to hold on to or be guided by. Whilst the elusiveness of the data is not an uncommon feeling for an ethnographer (Visweswaran, 1994), it troubled me and caused me to wonder and question the lack of substantial data. I was concerned with how to adequately convey how important this event was to me and the two main characters involved. My discomfort related to how the event made me think about the difficulties of 'doing' relationships? How could the complexity be succinctly explored and captured encompassing all that happened in that day, and how it may or may not have contributed to the 'chair' incident? How could I bring alive the joyous, complicated characters of Saffron and Adele alongside the strength of emotions and feelings with the snippets of information I had? Was there potential to evoke in others a small a sense of what I was experiencing and feeling that day? It bothered me. It troubled me and I spent hours thinking about how I could hear the voices of the protagonists without misrepresenting them or failing to capture the intensity of what happened. I felt the weight of having to demonstrate 'academic rigour'. Yet a significant proportion of my PhD reading and thinking has been advocating against being bounded by the rules of traditional understandings of qualitative 'methodology', of even working against 'methodology' for the sake of seeing the new through valorising traditionally overlooked 'data'.

It was drawing on my practical experience and years of working with young people that inspired me to attempt a dramatic reconstruction. My motivation has always been to bring relationships to life, not to just identify themes or report on events (Vannini, 2015a). Methodologies provide guidance but a rigid adherence to a method does not ensure insightful research (Watts, 2014) nor does presenting 'literal' truth illustrate the reality of what it is like to live the life of those being researched (Pickering and Kara, 2017). There was a sense of feeling restrained and hampered for me, therefore, in the spirit of releasing myself from the rigidity of traditional research paradigms, I moved to welcome the messiness and creativity inherent in transgressive data (Hohti, 2016),

looked to make the moments come alive (Vannini, 2015a) and embraced the drama of people's lived experiences.

The possibility of thick description in ethnography offered me an opportunity to do this as means of capturing the messiness, the affect and the movement as a whole story that encompasses the stories of various actors (Krenske and McKay, 2000). However, I found myself unable to grasp the relationalities, the unfolding of life (Dowling, Lloyd and Suchet-Pearson, 2018) and emerging potentialities with a typical presentation of data. In addition, thick description aims for the reader to ascertain and understand the context, meaning and interpretation of the actors present. But in capturing the dramas, the affect and refrains of everyday living I wanted to bring the sensations to the fore, not just my explanations or interpretations (Springgay and Zaliwska, 2017). The creative, artistic expression offered by drama gave me the opportunity for this.

As an arts-based approach a drama is a means to not just be about affect, but to be affective (Vannini, 2015a), to feel and experience 'doing' relationships from a non-representational perspective. With this in mind, the process I used to write the drama also reflected two other concerns; the first is that any writing up of ethnographic research is driven by theoretical reasons and involves making both political and ethical choices (Fiske, 1991) and I wanted to be accountable to the persons involved; second that whilst I wanted to capture the messiness of everyday speech, I am aware how we talk is not straightforward and can look terrible when written down due to the rhythms and intonations of people speaking together (Davis, 2016) which is problematic when writing for a PhD. Any genre of writing is performative, it does something and something comes to matter. Using an arts-based approach, such as a drama, is an invitation into other knowledges and other ways of being, and as a way to connect (Quijada Cerecer et al, 2019). In writing a drama, I wanted to explore what came to matter for the two protagonists, understanding different ways of becoming whilst trying to evoke the messiness and complexity of the event(s).

5.6.1 Developing the script

In developing the script, I tried to be attentive to the four characteristics that are generally present: "words, embodiments, spaces and things" (Harris, Holman & Linn, 2016, p.3). The thing was the chair, and this along with the words and the people co-constituted the space and the space was embodied through the words. This was not

about identifying place but evoking spaces. As Harris et al. (2016) identify, the four characteristics are all in relation to one another – affective and affected by the connections.

The script developed over time with feedback from my supervisors paying particular attention to the voices – did the words attributed make the characters come alive/were they believable? I was particularly aware as to the rhythm and intonation of their speech. I wrote the scenes drawing on actual speech patterns. I have hours of audio recordings that helped me capture the essence of their interactions and the types of words and phrases they used. I witnessed their lounging around and just chatting, as I wrote the drama. I could 'see' each young person and the types of physical actions they made. The words of Adele in the third scene are almost word for word from an interview she gave me. Some chunks of speech have been omitted and others rearranged, but the words are hers. I could hear their voices as I typed. However when in print, I worried that it seemed tokenistic or patronising. I gave a draft of this chapter to Adele for her input, to ask if this felt familiar and to hold me to account if it wasn't. Adele's opinion was important, so did the script feel real to her? The only negative feedback was that I had got her outfit wrong! In the original, I had Adele wearing a vest top. Adele's words to me were "I would never ever been seen in a vest top, that's so wrong", so this was changed. Safeguarding protocols meant I could not contact any of the young people involved, so I do not have their verdict on the drama.

Finally, in the first scene I have chosen to place the spotlight on the chair as a device for highlighting agency and the magnitude of what the chair came to reveal. It is in these decisions I hope to have created an affect that will resonate with an audience in a way that simply using data from the field notes or recordings would not. In making these decisions and formulating the drama, I found myself further analysing the data. It came alive to me in ways that were not apparent when reading my notes and listening to the recordings. This approach focused a lens on events, relations, doings and affects (sic) acknowledging energy and the tension of fluidity and stickiness within the research area (Lorimer, 2008) and capturing the exciting and diverse number of relational possibilities as they are played out against the background of living (Vannini, 2015b).

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on one central event but in drawing the boundaries for analysis, what emerged was a number lines of flight that highlight the complexity and messiness of doing relationships, particularly in and through conflict and change. This chapter could have focused on a psychological lens understanding the two individuals in their struggle whether for power or other motivations. However, humans are not standalone. Posthumanism refutes this exceptionalism. Instead, the analysis of this fleeting moment makes known that the relationship was not just shaped by each other but also by other elements. The affordances of the chair (to shape, to spin, to symbolise) in this event demonstrate that humans, non-humans – material or animals shape and are shaped by each other in their encounters and within this ecology is where learning takes place. The world is not full of inert objects, instead they come to be known through intra-action, they are both dynamic and agentic in these entanglements (Sheridan *et al.*, 2020).

By wondering about this incident and paying attention to the 'glow' of the chair, that became brighter, allowed an understanding that relationships are ongoing and distributed. They are not just situated in the here and now, they queer timelines with historicity and futurity coalescing in an affective moment. The emotional and physical marks left on bodies alongside the cognitive memories influence trajectories whilst people not even involved directly in the moment are entangled and implicated. With this, the unspoken communication between humans and the more than human contribute to the ingredients that make up the ecology in which learning is happening.

The learning that emerges in the sympoiesis of the relationship is problematised, there is not an obvious 'teacher' or 'learner', instead what is seen is iterative learning. Little moments adding to what has come before and so influencing what comes next. This is not to say that learning always has positive outcomes, it is not always transformational, and neither is it necessarily transformational in a positive way. Instead, it can conform to previous understanding and experiences, re-emphasising messages already taken on by the body and sedimented yet further.

These findings have implications for doing research and education. As researchers and educators this requires further learning. It requires becoming alert to the unseen,

seemingly minor gestures, recognising the continual changes of multiplicities coming together and learning to pay attention to how learning happens in this ecology. This requires to not just focus on human-centred matters but on more-than-human events/encounters and to move beyond traditional qualitative methods. This is not to replace the traditional. Instead, by using a post-qualitative approach that moved beyond field and head notes into creativity and wonder, a worlding emerged that complements and adds to previous research that has conceptualised the features of challenges in the relationships between adult and young people.

Chapter Six: Noise - Doing relationships of connectedness and exclusion

Figure 10: A silent depiction of noise

6.1 Introduction

I come from a family where noise is always present and everything is loud. There was always a radio playing in the kitchen even if we were sat in the next room watching TV. My mum was part of a group of Serbian women who had travelled to the UK for work and stayed in the small market town I grew up in. Consequently there was always at least one person sat in our kitchen on a small stool with my mum, smoking cigarettes and talking with raised voices in incomprehensible Serbian. As a child I learned to block out the hum as they spoke, only remaining alert to hearing my name - was that a good tone or was I in trouble again? Sport was the background to our lives both in person and on TV, this came with the sounds of shouting, singing and swearing. Christmas celebrations were always big, several households having fun and making themselves heard above each other. And noise followed me into adulthood as I embraced gigs and big sporting events whilst working with large groups of teenagers in various environments. Noise has not just been sound but relationships, it has been 'sticky' connecting me with people, events and memories. Noise has been about

learning, working out where to pay attention, how to pay attention, curiosity and questions. Noise has been pivotal in my day to day 'doing'.

I say all of this to highlight I always thought I could cope with noise. I always have to have a radio on in the background as I work as I am not good at being surrounded by silence. I have had jobs that have required me to be alert and focused even when tired and preoccupied. And yet the noise whilst on the NCS programme was/is an overriding memory and feeling, so much so it overwhelmed me, bothered me and sent me hiding from all the recordings (visual or auditory) when I returned home. And yet within all or because of the noise I witnessed how relationships between adults and young people were building and how learning was taking place. How did people work with noise, and from a posthuman perspective, how is the learning environment shaped by noise? And does noise also help produce learning? Noise has stuck with me, making me think and wonder about the role of noise, the nature of noise, not what 'it is' but thinking with a posthumanist approach and recognising noise as within an assemblage – entangled and connected to other bodies within phenomena. This chapter is my following of noise which has unravelled potentials echoing and reverberating in their rhizomatic becoming. Playing with and understanding the differences that creatively emerge within the material-discursive environments, moving beyond thinking about evolution and instead thinking as creative involution (the coming together of transversal and disparate flights) as the noise, people, physical environment find other ways of being (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; Hansen, 2000; Barad, 2007). What differences emerge and what are they doing? In a programme such as NCS with so many people involved and the different environments; what does noise do, how are relationships shaped by noise, and what does it mean for learning?

The Soundscape of NCS[4] Please click on the link after reading the footnote.

But before I go any further, I need to elaborate on what it means to attune to the sound and noise in a learning event, as I explored in a recently published paper drawn from this chapter (Rennolds, 2022). Are the terms interchangeable? There is not a clear boundary between noise and sound, it is a fuzzy line, explored in other fields e.g.

[4] Clicking on the link should take you to Soundcloud, there is no need for an account. The clip should start automatically or alternatively just press play. Please be aware of your volume level before pressing play. The full URL can be found after the reference list.

acoustics and sound geographies, with conceptualisations of the difference often referring to responses in relation to humans. In this anthropocentric approach, sound is based on mechanics and biology. Soundwaves cross the auditory pathways and cause a physiological response (Berglund and Lindvall, 1995). In other conceptualisations, noise has more traditionally been defined as both a physiological and a psychological response (ibid) in that it is typically recognised as being a nuisance, noise has an adverse effect on the person experiencing it. This suggests a uniform response to sound but, as you will see in this chapter, noise as merely a negative concept does not capture the differences in response the same sounds could have on different people.

Traditional conceptualisations of sound by focusing on the human reminds us of the philosophical question– if a tree falls in a forest and no person is around, does it make a sound? A posthuman approach troubles this orientation, providing provocation to consider what is implicated beyond the human (Springgay and Zaliwska, 2017) in the process of worlding and the ongoing becoming-with (Haraway, 2016). Indeed, if the tree falls, this is an affective sign that something has changed (Kohn, 2013). The noise as it crashes to the floor being one feature of the message of difference. Paying attention to " 'more-than-human' collectivities" (Dernikos, 2020, p.135) in the understanding of sound, opens up knowledge about what sound does (Gallagher, Kanngieser and Prior, 2017). In their (ibid) exploration of how geographies of sound can open up to its '*broader sonic sensibilities'* (p.620) they consider sound as part of different bodies not just human bodies but the wider environment. In doing this, the authors frame sound as not only part of the landscape but also as something that can affect and be affected, paying attention to how it moves and emerges through intra-action with different bodies and materialities, human or non-human.

Agency is entangled in mutual constitution (Barad, 2007); When we pay attention to sounds, we are listening not just with our ears but through the physicality of our whole bodies. Sound in the form of soundwaves not only touches bodies or reverberates off bodies, it passes through bodies and enters space between bodies. Bodies that include the human and the other-than-human. Sound has the potential to affect whilst also being affected by the materiality of the environment e.g. a sound bouncing off different building materials will cause different reverberations, which alters soundwaves and their resonance on other bodies. For example, speech as just one sound from humans is more than just language, more than just words. The sounds in articulating the words are

noise, in that it affects bodies and is affected by other bodies in its movement. My approach to speech recognises more than the words as affective, and instead recognises the sounds produced as one part of the phenomena being studied. This problematises the conceptualisation of noise as simply having a negative effect on humans and instead embraces the multiplicity and complexity of noise-affect and the potentials it produces as one part of the material-discursive iterations (Barad, 2007). This recognises the entanglement in which noise emerges as agentic and where sound and noise blur together as interchangeable. Therefore, in this chapter, the terms will be used synonymously.

In this chapter I am hoping that we follow noise together, tracing its movement and wandering with it whilst wondering about it. I invite readers into moments of the fieldwork in which we can wander/wonder together and think about how noise can be both constructive and obstructive in learning and learning relationships. In doing this I will guide us away from an educational approach that values the spoken/written word as knowledge and language as representation. Instead, I will explore how attunement to noise invites us into alternative ways of knowing, asks us to pay attention differently and opens up a way to 'be' human that is not simply a human-centred activity. I will follow the soundwaves and first consider noise as an ethical 'doing', before going on to explore the different manifestations of noise and the tracings it makes. Together we can attune to the affectivity of noise as part of phenomena in different ways, experiencing how noise lives within the emotional, cognitive and physical that includes and excludes futures.

6.2 A Soundscape and more

This chapter will explore the questions of 'doing' relationships by paying attention to the sounds but also drawing upon written and photographic evidence that instigated particular memories or lines of thought creating a noisescape. With a posthuman approach I recognise that a noisescape is very much about how I choose to draw the boundaries of the data (Sheridan *et al.*, 2020). I have drawn a range of recordings together in short bites to try and create a bigger picture of the full experience, and in doing so, hope that the ebbs and flows allow wonder and curiosity about what can be heard. However, I recognise the sounds, photos, writings I have pulled together, are very much what affects me and whilst I aim for an understanding of the doing and

movement of noise, it still only directs readers/listeners to a small part of the whole experience, not just for me but for those who were part of the four weeks together on NCS. This is certainly true of any research; how else would an audience access the data except if it was bounded and reduced in complexity? However, a posthuman approach poses questions as to my (any researcher's) response-ability to the world and obligations to the participants and to others engaged with this research. I considered that it would be relatively easy to draw out the moments of heightened tension and in doing so create/direct the mattering for readers/listeners, that is manipulate or control aspects of the affective (Davies, 2018) with the view to leading readers/listeners in a certain direction. This seems unsatisfactory and misses the 'point', I invoke noise as data "as invitations to listen in particular embodied ways" (Pink, 2015, p.175), to understand the different affects it can have in different assemblages. I don't wish to represent just place or space but instead to understand what noise might do for those that experience it in those places and spaces and for us to share in the experience.

6.3 Noise and Attunement

Noise is everywhere, even when it is silent we hear it, feel it. In their exploration of the practices of attunement, Brigstocke and Noorani (2016) consider how this opens up "difference, dissonance, and suspension" (p.3). Attunement to sounds opens up the affectivity of noise, it has the capacity to evoke memories, feelings and thoughts. This agency to affect impacts in a range of ways, for example, think of the power of a piece of music, it can be both joyful and sorrowful depending on who is listening and what else is happening at the time of first and subsequent listens - the music is active with ongoing movement. It is the possibility of these iterations, evocations of memories and emotions, the potentiality to attach, to get 'sticky' (Ahmed, 2014) as an embodied experience, that struck me as important when thinking about noise and its potential in how people do relationships and learn together.

6.3.1 Attuning to the togetherness

Sound is ubiquitous in shaping daily life (Born, 2013) but certainly sound and noise, and what they mean to different areas of research, is an oft neglected facet both in research and especially in practice within learning environments. As you might imagine a group of eighty people can be noisy, very noisy and yet quiet with a

surprising stillness at times. The clip 'The Soundscape of NCS' draws together a range of moments and encounters across the whole of the NCS programme for you to experience both the noise and the quiet. For this section, if possible, I would invite you to identify the sections recorded at the disco, which took place on the fourth evening of the second week. In the recording you can hear the song 'Wonderwall' by Oasis as it comes to an end, accompanied by the cohort singing and cheering. This song 'caught' everyone in the venue as it started to play and the dancefloor filled. Other than a few members of staff standing at the side, the dancefloor was awash with bodies moving together with a fluidity that brought everyone together as one. I could see arms, lots of arms swaying, hugging others, holding onto each other. As a researcher, it could be the individual parts that make this up – the songs, the different people, the lights, the room, that are of interest. There is fascination with individual aspects but if you look at this as phenomena, the cohort/the room, in its becoming, were 'one' in movement together. It is in this that the moment of wonder emerges (MacLure, 2013a) and attunement can unlock the 'brilliance' or 'shimmer' (Rose, 2017) that is felt and lived. This impact is momentarily, fleetingly felt in physical time but leaves a trace to become enfolded in other iterations, such as this one memory I am remembering now as I write.

The song 'Wonderwall' was the unofficial anthem of the programme and all the staff and most of the young people could recognise and sing along to it. When I took this particular recording, it was the last full day of the second residential, so in total the whole cohort had been together for nine days. The moment I was observing was testament to what music and noise does in building relationships. This disco floor became evidence of shared experiences, mutuality and reciprocity that had happened in just nine days. It was, for me, a significant moment. A moment I may have missed or glossed over if I had not been attuned to a long line of noises that can trace their paths from the first moment we all met as a cohort (and before) to the assemblage on the dancefloor.

I had not consciously considered the importance of attuning to the noise, opening up to the affective nature of listening and feeling sounds when I started. However, it first occurred to me that noise was important on the initial bus journey to Scotland. I realised that the restrictions of the seat belts, the height of the seat backs, the fact I was sat fairly near the front of the bus and unable to turn around, meant it was really difficult to see what was going on: but I could hear lots of noise. Not only could I hear the sounds, but I

could also feel them, the general vibration of the rumble of the bus on the road through my body, the sudden loud laughter making me jump, the high-pitched squeal making me wince, the chatter that made me smile, sound was in and all around me – it was making me feel, both physically and emotionally – it was affective. Attuning to the noise connected me to a vibrancy of life that was almost ethereal, something I will return to later in this chapter. But first I wish to turn to a more functional approach to noise and its 'doing' in relation to space.

6.4 Noise and Spaces

6.4.1 Spaces of relationships and learning

Space is important for learning, there has been growing recognition that space can influence learning outcomes. The conceptualisation of space is not restricted to physical boundaries, although these may help us think about structured learning environments and what happens within them. One of the more well-known researchers on ecological perspectives, Bronfenbrenner, in his exploration of ecological experimentation in education wrote that the interdependence of environment(s)and learner leads to both *"undergoing progressive changes over time"* (1976, p.8). This ecological approach recognises the relationship of spaces as defined by home, school etc. and the interaction that impacts learner outcomes in school. The ecological is defined by interactions between people in the spaces they inhabit influenced by cultural or institutional norms. As a model it is a human-centred approach where materiality and the physical environment is inert or not considered in detail, a little like the scenery in a play, the material is a backdrop. Posthumanist thinking challenges the ontological premise of environment as backdrop because as a human-centric model it fails to acknowledge the reciprocal nature of encounters between human and non-human in shaping potentials as part of the material-discursive entanglements.

Other researchers recognise reciprocity and the social nature of learning, for example, research based in communities in the Global South recognise that spaces for learning are not confined to classrooms with their demarcated pedagogical practices, instead literacy is a social practice that takes place informally, with peers as and when it is needed (Robinson-Pant, 2020). I think this demonstrates a fluidity of learning in which informal and/or diverse spaces are important and so prompts the question of not only

how does the material environment shape the learning but how much do people shape the material environment to build communities of learning?

The literature review highlighted the difficulties in conceptualising the types of learning and the spaces the learning takes place in. There is not a direct link between a formal learning environment and only formal learning taking place particularly when so much of learning crosses boundaries or is better considered as points on a continuum in different environments (Rogers, 2014b; Robinson-Pant, 2020). Being mindful that using these as discrete categories whose definitions can confuse policy development (Straka, 2009), the NCS programme is a learning programme with expectations of achieving prescriptive, measurable learning outcomes. These are very much focused on life and social skills, not on comparable knowledge-based outcomes indicative of more formal learning environments. However, the contexts in which the NCS activities happen bridge different built environments – informal (the community), non-formal (outdoor activity centres) and formal (university and college campuses). The learning happening in these different environments is important when thinking about noise and what it does on the programme. As such there is a functional expectation around noise very much influenced by what has come before which can be viewed as a transactional expectation of noise or silence in formal learning environments based on managing behaviours. There were times in the programme that very much appeared familiar to those used to a school environment, for example a key part of the learning programme is the use of reflection. Time was set aside every evening for each team to reflect together on what they had done and learned that day. This was delivered as a group activity with a number of strategies and exercises employed to facilitate reflection including dyadic feedback, group discussions, drawing, and use of conceptual models, for example Schon's reflection model of in-action and on-action (Hébert, 2015). Of all the activities the young people took part in, the reflection sessions often felt more like 'classroom' activities in which noise was an instrument that signified engagement (or not) in the task. Very much like schools, in which sound is either acceptable or not, rational or not (Dernikos, 2020), engagement or focus was measured by the use of silence and talking with both at various times expected of the groups. Noise or absence of noise was a tool that could be employed for reflection as demonstrated by Adele (TL, Team 3) and her team. Adele had previously been employed within a school run by a faith-led community. During her time there, she had experienced the powerful use of

boundaried silences and contemplation time, so given the vibrancy of her group, she introduced the concept of quiet thinking time. After a particularly rambunctious start to a reflection session, she set them the task of thinking about what teamwork meant to them as individuals, all to be completed in silence.

"It took them 15 minutes to write down fourteen different bits on team work, erm, and I reckon it lasted two, two minutes before someone giggled or someone like did an intentional cough or shuffled or, erm, like fidgeted uncomfortably or even spoke, there was a few times when someone went (*lowers voice to a whisper****) "oh you've taken that one" type thing to which I just went "shh!", no words I just did that. So after the fifteen minutes they were looking at me like saying what have you just done to me, I don't understand"*** *(Adult Adele, interview Week 1, Day 4)*

Adele was attempting to shape the learning space through silent, solo reflections and research demonstrates how space for learning can be created by the teacher by employing conversation and gaps of silence in interactions with students (Walsh and Li, 2013). But as Adele's experience highlights, crafting the places and context for learning is not entirely defined by the teacher. Noise emanating in various ways from the young people challenge the learning framework and expectation in an environment in which the 'making of noise' can have consequences. You can be labelled "a troublemaker – i.e. a student that generates and disperses '*noise*'" (Dernikos, 2020, p.152, emphasis in original). The assemblage of young people and noise in this study were also defining the shared space.

However, the noise by and from the young people is not always subversive in its function, and neither is noise/silence restrictive in its potential. This opens up other ways of being and learning together as exemplified during a different reflection session. The task was one that all groups were set in which each group had to draw a car, identify the car parts and say which person in the group this car part represented and why. The group then had to feedback to others. As with other group activities, this one invariably involved talking and much laughter. But there was also thoughtfulness and negotiation in recognising the contributions from members of the group (Fig. 11&12). Space with silence was given to learn about how others saw you and this was built upon to ensure everyone felt good. There were turns taken to say nice things about others and the sessions I observed had a 'hum' of warmth as the young people undertook the task.

This was a framework in which the expectations were familiar, for example, there was an unacknowledged requirement and recognition to be kind to others, as well as expectations around the control of noise. Reflection – click on link.

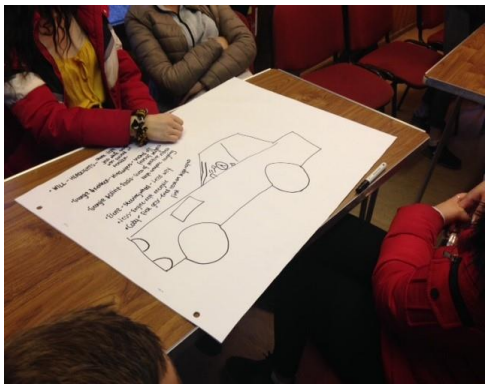
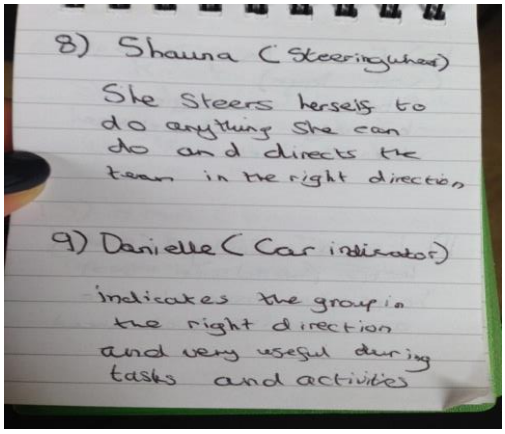


Figure 11: Team 3, car reflection, Week 1, Day 2

Figure 12: Team 4, car reflection, Week 1, Day 2



The chatter, laughter and quietness as noise facilitated a space, in which positive affect was created, pulling young people in and facilitating a 'feel-good' atmosphere that could be built upon. This opens up the potential for the future which was recognised by Team 3 in the final group reflection of week one. They were asked what they wanted to improve for the next week - week two, and amongst the general feedback of trying new things or getting more involved, there were several comments that included how this might happen:

"to improve, talk more….. to other people" *(YP Brady, audio recording)*

"getting everyone involved more, ……instead of just like speaking to one group or one set of people, speak to everybody, like ask them more questions" *(YP Bill, audio recording)*

"talk more as a group" *(YP Casey, audio recording)*

"try like be a bit more louder because I have been quite quiet" *(YP Anna, audio recording)*

"I would like to continue like talking to people that I wouldn't normally talk to, getting to know everybody" *(YP Leigh, audio recording)*

The comments from the young people make linkages between noise as human speech, inclusion and learning. In this instance, talking was very much related to exchanging knowledge between them as a group. A learning outcome they identified was being able to talk more as an improvement that facilitated relationships. And of course when people talk, the sound, as illustrated earlier in the chapter, plays with the physical environment creating different sounds with a further affective capacity. The capacity to connect by using noise is important, there is an affective component that signals openness to relationships, the boundaries of who is and is not included are supported by the use of the talking creating space for further noise which allows for potential group learning.

Bailey (2020) explored sound as a visualised representation in his analysis of an after-school Minecraft club, and whilst he too recognised how noise is used in managing classrooms, he observed that changing expectation of noises in gaming gave support to the creativity and togetherness of the group. Noise in this respect for the younger children helped them define their space in what was a familiar physical environment that typically had other expectations of what was permissible. This has similarities with this NCS programme where there was both difference and familiarity in the physical and learning spaces. Difference and Similarity – please click.

As all the audio clips amplify, there was a mutuality in learning to talk more as a way to create communal boundaries, creating a potential space for further learning. The shared creation felt safe as the young people and staff were response-able with and to each other, not only did they learn about each other but with each other (Taylor, Blaise and Giugni, 2013).

Therefore we might look to define learning spaces as multi-layered and co-created assemblages (Bayne and Ross, 2013) of which noise is part of the entanglement, and is

used to affect others. As seen in Chapter 5, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) write about space as a changing perspective, spaces are not set or firmly boundaried by physical objects into which we enter or exit. They use different models or aspects to explore the fluidity of space, as 'smooth' and 'striated'. They suggest that these two spaces operate in opposition but are continuously blending and translating from one to the other. This is not a binary concept, one space is not better than the other, the spaces work together. We are encouraged instead to view the capacity to transverse between and within spaces as 'the flux and flow' (Fairchild, 2018, p.61) that makes connections. This offers to me, a role for noise/sound and an opening for how noise can be agentive in the learning. In the exploration of relationships above, the movement of noise is inherent in the movement of space or maybe it is the other way around, maybe the movement of space is intrinsic in the movement of noise. Maybe the stickiness of the movement of noise and space together is what matters – moving together in the assemblage? What happens when they do not move together?

6.4.2 Opposing wavelengths

Noise was in and around us all the time, noise filled the gaps in every possible way. This could be overwhelming as I reflected earlier. On the first residential, teams started to learn and have their own songs/dances, singing and music permeated the air frequently, particularly when there was down time or specific time with their own teams. I was asked on several occasions to film or record a group both within and between teams. On one such occasion, I was talking to Emma, a young person, after her team had 'performed'. Emma described herself as 'on the autistic spectrum' and she acknowledged how much quieter she was than her (very loud) group members but she turned to me and said:

"song and dance brought us together" *(YP Emma, audio recording, Week 1, Day 4)*

This was a significant statement by Emma and she voiced my own thoughts. This team had (were still going to have) problems in how they all got along together, I found them a hard group to spend time with, as they were exhausting. Their trajectory as a group was haphazard, not at all straightforward. Attending sessions with them, I witnessed people talking over each other, teasing each other and the staff, comments about other members, and lots of swearing and/or moaning about activities, the environment or

other people. I often stepped in when there was aggression or nastiness to others. And yet there was also lots of laughter, general chatter and insightful comments. There was always a cacophony of noise happening in and around us all. Emma told me she found the noise difficult at times. Individuals who are neurodivergent often engage with the world in different ways but ambient noise can be overwhelming for some, causing anxiety and fear (Lamb, Firbank and Aldous, 2016). However, in this instance, it was not just Emma that was troubled, the general commotion of noise was a barrier to more than one person in the group. The volume, amount and type of noise obstructed but did not facilitate the relationships:

"Erm, I think that it should be specified, and it should be helped that the more quiet ones, shouldn't be over---, like not heard---, just cos these loud people--- and people should respect other people even if they would rather be quiet---like no-one should have to speak if they don't want to." *(YP Penny, audio recording Week 1, Day 2)*

Penny had been thoughtful and articulate in my conversations with her, but I also observed her struggling to be heard amongst some of the louder characters and general noise in the group. Her tone was quieter and her words less frequent than others in the group, a mismatch, as Saffron, a fellow team member, commented:

"Yeah but if you have a … a difficult student and you keep tryin' and tryin' and tryin' and tryin', you're gunna get to your ends width until you just go to…

Yeah but we've been nice to them and they, some people just can't be nice back, even like other people" *(YP Saffron, audio recording Week 1, Day 2)*

Saffron is referring to her observation that she feels there were members of her group not really talking with anyone. As an aside, it is ironic how much this quote sounds like it could have come from one of the adults on the programme and that it could have been said about Saffron as much as she was talking about people like Penny. This could be indicative of the transactional approach to talk/noise that was noted in the previous section. However, within these two quotes, the obstructive quality of noise is evident. The difference in the way Penny and Saffron expressed themselves both in terms of volume and quantity of noise was problematic to their potential for relationship building and highlights the 'tyranny of extroverts' (Reilly, 2000) that can be found in learning spaces. One talked too much and too loud (my interpretation), the other much quieter

and infrequently. This enabled two perspectives on how to build relationships. One was about talking with others, and one was about giving/taking space to think, using silence. I suggest that noise perceptions here are opening her/his-stories that are both associated with the past and now enfolded into the present, bringing to the fore perceptions of inclusion or exclusion. The entangled emotional aspects of safety, confidence in relationships and feelings of self-worth occupy different positions in the mattering within this data. Both girls wanted to connect but it seemed that there was a struggle to find an equilibrium in which they could bond and relate. Taking a simple explanation of the mechanics of sound, in particular the soundwave, when waveforms line up both in terms of their amplitude and wavelength, this is known as being 'in phase' (Barad, 2007). In their different ways, the noise waves emanating between Penny and Saffron were operating at very different amplitudes and wavelengths and this meant that opportunities to line up, even momentarily, to connect and to affect each other positively were being missed. However this does not mean that there is a certain trajectory to their relationship with few possible outcomes, instead, what emerges as mattering means that what comes next is indeterminate (Barad, 2017b). The way in which this mismatch is managed, whether by them or others, is important for offering opportunities to build a relationship.

6.5 Understanding noise and space for learning and relationships

Noise is different things to different people at different times and spaces, and therefore its affective capacity will vary. The complexity and fluidity of noise means it has agency to evoke and affect in ways that can be conflictive (Gallagher, Kanngieser and Prior, 2017) but it is not a simplistic binary in which some people see or feel noise as 'bad' whereas others embrace noise wholly as 'good'. Noise moves and pulls or pushes people to be part of the phenomena (or not). For both the young people and staff on NCS, they enter the NCS bubble on the first residential so they leave their previous striated spaces that gives order to their everyday being – measurements of results, expectations on behaviour dependent on fixed points of peer groups or adults and the day-to-day routine.

The young people recognise that noise makes boundaries that includes and/or excludes others. This opens up to defining and creating a space that is inhabited by those within the noise as opposed to those outside of the noise-space. The boundaries of noise define

the flow of space, the new space and creates ‘our’ space. Any previous connotations of noise e.g. talking in classrooms have been rewritten with new reference points enabling feelings of security within which relationships emerge and from which learning can flourish. But this is not without issues as the flow between striated space to smooth space to striated space, is not smooth at all. Perception is relational not differential (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987), so the movement is bumpy and problematic as spaces are negotiated through noise and create different spaces ready for the next potential(s) to be realised.

As we see with the reflection time, it starts as a smooth space with a line of flight created by the open-ended question. The answers build on each other, building vibrations, creating points of reference – inclusion, familiarity, courage, to build striated space. Once an ‘our’ space has opened, there are positive trajectories available for learning because the relationships that are becoming together can open up possibilities for change. This movement or transference from one space to another, enfolding and refolding onto each other (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) illustrates the breaking of binary categories when thinking about the space.

Noise is entangled in the spaces for learning and relationships. Is noise filling space, creating space, defining space, all three or something else too? What becomes crucial is what does noise do in various assemblages and in doing so what gets included and what gets excluded? What is the agency of noise in learning, how is it affecting the space and the relations of things/bodies in that space?

6.6 Noise as shimmer

6.6.1 What is shimmer?

Deborah Bird Rose (2017) writes of the Aboriginal aesthetic ‘Shimmer’ (translated from the Yolngu term ‘bir-yun’) and describes it as being the invocation “into the experience of being part of a vibrant and vibrating world” (p.G53). Rose applies the concept of shimmer to encompass the ecological, artistic and rhythmic seen in nature, art or music, describing it as the pulse from dull to brilliant. It is affective in that it captures senses, appeals to emotions and grabs attention. Shimmer is the ‘brilliance’ but brilliance cannot be experienced without reference to the dull, and it is the contrast that opens up potential ways of noticing and being in the world. As a way of paying

attention to the world, this is further elaborated in a paper exploring shimmer as a concept;

"To me, the shimmer is a merging of principles, objects or ideas that interconnect life forces to create something unique" (Malone *et al.*, 2020, p.134)

I was struck by how the awareness of 'shimmer' captured some of my thoughts and feelings with regards to noise and its role on the programme. There was a flow and movement to the noise which affected what came/comes to matter through the inclusion and exclusion of differing material-discursive iterations (Barad, 2007). Throughout the varying forms of noise I am/was curious about, the agentive capacity is illuminated through the term 'bir-yun', that is the supplication into a world of vibrations. Shimmer, in this vibrating sense, becomes more than an observable object, it becomes something you feel, hear and experience, it is an aesthetic open to all the senses, something that fills the in-between making connections. The intra-actions facilitate relationships with others and lay down knowledge of being in the world. Within this future 'becoming' is the 'ghost' of the past, or encapsulated in 'bir-yun' by the Yolngu as the experiencing of ancestral power (Rose, 2017). An alternative reframing of this is how past or forgotten knowledges can come to be known once more, alongside the present and encounter the 'brilliance' for the future (Malone *et al.*, 2020).

For example, noise as sound is not a simplistic equation of quiet equals dull and loud equals brilliance. In fact, the silence can be as brilliant in its piquing of curiosity or in its heightening of fear or in inducing feelings of calm, and these emotional responses as affect are also informed through past knowledge. Noise has a physicality not just in discursive utterances given by humans but also in the entanglement of non-human materiality. Noise is in and part of the future making.

In our end of our week one conversation, I asked Adele, a staff member, about where we were staying. Her reply offers a glimpse into the shimmer of this world:

"It's not just like people noise either, er, like last night in bed I definitely heard an owl or two and there's noises I've never even heard before where I'm just like wooh! But even when you walk, it's not like you walk in silence, there's a crinkle underneath you all the time" *(Adele, audio recording, Week 1, Day 4)*

Adele had become oriented to something that was not familiar to her typical daily experiences, her embodied awareness to the differences in her environment have not come about purely through sight, she was alert to the noises and the sounds. This attunement to noise has had an affect even if, in the above quote, it is simply the 'crinkle' underfoot as she walks. When I listen back to the recording of our conversation, I can hear what I experience as surprise in her voice, the intrigue as to what might be happening around her, as well as the attention she has given to her own movement with the 'crinkle underneath'. The crinkle is material, it involves her, her boots, the floor of the ground with sticks and leaves. These sounds are moments of brilliance for her, she is captured and attentive because of the contrast with the regularity of her everyday world. This hints at the agentive quality of noise, compelling Adele to notice and in doing so she is learning as part of 'being'. Noise creates contours, it undulates and maps onto our bodies, it is this movement that has the agency to affect both the learning relationships and the learning within this.

6.6.2 The beginning of shimmer

The first day saw the young people congregating and meeting their TLs & ATLs in a large indoor sports/football facility which also boasted an indoor play area that was being used by the public. For anyone who has ever tried to work with a new group in a sports hall, you may be aware of the difficulties this can present. As structures they are often echoey, cavernous places, as was this one we had gathered in. To add further complexity, it had indoor '3G' 5-a-side football pitches which is a material similar to that of a flattened carpet on the floor and creates a muffling of certain sounds. It would be remiss of me to say that I deliberately considered this at the time, I was aware of the difficulties of sound because I had experienced it many times but I did not think about it in any detail except to empathise with the TLs and ATLs. The first twenty minutes before climbing on the bus was chaotic, busy, difficult to hear each other and the staff did their best to get some small group activities going with their young people. It had all the characteristics of what might be perceived as the 'forming' stage of group dynamics (Tuckman, 1965) in that both the staff and young people were exploring positioning and boundaries with each other through various behaviours. I have often wondered when considering psychological group dynamic models, how they can be helpful to assess the current dynamics of the group (and to be conscious of the need to change something) but are not terribly useful in helping individuals/groups to know

how to ‘do’ the movement between stages. Understanding the role of noise and sound can help think about this movement.

I wrote previously that the disco dancefloor energy was the culmination of nine days of singing and dancing. If you listen to this section in the soundscape, you will hear noise possibly you may even wonder where the singing is, the noise is distorted, brash and fuzzy. Standing outside of this both in time and space, it takes some imagination to consider the connectiveness here. However, the capacity of music to bring people together materially, emotionally and linguistically was utilised from the beginning by both staff and young people, and continued throughout. On the bus journey to our first residential, I was *watching* the interactions when it occurred to me to *listen*. I sat in my seat and became more aware of the sounds, attuning to the different noises and it was then I took my first audio recording. When I listen back to it now, I can hear chattering and laughing, the familiar murmurs of the young people who already had friendships but were also taking tentative steps to in getting to know others, talking and asking questions. This initial patchwork of noise was evident for the first half of the journey and it was interrupted with a service station break. There was a functionality about the noise during the stop, questions and statements about what was allowed and where each person could go. Once the second half of the journey was underway, there was a noticeable difference in sound which was accelerated by the staff member Alfie. Welcome - please click.

The coach we had, had an amenable bus driver (a rarer occurrence than you might consider) and he allowed Alfie to take over the sound system. What started as Alfie singing along to well-known Disney songs became a murmuration of noise amongst the cohort on the bus:

“Alfie led a sing song off his music playlist, and by the time we arrived the teams had been singing, dancing in the chairs and generally lots of smiles.” *(Reflection, Week 1, Day 1)*

Alfie had taken the first steps in building relationships not just between the staff and young people but also within the various groups of young people. As a staff member he stood up and tried an approach to involve the whole coach, a lone person prepared to sing, and in doing so utilising the familiarity and popularity of Disney songs. This could have been disastrous but instead he and the music invited others into an

entanglement that created ‘shimmer’ and mapped onto individuals, filling the gaps in between so that it became a blanket to envelope and entangle further, a phenomenon, relationship building was being done. In this instance the noise that created the phenomena came from various sources: Alfie, the music, the sound system, the young people, the coach all came together in a shared moment. The music as noise was compelling in its power to engage and connect and open possible futures. The whole assemblage was indicative of leaving the old and embracing the new. Being on the bus and being driven was a material manifestation of leaving our other, our old lives behind, we were travelling **away** from home. This could evoke a number of emotions including loss, fear and anxiety. Instead, the music allowed Alfie to open up a new way of being and knowing; sound as an agentic force welcomed the young people in, gave an insight into a possible future where it was not like school or home and it seemed to work in that instance. In our old lives of home and school, noise is often frowned upon. If you disrupt the accepted noise pattern, you can be seen as problematic and troublesome (Dernikos, 2020). However, Alfie did something with the music that was not about creating meaning; instead the sound and the individual were creating sensations which opened up the potential for others to leave behind what was before and look to something new – the new relationships (Springgay and Zaliwska, 2017).

6.6.3 Connectedness – coming together

Returning to the team songs and dances, it is within this that the ‘shimmer’ becomes apparent and the agentic nature of noise in providing the (dis)connections that (un)facilitate relationships. Emma’s comment in a previous section, that song and dance brought them together, provokes the question - how did the noise produced through the music, the context and the different bodies do that? Despite the differences between members of this team, the team of Emma, Saffron and Penny were one of the first to have a team song, (‘Girlfriend’ by Ariana Grande) initiated by the young people not the staff. The song as a focal point emerged and became an invitation to come together, to work together. There was a power to the song that whenever it was played it transcended temporal and physical boundaries, allowing synergy and overcoming disharmony. Our Song – please click.

I saw this in action when my attention had been directed to record them. They were sat in and around their staff as a group, but in pockets of smaller groupings chatting to each

other. Raheem took his phone out and started playing 'Girlfriend'. One by one they each started to join in with the singing, then the staff got to their feet and started to dance using the dance moves they (the staff and young people of the team) had previously choreographed together. Then all the young people joined in, it was a rippling effect, a wave of inclusion. The sound moved between bodies and as part of bodies, encompassing and moving more of them so that the pinnacle of the phenomenon was when another Team moved nearer, drawn to watch them singing and dancing as one unit. Within this assemblage, the noise is loud, it comes from different sources – voices, a phone, hands and feet, the surrounding walls and yet despite this loudness noise has been instrumental in bringing people together, in being able to transverse within and as part of the entanglements. It is in the capacity of 'intervener', as an actant in making things happen (Bennett, 2010) but how is it 'doing' connectedness?

Earlier in this chapter I wrote that music is not always about creating meaning but sensations and I want to explore this in light of the team experience above. Morphy (1989) describes in consideration of shimmer with the Yolngu tribe, that each part of a ritual may have aesthetic appeal, and aspects of a ritual can appear in other rituals, but it is the culmination of the whole ceremony that brings **meaning** to the tribe. A shallow comparison with the teams in my study might suggest that the team dance rituals brought them a shared meaning enabling positive relationships amongst them. Indeed this would fit with a social identity theory approach in which the songs and dances act in bringing people together with a shared identity (Haslam, 2017) and certainly when we talked, there was an identity element to the activity – it was 'their' song, or as the clip highlights, this is 'our song'. The stumbling block for me within this, is the 'interpretation', I am unable to 'interpret' their understanding of meaning within the song and dance as for each individual in my study and without a shared cultural history the meaning may be contested. Therefore, is it a shared identity and/or something else that facilitates the relationships?

I would suggest that the facilitation lies within the agency and power of the song, dance and accompanying sounds to enable a sharing and exchanging of feelings (Volgsten, 2012), to bring about connections where there are none or they may be failing (Rose, 2017), with 'shimmer' being music's capacity to affect and connect. Harney and Moten (2013) discuss the concept of hapticality, that is a way of feeling both with and through others, which is in evidence amongst the teams. The music as shimmer reaches them all

and allows them to feel as each other, it has a social aspect of togetherness that they can build upon. As the affect circulates the intensity has the potential to accumulate and build affectivity (Ahmed, 2004) and the shimmer leaves traces on bodies and lingers creating connectivity, later to surface as memories. The memories contain emotions which have strengthened in the circulation. The invoked emotions are part of the material-discursive iteration and the opening of potential for positive relationships built on shared experiences. The intensity leaves traces to be felt beyond that present moment. The embodied intensities inherent within this noise assemblage become enfolded within the present and the future (Anderson, 2004) and anchors the group to each other. For the young people Penny, Saffron and Emma, the song 'Girlfriend' and their shared dance will always be something that they have in common, it will live within them bringing memories across time and space, temporal-spatial belongings in which they belong with each other. A reminder of fun times and smiles, the song acted as a pivot point whenever things were tough for the group, it moored them again and again to feelings that they were/are a team, no matter what went/will go on in other moments and assemblages. And this song will also affect the present moment emotions and reminisces, positive or otherwise. In my case, and despite my general ambivalence to both artistes, I will always remember my feelings of joy, happiness and being part of something when listening to these particular songs of Ariane Grande and Oasis. That joy washes over me even now.

6.6.4 Connectedness - othering

Noise is implicated or the agency of noise is implicated in bringing people together as well as creating obstacles for positive connections to be made. This exploration of sound in the form of songs and dance demonstrate how engaging in music rituals aid the building of closer relationships and how it can overcome friction points. As illustrated, noise is not a binary concept, it cannot be laden with either/or values as it is 'just' there as part of the assemblage. If the agency of noise can be recognised in conjunction with other elements of the environment, we can trace how it is entangled in the doing of relationships and learning. Using the idea of 'both/and' in thinking about noise, I am mindful of what comes to matter for some and what this means for others. This section considers noise in how it has agency to include and exclude, and recognition of this affect asks ethical questions of all contained within the assemblage.

The rhythms inherent in the songs and dances enjoyed by the young people and staff encouraged togetherness. Noise as a musical assemblage is embodied – we dance, we feel, we move, and we sing together. As we explore the assemblage, we can see different things. When we are fully immersed and very close, we can see and feel the individual movements. But as we start to widen the perspective, for instance if we step back slightly so as not to be fully entangled within, the view of the bodies begins to change. We can still see the individual bodies but as we step back further and further the boundaries between people become more blurred. For instance, similar colours of clothes make it hard to discern individual items, and the lack of definition can help the group to be seen/feel as homogenous, they become one body. Taken to its extreme, this is how astronauts are said to experience Earth. They have travelled to such a distance that the boundaries between countries seem parochial.

The changes in perspective allows us to see how the noise assemblages of singing and dancing as explored above, lead to not only a shared group identity but also a shared group physicality, a shared group feeling. The shimmer brought about by the sensations of music touches them all, so that they are one. The relationships forged seem beneficial, surely the connectedness displayed by the group can only be a positive? In this respect, there is a need to consider the words of Giraud (2019) who reminds us that there is a consequence to only paying attention to the immediate entanglement. She encourages us to be mindful of what comes next:

"It is instead important to constantly ask who or what is being excluded when certain realities are materialized at the expense of others..." (p.180)

I think Giraud is inviting us to resist the urge to base actions on reactions and instead act with a mindfulness of what might come to be in or out of future entanglements. For example, within this NCS cohort, the staff and the young people encouraged and facilitated good group relationships amongst themselves using means such as songs to assist them but what can be an unintended consequence of this? As I note, the further away from a group we stand, the less likely we are to see individual bodies. This distance perspective holds with noise; up close we can hear the individual voices singing, we can hear distinctive sounds from the clapping of hands but from afar individual sounds or voices become harder to recognise, it becomes one wall of sound. A wall of sound and an amorphous blob, a togetherness with a sense of impenetrability.

What if you stand outside of this particular boundaried phenomena/entanglement, what might be happening, what might this do for others? Wall of Sound – please click.

It can be uncomfortable to walk in on a group engaged and together in the use of noise. This highlights the concern that where noise can enable relationships to flourish, it can also, whether by virtue of sound or silence, inadvertently exclude others, as seen earlier in the chapter. In some ways, this was utilised with purposeful intent within the cohort in order to strengthen individual team bonding as the Social Action tasks were undertaken and achieved as a team not a cohort. Of the five teams, Teams 1 and 5 had emerged with a 'team song', Team 3 had a phrase they repeated to each other frequently 'Beeeeee', an almost melodic phrase when employed through and within the group used in many ways beyond a simple greeting. Team 4 engaged in a lot of sports based 'banter' with its associated noises of laughter, shouting and physical interaction in addition to the different songs precipitated by the strong sports presence in their group.

From an observer and in this case very much the outside observer's point of view, it was certainly more difficult to engage with the groups when in motion with group noise, to find a way 'in' at certain times because of these actions. I wrote in my little book on the very last day:

"Anyway said goodbye to Team 4 – the 'banter' is still there – I don't like it"
(Notes from my little book, Week 4, Day 4)

I never felt that I got to know the members of this team and even at the end I was conscious of how the banter made me feel. It was not a welcoming atmosphere and I did not often feel as wanted in that group as others. My relationship with the members of Team 1 were probably the strongest for a number of reasons and I often felt they treated me as a member of their group, not as 'an-other', and indeed they taught me their song and dance (which I was terrible at). The question that remains unanswered is - did I feel included because I spent more time with Team 1 which they recognised, acknowledged and so taught me the song and included my noise within their noise; or because they taught me the song it made me feel more recognised, acknowledged and I then spent more time with them with our noise aligning together and so felt included? The answer to this eludes me even with reflection, as noise is just one affective force in a phenomenon of complexity and multiplicity, but what has made me wonder, even as I write this, is that as a functional, secure adult I noticed the occasions when noise was a

barrier for me to get involved. I was alert to the isolation I felt and it was difficult for me, it is/was a lonelier, less joyful existence. These barriers and the potential exclusions that can be envisaged could hold ethical and moral issues that perhaps we do not think about on a day-to-day basis.

6.6.5 'Othering' in movement

If there was a sense of isolation for myself, where else might it be happening? Once excluded, how easy is it to become part of the group and can exclusion happen after being part of the group? The experience of Team 2 offers an insight into what connected noise and absence of group sounds does to various parties. The silence of Team 2 was 'deafening', in comparison to the other teams. There was not any discernible connection that was held within a recognisable noise assemblage. Was this problematic for them? How did they do relationships both within and between each other and other teams?

My perception of Team 2 was that the young people's relationships with each other and their TL and ATL was inconsistent and problematic. Maya (ATL) was inexperienced in working with young people. She would voice her uncertainty and would look for guidance from me. The TL (Alan) was at the other end of the experience spectrum, older and would often deputise for the Cohort Leader Angie. Whilst, it appeared to me, that he had certain ways of doing things and certain expectations of the young people, he did not appear to me to be dogmatic in his approach and he would often find me to reflect on what he was doing. However, these simple actions of seeking to talk elsewhere and not with each other indicate that their relationship was not smooth, little constructive noise/talk passed between them. This is in contrast to other team leaders who would still seek help from me but in addition to, not instead of, seeking support from each other as evidenced in the individual interviews I had with TLs and ATLs, Callum consistently expressed his gratitude for his TL, this next quote was just one of many;

"Being so young, Susanna is great as well, she is, um, very supportive of people, of me" *(ATL recording, Callum, Week 1, Day 4)*

Team 2 was a team that even from afar did not appear as either a wall of sound or materially as a blob, there was no unity in either sound or movement. In this respect, I

was as much part of their group as anyone else and I would often talk to various members of the group outside of activities. Their comments varied in describing their relationships with their staff members and this was encapsulated by Shola (yp), as we, and a small group of young people, were sat talking outside the disco:

"I think with one of them it's improved quite a lot and like with the other it's gone down a bit…..

With Maya, like, we've got along from the start and we're even closer now but like with Alan, like we got along really well last week. But this week, like today, one of the reasons it didn't go well were like, we told him our plan and he said no, you don't want to do it like that,.. and he didn't want to listen to us." *(YP recording, Shola, Week 2, Day 4)*

This was greeted by affirmation and support from others who were sat with us. At a superficial level, it would seem that there was an absence of collective connectedness other than in their agreement of the performance of their staff leaders. Had this arisen out of a failure to listen to each other or to engage in a shared group activity (enacted through noise)? Was it hampering them in achieving together? After all Shola tells us that their day out had not gone to plan. The conversation was not complimentary to Alan as the figurehead of the group.

At first glance it would be simple to characterise the problems facing the group as an issue that lies with Alan/Maya and the absence of predictability. They were failing or struggling in the second week to facilitate the relationships needed for learning. It could be considered as Alan enacting the 'othering' of the group as he sought to maintain the leader role. However, this feels unfair to both Alan and Maya. This analysis only gives one view as to what might be happening and arises through a lens focussed on European/American hegemonic ideas about leadership or considerations of pastoral care, in which the leader is responsible for bringing the group together and having care for the group. It is a lens that both privileges and damages the role of educator in this learning situation due to the immense expectations placed upon the leader.

Alternative knowledges may help problematise this when thinking about responsibility for the group relationship. For example, in an exploration of a concept they named as 'Indigeneity', Harris and Wasilewski (2004), who have North American and Maori

indigenous heritage, describe what we might learn from some commonalities found across different indigenous peoples' approach and understanding of communal living. This is not to say that all indigenous peoples have one worldview (their concept of indigeneity is predominantly built on Western hemisphere and Maori teachings and practices), rather they sought an understanding of core values that are shared. In looking for what is shared, they found what they called "the Four R's: Relationship, Responsibility, Reciprocity and Redistribution" (2004, p.492). They highlight the importance of relationships predicated on an ethos of care, and the need for reciprocity based on a cyclical and long-term kinship with entities that come into contact with each other, human or otherwise (ibid).

In returning to Shola's remarks, this may represent an absence or inconsistency of both reciprocity and care, particularly from Alan but where does the responsibility for the relationship lie, is it just Alan that needs to change his approach? I would suggest by considering different knowledges, a different perspective emerges and one in which noise is implicated in the doing of the relationship. It perhaps starts by considering what is meant by reciprocity and in the value of Reciprocity, as explained by Harris and Wasilewski (2004). There is a temporal aspect inherent which recognises that reciprocal exchanges are not always immediate or equal (ibid). Shola's comments indicated that the group and Alan got along the previous week but they felt he was not returning their present enthusiasm and eagerness to do the tasks. He only wanted to do things his way, they were not experiencing reciprocity with him. Equally, it could be said that neither was Alan experiencing mutual care. The care shown by the young people and Alan in week one, has not followed them into week two, they were not sharing the experience in the same way. However, the young people and staff in the other teams, even where there were challenges, did share something together, they shared their noise, it was reciprocal.

In the UK, the institutional and social cultures have historically defined the teacher as the leader, as in charge, which implies culpability when mistakes happen or things go awry in learning environments. Learning environments differ, and certainly the non-formal, intensive residentials we were in differed from a school classroom. However, in all cases the environments call for living together for a period of time whether that is a day or a week. The concept of 'Indigeneity' explains the importance of responsibility and redistribution for communal living. Here, responsibility is framed as a 'community

obligation' (ibid, p.492). That is all have a responsibility to each other and to everything around. This responsibility is based on harmonious connections, 'a spiritual interconnectedness' (ibid, p.494) with all that makes up the world. This emphasises the entanglement of phenomena and therefore the in-between of bodies. Noise is one aspect of that entanglement that affects others and so we have a responsibility to think about this in our encounters.

Harris and Wasilewski (2004), also, talk of a complementary principle of redistribution founded on sharing and being willing to give to others what you have. This does not have to manifest as physical items, redistribution can also apply to intangible gifts such as stories, knowledge and songs. Redistribution is entwined with reciprocity, knowing that gifts will be given and received. The four principles offered by Harris and Wasilewski offer an insight into the various agentic forms of noise. As I wrote previously, the musical synchronisation that happened in Team 1 was instigated by the young people themselves, they took responsibility for initiating what came to be a shimmer of togetherness, it was a similar situation within Teams 3 and 5. In addition, the young people employed this with a relationship ethos of care by inviting the leaders into their world (who showed mutual care by taking the offer), sharing positive emotions and knowledge (in my case of old school dance moves). Noise co-constituted this assemblage; the music was a gift.

This did not happen with Team 2, as I will explore, the 'othering' was not just from the leaders to each other and /or the group, the group 'othered' each other and the leaders. It is possible that age and/or experience played a part in this. Before I explore 'othering' further, I need to consider a frequently used phrase in the conversations I had with both young people and staff when discussing what they thought was important in the building relationships with each other. The phrase used was about 'being relatable', I, even succumbed to this phrase at the end of the first week in my notes:

"I'm not sure I'm even relatable to the staff anymore?" (Notes from the little book, Week 1, Day 5).

Notwithstanding this note, I was and still am conscious that I did not know what this might look like and despite me pressing for details, no-one else could clearly articulate the characteristics of this even if they tacitly knew what they meant by it. It was a phrase that was enticing to me in its intangibility. I write this because it is only now in

thinking about noise that 'relatable' seems within my grasp. In a review of leadership and social identity (Reicher, Haslam and Platow, 2018), the authors suggest:

"…that the ability of leaders to shape the shared reality and shared action of followers depends upon what they have in common with these followers." (ibid, p.131)

I would also suggest that this works in reverse that followers can shape the shared experiences when they feel they have something in common with their leaders, the leaders are included. This is the sympoietic nature of relationships in that they evolve together. Therefore, thinking with both the values identified with 'Indigeneity' and the social identity of leadership, what noise does, particularly as manifested here in songs and dance, affects commonality in experience and emotions. It opens up the sense of 'relatable' and in doing so, entangling all in the shimmer (Rose, 2017), creating reciprocal and supportive cultures that generate learning (Robinson-Pant, 2020). As a team this did not happen for Team 2 in quite the same way that it did for the other teams although they were very much part of the wider cohort's songs and dances. Therefore, assigning blame with regards to how relationships develop, is not useful in these informal environments. Instead, we can acknowledge that all have a responsibility to each other for learning to take place. And this is not to say adults can obfuscate their position, instead there is a need to help staff recognise how doing relationships is fluid, that shared responsibility is a sympoietic emergence. The affective entanglements with noise will happen, so awareness of noise as agentic within assemblages may help recognise where young people may not be thriving and included.

6.7 Noise and Cognition – 'affective' learning

Noise can be an agentic force in the material-discursive events that are entangled within the building of relationships between adults and young people in the non-formal learning environment. As previous chapters highlight, research shows that relationships are important to learning but what role does noise play in affecting the learning? In this section I want to explore how noise intra-acts as part of the phenomena and in its entanglement with the human and non-human creates spaces that both support and inhibit learning, recognising a shared agential capacity to make things happen and open up futures.

6.7.1 What is noise as speech in relation to spaces for learning?

Press-Ups – please click. The following is an excerpt of a transcript from this clip which was recorded at the beginning of week two.

"Can you show me how to do that?

What? Press-ups.

A press-up? You have to put your hand like that.

Don't do it like that.

You have to put your hands flat like that. Like that.

And then your elbows go in like that……

(Hear music and laughter)

Oh god

(? and ? talk over each other)

Get your bum down

(More laughter)

Put your hands near your shoulder

I can't I can't get my hands…

No, you do it like this, you have to do it like that

Yeah but if you doing that you have to get all the way down to the floor.

I'm just trying to do one of them.

What she trying to do? What a press-up?

Noo, not like that man

(More laughter)

Put your hands underneath your shoulders

What she trying to do? A press-up? "

(Transcript of recording taken Week 2, Day 1 0942)

I took the recording as we waited to be called together for the start of week two activities. We were outside, waiting by the main activity venue. People were stood and sat on the grass, concrete patios and some were sat at wooden benches and tables. People were generally in and around the vicinities of their TLs and ATLs but it was a dynamic scene with lots of movement. The group talking in the example were from Team 1, the group in which noise was instrumental in every way. Each colour indicates a different person and I have spread them across that page to encourage you to see them milling around, to vaguely sense the fluidity of the moment.

What might jump off the page is that it may feel obvious that of course noise is related to learning. Writing the previous sentence almost feels like common sense. They are talking to each other, therefore that is sound/noise. Indeed, noise is inherent in different theories of learning particularly socially and culturally oriented approaches to learning and literacies, although it may not always be obvious or explicitly acknowledged. For example, Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development predicates the need for social dialogue between teacher and taught and positions speech as a mediator. Speech, he claimed, was the mechanism with which "the child developed as a thinker and learner" (Smith, Cowie and Blades, 2003, p.500). However, it is language that is positioned as the organiser of thought and as the reflection and representation of culture (ibid). This pivotal role given to language perpetuates and reproduces the logocentric model of the world that is dominant in education without acknowledgement of what else might contribute to our learning. However, an alternative perspective can position the role of speech differently. Speech is sound, it operates at different frequencies and often in learning environments, speech is just one of the sounds that must be identified. Finding the target speech in amongst other noise is a sensory and cognitive process known as 'glimpsing' (Li and Loizou, 2007). Different voices are just some of the sounds intra-acting with other features as part of any phenomenon, and as I clarified at the beginning of this chapter, sound/noise are affective and affected in these entanglements. In learning environments, sound can be governed and used to control how it frames experiences and spaces (Bailey, 2020; Dernikos, 2020), and speech is part of this.

To evidence how problematic this human centric approach is, let us look at the language example given above. Take some time to read the words above, look at the language,

read it - - - - - - - - can you now do a press up? Even the previous sentence has assumed universal understanding as to what the words 'press up' are representing. This does problematise the importance placed on cognitive elements of learning without considering what else might be happening. In this brief moment the group are helping each other overcome a problem, that is, how to do a press up with Keeley being the young person wishing to know how to do a press up. A press up is a physical strengthening exercise, it requires the body to do something. To help Keeley achieve this, they are talking to each other and it is evident that there is some form of physical action being performed by Keeley which is being observed by others as suggested by the remark *"Noo, not like that man"*. In addition there is possibly a demonstration from someone else "*No, you do it like this, you have to do it like that"*. We can see from the illustrated data that music is playing, it is coming from a mobile phone. If we listen to the recording we can hear that the 'press-up' discussion is framed amidst a general hum of background chatter and traffic noises. Within the wider noise, is the entanglement of the focused speech as they try to help Keeley in her goal. Speech is just one feature of the entanglement. Nowhere within this assemblage does it seem that language is the most important factor for learning.

When language is seen as the mediator between the knower and known, it can be used to represent depth and particularly in the social sciences analysed to indicate intent and motivation (St. Pierre, 2017) but with our group doing press-ups, their chatter would suggest that the depth is not important. Similarly, the conversation does not give any indication as to what has motivated Keely to want to learn how to do a press-up. Does it matter that no-one is aware of her motivation? Others are engaging with her, and does it matter that we don't know why they are motivated to engage with Keeley? We know though that they are engaged with each other and so as a researcher does it matter that I cannot understand the inner workings of each individual and more to the point how would I ever really know? Instead, a space has opened for learning and what has come to matter in this moment is the assemblage, which includes different noises as well as the physical activity. The data description depicts a confluence of trajectories of which speech and the language were just two rudiments with agentive affective capacity as part of material-discursive iterations. This immediately rejects the primacy of language and instead it gives potential to see what is being done within the intra-actions and what emerges from this.

None of this is pre-determined, this is not a set learning outcome of a pre-arranged structured activity, it simply emerged as a phenomenon that caught my attention and made me wonder what was happening. Examining and thinking with noise unravels the primacy given to language as indicative of the dominant humanist perspectives in learning. If we move away from language as representational and instead consider the Deleuze and Guattari notions of assemblages of enunciation (ibid.) in which words being spoken is just one noise creating and responding as affective moments, then the entanglement becomes an important space for understanding. Conversely, I am not laying claim to noise as the most important aspect of these iterations, merely wishing to illuminate the affective capacity of noise, as a potential that is often overlooked in both discussions and experiences of learning.

6.7.2 'Shimmer' affecting more

Noise, whether present as sound, silence or materiality is dynamic and opens and closes potential as its role in learning relationships demonstrated. The movement is affective as it undulates across bodies, and when felt positively, the noise envelopes and includes individuals in its motion of 'shimmer'. This is fairly straightforward when you consider singing and dancing. If you see people smiling and having fun, individuals might be attracted to the fun being had. However, with the press ups you can see that there is an agentic draw in the hum and buzz of the mundane and this mundane opened up possibilities for learning. As indicated by the colours of typing, it started with three people but by the end of the short exchange, seven different people have been involved in this moment, each feeding and building on the previous contributions. In thinking through the press ups learning moment, we can see the shimmer in action, the affective affecting and the iterative nature of the learning with noise amongst this. It is not clear what are the pivotal moments here but having identifiable causes are always going to be problematic when no two moments are ever going to be the same. What we can do is identify what is happening to aid sense making in the future. What does matter in this instance is that Keeley's question led to two offers of instruction, and within this, there is laughter and more questions. The noise of the assemblage could be heard by others. It stuck, pulled people in, others joined in with positive responses, and participation was encouraged just by being. This participation was just part of the overall interaction in which through the intra-action the learning happened together, evolving as the conversation continued alongside the physical actions.

Therefore, for learning to happen, the conditions that encourage learning need to be recognised and applied as productively as possible. If as educators we fail to recognise the affect of noise, we are failing the learners either by not engaging them in the first place or by turning the willing away.

6.8 Conclusion

Noise is everywhere but within education and learning the focus (if any attention is given) is directed towards managing noise as a function of managing expectations in behaviour. This is true of any group of young people and their staff no matter the learning environment. Attuning to the world in different ways brings new ways of thinking about how we move through the world. Attunement moves attention away from the major to the minor, what can be mistaken as the inconsequential. The affectivity of noise, the potential to attach, to get 'sticky' as Sara Ahmed (2014) writes, struck me as important in moving from a dyadic model of relationships to considering the more than human as a potential in shaping human relationships and learning with each other as an assemblage.

If, as educators, we understand sound as embodied, not just about what we hear but affecting how we feel, a connection to the relationships we have, experiencing something together, this awareness can create spaces in and for learning. This becomes not just about the young people but 'listening' and learning for/from the embodied educator too. Becoming conscious of sound, how it fills and creates spaces, what it is doing, how can it be used, working out where to pay attention and how to pay attention will strengthen the learning and learning relationships. It is about 'seeing' the unseen and recognising noise is an actant, it does things.

This chapter has shown that paying attention to noise, as a manifestation of both sound and the environment entangled within phenomena, will offer insights into the his/her-stories of individuals and the potentiality of what is next. Traditionally education research has valued coherent speech and spoken language, words as representing objects, but by attuning to other aspects, it opens up the world to a becoming in which we acknowledge that relationships and learning are not simply a human directed effort.

Chapter Seven: Phones – Potential or Potent?

"I now discovered that with one flick of my hand I was able to do all the things my other friends were doing with their fingers. I was able to be as good as them, if not better. My quality of life has changed dramatically since I started using technology and only the other day I told my mother that technology is the limb I never had" Joanne O'Riordan[5](Coughlin, 2019)

7.1 Introduction

The quote above was said by Joanne O'Riordan when she was just sixteen. Joanne is an active and prominent disability rights activist, born with a rare disability called Tetra-Amelia Syndrome which is a condition characterised by the absence of all four limbs. The quote is taken from a speech she gave to the UN in New York, and it highlighted the important role of technology in supporting her to challenge the limits imposed on her functioning by societal barriers and perceptions. The speech is incredible in many ways but of relevance here is what the quote illuminates, namely the porosity of boundaries between the human and non-human. It poses the question of where the human starts and finishes in relation to other 'objects' in the world around them. For Joanne she describes the technology as a limb and therefore 'her'. It is the interaction or intra-active relationship(s) (Barad, 2007; Rovelli, 2016) that comes to matter in the becoming-with (Haraway, 2016) as both her and her technology move together.

Although this short extract of the speech could be critiqued for its overwhelmingly positive take on digital technology, I was drawn to this example because in the early steps of understanding posthumanism the most frequent example I came across in explaining the fuzziness of boundaries alongside the agency of the non-human and the capacity of 'things' to compel action, was that of technology, in particular, the omnipresence of mobile phones in our lives. Mobile phones are illustrative of this perspective because of how common they are. It is an easy example to grasp and for many people to relate to. It is estimated that more than 5 billion people own a mobile phone in the world (Pew Research Center, 2019) and we have become accustomed to seeing them in the hands of their users wherever we go in many parts of the world.

[5] Speech given to a International Telecommunication Union's conference 'Girls in Technology'.

For those of us who use them, we are often not far away from them, they are part of how we move through and encounter the world. And with the introduction of smartphones, they no longer have to ring or make a sound for us to be alert to something happening, instead we pick them up regularly, checking them and interacting with them. Haptic technology means they vibrate, moving themselves towards us and we are moved to them **by** them and what they may offer. This compelling to movement is the agency of the non-human in action. The boundary of where human and phone begin and end is not clear as the material agency acts to "confuse or diffuse the boundaries between humans and non-humans" (Coleman, 2020, p.25). Posthumanism decentres the human and considers the role of the non-human and the material along with the human, animal or ecological in the process of worlding, the ongoing becoming-with (Haraway, 2016). And as explored in earlier chapters, the approach asks us to consider the whole assemblage of which the human and the smartphone were often present in my research.

I was mindful that turning to mobile phones to explore relationships and learning might almost be a cliché, it seemed too obvious. But the human/phone hybrid was undeniable throughout my fieldwork and it was apparent that mobile phones, like other 'things' have a *thingness*, they are not just passive objects, they have the capacity to 'do', for example invoke sensations or support the production of hierarchies (Coleman, 2020) and this was noticeable in my day to day observations. And it is not just the phone but the applications (or Apps) available – that together offer all sorts of spaces that evoke/provoke affect and compel action. And despite early doom mongering about the dangers of technology, research has shown that technology is neither 'good' or 'bad', what is important is how it is used and what is mediated through and with the usage (Dyer, 2020b). It was this possibility that drew my curiosity, and I began to wonder about how we view and use phones and apps in learning environments, understanding what they might mean for learning and learning relationships.

This chapter will explore and follow smartphones and apps, but like the question posed as to what makes us human, we could ask, 'what makes a smartphone'? The entanglement of institution, culture, materiality and humans is encapsulated within a phone's functionality and emerges by examination of the utilisation of the phone by various actors/institutions. Whilst at times I can make the distinction between phone and the app being used, this is not always possible particularly in the early part of the

chapter and so the term ‘phone’ may often be used as shorthand for both. NCS, as an institution, has a complicated relationship with the expectations and the usage of phones, and in this chapter, I will consider what this does in the management of relationships, the management of space for relationships and also how this may open up new dimensions in thinking about learning. I will, then go on to thinking about the apps and specifically the use of ‘WhatsApp’, a secure messaging service that allows end to end encryption, thinking about the learning that emerges from this and the impact this has on relationships. As I explore both areas I will problematise the either/or messages that are often given concerning mobile phones in learning environments and highlight aspects of learning pertinent to many settings, beyond this specific learning situation.

7.2 My journey through the mobile age

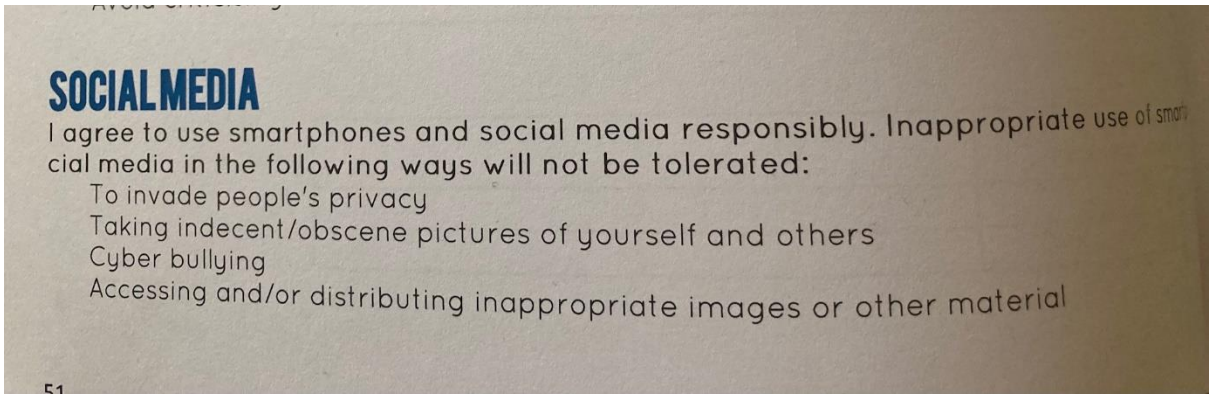
My curiosity about phones was piqued even before the programme began because of my past experience in youth work. I was interested in how the staff would manage the added layer of complexity that phones can bring to the relationships in learning environments, as I had experienced the years of transition from pre-mobile phone to smartphones now. I began my work with young people around 30 years ago, for a considerable part of my career, phones have not featured in any of the relationships between staff and young people. I am a youth worker that has gone from the era of mobile phones as luxury - when I first started it was relatively rare to even have a phone for lone working when out in the community - to its ubiquitous usage across all ages. I was running residentials before phones were accessible to most people, and then I was working with young people as the phone gained more popularity, and subsequently experienced some of the ‘difficulties’ that phones seemed to bring in their wake. For example, prior to mobile phones if a child was homesick when away, the staff would work with the young person to support them through the difficulties. In doing this, the aim was to help the young person recognise and cope with the experience in particular thinking about independence skills and resilience in the face of adversity. There was also a practical element to this as often access to a landline was problematic. However, if home was needed to be called because the young person was inconsolable (extremely rare), the landline enabled mediation with the parent. We could explain what was happening and reassure the parent/carer. This facilitated access was important because it meant that the staff member could work out a course of action with the parent that

was supportive of their child; the aim was for an affirmative process of learning. A supportive network was enabled as a collaboration between parent, staff, and young person. My view of phones was predicated on this basis going into the programme. That is, unfettered access to phones meant that this mediation is negated and what could be an easily handled situation and a possible learning opportunity could now become a highly emotional and damaging event. Therefore, to me it was a complicating factor that could adversely impact relationships very easily. I did not know how the use of phones could ever be helpful in a learning environment. The rest of this chapter will problematise this dogmatic and perhaps outdated view.

7.3 Mobile phones – Malign and/or Benign

7.3.1 Considering the Future

As mentioned previously, the participants on the NCS programme are subjected to differing messages about phones. There are expectations as to when and where they can use them and what they may or may not use them for. The initial expectations are set out even before the programme starts. In order for a young person to attend a programme they must sign the 'Young Person Code of Conduct', and this must also be countersigned by a parent/carer. This code of conduct will vary in appearance according to the provider, however they all contain the standard messages as to what is expected of the young person, and subsequently tend to include a clause concerning mobile phones. Phones and how they are entangled starts with these pieces of documents that leave traces before anyone even meets each other. To illustrate, here is the clause (Fig.13) in the code of conduct used by the programme I attended:



SOCIAL MEDIA

I agree to use smartphones and social media responsibly. Inappropriate use of smart
cial media in the following ways will not be tolerated:

- To invade people's privacy
- Taking indecent/obscene pictures of yourself and others
- Cyber bullying
- Accessing and/or distributing inappropriate images or other material

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Figure 13: Excerpt from the Seasonal Staff Guide 2019, p.51

The code mandates responsible use of the phone whilst on the programme, irresponsible use includes acts of indecency or abuse of yourself and others. The code of conduct is in the staff guide so that the staff are aware of what the young people have signed up to in terms of behaviour expectations. The expectations should then be monitored and infringements dealt with appropriately, according to the code. These conditions seem reasonable but how is it monitored? The data shown above highlights the interchangeability of smartphones and the apps on them. They are not separated in this instance and so both are referred to as 'the media', the media is a possible avenue of harm to and against others. The code is intended to offer a framework for safe and respectful interactions of which the phones are just one aspect. Social media is a space that the institution needs to monitor in order to mitigate against any harm to the individuals involved in the programme. Here we can see that the spaces the staff have responsibility for are not just the immediate environment but extend to spaces held elsewhere, spaces they cannot observe but can be held to account for. This is necessary to meet legislative safeguarding commitments and because research and experience has shown that young people are not necessarily protected from harm in places out of the family reach even if the family is a safe and secure base (Firmin, 2020). NCS is a space away from the family, **and** the staff on NCS take a pastoral role in becoming responsible for the welfare of the young people in their care. The types of behaviour not tolerated are all about damage and harm that can be done to others, and in signing up to this code of conduct, the foundations are being laid for building safe relationships. It also emphasises how the use of phones is about reciprocity of care with a responsibility to each other which extends the potential social spaces for learning (Harris and Wasilewski, 2004) to online methods as well as off line. It is intended to be helpful for participants in thinking about what the programme will expect and what it will look like. I was present at the day when everyone signed the consent forms (bag drop off day), and the reality was that many of the young people did not read the code and there were very few questions asked as to what this meant.

We can view this inclusion of phones in the code of conduct as a positive step that recognises areas of potential harm and mitigates against these with clear expectations from the beginning of the programme. However, a slight shift in perspective problematises this notion and demonstrates how this could also set up phones as a potential site of contention between youth and leaders. This 'code of conduct' involves

making three assumptions; signing up to the conduct around phones implies that each and every young person has read the terms, that they have understood the meaning of the words and that everyone has a consistent and shared meaning of the words. These are difficult assumptions to verify or take as a given as "W*ords surely matter, but they do not exist outside discourse and practice."* (St. Pierre, 2013, p.224). This reminds us that meaning happens in the entanglement of phenomenon, in the 'doing' which is an embodied and cultural process. Deleuze refers to this as 'sense', as 'a vapour' (Deleuze, 1994, p.204), the liminality between the proposition and things, or an area of potential (MacLure, 2013b). With this in mind, there is a dynamism in the language of the code of conduct which will not manifest in the same way for each and every encounter. This means the potential for safety that is provided in the code of conduct around phones, now also opens up potential futures that may include confusion and conflict in the doing. The code of conduct, whilst a protective factor for organisations and individuals, is a document that only comes alive when it is actually practised on the programme.

Even before a phone is seen or used on the programme, there is a push and pull inherent, there is a capacity that is waiting for its potential to affect. Phones are latent energy, waiting to be noticed or moved and similarly we wait for the phone to move us – a ring or a ping of a notification. These words echo what quantum physicists tell us about how the world operates - things only come into being by being in relation to another (Rovelli, 2021) and in this respect what impact phones will have on human relationships and learning will be dependent on the encountering. It is like the thought experiment of Schrodinger's cat, until it is observed, the cat is both alive and dead, and so with phones, we do not know the outcome until we 'do', until there is an observer.

7.3.2 The entanglement of spaces

Building relationships with others is difficult and can take time to develop, however when you only have four weeks of being and learning together, the building of relationships takes on an urgency. My instinct as a youth worker would be to start the first encounters in a dynamic and enthused way, modelling what is possible in order to alleviate painful or negative patterns of behaviour or emotions that people can have in new situations e.g. reticence, shyness, fear and anxiety; to manufacture an affective response that opens up ways of making new connections and relationships. However,

invariably with each entanglement, the encounters that happen between staff, young people and the environment will have different material-discursive iterations in their intra-action which will affect the potentials that are possible. Coleman (2020) suggests in her book *Glitterworlds – The Future Politics of a Ubiquitous Thing* that to follow a 'thing' requires us not to just follow the item across the different worlds it enters and leaves but also to be attentive to how it shapes the world – its 'liveliness' (2020, p. 20). Understanding the potential of encounters on NCS, as indicated above, means understanding the vibrancy of the phone which refers to not only its movement in space but its capacity to change and influence the space in its movement. This next section will explore this as part of the observations when on the programme. In these entanglements, my sense of wonder was drawn not only to the agentive capacity of phones but how this was folded and refolded into space. In this respect space is not a boundaried place that encompasses the entities within it, rather space and time are constructed relative to relational encounters (Massey, 1999). Phones are entangled in multiple encounters of the 'doing' of relationships and learning that open or close spaces, including or excluding possible futures. To illustrate what is being done by phones, it is helpful to think of the phenomena generated in different parts of the programme. The next sections will consider what happens within each week of the programme as there were distinct differences in both the use and agency of the phone.

7.4 Week One – New Connections

7.4.1 Creating space

I have attended and observed lots of 'first' days and seen how the interactions both change and yet stay the same over time. Invariably when walking into an unfamiliar space where one does not know anyone or only a few others, observations will consistently include recognisable behaviours that allow the person to feel more comfortable. We all engage in this, habits that enable feelings of security, and searching for signs of commonality that may help with interpersonal connections. For instance, looking for social cues as a guide to behaviours that may lead to bonding (or not) with others (Tuckman, 1965). This could look like distancing ourselves from unfamiliar people by sitting further away or huddling with people who are/appear familiar, hence small groups congregating together. These are the observations that have not changed since I first started working with people. This movement within

spaces is not just physical, it is accompanied by psychological spacing (Novelli, Drury and Reicher, 2010) and how we create this spacing has changed. Increasingly phones became actants (Latour, 1996) in facilitating spaces that buffer us from others.

"The yps had started to arrive …. They were milling around, everyone looking nervous, looking at their phones or chatting in small groups with their existing friendship groups." (Notes from the little book, Day 1, Week 1)

This extract was taken from one of my little books, in which I recorded observations. My notes evidence the hesitancy of the first day and in particular the use of phones was apparent. On the first day of the programme, as my notes remind me, there was an 'in-between' moment, a time where people arrive by various means, they register and then they wait. As we waited for the staff to draw us together, the young people engaged in a few distinct activities and for many of them this was to turn to their phones. In these situations, the phone offers multiple but distinct affects in the management of space and affecting future potentialities of relationships. One of the potentialities comes from the simple action of holding and scrolling on a phone. Whether intended or not, this action puts a barrier between the person and others, it makes it more difficult for others to engage the person in communication or social interaction. The looking down at the screen means their eyes are down which makes it harder to see if anyone smiles or moves closer. And for another person, not being able to see their eyes/face makes it unclear if they would be happy to be approached. The phone/human hybrid action creates a space that whilst not impossible to penetrate and open up, certainly puts obstacles in the way which makes engaging in human-to-human relationship formation more problematic.

However, by returning to the both/and provocation of posthumanism as opposed to either/or, there are other affects possible. Whilst it can be a quick and easy way to signal that one does not want interaction with others, taking an affirmative ethical perspective, this may not always be the intention of the action. In fact, it may be quite the opposite. Relationships are connections with others (human or otherwise) and at a time, such as meeting new people, when one may be feeling vulnerable or unsure or nervous, the phone offers a connection with certainty and familiarity. That is, social media and phones, whilst celebrated for all the new connections people can make, also provides links to existing relationships (Russett and Waldron, 2017; Dyer, 2020a)

opening up the ability to maintain and nurture relationships across geographical gaps and spaces (Hammond, Cooper and Jordan, 2018). Proximity is important for relationships as proximity gives opportunity to have encounters, to be in relation to another, hence the descriptor of relationships as being 'close' or 'distant'. Mobile phone technology has meant that physical proximity is no longer the only way to have an encounter with another person and with each advancement of this technology, the speed of this encounter has quickened. In this way, phones and social media applications queer space/time relationships, as although the young person is now placed somewhere new, the phone still allows an ephemeral connection in the here and now with relationships that have come before (Beuving, 2019). This extends the reach of the space for contact beyond the physical environment to other spaces, connections that can be with us all the time (Turkle, 2017). This may serve a variety of functions, not least of combating boredom (Russett and Waldron, 2017) or of giving access to 'emotional trails' (Longhurst, 2016, p.132) in revisiting reassuring messages or relationships.

The phone/human entanglement can also create a space for 'self-care' (Wilson, 2016) aiding wider wellbeing by not just having access to friends or family but activities that can sooth and calm anxieties or nervousness e.g. playing music or gaming or scrolling social media. Therefore whilst the phone may appear to be a barrier to relationships, it can also be a regulating feature that can provide comfort and familiarity before or when one has to embrace the new.

7.4.2 Green space

Figure 14: View from the hilltop, Week 1, Day 4

This photo (Fig.14) was taken in the first week. It did involve walking about 200metres up the hill to take it. It captures the stunning countryside we were in, just slightly below

the grass is the dip with a path that takes you to the log cabins. The rurality of the setting turned out to be an unlikely ally in the first week, particularly where the phones were concerned. In order for relationships to begin, the staff had to not only find ways of reaching through the walls of small groups but also beyond the connections offered by the phone. There are physical and emotional barriers to overcome in order to engage and build relationships as a new group. The photo demonstrates the isolation. The nearest main road was a mile away from the location of the outdoor centre. To access the road required driving along a single car width, unmaintained road, where there were no pavements, no streetlights and importantly, no phone signal. Not only was there no phone signal for any network, but once at the centre, there was also limited Wi-Fi. This was met with dismay and grumblings of discontent when we first arrived. But this also offered an opportunity for building new relationships as the phone was rendered more inert in this location. The space/world facilitated by the use of the phone rapidly shrank and therefore the phone became less affective. With the pull of home/familiar spaces no longer able to reach across the geographical sphere, space had to be created for the new relationships to emerge. The dominant element of the 'more than human' shifted, it moved from the phone to the rurality of the countryside, where the remoteness displayed its agency in shaping relationships. Different permutations of varying features (e.g. Wi-Fi, signal, apps) mean that the thing-power of phones waxes and wanes. Affect differs based on assemblages encountered and it is this more-than-human assemblage reveals its capacity to influence potential future relationships.

As with the previous chapters discussing the chair and noise, this is not to say that the physical space is the single fundamental factor for building relationships. Instead, the idea is to notice how the difference in the environments gave rise to alternative trajectories of relationship building or learning. Given the rurality, even if someone was bored, there was little personal choice in terms of distraction other than participating with their group. In this example not being able to use the phone minimises opportunities for conflict or isolation and increases opportunities for other ways to be together. Thus, complementing the activities that are being provided in the first week, which included team building and reflection activities – group activities that required people to get along with each other and build trust. As explored in earlier chapters, trust is a key characteristic of constructive, supportive relationships (Holland, 2015) as it is

fundamental to the process (Peters, 2017). What emerges in this entanglement is a sense of others and the reciprocity necessary for building and maintaining relationships:

"Just be yourself….all the group talks to each other in reflection" (*Audio recording, yp-Alina, Week 1, Day 3)*

"If you communicate with each other, like you get to know more people, like, some, like say if I spoke to Alina, she like she don't mind speaking to anyone, go over to them and make them more comfortable and stuff like that." *(Audio recording, yp – Naeim, Week 1, Day 3)*

These quotes came from a discussion I had with a small group of young people. These discussions would arise as we were sat around waiting or having food, time when they were not engaged in instructor-led activities. The responses above were given after I asked about what they thought they had learned in this first week. What is particularly striking about these quotes is the nature of learning that they share. They don't talk about any of the structured activities, for example abseiling or canoeing. They simply acknowledge personal and social development, learning to be with yourself and others. Both Alina and Naeim express the importance of talking with others and, importantly, how this is a shared responsibility. Alina highlights how everyone reveals personal thoughts in reflections. Sharing thoughts within reflections is a feature of practising 'trust'; the individual disclosing has to feel safe and secure enough to trust others to respond respectfully and those listening have a responsibility to handle the information in an appropriate manner, not just then but in the future too. They have to feel that what they talk about will not suddenly appear elsewhere such as in an online space. Naeim emphasises how important it is to make others comfortable indicating a sense of what this behaviour may look like, the reciprocity needed to engage in conversation. This mutuality in getting to know each other is aided by little or no access to social media.

In the previous chapter, I referred to Harris and Wasilewski (2004) and their concept of Indigeneity which encompassed four 'R's – relationships, reciprocity, responsibility and redistribution and in these two quotes the young people have given us an understanding of reciprocity, relationships and responsibility. What is important here is that this can open up spaces for learning that are shared not individual (ibid). Naeim even talks about moving - 'go over to them', to have that shared space. There is a physicality to these actions that are not present when building relationships online. When asked about

learning, these were not unusual responses to my question, many of the young people and staff would talk about the importance of getting to know both yourself and others. Whilst it is not the sole absence of phones that was instrumental to the formation of relationships, within the entanglement of the human and more-than-human, the lack of affective capacity of the phones was a consideration in supporting the building of the relationships and the learning of the programme aims.

7.4.3 A Multiple Space

The formation of new relationships was celebrated and stored alongside previous relationships by the phone, in fact the phone allowed new connections to be made, for example a friend from back home being introduced via a social media app. The affective power of a phone for facilitating relationships crosses traditional spatial and temporal boundaries of friendships. The phone created a space for the here and now, whilst anchoring a young person to their past and still allowing a different future to emerge. The obstacle of not being able to access Wi-Fi did not mean that phones were not used or seen during the week.

*"***Let's watch Love Island, no signal***"* (*Audio background recording – young person*)

*"***I've got 3 bars, selfie, gram it***"* (*Audio background recording – young person*)

As these quotes picked up from the background recordings illustrate, phones were in and part of the physical spaces despite the (almost) futility of trying to reach out from the residential setting. Phrases such as these are scattered through the background audio, as people were casually chatting. The draw of the phone and what is offered with that connection was just too great for many young people. It is not necessary to have a signal in order for new memories to be captured or to show others what you have been doing, such as in taking a 'selfie'. A selfie can be saved ready to be used at another point and shared with others. Although in this instance the young person found a rare space of connectivity – the '3 bars' - that meant access to Instagram and the possibility of other friends commenting or liking the post ready for the young person to look at later. In a sense the young people were facilitating relationships both with their new friends by engaging in familiar activities but also tethered them to the familiar of home, extending their friendship groups. However, this was not necessarily a fluid reciprocal activity. For instance, they could not engage with the cultural phenomenon that is the

UK TV programme 'Love Island' due to lack of signal. A programme such as this is conducive to 'watercooler' moments in which acquaintances can engage in discussions, even if they share little else in common. Access to the internet mediated by phones, allows these discussion moments to be more immediate. Social media apps such as Whatsapp and Twitter, also, offer opportunities to bond with shared insights and discussion about the events as part of a community (Stewart, 2019). However, 'Love Island' is aired on a daily basis hence four nights away is a lot of content that is missed and a lot of discussion from which one could be excluded. This both distances the young people from their friends at home but offers a shared experience with new friends bringing them closer in this geographical space.

7.4.4 My space

It would be wrong of me to characterise this first week as some sort of rural idyll in which the lack of access to phone signal was not a problem or, that this facilitated the smooth engagement in activities and relationships. Relationships are messy and following the movement of the phone demonstrates there were other trajectories, other potentialities that also emerged in this week. The remoteness and lack of wi-fi did help engagement with others and it also complicated other relationships. The following two quotes were captured in the first week and were both said by staff members.

*"***Leave them in your cabin***"* (Audio background recording - staff member)

*"***Take a photo and put that away***"* (Audio background recording – staff member)

These were two of many similar utterances that highlighted the phone as a space of potential conflict, confusion and hope. The first quote was a refrain that I heard often, the young people were encouraged/told to leave the phones in their cabins by the staff (and sometimes their peers) because not only could they not use the phones but there was a high risk of them getting damaged in the physical activities they undertook. The affective power of a damaged or lost phone can be like a tsunami of negativity on the cohesiveness of a group and so it is preferable to avoid this. More often, there was acquiescence to the request. There was also a sense of resignation in that the young people knew the likelihood of a signal was slim, so there was not much point in fighting this. However, an instruction to put the phone away could provoke resistance depending on other affects in that encounter. For instance, if the young people were

going off to do activities there was less chance of an argument. In contrast during moments of 'downtime' when everyone was relaxing, this request could be met with hostility and flashes of frustration from both parties leading to frictions between staff and young people. These were compounded by ambiguity when confusing and inconsistent messages were given. For example, the first quote has clarity of expectation - the phone needs to be put away. Whilst the second quote can be experienced in different ways because of its lack of clarity. The speaker moves from saying it is ok to take a photo (and so have the phone out) to putting the phone away. In the short term, this can seem like allyship, the staff member colludes with the young person to break or bend the rules. However over a longer time this can cause confusion as to what is expected and allowed. Relationships between adults and young people can be challenging when there is lack of clarity over what the 'doing' of shared expectations looks like in practice, as it fuels distrust (Holland, 2015). I will return to this later in the chapter where I consider consequences to this ambiguity that emerged in week two.

Although, we were in a very remote physical space with little online connectivity, this did not mean it was impossible. The residential centre did have Wi-Fi but access to it was restricted with strict guidance as to who could and could not use it. To access it you had to have the Wi-Fi code:

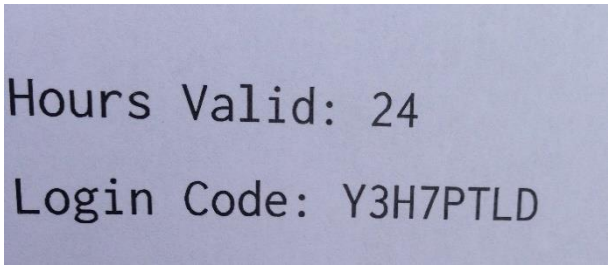

Figure 15: Wi-Fi Code, Week1, Day 2

The code as seen in Fig. 15 was time-limited, with restrictions on use. At first, we were only given codes that lasted eight hours, with the 24-hour code reserved for permanent site staff. However, the NCS staff were required to have access for communication with each other and for cases of emergency, 'WhatsApp' messaging app facilitated this. WhatsApp, as an online application is a useful app not least because you do not need 'data' to use it, you just need access to Wi-Fi. Relying on 'data' packages is problematic in that not only do you need a phone signal, but you also need a sufficient data package to engage which has financial implications. One of the beneficial aspects of apps such

as WhatsApp is that it can potentially democratise shared communication spaces and allow a shared place for discussions that do not rely on spatial proximity (Williams *et al*., 2022). Therefore, by Day 2, the site had granted us as a staff team, the 24-hour Wi-Fi access code. This access was not shared with the young people and the privileged access for the staff meant that the agentic capacity of the phone created a space of potential provocation for staff and young people.

The Wi-Fi code was a facility that was shared with staff, with the intention that it would not be further shared. However, possession of this code created an imbalance in the relationships between staff and young people. Phones were not just used for staff communication amongst ourselves, it also allowed the staff to reach out to their own friends and family, maintaining connections with the wider world. I was not immune to this pull, I messaged my husband, friends and family several times a day. They were valuable, familiar links that helped me through the programme. I was allowed to reach out to my home space but barriers were put in front of the young people to do the same. In this instance barriers are apparent, there is an 'othering', a gap made between 'them' and 'us' with the potential to affect feelings of inequality between staff and young people, which has the potential to cause distrust and further distance between each other.

With the potential for the phone to disrupt relationships in the early stages of the programme, how did the young people and adults navigate the potential conflictive terrain of phone usage in the first week? As noted above, often there was little reward for the young people in fighting to retain possession of the phone. However, this was not the only factor in mitigating against conflict. Paying attention to the actions of the Cohort Leader, Angie, is useful in understanding how or what other iterations may have been contributing to maintaining cohesiveness. Angie was a leader that led by example with transparency. She discussed with the whole cohort, the need for the staff to have access to their phones. She gave clarity to the expectation of staff usage, elucidating to the young people and staff that staff should only be accessing their phones when needed and she gently admonished staff (and young people) if they flouted the expectations. Her conduct was consistent and cajoling rather than confrontational. These modelling actions were congruent with the way Angie managed herself and we very quickly learned that Angie was steady, reliable and fair, she generated trust. Enacting the practice of relationships gives opportunity to learn for future relationships (Bernstein-

Yamashiro and Noam, 2013), as one learns reciprocity and responsibility to/with each other, what this looks like and what this feels like. Angie's conduct was important for me to follow as I often had a phone in my hand, mainly because my camera was an old iPhone. Whenever I took the phone out, I would announce that I was using it. This had a dual purpose as not only did it made clear the reason as to why I had a phone, it also alerted everyone that I was taking photos so they could request to not be included if they did not want to be photographed. Trust needs to be nurtured from the first encounters onwards, the movement of the phone offered opportunities to start doing that and to negotiate the adult/young person structural power differentiation in a fair and transparent way.

The young people and the staff did learn not to have their phones, by the end of the week it no longer felt strange, as this quote from Afra indicates;

"I feel at first like when we got told how, like you don't go on your phones as much, don't do this, I was a bit like, 'what the hell?'. But now I've come away from my phone, I feel like when I get home, I won't even be on me phone as much. I feel like, if I like, if I go out, I think I might just actually leave it at home and come back to you later, which is good."

(Interview Afra, young person - Week 1 Day 4)

Afra could often appear as lively and she was a vocal member of Team 1 who were referenced in the Noise chapter. The quote highlights the change she experienced with regards to the phone. There was learning that she could do without it, the phone in this material discursive iteration was no longer as affective or agentic as it had lost its power to connect. Whether her usage does lessen in the future is not the point, instead what is important in this moment is she had noticed her own change in behaviour, she had paid attention to the difference in herself and the potentialities it may open up.

Afra's learning is echoed by others and Adele, a staff member, offered an insight into how this helped the relationships:

"**It's almost like a community's formed with whoever you're with, erm not just with the teams you're in but with every individual who's here, the members of staff, erm members of staff who work here as well because that's the only real information**

there is, there's no real information like coming in or coming out, erm no one is on their phone, erm not really and even if they are, you only get it for a few seconds and you can't even then find out like anything decent" *(Interview Adele, staff member - Week 1, Day 5)*

The only source of information is each other with implications for sense-making, learning with each other and building a sense of community.

7.4.5 BUT

I cannot leave week one without mentioning an incident that made me smile and highlighted once again the vitality of the phone and its capacity to affect relationships. We all boarded the coaches for the return journey home and due to the remoteness of the outdoor centre, the journey to the main road took around 10 minutes. There was lots of chatter as we made our way down the single-track road and then suddenly I heard lots of bleeps, pings, rings and I wrote in my little book;

"we are about ½ mile from camp - & I can hear "I've got signal", "I've got 3 bars", "I've got 4 bars"…It felt like they had been given water after being in a desert for five days." (Notes from my little book, Week 1, Day 5)

There were lots of excited exclamations and then I noticed a hush had descended over the bus. I looked around and everyone - staff and young people - had their heads down looking at their phones. I asked the question "who doesn't have their phone in their hand?" and only one person, a staff member, replied that they didn't. Out of 26 young people and 5 adults on that bus, only two of us did not reach for our phone as soon as was possible. A quiet fell over the bus not less than 10 minutes from the activity centre because the spaces offered by the phone had opened up once more. This could be read as a snub to each other, but it is important to remember the friendships they had made would not be as prominent over the next couple of days whilst everyone returned to their homes. The phone in its vitality opened up the chance to reconnect with the familiar and so make the transition back into their everyday possible.

7.5 Week Two – The (Un)Facilitator

7.5.1 Changing Spaces, Familiar Spaces

The liveliness of the phone is not a product of the phone in itself as a separate object. It is a product of the intra-actions of bodies/elements making each other intelligible (Barad, 2007). Therefore following the movement of the phone through different environments, the intra-action within the phenomena illustrates different animation and possible trajectories, opening up space for change (Coleman, 2020). Different trajectories and animation mean that the potentialities that get included and excluded will alter according to the liveliness of elements. What do I mean by this? The geographical location within any entanglement is affective not just directly onto the capacity of the body to fulfil its intended role – in this case the phone, but also on the other bodies within the entanglement, provoking and affecting in different ways. This became something I wondered about during the second week – what difference did the change of venue, change of activities and change in perceived familiarity make to the relationships and learning when the cohort moved to their second residential? Following the phone offers insights into this.

As mentioned in previous chapters, the second week residential looked and felt very different to the first week. Firstly, the staff and young people had established relationships and the teams had shared some valued and fun experiences in their isolated and close-knit community. However, the second week took place at a local university hall of residence just on the outskirts of their hometown. The town and all it offered were close by and easily accessible – just a phone call or bus ride away. The activities whilst not exclusively delivered by the NCS staff did feature their input more heavily, the staff were no longer part of the group doing activities, they were delivering activities as well as upholding behaviour expectations. The programme was predominantly based indoors, held within smaller meeting rooms or a larger function room set for whole cohort presentations. Whereas previously the young people and staff had entered new spaces as strangers together, now the young people entered the spaces of the team leaders. Rooms that became owned by the Team Leader who rearranged the rooms according to their needs and in doing so, imposed their marks on the physical and social spaces (Taylor *et al*., 2020). The young person space was now their new bedroom in a shared flat with shared cooking facilities, and their phones. The whole set up, as was

intended, felt like an induction into a university environment for the young people to learn as if they were in higher education, to familiarise the cohort with independent living and community-based issues. There was also ample signal and access to Wi-Fi for everyone. The contextual environment had created a gap in the spaces between adults and young people, not just physically but psychologically and there was a disruption in how much time they were able to spend with their leaders relaxing and chatting.

The environment also felt strangely familiar for many of the group. It was in their hometown and most of them had visited the site at some point in the past. The activities felt more formal, both the young people and staff commented (not always in a negative manner) that it felt more like school as activities tended to be classroom based - thinking, talking and listening activities. The energy and physicality of the first week had disappeared and with it the sense of cohesiveness that the first week had supplied. The environmental familiarity seemed to merge with behavioural familiarity both from staff and young people and paying attention to the phone illustrates this change. My observation during this second week is that the phone and the space it took became much more contentious, phones were more provocative of tensions within the relationships between the staff and young people.

"Adele is giving out instructions or picking them up on things – Like snapchat "If I see you on snapchat, I'll take your phones for the session". (Notes from my little book – Week 2, Day 1)

"- Alan has been moving round the room, just took Layla's B phone off her." (Notes from my little book – Week 2, Day 2)

"- Maya just noticed Shakti on her phone, she tried calling her, but got up & walked over & told her to put it away." (*Notes from the little book = Week 2, Day 2***)**

These are just three snippets that I wrote down as I was observing. There were more written examples and even more that I didn't record for week two. The mapping of the space with the phone in week two felt as if it was inherited from previous spaces in which the phones are contentious, such as in formal schooling. The comments with regards to putting phones away felt to me more commanding. The negotiating of usage in the first week had given way to a more familiar power imbalance – that of teacher

and student. There was less reciprocity and more asymmetry in the power dynamics which did not go unnoticed:

"They were upset about what they saw as a change in boundaries. Last week they thought the staff had been fun but had not challenged them on certain things very much, like phones. This week, they feel the staff has come down a lot harder on them." *(Reflection – Week 2, Day 3)*

My reflection here is based on a conversation I had with Saffron and Raheem, and followed the 'chair' incident explored in Chapter 5. Their perception is that the staff have changed which, I would suggest, is not without merit, the confusing boundaries around the phone that were established in week one returned in week two to haunt the interactions between adults and young people. This was something many staff and young people were aware of. There was an often-voiced concern amongst the staff that they did not want NCS to be school-like, encapsulated by the comment from Claudia who did not want to seem 'teachery' *(Notes from my little book, Week 3, Day 5)* and yet they were required as staff to enforce behaviour and boundaried expectations of the young people. What being school-like or teachery entails was never defined but anytime this was discussed, it was taken that you could recognise it, it was a feeling rather than a description, which I will return to later.

I would also suggest that the dynamic had changed not just because of the staff seeming to behave differently but also the young people. For many of the young people, even though the first week had been a positive experience without phones, they were once more enticed by the phone particularly when engaging (or not) in many of the classroom-based activities. Physical spaces hold the memories of emotions and affects, filled with values of before, a relational time-space (Massey, 2005) and the responses to that space can emerge as historical and habitual. Whether they reached for the phones because of boredom, seeking connection or something else entirely, the familiar response to a classroom meant the human-phone hybrid was very much more in evidence.

"- Izzy has just asked Penni to get off her phone
- I've just looked at Alan. The grp has sat down again, two have got phones out. I can't hear what he said but they have put them away. Alfie has just gone over." (Notes from my little book – Week 2, Day 3)

By the second day of the second week the young people knew if they were seen they would be reprimanded (gently or not) and yet these further examples show this was not a deterrence against moving away from the classroom space as a focus and into what was offered via the phone-space. With reference to Raheem and Saffron and our conversation, the change in behaviour of the staff was noted but was not accompanied by acknowledgement of their own responsibility and role in maintaining relationships. However, given the redistribution in power (perceived or otherwise) during the second week as opposed to the collegiality of the first week, this problematises the doing of relationships in different learning environments. This highlights again, should there also be a responsibility on young people to maintain and nurture the learning relationships or should this be the adults' alone and how does this fit with the duty of care afforded to the adults as part of the relationship dynamic?

7.5.2 Mediated Space

Phones offered both connections for the young people and barriers, similar to the adults. Phones as explored earlier were a way for young people to maintain connections and to feel safe through links that cross physical spatial boundaries. However, the multiplicity of what emerges from phone intra-actions became more curious in the second week and not just because of the impression of not appearing to engage in the activity taking place. Access to Wi-fi meant access to the outside world, the world away from the bubble that was the NCS programme and it is this access that highlights gaps in relationships. The phones are not the site of contention or connections but become supporting actors to the main drama.

The phone is both a social space with public access but also a private space with limited access to others. When a young person used the phone on the programme, in the main, it was an inaccessible space not just to the staff but to me as a researcher in my general observations (Beuving, 2019). This is not so different to moments and spaces such as when a child daydreams. However, unlike an imagined daydream, the phone does make accessibility to other real or non-imaginary spaces much easier for the user. It is in these spaces that the perceptions of the relationship can be tested. This was more apparent in week two when the 'outside' world was so much closer and offered opportunities to reach into it, and in doing so, tested boundaries of trust and respect in the relationships.

An incident happened in the second week, late one evening in one of the flats. On initial reading it seems fairly innocuous. A pizza delivery was ordered and delivered to the flat at around 11.30pm, a time when all the staff were awake but typically in a staff meeting covering the day's events and preparing for the next. Following the meeting, the staff would then do the rounds checking on all the flats and making sure everyone was ok and settling down for the night. The pizza protagonist was Layla and unbeknown to the staff, Layla's uncle was a Security Guard on the campus. Layla had arranged for a pizza to be delivered to the security gate and her uncle then delivered it to the flat. Layla was aware that it was against the rules to facilitate access to the site for outside parties. With other NCS groups also on campus there were around 350 young people on the site plus a number of other young people on different schemes. The rules around outside access were in place to prevent chaotic comings and goings but also to keep everyone safe, as in the past there had been issues with visitors coming on to the campus and causing concerns some of which had resulted in safeguarding concerns being acted upon. Layla had utilised her relationship with her uncle to get round this rule, and in doing so had created (further) tension with her relationships with the staff (and some other young people).

The staff and Layla did not have the most constructive relationships. There was a lot of strain which had gradually built throughout the ten days they had known each other. The interesting aspect in this incident is not the rebellious act in itself. It was that the phone mediated this act. The phone had an affective power in this entanglement. The act of rebellion was quite creative, not obvious but the chance to eat pizza was mediated by access to the phone-space. The phone was not the cause, it was an incidental instrument that opened different avenues to test the relationship. It was only the next morning when more than one young person approached their team leader, that the adults learned what had happened.

The phone in the first week was implicated in the future of relationships. It was a thing with a social potential however in this second week example, the phone was a thing with a 'thingness' which became implicated in a trajectory already in motion (Coleman, 2020). The relationships already in place were a strong affective component both in Layla's actions and in how the staff found out about the incident. The staff found out about the incident because other young people in the flat raised it with their staff member. Whatever the motivation for telling the staff member, it could be suggested

that Layla's perception of the value of the relationships was not as strong as others. The lack of trust between Layla and the staff correspondingly highlighted the trust between the staff and other young people, as disclosing events such as this means trusting that the person sharing the information is not going to be implicated in the fallout. Quantum physicists tell us that the world is a collection of events, and that what comes to matter is what is most affective at that cut, that moment of focus, and this is how future trajectories get included or excluded (Barad, 2007; Rovelli, 2019). The positive trajectory for many young people and the staff in their ongoing becoming-with together meant that in this instance they told the staff what had happened with Layla. Relationships between adults and young people become vital as it is through trusted encounters that people can be cared for and want to be cared about. A historicity of positive relationships strengthens the potential for the future and conversely, as was seen with the chair incident, a more chaotic history of relationships makes the future more challenging to navigate in the moment.

7.6 Week Three – Roles in spaces

7.6.1 WhatsApp – blurry spaces

This chapter includes WhatsApp in the title and the popular messaging app will be the focus of this section. I became intrigued by WhatsApp and how it was being used only once I returned from my fieldwork. After the hiatus away from my data, I started to listen to the audio recordings and would find myself idling through the WhatsApp messages when I needed a break from the noise. I started to notice and wonder about the juxtaposition of what I was hearing in the audio - strictures around 'no phones" etc., versus what I was seeing in the different teams' conversations that were taking place. I was reading some amazing supportive, joyful and funny messages that were exchanged in weeks three and four and these were obviously appearing by way of the phone which had been discouraged in the first two weeks. Whilst I had an interest in the phone before and during the fieldwork, the complexity and multiplicity of the phone's functions became apparent in the comfort of my own home.

During weeks one and two, the staff used WhatsApp a lot. There was both an official staff group and an unofficial one. At the end of week two, the individual team WhatsApp group chats were set up ready for week three. The group chats included the work phone assigned to the Team Leader and all the young people. This meant that the

young people did not access private numbers of the staff. I was a member of all the groups set up via the work phone I was using, the only exception being for the unofficial staff group, as we all used personal numbers for this group. It was in week three that the messages exploded, and it is this, in the main, I want to explore in this section.

"I'm gonna be about 10 minutes late.."

"I'll be about 10 mins late really sorry 🙄"

"Gonna start writing shit up in a bit.."

"Was just writing this lol"

"Silver stilettos might be a bit much no?"

"getting a bit stressy about my outfit for Thursday"

"..we didn't all work together on this and we didn't communicate well."

"Enjoy your weekend guys. Thank you so much for all your hard work this week.."

The data above is taken from the WhatsApp conversations and I have purposefully not labelled the originator of the messages. It is a provocation, one that I felt when I read through the messages. My wonder was drawn to the blurred identities between adults and the young people. Without more context it may be difficult to decide, however even with context when I knew who was writing each message, I was struck by how similar the different groups were in the types of messages that were sent. For clarification the messages above alternate - first a young person then adult sender through the eight messages. From a content perspective I have paired similar messages – messages to notify others, messages looking for support over what to wear and messages intended for the whole team. As a provocation it highlighted to me the inadequacy of binary roles that we operate with – adult/young person, teacher/student, professional/friend etc. In reality the roles we take up are more fluid and fuzzier. They transverse dichotomies of either/or, which has implications for how we understand learning relationships. This goes beyond identity as a discrete concept, instead recognising bodies as embodied and embedded, allowing consideration of what is being

done in that moment (Braidotti, 2019a) and what it means for relationships not just between the adults and young people but between and within the staff as well as the young people, both between and within teams.

The phone is not just one space, its relationality means there are a myriad of spaces to access and even in what might be designated one space, for example WhatsApp, there are a myriad of conversational spaces to both access and set up. How engagement manifests in this space is curated by individuals depending on the design of the platform and within the boundaries of sociocultural expectations (Dyer, 2020a). Therefore paying attention to who or what is observing and participating in the conversation has a role in understanding the potentials of relationships. As the data above shows, binaries are unhelpful, each space serves different purposes for different people at different times. Certainly, the apology from the staff member who was going to be late appeared in the official staff WhatsApp group whereas the message with regards to getting 'stressy' about the outfit was part of an exchange in the unofficial staff group. These examples would suggest that the staff were mindful of what was appropriate for each conversation and certainly there was an un/conscious awareness of external observers – real or imagined which did at times manifest a certain formality to the messages particularly in reference to what the Team Leaders wrote in the Team WhatsApp groups, as seen in these examples;

"Guys this chat has brought tears to my eyes when reading it this morning!! I'm so proud of each and every one of you!!" *(Alan, Team Leader in Team 2 WhatsApp group)*

"Well done everyone! Someone's charger is in the room- does someone need that or is it fine?" *(Susanna, Team Leader in Team 1 WhatsApp group)*

"Guys, this account is for charity work only" *(Alfie, Team Leader in Team 4 WhatsApp group)*

The messages are perhaps what you might expect, the content is professional – supportive with reminders of what is acceptable to share. In acknowledging who might be observing or listening, the responses take a more familiar form or as previously referenced by the staff member Claudia, the responses feel more 'teachery' or maybe

the responses could be viewed through the NCS lens as indicative of manager/employee relationships preparing the young people for work expectations. The lens to view this through maybe incidental as a possible affect is to establish/perpetuate a power differential through the monitoring of expectations – positive and negative, staff giving praise or admonishing young people.

However, this belies the complexity of the messages and the multiplicity in what was being done. As Dyer explores in his research (Dyer, 2020a, 2020b) online spaces allow a certain 'selfhood' to be presented with a degree of self-selection as a means of socialising with others (Russett and Waldron, 2017). Certainly, the messages demonstrate more engagement from some young people than others, so the young people could self-select their participation in this space. However, within this NCS cohort, the WhatsApp space was visible as a means of communication with each other and was the only official space for this interaction. It was, also, a closed space, accessible to only the Team Leaders, the young people in their group, myself and management. There was no cross fertilisation of groups which meant some of the demands of typical social media spaces were not present. The young people and adults already had a relationship by the time the WhatsApp groups were set up. They knew each other and therefore there was not a need to carefully curate an identity, identities were already part of an ongoing negotiation that had started offline. In this respect the messages appear to me to reflect who they were and how they interacted offline. In reading the messages I was often able to identify the young person or staff member without looking at the identifier. However, this is not because of the role definition as seen above but because I could see or hear the person in the writing. The messages were conversational, funny, directive and supportive just like their interactions were in person, regardless of position in the Team, as seen in this collection of messages from Team 4:

"YP1: you've missed bare capitals bbbb

Team Leader: Guys make it half past

YP2: Ik corrected it now

YP3: is it cause you're eating your cheese and onion pasties???

YP4: Nah chicken bakes actually

TL: Anyone gets me a pasty you get Alfie points

YP2: Everyone who isn't at college is now late!

YP4: There's still 4 mins

TL: Pew pew

YP2: Nope 5 mins earlier or your late

YP2: Early*

YP4: Behave

TL: You are now late so staying an additional 10 mins"

What is apparent here is the blurring of roles. It is not just Alfie, the staff member setting expectations of others. In this example, YP2 is instrumental in clarifying boundaries. Similarly, Alfie is casual in his responses at first, almost as if texting his own peers until the final message in which he sets the consequences for the poor timekeeping. In my view the interactions on the WhatsApp have a reciprocity to them, there is back and forth with hazy roles – who is the staff member, who is the young person, does it matter as the group seems to be functioning? Whatever is being done here, the affect I feel is not forced, it very much feels as I had observed with this group with flexible and traversing role trajectories. There is an ease and confidence in the relationships in their ongoing becoming-with each other.

This maybe runs counter to earlier research which highlighted concerns about not only the ubiquity of phones but its effect on face-to-face encounters (Beuving, 2019) and the lack of authenticity in these interactions due to being connected but not engaged (Turkle, 2017). I would suggest that order of events is once more crucial, not simply as a causal path but as a temporal trace. In much research of online spaces, the spaces are open and therefore there are more opportunities to nurture new relationships when finding spaces, particularly when based around personal interests. This anonymised newness offers more opportunities for curating one's identity, the entering into the

space affects the curation. I cannot say if some of this was happening or did happen amongst the young people in other online spaces as they got to know each other over the first couple of weeks. However, at the point of setting up the group chats, everyone in the teams knew each other, which perhaps meant their online interaction served a different purpose, the relationship affected the use of the space. The WhatsApp messages I was party to, were traces of the existing relationships and the ongoing negotiations and iterations of these. The phone was part of the human-technology hybrid for relationships to continue to grow together. It is no wonder given the existing relationships, the expectations of the programme and the closeness in age (mentioned in Chapter 4) that actually the relationships were transversal across roles when it came to maintaining and sustaining relationships in pursuit of the team goals. But what does it mean for learning?

7.6.2 Learning Spaces

The previous section highlighted the blurriness of adult-youth roles. The messages explored are professional yet social both from the staff and young people, and without context such as the phone numbers or name of group, it is not always possible to discern adult from young person. This fuzziness extended into the roles for learning; who is teacher, who is taught? To explore who or what teaches and what learning emerges in this space, the text messages below offer some valuable insights. In the extract of text messages, the group are referring to a presentation they are to give as a whole group to a group of prominent adult community and business leaders. The aim of the task is to be granted a budget of money to seed fund their fundraising activities. It is the NCS version of the popular UK television programme "Dragon's Den". The whole group are expected to dress professionally, stand up and present for 20 minutes detailing their ideas, their research and what they will use the money for.

"YP1 20:55: Guys look at the slide I wrote is it ok

YP2 20:56: Yea it looks good!

YP1 20:56: Who wants to say that part

YP3 20:57: I can if u want

YP1 20:57: Yh

YP1 20:57: Learn most of it now

YP3 20:57: But I think get Kain or Shola too cause they make it better ygm

YP1 20:57: So you don't have to stare at the screen tmr

[Further messages]

YP1 @ 21:07: If you guys wants a picture of the slide you're speaking about I can send you a picture of it if you want and you can memorise a bit of it

YP4: 21:07: Yeah send me my pls x

YP5 21:10: Could u send slide 3 please about bake sale thing. I will give it a good go and I will try best

YP1 21:10: Ok

YP1 21:11: Anya which one is yours

YP6 21:12: Mine and ginges is about the charity

YP1 21:12: Ok

YP1 21:13: Jacob is yours the third one ?

YP6 21:14: The one about the charity

YP7 21:14: It's the one where we talk about the charity

YP8 21:16: I think your guys is the second slide because mine, Rachel's and Katie's is the third slide

YP1 21:16: Yours and Katie's is fourth if you include the first slide

YP8 21:18: I wasn't including the first slide then sorry

YP1 21:19: No don't be sorry

YP1 21:20: Guys as long as everyone gets a good idea of what they need to say and preps themselves so they're not too nervous all we need to do is print stuff out tmr

YP1 21:20: And practise

YP4 21:22: Yeah

YP2 21:23: Yea yea I'll practice my parts coz I have my paper sheet with me here"
(WhatsApp messages, Team 2 - Week 3, Day 3)

The nature of the exchange seen here in this selection of messages was not just seen within Team 2 group conversation, it was seen in varying degrees across all the groups. I chose to include this because in just a few short texts, there is so much to see and wonder about. I was fascinated by the support and instructions given across the group and the seriousness in which they were preparing for the next day's task. The actual Dragon's Den activity is an incredibly affirmative session to observe because of the whirlwind of emotions it generates from angst and nervousness to pride and elation, and because of the way that they all support each other.

The NCS programme is sometimes categorised as a non-formal learning programme which can be problematic. The tendency, particularly from a neo-liberal value perspective, is to give value to formal learning. This value is evidenced in the certification given, privileging exam based certification over other learning and in doing so diminishing anything that is not formal (Rogers, 2008). This feels to me like an injustice to the extent of learning and teaching that is actually happening. And in reading the above exchange of WhatsApp messages, I am struck by the thoughts of Harney and Moten (2013) in that 'form' can emerge from the informal with little need for the role of the adult or alternatively the young people are "*…displacing the centrality of the soloist…"* (Harney and Moten, 2013, p.136).

The young people are engaged in supporting and preparing each other for the presentation the next day. There are roles assigned, there is reciprocity in the exchanges "sorry – no don't be sorry", there is affirmation for each other, there is co-production, building the knowledge amongst the group. There is not an adult involved at all in these messages (and there were many more during the evening these took place). There is a refutation of the need for a soloist, they are an orchestra together. It is a reciprocal

pedagogy which includes a responsibility to each other and the sharing and redistribution of knowledge amongst each other in which their relationships are pivotal to learning with and from each other. This learning is not taking place in the space of physical structures or designated learning spaces. Instead the young people found the online space as a place for learning, a doing that echoes an exploration of student identity related to students transitioning from school to university in which the online space became a pedagogical space (Dyer, 2020b). In following the phone, it is possible to see the informal spaces of learning emerging facilitated by the (almost) immediate access which affords a quicker response for support and answers.

Which brings me to the next provocation that I had when reading the messages. In the data I have given above, I have made a deliberate choice to include the time of the messages sent. Before I wonder at this further, I will take this opportunity to remind the reader that the NCS programme is a voluntary programme for 16-year-olds in their summer holidays after their GCSE examinations. The examinations are a period of intense stress and concentration, and there is one summer of respite before the next round of formal development requirements begins. The young people could choose to leave the NCS programme at any time and could choose their level of engagement outside of the required hours of attendance. And yet here they are producing work with each other. Now, I invite the reader to consider the times these messages are being exchanged. The time in the data shown spans thirty minutes between 8.55pm and 9.25pm, however this was just a selection, in fact the full exchange started at 7.42pm with the last one coming through at 11.03pm, almost three and a half hours of at least eight young people in the team swapping thoughts and support. This was in week three in which attendance was only during the day, they were at home at the time of these messages. The first message was a young person reaching out about wardrobe choices (there were lots of people preoccupied with dress code) and that young person was affirmed by two other responses immediately (same time stamp). This does not mean that there was an expectation that everyone engaged. There was no pressure to respond, as not all the group participated, and people dipped in and out according to need or want. It was a volitional engagement space. Whilst lack of engagement and participation may have been more noticeable or more problematic in a face-to-face environment, as disengagement can be easily observed and affective for others, in the space offered by WhatsApp, this did not appear to be an issue. I cannot help but admire

the commitment and compassion not just to each other but for the charity they were fundraising for. Contrary to some of the fears shown in the first week about usage of phones, here it can be observed that at this point in the programme the informality of the phone space is not being abused or misused (at least not in the programme observable spaces). Instead, the call to arms is happening, the young people are learning with each other and in doing so they were response-able with each other without an over-riding need to be guided by an adult.

In reference to the ongoing concern of staff that they didn't want the NCS programme to 'feel like school', they were often unable to clarify what they meant by this. Answers would tend towards a theme that they didn't want to either themselves or the programme to feel 'strict'. However, by thinking through the use of phones and WhatsApp, particularly in this third week, it is possible to see what 'not like school' might look and feel like. Frames of learning can be changed or amended by the entanglement of material and/or ephemeral spaces. Following the phone and the WhatsApp space during this third week problematises learning by queering times and spaces (both as individual and environmental positions). There is a materiality to pedagogy that can be both familiar but also de-territorialising, offering potential for learning that are very unlike the current mode of schooling. In thinking about the doing of relationships and learning, these insights may offer comfort to the concerns of the staff.

7.7 Week Four - & Beyond

With so much happening in the first three weeks, in following the phone for the fourth week, I feel a little guilty, or maybe underwhelmed, or maybe remiss in my observations or maybe more. It feels as I start to write this section, that there is not much left to say and I am not sure there is much to say because the whole week felt very much like business as usual. The young people and adults were preoccupied and busy with the task at hand – that is to raise money and support their charities. It was functional. The phones were part of this entangled function as depicted here in the exchange that happened on their final day together.

"Me: Morning, Susanna's phone is not working so she has asked me to remind you to be at The [place] for 12. Be on time please?

YP1: Alright x

YP2: Ou I was supposed to be asleep until 11 why am I up at this time? 🙃

YP 3: Everyone please remember if you're bringing stuff for the sensory corner

YP4: [Meme or Gif]

YP5: wait is anybody putting glitter on their face

YP5: and keeley said she's going to be abit late because her mum is the only one who can give her a lift and she's in [other town] this morning

YP6: Remember ncs tips

YP6: Tops

YP1: Shit

YP7: I didn't get one cause I didn't go to that thing

YP1: I'm not wearing my top

YP7: I'll be wearing big g

YP6: You are wearing it Pey

YP1: 😂😂😂😂

YP4: I'm not I list line x

YP1: We are here

YP8: [Meme or Gif]

YP3: How are we taking our stuff back home? I brought a lot of stuff and I'm gonna have to walk to the bus station with it without anything to hold it"

The messages are co-ordinating, checking-in and chatty reflecting their supportive relationships and the learning that they have undertaken together; both practical e.g. project management such as the logistics over lifts, and social e.g. reminder of expectations such as being on time and clothes. In some ways following the phone is analogous to their trajectories as teams both in terms of the relationships and the

accompanying learning. These messages above are from Team 1, the team that struggled in the first week to find a positive potential trajectory. The first week both the team and the phones were sites of potential conflict but by the end of the fourth week the group is doing what it is supposed to be doing, fulfilling the social action requirements successfully. The phone has become a space for facilitating this success. Within these trajectories, binary notions of professional/friend, young person/adult and teacher/learner have become blurred whilst the phone has been both in and out of the programme – excluded and included.

However, the phone and its connection spaces continued past the programme which I only became aware of when I printed the WhatsApp conversations to read. The last dated messages appear in the following September and it seems there was some activity on another chat in which group admin was taking place in October. The phone and WhatsApp for some young people were an important connection space. But it is this that has left me wondering, what happened to their friendships, did they continue elsewhere, have they continued to support each other? This feels particularly poignant for me in terms of certain young people who expressed in their face-to-face conversations with me how this had been the first time they had made such good friends. I hope the spaces offered by the phones continued those important relationship trajectories. However just as phones offer connections, they also allow people to be kept at arm's length. Phones make it easier to either give tokenistic or infrequent answers or to do 'ghosting' - simply never replying to another person or blocking or unfriending them. There are so many modes of engagement on social media but in reality you only maintain contact with those that you really want to in whatever social space you choose. As Turkle (2017) concludes;

"We defend connectivity as a way to be close even as we effectively hide from each other" (p.281)

I hope that the space offered by the phone continues to connect the young people together in whatever ways that suit them, so that the relationships keep evolving and they remember their learnings.

7.8 Conclusion

As I mentioned with my own experience, how to think and include phones in learning environments has been a sympoietic learning relationship for me. Following the phone opened up the complexities and multiplicities of doing relationships and the learning that emerges from this. The articulation of what comes to matter in the entanglements, I observed, that the 'becoming with' of bodies (Barad, 2007; Haraway, 2016) created different trajectories for the phones and the learning and relationships, and in doing so problematised the adherence or need for binary classifications that haunt education (Strom *et al.*, 2018) - teacher/student, adult/young person, good/bad. Phones, as part of the entanglements that have emerged in learning environments, have previously been labelled with these unhelpful dichotomous distinctions.

This juxtaposition of attitudes to the phone is present in NCS both seen as a space to be policed, to be dismissed, and yet as a space to utilise when convenient. What I observed was the push and pull of the phone for all participants – adults or young people, acting as both a barrier and facilitator of relationships and learning. Phones and the social media spaces are both/and not either/or and by looking at what is done in different spaces (Gee 2004), they offer an insight into relationships and learning. The human relationship with technology is often characterised as detrimental to human, especially young people's, development whilst we simultaneously embrace the opportunities technology offers. Just like noise, technology is ubiquitous in our daily lives and even more so in the post-Covid era, in which for periods of time many relationships were conducted solely online. Yet our (education/youthwork/social work etc) patterns of practice with phones are based on the reactions to the earlier emergence of phones and the differences they offered at that point, not what they do now.

The provocation of this chapter is to recognise how phones are implicated in the doing of our lives. By recognising the vibrancy of phones and being curious as to what is being 'done' with, by and around phones; it is apparent that teaching and learning becomes a shared responsibility amongst all involved. Whilst phones can be a site of contention between staff and young people, they can also opportunities for building and strengthening relationships both as passive and active agents in different entanglements. For adults, the question arises as to what is the impact of our instinctive measures to govern the mobile phone usage at different times? As an example of seeing the

environment in all its materiality, how can this help both staff and young people embrace places of learning that feel less like school and more like an inclusive educational space? Othering phones is not practical or always beneficial instead learning environments that recognise the agentic capacity of the phone and harnesses its material vitality may open up a dynamic praxis of pedagogy.

Chapter Eight: Across Time and Space

"Tune your television to any channel it doesn't receive and about 1 percent of the dancing static you see is accounted for by this ancient remnant of the Big Bang. The next time you complain that there is nothing on, remember that you can always watch the birth of the universe" (Bryson, 2003, p.31).

8.1 Introduction

As a Bill Bryson fan, this quote is illustrative of his writing: informative, witty and written with a perspective that often provokes a different way of looking at the seemingly mundane. What is particularly pertinent about this quote is that the assemblage of watching television is not just constructed by the person and the television but by so much more, including traces of the past that hold remnants of the Big Bang. Time and space are interwoven into the assemblage; it co-constructs the moment. This is awe-inspiring to consider in such a mundane human activity. It is to time and space that I turn to help bring this discussion chapter together.

This thesis has explored how a posthuman approach might give different understandings as to how relationships are done in NCS as a non-formal, community-based programme. My overarching research question and sub-questions are:

How are relationships 'done' in the context of non-formal, community-based programmes like NCS?

c) *What factors are implicated in the practice of 'doing' in learning relationships in this context?*

d) *How does the assemblage of factors generate learning for young people and staff in this context?*

In answering these questions, I have paid particular attention to how specific more-than or other-than-human encounters illuminate how human relationships are 'done'. Relationships are not just between humans. Instead, being situated firmly in the world, the other-than-human features of a chair, the noise and mobiles phones, are found to be affective and affected in the sympoietic movement of the relationships. They are implicated as agentic in the practice of 'doing' the relationships. Agency is not something humans generate from within themselves; it is not about power held within

individuals or institutions. Instead, by following the 'things', it is possible to see agency as dispersed in the event, a feature of the intra-action (Barad, 2007; Braidotti, 2019b) that influenced the possibilities of what was being done. Similarly, the various entanglements generated learning for both the young people **and** the adults on the programme. Sometimes this was a practical skill that was mediated by the use of the thing, for example the phone; at other times it was about learning to do relationships themselves as seen with the chair incident. The findings are an empirical study of how learning emerges as a 'collective' (Mazzei and Jackson, 2018, p.171) of which the chair, noise or phone were just one affective participant in each assemblage.

For this chapter, I aim to bring these findings together, to move from identified material aspects of the context to the assemblage as a whole. Through paying attention to the components/concepts of time and space to discuss what this means for the relationships and learning across the programme, it is apparent that time and space are implicated in different ways – they both situate the relationships and affect the relationships. Whilst I have written more directly about conceptions of space in the literature review, I have been less explicit about time and yet is has been woven throughout the study. In thinking about time and space, I am recognising once more the dynamism of the world and that time and space come to be known through our encounters (Barad, 2007; Rovelli, 2019) and give coherence to our relationships. I will use the concept of time and space inherent in the programme to structure this discussion. This will involve a brief reminder about the different contexts as I write but the details of the whole programme, including the make-up of each week, can be viewed in Chapter 2.

8.2 Week One

Within an hour of the whole cohort meeting each other for the first time, the young people and the staff were on buses and travelling away from home. In terms of how we typically think about spaces, it was a physical experience of moving from one space (or location) to another. It was also mediated by another space, that of the bus. The start and finish locations change as a result of being aboard the bus space. For some of the young people, it was the first time they had left their homes, families and friends. And for the majority of the cohort, including for most of the adults, it was a journey with an unknown destination. Within that bus space, a number of affective possibilities are contained within the assemblage, and it is the movement and/or agency of these

potentials that are implicated in the first steps of building relationships. The instigation of the Disney songs sing-a-long was just one of the possibilities that emerged from these.

The young people had recently finished school, a place that they knew, that they had learned to navigate, in ways that made sense for them. In addition, outside of school, whether home was a comfortable space or not for each person, home was/is a familiar place. Familiarity was embedded in their day to day lives. Therefore, as I wrote in Chapter 6, the bus ride was a physical experience of leaving familiarity behind and encountering the unfamiliar. This unfamiliarity increased when they got to the residential centre. The first week took place in Scotland at an outdoor education centre. The view from the top of the hill went on for miles, an endless landscape of rolling hills. The cohort had moved from an urban environment with its familiar and defined public spaces to an environment with less identifiable boundaries.

However, although space felt unbounded all around, their space together felt much smaller. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987) invite us to wonder, spaces are not defined by how we enter and exit physical boundaries. What do I/they mean by this? Despite the openness and beauty of the place, it is strange. It was strange as we had never been there before. Being on board a bus makes tracking the location very difficult. If for some reason one wanted to leave the residential site and make one's way home, what would one do? The straightforward method would be to return to the main road. This would then require a decision about which direction to turn and what means of transport would be available from there. Without a vehicle, the only option is to hitchhike but that comes with its associated dangers. The ability to move freely becomes much more difficult and in doing so, constructs a much smaller space for habitation. How we move in a space is partly constituted by the place as "Places pose in particular form the question of our living together." (Massey, 2005, p.151). This has implications for doing relationships and affects learning.

When one leaves the familiarity of an environment, one leaves a sense of security. The sense of familiarity is affective in co-constituting spaces. As was seen with the phones, initially this insecurity could be alleviated by maintaining connections through social media. However, once on board the bus and particularly, once at the outdoor venue, the utility of the phones to provide opportunities for connectedness was diminished. This

potentially leaves the individual alone. Evolutionary and social psychology research suggests that it is the connectedness with others that can guard against uncertain environments and allow individuals to flourish (Maslow, 1943; Kenrick and Trost, 2004). In a different place, one has to focus on the here and now rather than on the history one has with others. In this situation, there was need to depend on others and a reciprocal requirement to be dependable for others; in other words, an interdependence. Perhaps this could be considered as the need for achieving 'psychological safety', being able to be authentic in supportive and reciprocal relationships (Newman, Donohue and Eva, 2017). From a posthuman perspective, whilst the maintenance of existing relationships is made difficult by the physical space, the building of new relationships can be implicated in constructing a space that feels safe and comfortable for the individual. The space is not just physical: it is co-constituted as part of 'doing'. For example, the value of the song and dance sessions were in being instrumental to co-constituting a safe space by inhabiting and changing the physical context to a space that was conducive to allowing the group to bond and achieve together.

Song and dance brought people together, as was so eloquently put by Emma when talking about her team; but they were not the only things that brought them closer together. In navigating the environment, they had to learn new habits and routines, new or different ways of doing things together, in order to function. In the absence of connections to the 'outside' world, the world on the residential became about each other. In the course of the everyday, dependence or interdependence was fostered. Interdependence is the outcome of members of the group doing things that affect others (Huston and Robins, 1982). For example, they took turns to make lunches or prepare breakfast for each other; each group took turns to clean up after each other and each cabin was responsible for keeping the space clean and tidy. They undertook activities that challenged, exhilarated or frightened them. They did these activities cheering for each other and/or by reassuring each other, as can be heard in the noise chapter. An alternative perspective on the interdependence is that they established a space for themselves as a group. All the physical environments became spaces they inhabited together and in doing so, they constructed the space to be welcoming, nurturing and comforting. They were focused on each other in the moment and in doing so they were learning to be with each other. I have used 'they' purposefully throughout this paragraph as it involved everyone: there was no distinction between staff, young people

or me; we all had a role to play. The tasks undertaken brought them physically and psychologically closer, creating proximity to each other. Key to this proximity was not only the spaces they moved in but the time they had to develop this. Relationships are investments in others and this takes time to do (Dunbar, 2018); so with each task being allocated a time, there was capacity to invest in each other.

It would be disingenuous to say that there wasn't disagreement or reluctance in this first week. A memory that stays with me is of a young person called Peyton. On the very first night, we were all required to make our beds up using the bedsheets provided. For some, this was the first time they had done this task and Peyton was one of those. He asked me to teach him how to do this. I demonstrated what to do and then stripped the bed again so he could practise doing it under my guidance. He complained very loudly and humorously about it, making me laugh but it was clear he was not happy about doing it. However, as he learned to do the task, he shared with me that he was not required to do anything at home. His mother did everything for him and he was perfectly happy with this; he recognised what a privileged position this was. The first morning of the second week, as can be heard in the soundscape, he asked about whether the venue had a spa and whether he could use it. This followed other comments about how he would have preferred to stay in a hotel and not have had to do the chores required of them. The members of his group frequently laughed with him while also gently teasing him about his lazy attitude. Even within these exchanges, it was apparent how the learning was emerging as part of the assemblage. He learned the task and took a step closer to independence; if we had been in a different space such as a hotel, this would not have happened. Similarly, he and the other members of the team learned about how different people see the world, how different experiences influence different actions. They were learning about relationships.

In using the time and space features built into the programme, it could be argued that the context of this first week, away from home with time focused on being together as a team, was conducive to establishing the success of one of the intended aims of NCS, that of social cohesion. In particular, the young people and staff were building connections with new people, reflecting on these new experiences and experiencing immense challenges, which make up three of the five core components of the programme. However, my concern in this study moves thinking beyond defined outcomes as end points, to thinking about relationships and how they might generate a

ripple of ongoing outcomes – intended or unintended. In just saying that they achieved cohesion and built relationships because they had time to be with each other in a different space, does not do justice to what was done within those spaces. The group, all of them, learned to build something together and individually, as they found ways to develop their relationships with each other.

The materiality of the space, the rural location away from home, opened up possibilities for the unfamiliar to be affective, and in doing so, the staff and young people created something together from the entanglement: they created a 'commons', a space which was theirs and one that they learned to share with each other (Linn, 2007) where change was possible (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). The space was not inert; rather, it moved with them in the form of memories and friendships, the traces being carried into a future point, moving as it affected in different ways. Pertinent to this movement is that no-one else will quite understand the experience; no-one else can quite enter the space in the same way. I have attempted to convey this, to give a sense of the space and time; but I know that this will have been different for each one of us.

8.3 Week Two

The second week started well. The site we were staying on for the week was typically used during the academic year as student accommodation. This meant the accommodation consisted of flats in which everyone had their own bedroom and an en suite. Unlike the first week, there was personal space that each individual could make comfortable (or not) to their own liking. On the first morning when everyone turned up once more with their suitcases, there was a lovely little hum of people really glad to see each other. As can be seen in the Noise chapter when they were helping each other to learn how to do press-ups, there was immediately a sense of ease with one another. This moment happened within ten minutes of them all coming back together after the weekend. Unlike the first week, there was a sense of familiarity in that not only did they now 'know' each other but the site they were on was in their hometown. Most of the group had visited the site at least once through the 'Warm Up' events that took place prior to the programme. When I chatted to people, they were all aware of the venue as it is often hired by community members for celebrations and events. In addition, relationships were established: the young people knew the staff and the staff knew the

young people, or so went the basic assumption of where their relationships were. Furthermore, there was a positive history to their relationships.

The history of the first week had left positive traces and the group was primed for a good future. However, as the chair chapter demonstrated, the way the relationships evolved during the second week was much messier and more haphazard than anticipated. This would appear to contradict the seemingly reasonable expectation of continued success. However, thinking through the lens of rhizomes in a posthuman approach, this linear expectation for relationships is challenged (Cumming, 2015). Indeed, this was borne out as what was experienced was not just messier but more volatile in the 'doing', so many more different trajectories than a simple straight line. The material-discursive arrangements of the second week were very different to the first week and this was implicated in how the week progressed.

A key feature that opened up difference in the 'doing' was the space created by the venue. Whilst in the first week, the rural location and lack of phone/Wi-Fi had shrunk the space, in the second week, the space expanded, affecting relationships. The location of the second week residential brought them closer to other people outside the cohort. The familiarity with the venue was also supported by the comfort provided by the lack of distance from home and other friends. And many of the activities happened as a whole group; there was less time doing activities as individual teams. In this new venue, the space had become looser, boundaries flexed more. Even though it was a residential away from home, the proximity to the town expanded the space available to the young people. For instance, whereas in the first week, getting home without support would have been very challenging, this location meant that home was just a taxi/car ride away. And getting hold of the taxi/car was very simple, as now there was a phone signal and freely available Wi-Fi. The connections to home, family and friends were easily facilitated and so the need to depend on others within the cohort was not quite as strong or urgent. As the pizza delivery event demonstrated (Chapter 7), relationships with each other had become less necessary.

Not only had the space grown more elastic but time also acquired a different quality. It took just 20 mins to get into the centre of the town from where we were. This worked both ways as access by the outside world to the group was also easier. For example, there were a few instances of young people leaving the programme for a few hours to

attend a medical appointment or attend a family event, further fragmenting the cohesion of the first week. Space and time had coalesced as an affect that at least gave the appearance or a sense of not needing each other quite so much. Whereas the first week, they had very much depended on each other for familiarity and security, during this second week, the demand was not quite so urgent or immediate. That is not say the relationships became defined by independence; just that the intense connectedness of the first week was not paramount. From a psychological perspective this is perhaps indicative of the weakened desire or intrinsic motivation to connect so deeply with others in the team (Deci and Ryan, 2000) because other support was just a moment away. An alternate view is that identity is bound within the assemblage and that subjectivity is a collective praxis positioned in space and time (Barad, 2019; Braidotti, 2019b). In thinking about the relationships defining that space and time, the space was much more diffused, there were less opportunities for doing the little things together such as singing and dancing. The shimmer that had linked and knotted them together as a group was now less tight, more dispersed, particularly during the first few days of this second week. The encounters with the 'vibrations of brilliance' were more tenuous (Malone *et al*., 2020) and instead, there was a sense of relationships fracturing within the entanglement.

Fracturing relationships beget conflict and conflict did indeed become more frequent, both within and between each of the groupings of the young people and staff. Whilst they perhaps were less dependent on each other, they did still have a familiar history as a group. Familiarity with each other is not always a positive affect. Tensions can rise with increased familiarity (Rockett and Okhuysen, 2002). For instance, within the chair drama (Chapter 5), there are hints of tension related to Raheem and his personal relationships with women: he was depicted as the subject of interest for more than one female. This was not an exaggeration as he was understood to be 'going with' (parlance for maybe dating but not exclusivity) with at least three potential girlfriends. With the heat and lethargy that hung heavily over the group and without room to move or breathe, the group space had become too close for some of the young people. There was almost an over-familiarisation with each other.

During this week, several young people were told that if their behaviour did not improve, they would be sent home. This did not happen in the first week in quite the same way; instead, it was couched as the young person not being allowed to return for

the second week. Was the group's behaviour better or worse the second week? I don't think it is possible to say but it is a manifestation of relationships that were more troubled. The 'doing' had become bumpier and the proximity of home meant that real exclusion from the programme was possible. I should note that there was only one young person who was excluded and therefore not invited to come back and this was after both residentials had been completed. In addition, there were examples of young people saying that they wanted to go home, most notably when Saffron, after the argument over the chair (Chapter 5), talked about, and actually started to pack her belongings. Although she did not leave, it did allow her time and attention from her Team Leader and led to another staff member working with her for the rest of the day, a connection with the staff that, as she said later, she had been missing that week. To her and many of the young people, the staff had also seemed "different" that week.

When young people are asked about how they see their relationships with professionals they are involved with, they often have difficulty articulating this (Bernstein-Yamashiro and Noam, 2013). Alternatively, they cast the professional in a range of supportive roles e.g. friend, mentor, support, depending on the contextual situation (Walker, 2005). As I have argued, context is affective. In this study, the combination of changing spaces and changing format facilitated a change in roles that the staff had to undertake. The staff **were** different in the second week, they had to be, due to the nature of the programme. For example, there was a requirement that the staff would deliver more activities and they had to take even more responsibility with regards to institutional requirements such as health and safety. They had less time to spend just 'being' with their group and often when they were with the team, it was in a different guise. After the closeness of the first week, in which everyone did everything together, the second week served to put a little distance between the staff and young people, both physically and psychologically. Space was opened by the different expectations of roles: the staff appeared more as 'teachers' and the young people more as 'taught'. The rhythm and habits that they had engendered in the first week had faltered. Neither the young people nor the staff were quite as 'relatable' for each other.

In the first week, I wrote of whether 'being relatable' was linked to age. I was fairly convinced that my age was just a distance too far to bridge. However, age does put us into separate categories that are often associated with power and identity differentials (Kallio and Thomas, 2019) and increased distance. But in this week, the week during

which I became more ‘relatable’, it was not age: it was about the power differential inherent in the spaces each person was positioned in. The staff were more distanced due to the requirements of the role and I was closer to the young people due to the fact I could just listen (that was my role as researcher). We were each ‘relationally aged’; in other words, relations shaped our perceptions of each other and not the actual years of our age. Age does not disappear but is moderated by relationship. The relationships differed and as explored in the chair chapter (Chapter 5), the violation of expectations that occurred was in part due to fragmented spaces of habitation occupied by the different bodies, resulting in a fractured relationship.

It is not only the diffusion of a perceived close space that is an issue: there is also a temporal aspect to this. The press-ups example (Chapter 6) shows a comfortableness to the relationship as they started the second week but maybe this sense of security and comfort was an extension from the first week, which became fragile in a new time and space. In a typical understanding of causality, it is assumed that repeating some action will have the same result. In this case, despite assumptions about it being the same, it was not. This is in line with a posthuman approach which suggests that no moment is ever exactly the same and so no action can ever be repeated in the same way with the same results. The time and space we inhabit are always a space-time that is specific to that moment of measurement, so actions will have different effects because of the different affective entanglements. Therefore, causality is much less helpful for human-to-human relationships but that does not mean it is necessarily completely uncertain or unpredictable. Rather, it is helpful to think about what follows as indeterminate. As Barad explains, “Each bit of matter, each moment of spacetimemattering, is shot through with an infinite set of im/possibilities for materially reconfiguring worlds and pastfuturespresents” (Barad, 2019, p.543). That is, a practice enacted in the moment is infused with what has come before and holds future potentials that are either possible or not possible. This means staying alert to the moment, to the here and now, as well as how it may be now different to the past. To think about what is most affective/effective will help in including and excluding potentials for the future. This is a different way of thinking and practising as it requires staying alert to the present, contrasting it with the past and noting its potential effect on the future.

The management of phones is a good example of this, as explored in Chapter 7. In the first week, the entanglement that included rurality and no Wi-Fi meant that there was

very little to manage; the phones were affected rather than affective. When there were circumstances that required a staff intervention, the responses varied, thereby providing inconsistency for the young people and the staff. This was an issue that Angie attempted to address several times in the first week, during the staff meeting, to emphasise the importance of consistent boundaries. This involved every staff member having the same expectations on behaviour and enforcing these in a coherent, fair and consistent way. Angie particularly reminded the staff about this with regards to the phones, so that they would not be a problem in the following week. Angie showed an awareness that the phones were holding time, were holding the moment when they would become more affective within the phenomena. Angie was an experienced staff member; this was her third time as a Cohort Leader and she had been a Team Leader before that. She was trying to use her experience to help the team manage the second week. However, as she reflected with me, it felt like nobody paid attention to her words. This reflection was acknowledged by some members of staff in the second and third weeks. Part of the issue was that they didn't follow Angie's lead in the way she role modelled the handling of the phones, at least not straight away. The staff in the second week started off by treating the use of phones as if it was the first week, where being told to put the phone away was easy to do because of its reduced affective capacity. Their first week approach was not as successful on the first day of the second week, which contributed to increased tensions. However, being alert to the moment, either in the first week, in more consciously understanding what Angie was trying to instil, or in the second week, in thinking about what the phone could do for the young person, may have helped the staff to think about different approaches to take. As Carpenter and Mojab (2008) identified, the gap in knowing and doing is not between research and practice but between practice and praxis. That is, learning is in the re-orientation of action within the negotiating of relationships always afresh.

As I look back on these events, it appears that the learning could only have happened in this way; it feels pre-determined. There is a danger of falling into the determinism 'trap', whereby behaviours can be predicted or a cause found. Instead, by paying attention to what was done, the experience helped the staff to learn, to reflect and put into context, Angie's advice. One of the implications for learning is that within the entanglement of the past, present and future – the spacetimematterings (Barad, 2019) – lies the potential to build on previous iterations and open up possibilities for change.

Learning happens in the becoming, in the sympoiesis of the material-discursive intra-action. Drawing on the premise of posthumanism as a hopeful endeavour or thinking about 'staying with the trouble' (Haraway, 2016, p.3), is an exciting position to acknowledge as an educator, as it means potential is always present.

It would be careless of me to define the week as one full of conflict. In fact, the week finished with a sense of euphoria. The activities on the Thursday involved a scavenger hunt around the town and then a disco. It meant that for most of the day, the individual teams were together again, without other distractions. It became a chance to remember all they had done in order to get to where they had arrived. The second week seemed to queer notions of temporality alongside the changing spaces constructed and inhabited. I spent the day with the now infamous Team 1 and within minutes of getting on the coach that took us into the town centre, the singing started – Ariana Grande again. The 'shimmer' became agentic; it had a contained space in which to leave its traces. This meant that when all the groups came back as a cohort, the spaces had once more shrunk for all of them: they were close again. The assumption that relationships were established and therefore, that the week would be fairly straightforward, was tested throughout the week as the group negotiated the new entanglement. There were a number of different affects that were pertinent to how the relationships developed but ultimately, it was in the remembering of what came before that the group finished on a high together. Listening to the soundscape of the whole cohort singing 'Wonderwall' sounds like a testament to the 'commons' they were part of.

8.4 Week Three

Another week, another change of venue and another change of programme. The venue was a local sixth form college in the centre of the town. This was a modern building but with the hall marks of being a formal education site. There were classrooms, entry and exit systems, rules that governed movement, and arrival and finish times. As a physical space, it was newly encountered but as an educational space, the practices, routines and habits felt familiar. Whilst the cohort came together briefly first thing in the morning and at the end of the day, for the remainder of the day they were focused on their team task. There was a classroom base for each team, all on the same floor and only accessible to the cohort. The tasks were all different depending on the charity or

community group with whom they were partnered. This meant that the teams were very much their own unit, not part of a bigger cohort.

In this week, understanding ideas around space as being both elastic and contingent on time and on activity (Pink, 2015) was helpful in considering how to do both relationships and learning. This was illustrated by the places they inhabited, including online, as seen with the use of WhatsApp (Chapter 7). The logistical reality that they were no longer together as a team day and night, meant that at the end of each day, the space of the group would expand/diffuse as they went home. Similarly, when on site, they were not all together for the entire day. For the Social Action project, they were assigned different roles and different tasks which meant that some of them might be in the computer room, others would be making phone calls within the corridor spaces or in the classroom and still others might be out in the town centre getting sponsorship and support. With the contextual factors changing, the 'contact zone' for learning changes too (Taylor, Blaise and Giugni, 2013) and again offers different opportunities for learning. The space of the group was flexible and pliable, constructed by the needs of the Social Action task and what they did within these permutations meant that different learnings emerged.

However, in order to facilitate communication and support, they needed a space where they could all be, without interference from others. To achieve this, they extended the 'commons' space online by connecting through the WhatsApp group. As the phone chapter (Chapter 7) demonstrates, the different groups used WhatsApp at all times of the day to talk to each other: even when they were at home, they sought each other out. In addition, the governance of this space was a remarkable step-change from the suspicion and controlled nature of the phones in weeks one and two. In moving to this space, the staff and young people were trusting each other to use the online space as just another part of their 'commons', with the same expectations and engagements present in the offline world. It is through understanding the capacity and possibility of all entities within an entanglement, whether human or not, that insights for other types of education spaces can be gained. This study has shown that utilising spaces in different ways can add to the learning, not detract.

The learning about each other that many young people remarked upon, was helpful in facilitating the functional responsibility that they had to and for each other during this

third week. As described in the previous paragraphs, the group would be in different places depending on the task they were undertaking. The types of tasks could range from putting together a project plan to talking on the phone to business owners. For both the staff and young people, it was again a week in which many of them were learning together but the nature of the tasks meant the practical skills learning looked different for each of them. For example, the person responsible for fundraising might be using a phone (their first experience of engaging in talking on a phone with a stranger) whilst the marketing person might be assembling a PowerPoint for the first time. They had to depend on each other and trust that everyone was fulfilling their roles. Each person had to be self-directive, independent and accountable. In this way, relationships were becoming interdependent again; the young people were learning how to contribute to a team in order to achieve success together. Whatever the means for how they got here whether it was the team songs or 'banter', by week three they were familiar with each other. This familiarity or what they had learned about their own and the others' individual strengths, were factors in how roles got assigned, including the co-project leader roles. That is, their previous experiences together allowed sense and meaning making with each other that were used for later experiences (Rogers, 2008). Temporality is entwined with the nature of learning. There is always a future aspect to learning. A less explored avenue is how the past is also bound with the learning, how the past impacts the here and now and what that means for the future.

What is further evident from week three is that each change in assemblage meant a further adaptation for the staff: the Team Leaders and Assistant Team Leaders had to find a new way of being once more with the group. They had to let go and (re)establish new ways of being, new habits and practices to support the young people, that both built on what happened previously and yet changed what was happening now. Within these fluid contexts, the staff were always having to respond. They needed to have a praxis that could "actualise new capacities, solidarities and modes of cohabitation" (Pedwell, 2021, p.167). For example, in contrast to week two where they had to be more 'teachery' (that is, they were felt by the young people to be more directive, more distant), week three required difference. The space being created of the functioning team now needed an alternate approach. The staff had to be more hands-off and yet still guide and support the group. With the group now engaging in different tasks, a useful conception of what is happening may be to think of learning as social practice, that is,

practices that happen in specific contexts with specific people. Within these contexts, the staff are fulfilling roles as mediators in the learning practices that the young people are engaging in. However, I would like to extend this notion by also thinking about the staff and their learning. Their roles are not just about mediating learning but also encompass their own learning. Relationships give insights into others and in doing so, staff could recognise and respond to the needs of the young people (Gosling, 2009). Through this action, they learn from the young person; their development is aligned to the development of the young person, thereby troubling the binaries associated with labels such as teacher/student, a perspective historically associated with education philosophers such as Laurence Stenhouse (Elliott, 2001).

8.5 Week Four

In thinking about week four, it appears not quite as exciting as the others and generally, just a little quieter. I know though that this perception is based on my own encounter with the week and where I was in my fieldwork experience. It is also why it is not referred to as much as other weeks within this study. The spaces I had to inhabit as I followed the teams were too scattered, too nebulous. I did not have clear boundaries to keep me focused. My connections with others were too disparate and short-lived. In thinking about the relationships and learning, I don't have any particular encounters that are helpful. It is only now, with time having passed and as I write this, that I realise that my understanding of week four has come about through writing this thesis. I know my initial perceptions at the time were shallow; it is only through deeper inquiry that I see the 'brilliance' present in week four.

At this point in the programme, there was no longer a Cohort Leader; we had said goodbye to Angie on the Friday the previous week. Now the teams were all doing their own projects and so were at places in and around the local community, depending on each day's activity. Although they still had the college as a base, there was not a scheduled time for them to all come back together as a cohort. There was no longer a cohort identity and affiliations were entangled within each team's activities. By the end of the week, each team had managed to raise at least £100 for their partner charity, even when this had not been the main focus of the project. By the end of the week, they had achieved what was expected of them and they had done this together.

And this is the brilliance of the final week: whilst relationships were important to enable success, the focus was on achieving the task, which they all did. They could not have done this without their relationships and all that they had learned together over the previous three weeks. Ultimately, what each team was measured by was the fact that they saw the programme through and achieved what was required. Whilst this feels very much like a typical educational expectation, that is perhaps because it is purposefully structured that way. A key difference in my observations, as compared to formal sites of learning, is the amount of time they invested in each other. They learned and achieved because of the work they all put into the relationships to build teams evoking the dynamism of the moment, the enfolding of time that is not just about the present but involved a historicity as part of the 'becoming' together (Braidotti,2019a). Learning happened in the sympoiesis of the intra-action of all the actors, whether human or more-than-human, outside the restrictions of spatial or temporal boundaries.

8.6 What does this mean for relationships and learning?

Relationships within non-formal, community-based programmes such as NCS are not done neatly. They are messy, complex and dynamic. This study has shown that it is not just humans or human-directed activities and structure that are implicated in the 'doing'. As we come to know the world through our encounters (Barad, 2007), it is not just about understanding the environment and context. It is about considering how the material-discursive arrangements move and come together over time, how the little things matter without seeming to. This means not privileging one element over another; there is no hierarchy, just affective and affected agentic elements (Taylor, Blaise and Giugni, 2013). It is understanding this that helps identify what is implicated in the 'doing' of learning relationships. Connections within entanglements are not just physical, emotional or psychological; they are spatial and temporal. And with connections coming together they also define space and time, no matter how fleetingly.

The learning that emerges from this is not one thing; it is not formal, non-formal or informal but all of those concepts or none at all. Learning is a 'doing' that is generated by the assemblage and an assemblage is never the same. Rather, it is always at a specific spacetimemattering. Each encounter adds to the knowing of the world which can both change and confirm what is already known. And any little change in behaviour or a different response can establish new ways of doing things which accumulate for

learning. In this way it is more than a social practice, more than a community of practice: it is a practice of encounters with time and space.

Chapter Nine: Conclusion

"Everything is in a relationship with everything else! It's a bewilderingly promiscuous world view" (Hildyard, 2017, p.33).

9.1 Introduction

I started this PhD because I wanted to understand what makes the building of learning relationships between professionals and young people. With a plethora of research on how important relationships are for young people, how they lead to better outcomes and the features that make positive relationships; how can we better understand their doing? The quote above goes some way to answering this. Before I conclude this thesis, I want to share an incident that happened to me. In January 2021, I had a conversation with someone who was the headteacher for a local authority Virtual School for Looked After Children and we were talking about "trauma informed practice", a concept that has very much been the buzz phrase in the frontline world of safeguarding and educating children. Discussions of this concept invariably call for more relationship-based practice, rightly in my opinion. I made a flippant comment to the headteacher about people not being very good at relationships, despite how we all like to think that we are. She was offended by this and challenged me on such a generalised statement. I apologised and clarified what I meant by this and when I explained, she understood what I was glibly saying. I thanked her for her challenge, for in that moment, it crystallised so much of what I was trying to say in this thesis.

This chapter will draw together the crystallised thoughts alongside the findings in the thesis to reflect on my learning and learning of/for others. Firstly, I reflect on how engaging with critical posthuman concepts and approaches, has enabled me to explore relationships and learning as both a collective endeavour and a relational praxis, moving from an anthropocentric focus to one that includes the world in its vibrancy. This has been possible by engaging in the practice of posthuman research working with post-qualitative inquiry. By engaging in defamiliarization and attuning to the world in different ways, a contribution has been made to the potential of empirical posthuman research within learning environments. I then open this chapter to connections with others by offering possible future research and questions for exploration including embracing the messiness and developmental aspects of learning environments, and

learning with collective and non-human pedagogies. To bring the thesis to a close I will finish the chapter with my gratitude and the hope of doing things differently in learning environments.

9.2 Understanding relationships and learning

My view is that relationships are problematic not because we humans are not good at them but because we accept the dominant narrative of relationships being simply between humans. And whilst we recognise that previous experiences or institutional demands can influence relationships, these are still human-centric features as part of the narrative. Within this study I have shown how influential the more-than, and other-than human are in the day-to-day practice of relationships. Using a posthuman approach I have illustrated that by paying attention to the entanglement or what Donna Haraway refers to as "staying with the trouble" (2016, p.4), it is apparent that the liveliness of the world is affective in how relationships move between young people and staff. The other-than-human entities are not just inert objects that are props to be used by human actors; instead, they are implicated as agitators, facilitators and mediators within an ecological assemblage of relationships. As Haraway also writes, this movement into the future is sympoietic; the relationships evolve together with all that is present in the world, each encounter bringing something different and altering trajectories; sometimes these are big changes such as when conflict happens and sometimes this movement is more subtle, a slight change in how things are 'done'.

This sympoietic movement is where the learning happens. Each assemblage as a multiple and complex entanglement means that what and how learning emerges depends on the collective agency of transversal connections (Braidotti, 2019b). This is contrary to the notion of learning held within the individual, contrary to the view that learning is always progressive within discrete, linear timelines measured by developmental stages. Instead, learning is a relational, collective activity, even when we measure it as one individual property or achievement. Learning comes from connections that are not just physical, emotional or psychological but also temporal and spatial. Learning is not just knowing, it is being. And the connections as they coalesce fleetingly, define time and space. In this respect, it may be worthwhile to move beyond research that looks at engagement within learning environments and instead think about connections, about making, doing, hanging onto connections. This alternative perspective implies the

importance of not just trying to create a context for optimal learning but learning from the context as an agentic factor to help with optimal learning.

9.3 Posthuman Research as Practice

One of the biggest challenges for me in doing this study has been finding my way through what it means to do empirical research using a posthuman approach. As explored in the methodology chapter, this has been particularly difficult given the scarcity of doctoral examples from which to draw upon. However, I have been inspired by the work of researchers such as Hohti (2016), Dernikos (2020) and Blue (2016) who have given gentle guidance, an insight into the practice of doing research differently. I was also mindful of the cautions from academics such as Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre to not repeat the humanist trap of needing a prescribed method to investigate the world (Lather and St. Pierre, 2013; St.Pierre, 2021). I believe that in adopting some principles/modes of inquiry that may fall under the heading of Post Qualitative Inquiry, I have contributed to the growing research on how to do posthuman empirical research within learning environments. Learning from writers such as Mazzei and Jackson (2018), Million (2009), Coleman (2020) and MacLure (2013; 2021) has given me the confidence to show how working with wonder, thinking with theories, analysing affect, embodied knowledge and the movement of things, can generate new perspectives on relationships and learning.

An important first step in this endeavour was to become comfortable in being uncomfortable. As the noise chapter (Chapter 6) demonstrated, it was only in breaking my existing habits and practices that I could attune to the difference all around me. I had to de-familiarise myself from what I knew, what my dominant narrative was and think about encompassing new habits. Pedwell (2021) suggests that habits are co-constitutive of the affective context which includes individual, social, cultural and institutional ways of being. This is how hierarchies are perpetuated and privileges created at the expense of others. Therefore, for change to happen, habits have to be disrupted and new (research) habits put in their place. This is what I had to do: consciously doing the little things differently each day so that I moved away from simply ‘observing’ to ‘being’.

By using creative vehicles such as soundscapes and drama, I have attempted to have the experience resonate rather than represent (Vannini, 2015a), to move the inquiry to a practice (Barad, 2007). In opening the world for you the reader to encounter I hope that you have experienced the multiplicity and complexity of doing relationships that gives understanding as to how unnecessary it is to try and reduce the world to sameness. Instead, it is about embracing the diversity which may not appear neat but can lead to new insights that may not otherwise emerge. By recognising the vibrancy of things (Bennett, 2016), I have illustrated how the non-human can be affected and affective and what this may look/feel like will depend on the assemblage. Lather and St. Pierre (2013) ask "Where/how do voices from post-humanist humans fit into the new inquiry? Are they voices after all?" (p.630). I would answer that this study has demonstrated that there are still voices and it is possible to hear them as they emerge in the transversality of connections/relations, the posthuman subject (Braidotti, 2019b).

9.4 Future beginning?

Writing about implications of this study would imply that I am bringing this research to a close. But I am not; there is no ending and there is no beginning, I am always in the middle. I 'started' this research already entangled with it and I 'finish' in the same way. I continue to work in the young people sector and I continue to think how we, as professionals, might give better opportunities to young people to achieve their own constructed and desired outcomes.

A posthumanist perspective challenges the many binaries of adult-young person, material-human, teacher-taught, individual-environment, thinking-doing that permeate educational research. This thesis attempts to demonstrate that the promise of post-human, post-qualitative inquiry may lie in the new/alternative perspectives and insights they offer to practice education in less anthropocentric ways. In doing this, this project is a contribution to theory and methodology. In recognising that relationships are affected by more-than-human endeavours requires paying attention to the moment, to be aware of what is happening and what may be different to similar moments in the past. In most learning environments, this is not an easy task and can't possibly be enacted every single moment without becoming exhausted very quickly. So how can this be put into effect? I suggest that there are a number of different avenues of research that might help take this forward.

This study has shown that a simple change in perspective can bring knowledge that can add to the existing evidence base, not supplant it. Therefore, cross-disciplinary research using diffractive approaches might benefit educational research. Changing conceptual lenses may allow insights for different practices; for example, what might be an alternative way of thinking about 'avoiding conflict' in learning environments? Instead of 'avoiding' something, how could we think about 'building' something? Learning from indigenous cultures may offer insights. For example, Comanche tribes see social harmony as a doing not an outcome; everyone must actively work towards this and enact practices that help this (Harris and Wasilewski, 2004). What might this look like in our classrooms? Similarly in this study, in discussing learning, I have made many references to the discipline of adult education. Despite the perspective that adults and children learn in different ways (Papen, 2012), this study questions this dichotomy, particularly as children move into their teenage years. Thus, educational research may usefully focus on the ecology of learning environments.

This thesis has problematised binaries in learning relationships, arguing that they are not always useful distinctions. Moving away from categories means paying attention to the process: how is learning happening within/across educational assemblages? It is also helpful to ask: how does the daily movement affect learning and what learning does it generate (intentionally or otherwise)? How can answers to these questions then be used to support and enable the staff in on-going efforts to recognise and assimilate learning as part of their practice.

Fundamental to this endeavour is to think about how we might carry on de-familiarising ourselves from our own safe and comfortable habits of practice. Pedwell (2021) advocates research centred on minor inquiry. How do the little 'things' or actions help facilitate change? How might we change our routines so that we can learn from the entanglement and make changes that make a difference to young people in learning environments? How might this be applied across personal, institutional and societal levels?

Finally, whilst posthuman approaches are now more common within educational research, there are still a number of areas which may benefit from deeper engagement with posthuman thinking and its implication for more formal educational environments. These include:

- Consideration of learning as a collective endeavour, not just an individual task

The dominant narrative in much education research is that learning is an individual activity. Whilst contexts have been acknowledged as influential for learning conditions (Bronfenbrenner, 1976), this has tended to take an anthropocentric focus in which cultural and institutional norms are the factors that can impede or support the transference of knowledge from one person to another. However, this thesis has challenged the linearity of this assertion. I have explored the context as a mediator and instigator of learning, recognising, that we are never not in the world. There is always materiality, physicality, bodies; there are always others – human, more-than or other-than human and there is always immanence. In exploring the more-than-human aspects of learning relationships, I have shown that the learning emerges not just from humans and that timelines are queered influencing the learning that takes place. This suggests that learning can never be individual, it is always a collective endeavour.

The potential of understanding learning as a collective practice has begun to be explored. For instance, the account of Springgay & Zaliwska (2017) in being affected and attuning to the liveliness of material within an art performance or the 'bag-lady collective' (Latto et al, 2022, p.153) who came together to make sense of bodies and knowledges through digital means during the pandemic. These forays into understanding the collective nature of learning have demonstrated what practice might look like. These insights about the playfulness, vibrancy of the world can be put to use in thinking about what collective learning might look like in different circumstances particularly in formal education venues and/or with young people. What would practice look like if we moved past a purely cognitive perspective of learning (as is the impetus in UK schools at the time of writing) and embraced the collective as co-constitutive of learning and development?

- Focusing on the developmental aspect of learning, not just an emphasis on curricular (formal) activity

Alan Rogers (2014a) challenges the utility of categorising learning, identifying the futility of labels such as formal, informal, non-formal learning in thinking about learning holistically. This thesis has shown how placing boundaries around learning categories fails to recognise the fluidity and movement inherent in learning, for instance does it matter that NCS had a defined notion of citizenship? What came to matter was

the ‘doing’ of that learning, would this be any different in a school classroom? Is it less about the curriculum and more about the people, the context, the little things? What about the activities undertaken, what might look different in the classroom?

Learning is an ongoing, iterative process in which the past, present and future are all entwined. This movement in learning is not confined to discrete life stages with curriculum knowledge being the only learning that takes place. In thinking about character or citizenship education, it means thinking more about the doing through relationships, as it this context that shapes the person (Bates, 2019). The sympoetic ‘becoming’ of both learner and educator together requires understanding the developmental aspect of learning, not just what is contained in the formal curriculum. Therefore, there is a need to support educators across spaces in understanding this. There is a need to help educators and learners to navigate learning together, being mindful that both learners and educators can be both learners and educators, they develop together. This begets questions such as what would be the steps to including this in professional training, what would (need to) change in schools if developmental learning was embraced?

- Valuing the nonhuman as fellow pedagogues

There is a growing movement exploring how the more-than and other-than human may be fellow pedagogues within an education system such as we have here in the UK. Most notably this can be seen in the increasing numbers of forest schools across Europe and the US. In doing so, encounters with the world are opened as learning opportunities e.g. exploring literacies as being in relation to sticks in the forest (Harwood and Collier, 2017). An approach such as this requires the traditional ‘educator’ to be open to different possibilities. In some ways this openness, akin to becoming more playful, feels more appropriately situated in early years where there is capacity to learn from play. Indeed much research into the nonhuman as a pedagogue has emerged from the younger ages within the formal education.

This understanding is not limited to early years, and there is much to explore in how we might value the nonhuman at the Higher Education (HE) level too. For instance, Demers (2022) explores how art as inquiry is useful for trainee teachers, an inquiry that includes the materiality of the art as much as the aesthetics to think about what learning emerges. Indeed, despite the widely accepted neo-liberalisation of HE, there is still

much scope to consider how we disrupt the classroom space of academia and promote alternative pedagogies for learning. However, an area that is considerably underdeveloped, in my view, is that of pedagogy at secondary/high school level. That is how do we work alongside adolescents to learn from the world in which we are embedded? This seems like a crucial question given the increasing urgency of the global climate crisis. There is a need to no longer only value the knowledge produced within the colonial systems of education that have been transported around the world. A starting point may be to consider learning from research into adult literacies and the importance of accessing and valuing different knowledges. This thesis has demonstrated that learning is not just a human activity and neither is it always measurable in a way that suits formal education. However, all learning takes place within contexts, we are always in the world, how can we harness the nonhuman to aid in the development of us as humans and for the benefit of the world?

- Embracing the messiness and ambiguity with a 'both/and' approach rather than opting for the simplicity of 'either/or'.

The formal education system that operates in the UK today has not changed significantly over the last 200 years. It is a system predicated on control and hierarchy, a system embedded in colonial historical inheritances. A system that operates as either/or – a person is either one subject or another. As explored in this thesis, many conceptualisations of education distinguish between who is being taught and who is doing the teaching – a subject is either a teacher or a student. There are other structural instances, such as the governance and behaviour operating at each level, where either you have power or you do not, either you are in control or you are not. In this marked hierarchy, someone is in charge and others subordinate. Even with discussions of, and seemingly intent for, inclusion, anyone who does not fit the hegemonic view of a student or pupil is either managed into submission or managed out (Hodkinson, 2010; Ball & Collet-Sabé). This thesis has shown that in examination of how learning is done that the learning environments are much messier and more ambiguous. A young person can be both a delight to work with and a challenge, an adult can be both teaching and learning, the environment can both help and hinder the learning taking place, and an item such as a phone can both transform and impede learning. Understanding what this means for a learner and an educator requires further exploration in order that we might create welcoming, creative and curious spaces of learning for all.

9.5 Thank you

Finally, I know that I thanked all the staff and young people within my acknowledgements but why not include this recognition in closing this thesis? I could not have done this research without the privilege of being accepted and welcomed as part of the NCS Wave 5 cohort that went away in the summer of 2019. They all reminded me of how utterly brilliant and devastatingly tiring it is to work with young people, the immense highs that make the lows so worth it. Thank you to all you wonderful people, I will be forever grateful. However, they are not the only young people I want to express my gratitude to. My entanglement with this research started back in the 1990s when I first started working with young people, I am thankful to each and every young person; thank you for the encounters that always taught me something.

In this study, I hope I have demonstrated to the headteacher mentioned at the start of this chapter, that relationships are challenging but not just because as humans we are not very good at them. Instead, in our entanglements with the world, the agentic nature of the other-than or more-than human serves to complicate what seems like a straightforward ‘doing’. The ‘doing’ is messy but it is in this turmoil that learning is generated and this has the potential to be transformational for everyone.

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Researcher of Noise (2022, July) *Reflection* [Audio], Soundcloud. https://soundcloud.com/user-666005575-600434182/reflection/s-aaBHA28svPU?utm_source=clipboard&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=social_sharing

Researcher of Noise (2022, July) *Difference & Similarity* [Audio], Soundcloud. https://soundcloud.com/user-666005575-600434182/difference-similarity/s-3oBqbQTHKg9?utm_source=clipboard&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=social_sharing

Researcher of Noise (2022, July) *Learning* [Audio], Soundcloud. https://soundcloud.com/user-666005575-600434182/learning/s-Dvu4BBlGcPP?utm_source=clipboard&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=social_sharing

Researcher of Noise (2022, July) *Welcome* [Audio], Soundcloud. https://soundcloud.com/user-666005575-600434182/welcome/s-Nj5xe8LbotL?utm_source=clipboard&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=social_sharing

Researcher of Noise (2022, July) *Our Song* [Audio], Soundcloud. https://soundcloud.com/user-666005575-600434182/our-song/s-vwFw6rJjwlF?utm_source=clipboard&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=social_sharing

Researcher of Noise (2022, July) *Wall of Sound* [Audio], Soundcloud. https://soundcloud.com/user-666005575-600434182/wall-of-sound/s-WEhje2ySzgy?utm_source=clipboard&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=social_sharing

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Appendices

Appendix I – Data examples

Transcript 11/07/2019 at 1933

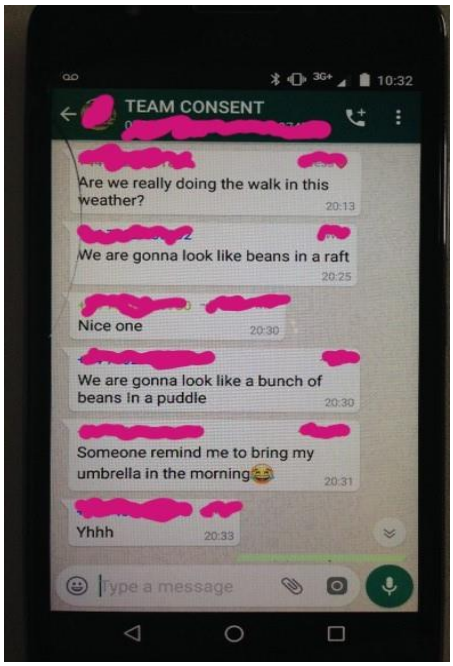
Transcribed 9 October 2020

It is evening time, I think it is a little bit of downtime. I have a short conversation with D (YP), and T (TL) joins in.

Person talking	What is said
D	You just need to always try con [can't make the word out]
Me	And then what did you say to him
D	[Pause] Aah I'm gonna miss it.. a lot
Me	Wha, What do you think you are gonna miss?
D	Just like…[calm sigh] just this
Me	Describe the scenes
D	Like, everyone's gettin along. Like we met, what four days ago
Me	Yeah
D	And everyone's just like bonding [lots of chatter in background] [pause] It's nice
Me	It is nice, it is. And so when you think back to how you were on Monday
D	I'd say (laughs) I've got better
Me	Yeah, and how did you feel on Monday? What would
D	{Talks over} When I first came and we parked right there, I was like, ooopphh oh god are we staying in a cabin? [Both laugh] But I like it cos its summat different, like if you brought me in and we was in a 'otel, I feel like, I just be umm be a bit like how I am at home, like making everyone do everything for me, like. Its now like when I go home, I'm gonna be like cook tea for my mum, I'm gonna, cleeeaannn, wash
Me	Nice
T	So if you were in a hotel would've been a different experience?

D	Yeah, definitely
T	Do you think you would've got as much out of it?
D	No, I feel like, cos at in the morning like, I feel like alls the hotel would've give me food like, just wake up when I wanna, {all laugh} and I'd like probably make try and make excuses to try and go back inside the hotel.
Me	And um, just how do you feel about the rules cos obviously the um,
D	I feel like when we first told like don't go on your phones as much, don't do this, I was a bit like, what the hell, but now I've come away from my phone I feel like when I get home I won't even be on my phone as much.
Me	[Laughs loud]
D	I feel like, if I go out like I might just leave it at 'ome and come back to you later [both laugh] which is good.
T	That's really good
Me	That's really nice. Can you just sit there, just for a moment?

WhatsApp Screenshot



An extract taken from the exported WhatsApp messages

These messages are from the staff official WhatsApp group and are taken from the first day of the second week. I have deleted phone numbers but each person is identified by a different number after the +44. For instance, +44 2 is Angie the Cohort Leader. The left hand numbers are the time the message was sent.

16:19 - +44 1: does anybody have kitchen roll? don't think we have any

16:23 - +44 2: Guys please don't let your flats buy silly things like 4 bottles of fizzy drinks!

16:24 - +44 3: we do

16:28 - +44 2: Also guys.... I know certain YP who I have had to speak to are complaining about this week already and myself, by all means let them rant but please try and support what I have said all of last week. I said I would be pulling out anyone who talks when other YP, Myself and staff are talking. If they listen to instructions I don't need to call them out in front of everyone

16:52 - +44 2: <Media omitted>

16:53 - +44 2: Please tell your flats if they asked for anything from Morrison's they need to come and get it in 5 from outside the flats x

16:58 - +44 2: Also anyone who was not present this morning when registrations this morning please can you fill in the absence form for them

17:00 - +44 7758 3: let us know when you're there x

17:00 - +44 2: 2 secs away xx

17:14 - +44 2: Welcome Maya & Danny

17:14 - 3: yous ready for food?

17:15 - +44 4: Angie said 5:45

17:16 - +44 5: You'd think a kitchen would have oven gloves? Lol

17:17 - +44 1: @6 where are you need key for store room

17:26 - +44 3: oh my bad missed that

17:44 - +44 2: Ready for first meal

17:45 - +44 2: :)

17:47 - +44 5: My flat coming now

17:47 - +44 3: will let the flats i'm covering know.

do you want them all at once or starter, main, dessert?

17:47 - +44 2: All together please

17:47 - +44 3: kk

17:47 - +44 7: Cutlery for 3 if poss I know I only said two before x

17:48 - +44 3: right

18:43 - +44 2: Staff can I have you and YP down

18:43 - +44 3: will bring them down. just getting Alina settled in

18:43 - +44 2: Need to speak to yourselves before we head up

19:21 - +44 2: Group 3 upstairs study room, break out room group 1, decking group 4, highburton group 2, main room group 5

19:23 - +44 2: Is this everyone's locations correct? Danny is looking now for packs as was told they were in packs..... wave box and flipchart paper and pens are in the wave box in the study room that I am in

19:27 - +44 2: Winners through to me at 8.30, quick break for everyone and straight through to reflection and then awards - 45 minute reflection tonight please. And then through to awards in main room. I will mark on originality, theme and making sure there are no gaps in journeys. It shouldn't be extortionate but shouldn't be scraping on a budget

19:33 - +44 8: Yup

19:33 - +44 9: 👍🏻

19:33 - +44 1: yes we're in study room - group 3

19:34 - +44 2: If anyone needs anything I'm in the study room with Danny doing budgets please ask if unsure at all c

20:25 - +44 2: Everyone please be wrapping up and sending winners through

20:26 - +44 1: where are you based? across from the study room upstairs in that room?

20:26 - +44 2: Yeah

20:26 - +44 1: sweet thanks x

20:57 - +44 2: Thanks Danny

20:57 - +44 2: Hope reflections are under way, very impressed with ALL groups so far

21:02 - +44 1: reflections been started now for group 3

21:04 - Me: All reflections have started

21:11 - +44 2: Thanks all

21:11 - 2: What time do people need until please?

21:12 - +44 6: Give us 20

21:12 - +44 2: Let’s say 20 to in main room for awards then please

21:12 - +44 1: main room? wheres that

21:13 - +44 2: Big room with the checked floor

21:13 - +44 2: Upstairs

21:13 - +44 1: ah okay cheers 😁

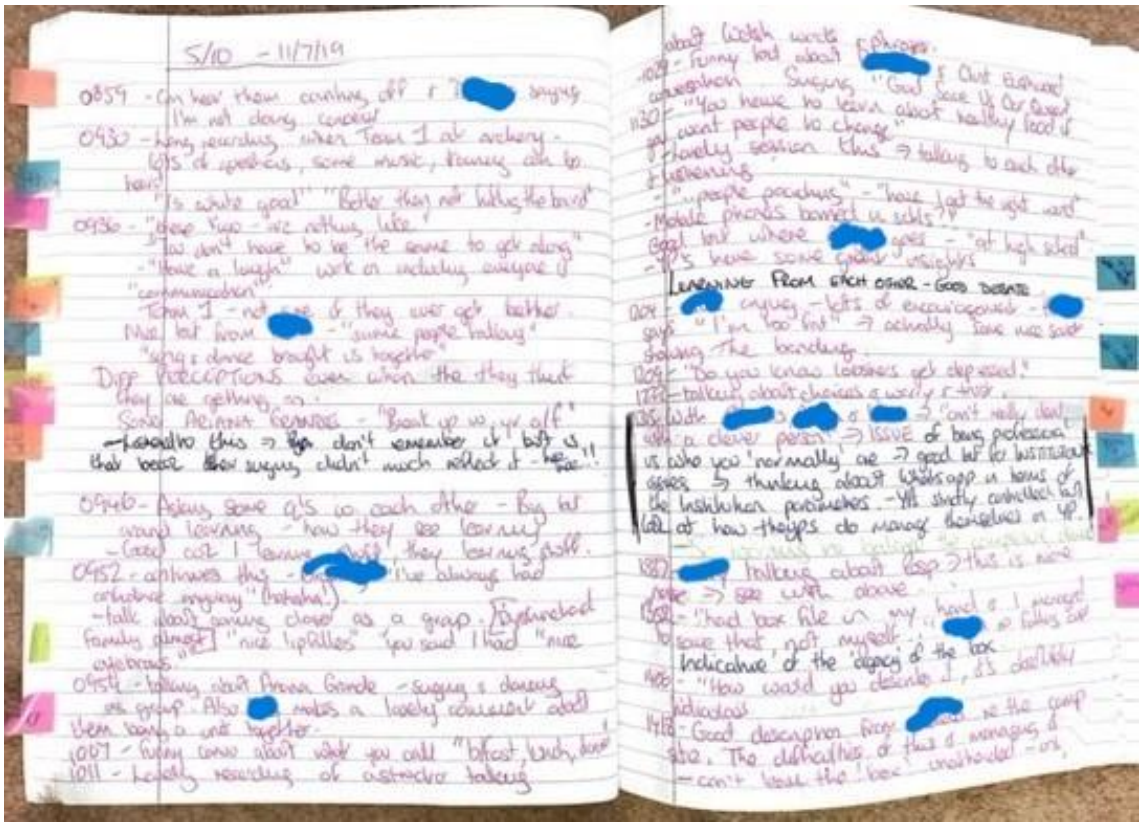
21:26 - +44 3: does anyone have a spare pillow? afra doesn’t have one

21:29 - +44 2: Everyone into the main room suite by 9.40 please, I need to speak to staff for 2 minutes before I brief the YP please so let your Young leaders group the teams quietly if possible x

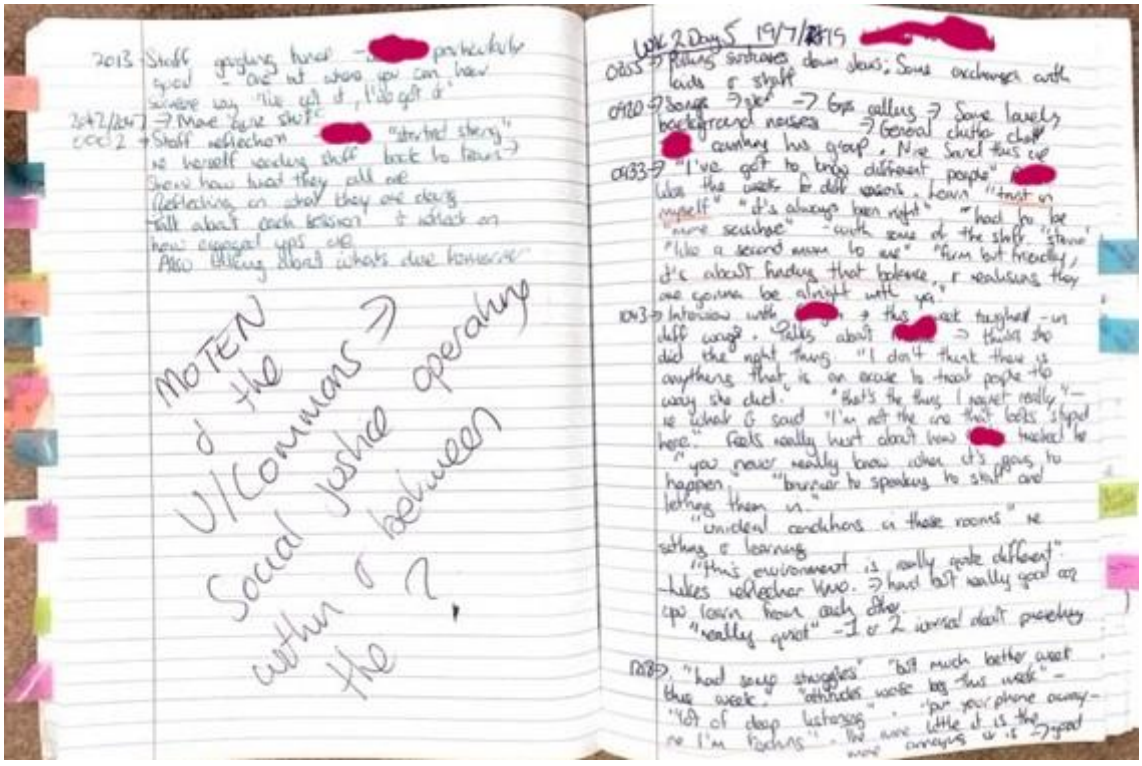
21:31 - +44 2 Sorry let’s switch to main study room acoustics are awful in main room

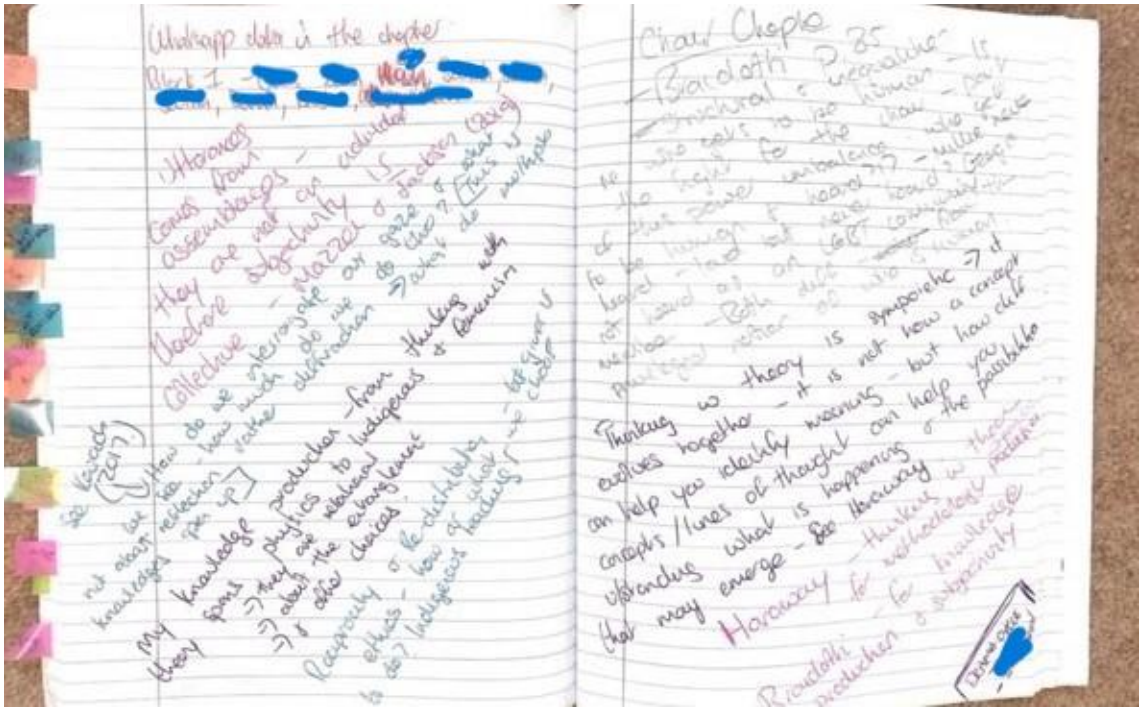
22:18 - +44 6: Has anyone seen an iphone dropped at the venue?

Appendix II – Analysis examples



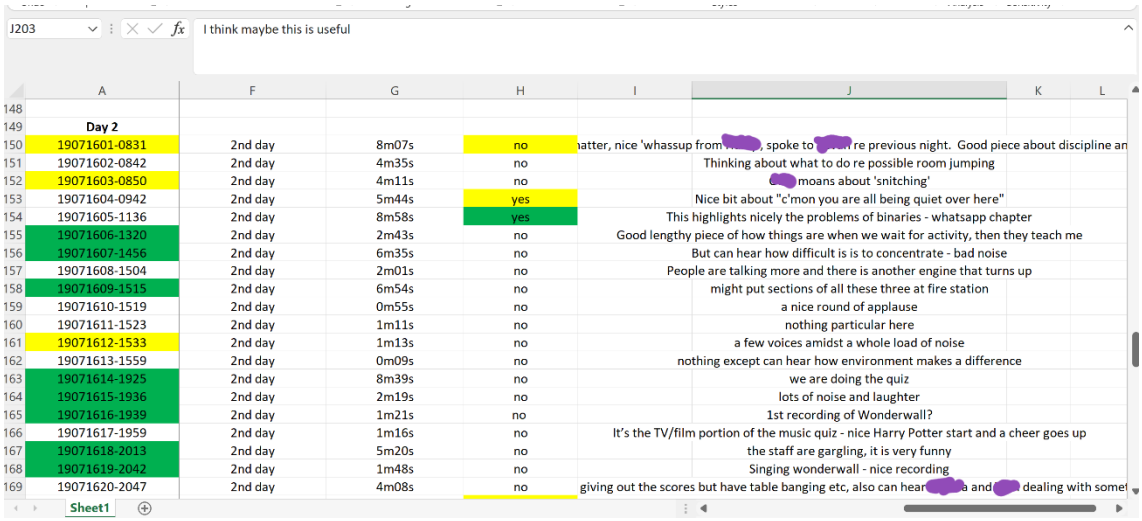
Pages from a notebook – detailing key moments from audio





Pages from a notebook – Early thoughts from analysis of Chair Chapter

Appendix III– Organising information

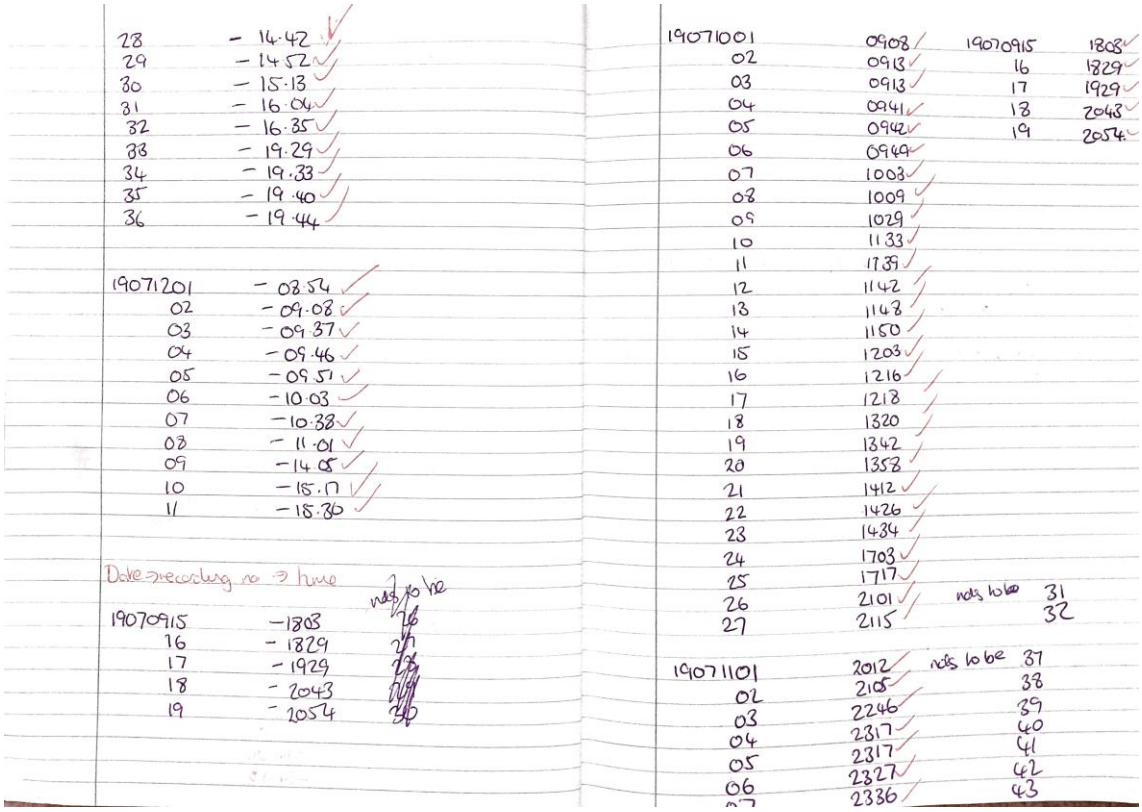


J203 | I think maybe this is useful

	A	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
148								
149	Day 2							
150	19071601-0831	2nd day	8m07s	no		atter, nice 'whassup from [redacted], spoke to [redacted] re previous night. Good piece about discipline an		
151	19071602-0842	2nd day	4m35s	no		Thinking about what to do re possible room jumping		
152	19071603-0850	2nd day	4m11s	no		[redacted] moans about 'snitching'		
153	19071604-0942	2nd day	5m44s	yes		Nice bit about "c'mon you are all being quiet over here"		
154	19071605-1136	2nd day	8m58s	yes		This highlights nicely the problems of binaries - whatsapp chapter		
155	19071606-1320	2nd day	2m43s	no		Good lengthy piece of how things are when we wait for activity, then they teach me		
156	19071607-1456	2nd day	6m35s	no		But can hear how difficult is is to concentrate - bad noise		
157	19071608-1504	2nd day	2m01s	no		People are talking more and there is another engine that turns up		
158	19071609-1515	2nd day	6m54s	no		might put sections of all these three at fire station		
159	19071610-1519	2nd day	0m55s	no		a nice round of applause		
160	19071611-1523	2nd day	1m11s	no		nothing particular here		
161	19071612-1533	2nd day	1m13s	no		a few voices amidst a whole load of noise		
162	19071613-1559	2nd day	0m09s	no		nothing except can hear how environment makes a difference		
163	19071614-1925	2nd day	8m39s	no		we are doing the quiz		
164	19071615-1936	2nd day	2m19s	no		lots of noise and laughter		
165	19071616-1939	2nd day	1m21s	no		1st recording of Wonderwall?		
166	19071617-1959	2nd day	1m16s	no		It's the TV/film portion of the music quiz - nice Harry Potter start and a cheer goes up		
167	19071618-2013	2nd day	5m20s	no		the staff are gargling, it is very funny		
168	19071619-2042	2nd day	1m48s	no		Singing wonderwall - nice recording		
169	19071620-2047	2nd day	4m08s	no		giving out the scores but have table banging etc, also can hear [redacted]a and [redacted] dealing with somet		

Sheet1

Organising the audio clips – Screenshot from the Excel spreadsheet



Organising the audio clips – Renaming and saving files