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### Original Article

# Researching children's schooling identities: Towards the development of an ethnographic methodology

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## Abstract

This paper argues that there is merit in the study of students' identity constructions as a means of understanding inequalities in schooling outcomes. However, the effectiveness of such accounts remains limited by the hiatus between the identity theories deployed in research studies and the empirical data used to illuminate such theories. The methodology by which interview protocols are used in relation to identity theories is tacit or unclear. This paper aims to address this issue by developing a methodology of identity construction for students in schools that makes explicit the links between theory, methods and data. In applying this methodology to an analysis of one longitudinal case study example, its utility is illustrated.

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## Introduction

Significant research exists on children's schooling identities and their connection with educational success (e.g. Hird, 1998 ; Gee, 2001 ; Renold, 2001 ; Youdell, 2003 ). These themes have been explored for example, in feminist critiques of schooling, the sociology of the learner, as well as the sociology of childhood. While this literature has significantly advanced understanding of the costs and consequences of particular constructions of identity for children, the ways in which theories of identity construction are related to the qualitative data used to illuminate the theories, has been little discussed. Rather, identity theorists have tended to assume an intuitive connection between theory and data, which may, in part, be attributed to the lack of a methodology for identity research in schools. This paper aims to review the challenges, advances and limitations of the identity literature, in order to start to develop a methodology for identity construction. This will be achieved through the following three aims:

1. *To consider the way identity has been treated* : In order to develop a methodology for researching children's schooling identities, this paper will first consider what identity research can tell us, and the challenges this invokes. This is followed by a discussion of the ways that identity has been theorised in educational (school based) research, through a critique of four seminal papers on the topic. Here it is necessary to scope the parameters of the best theoretical apparatus for identity research in schools, in order consider the advances as well as the limitations in the field. These papers have framed what may be considered the key axes of identity formation in school: gender, class, ethnicity and 'ability', while leaving a shortfall in the grounding of empirical data within a theoretical account of identity formation.
2. *To extricate the key components of identity construction, presented here as a model to guide research* : Analyses of these papers provides a basis for the development of a methodology, which links data to theory, in the conduct of qualitative research into children's schooling identities. This requires a justification for what are argued to be the key components involved in identity construction in school: structural forces, performance, narrative and dynamic arenas. These components draw from, but extend, the four studies presented, thus reflecting a more comprehensive methodology of identity construction. However, while this methodology carries theoretical assumptions, it is argued that these are relatively open, in that they leave it to researchers to develop richer accounts of the components involved. It is intended that this methodology can guide identity research in schools by explicitly linking theory to empirical research.
3. *To demonstrate the utility of the methodology in applying it to one case study* : The final aim in this study is to present original data from a school ethnography, within a case study discussion on the schooling identities of one pupil. This has two functions; first, to demonstrate how to operationalise the model in order to research identity in school, and second, to illustrate the value of an 'identity lens' in rendering meaningful children's school lives.

## Theorising identity and its implications for ethnographic research

Given that schooling 'teaches subjectivities as well as subjects' (Corrigan, [1982](#) , p. 19), identity research has continued to assume a central focus in the sociology of education, as a means of understanding children's lives in school. This is because the way students think of themselves as students and learners may have a strong bearing on their motivation, aspirations and expectations of schooling. For example, children's conceptions of their value and worth in the classroom can directly inform their orientations towards learning activities concerning the extent to which they are considered achievable, and to what extent learning is considered too 'risky' to accomplish:

'Identity' [can be] seen to put it very simply, as a representation of the self-belief and self-confidence which learners bring to new learning challenges and contexts. However, it is also what they become through interaction with significant others, [and] their experience of new learning opportunities. (Pollard and Filer, [1999](#) , p. 22)

The shaping of children's schooling identities has been explored both through a focus on pedagogical constructions of the 'ideal student' by which children both judge and are judged themselves to be valued students (Becker, [1952](#) ; Keddie, [1971](#) ; Hempel-Jorgensen, [2009](#) ) as well as through the effects of peer cultures and friendship (Youdell, [2003](#) , [2006](#) ; Renold, [2001](#) , [2006](#) ; Francis, [1999](#) ; Brown, [2012](#) ) in explaining children's schooling achievements. As a focus of ethnographic inquiry, Hammersley and Atkinson ( [2007](#) ) recognise identity construction as key to understanding what people do, and why. Individuals' pursuit of their interests and goals are framed by the institutional contexts in which they are situated, here identity is seen as key to understanding the situated meanings of social action:

It is a central assumption of ethnography that, in order to understand what people are doing and why, one needs to understand the meanings involved: how they interpret and evaluate the situations they face, and their own identities. (p. 168)

For school children, learner and friendship identities are fundamental in understanding and explaining their engagement within the school and classroom and how this may lead to school success or failure.

Despite the value of identity research, exactly what is meant by identity formation within schooling contexts remains something of a 'black box' (Lawler, [2012](#) ). That is, the issue of how complex identity theories inform a coherent methodological approach for identity research in schools, is a significant omission in the literature. The dearth of qualitative studies that relate data to theory in a systematic way, is a point that Goldthorpe raises in his critique of qualitative methodologies:

a convincing research methodology for determining patterns of social action and interaction has yet to be developed, and in particular, as regards the understanding of actors' subjectivity. (2007, p. 87)

Sfard and Prusak ( 2005 ) recognise that despite common usage, 'identity' within the contemporary literature is 'rarely preceded by any explanation' of what is meant by it (p. 15). This is apparent in case studies in which emphasis is placed on relating notions of identity to educational settings, through elaborate vignettes of interview data, without an account of how the data selected relates to the explicit or implicit theory of identity employed. This has especially been the case with respect to the study of learner identities (e.g. Hempel-Jorgensen, 2009 ; Bradbury, 2013 ; Daniels, 2013 ). However, if identity accounts are to have wider relevance then we might expect a degree of consistency in both how and why data have been collected relative to a preferred identity theory in different contexts. It is only under such conditions that we could expect theoretical developments (Mitchell, 1983 , pp. 202, 203; Goldthorpe, 2007 ). Failing to provide an account of how theory relates to the data prevents an evaluation of its merits and ultimately, interrupts the kind of theoretical development necessary to evaluate its worth as a lens on the social world:

[such methodologies] are not of a kind that involve objective transparent procedures nor therefore that are able to allow for any critical assessment of their application in particular cases. (Goldthorpe, 2007 , p. 89)

Given the complexity of identity theories, Goldthorpe's strictures on ethnography are demanding, especially since what we may observe, over time, in schools are students' shifting identities. This is all the more complicated given that Goldthorpe's demands on the robustness of qualitative measures sit within a broader set of debates on the nature of ethnography. Key to such discussions are the questions of purpose and representation, and whether these relate to a process of data collection versus an interpretive act (Van Maanen, 1988 ) or genre of writing (Clifford & Marcus, 1986 ). With the advent of post-modernism and its attendant 'central problem of legitimation' (Lyotard, 1984 , p. 3) the authority of 'grand narrative' knowledge claims were brought into question. Within the social sciences this led to queries concerning the limits and possibilities for researchers to represent or indeed invent the discourses by which others are known. Nowhere are such debates more pertinent than the discipline of social anthropology, centrally concerned with the exploration and representation of other societies.

Within the many strands of post-modernism, some social anthropologists embraced this methodological uncertainty, advocating ethnography as better applied to the critical standards of art than that of science (Gellner, 1992 ). Insisting that ethnography involves 'always writing', James Clifford ( 1986 ) has argued that 'Literacy processes—metaphor, figuration, narrative—affect the ways cultural phenomena are registered, from the first jotted "observations", to the completed book, to the ways these configurations "make sense" in determined acts of reading' (1986, p. 4). From this position we might evaluate the merits of ethnography not in terms of scientific rigour, but rather with respect to

the power of story-telling, whereby the authenticity or plausibility of the ethnographic account are evaluated according to how they resonate or 'ring true' for the populations they claim to represent (Fetterman, 1998). Against the literary turn, critics have argued that this risks the danger of unwarranted bias, in terms of either theoretical or ideological position (Goldthorpe, 2007, p. 74). Such criticisms have led others to emphasise the scientific credentials of ethnography as well positioned to extend and compliment the scope of survey work (Orum *et al.*, 1991; Hammersley, 1992; Katz, 1997; Burawoy, 1998). Yet, against criticisms of bias it has been argued that a moral and political agenda *should* inform both the motivation and purpose of the research endeavour (Denzin, 2002, p. 485). From this position the ethnographer seeks not to represent an independently existing life-world, but rather, if all research is interpretation, then to produce an account of the experience of the 'other' is a necessary component in effecting change, given that: '[w]e change the world by changing the way we make it visible' (Denzin, 2002, p. 485).

Nevertheless, it might be possible to draw some line of convergence with respect to what is arguably ethnography's greatest strength: 'its capacity to tell not only "what it is all about" but further "to tell how it is" from the actors point of view' (Goldthorpe, 2007, p. 74). Additionally, and from a Realist perspective (Haig, 2014), it has been argued that ethnography can provide an understanding of the generative mechanisms that produce quantitative patterns. If this is the case, then it seems reasonable to strive to make transparent the data sources by which inferences have been made, in creating the space for the reader to evaluate the extent to which researcher interpretations are illuminating.

## Difficulties in researching identity theories

While the above discussion outlines what may be considered desirable with respect to ethnographic research, putting it into practice confronts several difficulties, not the least that identity theories come in many forms. However, there are two elements to identity theories that are of particular note. The first is that some theories emphasise the coherence and stability of identity forms (Erikson, 1963; Blasi, 1988; Bourdieu, 1991; McAdams, 1997) while others emphasise the degree to which identities are multiple and liable to change over time (Ogilvie & Ashmore, 1991; Deux, 1993; Rosenberg, 1997), but identities may be, also, subject to change within certain structures. For example, if we are classed, raced and gendered individuals then this suggests a framework or structure within which identities are negotiated and change over time.

However, if we see identities as subject to change then this also suggests that we will only be able to capture the dynamics of change and the factors that may affect change through longitudinal study. In discussing the studies that have invoked theories of identity below, it is also clear that they provide 'snapshots' at best since they are not longitudinal, in failing to consider children's experiences beyond one academic year of study.

Second, one of the standard criticisms of the use of data in ethnographic research is that it is used simply to confirm theoretical preferences. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007), for example, deride cursory readings of the data with the objective of 'cherry-picking bits of data for quotation' (p. 162) in place of a comprehensive engagement that aims 'to compare and relate what happens at various places and times in order to identify stable features ... that transcend immediate contexts' (p. 163).

Now, it is not the case that we should be seeking data in a naïve falsificationist sense (Chalmers, [2013](#)), but identifying anomalies is important because they are a spur to developing theories. This is only possible through analysis of unfolding patterns or courses of action, which is why, for Hammersley and Atkinson ([2007](#)), it is not simply enough to invoke *ad hoc* examples that claim to represent ritualised or routinised behaviour, but also the 'unexpected outcomes or crises' (p. 169) that occur within everyday practices. These shed light upon the limits of 'normal' action and deepen our understanding of everyday phenomena. Such anomalies may only be possible through systematic longitudinal study.

A further criticism of identity research in ethnographic contexts, concerns the tendency with which classroom processes are presented uncritically as indicative of wider social systems (Sharp and Green, [1975](#); Whitty, [1977](#); Woods, [1979](#)). An example of this is evident in Apple and King's ([1977](#)) analysis of pedagogical behaviour management in one classroom, which led them to argue that children were socialised into passive behaviour. The sole empirical basis for this claim was founded on one comment from the teacher praising a child's dolls because 'they haven't said a thing all morning' (p. 350). In being mindful of such pitfalls, Waterhouse ([1991](#)) for example, warns that 'the micro–macro connections have always to be regarded as empirically problematical to be explored or resolved in relation each research setting' (p. 50). It was for this reason that he argued that the task for educational researchers was to identify the parameters for identity construction and acknowledge their susceptibility to change.

The challenge, then, for a methodology that seeks to capture the possible dynamics of identity change, is that the categories of data gathered must be able to accommodate both the possibilities of change and continuity in identity constructions and to identify anomalies that are not consistent with the theory being used.

## A critique of research on identity theory

In order to illustrate the way in which qualitative data has been treated in connection with theory within the literature on schooling identities, I will now turn to consider four papers, which have been instrumental in advancing understanding of the value of identity research in conceptualising educational inequalities. They have been selected in representing among the best research papers at our disposal for their theorisation of identity construction and their links to empirical data. The varying emphases reflect key theoretical developments, which have methodological implications. These papers are: Gee ([2001](#)), Hird ([1998](#)), Renold ([2001](#)) and Youdell ([2003](#)). Together these key texts will inform the later development of a methodology for identity research. However, despite the theoretical advances offered in these works, I argue that there is still work to do in translating these insights into a set of methodological commitments required to conduct identity research in schools, given that the links between theory and data are often intuitive, as the following discussion will consider.

Gee's ([2001](#)) work has three elements of note. First, his account emphasises the stability of identity construction because there is a core identity, which underlies multiple social identities that a person may exhibit. Second, we are recognised as being a certain 'kind of person' (p. 99) by others. Some types of social recognition are reoccurring, others are not. Third, the individual will mediate these forms

of social recognition into a core self-identity that reflects a coherent narrative. This explains for its relative stability (p. 111).

According to Gee, the 'kinds' of people we are recognised as being are context dependent and, therefore, subject to ambiguity and instability. He distinguishes four distinct perspectives on identity as a way 'to focus our attention on different aspects of how identities are formed and sustained' (p. 101). First, I (institutional) identities are defined by our position in society. This is helpful in acknowledging the contextual framing of identities in which identities are recognised according to specific functions which are open to change across space and time. D (discourse) identities are defined through interaction in multiple contexts on account of individual accomplishments. This perspective acknowledges the importance of discourse and dialogue in forming socially recognisable identities without the sanction of 'official' institutions. (103). A (affinity) identities are defined through collective affiliation with others. This is helpful in recognising the performative element of identities. Lastly, N (nature) identities are defined by nature, however, this perspective is most problematic since as Gee himself observes 'N-Identities always collapse into other sorts of identities ... through the work of institutions, discourse and dialogue, or affinity groups' (p. 102), so might be argued to be unhelpful to distinguish.

While claiming that all perspectives are present within educational contexts, the closest Gee gets to translating his identity theory into an agenda for methodological application, is in what he calls a 'combination' of activities which represent 'an active "bid" to be recognised in a certain way or to be seen as leaving oneself "open" to being recognised in a certain way' (p. 109). Such activities include: (a) speaking or writing, (b) acting and interacting, (c) bodily movement, (d) dressing, (e) feeling believing and valuing, (f) using objects, tools, or technologies (p. 109). This is not to say that individuals are free to enact such combinations, as he observes that people with time and resources can 'author' themselves far more powerfully than those without. However, in order to be activated, such combinations require recognition by others. This is helpful in negotiating the relationship between the role of the self as a subjective construction as opposed to one in which the self is externally constructed by significant others.

What follows Gee's theoretical position is an empirical example in which to 'illuminate, in more specific terms, some of the ideas about identity ... and some of the ways in which they might enter into research' (p. 116). This is offered in an example 'scenario' taken from one school. The exemplar scenario is presented as an extended vignette drawn from participant observations of a top and lower primary school reading group. The account focuses upon two Black children, one boy and one girl, within the lower reading group and include the researcher's speculations about their assignment to, and treatment by the teacher, within this lower group. Through brief descriptions of the children's behaviour and interactions within the class, we are encouraged to question why a clearly able boy has been assigned to the lower class when he had 'so deftly decomposed the sentence from a book that seemed [to Gee] much harder, in fact than the one being read downstairs [top group]' (p. 118). We are also led to question why a high spirited and engaged young girl is told to calm down by the teacher, after having claimed that she feels so happy:

We can note that the teacher fails to respond to the little girl in terms of the values of their shared 'lifeworld' (she would then have said something like 'But, oh, what happened to

make you so happy?'). (p. 117)

A discussion then follows in which Gee applies his typology in order to discuss how it might inform data analysis. This includes a discussion of the girl's failed bid to have her D identity as an 'African American' recognised by the teacher, in the end acquiescing to the teacher's D-identity for the child as "invited" to become socialised' (p. 118) into behaving more passively. The I-identity is also discussed in relation to the able Black boy who is positioned by the school as an 'at-risk minority student being served (saved) by contemporary school reform' (p. 118). While there are no references to N-identities here, only passing mention is made to A-identities in reference to the White children in the top class, who are 'forming a specific A identity as elites in the new capitalism' (p. 119). The reason for drawing attention to Gee's use of empirical data here is not to undermine his claim that his four perspectives on identity are helpful, but rather to illustrate that how these identity forms relate to one another is not made explicit. What we have is a typology of identity 'elements' which are then mapped on to an observational vignette. The reader is left to speculate upon the principles guiding his participant observations concerning: where he looked, who he selected to focus upon, the context in which his observations took place, and his means of following up the key lines of inquiry reflected in his analysis here. Not only is one of the four identified perspectives missing from his empirical account, but he does not explicitly engage with the specific activities involved in the 'combination' bids of identity staking; they are, rather, implicit within the scenario. Finally, Gee's methodology does not enable him to examine his core idea of a stable underlying self-identity (p. 111). In order to throw light on this question, he would have had to engage in a longitudinal study.

In taking an alternative focus on identity, one which would dispel of the notion of a consistent self-identity, Myra Hird's ( 1998 ) paper is useful in attending to the 'highly fractured, contradictory and shifting' nature of students' self-identities (p. 517). Rather than the 'core' or 'self' identity representing a kind of equalising and balancing function, as Gee ( 2001 ) implies, Hird ( 1998 ) argues that discourses of gender, social class, race and ethnicity 'are not easily isolated from each other nor are they easily unified' (p. 519), (also, see Yates, 1994 ; Biggart & Furlong, 1996 ). In order to understand these interactions, it is necessary to consider the 'prior conceptions of self' or 'individual self-identities' which are often overlooked given that it is far easier to speak of outer diversity (the diversity between individuals) than inner diversity (diversity within the individual), (Measor, 1978 ; Laclau, 1995 ; Mullin, 1995 ). However, methodological challenges should not deter the educational researcher from seeking to locate individual identities. Indeed, speaking of the self as comprising of discrete parts, courts the danger of suggesting that such parts are relatively stable, and add up to a homogenous whole (Spelman, 1988 ). Following Mullin ( 1995 ), Hird points out that dominant discourses often favour the homogenisation of identity parts, which invariably means the dominance of certain elements of identity over others, a clear example being concepts of assimilation advocated for immigrant populations who are expected to 'erase their differences and conform to the country in which they now live' (p. 523). Hird's claim is that sociological analyses of identity formation ought not to try to resolve or overlook the contradictions inherent within contrasting 'parts' of the self, but rather actively look for these tension points, as they offer the opportunity for productive transformation, by trying to understand how individuals are a member of different forms of social category (girl, working-class, student) and negotiating these various elements. Hird's work is an important injunction to the

identity researcher, to seek out the tensions points that are created as they interact and are mediated within the different contexts of social life.

In supporting her theoretical focus, Hird draws upon a number of short excerpts from interview transcriptions with middle and working class students discussing their future plans and aspirations concerning work, education and family. These accounts reveal the tensions that students feel from the contradictory expectations and values of their gender and class, in relation to their varying roles and goals. Hird is at pains to point out that such tensions are experienced and responded to differently, although the data she provides speak louder of the classed differences *between* students' accounts, than of any differences *within* the classed and gendered categories she discusses. Middle class girls' accounts, for which there is one supporting quotation, reflected an unproblematic assumption to achieve a professional career:

I want to go to Med[ical] school ... I've got an Aunt in South America and she's a doctor and she's the only medical person where she lives and I might go and work with her. I'll probably end up with my own practice. [Cathy, MC girl, aged 17] (p. 521)

Working class girls in contrast voiced the struggle they encountered from family and friends in seeking to attend university, which placed a strain on other assumed roles and obligations. Here Hird devotes more space to illustrating these tensions:

I'd like to go to university and do English ... I don't end up talking about it. None of the people outside of school are interested. [Rose, WC girl, aged 17] (p. 521)

And my boyfriend's not helping .... He's just not interested in education. He never has been. It's so hard explaining it to him .... And if he comes over at the weekend and I'm studying he doesn't think I should be studying. I've got a Saturday job too. And Peter comes round and he's in my room and I know he doesn't think I should be doing homework or thinking about work when he's there. [Amy WC girl, aged 17] (pp. 521–522)

While Hird's data reflects an element of tension between students' aspirations regarding work and family life, they do not show how these go on to inform, challenge and mediate their identities, and do not expand upon the consequences of their discontent or frustration between competing expectations made on them by others. There is also no indication from the researcher as to the process by which these statements, above, were elicited and placed in the wider context of a student's school life, which would enable the reader to understand how the theorisation of the battle between competing identity bids had been undertaken. This is a significant omission, and necessary in order to pursue this line of enquiry in another context.

While Gee's ( 2001 ) analysis is grounded solely in the observational data he presents, Hird's ( 1998 ) paper only draws upon short interview samples. These two papers are significant in separating the individual 'self-identity' from the identities by which we are recognised by others. In spite of varying methodologies, they reflect the utility of different methods of data generation used in ethnography. The

following two papers by Renold ( 2001 ) and Youdell ( 2003 ), reflect a stronger empirical commitment, since they support their analyses with both observational and interview data. Furthermore, their theoretical engagement is more keenly focussed towards the interaction of different influences on identity construction; in particular, configurations of identity roles within school. This involves a more sophisticated engagement with the interactions between structure and agency in identity making, within a discursive analysis of power diffusion between macro and micro school contexts. Their data illustrates how power hierarchies are both reproduced and contested in word and action through the agency of students.

Emma Renold's ( 2001 ) purpose is to explore the ways in which masculine identities intersect with discourses of academic 'ability', in explaining boys' orientations towards, and experiences of, schooling. Consistent with Hird ( 1998 ), Renold ( 2001 ) too observes identity to be 'relational, multiple and diverse' (p. 373) and like Gee ( 2001 ), she believes that identities do not pre-exist their enactment in the social world, but are rather constructed through a 'complex web of social interaction' (p. 373). However, Renold draws attention to the 'series of performances and repetitive acts' (p. 373) underlining the importance of considering which aspects may change over time, while others are stable. Yet, while she considers children as 'active subjects' (p. 371) in their social interactions with others, she argues that they are also subject to the '(discursive) forces of "hegemonic masculinity which legitimate certain ways of 'being' male through the subordination of alternative masculine and feminine subject positions"' (p. 373). It is this socially constructed hierarchy of identity positions, therefore, to which she attributes the tensions between the perceived feminisation of male academic success (Wolpe, 1988 ; Mac an Ghaill, 1994 ; Parry, 1996 ; Epstein, 1998 ; Paetcher, 1998 ) and the pressure of conforming to hegemonic masculine ideals for boys. Renold's paper represents an alternate perspective to that of Gee ( 2001 ) and Hird ( 1998 ), in that she places the possibility of agency within a dominant discourse of masculinity. However, this is only possible because of the longitudinal nature of one year's ethnographic research with students within their final year of primary schooling in England (aged 11). Her data sources are also multiple, including interview excerpts, participant observation notes, and reflections upon habitual practices, in order to discuss the range of strategies by which boys negotiate gendered and learner identities. The value of this is particularly reflected in the case of one boy, Stuart. She demonstrates his strategic navigation of school life over two terms from 'sissy' to 'star', in which he offsets the disparaging connotations of being a high achieving boy by developing an interest in football, which earned him inclusion within the dominant boy's friendship group (pp. 377–379).

However, while invoking the key elements involved in identity construction; performance and repetitive acts, hegemonic discourses and their effect on social hierarchies, and social interaction, these theoretical components are not clearly mapped onto the data and do not translate into identifiable tools for the educational researcher to locate different identity types within school. This is partly because the theoretical concepts that Renold uses are fairly loose and open to interpretation. We may have been better positioned to evaluate the 'hegemonic' power of peer group identities should Renold have articulated more clearly exactly what she understands as a 'discourse' and interrogated these in the light of the school's pedagogical strategies, in comparing teaching classes within and between schools, to see if the same discourses prevailed. Alternatively, Renold could have considered children's self narratives in order to evaluate the hegemonic pressure to conform. However, this was not possible as she employed only peer group interviews.

For a more systematic account of a discursive understanding of identity construction, Youdell's ( 2003 ) work also engages with the tensions evident between, in her case, gendered, and ethnic constraints upon learner identities. She employs a Foucauldian perspective on discursive practice in order to explore the educational failure of Black students within a specific UK school ethnography. Whereas Gee sees discourse identities as one of four perspectives, for Youdell, all identities are discursively produced, given that 'the meanings through which the "world" and the "self" are made knowable and known are imputed through discourse' (p. 6). This follows Butler's ( 1997 ) account of performativity which refers to any discursive practice that 'enacts or produces that which it names' (Butler, 1993 , p. 130). In this sense the performance is meaningful in actively constituting what Gee refers to as being a 'certain kind of person' (p. 99). These performances are structurally mediated in that (1) all performances require citation in order to be intelligible: the type of identity being performed must be of a recognisable form that others have previously encountered in the social world; and (2) being named is a prerequisite for recognition, thus the individual must be readily identifiable as being that 'type of person'. While all discourses are to an extent pre-existing, in that they cannot be summoned out of thin air, they are neither fixed nor wholly open in that their meanings shift and are always open to alternative interpretations. Youdell defines discursive practice as either 'bodily' or 'linguistic' (p. 7) and reflecting this she analysed vignette examples of student peer-group interviews, and descriptive accounts of pertinent 'moments' in participant observation, in demonstrating how through apparently trivial instances of talk or action, schooling identities are constituted. For example, she cites an interview with a group of Black girls who denigrate an Indian girl 'pretending' to be Black:

***Marcella***

She thinks she's Black ... (parody of a 'Black' accent). She talks to me like that, what a damn talk?

***DY***

What do you mean she thinks she's Black?

***Juliet***

The way she acts.

***Molly***

The way she talks.

...

***Marcella***

I know there's not a certain way for a Black person to present, but there is.  
(p. 7)

Youdell then draws an example of how these girls enacted their 'Black' female identity in the school corridor during morning break, engaged in bodily practices that endorsed their allegiance to gendered subcultural discourses at the same time as flaunting school rules concerning appropriate bodily conduct:

Marcella, Naomi and Marcia (Year 11 girls, Black) walk slowly around a corner. Marcella is in the middle flanked by other girls. She has an arm around the back of the neck of each of the girls, her lower arm and hand hanging over the front of each girl's shoulder .... Movement is facilitated by the girls each walking slowly and in time with one another. (p. 12)

The data illustrates how ethnic and gendered sub-cultural and learner identities are both performed and narrated, and highlights the contradictions between pedagogic and peer group perspectives. Unpacking the mechanisms through which discourses of institutional racism operate, highlights the possibilities and limits of identity constructions of valued learner and respected Black youth. However, because Youdell's ( 2003 ) data rely on key moments in her investigation, and there is no discussion of the representativeness of these moments in relation to different schooling contexts. This raises Hammersely and Atkinson's (2007) warning against 'cherry-picking' convenient data samples to support her claims (p. 162). Therefore, while she models how to engage with ethnographic data sources of interview and observation, I argue that it is necessary to map the key components which comprise identity discourse, be they, 'linguistic, textual, visual, bodily or otherwise' (p. 19). Both for Youdell ( 2003 ) and Renold ( 2001 ) a sense of continuity is assumed through the structures of hegemonic forms of classed, raced and gendered learner identity. This does not fully capture an understanding that structures will change, nor of how the relationships between the macro and micro contexts may also change. These points add to the importance of studying identity construction over time.

The four papers discussed here illuminate in different ways, the value of what are arguably two of the key data generation methods used in ethnography: interviews and participant observation. Careful consideration of the variation in approaches to these methods has been made in Walford's ( 2007 , 2009 ) expositions of ethnographers' contextual preferences and strategies. This has highlighted the tensions raised between the conduct and recording of pertinent 'moments' in data generation, and in maintaining a rapport with participants. Such debates are advanced in the context of identity research, whereby the application of these methods might be further guided by attention to identity construction. Given the critique of these papers, in what follows, I will develop a methodology for undertaking identity research, which, drawing upon the insights from these papers and other theoretical insights, identifies the key components involved in identity construction, and elicits the epistemological and methodological commitments that each component raises.

## The elements of identity construction

There are four parts to the model of identity construction that can link data to identity theory(s):

- i. 'Structural forces' refer to the social categories by which we are known, in terms of their implication in constructing power hierarchies of recognition, on a macro social level. These include the key axes of class, gender, ethnicity and age, as well as policy discourses about the appropriate learner.
- ii. 'Performances' refer to the processes and outcomes created through students' actions and interactions in school. Performances are one way in which structural forces are implicated on the micro level.
- iii. 'Narratives' concern the stories students tell themselves and others tell them about themselves, in order to inform and make meaningful their performances. These stories of self are another form in which structural forces can penetrate identity making.
- iv. 'Dynamic arenas' refer to the organisation of space and time into the micro level framings of different school contexts. Structural forces operate within dynamic arenas through performance and narrative.

A table illustrating a visual mapping of the contribution of the previous four key papers to the development of this model of identity construction is given below:

## Structural forces in identity construction

Structural forces involved in identity construction refer to the socio-cultural regimes of power, which historically operate to construct the macro level parameters for identity making. These include social class (Hird, 1998), gender (Renold, 2001, 2006) and ethnicity (Youdell, 2003) categories which are sedimented within the performances of teachers and students in school. Student identity research within the socio-cultural tradition has tended towards a narrow focus upon the intersection of class–gender–ethnicity (Kasworm, 2005), which has, perhaps, eclipsed a focus upon of another important structural determinant on identity construction: age. Age bears a particular structural force upon the possibilities for identity making given that within the UK and most other national contexts, it is the key determinant for when children enter and leave the schooling system. Age, therefore, represents the principal characteristic of the child, by which normative grouping decisions are made, that students and their peer cohorts will follow throughout their educational career. 'Age identity' is defined within a life-course perspective, as 'the subjective evaluation of a person's age, which is subject to individual and historical experiences' (Kaufman & Elder 2002, p. 169). The focus is on the subjective account in recognising that it is not so much the chronological age from which individuals derive their identity, but rather the socio-cultural norms and expectations which are attributed to age categories.

The significance of age in identity making, therefore, depends upon the individual's subjective account of his/her own age related behaviours, expectations, norms and conduct, relative to the same age or status peer group. Such judgments of age identity are both formally and informally monitored by significant others, organisations and institutions (George *et al.*, 1980; Settersten, 1999; Kaufman & Elder, 2002): for school students this involves peers, teachers and school staff, as well as the policy context shaping pedagogical decisions.

Studies into age identity in adolescence have discussed the ways in which they are mediated by other structural categories such as class (Benson & Furstenberg, 2007; Foster *et al.*, 2008; Benson & Elder, 2011), gender (Johnson *et al.*, 2007; Benson & Johnson, 2009) and ethnicity (Fulgini,

1998 ; Johnson et al., 2007 ), but in what ways do key axes such as class, gender, ethnicity and age have a role in shaping children's identities in school? How can such broad social categories frame who we are and how we wish to be recognised?

It is not the categories themselves that render structural factors to be a distinct component in identity formation, but rather their implication in organising such categories into power hierarchies within the school and classroom. So, for example, Renold's ( 2001 ) account of hegemonic masculinities can be seen as a structural determinant upon identity construction in referring to macro level understanding of studious masculinity as of less social value than the effortlessly high achieving or sporty masculinity evident by in Renold's study, Mac an Ghail ( 1994 ) and Walker ( 1988 ).

Another structural determinant upon children's schooling identities are the policy regimes that influence pedagogy, or what Gee may refer to as I (institutional) identities. This involves an understanding of policies, which in themselves may be a product of dominance structures. Alexander ( 2009 ) provides a way of understanding how structural forces, relating to policy, are filtered through teachers in constructing pedagogical practice and transmitting messages, which contribute to the creation of learner identities:

The real change, the transformation, comes when the curriculum passes from document into action and is broken down into learning tasks and activities and expressed and negotiated as teacher–student interactions and transactions. ... However faithful to government, state or school requirements a teacher remains, teaching is always an act of curriculum transformation. (p. 16)

In other words, the way teachers interpret the imperatives of the UK government's accountability regime for English schools will also have an impact on how classes are organised and the interactions between teachers and students (Ball, 2012 ). As such, structural forces only operate through the performances and narratives of teachers and students who may bring classed, gendered and ethnic experiences and assumptions into the classroom, which are then translated into the practices initiated by teachers.

Alexander's framework has three components: the first deals with the observable act of teaching; the second with the ideas which inform it; the third with the macro–micro relationship which links classroom practice to national policy.

The 'observable act of teaching' includes the different performative elements of: 'task' 'activity' and 'interaction'. The ideas or theories which inform the 'teaching act' can be understood in terms of discourse which Alexander sees as a fundamental component of learning and learner identity:

I distinguish pedagogy as discourse from teaching as act, yet I make them inseparable. Pedagogy, then, encompasses both the act of teaching and its contingent theories and debates. Pedagogy is the discourse with which one needs to engage in order both to teach intelligently and make sense of teaching—for discourse and act are interdependent. (p. 13)

Alexander ( 2009 ) places this account of teaching within what he calls the 'macro–micro relationship', meaning that both the teaching act and theory are couched within broader policy structures. A vehicle by which such policy discourses permeate the classroom is through the national curriculum and the testing culture, which has dominated primary schools (the schools serving the first two national curriculum stages for children aged 5–11 years old). In England students are assessed on entry to primary school (aged 5) and then at the end of year two (aged 7) by means of teacher assessments and testing. At the end of year six (aged 11) children will then take national standardised assessment tests (SATs). These curriculum stages are officially referred to as Key Stages 1 and 2 respectively. The tests are designed to measure school performance and to set targets for students based on defined levels of achievement in terms of what the 'average' student is expected to achieve at these ages. It is often assumed by policy makers that students are best taught in groups, according to their levels of attainment. Attainment, or when applied as a student characteristic of potential, ability, is a key example of a structuring determinant upon schooling identity; being placed within the top, or lowest 'ability' groupings places quite different possibilities upon children in terms of the kinds of learning identities they might create (McLeod and Yates, 2006 ). Structural forces, therefore, refer to the macro-level patterning of social arrangements that are laced by inequalities of power and in which convey the social categories by which we are known. However, as Alexander's discussion above illustrates, in order to penetrate the micro-worlds of children's schooling identities, they are transformed and operationalised through the performance and narratives of students and teachers.

## Epistemological and methodological commitments in considering structural forces

To highlight structural forces as a component of identity construction, therefore, commits the educational researcher to acknowledge that there are some aspects of our identities which precede and extend beyond us as individuals, and relate not only to the social category forms through which we are recognised, but also the value they assume on a macro social level and the ways in which these penetrate the micro contexts of school. This is an invitation to consider the social categories which are represented within school composition (such as class, gender, ethnicity, age and 'ability') and the ways in which such compositions might filter and mediate pedagogical strategies in the ordering of students into hierarchies of recognition. This directs the researcher towards considering the grouping decisions employed in school (and the positioning of different groups of children within them), as well as the policy discourses which may influence the strategies upon which pedagogical decisions are based. Lastly, it is imperative to consider the interactions between different social categories (e.g. of gender, class, ethnicity and 'ability'), in interrogating the tensions these configurations may produce (Hird, 1998 , see table 1).

**Table 1.** The contribution of the four key texts according to the elements of identity construction (highlighting similarities and differences)

Theorist	Structural forces	Performances	Narratives	Dynamic arenas
James	Not theorised but	Particularly relevant	Relevant to discourse	Relevant to Institutional (I)

<p>Paul Gee ( 2001 )</p>	<p>in the case of ethnicity is argued to constitute all other identity types (pp. 108–109)</p>	<p>to affinity (A) identities—shared in distinctive social practices (p. 105)</p> <p>Has a role in shaping all identities through individual bids for recognition. These activities include: speaking, writing, moving, dressing (p. 109)</p> <p>Implicit privilege of performance as data presented is drawn only from participant observation</p>	<p>(D) identities in being recognised through discourse and dialogue without the overt sanction of 'official' institutions (p. 103)</p> <p>Individuals' 'core identity' provides a coherent 'self story' pulling together social identities to provide a more stable narrative (p. 111). However, core identity is not considered in data analysis.</p>	<p>identities in recognising how institutions work across time and space in order that specific narratives and performances continue to underwrite the institutional identities (p. 105)</p>
<p>Myra Hird (1998)</p>	<p>Gender, class, ethnicity, race are acknowledged as 'discourses' (p. 519)</p> <p>Not homogenous categories that produce additive identities, but rather interact to produce key tensions that form identities (pp. 152–153)</p>	<p>Acknowledged that identity diversity is produced through 'practice' (p. 519) but methodology did not include observations</p>	<p>Implicit privileging of narrative element as interview is the only data source drawn upon</p> <p>Contrasts with Gee's core identity in claiming that the 'self identity' is NOT stable (in contrast to Gee) but rather highly fractured, contradictory and shifting (p. 517)</p>	<p>Acknowledged that identities were negotiated in the context of wider structures of diversity of schools, but school contexts were not theorised</p>
<p>Emma Renold ( 2001 )</p>	<p>Developed understanding of structural forces: gender, class and 'ability' in emphasising the hierarchical nature of power diffusion. Particularly helpful in addressing policy discourses of appropriate learner</p>	<p>Acknowledged the 'series' of performances and repetitive acts' (p. 373). This suggests a degree of coherence to identity constructions (re: Gee).</p> <p>Empirical data supported this in the participant observations and researcher reflections on changes in behavioural patterns</p>	<p>Acknowledged the discursive nature of structural forces (particularly in relation to gender and 'ability'). But discourse is not defined.</p> <p>It is claimed discourses legitimate the series of performance (p. 373), but this is not linked to a concept of 'self narrative'. Indeed one-to-one interviews were eschewed in favour of peer group</p>	<p>• While informal and formal spaces were not theorised, official 'academic' school contexts were distinguished from informal 'social' school contexts (p. 371). This was reflected in empirical data where Stuart's peer group values of 'outside' behaviour (re: football) are brought into the classroom (p. 378) consolidating both</p>

		behavioural patterns over time	labour or peer group interviews	
Deborah Youdell ( 2003 )	Like Renold, Youdell highlighted the hierarchical nature of gender, class as well as race and ethnicity (p. 8).  Structural forces are described as discourses (p. 6) as pre-existing socially recognisable identity constructions	Discourse explained as both 'performed' and 'linguistic' so performance and narrative are conflated  The cyclical interaction between narrative and performance is theorised in that performances will reinforce, contest and develop the meanings ascribed to them. To be recognisable and named the individual must perform (p. 6)  Participant observations of key performances are theorised but not triangulated with narrative accounts	The hierarchical nature of structural forces was highlighted in the emphasis given to discourses of institutional racism apparent in pedagogical (teacher) narratives that framed the possibilities for raced and gendered identity constructions  Narratives precede performances, as being called a name is a pre-requisite for performances being recognisable  Data drawn from group interview excerpts are used. Like Renold 'self-identities' were not theorised	While informal and formal spaces are not distinguished, nor theorised, they implicitly inform the observation 'episodes' which are drawn within formal spaces, such as the maths lesson and informal spaces, such as the school corridor during morning break (p. 12)

**Table 2.** A model for researching schooling identity in qualitative case studies

Identity construction component	Corresponding data sources	Questions to ask of the data
<i>Structural forces</i> : e.g.	Statistical school/year group/classroom composition indicators	What configurations of structural forces do case study students present and which elements of these are valued by them (e.g. by class, gender, ethnicity and attainment?)
<i>Gender</i>	Policy constructions of the appropriate learner through: The national curriculum, national performance indicators and national benchmarking, supporting policy documents	How do case study students' attainments measure against national performance indicators?
<i>Ethnicity</i>		How does this differ by school, year group or classroom?
<i>Social class</i>	Pedagogical strategies concerning academic progression  Other qualitative research on the various structural configurations found in school	How is the child positioned in relation to hegemonic constructions of gender, 'ability,' class, ethnicity and sexuality?
<i>Ability</i>		
<i>Sexuality</i>		

<p><i>Performance :</i> (<i>Embodied process: Social action and interaction in different schooling contexts</i>)</p>	<p>Friendship group socio-grams Participant observations in the classroom during lessons Participant observations in the playground, and other 'hidden' informal school spaces</p>	<p>Who/how do case study students interact with in the classroom? (peers/friends/ teachers) What are the learning orientations of case study students and their friends? Who do case study children interact with outside of the classroom? What are the social activities and values of case study students and their friends?</p>
<p><i>Performance :</i> (<i>Outcomes</i>)</p>	<p>Formal learning outcomes (key stage assessment results) Academic progression</p>	<p>How do learning outcomes relate to national and school based bench-marking expectations?</p>
<p><i>Narratives :</i> Stories of self <i>Stories students tell peers</i> <i>Stories teachers tell students</i> <i>Stories students tell researchers</i> Stories children tell themselves</p>	<p>Semi-structured interviews with students, parents, and teachers Informal conversation with teachers, students and support staff Conversations and classroom 'talk' between case study pupils, teachers, and peers</p>	<p>What is the schooling history? How was the first day of school? How have friendships evolved? Why? What are (least) favourite lessons? Why? How are the teachers? Why did children behave in key ways identified from observations? What motivated these performances?</p>
<p><i>Dynamic arenas</i> <i>Classroom territories</i> Playground territories</p>	<p>Classroom layout (and children's position within) School lay-out (and the spaces children orientation towards)</p>	<p>Do children ask seat-mates for help? Where do case study students orientate towards out of class? Who else there is included/excluded? What are the rules, expectations, norms and values that govern the territories?</p>

## Performance

The second component of identity formation in schools is performance. Kate Lawler ( 2012 ) discusses how in the West a separation is made between *being* and *doing* identity. While the former is seen as the 'authentic' self, the latter is seen as 'performance' or assuming a role. She argues that this is an artificial division. This follows her view that identity is an achievement as opposed to an innate quality, in which case, identity must always be *done* , as a prerequisite for *being* (p. 103). The connection between performance and identity construction as a social activity, has been drawn by several theorists in education (Rosser & Harre, 1976 ; Harre, 1998 ; Harre & van Langerhove, 1999 ) while Renold ( 2006 ) and Youdell ( 2003 , 2006 ) have applied Butler's theory of performativity to education in the context of dominant discourses relating to gender and education. The relevance of this latter body of work is that it draws attention to difference and dominance with respect to key structural axes in terms of school children's identity constructions and the conditions under which they are created through performance. However, in taking a discursive view of performance, Renold and Youdell follow Butler's conflation of both the 'bodily' and 'linguistic' components of social interaction (see Table 1). While not disclaiming the intractable union between words and action, the model developed here, separates these components into 'performance' and 'narrative' as a heuristic device in guiding empirical research.

Performances are the processes and outcomes of students' actions and interactions with others in determining self. In school they can be separated into two forms; embodied process and material outcome. Embodied process refers to the ways in which identities are enacted and played out through daily practices in the school. They are created through social actions with others in school, be they teachers or peers. While such actions may well include others, their role in identity construction refers to the physical expression of identification. This would manifest in children's interactions with others in school and their behaviours in different schooling contexts.

The second component refers to the outcomes of meaningful action. In school this includes the formalised outcomes of students' performance at key stages which since the early 1990s have been increasingly informed through standardised national testing indicators. This has led to a greater emphasis upon national, school and class based hierarchies in the formation of judgments about the student (Broadfoot & Pollard, 2006 ), and just as importantly, the student's judgment of him/her self. For example, playing football well or achieving highly at maths may contribute to different types of activity that a child engages in in school, and play a large part in shaping and motivating his/her identification with the meaning of these processes and outcomes.

The significance of the individually produced performance, but socially determined value ascribed to it, is apparent in school in relation to classroom and school hierarchies of achievement. Rosser and Harre ( 1976 ) view all social action as a form of performance given that the individual is continually playing out a role in relation to their interpretation of the activity and the value of their actions as perceived by other group members. They believe that the relationship between social actors and their performance is determined by factors including: their abilities to act in the setting, their knowledge of what actions are required to achieve what ends, and a theorisation as to what the process means to others. Central within this is 'local knowledge of the rules and meanings of action' (p. 172).

This combination of knowledge (of the rules) and of owning the abilities (including confidence) to act according to such rules, necessarily prompts the question as to how well equipped children are in relation to the activities practiced in schools.

The capability to understand and act can be seen to connect to the role of culture.

## Epistemological and methodological commitments in considering performances

To highlight performances as a component of identity construction, commits the educational researcher to acknowledge that there are some aspects of our identities which are defined through the relationships in which we engage. While these aspects are highly personal, they are still a means through which structural forces may operate. To acknowledge performances as a key aspect of children's schooling identities requires the educational researcher to consider students' interactions in key schooling relationships with teachers, support staff, class-mates and friends, as well as the cultures and values which permeate children's social relationships and the roles children may occupy within the different social contexts of school. Participant observations of social interactions can usefully be guided through tools which enable the child to indicate significant social relationships in school. One such example is the 'sociogram' which involves asking the child to write his/her name in the center of a piece of paper and then to identify significant friendships in writing their names on the paper. The strength of these relationships can be indicated through connecting a line between each individual and the participant's name in the middle, the closer the friendship the shorter the line between the two. Relationships between other individuals can also be signposted through positioning names closer together and connecting them with a line. This strategy is arguably a stripped down and simplified version of social network theory mapping (e.g. Wellman, [1983](#) ; Scott, [1991](#) ), which has been used in the social sciences as a way of scoping the structure and intimacy of social networks.

To acknowledge performances, furthermore, requires that children's formal learning outcomes in school should be considered, and incites the educational researcher to analyse these in relation to children's significant relationships in school.

To consider performance as an element of identity construction highlights some of the conditions necessary in order to act, but what of the motivations behind the types of performance children engage in within school? Why does a child engage in some performances and not others? How can we understand these to 'work' or otherwise? To understand this it is necessary to consider the role of narratives in constructing schooling identities.

## Narratives

Despite their basis in lived experience, narratives involve much more than simple description, but rather, refer to the interpretive devices we have for making sense of the world and our place within it: 'If narrative makes the world intelligible, it also makes ourselves intelligible' (Moore, [1994](#) , p. 119). Even the supposed raw truths of performed events, are continually reshaped and recreated, they 'shade and patch and combine and delete' details, context, action and meanings (Hacking, [1995](#) , pp. 250–251). Narrative, can be understood as both the motivator for children's actions and interactions in school, as well as the process by which such behaviours are constituted as meaningful for the self and others, or rather, the multiple stories of self.

In developing an account of 'narrative defined identity' that can be operationalised by the educational

researcher, Sfard and Prusak ( 2005 ) argue that identity is not extra-discursive but rather emerges from the act of communication (p. 17), notably self-dialogues proclaiming the narratives we tell ourselves of who we are (Gonzales, 1999; Hall, 1996 ; Gee, 2001 ). It is these stories of self, according to Sfard and Prusak ( 2005 ), which are the most important stories we can tell:

People tell others who they are, but even more importantly, they tell themselves and they try to act as though they are who they say they are. (p. 3).

It is useful to distinguish between the stories we tell ourselves of who we are from those we tell to others, because these stories may motivate or explain different types of performances.<sup>1</sup> Sfard and Prusak's most significant contribution is in providing a coherent formula for distinguishing between the different stories of self, according to the subject and object of the narrator. There are four key identity making narrative forms, these are: bAc where A is the identified person, b is the author and c is the recipient; bAa, where A is the identified person but also the recipient of the story; aAc, where the identified person is also the author of the story. While these multiple stories may offer conflicting or contradictory accounts, nevertheless, they comprise a rich tapestry of the multiple narratives for the individual to draw upon in making sense of self. From this set of self-stories the individual is positioned to construct the most significant story of all: the aAa story, which is the story we tell ourselves of who we are, through a continuous one-way conversation with the self. Sfard and Prusak argue that this is the aAa story which is likely to have the strongest bearing on our performances.

We might understand the aAa narrative to be so powerful as a means of drawing across the disparate stories of self that the individual encounters. In so doing the subject is required to negotiate between the various dimensions upon which such stories are founded (Linville & Carlston, 1994 ). These may include those of past, present and future selves, or those in which the individual aspires towards versus those that may be perceived as negative or undesirable. In this sense, narrative is both selective and constructive, suturing experiences, performances and aspirations into an identity project that is comprehensible in demonstrating progression, development or evolution through life (Polkinghorne, 1988 ; Gee, 2001 , see table 1). Continuity, therefore, is the core function by which narrative is effective in identity construction; 'a person's identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor—important though this is—in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going' (Giddens, 1991 , p. 54).

Furthermore, in order to reproduce itself as credible, the identity narrative must cohere to a recognisable form of social category. This because, as we are reminded by Youdell in invoking Butler; "Being called a name" (Butler, 1997 , p. 2) is a prerequisite for being "recognisable" (Butler, 1997 , p. 5, original emphasis) as a subject' (Youdell, 2003 , p. 6, see table 1). In underlining the individual's memberships in, or alternatively, exclusions from, different social communities, the narrative is either augmented or extinguished. Therefore, even when the child works individually, or stands outside the classroom for 'bad behaviour' he/she is still engaged in the process of performing to him/herself, and integrating the meaning of these performances and narratives of learning as a shared process on the basis of peer interaction and pressure (Sherriff, 2007 ). Therefore, through social group allegiance, the stories students tell themselves of who they are may share common characteristics with the stories

of other members of the group, in representing, inevitably, versions of the social categories brought about through structure.

## Epistemological and methodological commitments in researching narratives

To treat narratives as a component of identity construction commits the researcher to recognising that while some aspects of identities may be fluid, others may be more constant across time and space, and that story-telling is the means by which a sense of continuity is ensured, as well as transformations explained and justified. In organising and explaining performances, narratives are another medium in which structures may operate. They require the researcher to consider the multiple stories, told of and by children in school. In being, invariably, linguistic, narratives direct the researcher to employ semi-structured interviews with children, parents and their teachers, as well as to record informal conversations in the classroom, staff-room, playground and the school gates, in interrogating the meaning, for children, of school, lessons and friendships. They are an incentive to capture the significant moments such as children's first day at school, as well as the broad-brush accounts of children's schooling biographies. Given the centrality of the aAa stories, it is also essential to involve participants in self-reflection activities. Their mutually informing relationship with performances, directs the researcher to consider narratives in the light of social interactions, and involve participants in this exercise, for example, in providing children with vignettes of their performances in different settings and asking children to explain these. In evaluating the continuity and transformation of identities, it is also of critical importance to consider children's narrative reflections over time and across the different contexts of school.

## Dynamic arenas

The performative and narrative elements of identity construction must be understood in relation to wider structural forces as they are mediated within the spatial and temporal parameters of the school. If structural forces are the vectors by which structures stake their claim on the individual, and performance and narrative are micro level mediations by which individuals interpret, negotiate and inhabit the attendant meanings, dynamic arenas determine the locality in which such semiotic exchange takes place, through their implication in organising 'space' and 'time' within the local level school contexts.

For Mendieta (2013) the historical and geographical positioning of what he calls the social locus of identity, is a function of social topography, that is how they shape the field within which structural forces operate:

we move or are in the process of moving through those fields of forces. Social topographies themselves have changed in accordance with the stability and potentiality of some of the forces that constituted the web of forces determining the space of social interaction. (Mendieta, 2013, p. 408)

So, for example, the identity formants of gender, class and race will exert influence in ways very

differently for the boys and girls in Renold's ( 2001 ) and Youdell's ( 2003 ) research, than they will for boys and girls within Victorian Britain, or current day Afghanistan. Space and time, therefore, provide the parameters through which structural forces may operate, they are the ultimate structuring agents, but how can we understand them to operate with respect to the elements of narrative and performance in shaping children's schooling identities?

Within the sociology of childhood, space and time have been identified as key determinants in shaping children's social worlds (Jensen, 2007 ; Strandell, 2007 ; Zeiher, 2007 ). Such work directs us to conceptualise children's use of space and time as complex, blurred and multi-layered. Children's spatial trajectories out of school invariably affect their lives in school, for example, in living between two homes and fitting in with parental work patterns and non-local interests, children are more mobile, and their significant social relationships often spill over the 'local' community level. This may well shape children's utilisation of and orientation towards the different sites of school.

## Spaces vs Territories

In order to understand the roles that space and time have in the formation of children's schooling identities, we can turn to work which considers the spatial and temporal governing of children's school lives. James *et al.* ( 1998 ) argue that school spaces are never neutral locations, rather they are governed by (adult) processes of control and regulation over children's mind and body 'through regimes of discipline, learning, development, maturation and skill' (p. 38). Yet within these adult governed school spaces, Holloway and Valentine ( 2000 ) show that children are active in challenging the spatial rules of the classroom. They give the example of a group of girls who conspired to challenge the boisterous antics of the boys in dominating the lunch-time computer club. In so doing, the girls joined forces to complain that they felt excluded and in response the teacher arranged a 'girls only' computer room. Through such negotiations these girls achieved the creation of a new school space in which not only the players who perform 'computer club', but also narratives concerning the right to membership, were transformed. Children can, therefore, be seen to be active in the negotiation of spatial politics, in challenging boundaries as they seek to legitimate the performances that spaces contain and influence the narratives that make sense of them. Holloway and Valentine ( 2000 ) account for the relational structuring of spaces in arguing that they need to be considered in context. School spaces are not bounded, but are rather porous and constituted by webs of social connections:

What we get ... is a sense of the porosity of the school—it is not a bounded site, rather it is constructed and reconstructed through its interconnectivity with wider society. It is through these interconnections that these institutional spaces become sites of control. (p. 772)

While acknowledging the fluid meanings that spaces acquire, this account is somewhat loose as it raises the question: if we can not define the spatial boundaries of school, how can we talk about them at all? It is therefore helpful to draw a definition between *spaces* as physically bounded sites of the classroom, the school hall, or the playground and the interaction between space and time in shaping the different contextual meanings that spaces occupy. One way of doing this is to talk of 'territories', as the symbolic sites transposed upon these spaces (Brown, 2010 ). Territories are spaces in context of

the activities that are practiced within them, and the rules, rituals, rites and regulations that govern them. For example, the main hall is a school space, but this comprises, at different times, the separate territories of the assembly hall, the dinner hall, wet play room and dance hall. Within the same four walls the rules, norms and expectations change according to the territory. These are symbolic territories in assuming a fluid and temporal relationship with the physical spaces which they occupy.

Performances within the various school contexts, rest upon collective adherence to the rules of the territory and, therefore, to operate there must be a group understanding as to these rules in order for them to exist at all. For example, the classroom is a learning territory only so long as the learners (and teachers) understand it as such and behave accordingly. As Ivinson and Duveen ( 2006 ) have shown, in some types of classroom, territories can open up in which children can develop informal hierarchies of power and in which 'there was room for children to engage in extensive forms of interaction and negotiation often completed unnoticed by teachers' (p. 123).

## Epistemological and methodological commitments in researching dynamic arenas

To treat dynamic arenas as a component of identity construction recognises that performances do not operate within a vacuum, rather they are legitimated and mediated through the 'rules' of the setting, both those that are socially agreed and physically possible. Schooling arenas may be conceptualised as dynamic through the heuristic of 'territories'. This prompts the researcher to consider the physical layout of schooling spaces, such as grouping (and seating) arrangements, display boards and resources; as well as the (pedagogical) cultures which govern them—which pupils are invited to participate?, how? and to what ends? Territories also direct the researcher beyond the overt rules, regulations and expectations that determine school spaces, in seeking out the spaces pupils reclaim as their own; under the stairs, behind the bike sheds and the students' toilets. Because territories are spatial and temporal they may only be inhabited at certain times of the day, by particular social actors. Given their hidden nature, it may be difficult to locate the territories identifiable within informal school spaces and it is, therefore, helpful to ask participants; 'where is the place you feel most (un)happy in school?' This can both help to direct the researcher as to where to look, as well as to explore the role of territories in relation to student narratives of being valued, or otherwise in school.

In what follows I aim to demonstrate how these tools can be utilised in researching identities in school, by considering the effectiveness of the various components of identity construction in view of the different data sources they invoke, and the questions we may ask of them. In the table below I highlight the key dimensions to the analysis of identity, in relation to the evidence that it requires and the kinds of questions that can then be raised. While it is important to interrogate these various elements it is necessary to emphasise that how an individual constructs their identity will be through a synthesis that takes account of the interactions of these elements.

Given the above framework an example is now provided of how it can be applied in a specific case.

## Applying the identity model through a case study analysis of ethnographic data

The example used is of Clive, a White, British, boy from a low income family background, and the schooling identities that he constructed across three years, including the transition from primary to secondary school. While this data is from an extended longitudinal study, it is not argued that such timeframes are a requisite for identity research, rather the objective is to highlight the importance of considering change and continuity over time and space.

## The effects of structural forces upon Clive in Ivy school

The particular structural categories that framed this analysis were of socio-economic status, and gender as well as the mediating effects of performative policy discourses shaping classroom pedagogies (Ball, 2012).

Ivy is a 'junior' school, which in England means that it delivers the second 'key stage' of children's schooling, in serving four student cohorts from year three (aged 7/8) to year six (aged 10/11). Clive joined Ivy school in 'year four', aged 8 years old. He came to Thornton from Waterbrook, a large village some 30 miles away in the same county. He lived at home with his mother and brother in Thornton and had moved just over a year previously following parental break-up, as it had not been viable for his mother to continue to live in the family home in Waterbrook. The decision to move to a more affordable council housing estate in Thornton was also motivated by his mother's desire to be closer to her extended family. The composition of the pupil intake at the school and the ways in which it filtered the school's transformations of the micro–macro relations of policy discourses into school practice (Alexander, 2009) enables a consideration of the structural determinants upon Clive's schooling identities.

Ivy had 232 children on the roll. This included few children of a minority ethnic background; free school meals (FSM) was about average for the county at 7.8% of the intake. The school had above average Special Educational Needs (SEN) at 26% and had an excellent reputation for catering for children with additional learning needs. The school had a mixed socio-economic status (SES) composition. It drew 40% out of catchment area, primarily from council housing associations.

The following discussion is drawn from research generated over the course of one year spent in Ivy school, at which point Clive was in year 5. At that time, Ivy school had been under pressure from the local authority to improve children's level four grades in maths at the end of key stage two (aged 11). The school had been criticised for focusing resources upon the least able students, advisors had recommended refocusing resources upon those students who had the potential to reach level four: a triage strategy (Gilborn & Youdell, 2000). The following observation comes from a staff meeting where the head teacher is addressing the whole teaching staff:

Despite our best efforts none of our booster group achieved level four and unfortunately while we all recognize the invaluable difference these sessions have made to their self-confidence and achievement, apparently this just doesn't warrant the expenditure. I feel just the same as you all about all of this but we have no choice but to adjust our strategy. The priority for this year has to be [level] fours and fives. [Head teacher: Mrs Maddox]

Following this meeting the school had shifted from mixed ability class teaching to streamed cross year

split class teaching in numeracy. This had a demonstrable affect upon the conditions by which Clive was able to develop a learner identity in relation to his mathematical abilities as we shall see.

## Classroom performances

By considering Clive's interactions with peers and teachers in the classroom we consider his quest for recognition as a talented mathematician. Clive was originally placed in the upper set maths but after a couple of weeks had been demoted to the lower set. Clive's class teacher, Miss Knight, explained to me that this was due to his behaviour in class 'dragging down' the rest of the top group. For example, Clive would call out the answers despite being told by the teacher not to:

Clive misses the answer to a question and calls out 'Is it 0.5?' The teacher replies 'If you are not going to listen Clive then I'll mark it wrong'. This doesn't require a response but Clive does anyway; 'I'll listen then'. The teacher makes no further response to this comment. The teacher moves on to question 2 and asks a pupil to answer (one of the ones with their hands up). As the pupil explains his answer Clive calls out the answer and the teacher politely asks him not to call out. He is fidgety and punches his chair chipping in 'I got that one right'. He continues to call out during the activity and the teacher ignores his comments. (Lower set Numeracy lesson)

While the school's numeracy team recognised Clive had the ability to be in the top group, his behaviour was not consistent with their expectations. This is a clear indication of what Rosser and Harre ( 1976 ) refer to as the 'local knowledge of the rules and meanings of action' (p. 172) which determine the effectiveness of the social actor's performance. In failing to understand, or in flaunting the rules of classroom participation, Clive's actions had an impact on his potential to maintain an identity as a valued or recognised mathematician. Clive's classroom performances can be further explained by considering the narratives by which Clive made sense of them.

## Narratives

Given that narratives, or stories of self, both motivate and explain children's performances in school, it is necessary to consider both of these elements of identity construction together. I presented Clive with the previous vignette of his classroom behaviour in asking him why he called out in class. Clive explained that when he sought the teacher's attention for a valid reason, he felt overlooked: 'Cos every time I put my hand up to ask for help, nobody answers me'.

This comment reflects Clive's rejection of what he perceived to be the teachers' neglect. The triangulation of classroom observations, interview material and contextual knowledge of the school pedagogy pointed towards an explanation of Clive's attempts to challenge the rules of the classroom as an active bid to be recognised by the teachers. This analysis is furthered through what Sfard and Prusack ( 2005 ) call the stories we tell ourselves of who we are. In terms of the formal contexts of school this may refer to children's learner identities. When asked about his experience of the classroom, Clive professed to finding lessons 'hard' and did not enjoy them. Numeracy was the only

lesson which Clive claimed to enjoy because '[it's] something what I'm good at'. For this reason numeracy represented an important subject for Clive. This was supported in the teacher assessments of his key stage one attainment which placed him above the national average. However, following his demotion to the bottom maths class, it was difficult for Clive to sustain this identity. Clive was confused claiming he 'didn't want to move' and was unsure whether the down setting was attributable to his test performance or his behaviour:

Don't know why I got lowered err cos ... I was naughty or erm got lowered in my test cos I got something like two in my test.

In supporting the interplay between narrative and performance, the following comment indicates how Clive's conflicted learner identity had created an anxiety towards tests that affected his performance in assessment contexts:

I'm not very good at Maths tests ... Yeah I get, I get bad at tests but then afterwards when I go through it, I know the answers.

Frustration in the way the teachers' narratives contradicted his own may go some way to explain Clive's propensity to call out during lessons, as Clive explained: 'Some people think I'm like dumb and that so I just call it out the answer and then it's right. Then they think I'm not dumb.'

## Dynamic arenas

In order to understand Clive's 'territory' in the classroom it is important to note his seating position on a 'mixed ability' table alongside his best friends Marcus and Roman. Marcus and Ronan were positioned closely to Clive on his sociogram, and connected by a line between each other indicating the strength of the bonds between the three boys. Clive's numeracy teacher informed me that he and his friends were the least engaged and most off-task of the lower set. However, recently Clive had approached the teacher to ask if he could sit separately from his friends at a desk on his own at the back of the class in maths lessons. When I asked Clive about this decision to move he said:

I just like working on my own. I like, I like to work in group, people in groups if we're really like ... erm, not naughty, cos sometimes my friends ask me to mess about and I say 'okay then' and I get like a cross, or 2 crosses. Erm ... like cos every time I sit at the front I always turn, turn ... err look back to see my friends and if I kind of like sit at the back I can't ... I just have to keep my eye forward cos I can't look back, there would be a wall.

However, the following example indicates the dynamic nature of Clive's rule challenging social territory in the classroom in which the culture of the peer group extended to include Clive, even following his shift in seating position:

Marcus and Clive exchange a few comments with each other although from Clive's seating position they are a couple of meters apart. Hannah comes over to Clive's corner to get a couple of pencils from the drawers there. Clive starts to talk to her. Clive calls out the answer again to a question and this time Miss Knight accepts it and asks him how he worked it out, he tries to explain and she praises him. Clive and Marcus both start messing around making noises and Mrs Knight addresses Marcus (who is nearer her) 'Marcus if you do that once more you will be sent out'. He responds to her 'that's not fair, he was doing it as well' (gesturing to Clive). [Lower numeracy set]

Despite Clive's best intentions to separate himself from his social group, the effectiveness of this strategy was compromised by his failure to comply with the rules concerning participation. In effect, Clive's social territory extended over the classroom, rendering his physical separation from them as futile. This is an example of the 'informal cultures' of the classroom which can have a more pervasive affect upon children's behaviours in the classroom than the formal pedagogical activity (Iverson & Duveen, 2006 ).

## Evaluating the stability of schooling identities

Through this account of the various determinants upon Clive's schooling identities we can understand the tensions created for Clive between sustaining an identity as a talented mathematician with that of a rule-challenger and 'entertainer' among his classroom friends. Structural forces are brought to bear through the gendered and classed peer expectations concerning Clive's performances in class, which are filtered through pedagogical strategies of educational triage. Within the dynamic arena of the lower set maths class, Clive's narratives conflict with those of the teacher about what performances are recognised as denoting a talented mathematician. Clive's inability to reconcile these narratives of what is recognised as a valued learner and friend, both motivate and explain his performances as a disruptive pupil, and his academic outcomes in assessment situations.

In considering the various components involved in identity construction, the educational researcher is orientated towards the relevant data sources, which can be triangulated in order to build a convincing account of the different identities children construct in school. However, given that some have argued that identity forms are fluid both internally (Hird, 1998 ) and externally (Gee, 2001 ; Lawler, 2012 ), it is now necessary to consider whether Clive's identity construction at Ivy school held across time and location, by looking at the data on Clive's experiences during his first year at the Maple school. The Maple is a secondary school, which in England means that it is responsible for delivering the final compulsory curriculum stages in children's schooling careers, 'key stages' three and four. Children enter the school in year seven (aged 11/12) and leave the school in year eleven (aged 16).

## The effects of structural forces upon Clive in the Maple school

In considering the different school contexts, in this case in secondary school, the researcher can compare whether factors such as the ethnicity, class, gender or special educational needs of the school composition may frame the effects of structural forces upon Clive's schooling identities

differently, as well as the policy discourses that influence pedagogy. It is also possible to reflect on which aspects of Clive's identities are stable and which change, across his first year of secondary school compared with Clive's penultimate year of junior school.

Clive moved to the Maple secondary school at the normal admission point of year seven, aged 11. The Maple was a large secondary school for children aged 11–16. At the time of the most recent Ofsted inspection (the obligatory national school inspection assessment), there were approximately 1000 children on roll with a 215 admission intake in year seven. The school drew from five local primary schools and had specialist science status. The attainment of pupils upon entry was broadly in line with other maintained secondary schools, although the number of children with special educational needs was below the national average. The school served a large catchment area with lower than average levels of deprivation. The latest Ofsted report rated the school as an overall 'satisfactory' for effectiveness and 'good' for pastoral care and provision. The vast majority of pupils were White British. The school streamed the year group according to attainment for English, Maths and Science. There were six classes of descending 'ability', with a further seventh class for special educational needs.

## Clive's academic outcomes at the Maple

At the time of his third term in year eight at the Maple, Clive was currently placed in the middle ability group for English, Maths and Science. This was surprising in considering his prior attainment in terms of key stage 2 SATs results, which were in line with the national target of level 4 for each of these subjects, suggesting that he had failed to make the same level of progress during key stage three at secondary school.<sup>2</sup> This was reflected by his teacher appraisals at the Maple. Clive's most recent assessments are provided below according to his attainment and attitude in every subject. Both in attainment and attitude, numbers ascend in value and in attainment levels, 'A' is the highest and 'C' the lowest. Attainment grades are measured by key stage tests and teacher assessment in English, Maths and Science, and purely teacher assessment in all other subjects.

Subject	Attainment	Attitude
English	4B	2*
Maths	5A	3*
Science	5B	3*
IT	4C	2*
Drama	4C	2*
Art	4B	2*
DT	4B	3*
French	3B	2*

Geography	4C	3*
History	4C	4*
Music	3A	1*

By the end of key stage 3 in year nine, pupils are expected to achieve a solid two levels of progress from their key stage 2 assessments (Department for Education, 2011; 37), which according to the national expectations for KS2 (level 4) that Clive achieved, would be a level 6 (see note 2). At the end of the second term in year eight (when these assessments were taken), to be on line for this target pupils should be attaining around a level 5B or 5A. These results suggest that Clive was on target for Maths and Science. However, for all other subjects he was below average. Clive's attitude results show a majority response of 2 out of 5, which indicates that his attitude was less than satisfactory for five subjects including English and Information Technology (IT). His attitude was considered 'satisfactory' for subjects including Maths, Science and Geography. Clive's performance outcomes considered in relation to his prior attainment and national and school based benchmarking, indicate that Clive was underperforming according to his own potential and national standards. The significance of these outcomes upon Clive's learner identity is given greater clarity with respect to his classroom performances.

## Classroom performances

The following classroom observation of Clive's Maths class supports the general picture presented by his attitude scores and represents continuity with his performance at Ivy:

Clive is joking and laughing with Miles and James at 11:21. There is collective chatting between the four of them including Trevor. James asks the teacher if they are supposed to be working together, she replies 'No you are not supposed to be working together, Clive I'm going to move you if you don't do your own work'. Clive whines 'I don't know what to do'. The LSA [learning support assistant] comes over to the group and there is a lot of giggling. Clive and James slouch and make faces instead of listening to her instruction. The LSA responds 'Boys please'. Clive continues to pull faces although this goes unchecked. At 11:26 the teacher tells the group to stand up. 'You are standing up because some of you are not listening to me. I know it's the end of term, but I want to finish top trumps. Who hasn't started yet? Clive? Trevor? Everyone else apart from those two lads carry on' Clive and Trevor get called over, after their instruction they are separated and Clive is moved. When seated Clive pulls apart his keypad and starts to brandish it as a gun. He chats and jokes with his new seatmate and is told off again. Clive is sent to the corner at 11:34 and two minutes later the teacher comes and goes through the activity again with him. At the end of the lesson the teacher offers to stay in with the boys over lunch if they would like to finish their top trumps but they don't want to.

In what follows the narratives of Clive and his teacher are used to explain this consistent performance.

## Teacher narratives of Clive

Clive evidently experienced strained relationships with school staff as his Maths, Information and Communications Technology (ICT), Geography and Science teachers all told me that his social group was often separated from each other in class. Clive's Science teacher Mr Harlow explained how he interpreted Clive's behaviour as a reflection of an inconsistent learner, with an age identity that was less mature than his peers:

Clive I would describe as quite immature, he rushes his work, doesn't do it to the best of his ability. He isn't nasty, just mischievous. Hadn't achieved anything [on the group project] at the end of the first week so had to do book work individually, absolutely hated it and obviously worked on the group project over the weekend and brought in something which had the potential to be very good, but again they've lost the track of it .... He will get distracted by his friends very quickly.

When Clive had the autonomy of his 'personal space' at home he chose to work very hard on the school project, however, as soon as he returned to school and among peers, he stopped working on it, supporting the data in Ivy school that Clive experienced a tension between his aspirations to work hard and to be socially included.

## Clive's narratives

Turning to Clive's narratives of being a learner, we can see a similar ambivalence regarding his mathematical ability to that he had at Ivy. Indeed Maths continued to play an important role in Clive's learning orientations, in that he voiced pride in his mathematical achievements. When asked how he was doing in school, Clive's first response was in reference to formal learning outcomes, suggesting that despite his misbehaviour they were still important for him:

### Clive

Well uh, I've got a good maths level, I've got 60. Coz when I moved up here I was a 4A and now I'm a 6C.

### CB

So how do you know you've got that then?

### Clive

Well we did our Maths tests, the end of year tests about a month ago and we got the results.

### CB

And how did you feel about it?

**Clive**

Really happy coz I got the best in the class.

**CB**

Was anyone else happy about that.

**Clive**

Yes my teacher happy ... Coz in lessons [that I] have her in I normally mess around like, I'm like really lazy and then she's like really shocked because I was lazy ...

**CB**

So how come you did so well if you weren't listening?

**Clive**

Coz when I talk to people I never look at them when I'm talking to them so that they think I don't listen, but I am.

**CB**

Why don't you look at them then?

**Clive**

I don't know, don't like to ... .

**CB**

Why is that?

**Clive**

(...) I don't know, nervous I think.

Clive's pride in performing well in Maths contrasted with his disruptive behaviour in lessons. What is enabled through the triangulation of these data sources is a far more nuanced account of identity than if offered through consulting only observational data (e.g. Gee, [2001](#)) or only interview data (e.g. Hird, [1998](#)). This is because, consistent with his experience at Ivy school, there is something of a disjuncture between Clive's narrative and performative accounts, supporting Hird's ([1998](#)) claims of the conflict between identity narratives that Clive hold as to what type of learner he is. The longitudinal nature of study also provides some context for his narratives. For example, we might understand Clive's perception that others have low expectations of him, in view of the decision to demote him to the lower maths group for misbehaviour in Ivy school.

What is revealed in Clive's ambivalence, is a contrast to the outright rejection of schooling by Willis' ([1977](#)) 'lads'. Rather, Clive's behaviour can be seen in context of good intentions, he was evidently reflexive of how his age identity affected the meaning of secondary education:

When I moved to Ivy I was really little and now I feel really grown-up, because I have to wear these clothes and this tie and we didn't wear that at Ivy we just wore a polo shirt and a top.

This change in school uniform obviously marked a change in self-perception regarding the association between misbehaving and being childish, and behaving well and being grown up. When asked 'what difference does feeling grown up mean in terms of moving schools?', Clive responded:

At Ivy I was really naughty and now I'm grown up and getting better, I'm not good yet, but I'm getting better.

Here it is possible to understand how in moving up through the schooling system, age identity is interpreted by Clive in terms of an association between being young and misbehaving, and being older and not misbehaving. This association is reinforced by Mr Harlow. However, in considering why such good intentions were clearly not followed through, we have to turn to a consideration of the role of Clive's friendship orientations and the competing drives of social and educational inclusion.

## Peer group narratives

Clive's friendship group at the Maple had changed from that of Ivy, although his friends there all attended the Maple. In considering Clive's friendships at the Maple it was significant that despite going to the same school, Roman and Marcus were no longer indicated on Clive's sociogram. Instead Clive had listed three boys close to him and then three girls who were connected through a longer line of intimacy. It was notable that Marcus, Trevor and Miles shared all the same lessons with Clive, while Jade, Laura and Emma were only in Clive's registration class. When asked about his friends, Clive's description reflected the importance of sharing a similar outlook and dispositions related to being entertaining, active and rule challenging:

Miles's happy, and funny Err Jade's happy, Laura's happy, Emma's happy erm ... James's funny ... Yeah Trevor's really lively. Miles's lively they're all my friends are literally lively, a bit more than we should be in class.

Clive's account of his peer group social identity places significance upon the rule-challenging aspect of the group and this key aspect is given greater precedence with respect to 'the pond' territory. The following account discusses the negotiation process between pupils and teachers in staking the pond territory under the auspices of Clive's social group.

## Dynamic arenas: The pond

Locating Clive during break-times and lunch-times had proved quite difficult, and my only indication of his whereabouts had been following my questioning of where Clive felt happiest in school, to which he had replied, 'the pond'. 'The pond' was situated in a secluded area away from other pupils and staff, and was where Clive socialised with his friends. When I mentioned this to Clive he replied with some pride: 'that's 'cause no-one else goes there, they aint welcome'. In fact, to begin with the pond area had been off limits to pupils, but this had been difficult to enforce as a result of lunch-time staffing availability. After Clive and his friends continued to visit this area for several weeks, the head of year had conceded to permit the pupils usage in the understanding that Clive and his friends would take responsibility for cleaning the pond. As a key focus in the new sociology of childhood, the disciplining of children in space and time is a central means by which adults assert dominance over the child in school (Koverik, 1994 ; James *et al.*, 1998 ; Holloway & Valentine 2000 ). Therefore, achieving rights of ownership over the pond for Clive and his friends was a significant achievement, as the only place Clive claimed to feel happy in school. When asked 'Why?', he replied:

**Clive**

Because it's fun, it's fun hanging out there, coz no-one is watching me.

**CB**

So it feels like your space then?

**Clive**

Yeah.

Conceptualising 'the pond' as a dynamic arena whereby pupils strive to assert autonomy and ownership is helpful in considering its implications in maintaining a social identity of being a rule-challenging social group. This is an example of a successful teacher–pupil negotiation that has enabled some harmony between pupils' social orientations in school that was acceptable within the pedagogical 'rules of conduct' (Rosser & Harre, 1976 ). The pond was evidently the territory of his social group, enabling Clive and friends to perform friendship practices outside of the watchful gaze of authority figures and outsiders to the group.

## Dynamic arenas of classroom inclusion

While in the informal spaces of the pond a compromise had been negotiated in which the teachers were complicit, such negotiation did not work in the classroom where Clive and his friends were frequently in trouble for off-task and distracting behaviour, as a consequence of the characteristics of Clive's social identity involving entertaining his friends and rebelling against authority. It is helpful to consider the dynamic nature of Clive's classroom territories in explaining the fluctuations in his classroom performances, as reflected in the range in Clive's attitude and performance teacher assessments. Both in terms of Clive's request to sit separately from his friends in the Ivy and in his hard work on his Science project at the Maple, we can appreciate Clive's attempts to work hard against

their failure to be sustained. Clive's narrative here illuminates these inconsistencies to be a product of peer pressure. His account of his group's behaviour was that he felt that if he did not conform to such behaviour he would be ostracised:

**Clive**

I was good for ages but then when I first got in trouble I gave up.

**CB**

What was it that made you give up?

**Clive**

I dunno, coz when I started to mess around my mates started to mess around too so then I started messing around with em.

**CB**

Do you think that you're like the ringleader then?

**Clive**

I dunno, maybe.

**CB**

So whatever you do they do?

**Clive**

Not all the time, sometimes.

**CB**

So if you were really good wouldn't then they be good?

**Clive**

Doubt it. No they'd probably try to make me mess around.

**CB**

So do you think that happens then, when you try to be good?

**Clive**

Yeah whenever I try to be good everyone shouts at me, Oh you're a goodie goodie.

In Clive's case, the significance of considering both the formal and informal spheres of school over time and across school contexts, has been paramount in understanding the conflicts between teacher and peer group expectations, and the resulting fluctuations in his social and learner identities. In explaining why he tried to be 'good' Clive clearly recognised the importance of doing well, especially

with regards core subjects. When asked what was important about school he responded:

**Clive**

Maths, English, Science, I dunno what others.

**CB**

Why are they important?

**Clive**

Coz my dad said they're the ones you need really to get a job.

## Understanding the tensions between Clive's schooling identities

Through considering the shifting nature of Clive's schooling identities over time and across school contexts, we can see that the activities and friends comprising his social group changed, and that his confidence in his learner identity in maths fluctuated. In contrast the rule-challenging aspect was constant across Clive's narratives and performances within the classroom and playground. The longitudinal focus enabled recognition of the accumulative effects of Clive's social and learner identities upon his educational performance outcomes.

To some extent Clive's learner and social orientations reflect the structuring forces of class and gender by which male and working class cultures have been found to conflict with engaged and pro-achievement learning orientations (Willis, 1977 ; Renold, 2001 ), and particularly with respect to how these axes may be filtered through the performative pedagogy of schools. Therefore, the structural forces of class and gender may operate differently upon Clive within another schooling context, for example, schools with a high socio-economic composition have been found to exhibit less performative pedagogies, and emphasise an active and participative pupil (Hempel-Jorgensen, 2009 ). However, in triangulating Clive's narratives and performances within the contexts of the dynamic arenas of schooling territories, we can understand the importance to Clive of gaining the respect and validation from his friends, even when such efforts prevented him from being formally recognised as good at maths by his teachers. Through considering the multiple components of structure, performance, narrative and dynamic arenas in triangulation, it is possible to comprehend a nuanced appreciation of the significance of schooling experiences, by unpacking the tensions apparent between Clive's schooling identities. Ultimately, Clive was unable to connect his aspiration to do well at school with the behaviour necessary to achieve his potential in lessons. Focussing on his lessons would have been at the expense of his position within his friendship group, a price in which he felt unable to pay.

## Conclusion: Considering the validity of application

The objective of this paper has been to introduce a framework that may guide researchers in approaching the study of children's identities in school. This is in order to address the gap in the

qualitative literature, which relates theory to data. While some educational researchers that have focused on children's identities, have failed to provide a developed account of identity construction in school, the more sophisticated accounts engaged with in this paper, still leave something of an anomaly between the processes that have led to their data generation and the chosen data sources which are analysed (Hird, 1998 ; Gee, 2001 ; Renold, 2001 ; Youdell, 2003 ). In organising a range of data sources involved in the case study of Clive, according to the various elements of identity construction and their interaction, the analysis of qualitative data is rendered more transparent in the link between theory and method. It is hoped that the model of identity construction presented here, and the translation of these theoretical commitments into a set of data sources and the questions raised by them, may provide a platform for orientating aspiring identity researchers and ignite more experienced ethnographic researchers towards a similar form of theory–data methodological mapping.

There are four considerations in applying this model. First, it provides a way of thinking through how empirical research can be linked to theories of identity, and while it makes some schematic theoretical commitments, it does not elaborate in any substantive sense on theories concerning structures, performance, narratives and dynamic arenas of space and time.

Second, it enables the possibility signalled in the literature, that there can be conflict at the heart of identity theories and we may be able to identify the locus of these conflicts as between structures, performance, narratives and the interplay between space and time. In other words, our understanding of identity construction is driven, in part empirically. As such, identity research must stand up against the frequently raised critiques of qualitative ethnographic work, regarding the rigor in which data is treated in relation to theory. In this model the following claims have methodological implications in relation to identity construction:

- The structural component requires consideration of the social categories represented in school composition and their value within the school and classroom context, as well as of the broader policy discourses shaping pedagogy. This also invokes close consideration of previous qualitative research accounts of the particular configurations of structural forces found in schools, e.g. by 'ability', gender, ethnicity, class and age.
- The performative component requires that teachers' and student's actions and interactions are observed and recorded, as are their attainment scores. It requires that students' performance outcomes be considered through the lens of schooling relationships, and the cultures augmenting them.
- The narrative component requires that students' 'stories' of self are consulted through interviews with students, their friends, teachers and parents, and that conversations and classroom talk should be analysed and considered with respect to schooling performances.
- The framing of time and space into dynamic arenas requires consideration of the symbolic territories of school, in terms of the activities they contain, and the rules, regulations and expectations which govern them. This directs attention towards performances within the different contexts of school, and that narratives be considered in relation to these. Furthermore, the continuity with which structures are affective should be considered over an extended duration of time, in terms of how these shape performance and narrative.
- An understanding of identity must consider the interrelationship between these elements: structural forces are enacted and rendered meaningful through their translation into micro-

level performances and narratives, and these are contextualised within different schooling territories in ways that may change over space and time. As seen in the case of Clive, there are tensions evident between the different components of identity construction. This requires that data sources *must* be triangulated in order that such anomalies may provide a lens in to richer accounts of identity forms, as they shift or continue to operate in different schooling contexts.

Third, this model strongly implies that if we are to understand the influences on identity construction in school we need to view research in this area as longitudinal, in order to examine the nature and durability of school-based identity constructions. While the accounts presented by Renold ( 2001 ) and Youdell ( 2003 ) might be said to emphasise an enduring notion of structure, this account argues that structural forces may change in the effects they produce, and therefore the ways in which they are affective in schools will change as well. It is, therefore, necessary to consider whether axes of gender, race, sexuality and class shift in the forces they bring to bear on schooling identities, according to the teachers and peer groups that students encounter as they move through school. Furthermore, given that children's age identity constructions will alter in some ways with every year of schooling, a longitudinal focus can help identify those aspects in flux from those which are stable.

Lastly, this model raises the importance of comparison *between* school contexts in order evaluate the dominance of specific structural configurations, in terms of how they hold across different schooling cultures, as a more rigorous measure of macro–micro mapping than snap-shot accounts can illuminate. With regards policy discourses concerning the learner, such comparisons are essential in evaluating the pervasiveness of 'performative' culture, in terms of how these are translated through school cultures into bench-mark expectations by which pupils are evaluated and judged. For example, Booher-Jennings ( 2008 ) has observed that a policy emphasis upon a testing culture, creates an informal hierarchy constructed by teachers and peers with the effect of excluding those that are not seen as approximating the behaviours of the high attaining student.<sup>3</sup> These last two implications are significant in relation to the future of identity research in education, within a national and European climate of increasing financial austerity, whereby academic, voluntary and research institutions and organisations, are experiencing ever tightening resourcing. In such a climate it is all the more compelling to stake claims upon empirical grounds, that the scope of qualitative studies must not be curtailed, in order to bear fruit with respect to the value of identity research in understanding school life for children and young people.

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## Notes

- 1 It is this motivational function of narrative that dispenses with the risk of bifurcation between the mask and the actor 'wearing' it. This blurs the line between the front stage and back stage in

Goffman's ( **1961** ) analogy, in the sense that children may be telling themselves who they are at the same time as telling others, through their performances in school.

2 [http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/performance/archive/schools\\_10/s11.shtml](http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/performance/archive/schools_10/s11.shtml).

3 It also raises a question for further research about the findings by Ivinson and Duveen ( **2006** ) that in schools that operated weak classification and framing there was far greater 'space' for students to engage in interaction, and develop power structures beyond the gaze of the teacher. Given that the testing culture typically presupposes both strong classification and framing, the process seems to be one in which there is not a separate peer culture and hierarchy but one created by the system of pupil classification and teacher pedagogy.

## References

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