UNIVERSITY OF SURREY
SCHOOL OF EDUCATIONAL STUDIES

YOUNG PEOPLE WITH LOW LEVEL LITERACY SKILLS IN THE SCHOOL AND POST-SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

This research is focused on groups of young people considered to lack proficiency in literacy skills. A major aim has been to assess how this lack of competence in reading and writing, which I have called the 'traditional' literacy skills, affects both their school years and their routes to employment. Another central aim has been to investigate ways in which the new literacies, in addition to the 'traditional literacies', have been used to aid their learning.

The research began when the 'main group' of young people were aged eleven and about to transfer to secondary school. Subsequently, at fourteen, they completed a questionnaire and, several years later, between the ages of eighteen and nineteen, they were interviewed in depth. A second group of young people, the 'Year 9' group, was interviewed during the period of 'option' choices in order to compare and contrast their views with those of the main group.

Part I includes a consideration of the role of education in our changing society. The discussion centres on the extent to which the National Curriculum and training offered in the post school environment equips young people, specifically those who lack competence in the 'traditional' literacy skills, for a future that may involve a degree of risk.

Part II contains an explanation of the methodology used in the study and a discussion of the concept of literacy in today's society.

In Part III the data obtained from the young people including their views of their school life and their experiences after school, are discussed and emergent themes are identified.

Finally, in Part IV, the discussion moves from the particular back to general concerns as the themes become integrated into theories. The study has identified an over reliance by the school system on the skills of traditional literacy; the written word is used as the central method for learning and teaching and for assessment purposes in the school and post school environment. This works to the detriment of those young people who lack proficiency in reading and writing skills but who have other skills, abilities and 'intelligences'.

Consequently I have redefined the term 'traditional' literacy as 'school' literacy because the system largely ignores the crucial importance of other literacies, including technologies and other social literacies in everyday usage. These, if taught, could provide alternative pathways towards focused individual life-long learning. At present 'school' literacy acts as a divisive instrument in the school system; in some young people this creates as sense of powerlessness so they feel that they have little control over their own futures and are conditioned to accept their low status roles.

'Key' skills, like literacy at present, are defined narrowly, and place reading and writing skills as a central aspect of curricula. As I have demonstrated 'key' skills could, by a wider definition and application unlock the learning door into the twenty first century.
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## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BA (QTS)</td>
<td>BACHELOR OF ARTS WITH QUALIFIED TEACHER STATUS</td>
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<tr>
<td>BSA</td>
<td>BASIC SKILLS AGENCY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BTEC</td>
<td>BUSINESS AND TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION COUNCIL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBI</td>
<td>CONFEDERATION OF BRITISH INDUSTRY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDT</td>
<td>CRAFT, DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPVE</td>
<td>CERTIFICATE OF PRE-VOCATIONAL EDUCATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSE</td>
<td>CERTIFICATE OF SECONDARY EDUCATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CTC</td>
<td>CITY TECHNOLOGY COLLEGE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DES</td>
<td>DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DFE</td>
<td>DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DfE</td>
<td>DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESRC</td>
<td>ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RESEARCH COUNCIL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ERA</td>
<td>EDUCATION REFORM ACT</td>
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<tr>
<td>FE</td>
<td>FURTHER EDUCATION</td>
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<tr>
<td>FEFC</td>
<td>FURTHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL</td>
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<tr>
<td>GCE 'A' LEVEL</td>
<td>GENERAL CERTIFICATE OF EDUCATION 'ADVANCED' LEVEL</td>
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<td>GCE 'O' LEVEL</td>
<td>GENERAL CERTIFICATE OF EDUCATION 'ORDINARY' LEVEL</td>
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<tr>
<td>GCSE</td>
<td>GENERAL CERTIFICATE OF SECONDARY EDUCATION</td>
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<tr>
<td>GLA</td>
<td>GROUP LITERACY ASSESSMENT (SPOONER, 1981)</td>
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<tr>
<td>GM</td>
<td>GRANT MAINTAINED SCHOOL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GNVQ</td>
<td>GENERAL NATIONAL VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HE</td>
<td>HOME ECONOMICS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HMI</td>
<td>HER MAJESTY'S INSPECTORS</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>INFORMATION AND COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY</td>
</tr>
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<td>IT</td>
<td>INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY</td>
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<tr>
<td>KS</td>
<td>KEY STAGE</td>
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<tr>
<td>LEA</td>
<td>LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY</td>
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<tr>
<td>NC</td>
<td>NATIONAL CURRICULUM</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCC</td>
<td>NATIONAL CURRICULUM COUNCIL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NNEB</td>
<td>NURSERY NURSING EXAMINATION BOARD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NVQ</td>
<td>NATIONAL VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OFSTED</td>
<td>OFFICE FOR STANDARDS IN EDUCATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE</td>
<td>PHYSICAL EDUCATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PGCE</td>
<td>POST GRADUATE CERTIFICATE OF EDUCATION</td>
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<tr>
<td>PVC</td>
<td>PRE-VOCATIONAL COURSE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RE</td>
<td>RELIGIOUS EDUCATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSA</td>
<td>ROYAL SOCIETY OF ARTS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SATS</td>
<td>STANDARD ATTAINMENT TASKS</td>
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</table>
SCAA  SCHOOL CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT AUTHORITY
SEN  SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS
TEC  TRAINING AND FUNDING COUNCIL
TES  TIMES EDUCATIONAL SUPPLEMENT
YT  YOUTH TRAINING
YTS  YOUTH TRAINING SCHEME
PART ONE: The first four chapters of this study contain a consideration of the aspects that influence the experiences and aspirations of young people who are considered to have a lack of proficiency in literacy skills. The relative term ‘low level literacy’ is used in order to distinguish them from others who are unable to read and write, and thus considered by society to be ‘illiterate’, and from young people who as pupils are identified as having ‘learning difficulties’ and who may be the subject of a Statement of Need.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 The place of traditional literacy in society

This study is an examination of the effects of schooling on young people recognised as having low level literacy skills. How do these young people make their choices for the future in a rapidly changing society? How do they fare when they have left school?

The twentieth century has culminated, in this last decade, in a period of dramatic social change and a massive shift in work patterns creating a ‘no turning back situation’ and affecting most particularly the lives of our young people, the new society of the twenty first century. People, especially young people, will need to acquire new, different and flexible skills in addition to an increasing level of existing skills to enable them to contribute to society.

Comparisons have been drawn with the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century, in which the terms Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft differentiate two distinct life styles. Gemeinschaft refers to the community based on the hearth and the home, a mainly rural family life style in the self-contained structure of an autonomous small village community, in which people knew their places and so could arrange and order their lives. This way of life contrasts with that of Gesellschaft - the factory based society dependent on the relationship of the movement of raw materials and the transfer of finished goods between developed countries. This provided employment for the masses, and whilst employment was not as predictable as previously, there was still a good chance for people to remain in the same secure employment for their whole working lives and so organise their lives accordingly. In the 1990s it was recognised that the massive shift in employment structures was reflected in a similar shift in thinking. The concept of Risikogesellschaft, the Risk Society, introduced by Beck (1992), formulated a view of a society moving from a period of certainties and predictable outcomes in life to one of uncertainties and involving chance and risk. The loosening structures of this
society give rise to individual work transitions with the individual feeling the responsibility for making decisions for his or her future.

The acquisition of the skills of reading and writing, referred to in this study as the traditional literacy skills, enabled factory workers during the industrial revolution to move from their social class and offered wider horizons. Literacy gained more importance as the century progressed but as early as the 1830s when the influence of Tom Paine's *Rights of Man*, written in 1791, (Thompson, 1968) began to be felt, literacy was fundamental to all strata of society. Vincent (1981) reports that as the century progressed a series of questions developed concerning:

the connection between reading and manual labour
the relevance of the skills of literacy to social mobility
the impact that the revolution in communications would have on traditional popular culture
and, above all, asking if the pursuit of knowledge was to be a means of reinforcing or undermining the edifices of political and economic power which the middle class was attempting to construct (Vincent, p.67)

Literacy was a political, social and economic concern then and continues to be so one hundred and fifty years later. Government, employers and society have expressed concern about the 'falling standards' in education in our schools. One of the central themes of this debate has been a concern about the lack of a 'good' standard in the reading, writing and spelling of pupils. There has been a call for a 'back to basics' approach and to bring back the 'traditional' values of education by raising the standards of literacy, understood as reading and writing, in our schools. Conservative government legislation in the Education Reform (ERA) of 1988 (DES,1988) brought a national framework for education by the imposition of the National Curriculum (NC) in our schools. Further reforms contained in the 1992 Education Act focusing, in the primary school, on the achievement of this 'back to basics' premise, and a system of examining through schools compliance with the National Curriculum and its requirements, was introduced through the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED). The central aim seen by government is to teach the pupils at primary school to be literate and numerate and then to carry these skills to use them in the secondary school for the learning of a subject-based curriculum. The current Labour government elected in May 1997 regards literacy as the central priority for the education service as a whole and had previously set up a Literacy Task Force (May 1996), whilst in opposition, to develop 'a strategy for substantially raising the standards of literacy in primary schools over a five to ten year period'
Society is now able, through technology, to offer alternative forms of literacy by which to communicate. Television provides us on a twenty-four hour basis with news and information, the opportunity to learn other languages and to glimpse other cultures through the provision of cable and other television networks. It can inform, educate and provide pleasure and enjoyment. Telephones enable us to speak and hear clearly someone who may be in the next street or thousands of miles away. Computers and CD-ROM enable communication through the Internet and into cyberspace. Radio, audio-tapes, graphic novels, cinema, computer driven games all give wider senses to the term literacy. These are the new media through which individuals can be informed, gain knowledge and skills, and reflect and become critically aware.

The "traditional" literacy skills, reading and writing, have been and are still crucially important because they are seen as a necessary basis for the transmission of our culture and form the bedrock of our formal education system. The skills of reading and writing must be acquired and must reach a high standard to enable entry into professional careers. Our schools, which provide our young with their formal education, provide a curriculum in which much of the learning and assessment takes place through the medium of reading and writing.

There are in this technological age and within our complex society groups of people considered to be illiterate, semi-literate or as having low level literacy skills. They have not, for whatever reason, acquired a sufficient level in the traditional skills of reading and writing. The fact that they are not fully literate, that is in the skills of reading and writing, does not necessarily mean that they lack intelligence or have some form of disability that prevents access to this medium. Can the new technologies be enablers for these young people and empower them through the skills that they have? Or will they remain, as they were seen to be at school, low or under achievers, incapable of capitalising on their skills because they did not succeed in the curriculum that was offered them?

This study has, as a main focus, a specific group of previously identified young people who were regarded whilst at school as lacking a proficiency in literacy — the traditional skills of reading and writing. In the study an attempt is made to discover how their lives are affected by current sociological, cultural and technological changes. The study will aim to demonstrate the ways in which the lives of this group of young people have been affected by their lack of proficiency in reading and writing during their secondary school lives and the implications this
lack may have for their careers and adult lives.

1.2 The central question of the study
The central question the study poses is:
How does a lack of proficiency in literacy skills affect the lives of young people both during their school years and afterwards?

Banks et al (1992) have shown that young people's school years play a crucial part in the formation and development of the adult identity and in their career choices:

Young people's access to resources, occupations and domestic futures is critically influenced by career choices made in the mid-teens. These choices are themselves in large part, but by no means exclusively, bound up with identities, part social and part personal, established earlier. (Banks et al 1992, p.187)

Recognising this, my study is partly school based and focuses on factors within school connected with literacy that may have implications for career choices and adult identity. I also follow the same group of young people into the after school training and work environment with the aim of capturing the essence of the consequences of their low level literacy skills.

Assessment procedures are a central aspect of school life from pupils' earliest years to at least the end of compulsory schooling and frequently beyond. Most assessments from the less formal teacher's classroom work and homework to the more formal Standard Attainment Tasks (SATs) at the end of the four Key Stages (KS) of the National Curriculum and the examination at the end of compulsory schooling General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) are carried out through the medium of the written word. The acquisition and development of the two skills of reading and writing are of central importance throughout a pupil's school life.

Through the main question of the study, issues concerning assessment, curriculum, school organisation and the uses of literacy will be addressed. The study will question whether our increasingly technological society, through its education system and continued training, equips these young people considered to have low standards of literacy with the skills necessary for independent living, to become full members of society and to make a worthwhile contribution to that society.
CHAPTER TWO: THE STUDY IN CONTEXT

2.1 Background to the study

My initial formal involvement in research into children and young people with literacy difficulties began when, as part of an MA study (1987), I wrote up a project which focused on the reading and writing skills of all children aged eleven years from seven primary schools who were transferring to three secondary schools in an outer London borough. The main conclusion my MA study reached was that a higher proportion of pupils than the Warnock Report (DES, 1978) estimated as having learning difficulties would have difficulty with reading a major part of first year secondary school material (37 per cent compared to the Warnock 18 per cent). The study identified as part of this percentage a 'grey' area of pupils whose literacy skills although assessed as being lower than their chronological ages were not considered severe enough to warrant extra specific help or a statement of need. Their skills in reading and writing appeared to be not secure enough to succeed in the secondary school curriculum and cope with the literacy demands it exacted from its participants. It may be that they were less able than others to grasp the concept of words in the written form. However, when talking with them it was not apparent to me that they showed any lack of verbal ability; this in fact appeared to be not less than average. During my ensuing visits to secondary schools, as an advisory teacher for Special Educational Needs (SEN), I observed the ways teachers were addressing the difficulties experienced by such pupils now that they were beginning the transition period of adolescence.

I realised that a crucial time for these young people would be when they had to choose options within the curriculum, a stage when probably for the first time in their lives all young people have to make choices that may affect their futures in work and career patterns. For some adolescents this age of fourteen plus (14+) may be the first time that they have to come to terms with their achievements in school and to recognise that many avenues leading to full and satisfying lives, offering interesting and challenging jobs of high status, are barred to them. I believed that the realisation of their lack of achievement within the curriculum could lead such pupils to acquire a 'what's the point?' attitude, 'I'm not going to pass any exams', leading to disaffection and a lack of interest in school.

My school and classroom observations continued from an additional perspective when I became a lecturer involved in initial teacher education; part of my role was to observe teachers during their initial training, Bachelor of Arts
with Qualified Teacher Status (BAQTS) or the Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) in the classroom environment.

In the academic year 1990-1991 I visited the three secondary schools and met with groups in each school that had been part of the original study and who had been assessed at eleven years of age as having 'at risk' literacy skills, that is to be in the identified 'grey area'. They were not unknown to me at this time, some I had met at primary school, and others had seen me when I had come into their secondary classrooms to observe a student teacher. The pupils completed a short questionnaire (see Appendix 1) and I asked several of them what they planned to do when they left school. The aim of the current study (registered in January 1993) was to find out what was happening to the young people now that they were beyond the age of compulsory schooling and hence to address the main question of the study.

2.2 Related aspects

These young people were leaving school at a time of unprecedented change both in societal structure and the labour market. Much social science research during the 1980s focused on the lives of young people, especially as young people were staying on longer at school or taking further training. Key studies such as Willis's (1977) had become central to explaining the attitudes of young males towards work and schooling. From then on a growing body of knowledge expressed concern about the consequences the rapidly changing society was bringing to young people because of the lack of traditional industry based jobs. On the one hand the then government was extolling the virtues of the new 'meritocracy', ('you can achieve anything if you really try' and the 'on yer bike' syndrome), in which people were offered the initiative to take individual responsibility for their own lives now that the constraints of the industrial environment were lifted, and thus were enabled to lead satisfying and successful lives. On the other hand, research was reflecting the actualities and experiences of young people particularly those whose traditional form of employment had disappeared (Gesellschaft) and who could no longer return to the Gemeinschaft lifestyle of the pre-industrial society. Studies emanating from the experiences of young people highlighted the concerns and disquiet of those involved with young people in this rapidly changing labour market: Schooling for the dole? (Bates et al, 1984), Education, Unemployment and Labour Markets (Brown and Ashton, 1987) and Growing Up at the Margins (Coffield, Borrill and Marshall, 1986) were indicative of the lives some young people, especially males, were beginning to lead. Without the security of factory based employment for the masses, young
people in particular were left unskilled, without direction, often unemployed and beginning to live on the margins of society and were thus disempowered. The concept of uncertainty and change has tended to become a societal norm with government urging workers to be flexible and to be prepared to accept change. Responsibility for future work and careers now rests with the individual. It is the individual within the *Risikogesellschaft* (risk society) that needs the courage to take chances and to accept the government’s belief that individuals should be prepared to accept a concept of ‘life long learning’.

The supposed myriad of pathways, opportunities for all and the concept of choice and diversity brings to the young person a series of what Giddens (1991) has referred to as ‘fateful moments, a time when a particular situation or episode may be both highly consequential and problematic’ (p.113), so that individuals have to make decisions that have consequences for their ambitions and future lives. Thus individuals feel they are at a crossroads in the terms of life planning and any decisions taken will have consequences not only for future work and style of life but also will affect the self-identity.

2.3 Previous studies

Recent research has reflected on the school-to-work transition period; one such study is the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) 16-19 Initiative (Banks et al, 1992) which focused on how young people’s lives were affected and how they acquired their identities in this time of rapid change. A central goal of this first major study was to chart teenage careers, to classify and analyse them, so that they could be used as a basis for later studies. The study aimed to discover the extent to which government, education, employers and society were influential in shaping the identities of young people. The writers recognised that the period from 16-19 is a time ‘when past experiences and achievements in education and social life are consolidated and crucial choices about future directions are made’ (p.1). Although the young people may appear to make these choices from an individual base, they are dependent on ‘structural’ influences arising from their social and cultural groups. Social class, gender and ethnicity, as well as the characteristics of their local area, play a part in shaping the aspirations of these young people. The 16-19 Initiative classified the routes towards employment by identifying broad career ‘trajectories’, which are summarised as:

- I: academic mainstream leading towards higher education;
• II: training and education leading to skilled employment (...) work-based training and apprenticeships, or further education college leading to vocational qualifications

• III: other forms of education and training leading typically to semi-skilled employment;

• IV: early labour market experience of unskilled jobs, unemployment and ‘remedial’ training schemes. (Bynner and Roberts, 1991, p.xvi)

The trajectories reflected inequalities in resources, suitability of training as well as the previously acquired identities. Banks et al (1992) found that: ‘Of all the themes emerging in our research with most impact on policy, that of inequality is the most pressing.’ (p.187)

The writers highlighted concerns which, they believed, government and educational policy makers needed to address. First, that disadvantage is concentrated in groups defined by class, gender and race in particular localities. Secondly, that young people’s social and occupational values appear to be out of step with the demands of a modern technological society (p.18) (my emphasis)

The commitment to work of young people who had been relatively unsuccessful in competing for labour market opportunities was the highest of any group but they were the most negative among the groups in their attitudes to the new technologies (p.186) (my emphasis). They considered that the problem should be addressed with regard to ‘the inadequacies of curriculum and post-sixteen arrangements not only in formal education but also in the world of formal training.’ (p.187). The education system was seen as fundamentally selective, reducing choice and stunting opportunity. A new post-16 curriculum was seen to be needed if young people were to become active citizens and to ‘ensure success in the transformed labour market of the twenty-first century.’ (p.187)

One questions then whether much of the curriculum being offered at present in the school years pre-sixteen is suitable and relevant for all young people's future needs especially if, as these writers suggest, the influences of school in forming the post-sixteen identities has, for some pupils, been negative. This is not to suggest that pupils should be divided as being academic or practical; the Dearing Report (1996) points out the dangers inherent in this:

The academic/vocational divide is widely associated in British attitudes with a division between the able and the less able. (4.4)
The ESRC 16-19 initiative researchers (Banks et al, 1992) had recognised this previously and commented that:

Vocationalising the curriculum has been seen as reinforcing the divide between young people pursuing academic as opposed to vocational tracks and diverting attention from the proper task of education, the development of the whole individual (p.5)

Unfortunately this country recognises ‘success’ purely by examination results at 16 and 18, not only for the young person but also with regard to ‘successful’ teachers and ‘successful’ schools. The Graded National Vocations Qualification (GNVQ) trials of which were carried out in schools at age 14 and at 16 in 1994 has not yet acquired the same status as the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and Advanced level GCSE (A level) examinations. In spite of employers pressing for more vocational qualifications, they ‘still play safe and hire candidates with A levels’ (Dearing 1996, 4.4). Dearing maintains that this attitude damages the national interest in that the workforce is under-skilled and under-trained and that the ‘wide range of talents among young people’ is not fully developed. (4.5)

An associated ESRC study (Bates and Risborough, 1993) used the core research to highlight the inequalities apparent in the trajectories that the young people were following. Vocational qualifications were, it was professed by government and policy makers, introduced to enable the least advantaged to acquire skills for the newly available technology jobs, so that those who had not achieved academically would still be able to achieve by their vocational knowledge. However, Roberts (in Bates and Risborough, 1993) concluded that there were several problems in these arrangements. First there were no jobs available at age sixteen and unemployment benefit was by 1988 not available for under eighteen-year-olds. Secondly the new opportunities offered did not have equal status so that, to obtain a good job by age nineteen, the best option was to continue the academic route and obtain A levels. Those who did not do this, particularly those who had not obtained the necessary GCSE grades to proceed to A level, found themselves barred from entering the pathway leading to the best chance of success. So that in the areas of the country studied in the 16-19 initiative ‘poorly qualified sixteen year olds (...) were most likely to find themselves limited to non skilled employment and competing for an inadequate number of jobs at age sixteen.’ (p.235)
The first Anglo-German study (Bynner and Roberts, 1991) focused on the youth transition to work in the two counties. The second Anglo-German study (Evans and Heinz, 1994) identified four types of transition behaviour among young people: strategic, step by step, wait and see and taking chances. The most positive form of transition behaviour was summarised as active individualisation; these were young people who knew where they wanted to go and found a way of getting there: 'a process of self determined decision-making between occupational goals and in the choice of pathways to enter them' (p.xiv). The reverse was regarded as passive individualisation.'

Young people in the top trajectories, high achievers with strong social support tended to be in the active mode whilst those in the lower trajectories, poor achievers with weak social networks tended, to have more reactive transition behaviours. (p.xv). Young people, such as the ones in my study who leave school with few or no qualifications and likely to be in trajectories III or IV, were identified by Evans and Heinz as following a taking chances traditional behaviour (mainly trajectory III) or wait and see transitional behaviour (mainly trajectory IV). This latter behaviour is characterised by an attitude of 'learned helplessness' (p.212).

The concept of individualised socialisation then is positive for some, if they are successful in their school leaving exams and therefore able to take up offers of higher education, but not for others who are caught in the trap of being governed by their existing qualifications, receiving no employer-led training (Bates and Risborough, 1993) and being unsure where they are going. Thus they have few resources to support any decision they do take.

To this strategy we can attach the notion of structured individualisation (Rudd and Evans, 1998) which examines the school to work transitions of 16-19 year old college students with regard to preparation and expectations in the labour market. The aim was:

to explore the relative contribution of agency (input from young people themselves on an individual basis) and structure (inputs from organisations at a national and local level, the effects of labour markets, and influences of broad social characteristics such as gender, social class and ethnicity on the education to employment transition process (p.39).

The study found that, while individuals attempted to be proactive in making individual choices for their futures, they did still feel the influences of 'structure'. The structures did not necessarily enable these young people to acquire greater autonomy and make proper career choices, on the contrary they were more likely to regard themselves as dependent upon 'luck', (perhaps
recognising a Giddens' 'fateful moment' referred to earlier) or general external factors including employers' preferences and recruitment policies and the state of the job market in their particular locality. It is apparent therefore that these post school experiences continue to contribute to the identity young people acquire as they move toward adulthood and importantly, as Banks et al have established, these identities are rooted much earlier in young people's lives. Evans and Heinz (1994) conclude that not only are the influences of home and school important but also the young people's experiences of the challenges and rewarding experiences in the passage to employment help to assist the formation of their identity:

Self confidence in youth seems to arise out of success in completion of tasks, from vocation choice to labour market entry, and in coming to terms with changing work structures in personal decision making (p.213)

Furlong and Cartmel (1997) largely agree with Beck's concept of the risk society, in which 'social inequalities continue to exert a powerful hold over people's lives' and that the 'focus for decision making has moved from the group or class to the individual' (p. 4). They point out that this does not mean that social divisions are not still in place; 'there is little evidence to suggest that the effect of social class on life chances is diminishing' (p.112). The divisions are now less clear because of the growing movement towards the individualising of experiences for young people. Some young people as indicated above still feel the structures present in the transition process but, in the current climate that recognises that responsibilities lie within the 'self,' young people can blame themselves for their lack of success.

Furlong and Cartmel conclude that the individual risk taking which has been forced upon young people leads them to accept any crises or failures as a consequence of their own lack of achievement rather than a collective responsibility of society:

Individuals are forced to negotiate a set of risks which impinge on all aspects of their daily lives, yet the intensification of individualism means that crises are perceived as individual shortcomings rather than the outcome of processes which are largely outside the control of individuals. (...) Blind to the existence of powerful chains of interdependency, young people frequently attempt to resolve collective problems through individual action and hold themselves responsible for their inevitable failure. (p.114)
2.4 Present study

With these conclusions of the previous studies in mind together with the justification for my study, associated questions are introduced to illuminate the main question:

In what ways does a lack of literacy skills prevent access to and progress in the curriculum on offer?

To what extent is the curriculum on offer suitable to the needs and interests of these young people?

How much reliance on reading and writing skills do teachers place in their lessons on pupils?

What part do the new technologies play in the school curriculum?

What part do the new technologies play in these young people's lives?

How is the young people's view of themselves (their self esteem) affected by their lack of literacy skills?

How are their lives affected by their probable lack of attainment in schools?

How, if literacy (reading and writing) is regarded as essential for the transmission of our culture, do these young people continue the learning process and acquire knowledge?

These questions will be developed as themes by studying the experiences of two groups of young people previously identified as having poor literacy skills. The first group, consisting of twenty-two young people and referred to in the study as the 'main group', were between 18 and 19 years of age when interviewed individually. This group was part of those identified at 11 and whom I saw when they were 14. The second group referred to in the study as the Year 9 group were aged 14 years when interviewed. They form a minor part of the study and were interviewed in schools in small groups of two or three. Regarding both groups' 'lack' of literacy skills the questions, which are appropriate to pose, are: What will be their life chances? Will society value them for the skills they do possess?
Will they be empowered by having the opportunity to gain skills and knowledge to contribute to the society of the twenty first century?

2.5 Justification for the Study

My study finds its justification in several factors. First, because of the implications of my MA study as indicated above. A second is connected with government which maintains that its present policies aim for ‘excellence for everyone’ (DfEE, 1997a 1.19) and that ‘policies will be designed to benefit the many not just the few’ (p.14) yet, in practice, this may not be happening. Additionally, and extending the latter reason, research into the groups of young people who experience inequality and disadvantage needs to be continued in order that society may aim in the future to redress the balance somewhat so that all young people experience an equality of opportunity in school, in further education and in employment.

When the young people in the main group were eleven years old, I was aware that secondary school experiences could aggravate their difficulties, and this was one of the reasons that I had independently decided to follow them up. The study is thus partly retrospective in that this group is asked to reflect upon experiences in school and immediately following school. The study is also forward looking in that it attempts to discover how they are now dealing with any problems encountered and their plans and expectations for the future. The second group (the Year 9 group) being 14 at the time of interview provide the study with their actual experiences during their secondary school careers and at the time of decision making for their choice of options. I hope the study will add to the knowledge first by its focus on the actual experiences of a group of young people by information obtained from the young people themselves; secondly by providing information on school organisation and its effects on these young people and finally by questioning whether the curriculum on offer in schools and subsequently the government’s attempts to redress the failure in the post 16 environment gives these young people the equality of opportunity that the policy makers believe that it does.

The study is particularly pertinent at this time because of the recent and rapid and continuing changes in education that have affected teachers and pupils.

2.6 Summary

We are living in an age in which the individual has to take more responsibility for his or her own future world of work and career path, partly because the traditional forms of mass employment have disappeared. A variety
of pathways that offer choices appear to be available. However the most successful school route is the A level route to higher education which is largely dependent on an individual's knowledge and the ability to express this knowledge by use of the written word. Courses described as vocational do not as yet have the status or equality of the higher education route. Individuals' choices appear still to rest on the structures of the industrial society. Decisions taken at 'fateful moments' have implications for a future way of life and self-identity. Young people who are unlikely to succeed through trajectory I of the ESRC 16-19 study, the academic route towards higher education, because of a lack of ability and skill in the particular area of reading and writing, may find themselves on the lower trajectory routes or indeed be on 'routes to nowhere'. (Behrens and Brown, 1991)

The next two chapters which complete Part One of this study are concerned with aspects which affect the lives of young people, particularly those young people who are not experiencing success. These aspects are especially influential during the period of adolescence, a time when the critical pathways to adulthood open up (Banks et al, 1992). They are: schools and curriculum and the opportunities and structures in place for young people.
CHAPTER 3: SCHOOLS AND CURRICULUM

3.1 Introduction

Young people's characters and their life chances are fashioned by their school experiences (Banks et al., 1992) as well as by their home background and social lives. In order to begin to assess the influence of school on their lives, this chapter describes secondary schools, their organisation and curriculum. The education policies of both the previous Conservative government and the present New Labour government are challenged in that the proposed pathways towards adulthood are not, in fact, giving pupils equality of opportunity but are creating stronger divisions between the 'have' and 'have not' population of the future.

An explanation of current secondary school organisation and how pupils are organised within the schools follows the general background of education and schooling. Consideration is given to the curriculum and the assessment of learning in schools and the emphasis placed on the importance of traditional literacy within these areas. The recently introduced vocational qualification from age 14 (General National Vocational Qualification, GNVQ) is briefly explained and compared with the GCSE examination. The discussion that follows questions whether the curriculum, both in content and in the way learning is presumed to take place, is appropriate for all pupils in providing them with the necessary skills for their future lives.

3.2 Education and schooling

Society's aims for its young people are in part reflected in the types of educational experiences on offer. Education in its widest sense can be seen to be the sum of all life's experiences and only part of it is acquired through school attendance. 'Formal education' is the type acquired through the curricula of schools whilst 'social education' is acquired more informally both in and out of school.

Writing during the early part of the twentieth century, Dewey (1916) saw the necessity of formal education with the growth of the complex industrial society. He recognised that learning by direct sharing in the pursuits of adults becomes more complex as society becomes more complex. School then becomes a necessary part of society as without formal education the achievements and resources of a complex society cannot be transmitted. The crucial element of formal education in Dewey's time as now is the acquisition of learning through the medium of the written word. He perceives that formal education opens a way into the kind of experience which would not be accessible to the young if they
were left to pick up their training in informal situations with others, 'since books and the symbols of knowledge are mastered.' (p.8) Dewey's formal education process rests on the ability to read and write, as through this medium knowledge is acquired. He warns, however, of the danger latent in formal education, that it can easily become remote and bookish and that it will be merely the subject matter of the schools, isolated from the subject matter of life experience. He concludes that if the providers of formal education are not aware of this danger then it becomes a paper exercise with the topics seemingly irrelevant to human beings' lives.

Thus he maintains that schools have the increasingly delicate task of striking a balance between the acquisition of knowledge and the absorption of learning through more informal means:

As societies become more complex in structure and resources, the need of formal or intentional teaching and learning increases. As formal teaching and training grow in extent, there is a danger of creating an undesirable split between the experience gained in more direct associations and what is acquired in school. This danger was never greater than at the present time, on account of the rapid growth in the last few centuries of knowledge and technical modes of skill. (p.9)

Eighty years on, society is in an even more potentially dangerous situation than Dewey talks about. The rapid technological revolution that has moved on apace since Dewey's time, not least in the last ten years, has resulted in huge changes in economic situations and work patterns which have immense consequences for the future lives of young people. No longer are industrial unskilled or semi-skilled jobs available for a lifetime's work. Tomlinson (1994) argues that all school leavers whatever level of society they come from need the same skills. One can question if our present 'formal' education system suits the needs both of all young people and of society in general and whether the skills and attributes that young people have acquired through the more informal and social aspects of their education are recognised as being of value for their futures and for society.

Society at present relies on the results of formal education, which are in the form of qualifications obtained through the academic curriculum taught, assessed and learned mainly through the written word. Employers recognise these qualifications and appear to place little value on the skills and attributes that school leavers may have acquired through more informal learning and social education. That the two types of education, formal and social education, should operate hand in hand is clearly acknowledged in the identification of two long term goals for all children which the Warnock Report (DES,1978) defined:
to enlarge a child’s knowledge, experience and imaginative understanding and thus his [sic] awareness of moral values and capacity for enjoyment and to enable him [sic] to enter the world after formal education is over as an active participant in society and a responsible contributor to it capable of achieving as much independence as possible (1.4)

These goals do illustrate Dewey’s formal and social education working together and recognise that while the results of ‘formal’ education in the form of qualifications are important, so too are other aspects which cannot be gained simply through qualifications.

This widens the debate to question what society expects from our schools. The aims of the Warnock Report recognise that the purpose of education is not simply to be fit for employment. Yet there is still a dilemma as to what education is for, a dilemma which has faced societies from the beginning of the civilised world. Curtis (1965) quotes Aristotle:

Neither is it clear whether education is more concerned with the cultivation of the intellect or with character. The existing practice of education offers no solution to the problem. No one knows on what principle we should proceed, whether the young should be exercised in that which is useful in life or should goodness or should the higher knowledge be the aim of our training. (p.32)

What is perhaps more important is that whatever the aims, they should be the same for all children. A democratic society constructed from a sound ethical base should, ideally, hold all its members to be of equal worth and thus use the skills and attributes of all its members to their best advantage. If we accept the Warnock Report goals to be valid, then school plays a central part both through what is offered to increase ‘knowledge, experience and imaginative understanding’ and in preparing them to become ‘active participants and responsible contributors to society.’ School organisation provides some evidence of ways in which schools expedite or impede the achievement of these aims.

3.3 The organisation of secondary schooling

At the age of eleven, children move from primary school to secondary school where they will stay at least until the end of compulsory schooling at age sixteen. The NC now in place in primary and secondary schools in England and Wales was a result of the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA). Prior to this implementation a variety of views had been put forward as to what children should be learning and how they should be organised in order to achieve this
learning. The 1944 Education Act, attempting to bring to education a fairer deal for all children, recommended that schools should provide for the age, aptitude and ability of pupils and aimed for a non separatist form of schooling. However, whilst children in primary school were educated together up to the age of eleven, the 1944 Act was interpreted in some areas of England and Wales as a tripartite system of secondary education, keeping the academic grammar schools in place, with the addition of technical schools and secondary modern schools. Other areas operated a bipartite system with grammar schools and secondary modern schools only. These systems followed the advice of the Spens report of 1938 which classified pupils as one of three types of pupil: the academic, the technical and the practical (Holt, 1978)

Concern grew among educationalists during the 1950s that a fairer system should be developed particularly for the large majority of ‘practical’ pupils who were leaving with few qualifications in the academic sense or without any skills based training. As Holt 1978 has commented when arguing for a ‘core’ curriculum to offer to all pupils:

By the late 1950s some device was needed to give more substance to the notion of equal opportunity latent in the 1944 Education Act, and minimise the painful side-effects of selection by testing. (p.6).

The belief developed that there should be more equality of opportunity, allowing all pupils a chance to gain success. By the 1960s these more liberal views prevailed and a system of state comprehensive secondary schools began to spread throughout the country. Some areas have still retained the grammar schools and, of course, the independent sector has remained in place and is still exempt from most legislation pertaining to state schools. During the 1970s and early 1980s, concomitant with the comprehensive ideal, most pupils in state schools were encouraged to attend the secondary school in the local area, often identified as the community or comprehensive school. Children whatever their ability, who had been together in primary school progressed on to secondary school together.

The ERA of 1988 brought in other far-reaching changes. These included giving parents in theory more rights to choose schools for their children than existed before. Secondary schools now take pupils in from a wider catchment area and from a larger number of primary schools; children travel further and they may no longer be with their friends from the previous school. Schools are now legally obliged to take in children from surrounding Local Education Authorities (LEAs). Those LEAs that have kept grammar schools find
competition for places high. The Act gives direct funding to the school rather than to the LEA, through the local management of schools (LMS). All schools now have control of the majority of their budgets, unlike the previous situation, although the LEA still retains a percentage of the budget for support services. Schools were encouraged by the previous government to become grant maintained (GM), a situation that gave them total control of the budget and frees them from any responsibility to the LEA. The present government is phasing out GM schools with the schools having the option of taking on aided or foundation status. Being responsible direct to government, these schools have, according to the previous government's view, more freedom in the way they are run, more resources and the opportunity to specialise in particular areas such as technology or the arts. This organisation creates competition between schools, which is again approved by government as it is supposed it will go some way to improving standards. Schools need to market themselves to convince parents that their school is more successful and has better facilities than the schools nearby, as the more pupils on roll, the more money the school receives. School governors (voluntary, lay people) have more power both in the running of the school and in the appointment of staff. School results are published in league tables in an attempt by government to indicate which schools are 'successful' and which are 'failing'. Schools may wish to show the school ethos as being caring as well as academically successful but no school would wish to highlight the fact that, for instance, more than just a few pupils have learning problems, since the better the league table position, the more popular the school and therefore the more funds available. Schools then can in theory continue to be upwardly mobile by attracting 'good' teachers and having the resources to send teachers on professional courses.

It is not unreasonable to expect schools to be tempted to bring an element of selection into the admission procedures. After all, teachers would prefer to teach children who are willing to learn and who have supportive families interested in the education process who want their children to obtain good examination results, thus guaranteeing the child entry into higher education and eventually into a profession. Schools do not wish to have pupils on their registers who seem to have negative attitudes to schooling, whose behaviour is such that it disrupts the learning of others and whose families may appear to be uninterested in their child's educational progress. However, the aim of running schools on market principles was affecting teachers and pupils; according to Mac an Ghaill (1992):
There appears to be emerging a new bureaucratic schooling hierarchy of managerial technocrats, an ideologically divided teaching force, whose interests are being directed to the 'new realism' of the competitive schooling marketplace and an underclass of excluded, confused students with whom teachers have little time to interact. (p229)

The Labour government (DfEE, 1997a) has promised that the policy focus will be on standards not structures, (1.3), and that government will work in partnership with all those committed to raising standards (1.6). Three categories of schools will be in operation: community schools (run by LEAs) aided schools (that will contribute 15% towards their capital spending) and foundation schools (that will not be required to contribute towards capital cost) (7.5-7.7). It is expected that schools will choose the status that will best suit 'their character and aspirations' without distracting attention from the 'main purpose of raising standards'. (1.8). Consultation is taking place regarding the principles underlying the proposed frameworks. Grammar schools will continue, depending upon the decisions of local parents; the government says that:

There will be no going back to the 11-plus. However, we recognise that, where grammar schools exist, local parents have an interest in decisions on whether their selective admissions arrangements should continue. Changes in the admission policies of grammar schools will be decided by local parents, and not by LEAs. (7.34)

Independent schools will also continue and will be asked to share their facilities and specialist provisions with many more children and the local community. The government recognises that: ‘The educational apartheid created by the public/private divide diminishes the whole education system’ (7.35). Specialist schools, which the previous government introduced, are to continue and increase and will be used as a resource for the local community and neighbouring schools. This diversity, it is said, will not affect the opportunities that are going to be offered to all pupils:

We are deeply committed to equal opportunities for all pupils. This does not mean a single model of schooling. We want to encourage diversity, with schools developing their own distinctive identity and expertise. Specialist schools—focusing on technology, languages, sports or arts—should be a resource for local people and neighbouring schools to draw on. (4.10)

If schools wish to acquire specialist status, they will need to draw up a development plan and will need to find sponsors to raise private funds to
improve the specialist facilities and these funds will be matched by government funding. Schools in deprived areas will be given ‘some preference’ (4.11).

An observer may find it difficult to reconcile the realities of putting policies of ‘equality of opportunity’ and ‘diversity’ of schooling into practice; for this to work pupils with any type of specific ability will need to be recognised at an early stage and will have to be in the right place at the right time. Pupils who are intellectually able may not profit if there is no grammar school in the area and the specific talents of others may languish if there is no specialist school available. There appears to be a clash of interests between the public/private divide with sponsors raising private funds.

3.4 Pupil organisation in secondary school

Time tabling is a complex process as a means of organising a community of possibly over a thousand people. Systems need to be in place to enable smooth transition from one part of a school to another and to ensure that all classes have the opportunity to experience all parts of the curriculum. This necessitates pupils moving to a variety of places: science laboratories, gymnasiums, pottery and art rooms, computer rooms, home economics bases and so on.

Mixed ability teaching is another ideal of the comprehensive school system (Ball, 1981). Pupils of all ability levels are taught together in order to learn from each other, to become empathetic to the points of view of others and to gain an understanding and learn from the social and cultural background of others. This arrangement had been justified in the 1960s, as being educationally necessary in the sense that mixed ability was the fairest way to allow a child’s abilities to be revealed. By contrast it was argued that organising pupils by ability levels ‘conditions pupils to a level of response’ that has been set for them and which the authorities and the pupils come to believe ‘is a measure of their innate ability’ (Thompson, 1965). Some schools, although comprehensive in their admission procedures, have kept to the previous arrangements of:

- streaming - pupils are separated into ability levels for all curriculum areas, thus stream one for the most able, stream two for the slightly less able, and so on. There may be as many as six or seven streams in a school.

- banding - mixed ability grouping, sometimes organised into ‘able’, ‘average’ and possibly ‘lower’ groups

- setting - pupils are in ‘sets’ for different subjects depending on their ability in that subject. This may sometimes be organised only for the core subjects of
English and maths and sometimes science, pupils coming together in mixed ability groups for other subjects.

Decisions about who are the most able pupils and the not so able are made by means of testing procedures in reading ability, non-verbal reasoning and numerical ability, and may be made before they arrive at secondary school. The pupils' performance at secondary school will also form part of the decision making process.

As regards mixed ability teaching the Labour government states as a clear directive that it expects schools to organise pupils in sets (DfEE, 1997a). This decision is in spite of there being no unequivocal evidence that organisation by setting is the best method to encourage learning for all pupils. (Hallam and Toutounji, 1996). The government document defends selection by 'setting' by arguing that mixed ability teaching is unable to give to pupils the opportunity to develop their talents and diverse abilities. It states that setting has proved successful in the areas of Science, Maths and Modern Foreign Languages. This may be the case and while the government is not explicit in recommending setting in terms of other subjects, the same argument can be used for Technology, Art, Music and Physical Education (PE). Thus a school can, I presume, put pupils in sets for every subject in the curriculum, in order for the government maxim of recognising 'the different talents of all children' and delivering 'excellence for everyone' (DfEE, 1997a, 4.1)

Nor does it appear that the teachers will have a voice if they wish to protest that mixed ability teaching can be the most successful way in aiding pupil learning not only in knowledge but also in ways suggested earlier:

We are not going back to the days of the 11-plus; but neither are we prepared to stand still and defend the failings of across-the-board mixed ability teaching. That debate is sterile and provides no solutions. We intend to modernise comprehensive education to create inclusive schooling which provides a broad, flexible and motivating education that recognises the different talents of all children and delivers excellence for everyone. (4.1)

Schools are implicitly criticised for organising pupils in mixed ability situations. Teachers are accused of teaching only to the average achieving pupil while the needs of others are not met. The government statement in 'not going back' also appears to say that there will be no discussion on the subject; decisions have already been taken.

Boaler (1997) has found that negative responses from pupils in sets for maths came not only from the less able pupils but also the ablest. Pupils in low sets found the work boring and were annoyed and upset by the low levels of
work they were offered. Observations of pupils in high sets found that teachers covered work so quickly that pupils had neither time to think nor reflect. Boaler argues that in mixed ability situations, teachers aware of the range of ability in the class prepare work focused on small groups whereas with ‘setted’ groups teachers tend to think that the pupils are of the same ability. One of the main points of her studies is that in classes organised in sets ‘pupils have a reduced opportunity to learn’ (p.593).

However the government is planning to extend setting as a method of organisation by using it in the primary school and provides evidence that setting improves standards. A survey of primary schools by government inspectors (OFSTED, 1998) ‘endorses the government’s view that setting is well worth considering by schools of all types’ (p.5). as ‘a large proportion of the schools inspected demonstrated a clear trend of rising standards for pupils of all abilities’ (p.5). Setting in the primary school, according to HMI from the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED), is popular with teachers parents and pupils. The teachers regard sets as more manageable than mixed ability classes, planning is easier as the focus is on a narrower range of attainment and motivation is enhanced by common learning goals. Apparently parents prefer setting because they prefer their children to be taught with others of similar attainment and pupils prefer it as ‘they see this as a good preparation for secondary school’ (p.7). The inspectors found that the pupils welcomed setting even though they invariably knew the level of their set. These young pupils especially those in the bottom sets may, in their innocence and trust in the system, believe that setting is preparing them to cope with their work at secondary school. They may not realise that these procedures will carry on into the secondary school.

The children in the ‘top’ sets experienced the highest quality of teaching reflecting the fact that ‘upper sets are frequently taken by subject co-ordinators or specialists’ (p.5). The Inspectors are of the opinion that setting worked best when whole class teaching methods are employed; setting they believe fails when the teachers continues to teach the group as mixed ability, using small group and individual methods. This conclusion assumes then that all the pupils in the group learn at the pace and level. These conclusions are opposite to what Boaler (1997, see above) finds.

The government’s plans appear to include early identification of ‘particularly able’ and ‘talented’ children who will have the support of accelerated learning, specialist schools and partnership with independent schools (DfEE, 1997a, 4.5). The definitions of ‘particularly able’ or ‘talented’ are not discussed and it would be naive to ask if pupils without the required skills in
school literacy would be included in the government’s categories. So, although the government maintains that children will not be separated into different institutions on the basis of ability at 11, it does implicitly encourage the separation of pupils within the school, defending the argument by verbiage such as ‘inclusive’ schooling which will recognise ‘the different talents of all children and deliver excellence for everyone

Additionally the government provides more justification for separation and against mixed ability teaching by implicitly blaming teachers for its failure, blaming not the method but the deliverers of the method:

We believe in ‘diversity within one campus’, with the method of teaching and the organisation of a school playing to the strengths of every child. Mixed ability grouping has not proved capable of doing this in all schools. It requires excellent teaching and in some schools has worked well. But in too many cases it has failed to stretch the brightest and to respond to the needs of those who have fallen behind. (4.3)

It could be argued that the term of ‘inclusive schooling’ by the government’s justification separates pupils because of their ‘different talents’. One questions how these strengths will be decided. If a pupil has little strength in school literacy what will his or her strengths be in a subject-based curriculum assessed by the written word?

This effectively means that selection will take place by setting procedures not only in secondary schools but also in some cases in junior schools. (OFSTED, 1998). Suggestions are given to the exact ways in which pupils may be grouped. To my mind this complicates and builds in more structures within a school rather than less, making timetabling an even more complex and exacting task. Yet contrary to the government’s assertion of ‘diversity in one campus,’ grammar and other specialist school will continue to exist and be encouraged in their specialisms. It appears also that ‘particularly able’ pupils will be separated from others (4.5). Within the school, examples of good practice will be required in ‘target grouping, fast tracking, accelerated learning and the systematic teaching of thinking skills’ (4.4).

Additionally teachers will need to spend more time on paperwork and assessment to justify pupil position and possibly less time on lesson preparation and pupil learning:

Schools should make clear to parents the use they are making of different grouping approaches. OFSTED inspections will also report on this. (4.3)
The following sections give some background to the National Curriculum (NC), past influences on curricula and teacher responsibilities within the curriculum.

3.5 The curriculum in schools

Although schools are now largely autonomous in budgetary control, the NC has ensured that ‘content’ control is now centrally based. Government has decided what pupils should learn. Teachers are assured that the responsibility for the ‘how’ of learning, the use of their own styles and strategies, lies within their professional judgement. The Secretary of State is responsible for policy through the inspectorate, the Office for Standards in Education, (OFSTED), an independent body although employed by government. Teachers are inspected in all aspects of their teaching and they need to show that they are delivering the NC successfully.

The difficulty of choosing a curriculum that suits all pupils with widely differing academic or technical skills and other interests created much discussion and heated debate during the 1970s. Initially there was great optimism that the then new comprehensive system would seize that opportunity to develop new approaches to the curriculum, though there was some difficulty in shaking off the idea that there existed a ‘grammar school’ child and a ‘secondary modern’ child, the ‘academic’ and the ‘non-academic’ - the able and not so able. In practice, for a variety of reasons, a ‘watered-down’ academic curriculum was often in place, with no formal directives to determine the content of such a curriculum. More pupils had the opportunity in comprehensive schools to sit examinations although two levels were in operation: the General Certificate of Education, Ordinary level - GCE 'O' level (for the ‘able’ pupils) and the Certificate of Secondary Education - CSE (for the ‘average’ pupils). The not so able pupils were leaving school with few if any qualifications. Lawton (1973) commented that there was consistent failure to re-think the curriculum and plan a programme that would be appropriate for 'universal secondary education'.

A speech in 1976 by the then Prime Minister James Callaghan began the ‘great debate’, centring on curriculum content. It was felt that educationalists had had their own way for too long and that society in general should have a say in deciding what should be taught.

Views on curriculum content included philosophical perspectives which questioned why pupils, particularly in secondary schools, concentrated their learning in subject areas. Instead suggestions were put forward that ‘areas of learning’ should be considered. A variety of writers suggested curricula that they believed would help children appreciate the world and society and also prepare
them for adulthood. Phenix, for instance, suggested ‘realms of meaning’ (1964) as a basis for secondary school study instead of subjects whilst Hirst and Peters preferred ‘forms of knowledge’ (1970). The HMI booklets A Framework for the Curriculum (DES, 1980) proposed a number of common educational aims and Better Schools (DES, 1985) urged for a curriculum with a ‘coherent framework whose general principles hold good for all schools’ (para.3). Other suggestions included a core curriculum with additional areas of study being the choice of the school or LEA. There did appear to be a consensus of opinion that all children should have an equal opportunity to have access to a broad and balanced curriculum and that the same opportunity should be available to all pupils the length and breadth of the country.

3.6 The National Curriculum (NC)

The NC for five to sixteen year olds put in place between 1989 and 1992 purports to respond to all the anxieties and apprehensions. Society, we are assured, now has in place a curriculum suitable for all the pupils in the school. This NC has taken the ‘safe’ route of learning through subject areas, and paid scant regard to the more radical ideas suggested.

The NC is subject based, the three core subjects being English, Maths and Science. In this way it is similar to previous curricula that state schools in England and Wales voluntarily followed. Following a review of the NC by Sir Ron Dearing, chairman of the Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA, 1994), the foundation subjects are now Design and Technology, (including Information Technology), Modern Languages (after the age of eleven), History, Geography, Art, Music and PE. Four Key Stages are identified by age and Attainment Targets designed to ensure that pupils can be seen to progress in their learning; each attainment target contains eight level descriptors which provide the basis for making judgements at the end of each key stage on pupils’ attainment in particular aspects of the subject (SCAA, 1996a). The NC continues under the Labour government, which believes its introduction was ‘right, -albeit that it was 20 or 30 years too late’ (DfEE 1997a, 1.13).

When the original version of the NC was implemented, the then government stated that subjects did not form the whole curriculum of the school; schools should also include certain themes which could be taught within subject areas or through ‘other timetabled provision’ (National Curriculum Council, NCC, 1989). These themes are citizenship, education for economic and industrial understanding, health education, careers education and guidance, and environmental education. By introducing the themes, an attempt was made to
bring some cohesion to the curriculum; that is, the subjects would be linked
together by the themes' cross curricula elements and therefore pupils would be
able to understand the relevance of the subject and apply it to their own lives.
The pressures which an examination exerts on pupils to pass at the required level
and to show that the teacher has been 'successful' in the teaching of the subject
often mean that the themes are not actively taught. However, the Labour
government may highlight the teaching of the theme of citizenship, as it believes
that: 'A modern democratic society depends on the informed and active
involvement of all its citizens'. (6.42)

The revised NC requires that Religious Education continues to be taught
in addition to the NC as well as sex education at Key Stages 3 and 4 (11-16
years) and provision for careers education should be made at Key Stage 4 (14-16
years). Additionally schools have the 'discretion to develop the whole
curriculum to reflect their particular needs and circumstances' (SCAA), 1996a).

3.7 The Assessment of Learning

The Standard Attainment Tasks (SATs) administered nationally at the
end of Key Stages 1, 2 and 3. (Age 7,11 and 14) test pupils' learning progress in
the NC. Results of SATs at the end of these Key Stages are utilised for a variety of
purposes:
• to select pupils at the end of KS2, transferring to secondary schools, for
  attendance at grammar, aided or foundation or other 'specialist' schools
• to group pupils into ability levels within schools
• to place schools in the national 'league table of results'.
• to apply for funding
• to determine if a pupil has learning difficulties and the nature of any
difficulties
• to determine the level of a pupil's difficulties and apply if necessary for extra
  funding and assistance (DFE 1994)
• to identify most able pupils in order to give them extra help
• to assess the level of teacher performance in order to judge them as
  'successful' or 'failing' teachers
• to identify 'successful' or 'failing schools'.

Future plans (DfEE, 1999) include linking the identification of 'successful' and
'good' teachers to the performance levels achieved by their pupils. Thus the
higher the assessment results the better the teacher who then qualifies for
'performance related pay' with the grade of an 'advanced skills teacher.' (DfEE,
1997a 5.19). 'Outstandingly successful teachers' (5.2) will disseminate their
skills to other schools whilst at the same time the government will be prepared to act where the performance of teachers or heads falls below acceptable standards (5.3). The government has indicated that in addition to the evidence from examination results teachers will also be assessed on competencies including professional development, classroom management and motivating pupils. (Times Educational Supplement, 9. 4. 1999). However the balance of the two areas is not indicated and the assessment of pupil performance through the use of tests and examination will play a major role.

3.7.1 The General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examination

At KS4 (Years 10 and 11 age 14 –16 years) the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) course is followed. GCSE ends with a summative examination taken at age 16 and was introduced in 1987 before the ERA and the NC. The GCSE replaced the Ordinary (O) level General Certificate of Education (GCE) and the Certificate of Secondary Education(CSE). It gives grades of A-G, each one seen as a pass, but only pupils who have obtained five A-C grades are able to follow a curriculum at a higher academic level, Advanced (A) level. Success at A level enables a student to enter university. The GCSE results are seen as the gateway of opportunity which allows those who have achieved certain results to move upwards towards higher education by taking A levels and going on to university. This route is still the preferred route to successful careers for most young people; it means that they can be on the ESRC 16-19 initiative career trajectory I, the academic route leading to higher education (Banks et al 1992), which of all the routes offered is the most clearly defined.

Initially most teachers welcomed the introduction of the GCSE, for the course of study was regarded as a cumulative assessment of pupils' work over the two years between fourteen and sixteen years of age. This was regarded as giving a fairer assessment of pupils' work over a period of time rather than a one off performance during an examination of two to three hours. In addition, most, if not all, pupils were able to follow the course; there was no division at 14 into the GCE for more able and the CSE for average pupils. Pupils could be examined largely through course work particularly in English (up to 100 per cent with some examination boards). Teachers felt that, to some extent, they were able to concentrate on pupils' achievement rather than pupil failure; pupils could develop their skills and follow their achievements by their growing portfolio of work.
Pupils who had reading and writing difficulties were able to draft and redraft pieces of work; they had the opportunity to become real authors, thus improving their skills in these areas, while others took the opportunity to use different kinds of literacy for the presentation of their work. Art work included cartoon based stories, tape recordings and video presentations; skills were thus beginning to be transferred across the curriculum, not bounded by subjects. With this degree of choice even the weakest readers and writers could achieve some success and even more importantly they could begin to realise that text could become accessible to them and acquire meaning. Teachers introducing a wider variety of literature increased interest for the pupils; for instance some teachers focused some of the course content in the areas in which they lived.

Oral assessment gave pupils with reading and writing difficulties in particular the chance to succeed, and teachers began to explore the learning process further through the use of talking in the classroom, teacher with pupils, pupil with pupil, discussion and debate. Additionally teachers gained new skills by trying out enthusiastically these different forms of literacy. Soon, however, attacks from government and the media, which accused schools of allowing standards to slip and focused particularly on grammar and spelling, culminated in a drastic reduction of course work for the GCSE. The then Prime Minister, John Major, clarified the view of government in the belief that standards would return by reverting back to assessment by examinations:

(...) getting GCSE back to being an externally assessed exam, which is predominantly written. I am attracted to the idea that a maximum of twenty per cent of the marks should be obtained from course work. We short change our brightest children if we devalue the currency of the exams they take (Major, 1991)

It was apparent that the government was not willing to allow teachers to take responsibility for the assessment of pupils' learning nor even the content of what should be taught

3.7.2 Option choices at age 14

At the end of Key Stage 3 of the NC pupils are asked to choose options, regarding the subject programme they wish to follow for the two year GCSE course. This is probably the first time that young people are asked to consider their future careers. In reality there is at present little choice to be made, as the three core subjects (English, Maths and Science), one foreign language, one humanities subject and a choice within the area of Technology must be taken. Physical Education must be followed as well as Religious Education, unless for this last subject the parents request otherwise. Religious Education within the
NC includes the aims of enhancing spiritual and moral development, developing the ability to make reasoned and informed judgements and assisting pupils in their own search for meaning and purpose in life. These aims, excepting possibly spiritual development, are aims that perhaps the whole curriculum should address if society is to go some way to achieving the aims for education that the Warnock Report (DES, 1978) stated. But, at the request of parents, ‘any child in a maintained school must be excused from receiving religious education’ (SCAA, 1996a p.62). One can clearly begin to understand the difficulties of trying to teach the requisite skills for young people’s futures through a subject-based curriculum. If Physical Education and Religious Education are chosen as GCSE subjects then they are examined by written papers.

The two year GCSE course (Years 10 and 11) is now undergoing further changes with the introduction of a tiered system. Maths is the only subject that has operated a tiering system from 1988, although some examination boards have tiered Science and Geography; English was tiered in 1995. From 1998 these subjects will continue to be tiered and additionally so will Design and Technology and modern foreign languages. In 1998 most GCSE subjects will be examined through a foundation tier that covers grades G to C and a higher tier covering grades D to A* (SCAA, 1996b). SCAA give a rationale for their decision:

Tiering provides pupils with the opportunity to show what they know understand and can do by presenting them with question papers that are targeted at a band of attainment.

For example, in English, it would be difficult to find unseen reading material for a written examination that is suitable for grade G pupils and would also stretch grade A* pupils (SCAA, 1996b p.3)

These statements reinforce the belief that ability is assessed through the written word. SCAA assumes that because ‘grade G’ pupils will not be able to read the question (that is decode the words) they are not able to grasp the meaning of the question asked. It is odd therefore that History, a subject that, like English Literature, demands the ability to make informed judgements, is not included in the tiering system. Apparently for History, in common with several other subjects, ‘the evidence shows that it is possible to set questions in examination papers that are accessible and challenging to pupils across the whole ability range’. (p.3)

It is assumed that pupils will achieve a certain grade well before examinations take place. Teachers have therefore to decide at an early stage, possibly at the end of Key Stage 3 (14 years) the predicted outcomes for pupils.
Thus giving messages to the pupils about the limits of their ability and what they can realistically aim for in future. Organisational arrangements have to change as schools which have until now taught pupils as much as possible in mixed ability situations will now have to divide pupils at 14 (if not earlier), thus bringing in more elements of division and competition rather than applying the co-operative, comprehensive ideal of learning.

3.7.3 The General National Vocational Qualifications GNVQ for 14 year olds: a complementary course or an alternative route?

A recent government reform establishes as a pilot scheme General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) for 14 to 16 year olds; thus these courses take place within the compulsory period of the education process. After carrying out a review of the National Curriculum (SCAA, 1994) Sir Ron Dearing reviewed provision for 16-19 year olds and made recommendations in the Dearing Report (1996). Whilst the main focus was on post-school provision, the report recognised the need for a wider range of qualifications to be developed for young people aged between 14 and 16 to meet their 'varied interests and talents.' Although GNVQs introduced in 1993 were designed for the post-sixteen curriculum, the Dearing report recommended that GNVQs be made available to 14-16 year olds. Thus the Part One GNVQ is a new qualification in the GNVQ family designed specifically in response to this message (Harris, 1996). GNVQs aim to provide a broad based vocational education from which pupils can progress to Further and Higher education or further training and employment, the latter normally via National Vocational Qualifications, (NVQs) (DES 1991). NVQs introduced in 1987 and generally offered to young people from the age of 16 are based mainly in the workplace having been designed by 'industry and commerce specifically to mark competence in a particular trade or profession' (Dearing, 1996, 3.16). Dearing has also recommended that NVQs may also be appropriate at the age of 14 for some pupils who by this age are 'underachievers' and may have become 'disaffected by school'. (12.24, 12.25). The government, having taken up the recommendation, is carrying out the policy working with FE colleges in some parts of the country. (see Chapter 4, Section 4.8.1)

Within the GNVQ curriculum objectives, priority is given to the development of general skills (core skills, generic skills, cognitive processes, transferable skills) which are non-subject specific skills and processes. By following the GNVQ units, pupils should:

- experience a sense of achievement
• be motivated to continue learning
• assume responsibility for their own learning
• learn how to learn (GNVQ, 1996)

These aims would be appropriate for all pupils, not just those studying the GNVQ courses. The Dearing Report has recommended that for education under 16 it is the GCSE that 'develops general education as well as the practical application of skills, for example in communication and the application of number'. GNVQ courses would be appropriate when the subject area lies outside the GCSE list of subjects and where GCSE subject-specific criteria do not already exist' (3.26); thus 'studies would be under the remit of the GNVQ' (3.26).

The report maintains that some pupils would wish to aim for qualifications in both pathways (3.30) yet my experience as a GNVQ assessor indicated that there would be difficulties for the pupil in attempting both GCSE courses and GNVQ courses, as the approach of the two courses is very different:

• the GNVQ content is not defined and teachers can choose this for themselves. In GCSE courses the content is decided by government through the NC;
• GNVQ although subject specific has a large variety of subjects and includes areas such as Leisure and Tourism and Health and Social Care which are regarded as 'present day and everyday subjects whereas the GCSE is subject specific to the ten subjects in the NC and is mainly concerned with the acquisition of academic knowledge;
• GNVQ works on the principle of continuous assessment with all the work produced by pupils used as evidence of achievement and counting towards the award. This is presented as a written portfolio of evidence and in addition there are written unit tests of knowledge and understanding. GCSE courses have returned largely to written examinations with only a small percentage of course work assessed;
• a qualified assessor internally assesses GNVQs; it is as yet unclear whether this assessor needs also to be a qualified teacher. All GCSE examinations are externally assessed.

OFSTED inspectors (Harris,1996) highlighted a potential problem when pupils were attempting to study both GCSE and GNVQ courses as this caused stress in the pupils. As indicated above, the approach of the two courses is very different and cynics could assume that recommendations might be put in place
that suggest pupils take an either/or route because to follow both courses would be too difficult for the pupil. Reasons for this choice could be put on the pupil being deficient and not, as it should be, the focus being on the courses themselves and the way they have been constructed as a possible cause of the problem.

As both courses rely on the written word for the major part of assessment GNVQ cannot be recognised as an alternative learning experience for pupils whose skills in reading and writing are not strong.

However not only do the GNVQ and GCSE provide an uneasy fit, consideration must also be given to the fact that the GNVQ cannot as yet be regarded as a pathway before the age of 16. In order to prepare for a higher education route or some parts of the further education pathway certain levels of GCSE must be gained. There is no equivalence provided by a GNVQ pathway before the age of 16

One further reason it appears for introducing the GNVQ at 14 is to aim to satisfy the needs of groups of pupils who lack interest and enthusiasm in the school curriculum and who may not be making any progress. Here we can begin to perceive some degree of blame being allocated to schools and pupils. The Dearing report(1996) implies that this is because the GCSE course does not satisfy the whole range of ability; that is some pupils and schools are at fault, the pupils because they lack ability and the school because they have not improved the skills of literacy so that the pupils can succeed in the courses:

Latest indications are that approximately 30 percent of students in Further education lack the skills in basic literacy and numeracy to benefit fully from their courses. Further Education colleges continue to express their concern (2.21)

and

There is concern to recognise all achievements across the whole range of ability. Institutions want to be able to respond effectively to those who are not succeeding at school. They are looking for new approaches that will kindle interest and enthusiasm. This is seen as a key to achievement, and recognition of earned achievement is seen as a powerful motivator. Schools are particularly concerned about young people of compulsory age who are failing to attend school, are demotivated and not achieving their potential. Colleges find that an increasing proportion of their intake consists of young people who have not achieved much if anything, at school. (2.26)

Thus there are justifiable reasons why an alternative curriculum should be offered to some pupils, those who are not succeeding in the NC. The Dearing report refers to a particular group of young people: underachievers who while
they may be of 'any ability' have the potential to achieve more but fall behind for a 'variety of reasons, such as disaffection, truancy, severe difficulties at home, or personal psychological problems' (12.24). One can begin to discover further evidence that the blame is apportioned between teachers, parents and pupils. Sir Ron Dearing issues severe warnings to these 'under-achievers' and their parents, because underachievers 'who cannot find or keep jobs may become disaffected citizens' and may pass on their attitudes to their children. (12.25) He also directly relates the problems of the pupils to the reading background of the family:

The children of parents with low standards of literacy tend to find themselves at a disadvantage in schools. (12.25)

He suggests that children such as these will as they get older create for themselves (my italics) a bleak future:

As children become adolescents, they are increasingly likely to distance themselves from failure by opting out. They are likely to fail to see the relevance of the traditional curriculum taught in schools, with its long-term goals and academic focus. The more this happens, the wider the gap between them and the rest of the class is likely to become. To protect their own self-esteem, such pupils may reject school altogether and adopt other values, possibly in association with others, forming an anti culture. They may become aggressive and highly dysfunctional in class. (12.26)

Although Dearing does concede that 'outstanding teachers' may make a difference, (12.27) nevertheless he suggests that it is the pupil that should be moved and changed, not the school curriculum content or assessment of learning by the written word. His suggestion for solving the problem of disaffected 14 to 16 year olds is that they move to further education colleges because: 'Further education colleges have a long history of catering for learners who have been unsuccessful in school'. The colleges can motivate learners 'through a new more vocationally relevant activity'. (12.28)

Dearing further suggests that colleges will be able to address literacy and numeracy problems; by implication then he is suggesting that these pupils have been unable to improve their skills by what was offered them whilst they were at school.

Dearing's recommendation of moving these 'under-achieving' young people from their schools is confirmed by the Labour government. It is to take early action 'to promote work related learning for 14-16 year olds.' The government recognises that 'by the age of 14, too many young people, especially boys, have become disaffected with the school system and a traditional
Although reasons for this situation are not discussed, the government believes that work related learning: 'can help re-motivate these young people and raise their levels of achievement by enabling them to pursue options in a different environment such as a further education college,' (DfEE 1997a, 6.39)

The question of the appropriateness for all pupils of the content, assessment and methods of learning of the school curriculum and post-school curriculum (A level and GNVQ) appears not to be addressed by schools, colleges, the Dearing report or government. Additionally the question arises as to whether the curriculum as it stands is in fact particularly appropriate for any of our pupils. Yet both the Dearing report and the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) suggest (discussed in the next section) that pupils should be acquiring skills in learning through a variety of media so that they develop a critical awareness of life surrounding them.

3.8 The development of Key and Core skills

As described in Section 3.7 the assessment of school based learning (GCSE and the GNVQ) taught in the context of subject areas is by means of the written word. Proficiency in literacy (reading and writing skills), included as part of 'language' under NC requirements, is regarded as a key skill. The Dearing Report (1996) too recognises this area to be of central importance; the Report, having taken note of the requirements of employers and the need for young people to acquire marketable skills, defines key skills as:

- communication
- the application of number
- information technology (1.10)

The communication skills consist of language both oral and written; ideally all the key skills should be acquired during school life but otherwise from the ages of 16 to 19.

Information technology (IT) is treated as the third key skill by the Report. However employers had expressed few concerns about achievements in IT and the report surmises from this information that schools have successfully integrated IT into the NC:

One of the encouraging features of the consultation was the near-absence of any representation from employers about the familiarity of entrants to work with information technology. This reflects the extent of commitment given by education to the use of information technology, where the United Kingdom has
been in advance of many other countries. It is much to the credit of our schools and colleges. (2.10)

However caution should be applied before the assumption is made that all our young people have acquired a sufficient level of IT skills. According to the Report, employers had not said that young people had a good acquired level of skills in IT. Instead the Report states that few concerns from employers were expressed about information technology (7.3) and the 'near-absence of any representation from employers about the familiarity of entrants to work with information technology' (2.10). This could imply that employers' expectations are set quite low, as IT has only relatively recently become a crucial skill in the workplace and therefore is not necessarily a skill requirement on entering the workplace from school. In other words, whilst employers regard communication written and oral language and number as pre-requisite skills for obtaining and maintaining a job, IT skills may not be seen as essential in attaining that job. Employers will probably train entrants into their business in the IT skills with regard to the particular area of business in the same way that current employees are provided with on-going training. There is specificity about IT skills, and employers will have data and training packages related to this.

The Dearing Report also takes heed of the wishes of employers to see entrants into employment as possessing or developing a range of skills which the Report recognises as 'other core skills' (2.11). These include:

- Personal and interpersonal skills in particular, effectiveness in working as a member of a team
- The ability to manage one's own learning, as a skill needed for life-long learning.
- A positive problem-solving approach.

To add to the list of what are considered to be key and core skill are those that the Confederation of British Industry (CBI, 1995), representing the needs of employers regard as foundation learning. The CBI lists the outcomes from foundation learning which will give the individual a 'skills passport' which would be added to if the employers develop their organisation as learning businesses:

- Values and attitudes, including respect for others, integrity and a positive attitude to hard work and to change;
- basic and core skills;
- national qualifications, including those taken at 16 and higher levels;
- career planning. (CBI, 1995)
These key, core and foundation skills, reflect education and learning that do not rely solely on academic achievements by the age of 16. Other aspects of learning and character development are as highly regarded by both the Dearing Report and the CBI recommendations, as are qualifications, for example, working as part of a team, taking responsibility for one's own learning and being prepared to be flexible in work. From these stated requirements from industry (CBI) and information obtained from employers in the Dearing Report one can discern that the learning process itself is vital for the all-round development of the individual, in order that a 'whole' person emerges into adulthood. This intent concurs with the Dearing Report’s added assertion of the importance of continuing a positive attitude towards learning, so that the individual accepts the concept of 'life-long' learning'. (6.1)

It seems clear that what our future citizens need in order to take their places as full members of and contributors to society rests not only on qualifications gained in subject areas but also reflects the importance of the 'themes', considered in Section 3.6 (citizenship, education for economic and industrial understanding, health education, careers education and guidance, and environmental education.) introduced as part of the 'whole' curriculum. The themes and the Records of Achievement which pupils collect throughout their school life are not examined, yet the knowledge and skills obtained in these areas may be much more appropriate for our future citizens than either success in GCSE or in a plethora of GNVQ modules.

3.9. Discussion: choosing schools and courses

Recent government decisions have highlighted ‘successful’ and ‘failing’ schools identified through the league tables of results. The comprehensive schools have come under criticism with arguments that the more able child is being held back by fellow pupils. Whilst the Labour government stresses that it is ‘modernising the comprehensive principle’ (DfEE, 1997a, 4), there is a risk that the very principles that justify the existence of comprehensive schools are diminished by the different types of secondary schools on offer which belie the core beliefs of comprehensive education. Pupils will need to undergo some form of selection to guarantee a place at a specialist school, and as aided schools and foundation schools will employ their own staff and own their own premises, (7.6), broadly as voluntary aided and GM schools do now I assume they will have some rights in pupil admittance. However, the government states that: there will be no question of attaching unfair privileges to a particular category of school in funding, admission arrangements or planning school places. All schools, and all categories of schools must be treated fairly .(7.3)
Grant Maintained (GM) schools (a category which now will probably apply to be Aided or Foundation schools) appear, at present to have more choice as to which pupils they accept than comprehensive schools still under LEA jurisdiction. Although supposed to be non-selective in ability, by 1996 GM schools were allowed selection at a ten per cent level; denominational schools select on a religious basis, schools which have decided to specialise in particular areas such as technology or the arts select on this ability, and both can also use test results and parental interview as part of the selection process. Parents are still assured by the government of equality of opportunity by their right to choose schools that appear the most suitable for their children. But little choice is available in fact for the majority of parents unless they have the resources to pay for schooling or have children that show their ability to succeed in an academic or a specialist curriculum. For these parents it is the school that chooses the pupils rather than the reverse. State run grammar schools for example set their own catchment area for pupils and can set levels of achievement in entrance tests to suit their own wishes.

The Dearing Report highlights the need for a parity of esteem in the vocational and academic routes through education. (2.23), so that pupils can then elect to take courses that hold interest for them secure in the knowledge that their achievements obtained will match the levels of other courses. Thus for example in the Dearing proposed national framework GSCE grades A-C will match GNVQ intermediate level and NVQ level 2, whilst GCSE grades D-G will match GNVQ Foundation level and NVQ level 1.

However, evidence available (GNVQ Conference March 1996) shows that the top ten per cent of pupils attending the GNVQ pilot project schools were not involved in GNVQ courses. OFSTED reports indicate that allowing for this non-involvement of the high academically able, the range of ability was 'reasonable'.

Similarly a West Midlands school is using the GNVQ to motivate pupils with learning and behavioural difficulties. The GNVQ is seen to bridge the gap between obtaining a GSCE level G and a high grade in courses that have little status or recognition. The teachers involved in the GNVQ course were impressed by the level of student motivation and feelings of achievement; thus the school staff were able to clarify thinking about the provision at KS4 for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) in particular (NASEN, 1998). While the reason for the school decision is justified in that pupils were interested
in the course, nevertheless it sends messages to other pupils that the GNVQ is for those who are unable to cope with the GCSE; again the fault lying with the pupil.

Thus in the future academic qualifications may obtained in Grant Maintained (Aided or Foundation) schools, technical and specialist schools and the grammar schools and which will select pupils at eleven, whilst other pupils, deemed more 'vocational' and having 'failed' the academic tests and parental interview, will be in other schools probably concentrating on a more practical curriculum. And so pupils will once again be selected, separated and segregated at eleven. Some pupils will experience the curriculum as a diet of 'vocational' study with little evidence of academic rigour or challenging objectives. The previous Prime Minister saw selection as a crucial part of education policy:

Selective schools represent an important part of the rich spectrum of schools, which has become one of the great legacies of the Government's education policies. (TES, March 22 1996)

Thus, rather than believing that parents choose schools, the likelihood is that schools choose parents.

3.9.1 Discussion: the role of social background in school selection

A more covert method of selection is that of schools choosing parents rather than parents choosing schools. As indicated earlier, schools interview parents to gauge their child's suitability to the school in terms of motivation and interest or ability in a specific area such as music or technology. Middle class parents take up this opportunity to enhance their child's education but the working classes may not have the confidence to do this. Research shows that working class parents feel marginalised by schools, unsure of the structure of schools and of teachers' roles. They are diffident in attitude, which is interpreted by schools as a lack of interest, and so barriers between the two are set up (Bath College of Education reported in TES, April 5 1996).

Social class is seen by Chitty as being a central part of the selection process:

What we are witnessing at present is the steady advance of a form of social selection at eleven which is in many ways more invidious than the eleven-plus selection examination which dominated the education system in the post-war period. (Chitty, 1996, p.3)

The previous policies have been criticised by a variety of educational groups, as well as by political groups. Tomlinson (1994) and other contributors highlight
the inadequacies of current educational reform and present powerful arguments for a new ideology. Central to these arguments is the concern that these policies were built on inappropriate ideologies produced without research and which are not beneficial to a democratic society as they 'are likely to create greater social divisions and economic inequality' (p.3). Knowledge itself (which is channelled through the curriculum) is regulated by government and 'largely based on a late nineteenth century curriculum with distinct cultural barriers between academic, practical and technical' (p.4). The amount and kind of knowledge offered is determined by the social class origins of individuals:

Indeed education remains a preparation for a class divided hierarchical society, still permeated (despite some introduction of technological and business studies and a rhetoric of notional vocational qualifications) by anti-technological and anti-industrial ethos, in which both skilled workers and those destined for places on the margins of the economy receive a different and inferior education to those who seek secure professional jobs and positions of influence in the society. This ideology, and its developing educational framework and contents is narrow, backward looking, and potentially disastrous in both economic and social terms for young British people about to be in the twenty first century (Tomlinson, p.4)

Although Tomlinson was writing during the time of the previous government the current Labour government has continued the school organisational policies of the previous government. (see Section 3.3)

The question of curriculum content has been raised by O'Hear (1994) who would like a return to 'real' education, one that considers 'the whole child as a future citizen and which plans what should be learned in terms of the whole curriculum' (p.57). He envisages a curriculum of three broad areas which would highlight, in a liberal democratic society, the entitlement and obligation of each citizen: personal concerns, social involvement and concern for others, and a scientific and technological area.

This proposed content is reminiscent of the suggestions made during the 1970s which I discussed earlier, but which then were dismissed by both Conservative and Labour parties. O'Hear's curriculum content would, it appears, be more applicable to the Warnock goals of pupils growing up to be 'active participants and responsible contributors to society' than would a wholly subject based curriculum.

The Labour government plans to conduct a thorough review of the NC 'in due course'. The curriculum for the 21st century will be guided by 'our vision of a curriculum reflecting a common framework and a common entitlement' (DfEE, 1997a 2.37). The government has recognised the need to bring in the new technologies into the classroom, so that within ten years Information and
Communications Technology (ICT) will have ‘permeated every aspect of education.’ (4.16)

3.10 Conclusions

In spite of the fact that during the last ten years there have been considerable changes in modern economic society, the school curriculum which provides learning solely through subject-based study does not reflect these changes. Indeed the situation has been further entrenched by the provision of a NC which keeps the same academic base and which assumes that these school subjects will give pupils the knowledge that will prepare them for their futures.

The most recent application of GNVQ in the 14 to 16 curriculum assumes that those pupils unable to cope with academic work should follow a different route that will prepare them for a ‘vocation’; some pupils will be encouraged to take workplace experience at fourteen years old. There would seem to be little academic rigour in the course these pupils are offered. Most of the work of both GNVQ and GCSE courses is assessed through the written word and those pupils entering secondary school with poor literacy skills will be doubly disadvantaged.

Whilst the advent of comprehensive education comprises worthwhile values aiming for social cohesion rather than social division and provides opportunities for more young people, it still only provides one clear educational route to success, that of entering into higher education by the GCSE subject based curriculum, five C grade passes followed by A level. Those young people who have not obtained the required standard of literacy skills to perform well in examination situations are effectively barred from this route. Even gaining success in the everyday curriculum proves difficult as both class work and homework learning outcomes are assessed through the standard of written work. The comprehensive ideal may have failed in the content of what is being offered and in the assessment of this content. There is present a suggestion that pupils from homes with ‘low standards of literacy’ (Dearing, 12.25) will not experience the same success as those from more literate backgrounds. Others believe that the creation of a competitive schooling marketplace (Mac an Ghaill, 1992) and a steady advance of a form of social selection at eleven (Chitty, 1996) promote the continuation of a class divided hierarchical society (O’Hear, 1994).

Although the government now in power is saying that emphasis must be on standards not structures, that ‘diversity’ gives strength to every child, there is still a danger of reverting to the concept that there are different types of children: the ‘academic’, the ‘technical’ and the ‘practical’, and once again this society
will divide children at eleven years old so that they experience the ‘most appropriate’ curriculum for them as happened in education fifty years ago.
Chapter 4: Young People and the Social Context: opportunities and structures

4.1 Introduction

Adolescence, a time of uncertainty and change, is a fragile time for the emerging adult. The school-acquired identities of adolescents can affect their life experiences after school and are deciding factors in ascertaining their places in society and the contribution they will make to it.

Our complex technological society demands certain standards of literacy in order to enable a person to function in given situations and places. Thus 'functional literacy' is a relative term and different standards are needed according to the demands of particular situations (school, careers and places of work). The skills of reading and writing are central to the development and continuation of learning within the school curriculum.

Those young people who are not yet secure in their reading and writing skills, that is who are unable to function adequately according to the literacy demands of the secondary school curriculum, are disadvantaged on entry into the secondary school. As pupils progress through the school and the demands in standards of literacy in each subject grow, the pupils can drop further behind in their learning. Thus the learning difficulties within this area that these pupils experienced at primary school continue and can be compounded by their secondary school experiences.

The focus of this chapter is on the experiences of those young people whose literacy skills are not sufficiently developed for them to progress successfully through the secondary curriculum and who, therefore, are necessarily low achievers and consequently low attainers in the GCSE. The question needs to be confronted as to how far the lack of literacy skills not only impedes their progress in learning, but also affects their motivation, their views of themselves and their attitudes to life and their future prospects. Consideration is given to ways in which their aspirations are shaped according to messages they receive from self, peers, teachers, home and school. I argue that these influences affect their school life and that a self-fulfilling prophecy operates, narrowing their life chances.

First the pressures at the time of adolescence are focused on; secondly, as the adolescent progresses through secondary school, I look at how the attitudes of self, peers, social background and teachers operate and how these can affect the self-esteem. Available routes after compulsory schooling is over are examined and the question is asked whether more reliance should be put on the assessment
4.2 Moving into secondary school: expectations and realities

The move from primary to secondary school is recognised as a crucial time for the pupil. Although it can be seen as an exciting and challenging time, it is 'likely to constitute for most children the major point of change and the biggest upheaval of their educational career' (Fish, 1985). Whilst all children have to face changes within themselves as adolescence approaches, children who have 'failed' in their primary school years face an increasingly difficult challenge because reliance on reading and writing skills is more heavily emphasised in the secondary school. A focus of secondary school learning is on 'reading to learn' rather than the early primary years of 'learning to read.' In my previous study (MA, 1987) it was found that some of the reading material offered to first year (Year7) secondary pupils was of a higher readability level than some pupils could access and therefore a potential 'fail' situation was already in place at the beginning of some secondary school careers.

Given that the 'critical pathways' towards adult occupations are established by the age of 15-16 years (Banks et al, 1992) it is apparent that the early secondary school experience is critical in establishing positive attitudes to school and learning. Secondary school experiences therefore are crucial for those pupils who can be considered to be in an 'at risk' situation. While family attitudes and social background still remain important influences in the child's future, Hurrelmann (1989) recognises that school is of central importance for the future role and status in society of young people. He suggests that the school system determine the level of society young people will enter, by deciding which qualifications they will be working towards. He maintains that, as modern society is 'achievement oriented'; then the individual's economic achievement is what decides the place in the social structure of society, and not, as previously, the social background:

The educational system possesses a dominant function in the qualifications of the offspring of society and the selection according to different levels of prestige and qualifications. The final decision about the status attained takes place within the occupational system, but the pre decision in the form of presenting school-leaving certificates of different quality is made within the educational system.
Thus, with reference to Hurrelmann's premise, in the next section I draw attention to school factors that conceivably affect the future adult status of young people such as those in my study.

4.3 Social background, literacy and school performance

The growth of a meritocratic society in which one can succeed by hard work and ability, the proclamation of the Thatcher years, can serve to break down barriers of social class, although the creator of the term was far more cynical about outcomes (Young, 1958). Schools do have a central role to play in aiming towards the elimination of class barriers. Although this study is not principally concerned with the effects of social class and the lack of educational attainment, the issue of the social class background of pupils and their progress in the areas of reading and writing cannot be dismissed as being negligible or unimportant.

Whilst comprehensive schooling and the introduction of a single examination system, the GCSE, did bring about a certain level of equality of opportunity and enabled able working class pupils to move from their backgrounds, nevertheless the values that schools promulgate through ethos, organisation and curriculum content as well as the attitudes of some teachers, can serve to favour those children who bring with them to school the evidence of a solid literacy background. The quality of spoken language, accent and grammar can also affect teacher attitudes. (Stubbs, 1976). Children of middle and upper class parents whose own work depends on strong literacy and communication skills and who recognise the value of reading and writing skills may have the advantage here. Whilst an increased number of the working class aspire to these values for their own children there are people whose abilities lie in other directions and who themselves do not have strong literacy skills. Others who do not have strong literacy skills nor a sound economic base may not regard reading and writing as the main priorities for their children to acquire.

The Bullock Committee's Report (1975) noted the disparity in the achieved reading ages between children who come from the higher social classes and those from the lowest social class:

the difference between children from social classes I and II and those from social class V is equivalent to nearly seventeen months of reading age. (p.269)

Even though reasons for this disparity are unclear, the difference is a real one. The Report also suggested that the gap in literacy achievement widen with age.
The reasons for a lack of progress in reading and writing skills are many and complex and it would be far too simplistic to maintain that a lack in reading progress is a consequence of belonging to the working classes. Perhaps it would be fairer to say that parents who recognise the central and crucial importance of reading and writing for their child’s future success who spend time introducing them to the world of books, and for whom reading and writing is a daily way of life can and do influence the way their child regards these skills. This attitude tends to be associated with class.

Those pupils with low reading and writing skills may by virtue of their social background make less progress in their literacy skills both in primary and secondary schools than their middle class peers. Sammons (1995) following a cohort of pupils over a period of nine years found that pupils from semi-skilled, unskilled or manual backgrounds made less reading progress by age 9, given their earlier reading attainment levels, than if they had come from other social classes. This gap in attainment widened through the secondary school years and Sammons concludes that social class remains a very important predictor of later academic achievement.

Mortimore et al (1988) found that children in primary schools from unskilled manual backgrounds did not achieve as high a level in cognitive assessments and reading and writing as pupils from non-manual backgrounds. This latter group were rated by teachers to be of a higher ability ‘even after account had been taken of their attainment’ (p.139) and the authors concluded that some teachers have different expectations of pupils from different social backgrounds, irrespective of the children’s performance on cognitive assessments. Although Mortimore et al’s research showed that teachers had more individual contacts with low ability pupils and gave more feedback on their work than to pupils of higher ability, an in depth study of eight teachers showed that they made significantly more non work [my italics] comments to low ability pupils both in giving instructions and in giving more neutral and negative comments relating to their behaviour. The more able children’s work was criticised more and the less able child’s less. This attitude can certainly affect the ‘less able’ child’s work as without feedback on work and target setting their educational progress is further at risk. Children in these ‘low’ categories were ‘more likely to be treated differentially. Although the teacher gave them more attention the effects may still be negative’. (Mortimore et al, 1988 p.145)

Currently teachers have taken the brunt of the blame for the supposed lack of achievement for their pupils. They are being judged by results. A ‘good’ school is reckoned to be one that achieves high exam results and, by connection,
‘good’ teachers can be seen to be those who achieve ‘good’ passes for the pupils in their care. Pupils who are not interested, have low motivation and are in large classes cannot have the time spent with them. Ability grouping such as banding and setting can help the teacher to focus on pupil progress, but there are many instances of lower bands and sets being given the least effective teachers and the worst rooms. (Elton Report, 1989). This attitude can serve to lower the self-esteem of teachers as well as giving negative messages to the pupils in the low ability sets.

A factor that should be taken into account with respect to developing literacy in the secondary school both in a general sense and for the specific subject vocabularies is government attitude to the training of secondary school teachers, which is focused on prospective teachers gaining higher qualification in one subject area. The move generally appears to favour a BA or BSc degree in which one or even several subjects may be studied. This is then followed by a year's PGCE course, which is mainly school based and gives student teachers experience in the teaching of the one NC subject which has formed the largest section of their degree. Consequently there is less emphasis and little time spent on the theory and practice of literacy development. Traditionally, secondary school teachers do not on the whole see their role as including the teaching of reading and writing skills. Even in primary schools the older the child the less sure the teacher of the class is of knowledge of the reading process. In primary schools OFSTED inspectors reported that teachers in Years 3 and 5 (pupils aged 7 and 10) in 1992-1993 were unsure of the developmental processes involved in reading:

the main problem was that many teachers did not have an adequate appreciation of how competence in reading and writing develops, so that in approximately half of the schools assessment for diagnostic and prognostic purposes was weak. (OFSTED1993a p.16)

Secondary teachers, with a good in-depth knowledge of their subject but with no training in the medium by which they teach their subject, may not be able to assist pupils adequately in literacy skills development. Government now has recognised that trainee teachers do need to be equipped with the skills to teach literacy; the concentration is, logically, on primary school teachers. However solutions are not to be found only by improving teachers’ skills in the teaching of literacy. The causes of literacy failure cannot be seen to be so simple; the reasons are many and complex.

The attitudes of pupils towards the school environment are an additional aspect and are inextricably linked with factors which include home background,
relationships with parents, peer groups and teachers and what is on offer to them through their schooling. Williamson (1980) has posited that teachers, whilst carrying out a tutor role as part of the school’s pastoral care system, continue to support, perhaps unwittingly, the divisions in society. When pupils question the system, teacher/tutors have the difficult task of persuading them to accept the school system and give answers which will ‘at least avert the open rejection of the school and its practices.’ Subsequently, whilst some pupils designated as those likely to succeed may be given advice about option choices and courses leading to academic success, other pupils who have questioned the system may be redefined as troublesome or as having a learning problem:

In short whilst some children are guided, counselled and supported through a successful school career, others (the less able, the ‘disadvantaged’ etc.) are ‘processed’ to accept a system in which they are destined to become failures. For want of a better word, I shall call this process ‘pastoralization’ (p.172)

As these pupils move through the secondary school they may exhibit first a ‘glum tolerance’ towards their situation then subsequently develop ‘attributes of resentment towards the school in particular and society in general’ (p.173). He maintains that the fault lies in what the schools offer to pupils for, whilst comprehensive schooling made organisational changes, the crucial question of introducing different types of learning experiences was not addressed. Thus as Bell and Best (1986) point out, by indicating that the fault or problem lies with the pupil, the fact that the school has failed to offer them ‘meaningful and relevant learning experiences is lost from sight’ (p.34).

Bell and Best extend Williamson’s critique of the ‘product’ teaching system by using Davies’s (1980) work that illustrates that a school’s use of IQ tests benefits pupils who are competent in Intelligence Quotient (IQ) tests and who are proficient in the narrow range of skills that lead to success in school. Bell and Best add reading tests and examination success to the IQ tests. These skills, presumed to demonstrate levels of intelligence, ‘not only are beneficial to the middle classes but also promote negative stereotypes of certain social groups’ and serve to ‘divert attention from the power system that throws up inequalities in society’. (Davies p.19) Thus the groups of pupils who fail all round in the system continue to fail because of the teachers’ expectations for them:

To a considerable degree, it is argued, children perform up (or down) to the level expected of them, so teachers’ grouping and labelling practice, and the expectations they presume and communicate, have the effect of a self fulfilling prophecy. (Bell and Best, 1986 p.37)
The Government has reiterated its argument that teachers use social background as a reason for the low achievements of pupils:

Schools often fail to stretch the most able; and they have not been good at identifying and pushing the modest or poor performers, or those with special educational needs. In some cases the excuse has been that 'you cannot expect high achievement from children in a run-down area like this.' Even more often, schools in comfortable circumstances have complacently accepted average performance when they should be aiming for excellence. (DfEE, 1997a 3.4)

Schools, according to government, have also been complacent in their expectations for pupils, finding 'excuses' for pupils' lack of performance:

One of the most powerful underlying reasons for low performance on our schools has been low expectations which have allowed poor quality teaching to continue unchallenged. Too many teachers, parents and pupils have come to accept a ceiling on low achievement which is far below what is possible (3.3).

Again this is probably an oversimplification of the reasons for poor performance in schools; however, social background cannot be dismissed at the present time as not being part of the equation of low achievement. Teacher expectations for pupils have been recognised as being part of the influences on learning and thus affecting the pupils' own view of 'self'. Bennett et al (1984) found that teachers in infant schools matched pupils to a level of work suitable to their ability with a 40 per cent accuracy and this went down to a 30 per cent accuracy at junior school. The longitudinal research of Blatchford et al (1989) concluded that teachers of 6 to 8 year olds gave a broader curriculum coverage to those pupils for whom they had high expectations whilst those pupils for whom teacher expectations were low received a much narrower curriculum focusing on written language and maths. Feiler and Webster (1998) found that teacher expectations operate from the earliest years and are connected with class background. They, extending the work of Goodacre (1968) and Barker Lunn (1970), additionally reinforce the findings of Sammons (1995) when they conclude that children from low socio-economic backgrounds were predicted by teachers to be at risk of literacy failure. A central conclusion from Feiler and Webster is that although the predictions made by teachers about success and failure were accurate, the teachers were not convinced that intervention for weaker children was generally appropriate:
so for the children expected to fail, teachers neither increased their efforts in compensatory work nor did they engage with parents to suggest ways of intervening at home. (p.193)

4.4 Teacher and pupil attitudes

Paul Willis’s seminal study (1977) of the growth in anti-school culture in the secondary school by a group of working class boys whom he terms the ‘lads’, highlights the crucial importance of class background in the decisions that young people appear to make about their own futures. The ‘lads’ strength, with their resistance to authority and conformity, was in forming strong peer group values that would serve them in their after school environment. These culturally acquired values were against those of the school, which they saw as part of the ‘establishment’, and therefore something to resist, for they realised that their own values would serve them in their future factory work that continued and maintained the ‘them and us’ syndrome. Thus in this way schools served to keep the existing social structure by acting as agents of social control.

School culture was highlighted by Hargreaves (1967) who focused on school organisation, in a boys’ school, by which boys were streamed into ability groups for all subjects. The boys in lower streams developed anti-school and counter-school cultures through the solidarity of friendship groups. These culture group attitudes contrasted sharply with those pupils in the high streams who recognised the value of academic success for their futures and thus were rewarded by the school by the attitude towards and their expectations for them. Those in the higher streams tended to be from the middle class while the majority of boys in the lower streams came from the working classes. In the same study by Hargreaves of secondary schools in which pupils were streamed, the expectations of teachers were found to differ between pupils in top streams and pupils in low streams. In top streams pupils were expected to behave well and succeed academically; pupils in low streams were not expected to work but rather expected to misbehave, truant and to fail in school. Hargreaves quotes a pupil as saying:

If you’re in 4A, the teachers expect you to set a standard, you know? But if you’re in 4B the teachers almost expect you to be that bit more stupid, you know what I mean? (p.30)

Not all working class pupils form anti- or counter-school culture groups. Many believe that by working hard in school and getting qualifications they will be able to obtain the same jobs as those from the middle classes. Brown (1987), disagreeing with Willis’s conclusions, maintains that many young people merely
comply with the school without adopting conformist attitudes and that certain
types of compliance may be ‘as much an authentic working-class response as
that which leads to a rejection of the school values’ [Brown’s italics, p.25]. He
recognises three types of response from working class pupils towards school.
‘Getting in’ is that of pupils eager to leave school as soon as possible and
‘getting into’ the adult working environment; ‘getting out’: young people by
accepting school demands, working hard and revising for exams so that they can
get sufficient qualifications are enabled, they believe, to compete for middle class
jobs and so ‘get out’ of their class. The majority of ordinary working class pupils
however just ‘get on’ with it; they ‘neither simply accept or reject the school, but
comply with it’. [Brown’s italics p.25]

Recent evidence serves to strengthen earlier research in the working class
lack of attainment in school. In 1970 Rutter, Tizard and Whitmore found that
children whose fathers were in manual occupations were over represented
amongst those who did least well in tests (literacy and numeracy) and the results
of the 1996 British Birth Cohort Study survey (Bynner, Ferri and Shepherd,
1997) of those born in 1970 (BCS70) produced similar evidence, there being ‘a
steady rise in qualification level as the social class of the father’s occupation
varied from unskilled, through skilled, to managerial, and professional’ (p.21).

To sum up this section, the evidence continues to show that school pupils
from working class backgrounds do not tend to achieve as highly as their middle
class peers. The section has shown that there is no one clear reason for this
situation. However a number of writers over the last 30 years have illustrated
that the adjudication of school success which relies on a proficiency with the
written word, and have acknowledged that:

- teachers encourage pupils to conform to the system,
- that the school system continues to benefit the middle classes
- and that teacher attitudes and expectations continue to be influenced by
  pupil background

4.5 Moving up in school: adolescence and choice

As the child moves through adolescence, towards adulthood, views and
attitudes that appeared clear and certain may now appear dubious, may be viewed
with suspicion and can cause confusion and indecision. This ‘crisis of identity’
although it can occur at any age is most likely to occur during adolescence.
(Erikson, 1968). The identity is formed by a view of a variety of ‘selves’ to which
adjustments are needed; bodily, sexual, social, moral, the self as a learner and the
self in the organisation (Watkins and Wagner, 1987). In addition, a number of
growth tasks need to be successfully completed if the adolescent is going to reach adulthood independently, to be capable of making choices and taking active decisions about his or her future.

Several schools studied by Keys and Fernandes (1994) showed that attitudes towards school and learning tend to deteriorate to some extent as pupils move from first year (Year 7, 11-12 years old), towards third year (Year 9 14-15 years) with the older pupils more likely to play truant than the younger ones (23 per cent compared to 9 per cent). If pupils are to develop delinquent behaviours, these tend to reach a peak by age thirteen (Emler and Reicher, 1987). The same study found that delinquency is a social rather than an isolate condition, that delinquency cannot be explained solely by social class, area of residence, age or gender. A sample of 13-year-olds were asked what they regarded as the characteristics of delinquents. Delinquents were judged to be ‘morally reprehensible, academically deficient and emotionally hardened’ (p.12). Toughness of character was regarded as particularly important because it was seen to give protection against what they regarded as unfair treatment by authorities.

It thus becomes apparent that any lack of clarity of views regarding these ‘selves’ and uncertainty of direction and aims can confuse further and cause uncertainty and lack of vision for the adolescents. Those young people who in the transition to adult status hold clearly defined goals and can determine how to reach them are said to be in an ‘active individualisation’ mode. (Evans and Heinz, 1994, see Section 2.3) They tend to be in high status career routes and have a strong support system. Conversely ‘passive individualisation’ in which goals are weakly defined with no set strategies for achievement included poor achievers with a weak support system.

Furnham and Stacey (1991) have summarised the growth tasks as a series of adjustments and adaptations in which the individual acknowledges the capabilities of self and the requirements needed from him or her by society. Successful completion of these growth tasks indicates the future place in society and are part of the normative framework of society, that is what society will expect from them as adults and their societal contribution. There is an implicit acceptance of the norms of current society which keeps the structure of society in place. Thus, in times of full employment and when traditional working class jobs were available as well as there being clear divisions between men and women's work, a functionalist perspective operated. The school’s central task was seen as determining the match for the young person as to his or her future place in society. The socialisation process then in operation made young people
aware in which strata of society they would be placed and hence contributed to
the continuation of the efficient functioning of society. The recent rapid and
extreme shifts in changes in society and fluctuating work patterns could serve to
break down the stratification of society, but Furnham and Stacey conclude that
divisions and differences in outlook of the young working classes ‘help to
prevent the organization of united working-class opposition to the existing social
order’ (p.185). Conversely the ‘upper reaches of society’ have a homogeneity of
outlook which ‘contributes to the formation of a united upper-class defence of
the social order.’ (p.185)

Nevertheless the continuing economic shifts in society do offer the
education establishment in particular opportunities to work towards the
elimination of the class strata. However, Walker and Barton (1986) doubt
whether schools are able to justify schooling to all young people now that the
time of mass employment is over:

The logic used by teachers and school managers (..). has been reference to the
utilitarian defence that schooling mediates access to work and the wage, and
referees the inequalities that surround the transition from education to adult
status. (..) It provided a kind of ideological prop that could be used to fend off
challenges and to obviate the need to provide further justifications for schools or
their provisions. Once this prop is removed, however, and mass youth
unemployment makes the utilitarian logic look very thin then both pupils and
teachers are compelled to set out on a search for either a new logic or a new
perspective of schooling (Walker and Barton, 1986, p.3)

While the middle class have taken the messages about employment and
have realised the importance of acquiring new skills, the working classes, who
are the major group affected, may be slow to realise the benefits of schooling.
Brown has maintained earlier that pupils from working class backgrounds just
‘get on’ with it (Section 4.2). This does not mean however that the working
classes are committed to their education because they have complied with the
school; Brown notes that as unemployment grows so do feelings about the
relevance of their school learning to their own lives; feelings of being on the
outside may develop:

This opposition and sense of alienation from the school has been intensified as a
result of high levels of youth unemployment. Growing numbers of ordinary
working class pupils feel that they have less of a stake in school and society.
(Brown, 1990 p.99-100)
A critical time during the adolescent school phase is perceived to be the age of 14, the time of option choices when decisions need to be made that set the future pathways to adulthood. The NC serves to limit the choice to the ten curriculum subjects. Thus, at 14, young people need to consider seriously which pathways they wish to follow and the areas of work that will be appropriate for them, given their perceived level of ability; thus the opportunities available to them will be limited. Evans and Furlong (1997) express the views of a number of writers when they say that young people about this age:

(...) move through a stage of active exploration 'locate' themselves within the constraints of the society in which they are growing up. As their ideas about their academic potential develop, their occupational aspirations become more refined: certain sections of the labour market come to be seen as outside of their reach or requiring too much effort to attain, whilst other jobs come to be seen as lacking in prestige and falling below a level which they find acceptable (Evans and Furlong, 1997, p.32)

The 'zone of acceptable alternatives' (Gottfredson, 1981) can limit aspirations further and thus the stratification levels of the young person both within school and within society begin to be set.

The parents' own past school experiences can make them hesitant in approaching the school (see Section 3.9.1). Pupils from the middle classes at the time of subject option choices show a considerable concern for their career prospects; conversely those from a predominately working class background show one of relative indifference. In this way they make sense of the school and their own places within it (Woods, 1979, Williamson, 1980). The choice provided limits the available opportunities and pupils have to recognise for themselves the extent of their abilities. (Evans and Davies 1987, p. 109). Evans and Davies were writing before the advent of the GCSE examination which provides some choice within subject areas but the introduction of the tiered system limits the level of achievement.

The period of option choices can be crucial, not particularly with regard to the option subjects but with regard to how young people see them. A pupil whose academic self is high can take strength and begin to act positively and to some extent independently and keep a positive learning attitude (be proactive); another pupil who perceives the academic self to be low may react in different ways to what is on offer. This pupil can accept the curriculum the school offers in the hope of academic success or reject it: 'Education is an affirmation of a set of values, a means to an end, or an irrelevance' (Banks et al 1992, p.109).
The former may receive guidance in respect of the subject option course, while the latter, disillusioned by what the school offers, may be regarded as a ‘problem’. Additionally there are pupils who keep on trying in spite of experiencing failure and the risk of further failure. (Banks et al, 1992)

At this stage there appears to be little recourse to professional help, particularly for the individual, from careers advisers, though schools usually have at least one teacher who among other duties takes on this role. Teachers are subject based and can find it difficult to provide advice other from that basis; school organisation can further limit choice. In this way for example by the tiering system being in operation some pupils find that they will not be able to obtain high enough GCSE grades that will enable them to move up towards higher education.

4.6 Self concept of pupils and young people

Self-concept is recognised as an umbrella term encompassing self-image - the individual's awareness of his or her mental and physical capacities, ideal self - the ideal characteristics s/he would like to possess, and self-esteem. Self-esteem is defined as the individual’s evaluation of the discrepancy between self-image and ideal self (Lawrence, 1987). While it is normal to have some discrepancy between the two in order to strive and aspire to reach for certain aims, when continued failure is experienced in a particular area then the self esteem can suffer. An adult can avoid potential fail situations by for example avoiding the chess club when being unable to play chess, but a child in school cannot avoid reading and writing situations because these are central to school learning:

It is not surprising therefore that the child who fails in reading over a lengthy period should be seen to have developed low self esteem, the end product of feeling guilty about his/her failure. The child then lacks confidence in him/herself. (Lawrence 1987, p.5)

Although early adolescents, irrespective of their adolescent selves, may experience crises of self confidence, pupils who are failing through a lack of reading and writing skills may perceive themselves as failures in all areas and take on a self image of being ‘dim’ or ‘thick’ when they compare themselves with their higher achieving peers. In a study of three secondary schools (Fairhust and Pumfrey, 1992), pupils with reading difficulties had markedly lower levels of self-concept as learners than had independent readers, and poorer readers had a much higher incidence of absence than able readers.
Evidence of a positive correlation between academic performance and self-esteem is provided by Burns (1982) and by Rosenberg (1989). Although we are reminded that there is probably a complex interaction of the two over time with both academic performance and self-esteem affected by each other (Banks et al), pupils who are daily reminded of their own failures by having to respond to written text and produce their own written material, can to some extent find their self-esteem negatively affected.

Pupils, by comparing their achievements with their higher performing peers who are receiving approval from parents and teachers, can adopt an attitude of learned helplessness and blame themselves not only for academic failure but apply this to all their personal attributes (Galloway 1985). This recalls the attitudes to school typified by Willis (1977) and Brown (1987) (see Section 4.4), young people can, in their own way, preserve self-esteem in their own minds by actively rejecting school values or by passively conforming to them. As Galloway says:

Membership of a disruptive, disaffected sub-culture may be a healthier response than the more generalized apathy which characterises the behaviour in school of some pupils with special needs. (Galloway, 1985, p.116)

The young people in a survey by Richer (1968) recovered in the post school period from the "emotional and devaluing effects of education". They found that they were accepted as people in their own right, began to take on responsibilities and became more in control of themselves as they responded to the challenge of work. Those young people were leaving school in times of full employment and "becoming adult" by entering the labour market. The 1990s have provided very different post school experiences for young people given the lengthier transitions into a labour market itself different from that of the 1960s. Now post school experiences do not necessarily improve the self-esteem; young people staying on in education may not be there through choice:

Changing labour market structures have not simply provided positive incentives for young people to improve their qualifications; the sharp decline in opportunities for minimum-aged school leavers in many areas has produced an army of reluctant conscripts to post-compulsory education. (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997, p.16)

Self-esteem may remain at low levels because of the young person's feelings of dependency on the family; this applies to those of working class backgrounds more so than in the middle class. Whereas those young people of the middle class expect to continue to be supported and the parents expect to support them,
traditionally young people from a working class background expect to have some financial independence. However the increasing withdrawal of benefits, social security and unemployment for 16-17 years olds denies the young person both feelings of independence and a sense of contributing to the family or setting up a home. (Jones and Wallace, 1992). This situation can cause feelings of frustration and has effects on the self-esteem. Additional effects on self-esteem, particularly for those, like the young people in my study, with low level qualifications, come with the realisation that the Youth Training (YT) scheme that they are following may not lead to employment (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997). The self esteem takes another battering when the young person accepts these negative experiences as being a consequence of their earlier behaviour, regarding what is happening to them as being within the remit of their responsibility (Bates and Risborough, 1993). As Furlong and Cartmel point out, rather than these situations being their ‘fault’, other factors such as the stratification of the youth training schemes, the local job market and the protection of ‘traditional privileges’ (p.39) are far more influential.

Self-esteem continues to be affected as the young person moves into adulthood. A study by Macdonald (1993) followed young adults about the age of 21 who had taken up a government enterprise scheme. These young adults, although acting in a positive way by setting up their own small business had nevertheless been 'pushed' into it by having experienced periods of unemployment earlier. Their experiences on the whole continued to contribute further to the negative effects on the 'self.' MacDonald maintains that the enterprise policy itself was a:

particularly cruel form of economic policy which places the task of individual prosperity and of local economic rejuvenation squarely upon the shoulders of some of those least able and qualified to take the burden. (p.103)

Although MacDonald points out that some of the working class informants are able to be 'runners', that is are running their own businesses, the majority have 'fallen' and will return to the ranks of the unemployed. He concludes by saying that this culture of enterprise:

is simply a new and politically fashionable way for some young working-class men and women to fail (often drastically), for some, if they are lucky, to become prosperous, successful business people, but for the majority to join a growing number of workers who struggle to make a living in an increasingly casualized, insecure and marginal economy (p.103)
It is thus easy to understand how the feelings of failure experienced at school continue to be reinforced by after school experiences and that these ‘failures’ keep the self-esteem at low levels.

Thus young people’s feelings of low esteem can move with them into adulthood. The 1994 ALBSU survey (Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit now renamed the Basic Skills Agency, BSA) found there was a clear relationship between well-being and literacy and numeracy levels. (Ekinsmyth and Bynner 1994). The self esteem of the young adults, age 21, in their study was affected when they realised that their literacy difficulties had consequences for their ‘employment self’ and other aspects of their personality; others were not affected:

Despite the barriers to their progress, some individuals with the deficit may not perceive a difficulty, especially as they got older and when they have managed to hold down a job without them. When they do perceive a difficulty, their self-esteem is under threat, which may create psychological difficulties restricting their opportunities for employment even further. (p.8)

Those who managed to carry out their work without perceiving any difficulties may have chosen jobs that demand very few skills in literacy or numeracy.

The roles that young people play in society may by way of negative experiences give some amount of self-esteem back to the individual. The young women in Bates’s study training for jobs in institutional care, largely old people’s homes, referred to by Bates as the ‘care’ girls, are examples of this type of experience. Bates describes herself as ‘forcibly struck’:

by the radical transformation over a period of some nine months in these young women’s attitudes towards jobs which they initially viewed with abhorrence. (Bates, 1993 p.29)

These young women had therefore rationalised their positions, possibly because of an acceptance of their own ‘failure’ within the self and also, as Bates points out, because the local labour market had little else to offer them, ‘there were no real alternatives to the job’. (p29)

4.7 Gender

The inequalities that are experienced in school have found some focus with adolescent boys in particular, while girls appeared on the periphery (Delamont 1994). Increasingly, however, the relationships between gender and
education and future work are being recognised and the work of for instance Griffin (1985) and Measor and Sikes (1992) has attempted to redress the balance. The ESRC studies of 16-19 year olds and the Anglo-German research (Bynner and Roberts, 1991, Evans and Heinz, 1994) have studied boys and girls proportionally in their research of the effects of society on our young people.

During school life girls have tended to perform better than boys particularly in English. GCSE results in 1994 reflect this (OFSTED, 1995a p.23.) Their attitudes to the subject of English were generally more positive than those of boys. The attitudes of both sexes tended to be more positive in their approach to reading where there was a strong parental interest. (OFSTED, 1993b). The attitudes of teachers had a considerable impact. Nevertheless, a consistent picture emerged: girls were keener on reading than boys, but sensitive teaching had a noticeable impact on the attitudes of both boys and girls. In view of their strengths in this subject area, girls would, it is thought, take advantage of and capitalise on the situation by dominating all aspects of the subject, yet this is not reflected in classroom behaviour. Gilbert, researching in Australian schools, found that boys demand and are given more linguistic space in the classroom by their teachers whereas the girls tend to sit silently, allowing the boys to dominate oral work (Gilbert, 1990). Gilbert’s finding is reinforced in England by OFSTED, (1995a) that found: 'too often boys dominate class discussions at the expense of girls' (p.9)

In the HMI report (OFSTED, 1993b) the main findings show that ‘in low-attaining groups in particular, boys often dominated oral work’ (p.3). Two points can be made here. One is that boys who cannot read and write very well use the obvious channel, the only other channel of communication open to them, that of talking in order to gain success. When they cannot achieve through the written word, they ease their frustration and show their abilities through spoken language. Secondly some girls with poor reading and writing skills may be happy for the boys to dominate especially as they are not succeeding in a skill in which girls generally have supremacy. They have a good reason for keeping a low profile and Meyenn (1980) has pointed out ‘nice’girls and ‘quiet’ girls just do not want to be noticed. (see Meyenn below)

A third point concerning written work that Gilbert highlights and HMI (1993b) comment on is the gender bias in texts. HMI, found that male bias emerged most frequently in the boys’ written topics when an unguided choice of subject was allowed, but, when a clear purpose was suggested for the work or a particular type of reading material designated, the written work was less stereotyped. Gilbert interprets the situation from ‘the prevailing and oppressive
gender constructions' being offered to girls 'through traditional literature, contemporary media, classroom discourse patterns and the apparently innocent language of everyday use', (p. 186). HMI in England sees bias as emerging from male pupils and counteracted by school values whereas Gilbert, in Australia, sees the school feeding the pupils with male bias through texts that are offered to girls.

Just as boys form culture groups in adolescence so too do girls; they too recognise the importance of group attachment within school life. (Griffin, 1985). Although Griffin did not find these to be as large or as strongly bonded as studies of boys' groups, she did find that teachers referred and the girls themselves distinguished themselves by group naming, 'conformist, good girls or bright girls and trouble makers' (p.17) Meyenn's small scale study of girls in a middle school (11-13 years) identified 'quiet' girls, 'nice' girls, 'PE' [Physical Education] girls and 'science lab.' girls. The 'quiet' girls saw themselves as 'dunces' and were in bottom groups for lessons; having accepted their low status they were not anti-school but co-operated with the school system in order to have fun. The 'nice' girls seemed concerned to get though school without excelling or failing but mainly without being noticed. The PE group was regarded as being noisy and aggressive and helping each other with their schoolwork. The 'science lab.' group realised that school work was individual and competitive and were regarded by the teachers as 'mature', although the PE girls regarded them as 'teacher's pets'.

In the after school environment young women who have experienced literacy (and numeracy) difficulties in school appear to be at a disadvantage compared with men when educational achievement is considered. Although generally speaking they have achieved more whilst at school and stayed in education longer than men, many appear to have little direction and no clear destinations to aim towards. (Ekinsmyth and Bynner 1994)

4.8 Moving out of school and moving on

Thus, as attitudes and behaviours become part of the 'self,' what begins to emerge is the contribution of school and post school experiences to the formation of adult identity. Chapters 1 and 2 have briefly commented on the upheavals in labour market patterns that resulted in significant changes for the individual's work biography. The earlier sections of this chapter indicate the fragility of the developing adult identity. The interaction of influences on the variety of selves helps to create the emerging adult identity and thus the way in which individuals regard themselves. Identity is recognised as being a key aspect
of influence in affecting decisions made in the transition time between youth and adulthood and in influencing the career pathways taken:

Its [the identity’s] development is fundamental in relationships with others and consequently the ability to function in the social world including the world of work. Its evaluative aspect, self-esteem, is also central to social action. (Banks et al 1992, p. 12)

Additionally several other ‘growth tasks’ need to be addressed, including independence from the family both psychologically and economically (Furnham and Stacey (1991), Coleman and Hendry (1990), Jones and Wallace (1992). With all the adjustments that have to be made, plus for young people with low level literacy skills the growing realisation that life after school may be as disappointing for them as life in school has proved to be, the next stage may cause anxiety and apprehension as they continue to regard themselves as ‘failures’. The school-acquired identity therefore goes with them into their post school environment and the education process serves to confirm the ‘deeper roots’ of family background and peer culture:

Education and training help shape identity, but (…) the foundations of identity have deeper roots in family background and peer culture. [The groups of young people] bring with them to their post -16 education and training a set of values and expectations, which are reinforced and deepened by the experiences rather than challenged by it. Education is an affirmation of a set of values, a means to an end, or an irrelevance (Banks et al 1992 p.109)

In this section I shall consider the degree of choice available after school for young people such as those in my study.

The previous sections of this chapter have indicated that young people with low level literacy skills, especially those who are from a working class background, may leave school with few formal qualifications. Interrelated reasons, including curriculum content, styles of teaching and the assessment of learning, all dominated by the written word as well as by attitudes of parents, teachers and pupils, contribute to these outcomes. In previous societies, whilst the acquisition of literacy could enable upward movement towards the middle class it was not a pre-requisite skill for obtaining skilled employment. During the industrial age the skilled and semi-skilled working classes carried on the tradition to find their children similar employment. The father, as head of the household, would be responsible for deciding and finding a secure career for his children. To gain an apprenticeship for his son was the most important
contribution a father could make for his son's future, as there would be little wealth to inherit:

The possession of literacy might be a precondition for entry in to a trade but more important was the father's contribution both in payment and overseeing the behaviour of the son over the 7 year apprenticeship period (Vincent, 1981 p.67)

As the 1980s advanced working class parents may have found it difficult to advise their young, as it was their traditional forms of work that made the most rapid disappearance. The approach of 'getting on' in a traditional working class environment was no longer a viable option:

Many parents who were themselves young in the boom years of the 1950s and 1960s simply do not know what is in the best interests of their offspring. The labour market for young people has been transformed in the last twenty years and is radically different from the one most parents think their daughters and sons are growing up in. Parents in the northeast still talk the language of apprenticeship. (Coffield, Borill and Marshall 1986 p.205)

The end of compulsory schooling at age 16 now no longer culminates directly in employment, nor are young people considered to be adults within a working environment. At the time Willis (1977) was studying his 'lads', the majority of young people would go straight from school, some at 18 but usually at 16, into employment, the 'normative' model of transition (Jones and Wallace 1992 p.27). So whereas during times of full employment, and whilst society could still uphold the Gesellschaft (industrial based) principle, young people leaving school could acquire adult status through the workplace; now the period of youth is extended. Young people who would have gone straight into the work environment tend to stay in full-time education.

As the debate and arguments about school curriculum content concluded with the ERA act of 1988 and the subsequent implementation of the NC in all the state run schools in England and Wales, so the disquiets about young people's post school environments came in to prominence. The rapid and dramatic changes in the labour markets fractured the routes to employment so that the structured pathways into mass employment and to a lesser extent into the professions could be no longer securely in place. Emphasis on the responsibility for future work and careers was now transferred to the individual going through the transition period.

Section 2.3 of my study refers to the ESRC studies based around the developing careers and identities of young people growing up in the 1980s and
1990s. The broad career routes or trajectories towards adulthood in essence have been identified as: I the academic route leading to higher education, II training and education leading to skilled employment, III other forms of education and training leading to semiskilled employment, and IV unskilled jobs, unemployment and 'remedial' training schemes. (Bynner and Roberts, 1991) (see Section 2.3)

These trajectories that the ESRC studies considered to be in place in the late 1980s and early 1990s have themselves appeared as the 1990s progressed, to be less clear cut. Evans and Furlong (1997) point out that these latter years have brought with them 'an increasing fragmentation of opportunities and experience' that 'the processes of youth are highly differential, reflecting and constructing social divisions in society in complex ways'. (p.33). Although it can be said that the four trajectories to careers are still recognisable, there is as Roberts (1998) comments a 'transparency' about the still rapidly changing situation. The blurring of pathways can appear to give young people more choice and also more responsibility for their own futures. Decisions by policy makers purport to give young people opportunities to reach the same destination by different routes.

Evans and Furlong (1997) have used a metaphor of navigation to chart the transition process. As the societal 'niches' that were prepared for them were no longer available and as the influences of structural factors such as social class gender, educational attainment and labour markets appeared to be losing their hold, so more responsibility lay with the individual. Individuals came to be seen as 'navigating perilous waters' and negotiating their way 'through a sea of manufactured uncertainty' (Evans and Furlong, p.18). Thus this may be a time of doubt and uncertainly as well as a time of expectations and hopes.

The work of Evans and Heinz (1994), (see Section 2.3) put forward the notion of 'active' and 'passive' individualisation. Young people who operated in the active mode were largely from trajectories II and I and were planning their futures through higher education. Those, mainly from trajectory IV, who approached the transition with passivity and learned helplessness behaviour, adopted a wait and see attitude and felt that they were not in control of the situations in which they found themselves:

Rather than control their own transition, the young people too often found themselves propelled onto a downward occupational spiral into unskilled work and unemployment. (...) Those in the top trajectories, typically high achievers with strong social support, tend to the active mode; those on the bottom trajectories, typically poor achievers with weak social networks, tend to more passivity. (Evans and Furlong, p. 37)
Those young people without a sense of direction or ultimate goals can be ‘carried along in socially accepted career patterns’ and additionally, if they lack resources, both financial and social, they may lose courage to try different routes:

Lack of material and social resources act against risk-taking that could result in career ‘damage’. Transition behaviour which is characterised by a ‘step-by-step’ or a ‘wait and see’ pattern is linked to a passive kind of individualisation. (Evans and Heinz, 1994 p.213)

The next section is a consideration of the school to work transitions with the particular emphasis on those young people who leave school with few and low level qualifications.

4.8.1 Setting Out
When Sir Ron Dearing was asked to ‘strengthen consolidate and improve the framework of 16-19 qualifications’ (1996:1.1) there were 16,000 qualifications in operation. Many of these must have been largely unheard of, especially as teachers, parents and schools speak mainly of GCSEs and A level. However Dearing points out that the number:

reflects the wide range of purposes they are designed to serve the multiplicity of awarding bodies, and the simultaneous availability of qualifications being phased in while others are being phased out. (3.1)

His report aims to bring in ‘a coherent framework’ to cover ‘all the main qualifications and achievements of young people at every level of ability.’ (1.11); the range and levels of qualifications on offer would be available for adults also. He acknowledges that:

The academic/vocational divide is widely associated in British attitudes with a division between the able and less able. (4.4)

The provision in the framework of courses of the Dearing Report aims to bridge the vocational academic divide and encourage a continuum of learning. Thus in policy terms young people can progress through the stages offered by the Report’s proposed three routes of:

A level and GCSE: where the primary purpose is to develop knowledge, understanding and skills associated with a subject or discipline
Applied Education (GNVQ): where the primary purpose is to develop and apply knowledge, understanding and skills relevant to broad areas of employment.

Vocational training (NVQ): where the primary purpose is to develop and recognise mastery of a trade or profession at the relevant level (3.24)

Although as the Report says the GNVQ, like NVQ and 'A' level, was 'essentially designed as a qualification for those over 16' (3.19) a pilot project has established the GNVQs in schools for pupils from the age of 14. The report justifies the inclusion of GNVQ at this age as, whilst recommending that the GCSE remains the major route to achievement, the GNVQ offers a different range of subjects. (See Section3.7.3)

The young people in my study were caught up in the major reorganisation of the 16-19 framework for qualifications. When the main group of young people in this study left school at 16, the qualification changes were just being felt in the local area. Although at the time the main group left school, GNVQs (introduced 1993) and NVQs (introduced 1987) were in currency at the time of interview the courses were not generally available locally. In addition to the A level route which would probably be barred to them because of the lack of qualifications, what was on offer to them was a variety of courses run mainly by the British and Technical Education Council (BTEC), the City and Guilds, and the Royal Society of Arts (RSA); the qualifications on these latter courses were most likely to be carried out through the process of Youth Training (YT). Similarly the schools which the Year 9 groups attended had not yet taken up the option of GNVQ courses for 14 year olds

YT was introduced in 1990. The scheme consists of vocationally based classroom learning experiences combined with locally based work experience. The availability of the training depends on local employers. The system of YT is offered to school leavers for one or two years at the end of which the young person gains a recognised qualification. The acceptance of the Dearing Report's recommendations of NVQ and GNVQ means that these qualifications will be general in the UK; the schemes are three quarters funded by government with a quarter funded by employers (Payne, 1995). The examination boards and courses of BTec, RSA and City and Guilds are still in place, there are 'over a hundred bodies accredited to offer NVQ' (Dearing, 1996). The GCSE levels obtained decide the level of NVQ or GNVQ that the young person studies. Thus young people such as the ones in my study would be starting at Foundation level; however if their GCSE grades are below then they would need to complete a
course study at entry level. YT would give a qualification of NVQ level one or two at the end of the period of training. (Appendix 2)

YT depends to a large extent on the availability of work in the local area; currently the emphasis on training is towards modern apprenticeships and YT is becoming less available. The value of YT has had doubts expressed about it by writers in the area; its bad name was a left over from the Youth Training Scheme (YTS), which was generally seen as ‘an inferior kind of job’ and many of the employers who offered YTS ‘treated the young trainees as nothing more than cheap employees subsidised by Government’ (Bynner, Ferri and Shepherd, 1997 p.12)

However the Dearing Report places blame on the young people themselves:

The [previous] government guarantee of a training place to any young person not in full-time education or employment is an excellent investment, and far better (...) than unconstructive unemployment. But some of those participating are motivated by securing financial benefits from the State rather than by the opportunity to succeed in training. (...) the involvement of those who have little motivation to achieve affects its whole standing. (5.7)

The Report does not question the reasons for the lack of motivation but the Youth Cohort Study results (Payne, 1995)) may provide a clue in that those young people who were not on apprenticeship schemes tended to drop out of the YT schemes:

In contrast to YT apprenticeship schemes, non-apprenticeship YT schemes retain less than half of the trainees into the second year. (...) overall, YT trainees on non-apprenticeship schemes are notably less successful than YT apprentices in finding jobs.(p.v)

Without clear goals and objectives to aim for a ‘what’s the point?’ attitude tends prevail. The young people may also be confused by what appears to be on offer; Jones and Wallace (1992) comment on the multiplicity of names that Youth Training is known by in different Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) all over the country (p.38).

The young person does indeed appear to need skills in navigation to find her/his way into a career and should have the ability to apply knowledge, understanding and skills relevant to broad areas of employment.

4.9 The role of Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs)
The Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) set up by the previous government continue to play a key role in the post school environment. Funded directly by government, they are set up to serve local areas; their role is to:

help build robust dynamic local economies, develop businesses that can take on and 'beat' global competitors and to develop and encourage world class workforce with the skill need for successful businesses. (Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1994, p.15)

The remit the TECs have been given appears to encourage the competitive aspects of training and employment and moves away from individual development needs. The TECs run a scheme of training credits (Youth Credits) which entitle every young person of 16 and 17 leaving full-time education to training to 'approved standards' at least to NVQ level 2. The TECs have helped to develop and run the Modern Apprenticeship scheme that was launched nationwide in 1995. According to the Dearing report they are designed to increase the number of young people achieving NVQ level 3 (equivalent to A level) in two or three years; they are primarily for 16-17 year olds but are available to young people of 18, 19 or over (5.16). The apprenticeships are not available to all; entry requirements need to be of a certain standard if the young person is set to achieve a level equivalent to A level after 2 or 3 years. The Report says that a youth trainee should be able to transfer onto a Modern Apprenticeship scheme. The Report's recommendations suggest that young people should be able to reach the same destinations by travelling on different routes; for example by the routes of A level or GNVQ, or NVQ or a mixture of the qualifications.

4.9.1 The role of the Careers Centre

The recently privatised careers service is primarily responsible for young people aged 16 to 17 who have left compulsory schooling. The service liaises with the local TEC, which takes responsibility for training. All 16-17 year olds that the careers service meets are required to fill in an action plan (Careers Action Plan). It is mandatory for the young person going to the careers centre to meet with the careers advisor, in order to find out the local options and take guidance in other ways. The Action Plan sets out the responsibilities of the young person and careers service in the route towards becoming employed or taking part in training schemes. The Action Plan, for the young person, is set out thus:

My current situation; my future plans; my skills and interests linked to these plans; routes and options available to me; my preferred route/option and the
reason for it; what I need to do next; support I can expect from my Careers Adviser; Careers Adviser's supporting comments for parents/guardians.

Additionally the Action Plan:

shows the education, training and employment routes that are open to the young person and the qualifications, skills and experience they might need. (CfBT, 1998).

It appears from the requirements of the Action Plan that the young person should either have decided on what work they wish to do in the future or are dependent upon the Careers Adviser to give them some direction. The young person is either enabled or limited by the qualifications previously acquired.

Ex-pupils with qualifications below C grade at GCSEs will be unable to get onto the A level route towards higher education. Routes and options available will be offered either by attending further education college courses to gain GNVQs NVQs at Entry level, Foundation level or Level One, (or similar courses which are still available through the BTEC, City and Guilds and RSA exam boards), or to be in some form of Youth Training or by Modern Apprenticeship.

The privatised careers service is criticised in that the companies that have successfully obtained tenders (contracts for 5 years under the Competitive Compulsory Tendering scheme) have to justify their work by measuring outputs. Thus where previously careers advisers 'were motivated by trying to ensure that the kids made sensible decisions, now we're [the careers service] obsessed with production targets.' (The Guardian, 10-10-95). For ex-pupils with few GCSEs routes and options for them will be limited to GNVQs and NVQs at Entry level or Foundation level; availability of these courses may depend on the profitability of the courses.

While the principles and policies of the careers service have been elucidated (DfEE 1996), in practice the local careers services can only direct young people to education, schemes and training when the young people have the qualifications required for that particular course; the 'routes and options available' stated in the individual Action Plans may, for some young people, be extremely narrow.

4.9.2 The role of the Job Centre

The Job Centre's role is primarily to assist people over the age of 18 to find work and to advise them of training opportunities and direct them to the benefits available. People with particularly low skills in literacy and numeracy
are able to start a training for work pre-vocational course lasting from 2 to 6 weeks which aims to bring their skills to a certain minimum standard. A similar course in English is available for speakers of other languages. When a person has been ‘available for work’ for 26 weeks (that is has been unemployed and ‘signed’ on every fortnight at the Job Centre) they are eligible for Training for Work. In the local area where this research is based this allows an unemployed person to train for up to 12 weeks towards an NVQ level 1 or towards other qualifications such as City and Guilds and RSA. If they are over 18, benefit is given plus £10 per week for travel expenses. The New Deal, brought in by government in 1997 for young people aged between 18 and 24, is available in the local area for those who have been unemployed for 2 years or over. (DfEE, 1997c) It is run by local organisations, including Job Centres, TECS and employers who form ‘a network of local partnerships.’ The Deal, on offer nation-wide, gives 4 options:

- a job with an employer who receives a Government subsidy for six months
- work with the environment task force to improve the environment of your community
- work in the voluntary sector
- full-time education or training geared to helping you into work (DfEE, 1997c)

To qualify for the course the young person has had to have claimed the Jobseekers' allowance for more than six months. Job seekers’ allowance is paid when a person is actively seeking work and is not employed in any capacity; sometimes this may create a dilemma for a young person who may be taking opportunities to work on a part time or casual basis, which would make them ineligible for the allowance.

When young people accept the New Deal they receive the Jobseekers allowance and an extra allowance for expenses (such as travel when going to an interview). The young person cannot make the final decision as to which option they will follow and if they do not like the option they are offered they cannot go back onto the Jobseekers allowance. The New Deal literature makes this plain:

**Can I choose which option I take?**

You can certainly say which option you’d prefer, and we will do our best to help you get it. Although we can’t guarantee in every case to offer you exactly what you want, we will do everything we can to offer you a real choice.

**Can I just go back onto JSA?**

No it’s, important that you play your part too by participating actively in the New Deal (DfEE, 1997c)
4.10 Staying on Course

From 1990 onwards the numbers of young people staying on in education after the age of 16 have rapidly increased especially among young people who achieved at an average or below average levels. The state of the labour market has encouraged them to stay on:

Partly because of improvement in GCSE results (…) and partly because of the occupational structure of the youth labour market, staying on has grown particularly rapidly amongst young people with average and below average GCSE results (Payne, 1995 p.iii)

Young people such as these have been described by Biggart and Furlong (1996) as ‘discouraged workers’; these were young people in the Scottish school system who although they had achieved below average qualifications choose to stay on at school ‘due to a lack of credible opportunities’ in the local labour market. Any continuing resistance to the school system tends to be from an individual basis rather than from the solidarity of a peer group stand.

Many young people from working class families still tend to feel ill at ease in the academic environment of the school. Without clear educational or occupational goals many lack the motivation to study and are torn by a desire to participate in working-class youth cultures and to be accepted by their peers who have left full-time education. However, forms of resistance, which were once manifest in a collectivist form, have become much more individualised: qualifications come to assume an increased significance and employers place a greater emphasis on personal profiles. (Furlong and Biggart, p.264)

They lack the support of their own group, which has been dispersed at the end of their compulsory schooling at 16. Banks et al (1992) maintain that for young people such as these group identification helps to support the self-esteem and contribute to the adult identity:

The shattering of expectations and aspirations typifying many adolescents’ occupational experience brings with it a diminution of self esteem, and consequently the need to find ways of shoring up identity. Solidarity with the peer group provides an important means of doing this and at the same time helps shape future identity. (p.12)

Without this support these young people may feel increasingly powerless as they attempt to succeed by taking further unsuitable courses between the ages of 16 and 18. Just as they had little involvement themselves in the planning for their own for the future when ‘choosing’ options at the age of 14 so again now at 16, they take the advice given from career and teacher advisers.
The England and Wales Youth Cohort Study (Payne, 1995) found that those young people from the more disadvantaged homes still tend to try for the work environment rather than stay on at school:

Even so, amongst those with poorer results, the staying on rates of young people from advantaged and disadvantaged social backgrounds have diverged. For the former, staying on is now very likely, however badly they do at GCSE; for the latter, staying on rates have risen more slowly. (p.iii)

Reasons for the slow rise of staying on rates for those young people from ‘disadvantaged’ backgrounds cannot be proven; however one can surmise that the young person would want to become a wage earner either to contribute to the family finances or to become financially independent from that family. (Jones and Wallace, 1992). However Jones and Wallace explain that even if the young person does opt for work and training in the workplace they are provided with component wages rather than full adult wages. They interpret this situation as a form of social control:

young adults from 18 to 25 years are not entitled to full adult rates of social security, or often of adult wages, and therefore do not obtain social citizenship at this stage. All this represents a form of social control through enforced dependency, currently enacted through the social security regulations, (p.91)

Critically, the students realise which qualifications count, both for higher education and in the eyes of employers.

However vocational courses attract only a minority of students with very good GCSE results, and the movement away from GCE A level courses towards vocational course has been mainly amongst those with GCSE results around the borderline for entry to sixth form GCE A-level A/S courses. It remains to be seen whether the introduction of GNVQs, which were not available to the young people in this study, will increase the popularity of vocational qualifications amongst students with good GCSEs (Payne, 1995, p v)

The currency of the GNVQ may become higher as the qualifications become better known. However GCSE and the GCSE results still remain crucial when entry levels to courses are being decided. There are consequences too for 14 years olds. Section 3.7.3 of my study has indicated that curriculum changes in response to the Dearing Report will be felt by young people of 14 and who may in future leave school with fewer qualifications in GCSE having concentrated more on the vocational side of the curriculum. Whether these will serve to qualify them for higher education or training for skilled employment remains to
be seen. At present the evidence is clear that without a certain level of results at GCSE it is difficult to get on the higher or skilled training pathway. The Youth Cohort study (Payne, 1995) accepts the crucial significance of GCSE results:

GCSE results are the biggest single influence to staying on rates. In full time education after 16 they are closely related to the courses followed and to the chances to leaving after one year. In the labour market, they affect the chances of getting an apprenticeship, a full-time job or a non-apprenticeship place on YT, and there is a clear hierarchy between these three routes in terms of the average GCSE results of young people on each. Occupations are also strongly differentiated by GCSE results. (p.v)

An additional difficulty in reaching the aim of equality of courses, as the Dearing Report hopes, may become apparent with time. Section 3.9.1 of my study has pointed out that schools appear to be introducing GNVQ for the ‘less able’, rather than to give a wider learning base as Dearing had hoped by pupils and students taking a mixture of courses. The two ‘routes’ of GCSE and GNVQ are not compatible because of the differences in approach to learning and the variety of targets. (See Section 3.7.3)

The summary of present status and the proposed changes to the routes to wards adulthood give few obvious pathways or guarantees of permanent career or working roles in adulthood. The risk may be greater for those young people whose qualifications prevent them from gaining a modern apprenticeship or a YT apprenticeship or aiming for higher education by the A level route. The first comparative Anglo-German study, (Bynner and Roberts, 1991), using the information of the four career trajectories (in Section 2.3) found that those young people in trajectories III (education and training leading typically to semi-skilled employment) and IV (unskilled jobs, unemployment and ‘remedial’ training schemes) to be following uncertain routes, diverse destinations (trajectory III p.114) or routes to nowhere. (Trajectory IV). The young people in my study because of reading and writing difficulties and low school leaving qualifications are thus likely to find themselves on these routes. Bynner and Roberts found that obtaining employment straight from school with low qualifications was dependent on the local labour market conditions, so in a buoyant area young people were likely to move straight into work and the types of training on offers were often seen only as a stop gap to employment. In an area of high unemployment the young people did not have this choice. Both groups of young people in Britain (one from an area of low unemployment one from an area of high unemployment) believed their main aim should be to get a job, rather than continuing their training with what was on offer.
Trajectory IV comprised five distinguishable groups (a further two were applicable only in Germany); thus the young people were likely to find themselves in situations of:

- permanent unskilled employment, with little or no access to training:
- peripheral work, usually with periods of unemployment and/or on remedial schemes
- domestic careers;
- part-time employment
- long-term unemployment (p.138)

The study found evidence of groups of young people forming in peripheral type work, that is seasonal, temporary or work on a casual basis.

Overall:

there was evidence that groups of peripheral workers were either established or else in the making. Whether and how many would remain peripheral worker, recover into the primary labour market or start to form a semi-permanent underclass was difficult to tell at this stage of their careers. (p.162)

Bynner and Roberts concluded that:

respondents on the third and fourth trajectories had not dropped down; they had never been offered better opportunities. Many regretted not having worked harder at school. Nearly all deplored their obviously limited prospects. Unemployment was invariably detested. Most of those in unskilled jobs would have preferred something better (p.245)

An associated study by Bates (Bates and Risborough1993) found that girls from a working class background and who were low achievers in school can find themselves in the service sector looking after the elderly. This was low status low paid domestic type work which mostly the 'care' girls had not chosen initially but were encouraged to do by their college tutors. Additionally Bates found the background also influenced those girls who stayed on in their 'caring' jobs and who after a while, in spite of low pay and status took pride in their work, realising that they were making a contribution to society needs. She found that their home life, doing household tasks, looking after younger children, prepared them for this domestic care work and thus reinforced their traditional women's role. Whilst therefore the traditional work for young working class men has disappeared there is still plenty of 'women's work' available for the young women who find themselves in trajectory IV. Coffield, Borrill and
Marshall (1986) researching in the North of England had earlier found the same situation.

Furlong and Cartmel (1997) maintain that the effects of social class on life chances are still in place although they have become blurred by the individual experiences of young people. (See Section 2.3). The ESRC research (Banks et al, 1992) reinforces findings that social class is still in place:

Young people from professional family backgrounds were concentrated in the academic trajectory and those from manual backgrounds, especially partly skilled and unskilled, in the YTS/ unemployed trajectory. In between were those exhibiting social mobility upwards or downwards. (p.37)

It can be recognised that young people's after school experiences contribute to the adult identity; those young people who have experienced failure at school have their fears about themselves confirmed by situations in which they find themselves after school. Evans and Heinz (1994) also found that the majority of young people in trajectory IV ‘move between unemployment, casual jobs and sometimes deviant behaviour that locks them in a precarious status of social marginalisation’. (p.7). They conclude that not only are the influences of home and school important but also the young people’s experiences of the challenges and rewarding experiences in the passage to employment that help to create the formation of their identity:

Self confidence in youth seems to arise out of success in completion of tasks, from vocation choice to labour market entry, and in coming to terms with changing work structures in personal decision making (p.213)

With a degree of self-confidence, clear pathways and realistic aims defined, young people can take an active role towards their future destinations. Those with no clear aims or definite occupational goals and particularly those who leave school with low level qualifications and who are from a working class background may take on an attitude of learned helplessness and appear to be the most disadvantaged.

The risks, in striving towards an adulthood that is rewarding and satisfying, are many. In the next section I consider whether young people who feel unable to take charge of their lives are open to even further risk.

4.11 Emergence of an ‘underclass’

The previous sections of this chapter have indicated that young people from working class backgrounds with low literacy levels and who leave school
with few qualifications can find themselves in 'at risk' situations and on 'routes to nowhere'. The question can be asked if young people such as these form an 'underclass', a group of people that are segregated from the rest of society. There is a problem in defining such a group. For instance Mac an Ghaill (1992) believes that an 'underclass' of school pupils was created by the curriculum policy changes of the ERA Act (1988), (see section 3.3).

According to Dean (1991) the notion of an 'underclass', a nation divided by social and cultural background is far too neat a supposition as it suggests a simple division into the view of a 'them', -a feckless minority, and 'us', -the majority of responsible and respectable citizens, syndrome. He maintains there is little evidence to support the view that among the disparate groups this supposed underclass would encompass, there is a 'distinctive set of sub-cultural values and attitudes that set them apart from the rest of society'. (p.11)

In place of the traditional base of working class jobs are the peripheral jobs often in the service sector which provide low or un-skilled part-time often casual employment, (OECD, 1985). It has been suggested that there is no longer a working class because of the disappearance of working class jobs, and therefore if a person is not middle class then s/he is aspirationally middle class. However, if aspirations meet with failure then membership of an underclass would be all there was available.

Roberts (1995) maintains that young people who experience unemployment do not then necessarily become members of an underclass because other economic and social structures may be in place. He does, however, give several strands of evidence of underclass formation: the long term unemployed, those who 'disappear' from the system at sixteen or earlier, and the unemployable. The term unemployable is seen as relative as in times of high unemployment employers have more choice and can insist on higher standards. An additional argument is that the threshold for employment is now higher due to technological advance and competitive pressures. He acknowledges that one of the groups who find it most difficult to obtain employment are young people who at 21 years of age reported difficulties with their reading and writing, spelling, or number work. (Ekinsmyth and Bynner, 1994 see Sections 4.6 ,4.7)

The OECD (1985) does recognise a 'new underclass' which is described as a minority who do not hold the aspirations that others hold, who tend to be 'pushed out' of school because teachers see them as troublesome, as having poor motivation and who show signs of classroom disruption and absenteeism. OECD recognises a link between low level literacy skills and possible membership of an 'underclass'. Using evidence collected in Sweden in 1971
they judged problems to be socio-culturally based rather than economical. However the results of subsequent economic restructuring could add on an economic base as a source of problems. The following characteristics were found to be especially important:

- lack of school readiness at the time of entering school [Year 1]
- early school failure
- weak parental support of school learning (no participation and contact in PTA (Parent teacher Association) activities
- failure to learn to read during the first years of schooling which is aggravated by automatic promotion
- absenteeism
- disciplinary troubles

The study clearly highlights the importance of reading and writing, throughout the whole of school life, in order to achieve. While a causal link between each of these characteristics cannot be proved, a link between reading failure, lack of appropriate parental support and later school behaviour problems that in themselves may suggest a lack of self-esteem can certainly be considered. If the view of an underclass is rejected, evidence does suggest an increasing polarisation, marginalisation and segregation in society which leads to a divide between the ‘have’ and ‘have not’ members of society. Moore (1998) has indicated that pupil exclusion from school is associated but not determined by poor acquisition of basic skills, particularly literacy and numeracy; yet, he continues, only 1 per cent of pupils with statements are permanently excluded. Pupils who are at greater risk are, according to Moore, pupils with higher reading ages than those with statements but whose literacy skills are not high enough to cope with the secondary school curriculum (see also Section 7.2)

Previous dramatic changes in work patterns have tended to increase employment by contrast with the current decrease due to the present technological changes, a decrease that could mean that poorly qualified young adults in particular having been ‘driven further into the margins’ will be unable ever to work, (Coffield, Borrill and Marshall 1986, p.205).

Ashton and Maguire (1991), Coffield, Borrill and Marshall (1986) and the 16-19 ESRC study (Banks et al, 1992) show that people on the periphery of society are not evenly dispersed but are concentrated in geographical areas in some large cities. In this respect the divisions apparent are not necessarily because of class membership or fault within self but are for a complexity of reasons. But for the young people trying to get a job with ‘prospects’ it appears simple -there are not enough skilled jobs available. Brown and Scase (1991) do
not see an advantage in recognising an underclass but do find plausible the view that British society has become increasingly polarised. According to them the government policies of the 1980s led to an unfair distribution of the country’s wealth. Those people in professional and managerial jobs receive an increasing share of resources while those in ‘poor work’ or unemployed have to survive with less goods and services.

Finally, powerless young people, part of the prison population formed part of a research study by Devlin (1996). Although a firm connection between literacy difficulties and criminal behaviour cannot be established nevertheless Devlin found that an overwhelming majority of prisoners had experienced difficulties during their school careers. The Basic Skills Agency (1994) in a small-scale survey screened approximately 400 prisoners in standards of literacy and numeracy. The survey found that whilst 1 in 6 of the general population has serious problems more than 1 in 2 of The prisoners in this survey had low level literacy skills.

In section 3.7.3 of my study I have discussed the group of young people that the Dearing report recognises as the ‘underachievers’ at school who may be at more risk than other young people of becoming ‘disaffected’, citizens. Dearing warns that a lack of education attainment will preclude these young people from finding and keeping employment in the next century. He is anxious to prevent these young people from becoming a part of an ‘anti-culture’ (12.26)

His recommendation which is now followed up by government policy is to move these young people from school and into the FE college to experience work based learning (see Section 3.7.3). It is too early to assess if this will be able to successfully re-motivate young people restore their self esteem and enable them to integrate fully into society or whether it will be a holding operation to delay a possible downward spiral.

4.12 The worth of personal skills

The summative GCSE examinations at the end of compulsory school grade pupils by their results and little note is taken of personal skills and interests. As noted in Section 3.6, personal, moral and social education (PSME) does form part of the secondary curriculum but although the pupil leaves the school with a Record of Achievement that lists these skills it is the GCSE examination results that determine the future pathways.

The Dearing Report (1996) lists the skills that employers wish, in addition to adequate standards in the key skills of literacy numeracy and skills in IT (see Section 3.8 of my study), to see developed: ‘inter-personal skills in team
working, presentation skills (including skills of oracy and personal presentation),
and wider personal skills such as problem solving and self management of
learning programmes.' (7.46)

Similarly the previous government viewed that:

a broad and balanced curriculum and well developed courses of study, which
make the most of each young person's potential in every area [my italics] -
whatever their background, gender, ethnic origin or abilities-can provide people
who are skilled versatile and adaptable (DFE, 1994, p.3)

Yet the same government brought in league tables in which schools are measured
by results, regarding a 'good' school as one which has high examination results,
no regard being paid to the strength of personal skills

A personal skills development programme which highlights strengths
encourages a positive self image and in conjunction with a more relevant
curriculum should enable a young person to take a measure of control in their
own lives and move towards 'active individualisation'. However the
development of the young person 'in every area' is not fulfilled in school because
of the pressure for qualifications. Courtman (1995) argues that the heavy
reliance on the traditional academic curriculum precludes the inclusion of
policies aimed at the development of the whole person:

the pervading emphasis [on qualifications] obscures the view of an education that
has personal as well as academic objectives. There is no awareness here of the
equally important need to educate for maturity and purpose (...) when such
qualities are so needed to bind our society, our industry and our nation together
(p.14)

The Dearing Report (1996) pays particular attention to the National
Record of Achievement (NRA), regretting the fact that 'it has not achieved as
much as was hoped in terms of being seen by universities and employers as
relevant to their recruitment processes'. (2.28) Dearing believes that the Record
should reflect the interests, hobbies and personal skills and capabilities of a
young person and enable young people 'to take a greater responsibility for their
learning and in preparing them for their life-long learning as adults'. (6.1) Thus
the skills that can be acquired refer as much to personal development as much as
academic development. Dearing suggests that the NRA should be brought in at
thirteen and a half years old 'when decisions are being taken about the last two
years of statutory schooling' (6.21). At present the NRA can be utilised by the
Careers service when the young person is 16. The qualities are needed in
addition to the national qualifications (GCSE), not as an alternative accomplishment to gaining a place on a training course.

Although then higher education has widened its boundaries and a framework of further education qualifications are now offered, barriers still remain in place for some of our young people.

4.13 Conclusion

Pupils whose reading and writing abilities have not reached a sufficient level for them to achieve the required examination results at 16 that will allow them to study at a higher level also lose out in other ways. Choices already limited at the age of 14 become less available after school. Their sense of self-esteem can be affected; they may see themselves as failures and may form negative attitudes towards school and learning. These attitudes can stay with them and in turn be passed on to their own children. The skills and interests that they do have are not recognised as valuable to themselves or for society's needs. Consequently they may find themselves in a condition of 'learned helplessness,' passively accepting whatever limited offers are made to them. Whether they will in future be part of an emerging 'underclass' cannot be predicted but evidence presented here suggests that they are in an at risk position of being on the periphery of society and to a certain extent segregated and marginalised. The education handed to them with its main emphasis on learning through the written word, does not capitalise on what they have to offer and the ensuing loss is felt not only by the young people themselves but also by the wider society:

the plain fact is that the traditional academic curriculum is closed to many children, as it requires specific skills of literacy for access. Our society has mistaken the product of a literate and numerate populace for the process of enrichment. Not only are children refused such enrichment on the grounds that they simply can't read: they have also been undervalued as a social resource. To ignore the talents and to deny the development of these talents is not simply a loss to the individual but a loss to society as a whole. (Bell and Best, 1986, p.138)

Their school experiences are carried with them into the after school environment. School based qualifications count; the young people are aware of this and know that qualification levels will affect their future chances. Some young people want no further involvement in education and hope to get into the workplace. However, because of the lack of jobs available, young people are expected to continue in training or education based situations. Those young people who accept what is on offer, usually unskilled or semi-skilled work often
without the prospect of future permanent employment, rationalise their positions; if they do not, they have to accept that long-term unemployment will be the consequence. For a complexity of reasons the routes to employment have become less clear. There appears to be a confusing number of routes to take and the Dearing Report, by bringing in a national system of new qualifications, attempts to clarify both the standards and the routes themselves. However these qualifications themselves do not guarantee work and employers and the TECs recognise the ‘good’ passes in the GCSE school leaving examination as crucial when offering jobs or training. In reality some of jobs and training schemes are closed to those without the required qualifications. It appears that little regard is paid to the worth of personal skill young people have acquired perhaps away from the school environment nor does the Record of Achievement aid them towards higher education or skilled employment (through a Modern Apprenticeship) without the required level of GCSE results.
Part II

Part I of my study has considered schooling and curriculum, young people and after school transitions in general terms and has set the scene for this second part of the study as I begin to move from the general towards the particular. Thus in Part II, Chapters 5 and 6, consideration is given first in Chapter 5 to the methodological aspects of the study; methods are described and followed by the explanation and justification of the methods and techniques used for the data collection and analysis. Chapter 6 provides definitions of the term literacy and the part its various aspects play in the lives of young people. The final part of Chapter 6 begins to focus more on the specific and particular parts of the study as the sample of teachers’ lesson organisation is discussed.

Chapter 5: FROM GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS TO SHARED EXPERIENCES: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 Methods used

The central question of the study:

How does a lack of proficiency in literacy skills affect the lives of young people both during their school years and afterwards?

is addressed first by using in-depth open ended individual interviews with a group of young people, previously identified as having a low level of skills in literacy and who have since left school, in an attempt to understand their shared experiences and to interpret their experiences. The aim is to reach for the meaning that the phenomenon which the young people share, in this case a lack of proficiency in literacy skills, has for them (Eisner, 1991). This search for meaning, although as Eisner remarks, meaning can be elusive, is necessary because of the methodological approach that I take. The search is also implicit in the main question – How does a lack of proficiency affect...? Questions such as: In what ways did the lack of proficiency affect them in secondary school? Did they know that they had this lack when they were at primary school? How did they feel the teachers helped them? and so on are used to begin the quest for meaning. The young people are a homogenous group both in age and in that they were considered whilst at school to have low level literacy skills. This group will be referred to as the main group of young people.
Secondly, the central question of the study is given added depth by the inclusion of a second group of younger pupils, again identified as having low level literacy skills, who contribute to the search for meaning behind this main question and the associated questions. They were pupils attending four secondary schools who were at the time of meeting in Year 9 (age 14+) and will be referred to as Year 9 pupils. As with the main group, information from them was obtained by using open-ended interviews.

A third group of people also plays a part in the study: data are gathered, in the form of a questionnaire, from subject teachers of Year 9 pupils in a number of secondary schools.

In addition to the data obtained from the interviews and questionnaires within the paradigm that is used in this study, information is obtained from a variety of sources which serve to question, describe, inform and cause reflection for the researcher, myself, and which illuminate the field of study so that the enquiry is on-going. Thus my own professional experiences in pre-school, primary, secondary and special schools are used to provide a jumping off point for the exploration of written material, text books, journals, government documents, policy documents and so on. What follows is an explanation of the methodology and research design that I will use in this study.

5.2 Methodology: use of paradigms

Once the central focus of the proposed research has been clarified then the methodological framework: methods of data collection and techniques of analysis need to be addressed. The research design is crucial as it underpins the whole study.

The term methodology refers to 'the philosophical framework, the fundamental assumptions and the characteristics of a human science perspective' (Manen, 1990 p.27). The framework is also referred to as a 'paradigm', a cluster of beliefs and attitudes. (Kuhn, 1970)

The field of social science accepts two main paradigms. Convention agrees the terms normative and interpretive for the two paradigms. In the normative paradigm human behaviour is essentially rule governed whilst the interpretive paradigm is characterised by a concern for the individual. (Cohen and Manion, 1989). Two different approaches to collecting data are appropriate to the two paradigms: the quantitative method in the normative paradigm and the qualitative method in the interpretive paradigm. Each method uses a variety of techniques to collect data.
The set rules that the normative paradigm implies can, if followed, be considered to prove or disprove the hypotheses, which have been presupposed. Once a hypothesis has been formulated, some re-defining may be needed so that the phenomena observed can be measured and tested. Once this has been established the focus is then on the measuring instrument, the test items, survey questions and so on which need to be carefully constructed so that the instrument measures what it is supposed to measure (Patton, 1990). The data is then collected and analysed and the hypothesis proved or disproved. Research in the normative paradigm is usually in a 'macro' context, large scale studies and surveys which are likely to explain behaviour and look for the cause of a phenomenon. By contrast, the interpretive paradigm is not accompanied with a hypothesis to prove or disprove but rather with a broad research interest or possible topic, an open-ended first phase of question and search which is followed through by the personal involvement of the researcher. A study produced is likely to be at a 'micro' level and interpret and understand actions, and aim for meaning rather than to search for causes.

The differing approaches to the study of behaviour are summarised in Cohen and Manion (p.40):

**Figure 5.1: The Differing Approaches to the Study of Behaviour, Cohen and Manion, p.40**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Normative</th>
<th>Interpretive</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Society and the social system</td>
<td>The individual</td>
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<tr>
<td>Medium/large scale research,</td>
<td>Small-scale research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impersonal, anonymous forces regulating</td>
<td>Human actions continuously</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>behaviour</td>
<td>recreating social life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model of natural sciences, 'Objectivity',</td>
<td>Non-statistical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research conducted 'from the outside',</td>
<td>'Subjectivity'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generalising from the specific,</td>
<td>Personal involvement of the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explaining behaviour/seeking causes</td>
<td>researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assuming the taken for granted,</td>
<td>Interpreting the specific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macro-concepts: society</td>
<td>Understanding actions/ meanings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>institutions, norms positions, roles,</td>
<td>rather than causes</td>
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<tr>
<td>expectations</td>
<td>Investigating the taken-for-granted</td>
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<td>Structurelistals</td>
<td>Micro-concepts: individual</td>
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<td></td>
<td>perspective, personal constructs</td>
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<td>negotiated meanings , definitions</td>
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<td>situations</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Phenomenologists, symbolic</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>interactionists,</td>
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<td>ethnomethodologists</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Whilst the researchers in the normative paradigm are distanced from their subjects of study and the data, the researchers in the interpretive paradigm by
contrast become involved with and take a more active role in relation to the people they are studying.

Bryman (1988) believes that the two terms quantitative research and qualitative research have come to be used for the two divergent genres and that some writers perceive them as competing views about the ways social reality ought to be studied (p5). Other writers, Bryman suggests, believe that the two terms are used to denote the different ways of collecting data that are the most appropriate for answering the research question posed. It is the attempt to solve the problem posed and to illuminate the area of interest that should decide the method and so rigid divisions between the two are unnecessary. Similarly Silverman (1993) does not believe that we should be asked to choose between quantitative and qualitative methods and that the polarities around the distinctions between the two should be deconstructed (p.23). Thus the research question and the way it is posed can be used to emphasise the way in which the data is collected.

According to Bassey (1992), researchers working in the normative (quantitative) paradigm see reality as separate from themselves and expect other researchers to have 'the same perceptions of shared phenomena and thus common understandings.' (p.6). Thus the information obtained aims for objectivity. On the other hand those working in the interpretive (qualitative) paradigm see reality as a social construct and do not necessarily expect other researchers to have the same perceptions or understandings of the same phenomena. In this way the information gained is subjective. (p.6)

Eisner uses the term 'qualitative inquiry' in preference to 'interpretive paradigm', and believes that this approach can be usefully employed in the area of teaching and learning. He lists six characteristics that make a study one of 'qualitative inquiry':

- that it is field focused; those researchers involved in education would go to where it was happening; visiting schools, classrooms observing pupils and teachers.
- that the study accepts the *self as an instrument* (p.33) 'the self is the instrument that engages the situation and makes sense of it (p.34) (see also Patton,1990).
- the interpretive character of qualitative inquiry leads to the inquirers - the researchers- 'to try to account for what they have given an account of' and to explain what the experiences hold for those who are the subject of the study.
Thus, by interpretation, the researcher constantly searches for meaning

- in the use of what Eisner calls expressive language, the researchers display their own involvement in the process; and an empathetic stance is taken rather than a detachment towards the data being formed.
- attention to particulars –by accepting the uniqueness of and distinctive flavour of particular contributors, pieces of text and other material; particulars, once acquired and interpreted, manifest themselves in general themes.
- instrumental utility: Eisner suggests that a qualitative study should demonstrate its usefulness both by explaining a confusing situation and by providing pointers for the future.

These aspects of ‘qualitative inquiry’, together with the summaries of both paradigms by Cohen and Manion, (Figure 5.1) confirm that my study is located within the interpretive paradigm (or qualitative inquiry).

5.3 The key participants of the study

Three groups participate:

- a group of 22 young people, previously seen when they were 14 in school and who had when they left primary school at 11, showed a degree of literacy difficulties. At the time of the individual in-depth interviews they were aged 18 or 19. These young people will be referred to as the main group.

- 26 Year 9 pupils from 4 state secondary schools interviewed in small groups when they were 14 years of age. These pupils will be referred to as Year 9 pupils

- 88 Year 9 subject teachers, not involved with the Year 9 pupils above, from 12 state secondary schools, who filled in a questionnaire

5.4 Methodology: Research design, using the Grounded Theory approach

According to Patton (1990) qualitative methods consist of three types of data collection:

1. in depth open-ended interviews
2. direct observation
3. written documents
The main body of data for this study was collected by the in-depth interviewing of previously identified young people aged 18-19. Prior to and during the interviewing process, material was gathered by direct observation in schools and written documents and the process of analysis began through the procedures of: *induction*, *deduction* and *verification*. These are the three aspects of enquiry essential to the 'grounded theory approach'. (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This grounded theory approach, a particular style of qualitative data analysis designed especially for generating and testing theory (Strauss, 1987) is followed in my study. *Induction* refers to the actions that lead to discovery of an hypothesis; in the early stages of an investigation this is a hunch or an idea, which, according to Strauss comes from the researcher's experiences within the specialised field of his or her chosen research topic. *Deduction* also employs the researcher's experience and knowledge of the field of study, and draws out the implications from the hypotheses that are beginning to emerge for the purposes of *verification*. So, whilst the majority of the data was obtained through the in-depth interviewing of the main group of young people, the three types of data collection that Patton named (interviews, observation and documents), are used to a greater or lesser extent in my study.

This other material in a sense provides the backcloth and structure that build the framework for the interview process. For example my role in higher education included that of a link tutor which required me to visit a variety of educational establishments to observe student teachers in the classroom; these included 6th forms to observe students teaching A levels; FE colleges, where I would observe the student teachers teaching either GCSE re-take pupils or GNVQ pupils; and tertiary colleges where I tended to see a mixture of the above mentioned courses. I was aware that the whole school experience was a part of my field of study; informal conversations with teachers gave rise to reflection, as did conversations between pupils and teachers, written material about the school for example, prospectuses, information for parents and year group meetings was read. Informal conversations with colleagues often gave rise to an idea to be followed up and so on. I visited the local Job Centre, the newly privatised local Careers Centre and the local tertiary college which the majority of local young people attend for further or higher education courses after the age of 16. Government and political documents played an increasingly important role as each political party emphasised education as a central theme in their political creed. Additionally the work and theories of other researchers in similar fields were studied.
Verification or invalidation of the emerging ideas began to develop as the interviews took place as data from individuals was compared and contrasted and initial analysis was taking place. Figure 5.2 shows the processes of grounded theory beginning to operate in my study.

5.4.1 Methodology: defining and using ethnography

The term ethnography can be simply defined as writing about a way of life (McNeil, 1985). To this end the ethnographer needs to go out into ‘the field’, that is into the social situation being studied, so that the researcher can ‘see it like it is’. S/he then describes what he or she sees, observes, hears and overhears. Ethnography's purpose is to:

describe the culture and lifestyle of the group of people being studied in a way that is as faithful as possible to the way they see it themselves (McNeil p.54)

No prior assumptions are to be made by the researcher regarding the views and beliefs of the people being studied; rather a faithful description is the aim of the researcher. Thus, the data emerges from the situations and the group being studied as the researcher continues to observe:
Ethnography is two things at the same time, a research method and an experience (...) Ethnographic research requires relationships based on exchange. (...) The price of increased freedom in the research method is that the ethnographic researcher becomes more vulnerable than the quantitative sociologist (Blackman, 1995 pp.20, 21)

The ethnographic researcher needs to apply theoretical rigour both when working in the field and in the analysis of the data at her/his disposal. The use of the grounded theory approach, as put forward by Glaser and Strauss (1967), both in the collection and analysis of the data, serves to answer the criticisms levelled at the ethnographic approach.

5.4.2 Methodology: phenomenological perspective

In addition to an ethnographic description of the approach used a phenomenological aspect is apparent; that is the study of the shared experiences of a group of young people. Using a capacity for empathy, the researcher attempts to get into the minds of others to try to understand what it feels like to be them and to be able to understand and explain their actions. By the use of empathy the phenomenologist 'is committed to understanding phenomena from the actor's own perspective'. (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984 p.1-2). Additionally the phenomenologist assumes that there are core meanings - essences, mutually understood by the group of people who have experienced the phenomenon. Ideally the phenomenologist would experience and live through the phenomena being studied; when this cannot be so, as in my case, a phenomenological perspective is acceptable. (Patton, 1990)

5.5 The identification of the main group of young people

Although not strictly a longitudinal study this work is unique in that the young people who form the major part of this study were identified as having 'at risk' literacy skills by my MA study in primary school when they were eleven years old. My work as an advisory teacher (1986-1990) for special educational needs involved working with underachieving children in primary and secondary schools. Children from the 43 state primary school transferred, in the main, at 11 years old to the 8 state secondary schools. The central purpose of the team of advisory teachers and educational psychologists involved in the project that I wrote up as part of my MA study, was to ascertain the number of children who on transfer to secondary school would need extra support in their literacy skills. At that time the primary schools in the area were using a variety of literacy tests
which, because of differences in content and method, could not give a comparable standard of achievement in reading.

The Group Literacy Assessment (GLA, Spooncer, 1981, see Appendix 3) was chosen because this test is designed for surveying and screening the performance of pupils at the age of transfer from primary to secondary school (Chronological Age 10.6-12.6). Its merits include the use of a meaningful reading context, a picture clue followed by a complete story, the provision for pupils to use clues, contextual and syntactical, to evaluate meaning and the provision of a reading age. This assessment was used for all the eleven-year-old children (Year 6) children in the 7 primary schools in the pilot project. The assessment provides information using a simple form of criterion referencing to divide the range of scores into 4 main categories or bands:

- Category A - reading age 13.1 -14.0+, comment from the GLA – ‘very competent

- Category B - reading age 10.6 -13.0- ‘this is the broadly average band on entry to secondary school who may need some help in particular areas but not on any systematic remedial basis.’

- Category C - reading age 9.1 - 10.5 ‘in need of help to become competent. Longitudinal studies have shown that this group may be at risk, since, while they appear to have mastered the basic skills, exposure to the more specialised and technical demands on literacy may cause a slowing down or regression.’

- Category D – reading age 7.4 – 9.0 ‘in need of urgent help; this group are not sufficiently secure in their skills to be autonomous in handling written material.’ (Spooncer, 1981)

Table 5.1: Results of the Group Literacy Assessment used in the 7 primary schools when the main group was 11+

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total no. tested</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The total number of children tested was 241. The project team meetings decided what action would be taken: the educational psychologists would discuss
with the school the urgent priority cases; the advisory teaching team would
develop, in conjunction with the school, 6 week literacy programmes for the
children in the D category of the GLA, that is, those with a reading age of
between 7.4 and 9.0 years. There were thus 27 children (11.2 per cent) seen to be
at serious risk of being unable to cope with the secondary school curriculum.

Initially the team believed that the standards achieved by the rest of the
groups (A, B and C categories) should be adequate to cope with the work that the
secondary school offered. However I heeded the GLA cautionary advice that
those in the C category would be, ‘in need of help to become competent’, and
that more ‘specialised and technical demands on literacy may cause (…)\nregression’ (see Category C comments, above).

With this advice in mind together with my experiences of working in
secondary schools I decided to take the readability level of a selection of first
year secondary school (Yr7) teaching materials. By using a selection of
computer programmes of readability formulae, including a development of the
Fry Readability Graph, Fry 1972) the materials were found to be mainly within
the reading ages of 10 to 10.6 although some passages had levels of 11 years or
over. Consideration was taken of the limitations of the formulae because,
although they take into account average sentence length and the number of
syllables, no account is taken of any subject special vocabulary that would tend
to make comprehension more difficult.

This discovery brought more focus onto the C category group of children
which I analysed further to highlight that these children too, that I called the C
minus group, might have difficulties in understanding the reading texts presented
to them at secondary school level and therefore would have less than adequate
skills to make progress in the secondary school curriculum.

Table 5 2: Further analysis of the GLA C category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Schools</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Reading Age</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C+</td>
<td>10.1 - 10.5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C-</td>
<td>9.1 - 10.0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus, from a total number of 241 children tested, 74 of them (in
categories C and D) could, according to the GLA, fall further behind in their
literacy skills at secondary school. My interest lay, as I have said, with the C
group; because of these results the secondary schools may regard them as average
and not allocate any individual or specialised help. Neither the C minus group
(25 pupils) nor, as I now called them, the C plus group (22 pupils), had been designated whilst at primary school as having special educational needs or learning difficulties, and thus whilst teachers may have been aware that their reading and writing skills needed improvement, the facilities, resources or skills were not available to give them extra provision.

At the time of my MA study I called the C minus group the ‘grey area’ of children; I believed that they were children who might cope adequately with the first two years of the secondary school curriculum but who might towards the end of the third year (Year 9) begin to exhibit ‘failure’ tendencies. I saw the end of Year 9 as a crucial time for the young person as options have then to be chosen in preparation for the GCSE examinations and the young people in the C minus group might begin to see clearly what they perceived as their own ‘inadequacies’.

My MA study provided this starting point for the in-depth study of the young peoples’ experiences. The GLA given before the transfer from junior to secondary school had highlighted a group of 74 pupils (scoring C or D) who might experience difficulties during their secondary school careers.

Out of interest and to some extent concern, during the academic year 1990-1991, I followed up a smaller group of these pupils when they were in Year 9 at secondary school and about to choose their options. I was particularly interested in the C- group; it was these pupils that I had asked to see I met with them first to explain to them what I was planning to do, I showed them the GLA and asked if the following week they would agree to see me, all agreed. On my second visit during the space of one lesson (about fifty minutes) they filled in again the GLA and completed a short questionnaire (Appendix 1) and I spoke with several of them. I sought and obtained permission to do this from the Director of Education of the LEA and the head teachers.

In total I met with 29 pupils, mainly from the C- category (19), and several from the C+ (2) and D (8) categories in the three secondary schools. Initially I had asked to meet solely with the C- group but as the possible total number was only 25 I thought it prudent to include the C+ and D categories also. In the pilot project 25 pupils had scored C- 22 scored C+ and 27 scored D. I had widened the criteria limits to include the C+ and D categories because I wished to have a reasonable number so that I had a meaningful sample.

The question should be asked as to why less than half the pupils (29 from 74) were met with at 14. Several problems were encountered. The first one was that not all the pupils from the primary schools had transferred to the three secondary schools that were part of the original project; some had gone to
different secondary schools in the borough, some to schools out of the borough (in such an urban environment journeys to such schools were not difficult) and for some there was no record of which schools they were now attending. Secondly I was anxious to act ethically as a researcher; the first head teacher I approached was new to the area and thus had not been involved in the transfer study. She was anxious that the pupils in her care had obtained permission from their parents before meeting with me. A letter was sent (Appendix 4) seeking this permission. Unfortunately for me 12 parents did not reply. In retrospect the letter should have been worded differently, that is for the head teacher to say that the meeting would go ahead, unless the parents refused permission in the letter return. The other two head teachers did not ask parental permission, interpreting my involvement with the pupils as part of assessment and planning procedures. Thirdly in schools two and three, 10 pupils were absent at the time of the meetings (four of these were known truants)

Once this current piece of research commenced I met with 22 of them individually, in the two years after they had left school when they were aged 18 or 19.

5.5.1 Participants: Year 9 pupils

During this current follow up study a subsidiary group of young people were identified and met with. These were Year 9 pupils (14+ years) in four secondary schools at the time of option choices that again had been identified, this time by school staff following my suggested criteria as having a low level of skills in literacy. My suggestions asked school staff to include pupils who did not have statements of need, had no known disability, and who had a reading age of between 9.0 and 10.6 when they entered the school at 11. These were not the same secondary schools that the main group of young people had attended. The main group were pupils at three state secondary schools; meeting the Year 9 pupils in four different state secondary schools gave more width to the study while continuing to gain the depth of information.

5.5.2 Participants: subject teachers of Year 9 pupils

The second and minor strand of the research focuses on teachers and teaching. The basic piece of information that I wished to discover from teachers was how they organised their lessons. In my role as a tutor for PGCE students I had seen many lesson plans and programme topics that my students had written and which had been authorised by their school subject mentors. Most lesson plans mentioned a percentage of written work; some plans showed that pupils
would spend over half the lesson time writing. Few lesson plans included computer work by all the pupils; the most frequent use of the computer seemed to be aligned to maths lessons when the class was timetabled to be in the 'computer room'.

I wished to find out the extent to which teachers used technology such as television radio and the computer and to what extent they relied on text, and also how much reading and writing demands were made on the pupils. This may appear to be basic information but I found it difficult to discover; teachers organise the breakdown of activities in their lessons themselves and the time given for these activities changes because of a variety of factors. The current research literature on teaching and learning in the secondary school classroom did not satisfy my needs or provide enough evidence on teacher organisation of lessons. There is very useful advice on good practice, in how to teach and how to organise lessons (for example Wragg 1984, Kyriacou 1986, Tickle 1987, Woods, 1990a, Moon and Mayes 1994) but these did not give evidence of the time spent by pupils on reading and writing activities in the classroom. The Oracle project (Galton and Willcocks, 1983) and Mortimore et al (1988) have provided information of primary school classroom happenings, but recent and relevant secondary school material is sparse.

Some of the literature at times appeared to be contradictory to what I had observed in classrooms and read in reports from student teachers and from teachers themselves. My observations concur with those of Sleeter (1987) who has said that in practice there appear to be two main teaching procedures used, particularly in the secondary school; these consist of the teacher lecturing or explaining information to the whole class then 'monitoring seatwork' while the pupils fill in worksheets or answer questions based on reading information from textbooks in their exercise books. In an attempt to find out what was actually happening in classrooms a small empirical investigation of my own carried was out. A number (108) of subject teachers of Year 9 pupils were asked for information about lesson organisation and content. The questionnaire is included as Appendix 5.

5.6 Preparation for data collection: Ethnographic interviews

'Open-ended' interviews, used with skill, can assist towards an understanding of these young people's worlds, explore their hopes and aspirations, their fears and failures. Interviews give the opportunity to 'step into the mind of another person to see and experience the world as they do themselves' (McCracken, 1988 p.9). 'Open-ended' interviews, then, as a way of
data gathering gives credence and support to the ethnographic phenomenological perspective approach.

Interviews have many forms that can be placed on a continuum with the structured interview at one end and the unstructured interview at the other. The structured interview is considered to consist of a specific schedule with a fixed order and form of questions with specified alternatives and therefore no allowance to follow up any interesting ideas from the person being interviewed. (Burgess, 1985). Thus the situation is closed. In comparison the unstructured interview allows the interviewer to follow up on ideas, to probe and to open up new dimensions suggested or implied by the other person. The greater flexibility and freedom creates an 'open' situation whilst still maintaining the need for careful planning (Cohen and Manion, 1989).

The unstructured interview can be considered to be an 'exploratory depth' or a 'free standing' interview such as those suggested by Oppenheim, (1992), the purpose of which is to help formulate research hypotheses and develop ideas rather than to gather facts and statistics. This latter type of interview appears to be more appropriate to this qualitative enquiry than the structured interview, bearing in mind that the theories are expected to emerge from the data and built on as more interviews are conducted; additionally this approach serves the grounded theory method.

Cohen and Manion (1989) name two other types of 'open' interview: the non-directive and the focused interview. The non-directive interview is derived from a therapeutic background in which the interviewees or patients are encouraged to talk about themselves as much as possible with the interviewer giving little direction to the interview and handing over the control to the interviewee. The loss of control by the interviewer in that type of interview led to the development for research of the focused interview. This type of interview is typified by persons interviewed all having experienced a particular situation. Because of this known situation, the interviewer is able to arrive at a set of hypotheses in advance, relating to the meaning and effects of that particular situation. The researcher then constructs an interview guide.

This type of interview may appear to lend itself to my research study except that I wish to avoid an analysis of the young people's situation and arriving at a set of hypotheses before the planned interviews. What would appear to be more relevant are the three approaches that Patton (1990) focuses on which can be used to collect qualitative data through the use of open ended interviews. The first is the 'informal conversation' interview, the second the 'standard open-ended interview' but it is the third approach, the 'general interview guide' that
appears particularly appropriate to this study. In this type of interview the researcher has previously compiled a set of issues that will be explored during the course of the interview and the guide serves as a basic checklist. There is no specific order of dealing with the issues and no set of standardised questions, and the wording of the questions need not be strictly adhered to although it can be prepared in advance. The value of the guide is in the framework that assumes that common information should be obtained from each person interviewed. In addition the interviewer has the opportunity to open up areas of interest, probe and develop them, and clarify particular points. There will be more spontaneity in the questions, and a more conversational style to the interview will be apparent while at the same time the pre-determined framework will remain in place.

Additionally the ‘ethnographic interview’ as described by Spradley (1979) supports grounded theory as the researcher approaches the phenomenon with a conscious attitude of ‘almost complete ignorance’. (p.4)

Further authenticity can be given to the interview by adopting the measure of recognising the interviewee as an informant. Interviews are conducted in such a way that the interviewer is informed about (in this case the young person’s views and feelings) rather than the interviewee responding to questions asked. Thus the interviewee becomes an informant and not a respondent (Spradley 1979, Powney and Watts 1987). The informant begins to be involved in deciding which way the interview will proceed and to have some control in this decision making process; meanwhile the interviewer encourages and perhaps comments, at the same time being aware that any information being revealed may need to be guided and gently brought back within the flexible boundaries of the prepared area of questioning. Using Cooper’s (1993) suggestions on interview style based on an informant style interview I endeavour to structure the interview by:

- using open ended questions

- allowing the shape of the interview to be dictated by the range of concerns raised by the informant, advancing the interview through request for clarification, exemplification development of ideas (bearing in mind in this study the set of issues to be addressed)

- using the young person’s vocabulary, and techniques of paraphrase and reflection
indicating interest empathy and positive regard, verbally avoiding interruption, forcing the pace (i.e. be tolerant of silence, show patience)

ending interviews with warmth, communication and appreciation. (p.130)

McCracken's (1988) 'long interview' prepares questions using analytic and cultural categories; the analytic categories refer to the review of literature and previous research that has focused in similar areas whilst cultural categories take into account the feelings and values of those being interviewed. Further support is thus given to the grounded theory approach.

For the purposes of this study a combination of aspects from several types of interview are used:

- the structure and type of questions of the ethnographic style interview (Spradley, 1979)
- the general interview guide, the preparation of a set of issues (Patton, 1990)
- this set of issues to have regard for the analytic and cultural categories (McCracken, 1988)
- to reinforce the style of the ethnographic interview by regarding the interviewee as an 'informant' (Spradley, 1979, Powney and Watts, 1987, Cooper, 1993)

5.6.1 Validity in interviewing

Hammersley (1992) uses the term 'validity' as a synonym for 'truth.' In the search for 'meaning' the researcher, using and checking the information given, can begin to reach for the true meaning of the phenomenon under study. My search becomes valid as during the interviews my informants became aware that I knew their schools and teachers; the main group remembered that I had met them previously in school (when they were 14) whilst I met the Year 9 groups in school and thus they were aware that I could check information given to me. Additionally the informants often verified the statements of others; this could occur for instance when an informant spoke about the attitude of a particular teacher, the relationships within the group, the attitudes of certain of them towards work. I felt it important to be ethically correct in that I did not mention other informants during an interview but I could enquire about the context of
situations mentioned, a question such as 'what happens in science? elicited responses that not only added to the data for the framework of questioning but also could verify the statements other informants had made. According to Whyte (1984), 'first interviews provide little evidence on an informant's reliability, unless he [sic] is reporting on a situation about which we have prior knowledge, thus my familiarity with the informants' schools and situations assisted my in-depth interviews. In the search for 'truth' from the informants. Whyte continues by saying that:

Perhaps the major way to detect and correct distortion is by comparing an informant's account with accounts given by other informants [Whyte's italics] (...) we can cross-check accounts from different informants for discrepancies and try to clear these up by asking for further clarification. (Whyte, p.116)

5.7 Preparation of a set of issues for the main group

With regard to the main question of the research study and the connecting questions, a set of issues was prepared during the early stages of the research following the 'general interview guide'. The following areas are introduced into the interview:

READING AND WRITING
experiences at junior school, reading at home with parents or carer, experiences at secondary school, difficulties experienced at school, in examinations reading and writing at the present time, use of library, cursive writing

ATTITUDE AT SCHOOL
attitude to work, teachers, other pupils, self

ATTITUDE AT COLLEGE
attitudes to work, teachers, other students, self

ATTITUDE AT WORK
attitudes to and from colleagues, management

USE OF TECHNOLOGY
at home, at school, at work: computer, television, and tape recorder

FUTURE PLANS PERSONAL LIFE AND CAREER
parents, employment influence from teachers, parents in choice of career

CHOICE OF COLLEGE COURSE
courses studied at college and reasons for choice

INFORMATION GATHERING
television programmes watched, library membership, books read, amount of writing in work or leisure

FRIENDSHIPS AND LEISURE OCCUPATIONS

5.7.1 Preparation of the set of issues for Year 9 pupils

There were several purpose of these visits: first: for me to be able to talk with them about their actual experiences in school, what was happening to them at that time. The information obtained from the main group about their school experiences was of necessity reflective. By meeting with a younger school-based group I could use the meetings to verify or not pieces of data that were emerging from the main group interviews. Secondly the National Curriculum was by this time (1995) firmly established in all stages of schooling and both staff and pupils had experienced changes to the curriculum content. Another reason for the visits was to discover how these pupils were advised about their options and the different ways they were advised in the choice of options and their hopes for the future. Finally we would discuss the influence of the computer in their school lives; during the four years since the main group were interviewed aged 14 the computer was becoming increasingly important in the work environment. I wanted to discover if the computer was now part of their daily curriculum.

Although the set of issues for the second group of young people has similarities to that of the main group the situation is different in some respects:

- the interviews are carried out in the school situation rather than in the young person's home
- the interviews are shorter in length due to the limitations of school organisation
- the young people are at a different stage of their education

The set of issues was informed by the data that began to emerge from the interviews of the main group and thus contained:
READING
attitude towards reading including frequency both in and out of school and at home, help given at junior school, help given now, reading aloud in class, use of library

ABILITY GROUPS FOR DIFFERENT SUBJECTS
attitudes to being in 'low ability' sets for English or other subjects, attitudes to being in a mixed ability setting for English and other subjects

DIFFERENTIATION OF WORK
if given different books, work sheets or if withdrawn from main class for extra help

USE OF TECHNOLOGY
in class, at home, radio, television, computer.

OPTION CHOICES
what are choices? why? how decided?

FUTURE PLANS ON LEAVING SCHOOL
college or work, type of work, career plans

5.7.2 Preparation of teacher questionnaires and exposition
Although the information obtained from teachers of Year 9 pupils was planned to be a very small part of the study, nevertheless, if the information was to be useful, careful planning and design of the questionnaire was crucial. The areas of questioning focused on lesson organisation and the structure and type of follow up work given. For instance:

the constituent parts of a lesson, particularly the amount of reading and writing required from the pupils

the reading and writing component of homework

the time spent learning through group work

the use of television, radio, computer, video, tape recorder during lessons
Initially, as part of a pilot study, a short eight-question questionnaire was sent to ten teachers (cross-curricular subjects) of Year 9 pupils in one state secondary school. (Appendix 6) All the questionnaires were completed and returned. Immediately a problem was apparent, mainly with the way in which the questions were asked. For instance one question posed was:

How much time (approximately) is usually spent on oral discussion in lesson time?

The terms 'approximately' 'usually' and 'oral discussion' were open to debate; one teacher asked for clarification of 'oral discussion'; did this mean talk between small groups of pupils or question and answer between teacher and pupil? Does 'approximately' mean half the lesson measured in minutes does it usually mean every other lesson or a part of every lesson? Additionally the information was difficult to analyse. It also became apparent that the questionnaire had little application for the subject of PE; consequently the main questionnaire was not sent to PE teachers although Art and CDT teachers did complete the main questionnaire.

The pilot questionnaire highlighted the mistakes and served as a basis for the questionnaire proper that aimed for reliability. The questionnaire proper uses a Likert scale (Oppenheim, 1992 p.195) whereby five positions are given a score from 5 down to 1 or 4 down to 0 and respondents choose the most applicable. The 5 positions for this questionnaire are: always, usually, occasionally, hardly ever and never. The questionnaire uses as many factual questions as possible, for example: 'In lessons there is an element of written work', so as to determine the amounts of time spent on the various activities that constitute a lesson. There are 30 items in the pool, some of them subdivided, thus: 'In lessons written work takes up less that half a lesson' and 'In lessons written work takes up more than half the lesson'. (Appendix 6) Subjects were weighted according to the Year 9 timetable in the amount of time accorded to each subject; thus English and maths were accorded a higher score than art CDT and foreign languages.

108 questionnaires were sent out to Year 9 subject teachers in 12 schools on a cross-curricular basis in the following subject areas: English, Maths, Science, History, Geography, Religious Education, Modern Foreign Languages, Art, CDT. Thus, each school received 9 copies of the questionnaire. A letter to the head teacher and a separate letter to the head of Year 9 asked if the latter would collect and return them to me. (Appendix 7)
5.8 Methods in Use: organising and conducting the interviews:

'The quality of the information obtained during an interview is largely dependent on the interviewer.' (Patton, 1990, p.279). Because the researcher is the instrument then this can either be a strength of the study or a limitation, especially as McCracken (1988) reminds the researcher: 'There is also the pressing knowledge that this opportunity will never come again. What the investigator does not capture in the moment will be lost forever. This is a challenging occasion because mistakes are both easy to make and impossible to rectify' (p.38.) Therefore careful preparation is essential; this includes not only my preparation of the set of issues for discussion but also for me to learn how to conduct an interview of this type and have an awareness of problems that may arise.

The validity and quality of qualitative interviewing depends on the establishment of a particular kind of social relationship between the interviewer and the informant (Ackroyd and Hughes, 1992). An awareness of strategies for establishing and maintaining the contact is important particularly during the first stage of contact as if this fails the proposed interview will not take place as the informant may decline or break contact at any stage in the process. In my case I had already forged somewhat tenuous links with the main group when I had seen them when they were 14 and I was able to mention this when writing or speaking to them by telephone. Most said that they could not remember seeing me but luckily once I was able to speak with them on the telephone I could remind them of the situation (which school room we were in, what they did) and all of them remembered the literacy screening test. In order to establish a 'relationship of rapport' with the informant the interviewer must convey 'trust, reassurance and even likeableness' so that the informant sustains interest and motivation. (Ackroyd and Hughes 1992, p.108). This can itself be somewhat hazardous; the interviewer should be able to show a relaxed friendly and confident demeanour for the rapport to develop, thus encouraging the informant to feel happy to talk freely. Interviewers though should be aware that although sincere in the way they present themselves, they are nevertheless in a role-play situation; this awareness aids correct and ethical behaviour. For instance when interviewing the young people, mostly in their homes, I have found it more appropriate to dress in a reasonably casual manner, such as trousers and sweater. By doing so it is hoped that they will not connect me with educational institutions in which case I could be regarded as a teacher, which might cause them to take on the role of a pupil.
School visits require a more formal manner of dress; Measor (1985) has stressed the importance of the correct attire in different situations, and as I met with the Year 9 pupils in the more formal atmosphere of school there needed to be recognised some aspect of teacher/pupil response. Cooper (1993) maintains that this can be eliminated by the approach of the open question, informant style of the interview, but, with a lack of previous contact and the shortage of interview time which the school organisation demands, it should be recognised that the data from the Year 9 group may not be as open and honest as that from the main group. On the other hand there is no guarantee that a strong rapport results in more truthful responses; the informants, when there is a strong rapport, may wish to retain a friendly atmosphere and avoid conflict (Ackroyd and Hughes, 1992).

Another difference in the situations is that for organisational purposes the Year 9 pupils were interviewed in groups of two or three. As Rudd (1996) has pointed out this may add to the honesty and forthright opinions that the informants offer. Additionally as pointed out in Section 5.3.3 information given was verified by either discussion in the members of the same group or by me asking a question on the same topic to members of an ensuing group.

With the main group and with Year 9 groups I tape recorded interviews; having obtained permission first from the informants, either by telephone for the main group or on my initial visit to the Year 9 schools.

5.8.1 Organising and conducting the interviews with the main group of young people

Once this study had commenced I needed to contact again the pupils that I had seen when they were age 14. By this time (1993 -1994) they were ex-pupils and I was not able therefore to see them in school. With no other way of contacting them I again sought and gained permission from the LEA to write to the schools in question for the addresses of the pupils. Once I had these I was able to obtain a telephone number for some of the ex-pupils and speak to them by telephone to make the initial contact. Some of the young people that I did not have a telephone number for proved to be difficult to track down. I sent them a letter asking them, to reply not by letter, which I realised they might not feel confident to do but asking them to telephone me. Finally out of the 32 pupils seen at fourteen years I was able to interview 22.

Some potential participants were lost in the following ways:

- 2 parents sent letters to say the their children did not wish to be interviewed
- 1 young person was living several hundred miles away
• 1 young person telephoned me after I had written to him and refused to be interviewed
• 1 letter was returned saying 'not known at this address', even though the young man's mother was living there
I did not receive replies or telephone responses from the various letters I wrote to the 5 other young people.

The telephone was the best method for me to communicate with the young people for once I began to speak I was able to remind them of the visits I had made to school, which room they were in and what they did, and most readily agreed to be interviewed. However even when interviews were arranged, difficulties cropped up. Most of the interviews, except for 3, were held in their homes. Extracts from my field notes indicate the difficulties of actually meeting with some of them; 5 interviews that I had arranged had to be re-scheduled as the potential informant was not at home, (one elusive informant required 4 visits and many telephone calls and several letters before I managed to see him).

The interviews were transcribed and sent to the informants for perusal and comment.

5.8.2 Organising and conducting the interviews: the Year 9 group of pupils

As with the main group when they were 14, I visited the 4 schools initially to meet the pupils, explain my research, then asked to meet with them the following week to talk with them, using my prepared set of issues, and to ask them to fill in the questionnaire. I had not tape-recorded the main group when they were 14 but with the Year 9 group I did ask and receive permission to record our interviews. The total number of pupils seen was 25 (9 girls, 16 boys); school A: 10 pupils, school B: 6 pupils; school C: 5 pupils, school D: 4 pupils. The interviews were held in small groups of 2 or 3 pupils within the space of the total time available; this varied between 1 hour and 1 hour 20 minutes. I returned to the schools at a later date to show the transcripts to the pupils and to the Head of Year 9.

5.9 Analysis of data: using the Grounded Theory approach for analysis

I employ an ethnographic, phenomenological approach in my study when collecting and analysing data in order to reach for 'meaning'. The study cannot claim to be a 'pure' form of ethnography as I did not live with or spend time alongside the main group whilst they were in school or in the place of work in order to study the effects of the phenomenon (low level literacy skills). However
the study is ethnographic in several ways: I spent time in secondary schools observing student teachers and teachers in lessons; I interviewed the Year 9 groups within the school setting, I observed similar groups such as the groups in my study both in the primary and secondary settings. Also the study is ethnographic in that it employs an ethnographic approach both in the interview situation and in the analysis of data.

The study begins with no hypotheses to prove nor are any prior assumptions made as to the conclusions. Within the grounded theory approach, hypotheses are expected to emerge from the data and are proposed or formulated as further data are gathered. A crucial difference between the grounded theory approach and the phenomenological method is that the grounded theory method requires the researcher simultaneously to collect code and analyse data from the first day in the field. (Glaser and Strauss, 1968). In the grounded theory approach, the continuing processes of induction, deduction and verification are themselves justified by the use of guidelines that emphasise that certain operations must be carried out. However these are seen as ‘rules of thumb’ (Strauss, 1987 p.7) rather than an application of standardised rules which could, Strauss maintains, inhibit the researcher’s unique style. The grounded theory method itself emphasises the need for: ‘developing many concepts and their linkages in order to capture a great deal of the variation that characterises the central phenomena studied during any particular research project.’ (p.7) Critical in this respect are two things: the quality of the data and the analysis of the data, both of which rely on the skill of the researcher.

The procedures include the use of concept-indicators arising from events, happenings, materials read, interviews held, and which indicate a particular concept. Thus Andrew, one of my main group informants, when he says, referring to his work status, ‘it’s a bit dodgy’ suggests insecurities about the future; this statement is then compared with other statements from other informants. These indicators are then coded into categories. Coding is initially open coding which scrutinises the text very closely raising and answering questions and then extends to categories which are central to the integration of theory. The testing of emerging and evolving theories is achieved by theoretical sampling so that the emerging theory can be checked compared and contrasted with other data from different sources of information. Theoretical memos serve to summarise and track the coding, to stimulate further coding and bring together the developing hypotheses for the integration of theory.
The process of **theoretical sampling** assists in the formation of categories and **core categories** (which are central to the integration of the theory being generated). Theoretical sampling aided in the early stages of my study; an example of this occurred when I was visiting a secondary classroom and before I had prepared my focused research question. The extract is taken from my field notes:

met Susan D. now Year 8 at [secondary school] who was one of my pupils for literacy difficulties in the infant school. Class was being asked by teacher to read from book and answer questions on pollution. She and her friend were chatting amiably but were not working and had not answered any questions; when I asked why she said they couldn't read what was on the page and were waiting for the teacher to help them.

This experience led me to query the attitudes of teachers towards pupils and expectations of pupils from teachers and vice versa and where the responsibilities for progress on learning lay and contributed to the set of issues for the general interview guide.

The conclusions of my MA contained implications for consideration: first whether the curriculum on offer was suitable to meet the on-going needs of children and second whether schooling would be able to match the Warnock Report aims for education that a young person should be able to be ‘an active participant in society and a responsible contributor to it’ (DES, 1978:1.4). These areas would form part of the present study. In order to identify pupils that I wished to meet at 14 I needed to go back to the data analysis made when they were 11 and re-analyse it in the light of their literacy progress in the secondary school.
My MA study had produced such words as 'disaffection' as a description of possible behaviours of the pupils with low level of literacy skills in their later school years. This led me to explore the notion of an underclass, as well as the marginalisation of young people. I also ascertained the routes towards adulthood that were available to young people such as the ones in my study. Thus, as the process of theoretical sampling was taking place, so too were the processes of deduction induction and verification; the grounded theory method being followed. The analysis in this study is an iterative process; as one interview was completed so it was studied to look for emergent hypotheses which could then be focused on when carrying out ensuing interviews:

The initial focus is on full understanding of individual cases before these unique cases are combined or aggregated. This means that the findings are grounded in specific context; theories that result from the findings will be grounded in real world patterns. (Strauss, p.45)

Once several interviews had been completed the intensive study of tapes and transcripts led to the writing of 'reflections' that led in turn to other avenues for investigation. For example one participant spoke of feeling 'trapped' because of his lack of reading and writing skills. This led me to reflect on the levels of self-esteem as well as to investigate what training schemes and employers asked for as entry qualifications. Another example is that at the early stage of each interview, after the introductory stage and when beginning the 'grand tour' (Spradley, 1979). I asked the question, although not with the same wording each time: 'When you got to secondary school what happened?' The responses caused me to reflect that teachers are referred to as 'they':

Examples:

they used to put us into four groups, set four, which was the lowest....
they put me in a normal English group with all the other children.
they should have given me the opportunity to do the same as the others

These comments justified my researching the area of school organisation, recent government policies and curriculum content.

The growth and improvements in communication technology in the 1990s led me to consider the impact these were having on schools and the extent to which teachers were using these as additional or alternative methods of enabling young people without strong reading and writing skills to progress in their learning. Another avenue opened, that of considering reading and writing as the
traditional skills of literacy and how the new literacies were being used as well as
the extent of oral work in the classroom. My experience as both an advisory
teacher in primary and secondary schools indicated to me that secondary schools
relied more on the read/write route and less on oral work than the primary
schools. Additionally my work as a teacher trainer, and previously as a support
teacher, had allowed me to observe frequently both student teachers and
experienced teachers and to listen to the advice that teachers gave to student
teachers. Therefore adding to the grounded theory process was my experience
and field notes.

The following extracts are examples from my field notes of observations
of PGCE students:

Year 9 History: topic: factory systems in the 19th century; length of lesson 40
minutes: lesson start, pupils asked to read 2 pages of text book, after 4 minutes
question and answer lasting 3 minutes, teacher talk 5 minutes, written work task
from text book for remainder of lesson 30 minutes.

Year 9 History: topic: World War II - Hitler, length of lesson 1hr 10 minutes,
introduction of topic by teacher - 7 minutes, first task taking information from
work sheets in groups, some discussion but mainly were filling sheets
individually - 8 minutes, feedback to teacher, written on board, next written task
set - 6 minutes, written task to end of lesson 49 minutes.

Year 10 English: length of lesson 1 hour, topic - format of television news: first
task watch videos of several news items - 14 minutes, in groups discussion of
ways news items are presented 8 minutes, written task to write a news item
individually - 35 minutes.

It thus became apparent that evidence of lesson organisation was needed in an
attempt to ascertain how lessons were constructed, with the aim of discovering
the constituent parts of a lesson, that is the amount of reading and writing and the
extent of oral work and the new literacies. Consequently the teacher
questionnaire was designed. Thus theoretical memoing aided the composition
for the framework of the questionnaire.

5.10 Analysis of questionnaires

The questionnaire responses from 88 teachers were entered into the
computer. In each category the number of respondents is multiplied by the
number allocated (0-4) to each frequency of answer e.g. ‘Always’ = 4; then the
categories added together to give a score. The total score for each question is
then given as a percentage based on the maximum achievable score.
Year 9 timetables from several schools were analysed; the aim being to establish fair weighting for different subjects based on the amount of lesson time for each subject per week. As there was some variation in lesson time between the various schools only a simple weighting could be deduced whereby English, Maths and Science were accorded a weighting of 3; Technology, History and Geography were given 2; Home Economics (HE), Religious Education (RE), Art and Design were given 1. That is in general terms a subject weighting of 3 such as Maths is given approximately 3 times the weekly lesson time compared to a subject with a weighting of 1. The scores are added up and divided by the maximum possible score. The different weightings were calculated, and percentages accorded the totals. Thus as an example if question 16b ‘Homework set is a written task’, had 20 normalised weighted responses and achieved a score of 58, and if homework set was always a written task then every respondent would have answered ‘always’ leading to a score of 80 (number of responses multiplied by 4 for ‘always’). To calculate an estimate of how often homework is a written task the actual score can be divided by the maximum score and this fraction 58 divided by 80 expressed as a percentage.

It was found that the number allocation to the 5 categories was too simplistic. If 4 = ‘Always’=100%, 3 = ‘Usually’ = 75% then ‘Occasionally’ could be interpreted as 50% of the time and ‘Hardly ever’ would be 25% of the time. This is clearly erroneous; a more realistic assignment of values to the 5 terms was required:

‘Always’ is obviously 100%
‘Never’ is obviously 0%

A more reasonable percentage of the other terms was as follows:

‘Usually’ – 90%
‘Occasionally’ – 30%
‘Hardly ever’ – 10%

The values attributed to the terms were fine tuned with a view to making the questions which were mutually exclusive add up to 100 per cent.

Part II of my study is continued by bringing into focus the centrality of what I call traditional literacy in the school curriculum and its crucial importance in the lives of school pupils. Chapter 6 begins with a focus upon literacy in general terms and contains definitions and descriptions of literacy; there follows a discussion of the historical importance of literacy and the way literacy is used in society at present; finally the way in which literacy is used and defined in education will be illustrated partly by a discussion of the results of the teacher questionnaire.
CHAPTER 6: ASPECTS OF LITERACY: SUCCESS AND FAILURE IN SCHOOL AND WORKPLACE

6.1 Introduction

This chapter is concerned with literacy in a wider context than that of traditional literacy, with its focus solely on reading and writing aspects. Chapter 3 (Schools and Curriculum) has indicated that traditional literacy is the key to learning development within the formal education system. Chapter 4 (Young People and the Social Context) has shown that young people who are unable because of low level literacy skills to achieve the high grades at GCSE level that will enable them to move into higher education, can be negatively affected in such a way that their beliefs in their own capabilities are lowered. Their self-esteem is not just low as far as literacy skills are involved but their whole personality can be affected. Other skills, which they do possess, may lie dormant because the curriculum does not encourage or develop them. Their poor examination results lead to jobs that are largely unskilled, perhaps temporary, and there is a high risk of unemployment. The same chapter has indicated that social background may have an influence on the development of reading ability.

The importance of traditional literacy within the culture of this country as a means to develop learning is acknowledged in this chapter, Aspects of Literacy. We should nevertheless have an awareness that reading and writing does not provide the only route to learning and acquiring knowledge and that other forms of literacy, including the newer technologies, can be harnessed within the educational system to provide alternative routes. The education system and the teachers have been accused of not utilising the newer technologies (Buckingham, 1993; McLuhan, 1970; Underwood and Underwood, 1990; Plewis and Veltman 1996; OFSTED 1995b).

Within this chapter, the term literacy is considered in the context of its social, historical and political significance. The way our society accepts ‘learning’ in the terms of reading and writing competency is highlighted and consideration is given to other ways of learning, especially the utilisation of new technologies. The results of the teacher questionnaire, which aimed to illuminate the ways in which teachers organised their lessons, are then discussed.

6.2 What is literacy?

Attempting to give a concise and accurate definition of literacy is difficult. It can be said that two aspects, those of reading and writing, are the
most widely used in our culture and in our education system. Thus literacy for most people is defined in these terms.

6.3 Literacy and language

Traditionally the term language tends to be applied to verbal communication but the term can also imply communication through facial expression, body language, gesture and the language that 'speaks' to us through art and music. The National Curriculum (NC) in our schools uses the term language to include three elements: reading writing and speaking/listening. Thus, literacy is encompassed in the NC in the term language. However the pupils' skills in the area of speaking and listening play a minor role in assessment in the summative GCSE and GNVQ examinations.

Yet spoken language is vital in our lives and culture. Spoken and written language are intertwined, the development of the written aspects relying on spoken language development; as the written element develops so it begins to affect the spoken language and new words having been read and understood become part of the individuals spoken vocabulary (Garton and Pratt, 1989).

Historically other societies have recognised the value of other forms of literacy to aid in the understanding of and as a contribution towards their society. Freire (Freire and Macedo1987) studied a group of people who made complex decisions reading their society. These decisions were made through debate and discussion and were conducted through the medium of speech as none of the participants used reading and writing to communicate. According to Freire they had made sense of their world through a sophisticated form of spoken language, communicating clearly, having respect for the views and others and making group decisions. They were however illiterate as regards western culture attitudes. Yet as Freire points out they were highly literate in using the spoken word to understand their society and make contributions towards its future.

The National Oracy Project (1992) in which teachers played an important role confirmed that their work showed 'the vital importance of talk in effective learning'. The reasons given were that talk helps:

- learning to be collaborative
- to motivate learning
- to work towards understanding
- to create valuable opportunities for pupils to express what they understand, what they do not understand and what would help them further in their learning (p.2)

Through talk shared ideas help towards developing critical awareness.
Walsh's aptly named book *Shut up, Communication in the Secondary School* (1988) gives credence to the idea that talking is not central to the secondary school curriculum. She maintains that the skills of language through talk are essential requisites for reading with understanding but that talk as a means of encouraging pupils particularly those with special educational needs is not included as much as it should be. Instead pupils with literacy difficulties may receive a disproportionate amount of time concentrating on the mechanics of reading and writing skills, which does not allow the pupils the opportunity to develop his or her ideas. Thus participation in the subject area is limited the subject itself and the medium through which it is taught often determines the literacy level.

6.4 Literacy: reading and writing aspects

Traditional literacy, that is reading and writing, has been described as 'a product of cultural evolution and is dependent on cultural transmission for its continued existence' (Ellis, 1984 p. 87). Literacy is seen as the 'foundation of our education system' and 'a specifically human good to which all human beings are entitled as of right. (Young and Tyre, 1983 p.6). It is termed the 'bedrock of education' since pupils need to be literate to access the NC (Pumfrey, 1991). Thus for British culture, as it stands at present to continue, these two aspects of literacy need to be at the centre of the NC, which in itself is central to the pupil's school life. Whatever a child's inclinations or skills, traditional literacy acquisition remains central to school learning. Without the acquisition of these skills, children are denied access to any school learning. Bryant and Bradley (1985) are clear about this:

Of all things children have to learn when they come to school, reading and writing are the most basic, the most central and the most essential. Practically everything that they do there will be permeated by these two skills. Hardly a lesson can be understood, hardly a project finished unless the children can read the books in front of them and write about what they have done. They must read and write or their time at school will be largely wasted. (p.1)

Competence in these skills is crucial if children are to take their rightful place in our society. This 'rightful' place, achieved by acquiring traditional literacy, has to be the aim of all those involved with children, from the earliest day of attending school. Yet in the wider sense education is not wholly based on the two skills. If our children are to attain their 'rightful status' in society, other skills, values and attitudes not dependent on reading and writing skills also need
developing as indicated in the Warnock Report (DES 1978, Section 3.2), the Dearing Report (1996), the CBI (1995) and employers.

Formal education is of central importance in providing these values to its future citizens and indeed the legislation of the Education Reform Act states that the NC prepares pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life. (DES 1988). The achievement of these aims is attempted through a subject based academic curriculum in which traditional literacy plays the key role. We may question whether these subjects are enabling the children to work towards these long-term goals and whether the goals are reached by having competent literacy skills. Our culture sees reading as a way of understanding the thoughts and feelings of others and in doing so amplifying human abilities. Its successful acquisition is a source of power to the pupil, while not having the skill disempowers and seriously and progressively disadvantages the individual.

Not to be able to read in our society is to be disempowered, impoverished, marginalised and frequently demeaned. Illiterates are cut off from major sources of knowledge, insights and speculations (Pumfrey 1991, p.5).

The question ‘What do you understand by the term literacy?’ was posed to a group of educational researchers at a conference at Surrey University on June 23 1993. The 25 responses received showed that there was broad agreement that the term concerned reading and writing, (20 responses). Several of these included the word basic, although none indicated what a basic level might be; ten recognised degrees of competence and three included oral language skills in addition to reading and writing. The remaining 5 responses saw literacy in a wider context, including ‘providing access to knowledge and power’ and ‘access to global culture’. Thus, other aspects of literacy become apparent in the interpretation of the term.

6.5 Literacy: culture, knowledge and power: the controlling forces of literacy

Literacy is a powerful tool. In our society, by the acquisition of traditional literacy, the individual has historically become empowered to escape the restrictions imposed by class membership; he or she can ‘rise above his or her station’:

the old underclass consisted of a majority which - not least thanks to its own articulate spokesmen - organised itself politically and can claim partial credit for the immensely expanded opportunities for schooling that are now open to all young people. (OECD 1994, p.36)
It was not simply the acquisition of reading and writing skill that caused the underclass members to rise above their station. By using reading and writing skills to inform others, the working classes became aware of the society they were living in and began to use the written word to try to understand and change that society. (Thompson, 1968).

Not all those who held power believed that opportunities should be given to everyone; some feared that the order of society could be threatened. In the early nineteenth century, parliament was told that schooling and especially the acquisition of literacy would be dangerous for both the working classes and the 'higher orders'. Simon (1960) quotes a parliamentary debate of 1807 in this respect:

It would teach them to despise their lot in life, instead of making them good servants in agriculture. (..) to which their rank in society had destined them; instead of teaching them subordination, it would render them factious and refractory. It would enable them to read seditious pamphlets, vicious books and publications against Christianity; it would render them insolent to their superiors; and, in a few years the result would be, that the legislature would find it necessary to direct the strong arm of power towards them. (p.132)

Those who were working with the poor children to give them an education defended their views by insisting that the level of education be such that the children would understand their place in society. Simon uses the work of middle class Hannah More as a demonstration of this attitude:

they learn, on weekdays, such coarse works as may fit them for servants. I allow of no writing for the poor. My object is not to make them fanatics, but to train up the lower classes in habits of industry and piety. (p.133)

For those holding the control, whether by a kindly paternalistic attitude or brute force, any threats to the status quo could bring with it fear and uncertainty.

Freire’s work with underprivileged adult groups in South America from the 1960s onwards can be allied in some respects to the experiences of the British 'underclass' of the 19th century. He stresses the importance of recognising that the term literacy should constitute much more than the decoding of words. Language and thought are encompassed in his understanding of the term. For Freire, individuals use their knowledge of the world they know in order to understand that world and in doing so add both to their literacy skills and knowledge of their world. Literacy is a continuing process of gaining knowledge
and information and then consolidating and interpreting that knowledge and using it for one's own purposes:

Reading does not consist merely of decoding the written word or language; rather it is preceded by and intertwined with knowledge of the world (...) Reading the world always preceded reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world, this movement from the word to the world is always present; even the spoken word flows out from reading of the world (...) For me this dynamic movement is central to the literacy process (...) reading always involves critical perception, interpretation and rewriting of what is read. (Freire and Macedo, 1987 p. 29-36)

Freire's insistence on the importance of the learner's involvement and interaction with the text complements the views of Vygotsky (1934,1986) who maintained that children's failure to advance in reading was because of their lack of involvement with the text and the subsequent lack of interpretation. According to Freire literacy is a set of practices that serves to empower or disempower people; literacy can either 'reproduce existing social formation or serves as a set of cultural practices that promotes democratic and emancipatory change'. (Freire and Macedo, p.xii)

It is the approach to the teaching of literacy that is crucial to Freire. Ideally the learners should be active participants, learning to satisfy their needs to increase their understanding of their world; thus the control is with the learner rather than the teacher. What often happens, Freire suggests, is that other approaches are used depending on the status of the learner in society. He outlines the several approaches that have been used in the teaching of reading namely:

- the academic approach - acquiring pre-defined forms of classically based knowledge, primarily serving the elite classes and legitimising the dual approach to reading; one for the ruling classes and the other for the dispossessed majority;
- the utilitarian approach is used to meet the basic reading requirements of contemporary society, a mechanical skill is emphasised rather than any form of critical analysis of the social and political order
- the cognitive development approach enables the learner to critically analyse complex reading texts but Freire's objection to this approach is that it lacks the reader's own history and experience and thus the messages in the text become less significant
- And the romantic approach which although aiming for meaning, the reader is not made aware of class conflicts, gender or racial inequalities.
These approaches have echoes in the past. Just as Hannah More's pupils earned enough literacy to 'know their place', so literacy can, in modern society, be functional and utilitarian; enough to operate on a day to day level but without moving towards one's own interpretation of text that will move the individual forward in learning.

Freire's own preferred approach is the 'emancipatory approach' in which he maintains that literacy should use the pupils own knowledge of the world through language and the written word to make sense of their own world, thus critically 'reading the word to read the world' with the teacher being a facilitator. (Freire and Macedo, 1987). But emancipation implies the right to freedom and thus the power to make decisions at least for oneself and whilst it seems to meet the aims of education suggested by the Warnock Report (DES, 1978) there are problems with this approach. Freire is aware that literacy acquisition does not only involve the learner and the enlightened teacher, politics are also in evidence:

It would be tremendously naïve to ask the ruling class in power to put into practice a kind of education, which can work against it. If education was left alone to develop without political supervision it would cause no end of problems for those in power (p.36).

Illich's views (1976) on the way society operated led him to believe that formal schooling was a controlling force in keeping everybody in their assigned social role, and, as such, formal schooling disempowered rather than educated. Learning and education were secondary to conforming to rules and obtaining the certificates:

Equal educational opportunity is indeed both a desirable and feasible goal, but to equate this with obligatory schooling is to confuse salvation with the Church. (...). Neither learning nor justice is promoted by schooling because educators insist on packaging instruction with certification. Learning and the assignment of social roles are melted into schooling. (...) Roles are assigned by setting a curriculum of conditions which the candidate must meet if he [sic] is to make the grade. (...) school reserves instruction to those whose every step in learning fits previously approved measures of social control. (Illich, 1976 pp.18-19)

Thus the way in which the curriculum is organised, the school ethos, the texts used, together with the teaching approach can serve to 'distance' some pupils from their own experiences so that formal schooling for them may become irrelevant, they begin to feel disempowered and, realise that they will have little future say or status in society. On the other hand schooling rewards those pupils who are willing and able to conform and meet the requirements of the courses
presented and the examinations system. Schooling thus controls the learning opportunities open to the pupils. This concept agrees with the Foucault premise, interpreted by Kaplan (1994), that the politics of power relations, which determine who can become the literate and the high literate and who will remain illiterates, semi-literate or functional illiterates, arise from social conditions.

Those people who have 'failed' following the reading and writing route to learning regard themselves as unintelligent which indeed is how others see them. Turk and Unda (1991), writing about social conditions in Canada, recognise that the terms 'literacy' and 'illiteracy' are used to 'disable' people making them believe that their problems are their own fault, that they are 'deficient if not dumb' (p.270). However, they point out that the fault, if there is one, rests, not with the individual but in the way society operates:

Limited literacy is not a major cause of unemployment ( ) a major reason for poverty - too few jobs, a low minimum wage, an increasing proportion of part-time as opposed to full-time jobs, a growth in the relative number of low paying service sector jobs, and inadequate levels of social assistance are. (p.269)

In other words controlling forces are in place for those with low literacy skills. Sleeter (1987) agrees that literacy is a social problem and maintains that society holds the control over those people who lack skills in literacy. She argues that because learning disability is defined in terms of the lack of reading and writing skills, teachers are aiding the continuation of the control. (see also Jones and Wallace, 1992, Daniels, 1993). This situation, especially if combined with other factors such as poverty, gender and class, can serve to continue a downward spiral of deprivation and keeps them on the lowest stratum of society.

Teachers have been affected by government involvement in the classroom. Meek (1993) maintains that government 'interference', in particular the way literacy is taught, has affected the professionalism of teachers and has prevented them from reflecting and learning from the ways literacy can be taught.

The government took more control over the curriculum when it introduced the 5 year (1997-2002) National Literacy Strategy (DfEE, 1997b) the basis of which is the National Literacy Project (NLP). The stated aim is that by the end of 2002 80 per cent of 11 year olds should reach English Level 4 in the KS2 NC tests. The aim is that tests will confirm that for 80 per cent of pupils their reading age is at least equivalent to their chronological age. The National Literacy Strategy has given us the project's definition of the term literacy. The authors state that:
The NLP Framework is based on a broad definition of literacy:
The concept of literacy can be defined very widely. However within the aims
and purposes of the National Literacy Project, literacy is defined simply as ‘the
ability to read and write’. Literacy is treated as a unitary process with the two
complementary aspects, reading and writing. (p.45)

So, although the Literacy Project accepts that literacy can be defined widely, it
nevertheless narrows the definition to ‘reading and writing. Schools are required
to follow the approach to teaching literacy as recommended by the NLP unless
they can show that their approach ‘is at least as effective’ (p.5). There follows
the nine areas of literacy that the NLP states are the required levels that primary
pupils should achieve (Appendix 8). Additionally, in order to receive their ‘core
entitlement,’ (p.7) primary schools are required to:

- adopt the approach to literacy based on that of NLP;
- devote a structured hour each day to literacy for all pupils;
- produce a school literacy action plan for the next 2 years;
- produce detailed and practical schemes of work for literacy in line with the
  NC requirements and comparable to that used in the NLP;
- and
- dedicate 3 INSET days to quality staff training in the 1998/1999 academic
  year.

Teaching objectives for each term consist of 3 strands: Word level - phonics,
spelling and vocabulary, Sentence level – grammar and punctuation and Text
level – comprehension and composition

Each school day, from September 1998 primary schools are encouraged
to hold a ‘literacy hour’, which consists of: whole class and differentiated group
teaching, reading and writing tasks and the ‘focused’ teaching of phonics,
spelling, vocabulary, handwriting and grammar. Pupils spend 60 per cent of their
time being taught as a whole class and 40 per cent of their time working
independently. It can be assumed that with classes of 30 children partly for
reasons of control ‘working independently’ will consist of pupils performing
individual reading and writing tasks

In a consideration of the targets for 80 percent of 11 year olds in which
there will be ‘a zero tolerance of underperformance’ (DfEE, 1997a p.14). Foster
(1998) queries the apparent lack of targets for the remaining 20 per cent because
with only one target to aim for this group is set to fail. Foster whilst speaking
from a political position nevertheless makes sound educational comment. He
recognises that without an incentive pupils and teachers can lose motivation and
that there will be a danger that the 20 per cent of pupils ‘will form a
disadvantaged and disregarded underclass- the pupils consigned for ever to that failing 20 per cent' (p.16)

Secondary schools are reminded that reading and writing skills are not 'exclusively the province of a few teachers in English and learning support departments.' They are told that, whereas in some schools this message has been taken to heart in other schools there are 'strong signs' that the issue has been neglected, with decreasing use of reading as a means of learning and only haphazard efforts to focus on improving writing in the relevant subjects' (p38).

However, although teachers are now subject to the demands of the NC and, for some a directed daily literacy hour, they still do have some flexibility in the ways that they organise their lessons and how they present the materials. In the classroom they are far more in control of the dissemination of subject matter than are the pupils, and they use their own developed strategies to inform the pupils.

Sometimes, situations in the classroom appear to be negotiated between pupils and teachers, the aim being that the goals of both parties are attained. (Blackman 1995, Delamont 1976, Woods 1990b). Woods, from his observations of lessons, categorised classroom work situations: hard work, which implies total commitment from pupils, and, at the other end of the scale work avoidance, which, in extreme cases could be total. According to Woods, most pupils are involved in the two situations between, that is 'open' and 'closed' negotiation. Many of the 'open negotiation' lessons consist of the teacher carrying the burden of 'work' for the first part of the lesson then, having fulfilled his/her part of the bargain, the pupils will be expected to 'work' for the rest of the lesson. Woods calls this 'distance work' because pupils are a long way from the point of origin and are likely to have little involvement in the work. From my observations of teachers at work I have found that a likely form of the lesson is for the teacher to orally review the previous lesson or homework, to move on to new work either by giving information orally or using prepared information sheets; this is followed by question and answer time and perhaps some discussion and then the setting of written work from either the board, overhead projector, worksheet or text book. Once the written task begins then the pupils need to fulfil their part of the bargain and 'work'. Thus it may often be the case that the teacher retains control over the work, the responsibility is not handed on to the pupil and thus the level of pupil involvement is slight. Woods draws a parallel with this lack of mental involvement and the often repetitive nature of the work with the work that many pupils move on to after school where management tells them what to do and they do it even though they do not feel involved in it.
Additionally, the group of pupils that Willis (1977) calls 'the lads' found the schoolwork presented to them was 'distant' from their interests. One instance cited by Willis illustrates that literacy itself was regarded as being in the control of the teachers and therefore something to rebel against:

PW: What's the last time you've done some writing?
Will: When we done some writing?
Fuzz: (...) last time was in careers, 'cos I writ 'yes' on a piece of paper, that broke me heart.
PW: Why did it break your heart?
Fuzz: I mean to write, 'cos I was going to try and go through the term without writing anything. 'Cos since we've cum back, I ain't dun nothing [it was half way through term]
(Willis, p.27)

One questions the presentation of this in pseudo-phonetic 'incorrect' spelling. On the one hand Willis may have wanted to give the reader an indication of how the boy spoke so that the reader could attempt to enter the realm of the 'the lads', in a bid to understand the culture of groups which is the subject of the book. On the other hand he perhaps wanted to show that the boy was speaking naturally in a relaxed fashion to him so that the reader is aware that the information received is a true record of what was actually happening. However it could be interpreted as Willis having a rather condescending attitude towards the boy, the boy shown as being unable to use standard English shows his lack of ability, particularly since forms such as 'cum' and 'dun' in fact represent standard English pronunciation. Alternatively, what Willis does illustrate possibly unintentionally, is that the boy may be deliberately using a form of speech that does not conform to the language of school, the language of the establishment. So the boy shows his resistance by not only rebelling against the literacy of school but also the language of school.

With regard to spoken language, there is a hierarchical presence that recognises that a certain form of speaking; Standard English is superior to the accent and dialects of regional or ethnic minority groups. Thus the speaker of Standard English may be viewed as more intelligent than those people who use other forms of the language. But as Wood (1988) maintains, this situation should not be related to intelligence or linguistic superiority, rather it has its roots in political social and economic affairs:

..the fact that one way of speaking is viewed as superior, more intelligent or more 'proper' than another is not a linguistic phenomenon, but a political social and economic affair. A particular way of speaking has become dominant because
those who speak it have risen to power, and control functions like education, mass communication and the means of production. Such a view, (…) leads to a rejection of the notion that some children are 'linguistically deprived' or their language impoverished if they happen to speak with a particular dialect or creole (p. 92)

This argument is picked up and developed by Tett and Crowther (1998) who argue that society should recognise that literacy should be located within 'the cultural politics of society' rather than it be seen simply as a 'neutral technical issue' (p.454). They reinforce the beliefs of Freire (1972) when they state that society should recognise that the teaching of literacy must acknowledge that power is distributed unequally. Thus the system in place can give the middle classes privilege whilst the working-class communities can be marginalised. They are aware that the emphasis on the mechanistic aspects of literacy does not necessarily enable the child to understand the purpose and meaning of print. They maintain that family literacies, the language of home and community, are largely unacknowledged by the school curriculum and by the suggested methods of teaching literacy and thus ‘community literacies can be marginalised in relation to the dominant literacy forms:

By recognising that literacy education is essentially a political process it is possible to move away from a neutral technology approach and, instead, focus on the way in which literacy operates as a culturally normalising tool that can limit participation in civic life for those that do not have full access to the dominant code (p.455)

Hoggart (1998) maintains that a basic literacy (Level 4) acquisition is unable to cope with the mass of 'assaults' that bombard people through television radio newspapers and so on. He too is highly sensitive of the politicisation of literacy regarding the acquisition of basic literacy as being 'depressingly inadequate' for society today’s society:

The level of literacy we accept for the bulk of the population, of literacy, unrelated to the ways language is misused in this kind of society, ensures that literacy becomes simply a way of further subordinating great numbers of people. (p.59)

He dismisses the Government’s aim of Level 4 achievement by 2002 stating that a definition of literacy that stops at level 4 (which equates with a reading age of 11), which he regards as a basic level, is ‘inadequate for effective adult life in developed open commercial societies such as ours’. (p.56) The need, he says, is for far more critical awareness, the acquisition of a ‘critical literacy’ which would first be able to absorb ‘information and knowledge adequate for the more
complex practical managing of daily life’ and that would also be ‘Alert to the manifold deceptions – carried mainly in language – by which persuasion operates in an open commercial society.’ A person who had learned critical awareness would be:

not easily taken in, able to ‘read’ tricks of tone, selectivities, false ad hominem cries, and all the rest. (p.58)

Robinson (1974) has defined the twelve abilities essential to the critical reading of text:
recognising and discriminating between judgements facts opinions and inferences:
comprehending implied ideas
interpreting figurative and other non literal language
detecting propaganda
forming and reacting to sensory images
anticipating outcomes
generalising within the limits of justifiable evidence
making logical judgements and drawing conclusions
comparing and contrasting ideas
perceiving relationships – time, space, cause and effect
identifying bias or point of view
recognising and reacting to satire, irony and cynicism (p.9)

Walker (1974) is of the opinion that these skills can be developed once a child has reached a reading age of 9, which he considers to be a basic skill competence in reading. Other more recent researchers in the field of the early acquisition of literacy for example Bradley and Bryant (1985), Pinsent (1992) would argue that the skills begin and can be developed at a much earlier age when a child is first approaching text. If we compare the list of skills that Robinson (1974) gives with the activities that teachers are required to carry out in the literacy hour and it can be understood that a ‘rich critical literacy for all’ cannot be the aim.

Regarding Fuzz mentioned above, (Willis, 1977) by his refusal to write anything down, thus ‘beating the system’ and winning out against the establishment, he keeps his sense of self worth, but in fact defeats his own ends. Because he will not write anything down he denies himself the opportunity to pass exams which are the passport to future success and advancement in the workplace. Thus he probably condemns himself to a life of factory work, which was then available. Furthermore the act of refusal and concomitant failure can be regarded as a fault or deficiency within self rather than a fault of the system. If the young person, in this post-industrial age where factory work has disappeared,
maintained a similar attitude in school he or she would leave school with few qualifications and with a higher probability of unemployment.

All young people who, by the time they begin the examination syllabus at 14 years old, are not secure in their literacy skills are more at risk than their peers of future insecurity in the workplace are. The next section is a consideration of the connection between the pupil's literacy status and ability.

6.6 Literacy defines ability

The arrival of comprehensive schooling in this country ideally gave each pupil an equality of opportunity. However as the Schools and Curriculum chapter has shown, this does not happen; state schools that select at the age of 11 are becoming more prevalent particularly with the arrival of 'specialist' schools and aided and foundation schools encouraged to continue by the government. This study cannot encompass the private sector that continues to grow in this country.

Pupils are usually at some stage of their schooling put into ability groups. Tests of 'ability', usually including an 'intelligence test' and a literacy test, will assist staff in deciding where the pupil will be placed. The influence of Burt (1933) who proclaimed that intelligence is 'inherited, or at least innate' and that 'it remains uninfluenced by industry or zeal,' still infiltrates schools and can be used to justify a pupil's placement in a particular group. Simon (1991) maintains that Burt's early influence created an 'ethos of failure' which affected both the attitudes towards and the process of education so that by using the argument of a pupil having a ceiling of intelligence, an education system was being created that was 'a near perfect method of social control' or be seen as 'buttressing the social order' (p.159). Thus schools could abrogate responsibility for the child's slow learning development and a low level of literacy skills, by blaming the lack of achievement on the child's lack of intelligence or their family background.

Tests of 'intelligence' are once again proving to be useful because they are easy to apply and 'prove' a pupil's academic worth as competition for selective places increases. A pupil's proficiency in reading and writing is used to measure progress not only in the skill but also formatively and summatively to define their ability in school academic learning. Thus when a pupil enters secondary school, results of these tests may decide where a pupil is placed within the school organisational system, and at age sixteen, the examinations check the knowledge acquired though the medium of reading and writing. Research has shown that the most reliable predictor of pupils' GCSE examination success is the level of achievement at age eleven which is measured chiefly by reading
ability. (Goldstein et al, 1993). Additionally, influential educational reports heighten the importance of traditional literacy skills and hold true to the view that the one route to learning is through acquiring reading and writing skills. The Warnock Report (DES, 1978) acknowledges reading retardation as a cause of the lack of educational progress in children. The Intelligence Quotient (IQ), assessed by standardised tests of ‘intelligence,’ seems to be regarded as static, and the Report clearly acknowledges that children whose reading standard is well below the norm will have educational difficulties but while for some children this is acceptable because of a low IQ, other children are identified as being more intellectually able but still exhibit reading and writing problems.

The Dearing Report of 1996 separates the lower attainers from the underachievers and those with learning difficulties. Dearing defines lower attainers as pupils who do not have a statement of special educational need but who ‘nevertheless have real difficulty in learning and typically do not obtain grade G at GCSE or its vocational equivalent.’ (12.1)

He goes on to say that these young people, the lower attainers, are his particular concern as they are ‘at the lower end of the normal ability range, having perhaps in their early years made poor progress in reading and consequently struggled through out their school careers (my italics), but who still have the potential to better their current achievements’ (12.3)

These statements can be interpreted to show that the Report accepts a causal link between real difficulty in learning and low achievement in reading. The learning difficulties are apparent because of the lack of reading and writing skills. Pupils regarded as having a learning difficulty or being slow learners are often diagnosed as having learning problems because of reading and writing difficulties (Clunies-Ross and Wimhurst 1983). Educational progress in our school system is dependent on having adequate skills in these two areas.

Teachers have to use written assessments of pupils both in a formative and summative way to decide what the pupil has learned and how to develop the learning. In doing so, they implicitly accept that a pupil’s written attainment is a fair assessment of the knowledge acquired and the ability of the pupil. This is illustrated by using an example that appeared in a national newspaper. A child having difficulty in learning was then assessed as having a dyslexic problem and given extra individual assistance. As her written work improved the teacher says that he was now able to recognise her learning potential which he had not been aware of before:

he [the teacher] found it hard to get any volume of work out of her. Now, confident that she had a learning problem and was not stupid Katy was writing
extensively and enthusiastically though her work was so badly spelt that it was not easy to discern what she was attempting to communicate. Nonetheless he could see more clearly what she had learned and understood and could teach her according to her intellectual ability (The Daily Telegraph, November 13, 1996 p.19)

Several comments can be made; first the teacher was unaware of the capabilities of the pupil; perhaps, because of a large class, he had spent little time talking to individuals or used class time for discussion. He assesses a child's ability by the written word and the newspaper also assumes that intelligence is evidenced through the written word.

The view that writing aids our intellectual ability (and therefore our 'intelligence') has been generally accepted in our culture. The written word gives power to the writer. The act of writing can clarify and crystallise our thoughts and demonstrate the extent of our knowledge and understanding. (Taylor, 1989)

Capturing our thoughts on paper gives us the opportunity to reflect on our thinking. (Manen, 1990). The written word empowers the writer, encouraging an attitude towards an understanding of society (Pumfrey and Elliot, 1990) and an opportunity for developing an independence of thinking.

However, Gee (1990) disputes that higher order cognitive skill thinking can be developed only through the written word, 'humans who are acculturated and socialised are already in possession of higher order cognitive skills' (p.130)

It is our cultural tradition that has decided the way in which cognitive skills are to be developed and our formal schooling continues to emphasise development through the written word.

Gardner (1983) criticises the view of 'intelligence' as a single faculty. He identifies a minimum of seven intelligences: logical-mathematical, linguistic, spatial, bodily-kinaesthetic, musical, inter-personal, and intrapersonal and says that existing curricula depend heavily on the first two: logical—mathematical and linguistic. The other intelligences even if they are a part of the curriculum have no large part in it and few, if any, of these latter intelligences rely for their assessment on the use of pencil and paper tests via the written word. The theory of multiple intelligences has implications for the teacher as to how the pupil is taught; if a child is not learning by the traditional method then alternative routes should be sought that use the pupil's own set of intelligences. In this way the pupil is given a secondary route to the solution of a problem, perhaps through the medium of an intelligence that is relatively strong for that individual.

Young people do have other skills and have a contribution to make but cannot and do not have the opportunity because of curriculum reliance on
reading and writing. Walker (1989) points out that these pupils do not necessarily have a learning difficulty and, if given the opportunity, could make valuable oral contributions to classroom discussions. They show insight and easily grasp concepts but cannot communicate these through the written word and thus may be ‘branded careless or lazy’ (2.3 p.41). Teachers have to rely on the written word for assessment because of the curriculum and examination system and thus the contribution that those without a high level of written skills can give is ignored:

...in the melee of school routine it is all too easy for teachers to ignore or to forget that an inability to read does not mean an inability to learn. Even when teachers are aware of this fact, they find it difficult to present their lessons without recourse to the written text, and it is not uncommon to discover the level of the text far exceeding the skill of the reader. (Bell and Best, 1986 p.84)

Whilst the written word remains supreme, people with low literacy levels of reading and writing skills can be further deprived because their spoken language vocabulary may increase more slowly than that of their more literate peers. Combine this with non-standard English way of speaking then there is a likelihood of being regarded as less intelligent than peers who have higher literacy levels. (See Willis 1977 and Wood 1988, Section 6.5). So some pupils join a vicious circle of disadvantage; because they are not interacting with text they are failing to make sense of what is being read and interpreting and because they are presented only with the written word for learning they are not acquiring a spoken vocabulary with which could improve their reading and so on. Add to this the family background, which also plays a part in reading and writing development, and the circle may be complete. The longitudinal British Cohort Study (BCS70) found that poor performance in literacy and numeracy assessments was associated with unskilled manual family backgrounds and parents who had failed to gain any educational qualifications (Ekinsmyth and Bynner, 1994).

The statement that Bell and Best (1986, see above) have made regarding text levels was given support by the readability level data that I gathered as part of my MA study (1987). I found that the material offered to first year secondary pupils (Year7) was too difficult for many of them. Additional confirmation for this view is supplied by Sawyer, Potter and Taylor, 1994 who surveyed alternate years from Year 2 to Year10, pupils aged between seven and fifteen years, and found that a significant amount of reading material was found to be too difficult for the vast majority of children in that year with humanities and science having the highest readability levels.
The newer technologies do have the power to provide young people whose skills or forms of intelligences will thrive by learning through a medium other than that of the written word.

6.7 Literacy after school

Several large scale studies concerning adult literacy have recently been completed: the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) (OECD, 1995), the British survey, again commissioned by OECD (Carey, Law and Hansbro 1997) and research by the Basic Skills Agency (BSA) (Ekinsmyth and Bynner 1994 and Bynner and Steedman, 1995). The first two surveys sampled the working population, that is, people between the age of 16 and 65 years.

The IALS survey (OECD, 1995), a comparative study of 7 western industrialised countries, accepts that literacy constitutes a multiplicity of skills and, noting the undesirability of setting an international standard for literacy defines literacy in the terms of 'a mode of adult behaviour', 'using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential.' (p.14). This survey assessed literacy skills in terms of 3 domains: prose literacy, document literacy and quantitative literacy. Performance in these 3 areas is grouped into 5 literacy levels; level 1 representing the 'lowest ability range', and level 5 the 'highest'. The British survey, although not included in the original group of countries, formed part of the same survey using the same methods and criteria. The conclusion drawn in both surveys recognises the importance of literacy skills (from the 3 domains) for the continued development of the individual for 'life chances and use of opportunities' (OECD p.116). More specifically the international survey found that:

- differences in literacy have consequences. Low-skill adults [in literacy] are more likely to be unemployed, or if employed, to be employed in industries that are declining. High skill adults are likely to have higher incomes. (OECD p.85)
- The IALS also noted that employees with low levels of literacy skills had difficulties gaining promotion or changing their jobs because of their difficulties with the printed text when studying in courses that would enable advancement in their work.

The British survey found that people at level 1 were predominately older people with low levels of education and those at levels 4/5 were predominately young (under 45) with high levels of education, whist the people at levels 2 and 3 were a less clearly defined group. The British survey confirmed that people with lower literacy skills were more likely to consider their skills as limiting their
opportunities. There is confirmation too that once young people have left school, those who have found little success in literacy there tend to avoid the kind of reading and writing situations in which they found themselves daily whilst at school. Newspapers were a popular reading material (only 2 per cent of respondents never reading them), and the authors acknowledge that, because of the wide range of material available, in style, content and level of reading difficulty, people at all literacy levels could access some newspaper material.

The British survey acknowledged that for some people the television is an important means of getting information and keeping abreast of current events. Although an association was found between low level literacy and watching television, the survey points out that watching a high level of television does not necessarily imply that this causes low literacy levels and that it could just as easily be that a watching a great deal of television is a consequence of having of low levels of literacy. However, it goes on to say that watching television may reduce the time available for reading books, implying that improvement in literacy levels will thus be held back. The survey's definition of literacy is text based and, although the survey recognises that many people used television to obtain information and keep abreast of current events it nevertheless regards television as inferior to a more 'literate' way of obtaining information.

Additionally the survey found that people who have higher literacy skills use the computer more in the work place than those with lower literacy levels; these people then have the opportunity to carry on improving their literacy (text based and computer literacy) skills which will make them more marketable in the work place. Similarly more highly literate persons used the computer at home on a more regular basis than those with lower literacy skills. (4.4)

In the workplace in Britain as similarly found in the IALS study, employees in the declining industries such as mining, construction and agriculture tended to be in the lower literacy levels than those in other sectors; the clerical and secretarial sector employed people at all levels of literacy although few were found to be at level 1 and in sales and engineering, people with the two lowest literacy levels were in occupations such as machine operators and 'other elementary occupations' (3.6). The survey highlights the continuing importance in a person's life of text based literacy; those without these literacy skills are restricted to a narrowing choice of employment or alternatively unemployment. Literacy in other forms radio television and the skills that the computer can provide as an alternative to text (e.g. problem solving), are not recognised as having equal worth.
The consequences then are for individual status. Those with low literacy levels are kept in a low stratum of society, the lack of literacy prevents them from gaining employment, or having obtained a position, they are less likely to make advancement or change jobs. They are likely to have lower incomes than the more highly skilled in literacy, they are more likely to be unemployed or be in jobs that are unskilled and probably insecure. Even in employment they are less likely to be offered training than their more literate peers are. Thus people with low literacy levels can be regarded, as having less control over the direction their lives will take than those with higher literacy levels. This situation applies both in the work place where their jobs are likely to be unskilled and in the type of training they are offered after leaving school. (OECD, 1995 p.113)

The situation can be changed for people who have low literacy levels. Freire's work with adults in South America showed that they could frequently become empowered and could take control of their lives by using the type of literacy that had meaning and relevance for themselves. (Section 6.5) Similarly in England, Hamilton and Barton (1995) found that literacy is a resource that people can use to make sense of the events in their lives. This theme was expressed in a number of different ways: to inform and explain, to follow hobbies and interests, to gain control over their environment, as a tool to promote personal chances and to solve problems that arise in everyday life. Street (1993) highlights the importance of the communicative aspect of literacy highlighting the relationship with the spoken word; and by including a width of viewpoints from a variety of writers; he stresses the importance of the cultural and social contexts of literacy.

When young people reach the workplace, skills beyond those of reading and writing are needed. Workplace literacy in the USA is defined as 'written and spoken language, math, and thinking skills that trainees and workers use to perform training and job tasks'. (Askov and Aderman, 1991 p.16). The writers recognise workplace literacy as being a social economic and educational issue, views which serve to emphasise that literacy involves a width of skills in addition to those of reading and writing. Taylor (1991) is also aware that workplace literacy requirements constitute more than the reading and writing aspects of literacy. His Basic Skills Profile consists of 5 areas: basic literacy and numeracy skills (reading writing and computation), basic listening and oral communication skills, creative thinking and problem solving skills, personal management skills (skills related to developing the attitudes and behaviours required to keep and progress on the job) and teamwork skills. (p.188)
Further information pertaining to basic skills is provided by a comprehensive longitudinal survey of people born in 1970, the British Cohort Study (BCS70) and used by the Basic Skills Agency (BSA) (Ekinsmyth and Bynner, 1994 and Bynner and Steedman, 1995). The authors limited the concept of basic skills to literacy (reading, writing/spelling) and numeracy. These findings are particularly pertinent to my study because they concern people in their early twenties, unlike with the two OECD studies that deal with the whole age range of the working population. Ekinsmyth and Bynner found class background to be influential: young people with poor literacy and numerical skills tended to come from unskilled manual backgrounds, with parents who themselves had failed to gain educational qualifications. The study found evidence that poor literacy and numeracy skills had impeded educational progress and occupational success. The young people who were aware that they lacked literacy and numeracy skills tended to have failed to gain any educational qualifications and to have left school to gain employment at the earliest opportunity. Additionally those who reported problems had a poorer self-image than the others and had experienced difficulties in educational training and employment. The young males in the study with poor levels of literacy and numeracy tended to have spent time on training schemes which had not led to employment and to experience more unemployment than those without difficulties. The cycle of low literacy then continues, as the survey found that although young women with poor literacy skills stayed on at school longer than their equivalent males, they tended to have a number of different jobs and to leave the labour market frequently to have children.

The other BSA study focused on childhood factors that may contribute towards difficulties in basic skills: literacy (reading, writing and spelling) and numeracy. (Bynner and Steedman, 1995). The focus here is on three interrelated factors: family background factors, school factors and family support factors. The family background factors that were seen to influence basic skills development were mainly economic and social factors; those living in disadvantaged circumstances in their early years were likely to show poor basic skills in adulthood. Family support, particularly the parental role both before school age and the level of interest shown during the school years, was regarded as crucial in skills acquisition and development. As adults of 21, those having low reading scores were more likely to have lacked books in the home and, although they were less likely to have been read to every day, they did not seem to have watched more television than others. In school the age of 10 was crucially important, for literacy at that age turned out to be the most powerful
predictor of adult basic skill scores. At age 10 classroom organisational factors such as the teaching approach used and whether the class was streamed had no relation to basic skills in adulthood, although adults with basic skills problems tended, more than others, 'to have been given remedial help in reading and mathematics and to have been placed in remedial classes.' (4.5) The use and frequency of homework at this time bore no relation to adult basic skills. (4.7). There was a small tendency for those with low reading and numeracy to have attended schools where the dominant type of housing was council housing, but there was found to be only a weak relationship between the reading and numeracy scores and the academic intake of the school.

From the evidence provided by the cohort members, clear signs emerge that many teachers fail to spot emergent basic skills difficulties. Bynner and Steedman suggest that a fundamental part of the teacher’s role is to recognise and diagnose individual difficulties as it is part of the teacher’s formative assessment of the individual child’s educational progress; ‘its absence (...) is a cause for concern’ (6.21)

6.7.1 Support for literacy after school

Dearing (1996) acknowledges that young people with low literacy skills would benefit from assistance after school. He takes cognisance of the concerns of both the Basic Skills Agency and employers that the key skills need emphasis after the age of 16 as well as during the school years. He expresses concern that in colleges of Further Education ‘30 percent of students (...) lack the skills in basic literacy and numeracy to benefit fully from their courses, (2.21) and that colleges were finding that ‘an increasing proportion of their intake consists of young people who have not achieved much if anything, at school’ (2.26).

The Basic Skills Agency (1993), recognising that more young people with basic skill needs were moving into further education and training, devised screening tests into assessed levels of literacy and numeracy that were broken down into 4 levels - from Foundation to stage 3. The Agency emphasises that only rough comparisons can be made with GNVQs and N.C. levels. These are:
The results of these tests showed that of the 12 colleges in which students were screened results varied but ‘even in the college with the highest levels of literacy attainment, nearly 30 per cent of students were at stage 1 or below’ (1993 p.14). Further research by the Agency during 1995-1996 for the purpose of determining the drop out and completion rates of FE college students with ‘weak basic skills’ revealed that ‘students who got support with basic skills were almost three times as likely to complete their course than those who didn’t get support’. (Basic Skills Agency 1997, p.3)

Therefore support in many cases can enable the young persons to successfully complete the course they are following. Certain courses at the same level of difficulty demand higher levels of literacy than others and more and more courses ‘require evidence of competence in the core skills’ (p.8) (see Section 3.8 for core skills information). The Agency clarifies the meaning of basic skill support in order to differentiate the process from other types of assistance given to those with low level literacy skills:

Basic skills support is additional help for students who may find their vocational or academic course too difficult because of problems with basic skills. It’s different from language, literacy and numeracy programmes where the main purpose of someone being on the programme is to improve their basic skills. (p.9)

Thus the support provided ideally works in conjunction with the course that the student is undertaking. The Agency research (1997) found that this basic skill support is available through workshops and timetabled support and some colleges are developing partnership teaching whereby a specialist literacy tutor and the course tutor work together. This may in future prove to be an effective
method for improving student's skills. Support teaching, used correctly, that is with two members of staff sharing the teaching and both using their different areas of expertise (subject area and literacy) has been justified. Other forms of support that are developing are: direct tuition in a learning centre, group work, one-to-one tuition and planned additional support by vocational staff. (p.10) However, again the question should be asked why the emphasis of the course appears to centre only on traditional literacy elements. Nevertheless both the Basic Skills Agency and the Dearing report emphasise the fact that colleges use a wider and different approaches in teaching and learning.

The Basic Skills Agency (1997) states that the 'new styles and 'approaches', for example the open learning approach, require 'good basic skills'. Although some facets of the open learning are different from the presentation of knowledge in the secondary schools little else is new. The central element is the written word even though the course may be essentially skills based. The Agency's research found that many students in 1995-1996 who had been assessed as needing additional support for their courses were not receiving help and that the provision of support varied considerably among colleges (p.18). Even when support was available the Agency determined a number of barriers that the young person needed to overcome to enable them to acquire the skills:

However, the most important barrier is attitude. Young adults in particular, are sensitive to the stigma attached to poor basic skills and this acts as a real deterrent, just as importantly they may also doubt whether improving these skills is essential to getting through their course. (p.18)

The Agency recommends that colleges need to make concerted efforts to remove barriers that stop students taking up additional support.

Young people who are based mainly in the work place and undertaking NVQs may not receive this additional basic skills support. Dearing justifies this non-inclusion of the key skills of communication, the application of number and information technology, particularly for young people 'at the lowest levels' as complying with employers wishes:

The argument against compulsion, particularly at the lowest levels, is strongly made. It would be wrong if people were denied the opportunity, as a result of requirements in communication, the application of number and information technology, to gain recognition of achievement in their chosen calling. It could be a powerful disincentive to young people seeking to build up a vocational skill if other skills, not immediately needed for the qualifications being sought put the qualification beyond their reach. Such a requirement would add to the cost of
provision, and this might of itself be an obstacle to the take-up of the NVQ.
(Dearing, 1996 7.40)

Dearing appears to be saying these young people are not able to succeed by the traditional reading and writing route, therefore provision will be made to make the course assessment more practical. This appears to be acceptable because the young persons are being judged on their ability to achieve the aims of the course. However while he rightly maintains that the young people should not be denied opportunities to improve their skills he accepts that the qualifications route is by the written word and implies that young people with low level reading and written skills lack the intelligence of those with good written skills. Additionally the courses available keep the young person at the lowest levels of achievement. As can be seen from Table 6.1, without literacy skills the young person cannot progress to the higher levels in GNVQ as NVQ courses are matched to GNVQ levels (see Appendix 2). Dearing does not offer alternative assessments for higher levels and thus once again reading and writing skills are equated with ability and skill. It is unclear why the cost of provision is mentioned especially with regard to these young people.

Although Dearing includes numeracy and information technology as key skills, the key to all the skills remains the reading and writing route of literacy. At a time when technology begins to assume a dominant role in the workplace, the next section is focused on these new technologies.

6.8 A time of change: the new technologies

As earlier sections of this study have indicated reading and writing should not be considered to be the only routes to learning other literacies form a large part of young people’s lives. Although a consideration of other forms of literacy has only been a small facet of the study, my research would have been incomplete without the inclusion of ways in which these technological literacies can assist learning. Television, radio, the computer and digital technology continue to have a dramatic impact on the lives of people in both work and leisure time and in turn affect the way society operates. These ‘new’ literacies are part of daily life and are part of our culture.

Some communities are using television to replace the more traditional forms of reading and writing. People who have never been literate in the traditional sense are learning to read the world through the word by means of the television medium. Reiterating Freire’s view of reading, Archer and Costello (1990) say that ‘reading is not a technique, but a way of analysing experience critically in order to be able to participate in a wider society’ (p.120) and
demonstrate this by the experiences of Chileans living in the barrios. These groups, although living under an oppressive rule of government which meant that television channels were censored, watched television for many hours a week. Although few were able to afford much in the way of material goods, most had television sets. The viewers took in a diet of censored news programmes, 'soaps', game shows and advertising of products which none watching could afford. This offended the 'popular education group' (adult literacy teachers) who saw television as a threat in that it presented to the viewers a world totally at odds with their lives and which thus encouraged 'passive' viewing and an escape from reality. Equally, however, it can be said that the popular educators are using their own censorship by assuming that television produces passivity; instead they could discuss with the viewers the 'unrealities' being watched on the television, in order to aid them to gain a critical awareness and use this as a starting point for debate about other cultures and other ways of life. Thus television viewing, as an alternative to the book, gives us the opportunity to 're-read' the messages that this visual and aural print gives us, so that we can 'analyse those images in an active, interpretative manner rather than passively accepting their intended content'. (p.120).

McLuhan, a media scholar, writing in the 1960s, was aware even then that technology, although accepted and used in society, was not being harnessed by schools:

Today in our cities, most learning occurs outside the classroom. The sheer quantity of information conveyed by press -magazines-film -TV- radio far exceeds the quantity of information conveyed by school instruction and texts. This challenge has destroyed the monopoly of the book as a teaching aid and cracked the very walls of the classroom so suddenly that we’re confused, baffled. (McLuhan, 1970 p.1)

He was aware that literacy, available through the extended media, opened up vast channels of communication between individuals and society; he warned society of the dangers of ignoring these new channels of learning, as had Dewey earlier in the century: (see Chapter 3, 3.2)

If these 'mass media' should serve only to weaken and corrupt previously achieved levels of verbal and pictorial culture, it won't be because there's anything inherently wrong with them. It will be because we've failed to master them as new languages in time to assimilate them to our total cultural heritage. (McLuhan 1970, p.2)
Lack of the assimilation of television in schools is a criticism used by Coe (1994) who argues that television, although part of popular culture, has not been accepted as necessary for ‘cultural transmission.’ Popular television programmes are not considered worthwhile for analysis and social comment; thus little critical awareness is developed. When the GCSE syllabus included current fiction and ‘soap’ programmes, in order to give the pupils experience to comment critically on social aspects of life today, newspapers ridiculed the idea until government took action so that only ‘classic’ material was judged essential to the curriculum. This elitist attitude not only degrades the programmes that pupils watch but also serves to marginalize and alienate some young people from the culture that does have status.

Masterman (1980) believes that television education should be part of an education for responsible citizenship. He found that 6th formers were leaving school lacking in the ability to evaluate critically the messages that programmes were putting across: which is a ‘startling indictment of the level of visual literacy which exists in schools at the present moment’ (p.77).

Television in the late 1990s can be said to be truly part of our ‘cultural heritage,’ an integral part of everyday life. The risk, with the proliferation of available channels, is that television is there to ‘satisfy the needs of the people’, provide the bread and circuses for the populace. David Attenborough warns:

If they watch mindless pap they’ll have trivialised the most important technological revolution since Gutenberg devised type centuries ago (Attenborough, 1994)

Yet television, with an impact on both sound and vision (our two preferred senses), can make accessible a degree of knowledge and understanding that is hard to match by the written word alone; and, since television is now an integral part of societal life, children should surely be encouraged throughout their school lives to develop a critical stance towards this medium. By means of continuing discussion of the television programmes by which so much information is channelled, pupils can by become visually literate, and thus prepare for achieving an independent mind-set in their adult lives.

Shafer (1991) cites Canadian studies that showed that significantly greater learning results when audio-visual media are integrated into traditional teaching programs. The use of sound and motion increases understanding by 30 per cent over other presentation methods. Interest, motivation and retention increase by 33 per cent for as long as a year after viewing. (p.458). Similarly, in television programmes designed for improving adult basic education and literacy,
in addition to an improvement in measured results, there is also improvement in motivation, confidence and the perceptions of applying the new found knowledge practically and using it to seek advancement in the workplace.

The question arises as to why television has not been used as a major source of learning in schools. Although television programmes prepared especially for schools for the NC subject areas have recently been more widely used, particularly in primary schools, schooling has not capitalised on bringing the child's home learning into the formal classroom environment. Pupils who have difficulty using the reading and writing route to learning can, as indicated earlier, find themselves distanced, alienated and marginalised; they may resist acquisition of traditional skills as a defence against the established order.

Masterman 1980, believing that television education should be part of an education for responsible citizenship, has strongly criticised schools for not including it in the curriculum:

The fact that the medium continues to be ignored by vast numbers of schools in spite of a whole string of recommendations from official reports over the last twenty years is indeed an indictment of the conservatism and inflexibility of many educational establishments and of the inability to respond to developments and trends of major significance within society. (p.13)

The reasons for teachers not using the medium to any great extent may be influenced by society's attitude that television does not have the worth of text based literacy. Television and 'progressive' teaching methods take the blame for the alleged decline in children's reading abilities; television is regarded as providing ‘harmful educational and psychological consequences for the developing mind’ and is ‘the deadly enemy of literacy and schooling and the values they are assumed to embody’ (Buckingham, 1993 p.21) Thus, teachers have been able to justify the non-inclusion of television into the curriculum. Yet the Independent Television Commission (ITC) report (Kelley, 1998) found that teachers do believe that television can aid them in their teaching. The survey found that teachers believed that television offered an alternative teaching approach; 26 per cent of primary and secondary teachers in the survey felt that television compensated for pupils with low literacy levels and 74 per cent of teachers of reading felt that the use of television did support teaching and learning in the subject area. However the survey found that there was a sharp decline in the use of television in secondary schools between 1990, when 44 per cent secondary school teachers were using television once or twice a week and 1997, when television was used less than once a month by 60 per cent of teachers. Although the teachers valued television as a resource, the reasons
given as the barriers to use were: pressure of time, difficulties with access, inappropriate content, lack of technical support and the relative quality of schools television. Kelley suggests that, because the study of television was removed from the NC, teachers interpreted this as a signal that television was not an appropriate medium for use in schools.

In the same ITC survey, pupils reported that they both like and learn from watching educational television, rating it more highly than many other learning methods. The survey found, from pupil and student interviews, that a significant result was the 'low estimation they had of homework' (4.4). The survey includes as a recommendation the setting up of 'real homework channel/s with targeted programmes at set time supporting key aspects of the NC' (4.6). This recommendation would seem to please both the pupil and the teacher, the pupil being able to learn from a medium s/he enjoys and thus negating the views they have of homework. Equally the subject teachers would be relieved from the burden of setting and marking of homework once or twice a week; some of the responsibility for the homework would lie with the pupils, thus making them more involved in their own learning. Additionally having had the common experience of watching the programme, pupils should have much to discuss and debate and critical awareness could flourish with teachers encouraging the transfer of this awareness to other 'less educational' programmes that pupils watch.

Buckingham's (1993) research evidence shows that, contrary to the accusation that children are unselective, uncritical and unsophisticated viewers, even young children showed a high degree of critical sophistication in their judgements. They are competent in distinguishing between what is viewed on the screen and reality and are sceptical of advertising's persuasive functions. However he did find evidence that news and information programmes are of little interest 'except to some older middle class children' and even they found little to discuss in the way television dealt with political issues or to question any partiality or bias in news broadcasts. (p.283)

In many homes there appears to be little monitoring of what children watch, and teachers are concerned that television and videos are used as 'electronic babysitters' so that children in reception classes are unable to listen, only to passively watch, which has a knock on effect on their language and reading skills. (Times Educational Supplement, March 8 1996). However, Willis (1990) finds that television is not watched passively at all:

Far from being the passive watchers of political mythology, they actively collaborate with the screen to create and recreate a web of meanings that are
relevant to them and anchored in their own lives. They develop active and varied relationships with the TV screen and creatively and selectively take up its meanings and messages into their own symbolic work. (p.32)

In other words television is a familiar part of their lives, treated almost as 'one of the family'. It should not be difficult therefore to encourage all television watchers to adopt a far more critical and evaluative attitude. Hoggart's (1998) argument that basic literacy (Level 4, a reading age of 11) acquisition is unable to cope with the mass of 'assaults' that bombard people through television radio newspapers and so on can be used to argue that television programmes could be used to develop a critical awareness and to work towards obtaining a critical literacy level. Although Hoggart says that reading through the written word is a different skill from 'reading' through the medium of television a view with which I would agree, the critical abilities that Robinson, (1974, Section 6.5) indicated apply just as well to spoken and visual messages as well as reading. Also television can be a useful tool to aid critical awareness in other media.

Critical evaluation of the media messages could be the role that all teachers should be fulfilling but as yet it does not appear to be within their curriculum responsibilities. Television can be a useful teaching tool but it also needs to be an integral part of the whole school curriculum; for it to be effective in the learning process teachers should be skilled in the medium. Government however continues to degrade television's usefulness; it suggests that television viewing wastes children's time when they should be doing homework. It emphasises the value of homework (DfEE, 1997a) later making it a compulsory part of the curriculum.

There is evidence that pupils in our best schools do more homework than their peers. Disturbingly, almost half of all pupils in their last year at primary school are not given regular homework, and by contrast the vast majority of pupils of this age spend two hours or more watching television every day' (6.26 p.58)

6.8.1 Computer and digital literacy

The home computer is increasingly regarded as a learning tool for children. The computer already has its role in the workplace and is becoming increasingly more powerful. Electronic mail and the Internet mean that communication and sharing of information is possible between different countries. Electronic devices, mobile phones, fax machines, electronic calculators are all used in everyday life. Although at present much of the computer information is text based, the introduction of sound will enable the spoken word to pass through the system.

Importantly the computer is an active medium; children by adopting this active role in learning can become empowered. Underwood and Underwood
(1990) bring together the ideas of Piaget (1982) and Papert (1980) and show the capacity of the computer as a tool for personal learning; 'abstract ideas can be made concrete and the means of manipulating the world made personal and apparent.' (p.35). Additionally, computer work can develop a child's thinking as a means to read the world; 'Cognitive development is seen not as the product of an accumulation of facts but as being driven by the child's own interactions with the physical and social world' (p34).

Negroponte (1995) suggests that the limited impact that television has had in assisting learning in school is because the control has been kept by the teacher. He maintains that the learning potential of the computer cannot be similarly held back; instead children will take a far more active role in their own learning, and thus become empowered. OECD (1994) suggest that the role of teachers will have to change from being that of a source and controller of information to one of an adviser and 'gatekeeper' of information:

Indeed if schools do not make use of the new technologies in this everyday way, young people will become alienated from their educational provision because they will find it more and more irrelevant to their daily life. (p.219)

Schools are being encouraged to include computer work in the form of Information Technology (IT) as an integral part of school life. Part of the OFSTED inspectors' task is to encourage a wider and more integral use of technology in the classroom but achievement of the aims seem a long way off:

the development and support of pupils' IT capability depends on the commitment and expertise of too few staff in schools. The needs of such staff for training in teaching and assessing IT are rarely met. (OFSTED, 1995b)

Plewis and Veltman (1996) compared the experiences of children in the early years of schooling (Key Stage 1) in 1985 to that in 1993 after the implementation of the NC. Science, including technology was incorporated as a core subject, a move the government had announced towards a more scientific and technological curriculum in order to give children powerful skills for their future working lives. Plewis and Veltman, defining the scientific curriculum as science, technology and maths, did find that about a quarter of the timetable was spent on scientific activities, but most of this time was maths work; they estimated that pupils spent four times as much time doing maths as they did science. In the activities of art, craft and construction the total time spent was 11 per cent compared with 1985 (21per cent), half of the time was spent drawing crayoning and tracing as it was in 1985. They found that: 'Certainly, there was
no evidence of a shift towards activities of a more technological nature over the
period.’ (p.9) They observed that pupils spent less than two minutes a day on all
computer work and point out that the Dearing Report (1996) has recommended
that nine minutes a day are taken up by information technology within other
subjects: ‘This would represent a considerable increase over our observation of
less than two minutes a day for all computer work.’ (p.15)

Many teachers, particularly in primary schools, have embraced computer
technology recognising the degree and types of learning that the computer
enables to take place. This can be in the form of co-operative learning thus
learning together; sharing learned experiences and social learning by the use of
small groups and paired work. The pupils talk to each other about what is being
learned; they are involved. Another consideration is that the computer allows
failure without making accusations about the ability of the operator. The
operators do not have to accept mistakes as their fault. Instead in individual and,
more importantly, in small group situations the computer can take the blame for
making mistakes and so no damage to the self-esteem of individuals in the group
is caused. (Underwood and Underwood, 1990). Co-operative learning has been
seen to improve self-esteem and additionally to encourage pupils of different
ethnic backgrounds and abilities to mix more together. (Slavin, 1990)

The government’s emphasis on computer work in schools, referred to as
Information Computer Technology (ICT) is mainly text based and the ideas for
believes that computer use in school can be particularly exciting. Children can
be active learners discussing and solving problems in a co-operative learning
environment:

They [computers] should serve children as instrument to work with and to think
with, as a means to carry out projects, the source of concepts to think new ideas.
The last thing in the world I wanted or need was a drill and practice programme
telling me do this sum next or spell that word, why should we impose such a
thing on children? (p.168)

Some teachers have appeared unwilling to introduce the computer as a major
means of learning (Selwyn, 1999). Selwyn says that reasons such as a
combination of lack of technical skills of teachers, a lack of resources (teachers
cannot satisfy the need of 30 pupils with one computer), a lack of relevant
software for their subjects, lack of physical space, the organisation of the
secondary school curriculum and so on can be given but do not fully explain their
reluctance. Newspaper reports have highlighted a supposed lack of teachers’
technological skills so that, when its uses are not fully understood, teachers may feel threatened and vulnerable.

.... Using a computer, as a tool is likely to disenfranchise a traditional teacher whose place in the pecking order of school is easily lost (Sunday Times, 4 December 1994)

Thus, teachers because of their own insecurities may in fact be condoning the views of those who wish to keep the status quo of society in place.

6.9 Teachers and the new literacies

In the methodology chapter I gave the reasons for including a teacher questionnaire as a part of this study. The questionnaire was given to Year 9 subject teachers across the curriculum, except PE, in an attempt to discover ways in which they organised their lessons and how they used television, radio, the computer or the other forms of literacy. The questionnaire was returned by 81.5 per cent of the teachers, (88 from 108)

A breakdown of the lesson activities in Figure 6.1 shows the frequency of question and answer, written work, oral work and practical work. Thus question and answer activities are present in 88 per cent of lessons, oral work (which may be in addition to the question and answer period or included in it) is present in 82 per cent of lessons, written work is an element in 81 per cent of lessons whilst practical work is to be found in 51 per cent of lessons.

Figure 6.1: Frequency of lesson activities

Figures 6.2 - 6.5 illustrate the amounts of time taken up by individual and group work, question and answer, written oral and practical work. Individual work occurs more frequently during lessons than does group work. Figure 6.2 shows
that in these secondary school classrooms the pupils work individually for 72 per cent of the time.

![Individual vs. Group Work](image)

**Figure 6.2: Lessons working individually or in groups**

Most lessons (88 per cent Fig.6.1) include an element of question and answer and Figure 6.3 shows that in 83 per cent of lessons question and answer take up less than half the lesson.

![Amount of lesson taken up by question and answer time](image)

**Figure 6.3: Amount of lesson taken up by question and answer time**

In 81 per cent of lessons (Fig.6.1) there is an element of written work and, as shown in Figure 6.4, this took up over half of the lesson time in 55 per cent of lessons.
Figure 6.4: Amount of lesson taken up by written work

**Figure 6.5** shows that oral work is a part of most lessons (82 per cent, Fig.6.1) and in 68 per cent of lessons this took up less than half the lesson compared with 32 per cent of lessons taking up more than half the lesson.

Figure 6.5: Amount of lesson taken up by oral work

The amounts of practical work in lessons are shown in **Figure 6.6**. Practical work was included in 51 per cent of lessons (Fig.6.1). The percentage was higher in Science, technology and maths; in these subjects 64 per cent of lessons included an element of practical work whereas in English, RE and history 23 per cent of lessons included practical work. **Figure 6.7** shows that in 57 per cent of lessons practical work took up more than half the lesson.
Figure 6.6: Practical work in Humanities and Science

Figure 6.7: Amount of lesson taken up by practical work
When pupils work in groups (42 per cent of lessons), the pupils are more likely to be working together orally or at a practical task than at a written task; Figure 6.8 shows the amounts of time spent on these activities: (38 per cent oral, 28 per cent written, 51 per cent practical)

Figure 6.8: Amount of group work time in lessons spent on oral, written or practical work
Thus pupils find that most of the time written work is an individual task, 72 per cent of the time pupils work individually, (Fig. 6.2). This is consistent with curriculum assessment requirements and with teacher management of time and ways of assessing. The pupil may complete oral and practical tasks well but it is the written work that will be assessed and thus the pupil’s performance is judged on the standard of the written piece of work.

When written work is part of a lesson, textbooks are used in 57 per cent of lessons; worksheets in 46 per cent of lessons, (the overlap may be the result of teachers using both textbooks and worksheets in a lesson). Video films are used in 27 per cent of lessons whilst radio and audio tapes are used in 21 per cent of lessons and computers and Information Technology used in 23 per cent of lessons; the amounts of time these are utilised are not made clear by the questionnaire results, and thus it could be that these aids are used for a whole lesson or 5 minutes. Figure 6.9 shows the uses made of different types of lesson learning aids. Printed materials are used the most, almost three times as much as videos (including television programmes), radio and other audiotapes and the computer. The results of this small-scale survey are quite clear in this respect: classroom activities and classroom learning are centred on the written word whilst the newer technologies take up relatively little of the time available.. There is confirmation too that the format of lessons is largely as I have observed thus lessons usually begin with question and answer then move to pupil written work (See Woods (1990) 6.5) and Sleeter, (1987) (see Sections 6.5 and 5.5.2).
When the teachers are asked about the tasks set for homework the responses show that 78 per cent of homework set is a written task; when the task is not a written task it tends to be a reading task or a mixture of the 2 literacy aspects. (Figure 6.10). Thus written homework is 3 times higher than reading homework set and twice the amount of both reading and written set homework. These percentages reaffirm the assessment procedures used in school, written work individually completed will be given a mark that contributes to the pupils' overall assessment in the subject.

![Homework Graph](image)

**Figure 6.10: Homework**

This government has pledged to improve literacy in schools; it accepts that although business has been transformed by new technology 'education has only been marginally affected' (DfEE 1997a 4.16). Recognising that: 'we cannot prepare our children for the world of tomorrow with yesterdays technologies' (4.16) it declares that: 'we must modernise comprehensive secondary education and open up access to new technologies for all.' (DfEE July 1997a p.37)

6.10 **A time of change? Literacy for the 21st century**

As I have attempted to show in this chapter, the term literacy encompasses a multiplicity of skills and, as the newer technologies continue to necessitate changes in work and the workplace, a variety of modes and tools for learning are needed to equip the new worker with the requisite skills. Thus one might expect that the school curriculum and the post school environment would include the development of this width of skills. A definition of the term 'literacy' thus includes all aspects of communication that are available in the
modern world in order to increase awareness and an understanding of that world. However the government has increased the more mechanistic aspects of literacy acquisition, focusing particularly on phonic skills acquisition to aid the decoding of words. The National Literacy Project confirms that (1997b, see Section 6.5) ‘literacy is defined simply as the ability to read and write’ (p.45). The Prime Minister is confident that phonics is the key to early literacy. At a literacy conference he said, ‘we know that phonics is crucial in the early years of schooling.’ The Chief Inspector of schools speaking at the same conference castigates the teaching profession for not teaching phonics to children, he said that teachers are ‘trained to believe phonics is the work of the devil’ (Radio 4 News, 7th December 1998). This may imply that the aim is for the whole population to be functionally literate and while this may appear to be a more realistic and practical goal, the crucial aspects of literacy, that is the development of critical faculties using literacy to make sense of their world (Freire and Macedo, 1987) are not mentioned.

The new technologies are mentioned only once in the National Literacy Strategy (DfEE 1997b) as part of a planned OFSTED study of secondary schools. OFSTED are asked to analyse ten areas of which the tenth analysis is to be: ‘the contribution to literacy made by the use of information and communication technology’ (p. 39). It would appear then that literacy, as defined by the decision makers of school policy, consists of reading and writing and that these two skills are to be the route to learning. Thus any computer skills acquired are to be focused on the improvement of the two skills. Policy makers rarely mention television, the other part of the technological revolution, which is part of the everyday lives of most people in this country. When television is referred to it is usually in a negative manner.

6.11 Conclusion

Defining literacy is a complicated business. What soon becomes apparent is that the term literacy should not simply be confined to the skills of reading and writing but, in modern society, must take on a much wider meaning. Literacy has social, cultural, political and technological aspects. Depending on how it is used it is an extremely powerful tool or weapon. Most high status and financially rewarding careers demand a high level of reading and writing skills and thus the traditional reading and writing aspects of literacy are crucial to those who hold the powerful positions. The power of literacy remains at present in the hands of the traditionally powerful. The computer, the power force of the future,
is being developed with an emphasis on the written word and is thus is an agent in aiding the retention of power.

Intelligence in our society is often measured by the amount of success in the two skills of reading and writing. Other forms of intelligence as suggested by Gardner (1983) are not utilised and the newer technologies have not as yet been harnessed to provide pupils with alternative routes to success.

The influence of the pupil's family background in the development of traditional literacy skills cannot be ignored: poor literacy performance is associated with unskilled manual backgrounds (Ekinsmyth and Bynner 1994), whether the pupil rejects or conforms to the school values. (Willis, 1977). Additionally the social background of children is seen to affect the expectations of teachers for children even from the earliest years. (Feiler and Webster, 1998, Blatchford et al 1989).

The control of literacy development in schools does not rest with learners or teachers but with the outside pressures with which the teacher has to conform. Two of the constraints appear to be: firstly, pressures of the curriculum which has to be covered for the exam syllabus (teachers quoted in this study believed that the NC demands more written work from the pupils than previously) and secondly teachers especially with the lower groups, feel that they have more control and discipline when their pupils are working quietly at individual written tasks. Allied to this is the lack of relevance of content of the literacies to some pupils; seldom are pupils allowed to bring to the classroom their own interests from the world outside school that could stimulate interest and increase learning. The small-scale survey I completed shows that teachers continue to rely on printed materials far and above any other medium and will continue to do so to satisfy the demands of policy makers.

The power of traditional literacy has not diminished in formal education, even with the rapid growth of technology and other media through which learning can take place. While society outside the school gates is using developing and manipulating other forms of literacy, schools are required to put more emphasis on text and text-based communications. Instead 'basic' skills are seen as the minimum levels in reading and writing required to perform fundamental societal tasks; the learning tools that our technological society provides—radio, television problem solving by computer as well as communication orally, are downgraded in schools. The primary literacy hour is an example of this emphasis on the written word; equally the secondary school curriculum relies heavily on the written word to impart knowledge, assess knowledge and to organise and control large numbers of pupils. The present
government and the previous government appear to place more importance on a 'back to basics' utilitarian or functional form of literacy using a reading and writing route to learning.

Present society can provide successful professional careers for the *text-based* literates, those who have acquired certain standards in school literacy. When this level of skills has been attained (and this appears to be at approximately level 4 or a reading age of 11) then the secondary school curriculum can be accessed and progress made. The young person can then move onwards and upwards, able to use a degree of critical literacy (Hoggart, 1998, Robinson, 1974) and thus acquiring more literacy and other knowledge and skills through for example the use of the computer and other media. Young people who achieve at the level of functional literacy at school find that barriers are in place for any future success. For example some young people with low levels of traditional literacy having acquired the belief that they are not very able may lack the confidence to approach the keyboard and so deny themselves an avenue of opportunity that could provide them with life long learning. Instead at the end of compulsory schooling they may discard all school learning and, if the computer has been presented to them solely by a text based route, they may discard the computer also as being irrelevant to their future life styles.

This chapter has also emphasised that 'literacy education is essentially a political process' (Tett and Crowther, 1998) and that society ensures that 'the level of literacy we accept for the bulk of the population (...) becomes simply a way of further subordinating great numbers of people' (Hoggart p.59). There is a clear comparison with the struggling would-be literates of the 19th century who were taught only as much literacy, reading and writing, as was thought necessary by those with power, with those of today. The acquisition of critical literacy for all members of society can be seen as a threat to the fabric of society for just as in the 19th century certain sections of current society 'could learn to despise their lot in life (...) to which their rank in society had destined them'; and that instead of 'teaching them subordination', it would 'render them factious and refractory'. (Simon, 1960, see Section 6.5)
Part III

Part III which consists of Chapters 7, 8, 9 is focused upon the groups of young people – the main group who were aged between 18 and 19 years at the time of interview and the Year 9 groups age 14 plus. Chapter 7 is concerned with the data obtained from the main group:
• when they were age 11 (results of the screening Group Literacy Test Appendix 3
• when they were 14 and re-tested on the GLA and given the short questionnaireappendix1
• the results of their GCSE examinations
• their situations at the time of interview
In Chapters 8 and 9 I use material from the interviews with the main group and the Year 9 groups (Chapter8) to discuss and develop the main themes which are the subject of the final part, Part IV of the study

CHAPTER 7: THE LITERACY BACKGROUND AND PROFILES OF THE MAIN GROUP OF YOUNG PEOPLE

7.1 Introduction

The emphasis of this chapter is on the main group of young people and on standards achieved in the GLA literacy tests. Chapter 5, Methodology, has described how the young people were initially identified. This chapter has as its focus the young people’s questionnaires, and the initial results of GLA and the results of re-testing when they were 14. Some profile information is included, GCSE results and status at the time of interview. Further profile information is contained in Appendix 9.

The previous and present governments have become involved increasingly in literacy policies in schools. The 1981 Education Act (DES) reinforced the Warnock report’s (1978) recommendation that a reading age (RA) of 28 months below the chronological age (CA) shows the need for special educational provision. The C minus group (RA 9.1 – 10.0) does not then qualify for such help. However this cut off point is an arbitrary one (Galloway 1985, NARE Guidelines 1985). In Chapter 5 (Section5.5), it was pointed out that whilst the majority of those in the D category (11.2 per cent) should qualify for extra help at secondary school those in category C would probably not be regarded as needing extra help. However a further breakdown of the data provided by the GLA in Table7.1 shows that a further 10.4 per cent would need extra provision if they were expected to cope with materials with a readability level of between 10 and 11 years. The C plus group could also be included, as their reading ages (10.1 –10.5 years) would only just enable them to cope with
secondary school work. Thus the total of pupils who may need some extra assistance would be 30.7 per cent.

7.2 Literacy test results: main group at 11

The introduction of the NC brought in with it the inclusion of national tests for literacy at the end of KS2 (11 years) so that the results both for children and school standards are comparable. The Labour government in 1997 set literacy targets for children so that 'By 2002 80% of all 11 year olds will reach the standards expected of their age in English (i.e. Level 4)' (2:21) thus implicitly recognising that the secondary school curriculum requires this standard in order to access future learning. If the results of the GLA were used to determine the RA of pupils at the end of Key Stage 2 (11 years) then a percentage of children who were in the B category would, as far as the government are concerned, possibly have inadequate literacy skills in some of their secondary school work. Of the 116 children assessed as being in the B category (RA 10.6 to 13.0), 18 pupils scored between the reading ages of 10.6 and 11, 15.5 per cent of the B group category and described in table 7.1 as the ‘C++’ category. From a total of 241 children 112 had a RA of less than 11 years. Thus by using the categories set by the GLA and the standards expected by government 38.2 per cent of the children assessed in my MA study would be expected to have some literacy difficulties in secondary school.

Table 7.1: Percentage of pupils with a RA of less than 11 years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Reading Age</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C++</td>
<td>10.6 - 11.00</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>10.1 - 10.5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>9.1 - 10.0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>7.4 - 9.0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Moore (1998) most secondary school have 30 per cent of pupils in Year 7 with reading ages 2 years below their chronological age; furthermore only those pupils with RA of 8.5 or below qualify for a statement and thus are guaranteed extra help. He maintains that pupils who are at the greatest risk of exclusion from school are those with a reading age of above 8.5 and cut off from secondary school support. He says that those pupils with RA 8.5-10 years have to tackle secondary texts of 14.5 RA difficulty. Pupils scoring
these reading ages in tests are the ones that I have identified also as being 'at the most risk'.

A further problem, which has been recognised, is the use of testing to recognise and judge a child's ability levels. The National Literacy Project acknowledges that 'a number of those who responded to our interim reports expressed doubts about the use of Key Stage 2 NC tests but none provided a better alternative' (3: p.13). Other problems about testing become apparent such as whether tests reflect the actual ability of the child; whether the tests which are relative to standards set nationally could or should change as standards improve and lastly the question arises as to who should set the requirements for literacy standards in a rapidly changing work environment.

7.3 Meeting the main group of young people at 14

However, using the results of my MA study, I believed that the C group particularly the C minus group would be the most vulnerable in the secondary school. They would continue to be in the 'grey' area, as they would probably not be designated any extra provision, having neither poor enough skills to merit extra provision nor having enough skills to make solid progress in the curriculum. When the pupils were in Year 9 I contacted the 3 secondary schools that the majority of children from the 7 primary schools involved in the project had transferred to and asked to see those pupils, by name, who had been in the C minus category at primary school. In the event, because of school organisation, I also met pupils who had scored in the C plus category and some from the D category. Some of the C minus pupils had not transferred to the three secondary schools that formed part of the study. Thus it was that the groups that I met in the three secondary schools when they were 14 years old formed the basis of this for interview at 18—19 years old.

Table number 7.2 gives the results of the GLA (Spooncer, 1981 see Section 5.5) for the main group when they were aged 11 and again when they were 14. As the GLA is an assessment designed for use with pupils between the ages of 10 and 12 years, at the time of school transfer, the results that each young person obtained at approximately 14 years of age can only be seen as indicative. From Table 7.2 it can be seen that in their last year at primary school the young people scored mainly in the C category of the GLA (reading age 9.1-10.5), which implies that at secondary school they would be 'in need of help to become competent' and would probably be 'at risk' as the secondary school curriculum demands of subject specialist vocabularies and increased amounts of written work began to take their toll.
Table 7.2: Results of the GLA when the main group were first in Year 6 (11+) then in Year 9 (14)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>primary school</th>
<th>secondary school</th>
<th>improvement in R.A.</th>
<th>level of progress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C.A.</td>
<td>R.A.</td>
<td>CATEGOR</td>
<td>C.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANDREW</td>
<td>10y 6m</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>C-</td>
<td>14y 2m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BARRY</td>
<td>11y 1m</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>C-</td>
<td>14y 10m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CATHERINE</td>
<td>10y 6m</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>C-</td>
<td>14y 2m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHRIS</td>
<td>10y 11m</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>C-</td>
<td>14y 8m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DARREN</td>
<td>11y 0m</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>C-</td>
<td>14y 9m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAVID</td>
<td>10y 8m</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>C-</td>
<td>14y 4m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEBBIE</td>
<td>11y 0m</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>14y 9m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JANE</td>
<td>10y 7m</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>C-</td>
<td>14y 5m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JOHN</td>
<td>11y 0m</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>C-</td>
<td>14y 9m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KEITH</td>
<td>10y 8m</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>14y 5m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOUISE</td>
<td>11y 1m</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>C+</td>
<td>14y 11m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MARK</td>
<td>10y 11m</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>C+</td>
<td>14y 5m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MICHAEL</td>
<td>10y 11m</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>C-</td>
<td>14y 7m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAM</td>
<td>11y 5m</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>14y 2m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PETER</td>
<td>11y 0m</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>D-</td>
<td>14y 9m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SALLY</td>
<td>10y 7m</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>C-</td>
<td>14y 5m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SARAH</td>
<td>11y 2m</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>C-</td>
<td>14y 11m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIMON</td>
<td>10y 7m</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>C-</td>
<td>14y 3m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEPHEN</td>
<td>10y 8m</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>C-</td>
<td>14y 6m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRACEY</td>
<td>11y 0m</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>C-</td>
<td>14y 9m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VALERIE</td>
<td>11y 4m</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>C-</td>
<td>15y 1m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VICKY</td>
<td>10y7m</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>C+</td>
<td>14y 3m</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The young people in the C- group (the category that the MA study defined and highlighted) and the high end of the D category are above a year behind in their reading age compared with their chronological age whilst those in the C+ category are slightly less than a year behind in their reading age. The results of the GLA when they were 14 years of age in Year 9, having been at secondary school for three years, show a wider gap between the reading age and the chronological age to between two or three years and in several cases almost a four year gap.

Despite the reservations expressed above, several points can be raised which are relevant. First, as suggested by my MA study and recently stated by
government (DfEE, 1997a), many teachers in secondary schools do not have the expertise to teach and develop reading skills. Second, as indicated in my earlier study, text materials presented to Year 7 pupils (11 years) were often of a readability level of age 11 and higher, and therefore largely inaccessible for those with reading ages of less than 11 years. Third, the section of the previous chapter (6.8, Teachers and the use of literacy) showed that the teacher respondents used text based materials to a much greater extent than any other tool for learning (apart from themselves); these young people’s literacy levels had not been improved by maximum exposure to text based materials. Fourthly secondary school organisation of pupils into streams, sets banding or mixed ability situations may influence progress and lastly, connected with the previous point, the experiences of the pupils themselves in the secondary schools can influence their attitudes towards literacy and affect the development of ‘self’, as the next chapter demonstrates.

7.4 The main group of young people: at 14, their GCSE results and their situations at the time of interview.

As the school and work experiences of the main group of young people begin to unfold it is appropriate here to include profiles to each of the informants. Some information is gathered from the questionnaire administered to them when they were in year 9 (14-15 years) old (Appendix 1, some from my field notes, the GCSE results from school or college and the remainder, the major part from the interviews. As agreed with the young people all their names have been changed to ensure anonymity. Table 7.3 indicates the plans that they had when they were 14, Table 7.4 shows their GCSE results and Table 7.5 indicates what they were doing at the time of interview and their future plans.

When they were 14 the young people of the main group appeared to be making sensible plans for their futures. Their expectations for future study or work after their GCSE courses appear to be realistic; they are not aiming for areas of work that are obviously going to be impossible to enter. Of all the young people Jane appears to be the only one that will have difficulties completing her chosen route to employment for teachers, especially, need strong traditional literacy skills. Those planning to go straight into work after leaving school do not appear to have set ambitious targets for themselves in face their aims appear un-adventurous apart from perhaps Sarah who wished to work ‘in computers’. The rest of the young people expressed plans of carrying on their studies at Further Education College. The area in which the young people live is served by one Tertiary College that offers the widest number of courses of all the near local
colleges and again their courses of study do not seem to be unrealistic. At this stage of their school lives they had not received any individual careers advice.

Table 7.3: Subjects most enjoyed at 14 years and plans for after school: data from questionnaires at 14, Appendix 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Subject most enjoyed</th>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Job?</th>
<th>College?</th>
<th>To study?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andrew</td>
<td>Art</td>
<td>can draw quite well</td>
<td>yes,</td>
<td>unsure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barry</td>
<td>CDT</td>
<td>likes making things</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>CDT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catherine</td>
<td>Drama</td>
<td>enjoys it</td>
<td>yes,</td>
<td>unsure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>Drama</td>
<td>enjoys acting</td>
<td>yes,</td>
<td>unsure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darren</td>
<td>CDT</td>
<td></td>
<td>yes, work</td>
<td>with Dad</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>HE</td>
<td></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>cookery</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debbie</td>
<td>Business studies</td>
<td>enjoys computer</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>secretary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Drama</td>
<td>likes teacher, work</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>school teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Art</td>
<td>work more freely</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keith</td>
<td>HE</td>
<td>likes cooking</td>
<td>yes, truck</td>
<td>driver</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louise</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>likes reading</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>computers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>Drama</td>
<td>good at it</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>PE</td>
<td>fun, sporty</td>
<td>Yes, math</td>
<td>Art</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pam</td>
<td>Art, Graphics</td>
<td>likes drawing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>PE, cooking</td>
<td>likes sport, cooking</td>
<td>yes, brick</td>
<td>layer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>Drama</td>
<td>likes practical</td>
<td>yes, hair</td>
<td>dresser</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Business Studies</td>
<td></td>
<td>yes comp</td>
<td>uters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon</td>
<td>CDT</td>
<td>likes making things</td>
<td>yes, Art,</td>
<td>CDT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen</td>
<td>HE, Business Studies</td>
<td>good</td>
<td>yes, HE,</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracey</td>
<td>Drama</td>
<td>likes acting, organising</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>nursing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valerie</td>
<td>HE</td>
<td>likes cookery</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>nanny</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicki</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>likes practicals</td>
<td>yes, make</td>
<td>up artist</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7.3 also shows the subjects that they enjoyed when they were in Year 9; it is noticeable that most choose subjects in which other skills, apart from those of reading and writing, can be demonstrated.

When they were 14 the main group appeared not to realise that several C grades at GCSE needed to be obtained if they were to get on a higher education route towards employment. Most of them were not aiming for higher education; instead they planned a more skill based training route or were determined to find employment. The grades they obtained D-G would enable them to get on
Foundation level courses (GNVQ and NVQ). Their GCSE results in the event prevented many of them from following their chosen routes.

Table 7.4: The GCSE results obtained by the main group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eng.</th>
<th>math</th>
<th>science</th>
<th>Other subjects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andrew</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>U</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barry</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catherine</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>DOUBLE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darren</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>DOUBLE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>DOUBLE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debbie</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>DOUBLE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>DOUBLE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>DOUBLE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keith</td>
<td>none taken</td>
<td>none taken</td>
<td>none taken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louise</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>none taken</td>
<td>none taken</td>
<td>none taken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pam</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>U</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>U</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>U</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracey</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valerie</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>DOUBLE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicki</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>DOUBLE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of those who had taken Drama most found this to be their ‘best result’ with a C or D grade; unfortunately Drama is not counted as an ‘English’ pass. Two young people, however found that their level of passes enabled them to get...
onto A level courses. Catherine with her Double Science result which counts as 2 C grades together with Drama and CDT was able to move onto follow 2 A level courses with the provision that by the end of the first year she would have retaken and passed her English GCSE. Pam also needed to retake English even though she exceeded all her expectations in GCSE obtaining a total of 8 subjects at C grade or above and included an A in Art; although at 14 she had planned to follow her love of Art at College she opted for perhaps to her the more sensible route of Science. These two young people, Catherine and Pam, could be said to be from the middle class or in Pam's case, part of the 'aspiring working class'. Her parents are very ambitious for her, coming from China to relatives who own a restaurant, for the purpose of getting the best education they could for their two children. Catherine's father works for social services at a middle level, and according to Catherine, he wants her to go to university.

7.5 Profiles of the main group

Most of the young people found themselves on a Youth Training (YT) course, a Foundation course or a pre-vocational course or they were unemployed. In Chapter 9 I discuss their situations and their future plans, by an examination of the data. Table 7.5 gives some indication of what was happening in the work environment of the young people two to three years after they had left school. Further details of the young people their family backgrounds and their situations at the time of interview are to be found in Appendix 9.
Table 7.5 Profiles of the main group of young people at the time of interview when they were 18-19 years old

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Post-school education or training</th>
<th>Status after 2 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andrew</td>
<td>2 years YT in joinery, carpentry</td>
<td>Insecure, hopes for job with YT employer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barry</td>
<td>6 mths with model making co. (closed down)</td>
<td>unemployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catherin</td>
<td>2 yrs A-level</td>
<td>taking year out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>casual temporary work</td>
<td>unemployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darren</td>
<td>gardening, cleaning contracts with father</td>
<td>continues working with father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>1yr YT in motor repairs, difficulties during 2nd yr.</td>
<td>part time tyre fitter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debbie</td>
<td>1yr YT CGL1, PVC. 1yr placement in Day Centre</td>
<td>Insecure; hoping for work at Day Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>left BTec Caring' course, several jobs in shops</td>
<td>YT, part time NVQ working with children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>left PVC engineering course,</td>
<td>completed 1 yr. of car mechanic apprenticeship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keith</td>
<td>unemployed</td>
<td>unemployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louise</td>
<td>lost YT office placement after 7 months</td>
<td>Completed 2nd YT office placement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>CG LI PVC course, completed BTEC First course</td>
<td>Insecure hoping to continue at college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>left school at 15, job with electronics company</td>
<td>completing 2nd year plumbing apprenticeship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pam</td>
<td>2 years A-level</td>
<td>hoping to go to university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>several jobs in shops</td>
<td>unemployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>office work redundant after 2 years</td>
<td>office work in large chain garages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>1yr YT CGL1, PVC. 1Yr placement in Day Centre Day centre or residential work</td>
<td>Insecure; hoping for work at Day Centre or residential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon</td>
<td>1 yr. YT PVC engineering, 1 yr BTec</td>
<td>working on market stall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen</td>
<td>left YT mechanics course,</td>
<td>unemployed, hoping to become musician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracey</td>
<td>2 yr. YT course (PVC and BTec First in Caring)</td>
<td>Insecure, hopes to continue course works part-time in Chemists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valerie</td>
<td>left PVC course in Caring</td>
<td>works on check out in Supermarket</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicki</td>
<td>completed 2 years BTec PVC and First in Caring</td>
<td>Insecure; hopes to continue with full time courses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary

This group of young people experienced literacy problems during their primary school years. Once they were at secondary school their literacy standards balanced against their age went down. By ‘not making the grade’ that is in obtaining the elusive GCSE C grades, they find themselves unable to get on to a more structured pathway towards adulthood.
Chapter 8: Discussion of data: the young people's experiences of literacy in school

The information gathered in Chapter 7 begins to illustrate how a lack of literacy skills affected these young people during their school years and the implications this held for their lives after school.

The next two chapters focus in some detail on the data obtained from interviews with the main group and the Year 9 groups. By doing so the study, using the grounded theory process explained in the methodology, moves from open coding towards the development of themes.

8.1 Introduction

In this chapter the views of the main group of young people on their school experiences as seen in relation to their perceived lack of literacy skills are presented. The sections of the chapter are concerned with school factors that have influenced the main group of individuals in this study in the shaping of their identities. Material obtained from the Year 9 groups is used to complement or contrast with the main group experiences. The school experiences are explored using the data from interviews and the conversations that took place are printed in italics. A purpose of this chapter is to examine the effects on young people with a lack of proficiency in literacy skills during school years so that part of the main question of the study finds answers:

How does a lack of proficiency in literacy skills affect the lives of young people both during their school year and afterwards?

The interviews were held 2 to 3 years after the main group had left school. Thus the experiences they speak of are reflective and retrospective. The data from the groups of Year 9 pupils were obtained by means of interview and a questionnaire is included to identify similarities or differences in their experiences compared with the older group. The Year 9 groups describe and discuss the school experiences that they were currently experiencing in school. Initially, as explained in the methodology chapter, the framework of questioning prepared before the interviews was considered and 'reflections' made. Gradually, as new interviews progressed the data included more discussion areas than the initial framework contained. Excerpts from the interviews are included in italics and are of a length to include whole units of meaning and also aim to give an illustration of the manner in which the interviews were conducted.
8.2 Early experiences

For some of the young people in the main group particular problems played a large part in their lack of progress in their early school lives. For example, Pam was learning English having spoken Cantonese at home, Catherine was having problems later to be diagnosed as dyslexic difficulties, Louise had behavioural problems, and Michael’s home life, with a violent, alcoholic father was so frightening that the acquisition of reading and writing skills was not high on his priority list. Keith not only had the difficulties of a cleft palate to contend with but also with family disintegration which had left him as a small child in the care of a loving but drug addicted alcoholic father. Others’ problems were of a more obvious physical nature, especially hearing and sight, and whilst in this study it has been impossible to make an in-depth analysis of early physical sensory or social difficulties, the implications are that early problems of any kind can affect learning development and have far reaching effects. For instance Mark, who had four operations on his eyes whilst at junior school and needed to wear glasses, also had hearing problems and difficulties in the classroom:

Mark: at first I refused to wear them as I felt stupid and that but as the year went on I began to wear them but you always get name calling so you stop wearing them and you have to strain to read (...) I spent a few times in hospital as well, for the ears, they used to get infected and blocked up so I couldn’t hear properly, it was like glue
VM: so did you have a lot of time off at junior school?
Mark: no, not a lot it was hard going back to school with the ear still gungy trying to listen and sit down and do the work
VM: do you think that it affected your work?
Mark: yeah it did, something must have I mean at school it was with my hearing, it must have affected my concentration, because I could never concentrate for more than five minutes

Before Valerie’s eyesight problems were diagnosed she copied most of her work from a friend, and even when the problem was rectified she continued the habit at secondary school. She refused to wear her glasses because of the fear of being taunted by her peer group. She was aware that the strategies she used to get her work completed would have consequences that were not always to her advantage:

Valerie: when I was at junior school I had bad eyesight (...) so my mum told me to sit at the front of the classroom, then they sent to an opticians from school, that was when I was in the fourth year [Yr6]
VM: do you think that put you off reading at all?
Valerie: well I couldn't see the board I was copying other children as even when I went up to senior school I wouldn't wear them because everyone used to take the Mickey out of me so when it used to come to blackboard work I was copying my next door neighbour (...) and I was getting her answers as well

VM: so that must have affected your work at school
Valerie: yeah especially English because English work was all off the blackboard

We begin to get an insight of how these pupils spent their time in secondary school. Much of the time appears to be spent reading and writing, activities which are consistent with the teacher questionnaire results that are shown in Chapter7. Valerie assumes that this is what being in school is all about, that learning in school consists of reading from the board or book then answering questions of copying information into exercise books.

Some of the young people believe that they lacked specialised individual help at junior school, which is where they felt this type of special help should be focused, because at secondary school to be 'singled out' signifies a difference from the peer group. The emerging adolescent does not wish to signal any differences to the group; to be part of the group and accepted by the group is very important:

David: if you're very young you can get away with individual help and I don't think you'd be ruled out very much I mean you would be slightly but not a lot because the other kids would be that young they wouldn't understand

Stephen and several other young people felt embarrassed in primary and secondary school when they had to read aloud in class:

Stephen: oh yeah really, I mean my teachers at [secondary school] and [primary school] used to, we used to take it in turns like reading standing up and I used to try and get out of it; cos like its what your classmates say and everything like that, you get stick, but now I just don't care [laughs] if they give me stick they give me stick

During the later primary years all the young people began to be aware of their lack of proficiency in the area of reading and writing compared with the levels achieved by their peer group. They recognise the importance of their junior school experiences and realise that success at secondary school depends to a large extent on the amount of success acquired at junior school. Once they have moved into secondary school the situation changes in many respects, not least in what their friends will think of them if they 'can't read'; particularly as they were approaching the period of adolescence and did not want to be seen as
‘different’ from their peer group. To be singled out for extra help in the secondary school for example in ‘special needs’ classes appears to put a stigma on them. They worry about the attitude of their peer group and how they will be regarded if they are seen to have difficulties in this area.

The different organisation in secondary school and the recognition by schools that the secondary school emphasis is using the previously acquired reading skills to make learning progress in the NC (reading to learn see Chapter 3) meant that for some, assistance with learning to read was less helpful:

Peter: *when I was at junior school I used to like reading all the books but I went off it as soon as I went in to G. [the secondary school], and that's when I made my mistake like reading I just stopped completely I don't know why I just stopped (...) at [secondary school] you didn't get individual help it was just the whole class getting help at the same time and it wasn't as good*

Although Peter recognises that he was not getting the focused individual help that he knew he needed, he takes upon himself the responsibility for his lack of progress in this area.

8.3 Early secondary school: the ‘setting’ experience

Like most 11 year olds, these young people looked forward to going to secondary school with both pleasure and apprehension. When pupils are transferred from junior school to secondary school they are often organised into groups using the results of assessments in literacy, numeracy and tests of intelligence as part of or in addition to their NC assessments. (Chapter 3)

Sometime during the first year, the entire main group experienced ‘setting’ as part of the school organisation, more commonly at this stage for English and maths. The results of Group Literacy Assessments, taken before transfer, were used with other test results to allocate them to these ‘sets’. Later in their time at school some were put into sets for other subjects such as languages and science. The pupils had no choice in the school’s decision as to where they were placed; the school controlled the setting process, defending the decision by the results of tests used. With two exceptions all of them were in what they term the ‘bottom’ set for English. Finding themselves in this situation confirmed the suspicions they had felt about themselves in junior school; their lack of skills in reading and writing meant that they ‘were not very clever’. They then have equated their lack of skills in reading and writing with a supposed lack of ‘intelligence’. Darren says he always had reading problems and he interprets this lack of skill as a lack of intelligence:
Darren: from what I can remember yeah never been too bright (...) but I get along now really I'm all right now (...) but I've always had a bit of a problem with it (laughs) don't really worry me though 'cos I don't really do much writing like I can read books and things (...) car magazines (...) yeah I don't exactly get into a book (laughs)

And so, because of this recognition, their setting placements came as no surprise to them and they accepted the school's decision:

Stephen: oh yeah I was in the bottom sets (laughs) for everything I think
VM: how did you feel about that?
Stephen: erm not too bad really 'cos I knew that I wasn't all that bright but I knew that I wasn't dim basically I was just like half and half. I'm not a brainy person I suppose

By the age of eleven therefore they have realised and have begun to accept their lack of intellectual ability; they equate, as does the school system, reading and writing skills with intelligence. Thus they begin to regard themselves as 'dim', 'a bit stupid' or 'not very bright' 'div' and 'divvy' and rationalised their positions by maintaining that they would not be able to cope in the higher sets. The fact that their friends were with them gave support to some but others developed strategies to cope with their situation and also acquired behaviours that 'kept up appearances with their friends'. The literacy assessment scores in the previous chapter which show that these skills actually regressed during their first three years in secondary school confirm this view, which is also consistent with the Basic Skills Agency research. (Bynner and Steedman, 1995). Their levels of self-esteem are affected when they realise their low status in the school.

Of all the young people in the main group Louise and Catherine are the only ones to have 'got out' of the lowest set. The majority remained in the 'bottom' sets often for other reasons than a lack of ability. Although Tracey felt 'a bit stupid' in the bottom set she had 'learned to cope' but objected to having to stay there for organisational reasons:

Tracey: there was only ten of us in the group and there were twenty in every other group (...) and she [the teacher] didn't have enough people in her class so I had to stay there

Unlike the young people that Blackman (1995) encountered, these young people had earned no rights of negotiation. His young people were in the higher ability sets and it was the level of ability that gave them status and a degree of self-empowerment rather than other influences such as class. They also took strength from their group membership. He had studied two middle class groups,
referred to as 'boffin girls' and 'boffin boys' and two working/lower middle class cultural groups the 'new wave' girls and the 'mod' boys:

(However), a major finding of the study was that the distinguishing marker of all the groups studied, irrespective of their differences, was the common celebration of their pedagogic status and the privileges to which this status gives access. The evidence strongly suggests that status rather than class can be perhaps the more crucial agent in the generation of different forms of behaviour that might be described as showing degrees of resistance and conformity (p.253).

The young people in my study, however, found themselves to be disempowered, having few if any rights of negotiation, or gaining any strength from group membership. Individually acquired strategies helped them to cope with their low school status and low self-esteem.

8.3.1 Year 9 comments

Some Year 9 pupils made similar comments. A Year 9 pupil who did move up a set in Maths missed the time that he would have had on computers as, like most secondary schools, the computer room was timetabled half termly for different groups. Other Year 9 pupils had voiced their feelings about remaining in the low sets, knowing that not much work was achieved and that the rest of the year group treated them as 'divs'.

VM: you're in the same group [for maths] are you? Which set is that?
Colin: lowest
VM: how do you know it's the lowest?
Colin: cos they're all the divs (all laugh) we're in the lowest for History English Maths Science
Stuart: yeah games
Gavin: no we're high in games we're the highest in games

Gavin is anxious to point out that the group does have skills in particular areas even if these have little worth in the school achievement system.

Michael from the main group and Jack from Year 9 saw that there was no chance of any upward movement and actively rejected the system in an obvious and sometimes aggressive manner, Jack saying 'stuff it then'. Michael had by the fourth year (Year 10) rejected the school system and left school. The Year 9 pupils also commented on the unfairness of having to remain in the lowest set, which served to affect their attitude towards the work:

VM: say if you worked really hard
Tony: they don't put you up though
Terry: *there's the same amount in each group (....) they only put people down they never put people up, we've been complaining*

Jack: *like me when I was in the second year I never used to do any work, but then at the beginning of the third year they said if you work you'll get higher, I did work but they still didn't out me up and I thought 'stuff it then', I just couldn't be bothered to do any work*

Colin is angry that he has not been given the opportunity to attempt more difficult work:

Colin: *‘cos I done near enough all the work in my old school its not fair they could just give us a chance up in another group see if we can cope with the work*

Colin confirms evidence that Boaler (1997) has presented, namely that pupils in low sets found the work boring and were annoyed and upset by the low levels of work they were offered.

Year 9 pupils have the same reservations as the main group when asked to read aloud in class; the comments are made so often that it appears that teachers of all subjects continue to ask pupils to read from previously unseen text to the rest of the class. Dan realises that his reading abilities are lower than those of other pupils and was particularly upset at having to show his inadequacies by reading aloud in class:

Dan: *I find it alright but I don't like reading class I mean when I was in the first year the teacher told me to read and I started to say no and that and I nearly burst in to tears I basically didn't cry but I was getting worried and I started taking days off.*

8.3.2: *Low in school hierarchy*

The school organisation of setting made these young people recognise how others perceived them; they recognise that they were low in the school hierarchy as the school did not expect them to be high achievers:

Sally: *yeah put into sets like, the top group the ones which were really brainy, then the people that were average and the people which were poor,(....) but they sort of come out with names like alpha and erm kappa*  
VM: *and you think this was a mask to*  
Sally: *Yeah*  
VM: *did you know what group you were in really?*  
Sally: *Yeah the bottom group*

Some think that the situation of finding themselves in the lowest sets was unfair, as they believe that were not being given the same chances as the other
pupils in the school. Simon, although in school he maintained a positive attitude towards his work, is of the opinion that his placement in Set 4 was unfair. He believes that he was put into the low sets because of his lack of proficiency in reading and writing and that this lack should not have prevented him from attempting the work that others were offered. (see Section 8.15)

Peter however, accepts the situation as being a fair indication of the expectations the school had for the young people in the bottom sets. Although he admits that he 'hung around with the wrong people' and that he lacked concentration in school, he rationalises his behaviour because of his expected lack of achievement that would be obtained from his schooling; it appears also that before he had reached the age of 16 he had decided that he was not on a pathway towards a successful career:

Peter: and it was worse when I started at [secondary school], started hanging around with the wrong people really
VM: oh right
Peter: that's what made me not concentrate enough most of the time, some of the time when they weren't there I'd concentrate but when they came back we'd muck and mess around in class
VM: yeah can you muck around in set 4 easier than you can in other sets do you think?
Peter: yeah you probably can, 'cos its all the people that get put into set threes and twos ones and twos really, I mean they're the ones that've got to concentrate the most, they're the people that want to get somewhere
VM: mm
Peter: they're the people who'll want to get somewhere but I mean I would have liked to get better grades than what I did at school (...) but it was the people I used to hang around with that did it, I weren't concentrating enough, doing enough reading writing and spelling, I used to get told off for not listening

The emotions pull in opposite ways. On the one hand to be in set 4 was 'at the bottom of the heap' therefore bad behaviour is justified and expected; this shows the 'don't care' attitude towards the school establishment and teachers and gains esteem from the friends in the group. On the other hand there is recognition that in the long term the effects on self were negative - the only people going to suffer were themselves. Therefore, some saw that they should not be seen to be a belonging to the group; that it was important to dissociate themselves from the 'bottom set' mentality of bad behaviour and negative attitudes otherwise they too would be labelled as being 'stupid' and disruptive. Catherine felt the stigma of the lower sets because she wasn't with her friends but was with people she didn't want to mix with. She accepted that she would
have to work harder than her friends in order to get recognition for her efforts and to achieve some success:

VM: *how did you feel then?*
Catherine: *I didn't really have any friends in the group so I think maybe I worked harder to get, you know so I didn't have to be with the people that were in it 'cos I didn't really like them and they weren't nice to me* (laughs) *so*
VM: *mm and that helped you, did you feel that you had to work harder or it took you longer to do the work?*
Catherine: *yes, it took me longer to do work than all my friends, I didn't really notice it, it was just something I had to do*
VM: *and you were determined to go to [higher education] college were you, you wanted to go on?*
Catherine: *oh yes, I didn't want to have to work in Sainsbury's* (laughs)

Thus, she is able to laugh about working in a supermarket as her GCSE results enabled her to follow A-level courses at the local tertiary college; her father has a professional job and probably the family expectations were for her to study at a higher level. She had realised, at an early stage of her secondary schooling, that if she stayed in the 'low groups' any future success would be limited.

8.4 Literacy and self esteem- feelings of self worth

Being in low sets appeared to work on the self image in two ways for both groups: on the one hand there was an acceptance that they were 'not clever' and therefore deserved to be in the 'bottom' sets, which gave them a negative view of self; on the other hand they retained some shreds of a positive self image by the behaviours they adopted. Some of them made comments such as 'it didn't bother me' and found coping strategies often taking strength from having the protection of their friends:

Sally: *yeah the bottom group (...) I wasn't really bothered, my friends we in the same class as me, I thought well at least I've still got my company and I knew I wasn't too good at my sciences anyway, I hated them*

Valerie felt the embarrassment of the 'bottom' sets:

Valerie: *I was in the bottom [set] for English (...) all my mates were all top and I was bottom it seemed a lot awkward for me because I felt as though I was the 'divvy' one of the group you know I mean even though they were all my mates they never... they always used to help me and they were never horrible about it but it* (pause)
Tracey from the main group feels that the school experience has ‘scarred’ her, she resents the way ‘they’ have treated her at school:

Tracey: at junior school I kept getting bullied and picked on a lot because I was thick

(...) I’m not a brilliant reader or a brilliant speller and then they’d [the teachers] would say ‘Tracey do you need help?’ in front of everybody which is really embarrassing they don’t realise that there’s problems also out side the school you’ve got problems with your friends, they don’t understand that. They don’t realise that it scars it has scarred

VM: you say it’s scarred you?

Tracey: yeah I remember things like I couldn’t do things and I felt an idiot and I cried and everything like that I think the schools are pretty bad I think they should realise they’re looking after children not robots

8.4.2 Year 9 comments

One group of year nine pupils had found some strength in the support they gave each other but the lack of self esteem is still evident; a comment made that other pupils ‘don’t bother picking on them’ can be interpreted that this pupil sees herself as being very low in the school hierarchy.

All the year nine pupils interviewed had experienced setting and are in the lower groups:

VM: how do you feel about being in sets

Andy: I feel bad especially when you have exams ‘cos they [the invigilators] shout ‘set 1, set2’ and when they say ‘set 4’ you have to put your hand up and everything and once he told us to stand up so everyone could see who it was

VM: and do you feel that?

Andy: yeah they always make fun out of set 4 people they say you’re thick and you’re dumb and everything like that and ‘you’d go down into set 5 or 6 if they had them’ they say you’re totally thick

VM: who says this?

Andy: Everyone you see they all say ‘oh you’re set 4’ if you had a fight or anything

VM: how do you feel then

Andy: I feel shame I feel ashamed

Andy’s feelings come through strongly; on the one hand he is angry that his peer group regards him as being stupid and on the other hand he feels ashamed at his own perceived lack of abilities. The teachers appear to be unaware that their organisation of collecting exam papers can affect pupils in such an emotive way.

They were aware at 14 that their future options were limited that they had less chance of success than pupils did in higher groups. They could also recognise that setting procedures affected their relationships with the teachers.
Alan: *some teachers I really like but some teachers I hate* (...) *some teachers don't really care it depends on who you are what set you are in*

VM: *do you think in set 4 you don't get as much attention*

Alan: *you get more attention but it's not really nice being in set 4 you feel* [pause] *and sometimes you can't get, as they say, 'no you can't get as or Bs', that will put you down*

Alan is aware that pupils in Set 4 are not being offered the same opportunities as pupils in other sets. In Science, Set 4 at this school follows a different science course; according to Alan this is because the group is not able enough to follow the other science course. He has already realised that his aims for the future will not be realised and has rationalised his situation:

Alan; *well I wanted to be a vet but I couldn't and there's too much competition as well, if I was in set 1 I could do that maybe or even if I was in set 2, they say 'you won't be able to do that you're not good enough', my science teacher says that too and that really offends you. Really you need double science and they won't let me do that. I can't do double science, I would love to take it though. (...) Now I want to be a diamond cutter, cos I'm good with my hands and my uncle's a diamond cutter and he makes loads of money*

Thus attitudes towards self - expectations, achievements and image are affected by school organisation; organisation also contributes to the learned behaviours the young people after the experiences of low sets acquired of feelings of separation and alienation from school work, other groups and teachers. Instead of experiencing shared and positive learning in which the teacher acts as an enabling force to reach the individual's learning targets the young people seem to need to battle against the system and acquire negative and hostile attitudes towards 'them'.

8.5 Creating the culture and acquiring attitudes

Aspects of personality that contribute to the future adult identity are recognisable demonstrated in the 'bottom set' behaviours. In order to survive the school experience, the individuals have actively created a culture in response to the circumstances they were in and the problems they faced. They needed to decide what type of behaviour they would adopt so that relationships with teachers and peer group would be defined; the young people thus developed strategies for coping with being in the 'bottom set' and dealt with the situations in which they found themselves in different ways.

Although he believed the system of setting to be unfair Simon realised that he had little control over where he had been placed within it and so decided
to accept the situation and conform. He kept a positive attitude, believing that, if he kept working, he would make progression, albeit in small steps, and thus reach his goal eventually. Similarly Tracey, with support from home and the positive attention of a SENCO, was of the view that she too could reach her set goals. Both these young people continued to show their acceptance of the system. Other young people adopted behaviours that took up an anti-authority stance; they spent their time ‘mucking about’ and defying the teachers, which, to them at least, gave them some credence with their friends. Valerie and others adopted a different strategy being ‘goody goods’ and keeping their heads down so they would not be noticed.

One group of Year 9 pupils has found some strength in the support they gave each other but the lack of self-esteem is still evident. Their comments about other pupils not bothering to pick on them can be interpreted as these pupils seeing themselves as being very low in the school hierarchy. The Year 9 pupils’ feelings come through strongly and it is not difficult to work out reasons for their justification if they needed it for possible bad behaviour and negative attitudes towards school, curriculum and teachers. (Andy 8.4.2). Feelings of ‘shame’ of being ‘scarred’ by the experiences of knowing that you were ‘the divvy ones’ all served to weaken levels of self-confidence. Behaviours appear to be caught from others in the set, as is illustrated in the next section.

8.5.1 Mucking about, being a 'goody good' and troublemakers

It is when the main group and Year 9 groups are ‘put into sets’ that anti-establishment feelings begin to emerge. Both groups begin to take a ‘them’ and ‘us’ stance. Informants use the expression ‘they put us into sets’ implying, at this early stage of secondary schooling, the ideas of either passively accepting the situation i.e. ‘I deserve to be in set 4 because I am stupid’ and getting on with it or resisting the school’s decision by some form of resistance (Willis, 1977 Brown 1987, Section 4.4). Sally realised that although ‘they’ attempted to ‘mask’ the school organisation by giving different names to sets, the pupils realised they were in the ‘bottom’ groups.

Most were of the opinion that being in the ‘bottom sets’ was not a learning situation. This position rather than stimulating learning only confirmed their low beliefs in themselves and their low status in the school hierarchy. Being with pupils who had the same perceived low ability acted as a catalyst for rebellion rather than a support system to improve their abilities. The young people acknowledged that set 4 was the 'mucking' about group
Louise: To begin with I was in all the set fours, the low sets that's really the time when I used to muck around. Everybody in set 4 knew everybody else so not a lot got done

Once acquired, the variety of behaviours and attitudes appeared to become more entrenched as they got older. Tracey, for instance, would not give up and determinedly asked teachers for help when she did not understand the work being given, whereas Valerie kept quiet and put her head down for she just wanted to get through this school experience with the minimum of embarrassment:

VM: so what was your behaviour like in school then?
Valerie: oh I was really good, I was a goody good, I always got my homework in and things like that
VM; so you did work
Valerie: oh yeah I always got my work up to standard (...) I either used to copy my next door neighbour or get it all wrong basically and I thought that if I copy my next door neighbour at least I'll get a high grade once in a while. (...) was like I never, when I say I never, I never put up my hand to ask about anything, ooh I never, I was hidden in a corner, ooh don't ask me, oh God don't ask me I don't know the answer and I was like that all the time I can't help it

Behaviours were either caught from each other, or they behaved in the way that they believed set 4 was expected to behave. Stephen was in no doubt of the type of people he was with or how he was expected to behave. Although he recognises that the teachers were trying to help them he believes that set 4 was expected to 'muck about' and he took strength from friends who behaved in this way:

Stephen: all the less brainy people were in set 4 and it was all the mucking about group, I was always in and like was with [names friends} and they was just like constantly mouthing off to the teachers just having a laugh and I was right there in it

Stephen is aware that it was the influences of friends that contributed to his behaviour:

VM: do you think you messed around a lot because you couldn't do the work the reading and writing part of it
Stephen: erm no I think I could do it but I dunno everyone was just mucking about
VM: was that because you were in set four?
Stephen: erm probably they started like saying 'come on Steve sort it out, what're you doing working and then I started larking about with them, the first
time I thought yeah that was quite fun and I carried on (laughs) but then I started like trying [to work] and mucking about at the same time and it just wasn't working

Barry points out the unsuitability of school organisation to put all those regarded as being of similar ability together; they recognise that they are at the bottom in the school hierarchy, they believe that teachers regard them as 'no hopers' and with their self esteem getting lower and lower try to maintain some vestiges by actively rejecting what is on offer. Neither teachers nor pupils receive any satisfaction from these encounters:

Barry: I was put into a set or a group of children that matched my ability
VM: your ability in reading and writing?
Barry: yes that was good but it was also bad, (...) they were in the lower sets for a reason because they couldn't concentrate They put everybody, all the disruptive people together and it made the class even worse, it would have taken a very special teacher to control that group, there were teachers like that but the whole class would suddenly uproar an it would be a total disaster but it was an excuse and it made everyone feel normal because everyone else never done the work

His suggestion is to put pupils of mixed abilities together so that positive behaviours and positive learning experiences can be 'caught' from others. (see Section 3.4)

Barry: it was a bad thing putting all those people together , they should have been split up into groups with children that would work, I found when I was working with someone who got in and done the work , I was right beside them one hundred percent of the way and at the end of the day I felt as though I could tell them something not what they could tell me

Several became known as troublemakers to teachers:

VM: you got chucked out of science?
Stephen : yeah I always just like to walk in the room and it would be 'get out'
VM: (laughs)
Stephen: 'wow cheers' I can't believe this

Similarly Michael who left school at fifteen without taking any examinations feels that he had little chance of success at secondary school because he was a known as a troublemaker by the teachers. He uses the term 'branded' as if he carried with him throughout his school life, a visible mark that singled him out from his fellow pupils. Michael was more personal in his complaints; he believed that teachers had singled him out as a potential troublemaker. Once he
became 'branded', he fulfilled the expectations of teachers by behaving in a way he thought they believed was appropriate for him, which is why, in the end, he 'just blew school out':

Michael: *I didn't like school much, just blew it out* (laughs, slightly ruefully), *I just didn't get on there, when I first went to school in the first year I sort of messed about a bit and then the second year came and its time to knuckle down, but they wouldn't have it, sort of branded and that was it really. Once you're branded that's it [they] wouldn't give you another chance*

VM: *what were you branded for?*

Michael: *trouble making I suppose* (laughs) well in the first year [Year?] *I was like a bit naughty and that, like I used to get the blame for things I didn't do, and then when that started happening I started getting naughty 'cos I got the blame for it anyway so I might as well do it, you know what I mean, like I'd do whatever I got the blame for so that's basically it*

Debbie was very 'chatty' in school behaviour which, combined with her inability at times to complete the work used to get her into trouble:

Debbie: *I was really really chatty, I was quite loud, but me and [friend] we always used to get into trouble*

VM: *was that anything to do with the fact that you really couldn't do some of the work?*

Debbie: *some of the science I would be able to do but some of the science was really hard like out of the textbook, I didn't understand it. The teacher would read it out to all the class and then she'd go so fast that I wouldn't be able to catch everything she said even though I did write it down on paper, she'd still go too fast and I used to go back to her and say 'look you've read it too fast, can you give me some more examples of what you've just said?' and like she'd go 'no way, I've got to help somebody else and I'd get behind in all my work so (...) I have actually screamed and cried in class and I used to walk out all the time because she used to wind me up something chronic and she just wouldn't leave me alone, she has locked me in the stock cupboard before to do my work, she was a really nasty teacher.*

Debbie appears to have been frustrated by her own perceived inadequacies of not being able to get on with her work without the assistance of the teacher. She had to rely heavily on teacher in-put in order for her to be able to produce some work. The teacher, probably in this case without meaning to, retained control of the learning, the work and the situation that caused annoyance and frustration both to herself and the pupil. One can recognise too in this situation the amount of stress the pupil and teacher are feeling.

The young people recognise that both school organisation and teacher attitude played a part in their own acquired attitudes towards work and school.
Some of the young people then were hesitant to make close friendships within these groups; if they did, they feared that they might become badly behaved and take an anti-authority stance. They believed that teachers would think they might behave badly or think them stupid, the rest of the peer group might think them stupid, dumb or 'div'. Sally did not wish to be accepted as part of the 'bottom' group and, as with others, realised that to regain any self-confidence and have a degree of esteem from friends a move to a higher set was essential. Thus they would be accepted as part of the group to which they believed they should be members. Additionally belonging to a 'higher' set would give them more strength and self-confidence in their own abilities. They did not want to be 'branded', as Michael believed he had been.

Andy from the Year 9 groups had learnt this lesson:

'cos I was in the wrong crowd and everything but now I'm like with Alan and Rob more brainy people. If you hang around with bad people you get more like in to them I learned that if you go and sit with next to clever people and everything you don't talk, you don't do nothing, you do more work.

On the other hand, Stephen from the main group had not learned to mix with the well-behaved pupils in his group. He believed that the science teacher began to exclude him as soon as he entered the classroom; perhaps she expected that his 'mucking about' behaviour would influence his friends and so disrupt her lesson.

Thus in school at one end of a continuum of behaviour these pupils could be almost transparent to teachers and the peer group or at the other end they would be immediately recognised for a high level of their 'mucking about' behaviour. If they did find strength in the group it was in taking a stance against authority, a 'them' and 'us' situation, and if this stance was taken it was regretted once they had left school.

Attitudes towards self that they acquired during their school years have contributed to the formation of an identity which continues into adulthood unless there is some kind of happening or intervention that causes a change of attitude towards self. The teacher on the PVC (Pre-vocational course) and GNVQ foundation courses talked about the feelings of anger that young people who have failed at school have acquired and how some had tried to take control of their situations by refusing to go to school:

Anne: we get a percentage of students, who were school refusers, I know this is a horrible term isn't it? You know the kind that didn't like school mainly because, not because of the school itself, but because they had learning difficulties that had gone unnoticed for obvious reasons you know class size, no
ones fault what ever. So they were angry and their self esteem was down there, that's kind of a generalisation

If the classroom work and how it is presented is not understood by the pupil, feelings such as frustration, anger, beliefs of their own incompetence result in a variety of behaviours.

8.6 Teachers and relationships

The relationships made with teachers appear to be a crucial part of these young people's school experiences. Relationships were complex and it is not easy to unravel cause and effect of the behaviours and attitudes these young people acquired. Perhaps they relied more on teachers to give them help because they saw themselves as inadequate and were insecure in their learning. Many in the group mentioned individual teachers who had encouraged and helped them during their time in the secondary school. Some teachers were singled out as being especially helpful. When they believed that assistance was not forthcoming they would react in the behaviour that they had decided for themselves, rebelling, working harder and/or keeping a low profile.

Mark: yeah I never used to muck around a lot as I knew my Mum would kill me, but the first opportunity to talk I would, if the teacher weren't there to help and if anything seemed difficult you'd just think 'Oh I can't do that' straight away

Most spoke of a perceived unfairness in the attitude of teachers towards other pupils compared with their group. This is probably due to a variety of factors including: the possible behaviour of the group, the activities the group was asked to carry out (more reading and writing than other groups possibly for control purposes, the view of the Elton Report (1989) that these 'low' classes were given the worst rooms and poor teachers:

VM: what I seem to be finding is that, well school hasn't been easy but those people who seem determined are getting where they want to go
Mark: a lot of it was at school, the kids who are quite intelligent and willing to learn the teachers seem to focus more on them, but the people more like me who had a bit of trouble you know in a way they'd sort of have a go at you really. We had a teacher once she would explain something then she'd say 'right whoever doesn't understand put your hand up', you'd think 'well I don't understand' so I put my hand up and people would put their hand up and she'd start yelling at you

Michael, who left secondary school before taking his GCSE exams, found that his teachers gave help to those who according to him did not really need help and that this situation was apparent while he was at junior school
VM: when you were at junior school did you have any extra help to read and write?

Michael: yeah, when I was at junior school, I was like, you know they didn't really help me at all, I got a bit of help, but I didn't get a lot, its all the same sort (pause) just the people who were good at it seemed to get more help in junior school than what I did 'cos I needed help, but the people who were good at it got the help and I didn't so it just took me further back even more, 'cos they were striding ahead and I wasn't getting any help so I was falling behind and that was it. I never got any help all the way through school. the only help I'm getting is now at college.

VM: do you think you found any of the work difficult?

Michael: yeah I found the work difficult but, like when I asked for help I didn't, I get it from some teachers (...) some subjects I didn't get help. I didn't like the teachers so I just blew it out, didn't bother 'cos I wasn't getting the help I wanted so, what was the point in working if I wasn't going to get anywhere?

Michael's comments are significant in that they support the research of Mortimore et al 1988, (see Section 4.3) who found that although the same amount of time may be spent with pupils such as these and the 'higher level' pupils, more non-work comments are made and thus the results may still be negative.

Sometimes it is possible to recognise the amount of stress the teachers are experiencing in their everyday lives: large classes, extra responsibilities, unruly pupils and examination pressures lead to classroom behaviour that is not conducive to learning and affects both teacher and pupils:

Mark: we had one teacher who broke down and started crying, cos we were playing up, in the end it was getting to the stage where teachers were only teaching those who wanted to learn the brighter ones, if you were talking one minute, they'd kick you out of class, you're not going to get any work done like that

Louise also feels sympathy for the set 4 teachers:

Louise: Set 4 was awful I don't know how the teachers stood it I don't know why they didn't just get up and leave. Nobody did any work even though they were 14 15 years old they acted as if they were 6 or 7

The examples that David gives illustrate the relationships teachers forge with pupils and the way pupils interpret teacher behaviour, which then affects the ways in which the pupil reacts and relates to the situation.
David: my English teacher wasn't too bad except he got really annoyed if you didn't get things right, I mean if you can't get something right it ain't down to you.

VM: no

David: so that wound me up a bit (...) there's one teacher who didn't like me, Mr. R. he used to get on my nerves he really did used to have a go at people in a bad way I mean to be honest on a scale of one to ten on being sacked from [the secondary school] he was number one out of ten, he definitely should be sacked.

VM: did he lose his temper?

David: he used to shout a lot to me- shouting at pupils of fifteen, I think when I was younger, he used to hit his ruler on the desk

On the other hand a calm and more relaxed classroom environment appeared to help the learning situation. David describes how in some circumstances he liked to work, and felt that when he was actively engaged in his learning and could contribute something he felt happier:

David: my maths teacher used to put it on the board and he used to do things that the whole class could join in, I mean I found that a lot easier that sitting there and writing, that used to bore me to death I mean an hour and ten minutes of writing to me it was just like punishment. (...) I liked him [maths teacher] he was good fun he was probably one of the best there

Although David felt that the teacher was easy going, the way the teacher organised the class was probably a result of thorough preparation, an enthusiasm for the subject, and an understanding of adolescent pupils.

When the career pathways for teachers open up for them taking on responsibilities not only for subject teaching but also for other aspects of secondary school work, the strain begins to tell:

David: Miss S. wasn't too bad she used to help you

VM: what subject was that?

David: RE, but she was my form tutor as well, head tutor as well [Head of Year], its a bit weird she seemed really strict, like she was a Head [of Year] and a teacher as well, I dunno, I think the higher up they go the more headstrong they get, dunno what it is, I mean I thought when they become teachers like they want to teach pupils to learn not have a go at them.

Michael sums up the relationships he thinks need to be established for successful learning to take place:

Michael: that's the bottom line, you got a good teacher you'll work harder even though you're doing it for yourself, you work harder 'cos you're enjoying it, if you're not enjoying it you're not going to work.
8.6.1 Year 9 comments

The Year 9 pupils endorse Michael's comments; several pupils say that some teachers treat some pupils in 'different ways' than others:

Colin: *the ones that need help he doesn't give it to*
Stuart: *no he says 'wait there' [in a stern 'teacher's voice'] and then he goes on to other people*
VM: *so he makes you wait*
Stuart: *yeah about half an hour*
Colin: *to the end of the lesson near enough then you can't get your work done and you have to stay behind*
Stuart: *yeah 'You haven't done enough work stay behind' [teacher's voice]*

Other Year 9 pupils showed their feelings about being in the 'bottom sets'; they complained about unfairness and it is not difficult to understand that their self-esteem is threatened day by day:

Terry: *yeah you can't talk or anything but in the A group they don't get into trouble and the teachers wonder why, the teachers keep moaning, you can't do anything about it 'cos you say you're bored 'cos you haven't got no proper work to do and they start having a go at you*
Jack: *what happens at this school is if you're clever you're bound to be loved the teachers will just keep picking on you till you leave school*

One group of Year 9 pupils in particular had complaints about the teaching they were receiving; this may be relevant to the current teacher shortage whereby supply teachers or teachers of other subjects have to 'cover' classes. Perhaps pupils who are not going to boost the school's league table position (see Section 3.3) are given the less specialised teachers:

Tony: *we have 2 lessons a week of Geography and one lesson run by an Art teacher and the other by a French teacher and you don't get like any set work (...) you just get a book and you just copy it out of a book (...) one time she says 'oh you can pick the work today' and you just look at a page and say 'oh we'll do this page, (...) its impossible (...) all you're doing is copying out of a book you're not learning anything you don't do any projects or anything like that its boring, you don't like get question or anything you just have to copy out.*
Gavin: *they're making it harder for us not easier,*
Jack: *it's too late*

Jack realises that he is going to have problems obtaining any decent GCSEs. Young people do realise the central importance of the GCSE in their profile and that these results decide their after school chances and experiences. Jack
believes that at 14 years old it is already ‘too late’ for him to get on to a successful career route after school.

8.7 Teaching approaches to the curriculum

Evidence has been presented in previous sections that these pupils in the bottom groups felt that for a high percentage of lessons they were required to spend much of their time writing. This was possibly a control mechanism and also employed to give evidence that the pupils had completed some work. Teachers do have the skills to use other methods and approaches with their pupils so it may be asked why other teaching methods are not fully utilised in the classroom. Kelley’s research (Section 6.8) has given possible reasons for television not being used in classrooms. There are several other problems. Teachers are under considerable pressure to obtain good examination results; the prestige of the school relies on this. They have to conform to the structures of the National Curriculum in assessment and content, which serves to restrict the approaches in use, and ensures that these approaches, especially in the secondary school, are linked with the written word. Other approaches that the teacher may wish to use are time consuming in operation and implementation and they are also more expensive in both in classroom equipment and in human resources. The amount of work that the syllabus forces them to get through prevents them from having the time to try out new ideas and approaches to learning with individual pupils. A quotation from my field notes, although it could be interpreted as an argument against mixed ability teaching, also shows the extent to which teachers are controlled by the curriculum requirements, so that they recognise only one approach to learning—though the written word:

Teacher A: they can't access so much of the stuff since they can't read, I'm teaching geography to Year 9 and only three of them can read
Teacher B: I've got modular science mixed ability GCSE so you've got kids that can't do anything in with those who are going to be scientists. Part of the spirit of the course is that it's meant to be enquiry based but some of them by then are completely switched off but one or two may get As or Bs this years, like most of the GCSE's list of criteria they have to produce six projects

Teachers may also give these pupils ‘more of the same,’ not just for control but to try to improve reading and writing skills. This choice of work by the Year 9 teacher in the next example is centred in her belief that this is what her pupils need and that it will offer them practice in improving their area of weakness. It takes little account of what the pupils have themselves enjoyed. The teacher explained to me what she was planning to do for the lesson:
They're going to do a bit of grammar, we've tried creative writing but the most difficult thing to get them to do is to write anything down

My field notes at the time indicate my thoughts on this activity:

Why can't they try oral creative stories? Pretend they are round the camp fire, or by the fireside, think up stories for young children, stories based on their hobbies, TV scripts; stories recorded then written up by the teacher and ‘published’.

The same group of pupils told me how much they had enjoyed doing a project on Frankenstein (see Section 8.8.1) when they made game-boards and watched a video, but that most of their lessons were carried out at the direction of the teacher and even in music the time was spent writing.

My study’s findings agree with those of Cooper and McIntyre (1996) who observed secondary school lessons. They indicate that National Curriculum pressures prohibit pupils being proactive in their choice of work yet both teachers and pupils valued lessons that centred on the integration of teachers’ and pupils’ interests. When time was available it was the ‘more able’ who were offered choice:

When teachers did employ reactive strategies with Year 9 classes, this tended to be dependent on their perceptions of their pupils' ability levels: the guiding principle here appearing to be that ‘brighter’ pupils could be trusted to make valuable use of the limited time in the pursuit of their own interests. (p.107)

Thus Blackman’s (1995, see Section 6.5) point that the more able pupils had some powers of negotiation is reinforced, whereas as shown above the young people in my study had few if any powers.

8.8 Classroom organisation and content of lessons

So far I have attempted to show that school organisation (setting) affects attitudes, as does the relationship between teachers and pupils. Another aspect to consider is the content of the subject and how the teacher presents the work to the pupil. One might expect that pupils with low level literacy skills would find enjoyment in doing aspects of subjects that are not directly concerned with reading and writing.

Keith, who spent most of his time from Year 9 being ‘bored’ and ‘bunking off’ defends the teachers in the school; it was the subject that he says he did not enjoy but it may be the way in which the subjects were taught that was
the real cause of his boredom; the practical element of lessons which he enjoyed was missing from his science lessons:

Keith; *I particularly disliked science*
VM: *why was that?*
Keith *erm I don't know I just found it boring, it didn't interest me at all*
VM: *do you think that had anything to do with the teacher?*
Keith *not really but I can't remember ever getting any of the decent science teachers there*
VM: *is that because you were in the lower sets?*
Keith; *yeah*
VM: *do you think that the teachers didn't regard the lower sets as worth spending time with, is that what you think affected your science?*
Keith *I don't really think the teachers saw it that way just if we were in the lower sets [we were] the less important*
VM: *it wasn't like that*
Keith: *no it wasn't like that they tried really hard*
VM: *was there a lot of written work in science then?*
Keith: *there was, it was like mostly written work [we] got like very few practicals (coughs) I did like practical science best because they were fun, doing the experiments and stuff*

Thus although, according to Keith, set 4 was not allocated 'decent' teachers, the teachers they had nevertheless worked hard for the pupils. However the work given and the classroom organisation, given that set was the 'mucking about group', may have reflected an aim for control rather than the main emphasis being on learning. The teacher may have felt that the situation was under control when the pupils were set individual writing and reading tasks from books rather than practical work in groups. Keith describes what would be a typical religious studies (RS) lesson, another subject he found 'boring':

Keith: *the teacher would probably like just sort of say what he wants us to do, like write a few things on the board, maybe ask a few questions and stuff then just let us get on with it*

Michael who has said earlier that he felt that he did not get enough help he needed specifies that it was help in decoding the written word that he needed:

VM: *what sort of help do you think you needed?*
Michael: *erm (pause) I dunno just explaining things, I suppose explaining questions and I've got a problem with that now, I get questions like on paper and they've obviously got a lot more difficult with the work I'm doing now but its the same it adds up to the same I just need the questions explaining a bit better than what they were*
VM: *so, when you talk about questions were these questions written down?*
Michael: mm yeah written down on paper I found it quite difficult to understand some of them

Valerie believes that a different form of assessment would have helped her:

VM: in what way would you have done better?
Valerie: for me? Spoken because I can't spell so if you was to tape it all exactly like this, I wouldn't have any trouble with my writing would I? No it would be a lot easier, (...) I'd probably get a higher grade but people like me (...) if you write you do spelling mistakes I don't think you should get a low grade on it because you can't help that

8.8.1 Year 9 comments

The Year 9 groups too realised that the way the teachers organised the lessons and the approach used for their learning was crucial to their futures. One Year 9 pupil, Paula, wanted to become a beautician when she left school and would need to pass science at C grade GCSE as well as English. However she was despondent about her chances of succeeding. Paula was aware that being in a low science group the pass she could obtain would not be high enough to gain entry onto a beautician-training course:

Paula: yeah I find it [science] really difficult don't understand the long words that come in, our teacher doesn't explain it well enough does she?
Hannah: our teacher (...) put us off a bit, its just copy off the board copy this copy that
VM: is the reading and writing part the hardest?
Hannah: because she doesn't explain it, I mean last year I had a really nice teacher no, that's just copying, the understanding of what going on is hard
Paula: that why my test results are not good because I've had this teacher all the time.

Other comments from a group of Year 9 pupils indicate that teachers do give individual written tasks as a means of control:

Dave: its still loud and noisy innit?
Tom: yeah we don't get much work done, its not good work any way its just like photocopies out of a book (...) we've got a text book, she photocopies sheets and we have to just fill them in
Dave: in science I've got to do a lot of writing
Tom: yeah science as well you have to write a lot and the rest of the class is (...) faster and like the teacher's moving on to write more and you haven't finished

Yet the Year 9 pupils were enthusiastic towards subject areas when they were more actively involved both in the choice and in the execution of the work:
Tony: *I prefer doing projects*
Jack: *we did a project about Frankenstein*
Terry: *we made game-boards we all done a paper each which was good ‘cos everyone was into doing it*
Jack: *we was actually enjoying it*
Terry: *it was fun as well ‘cos you watched a video before you actually done it (...) you knew more about what to write about him*

Giving pupils more choice then appears to help their learning. However, the group mentioned above gets little choice in what to do and object to not being asked to do much harder work:

Terry: *yeah much harder work than [phonic work VM] that (...) and she said we was going to do about graffiti and the next lesson you’re not allowed*
Jack: *that does my head in*
Terry: *at primary school you had things to do you had proper teachers you had projects and things to do, all the work was set for you, you didn’t have to read out of a book and copy all the work out like you do here*

Pupils then are prepared to work if the material offered to them and the approach used captures their interest. But, as long as control remains as a constant high requirement for the teacher, then ‘boring work’ may be all that is on offer:

Terry: *it’s the same in music isn’t it? In music you just like sit around and sir’s just shouting at people you don’t do any work*
Tony: *in my music group we have to copy out of the book and sometimes she says you can use the keyboards next week then we don’t do it*
VM: *what do you do in music then?*
Terry: *he just writes things up on the board and you have too copy it down*
Tony: *she gives out worksheets about people and you have to like write them down*
VM: *about famous composers?*
Tony: *yeah why do you really need to know about that?*
Jack: *I think what this school needs is some new teachers*

8.9 **Option choices at 14 years of age**

Others are aware of the one route to success and ask for a more varied diet not just in relation to lessons and ways of presentation but also in allowing the pupils to have more choice in deciding the subjects they wish to follow:

VM: *so you think that at school there isn’t enough choice for you?*
Simon: *no, its all channelled the same way, all the same idea, I think it should be more varied, should have extra things, extra lessons, so that its not just*
reading and writing all the time; (...) some people didn't seem, I don't know why to be interested in anything, just didn't want to be at school 'cos they felt, dunno, its hard to explain how they felt, a lot of people felt as if it was a prison, they didn't have no freedom; you did it, you had to do it or you'd get into trouble for not doing it, there were no ifs and buts, you had to do it, and if the only way to get out of it was getting into trouble, well ...if people didn't want to go to a lesson I think it would be a good idea if they went to a different classrooms and did something they did enjoy instead of bunking off school and not doing anything at all , where they could pick up something they're good at and get themselves better at that ; say if they're not gong to get better at say like French and they're good at CDT they'd go and do more of CDT and get themselves better qualified at that and they'd get a higher grade which is better than having two Ds when you can have one A and one D

What Simon is suggesting is a situation that was supposed to be brought in by option choices at 14+, so that pupils would be able to concentrate and develop their areas of interest. This if properly planned would lead them towards a suitable career pathway

The choices offered at 14+ are limited (see Chapter3). However some choices can be made which capitalise on the pupils' interest and enjoyment in a subject. At this stage some advice is needed from careers officers and school career teachers to advise pupils and parents about the best courses for them to follow. Schools in the private sector concentrate on the 14 -18 curriculum so that a planned route to university will be followed (Roker, 1993); this does not come into the jurisdiction of state schools because of the school leaving age of sixteen. Many schools, especially denominational and selective schools, have encouraged the formation or strengthening of the '6th form' for the study of A-levels; further or vocational courses are not especially highlighted. The schools in the borough that these pupils attended end the curriculum at 16, and then pupils can if they wish attend the Tertiary college which offers a wide range of both higher and further education courses. Although there is not a wide range of choice to be made at the age of 14+, it is nevertheless important for the young persons to feel that they are assisted and guided into making the best and most informed choices that may help or guide their future careers.

Subjects such as Design and Technology, Drama, Art or PE that have more practical work and less reading and writing involved than the other subjects would one presumes be chosen by young people such as those in my study, in preference to more text based subjects. These young people were however unable to choose all four, either because school time tabling organisation prevented this or the subject not being on offer for a GCSE course.
Another influence that appears to have affected option choice for these young people is whether or not they liked the teacher. If they did, they would opt to take the course without thinking about its relevance to their own futures. As previously shown this highlights the amount of reliance these young people that are perhaps more vulnerable and sensitive, put on teacher/pupil relationships. The relationship with the teacher or hearsay evidence about the behaviour of a particular teacher in the classroom influenced the choices to be made at the time of option choice. They did not appear to worry overmuch about how option choices would aid their future careers. John who at the time of interview was an apprentice mechanic, and who enjoyed the practical aspects of all his subjects chose not follow Design and Technology as an option:

John; you had to choose, erm either design and technology, home economics, or art and design
VM: and you could only choose one of them?
John: yeah if I remember rightly
VM: would you have chosen all three if you could?
John: no, I don't think so I mean the reason I didn't do design and technology was that I didn't like my teacher I didn't get on with her
VM: so that put you off the subject did it?
John: yeah (laughs) I didn't get on with her at all

So he chose to do Home Economics because he liked the teacher but there were pitfalls here as well; it appears that in the fourth year (Yr.10) he excused himself from the lesson:

John: I enjoyed the cookery side but not the theory side, I liked the home economics teacher Mr A. but when I didn't do the theory side of it they told me not to bother coming back to his lesson, so I didn't, [spoken defensively] then officially I didn't go at all in the fifth year to his lesson I just did something else, but er I did the exam for HE
VM: did you get a grade?
John: no un-graded 'cos I mean I hadn't gone in the fifth year and some in the fourth year so when I came to do it [the exam] I didn't know what was what or anything

Stephen had a choice between Home Economics and CDT. Although he had indicated that he wished to train as a mechanic after leaving school and knowing that CDT would be quite useful, he nevertheless found himself taking Home Economics. He chose this on the basis that other pupils that he did not relate well with were opting for CDT, hardly an informed choice.
Andrew, who went on to train as a carpenter, and who has acquired an impressive oral vocabulary of technical joinery terms, did not develop an interest in this area at school; on the contrary he was ‘bored’:

Andrew: *a CDT lesson most of the time was just messing about, we'd get old wood and do something with it 'cos like I said I don't know how to do it*

VM: *right and did they show you?*

Andrew: *no I don't think they did but with a class of thirty people I mean I found the teachers more favoured like the better people and if you weren't too good they just thought 'oh no let him try and sort it out himself' and then you'd get into trouble but the others would say 'we've got ours done' but they'd had help from the teacher and you'd just think 'no I can't be bothered to do it now'*

Andrew believes that now he is more knowledgeable about carpentry and joinery, but his school lessons did not provide the basics of the subject.

The several informants did realise the importance of option choices at this time and this at a time in the young person’s school life when some careers help and guidance would have been particularly useful:

Mark: *I was unhappy when it was coming up to doing your choices (...) I just didn't have a clue what I wanted to do. People were saying I want to do history 'cos that will help me get such and such and I want to do home economics 'cos that'll help me with my catering' and I was sitting there thinking 'well I don't know what to do and if I make one wrong choice I become something else and that was it, I was stuck*

The young people were of the opinion that they received little careers advice at 14 at the time of option choices, although during the next two years they did receive information of a general nature which was given to all the year group. One of the important indicators of any future career path became evident when the young people did their work experience. Mark, in common with others, would have been assisted by more guidance and direction:

Mark: *we only really had career talks in the 5th year (age16) and with everyone at once you were only getting about 15 minutes a go. You can't talk about your career in that short time. Also with work experience you should have longer to book it, with so many people you have to fight for the one you want (...) I was mainly looking for a sports related one but the only ones they had were working in sports shops, I didn't fancy that.*

The young people also tried to discover the amounts of writing involved in particular courses. The subjects that may have helped them recover some self esteem because they were good at them were turned down because of the amount
of writing the examination courses involved. Thus subjects such as Drama and PE that contribute to personal development and skills were turned down because of the amount of written work.

8.9.1 Year 9 comments

The Year 9 groups were also finding that the lack of choice between the subjects they enjoyed doing was limiting their options. R. who had previously belonged to an athletic club and wanted to do his work experience in a sports centre, had decided not to take PE as the choice was between that and Art.

8.10 Choosing Drama

I have taken the subject of Drama as an example of how these young people could find expression for their talents and to show the enjoyment, satisfaction and some degree of success in the subject. For some of them Drama gave them their highest grade (See Table 7.4). Catherine from the main group, was taking theatre studies at A-level:

Catherine; for A level we do a practical exam you get into a group of say 5 or 6 and devise your own little play and there's the individual skill where you choose acting or set design of costume design and they'll examine you on that.

Drama was not always available to take as a GCSE course and even then the choice was limited, as the choice may have to be taking only one of the 'practical' subject course such as Art, Art and design, CDT, PE or Drama. Those young people in the group who did choose Drama found that it helped their self-confidence not only in the subject itself enabling them to get a good grade but also with improving the image they held of themselves.

Mark: when everyone used to put their hand up to read, I'd never do it I thought what if I make a mistake or can't read a certain word, you think if I read and make a right cock up of it everyone will laugh, but as I got on slightly more, I took drama and with that you're always reading plays so I got a lot more confident, just to like stand up and start reading.
VM: you seem to be very happy, very confident (...) if you could describe yourself when you were fourteen how would you describe yourself then?
Mark: not much in confidence, sort of coming up to a lesson thinking 'English oh not that boring subject', sort of thing everything would be boring apart from sport, I did find a lot of the subjects boring.
VM: and you enjoyed drama it sounds as if that brought you out of yourself.
Mark: Yes, I enjoyed it, I enjoyed the practical side of it and at first I would only ever do acting in big groups and gradually as we went on through the years I was getting up in front of people just me and another person trying to take on all
the lead roles that’s what actually got my C in drama, my acting there was quite a bit on it in the exams
It was the ‘theory’ side of the subject that prevented Mark from obtaining a higher grade:

VM: you got a C in drama?
Mark: yes that was pretty good the good thing about it was my practical work my theory was just, like having 7 for my course work, 7 out of 20

Chris enjoyed Drama and PE because they took him away from the written word for which he was grateful:

Chris: yeah in PE and drama the time just flew by we was enjoying ourselves, all the other lessons that just drag on, like English, you thought half an hour was up but you’d only been in the lesson for fifteen minutes and you’d only done half a page, no I didn’t like it whatsoever

Vicki was ‘quite shy’ in school and Drama may have been a challenge for her as at first she didn’t like it at all. However, the arrival of a new teacher ‘made everyone feel confident in themselves’ and gave her enough courage to break the shyness barrier- ‘I let myself out of my shell’. Her Drama C grade was her highest GCSE result. Tracey too obtained her highest GSCE grade for Drama and knows that but for the written elements in the course her grade would have been even higher.

Some avoided Drama at the time of option choices even if it was available. Andrew whose father is a set constructor for a film studio, and who had attended Drama classes when younger deliberately avoided choosing drama as an option because he had heard that that was a large component of writing in the GCSE course:

VM: I wonder why you didn't choose drama?
Andrew: 'cos I didn't like it
VM: but you said that you liked taking on a person's character and attitude and that's what you did in Drama
Andrew: yeah but I suppose it was to do with the teacher like you act differently to different teachers, the Drama teacher was good
VM: ah, I think its a shame you didn't choose it 'cos I feel you've got hidden talents there
Andrew: when I was younger did go to a Drama school
VM: did you?
Andrew: Yeah but when I got to school, they was good lessons like you could have a laugh and that while you was making up your play I dunno I just didn't like, I think I heard there was too much writing involved in it or something so, it was a bit [pause] the coursework and that there's a lot of writing involved
VM: So you thought 'oh no I don't want to do that'

So although Andrew enjoyed and was good at the subject and liked the teacher, he chose not to follow the two-year examination syllabus because of the amount of writing he had heard it involved. Interest in the area and a possible future hobby, especially combined with the training in carpentry, which he undertook after school, must now be rekindled.

Keith who in addition to having a chaotic and ultimately tragic home life has had to overcome speech problems caused by a cleft palate, enjoyed Drama in the early secondary school especially as it had 'nothing to do with written work'. Thus the subject was 'one of my favourites' and 'I never got into trouble in Drama either'. Drama was beginning to give him the confidence to speak in a large group; he was less of a behaviour problem than in other subjects and might have gained a reasonable grade in an examination situation. Drama then should have been a sensible option choice for Keith, and it was available for him to choose but he found himself studying RS instead because he was 'put there', a subject which he 'hated'.

Sally dropped Drama when she was required to carry out the written aspects of the subject:

Sally; I liked acting but then it just totally changed and it wasn't me in the end so I dropped it (...) we had to do essays about the practical we'd been doing and what we'd learned and we thought it was pretty boring really

8.11 Practical Work

The problem for them then appears to be not solely the way their attitudes are affected by the teacher but the way in which information, knowledge and skills have to be acquired, that is through a reading and writing route. Many of the young people would have preferred to learn the subject in a more practical way. This does not mean to say that they would like to do what we consider to be practical subjects i.e. vocational type work but rather to take a more practical approach to the subject areas of the curriculum. If the courses offered more variety in the type of work, more positive results, both in attitudes and examination success, might ensue. Most of the young people said that they achieved more in the practical aspects of a subject. This included for them oral and group discussion as well as actually 'making things'. The theoretical aspect of a subject was seen by them as the ability to put their ideas down on paper:

John: well I've always been good at things to do with my hands, I found it easier, and I could take it in better rather than the theory work
VM: *what do you mean by the theory work*
John: *well the writing side, getting information from textbooks*

David explains that if a task and a problem to be solved were explained to him orally he would not have a problem in finding a solution:

David: *yeah it was very difficult for me to write things down*
VM: *so would you have got better grades at school if you had done like a lot more practical things in your subjects?*
David: *yeah I probably would, would have got a lot better grades ’cos as I am only good with my hands*
VM: *and you’re quite creative*
David: *say if, like mechanics, if someone got a book of how an engine works and what was involved in it and asked me questions and wrote it [the questions] down, I wouldn’t be able to explain what the problem is or how to fix the problem on paper, but I could show you and I could do it*
VM: *right*
David: *and that’s my problem, I mean I knew what was going on but I just couldn’t put it down properly on paper so that’s one of the main problems*

At least in Stephen’s opinion a curriculum that offered more practical and creative opportunities to learning would have helped to eliminate the bad behaviour and boredom that these young people often exhibited:

VM: *you said you liked the practical things like cooking*
Stephen: *yeah, really, making things, ’cos like then everyone’s busy at like doing things instead of always reading and writing and getting shouted at by teachers and whatever, I mean if it changed in school it would be much better, people wouldn’t bunk and stuff I mean I can say now I used to bunk and everything (…) I’d like more creative stuff instead of going into classrooms and to solid working and writing [moves wrist]*
VM: *you were going like that with your hand as if you were writing all the time*
Stephen: *yeah I used to get blisters from writing sometimes, I had the days where I had to write thousands I’d start work just like that I was good and then other days I used to sit at the back of the class with all my mates just throwing things round just mucking about I always used to do that in science that’s why I got chucked out I think (laughs)*

So if schools gave real curriculum choice and used a variety of methods especially interactive ones then Stephen would be a willing pupil:

Stephen: *I’d probably go back to school now and I wouldn’t bunk at all I mean I’d probably get a career ’cos I mean I’ve learned from my mistakes now but its too late so if I could go back turn the clocks back it would work out fine*
Although he never worked in science, he realises that he would have benefited from acquiring some scientific knowledge. He now recognises that it was the written work that school science involved that he found difficult, whereas he enjoyed the practical part:

Stephen: *I got un-graded in all the sciences 'cos like I never knew nothing, science just didn't agree with me (laughs) and I didn't agree with science I mean I dunno I feel I need to know a bit about science but I just couldn't be bothered (laughs) I dunno it was mainly just like writing, I like the physical side of it the practical.*

The Dearing Report (1996) could use some of the above comments to justify the transfer of young people who appear to have little interest in the school curriculum to colleges of Further education at the age of 14. Dearing has focused the reasons for the young people's 'disaffection' on the pupil rather than on the curriculum (Section 3.7.3). However, it can be argued that the evidence from the young people who have spoken here suggests that, given a realistic choice of subjects and a range of methods used in the teaching of the subjects, an enthusiasm for school life would have been apparent. The next section is concerned with television and computers, two of the newer literacies and part of most people's lives, and their use in school.

**8.12: Computer work and the use of television in school**

I have said nothing so far about the young people's experiences of computer learning in schools. This is because computer use did not appear to be an integral part of their school learning. The main group had little to say about computer use in school, and at the time of interview none of them used a computer at home. Several young people from the main group were following a business studies course but only Louise followed up her computer work; although Debbie liked computers her post school training in 'care' did not include computer work. Others from the main group made negative comments such as 'me and computers just don't get on'. Several young people in the Year 9 groups were using computers to aid their reading and writing and the remainder used them when computers were timetabled. For instance in Maths the computer room would be available for the group either on a weekly basis for one lesson or for a block of lessons for perhaps half a term (6 weeks).

**Television**

Most of the young people in this study recognise that television is at least an important source of information for them and some recognise that it can be
additionally a way of learning that for them is much easier than the written route:
VM: what about the television do you watch that?
Pam: yes yes (laughs) you can learn a lot from watching TV like documentaries and things like that

VM: Did you like reading then?
Lucy: erm, it was all right but it wasn't like, I prefer to sit down watching a film about it rather than sit down and reading about it (laughs)
VM: Right so watching a film about it would
Lucy: It explains it more it explains what's going on than a book does really it sort of if you can, they tell you what's happening and you can see it it sort of explains it more than just reading a book well I think so (laughs)
VM: If I asked you then where you got information from, what would you say?
Lucy: TV definitely its more educational they always say that, like things on like for little kids who are about three and four they sit down and watch erm Play school that, apparently that is educational for them they learn things like triangles, squares and what's going on I mean there's a lot more you learn from TV than you do from a book that's my opinion (laughs)

Valerie uses television as an information source and after a certain item has caught her interest will gain further information from reading the newspaper. Thus television can be also utilised for stimulating reading. The same has been true for others from both groups. Andrew from the main group found reading the set books in class boring but after he watched the cartoon version of the book Animal Farm by George Orwell, he was stimulated enough to read the book again. The knowledge and meaning of the book that he had gained for watching the video enabled him to find meaning also in the written word.

8.12.1 Year 9 Groups
Similarly the Year 9 groups found little enjoyment in reading books or novels for information or enjoyment; they preferred newspapers. They enjoy watching television but tend to disparage its usefulness to them; several year 9 pupils do recognise that they can learn through the medium.
VM: so you tend not to read books
Dan: no I read papers I like reading the sports in papers and the TV, the front page and the TV guide
VM: what about television what do you watch?
Dan: I like watching football and educational programmes like Grange hill and East Enders, I know they're not educational but I like watching all them (...) they are real life stories and I watch a lot of thing like programmes to help you work at school sometimes when I have days off they sometimes on channel 4 they have programmes about science so when I'm ill I watch them

Several Yr9 groups find that the television used in school helps their understanding in a particular area:
Becky: we've just done Romeo and Juliet and saw a video which was great when we had our assessment on it, I understood the questions 'cos I'd seen it and [the teacher] explained it over and over again (...) I think seeing something is a good help to understanding

8.13 Hoping for success, barriers to success

As Barry has discovered, being good at the practical subjects or practical aspects of other subjects was not enough to gain access to higher education or a particular course in further education. Without good passes in English or maths to support his strengths in CDT, he was prevented from getting on the course he had chosen. He is angry with this because he believes that he does have skills that is now unable to develop:

Barry: education is right in saying you need English and maths because you do, that the way the world runs, CDT is what people would regard as a sideline like some people might say French CDT they're branches of the main set of education mean they're optional you can choose to do them or you can by-pass them but maths and English they're the route of everything and I haven't got them so everything else just doesn't count

Barry recognises that skills in English, that is reading and writing, are requisite in providing the route to a wider pathway of courses and the possible success in these courses. There is a real sense in his comments that he feels that his skills are being devalued by society. Opportunities to use his skills have been denied him and consequently there is no development of his skills. This causes feelings of frustration and inadequacy; and his image of 'self' becomes one of uselessness rather than one that could make a positive contribution to society.

Pam also is very anxious that she would not be accepted into university; although she has passed her GCSE with good grades and is studying the sciences at A level, she has been unable even after two re-takes to gain a C grade in English language; Catherine too has not yet obtained the elusive C grade.

Mark, who was in the 'middle' sets and willing to put in some hard work, realised that he was not going to be able to achieve the grades that would enable him to move directly into higher education. Although he, like the others, realises that his results would reflect his own efforts he nevertheless believes that his teacher should also take some responsibility. There is apparent in his comments the feeling that teacher expectations for this set were not very high, that the time would be spent more productively with the sets that would be able to get the A-C grades for pupils and teachers know that is these grades that 'count' for teacher,
pupils and the school. Mark is aware that he has no powers of negotiation with
the teachers and like Barry, feels powerless in the situation:

Mark: yeah we were in sets for maths English and languages. I was in the middle
sets for all of them.
VM; good how did that feel
Mark: it felt all right because the work load was good but when it came to the
exam , and we said can we get As if we did ...like it was a lucky exam paper and
the teacher said no, you do a set paper so the highest you can get is, in maths it
was a D in English was a D . I got a D for maths but only an E for English. If
we'd all done the same exam paper at the end of it all then perhaps some people
would have got lucky and got a better mark. But knowing you could only get a D
was a bit degrading really , you think of all the people in the top sets and you
think , what's the point. In English I thought the exams were really long we had
a lot of course work in it as well. The teacher she'd set you the course work for a
certain date and then gradually she'd just sort of forget to collect it in and you're
thinking if she's not going to collect it in I'll do it at a later date. And then in the
end you realise you've got five or six to do and you've got this deadline and
you're rushing on with them. It's all self inflicted really but if the teacher had
been a bit stricter you would have got a better deal out of school

8.14 Getting a good deal from school

Most of the young people interviewed, when asked if they gained a lot
from school were quite certain that they had learned. Peter who at the time of the
interview was unemployed puts the blame for his lack of achievement at school
solely on himself. He believes that the teachers did what they could for him and
that if he had his time again thing would be different. He has realised that
without qualifications he cannot set out on any career path; he believes that he
had the control for what he did at school and the results he obtained and he does
not blame the teachers or the school. Instead he puts the onus of responsibility
and blame on his own self:

VM: do you think you got a good deal from school?
Paul: No, no I could have done a lot better, it was my fault really not the
school's fault
VM: so you're blaming yourself are you?
Peter: yeah (laughs) the school did what they could for me
Paul: but I wasn't listening or anything like that I was messing about all the time
VM: but maybe you were messing about because you couldn't do the work
Peter: no, it weren't just, I mean I could do most of the work, some of the work
was quite difficult but it was just the people I used to hang around with (...) and
I wish I was back at school now, I now that sounds stupid but, I mean when I was
at school I didn't want to be there but...
VM: no, now you'd give your eye-teeth to be back and you'd pass your GCSE with flying colours
Peter; yeah I would like to get better grades, some more things, behind me, that's what you really need the experience and the grades (...) better examination marks O levels A levels, things like that that's what you need to get good jobs

Peter regrets the time he wasted at school now that he can reflect from a vantage point several years later of experiencing a series of casual jobs and unemployment; like other young people he knows that GCSE grades provide a door that is either open for them to choose courses or closed to prevent entry. (see Section 4.10)

However many of the young people, as I have attempted to show in this chapter, are aware that they do have other skills but these are of low status compared with achievements through the reading and written route. They know that they are capable in some areas and do have intelligence, although two commented that the skills they had were 'just common-sense'. School however has not developed these skills. Simon objected to being taught by a 'really basic' approach and further more resented that he was not given the same opportunities as his per group:
Simon: I did know myself that I could do what other people were doing
Simon, who was of the opinion that the system of setting was unfair, also wanted the school to recognise the different ways of learning that some pupils have:

Simon: I found that at school a lot of the teachers treated you differently to what they treat other kids, like in lessons, say in English there were all different sets, you'd get treated like -you'd know what everyone else was doing and you'd think I could do that its not hard and we're getting taught differently - really basic which doesn't help really 'cos you know I felt a lot of the time I could do what other people were doing but I didn't have the opportunity to do it, because I was in a lower set because of reading and writing. I was in the fourth set just through my reading and writing I did know myself that I could do what other people were doing its just that I had a different way of getting round to doing it
VM: and how did that make you act do you think?
Simon: well you try not to let it get to you but I mean you feel as if you were like lower than other people like it puts you on a downer that's what I think's wrong because you're not - its just different still think they should have given people the opportunity do the same as the others were doing and if they did it wrong they did it wrong but I felt I could have don what the other people were doing if I'd been taught and shown the ways
VM: so you managed to keep going even though you felt, did you feel angry or what
Simon: no I didn't feel angry it was like as if I'd missed out on something an opportunity that I could have taken and I didn't have the choice to take it
Simon provides evidence for Gardner’s (1983) suggestions of the presence of other forms of intelligence, which are differently balanced in individuals. It is also evident that the school system does not take into account these other intelligences as different learning approaches are not provided.

Catherine too recognises that alternative approaches would have aided her:

Catherine: *its so single minded sometimes, you know not everyone’s the same not everyone can learn in the same way, there should be a different choice*

VM: *of subjects*

Catherine: *no the way it’s taught because everyone learns differently*

These comments serve to highlight the points made in the section concerning ‘practical’ work; the young people’s preferences for that type of work may be a consequence of the different forms of intelligence.

Darren, however, believes the onus of responsibility for learning rests with the pupil and that neither the staff nor the school system should take the responsibility for any lack of achievement of the pupils.

8.15 Conclusions

The secondary school curriculum and exam system confirms these young people’s negative views of themselves and reinforces what they had suspected at junior school - they are ‘not very bright’. Teacher attitudes and school organisation have confirmed these views. They hold themselves in low self-esteem even though they may laugh off this ‘lack of ability’ and they compare themselves with their friends who they believe are more ‘intelligent’. The system has exerted its control through the organisation of classes. Anti-establishment attitudes emerge as they begin to recognise their lack of status in the school hierarchy in the bottom sets; they feel disempowered and there is the risk of them being deskilled rather than enabled to address their work. Many of the young people from both groups have tried to fight the system by displaying negative behaviour and attitudes towards work. Some have kept a low profile while others have worked hard, believing that hard work would bring the reward of moving up in the setting system. This lack of self-esteem may cause them to give up trying and showing an interest in those areas in which they are skilled. The realisation of the crucial importance of reading and writing does not make it easy for them to acquire this skill, neither do they wish to practise the skill for they have fears of shame and of being put down in front of their friends. They do not enjoy reading and writing and they do not read for pleasure.

Several young people realised that they were being offered only one route to learning, using the traditional skills of reading and writing. Other learning and information sources such as radio and television have little prominence in the
classroom, although these young people believe that television is for them a major source of information. The examples shown in this chapter aim to highlight the continued importance of reading and writing in the school curriculum. Schools and government policy makers maintain that the written aspects of the lessons, together with homework, reinforce learning, and conventional wisdom largely agrees with this view (Manen, 1990). Pupils tend to be provided with written notes from which to revise for examinations. With large classes and with the threat of possible unruly behaviour particularly among the 'lower' sets, giving individual written work can bring a calming atmosphere to the classroom and pupils are 'seen to be working'. I am not arguing that that this way of teaching cannot be defended, it is the route by which most pupils learn and reinforce their learning. My concern is with those pupils who have been unable to find success by this route.

Both the main group and Year 9 groups of young people recognise the heavy workload of the teachers and the amount of stress that they are under, and largely blame themselves for their perceived inadequacies and lack of success in examinations. The teachers unwittingly confirm these inadequacies, perhaps subconsciously, by concentrating their efforts on pupils who appear willing to learn and who show some achievement in the subject.

School organisation as far as both 'setting' and timetabling are concerned works against these pupils by not allowing them to study the range of subjects in which they would be able to achieve. They are also unable to achieve high grades because of the tiered system. Some schools do not offer subjects such as PE or Drama and whatever the subject, the main examination assessment is by the written word. Thus on leaving school most of these young people, having obtained 'low grade' GCSEs, recognise their limited value in the workplace and thus tend to be grateful for whatever they are offered.
Chapter 9: Discussion of data: the after school experiences of the young people in the main group

9.1 Introduction

In this chapter I consider the effects that a low level of skills in literacy have on the young people's after school experiences, and the roles that agencies such as the careers service and job centres play in the young people's decision making about their futures. The types of courses the young people take and the role of employers are also discussed. Interview data from the young people and also from adults who perform key roles in assisting the young people to obtain training and work are used and additional information comes from field notes.

The themes that emerged from the data concerning the school years of the young people - the control influences of school organisation and teachers and their lack of self-confidence and esteem, are manifested in their lives after school.

9.2 Self-confidence levels

The lack of good formal qualifications has affected the levels of self-confidence of this group of young people. Their GCSE examination results in large part confirmed their views of self, and it has been recognised that poor results may contribute to further decline in confidence and self esteem, both essential requirements of employers (Bash and Coulby, 1989).

The controlling aspects of the school experience continue to exert a strong influence and may result in the young person becoming less proactive in decision making about his/her future and instead, a more passive or reactive stance may be acquired. They believe and accept what their examination results have re-affirmed; that they are 'not very clever' and so must accept the job or training that is offered to them, even though this was not the future that they had planned for themselves. Their reaction to what they believe initially is a negative situation may however be positive and they may persuade themselves that this is what they wanted for their future (Bates, 1993). By taking this attitude they conform to the controls exerted by either the employer or the further education system. A small minority of the young people were beginning to experience some success within the system; the two young people who were on the A level route were feeling positive although they expressed some concern about their A level examinations. Generally however, their school to work transitions were not without problems.

Another reaction is to reject what is on offer at college either with the belief that they deserve something better or with the feeling that, having left
school, they can go out and get a job without having any extra training and thus take the risk of ‘going it alone’

9.3 Keeping a positive attitude and trusting the system

Although both Simon and Mark believed that the attitudes to them in the school had been unfair they nevertheless had decided to follow full-time college courses. Both had supportive home backgrounds and hoped that by continuing to work hard they would become successful in their chosen fields.

In the early years of secondary school Mark had thought that he would specialise in business studies but had realised that his computer and literacy skills were not adequate for him to follow such a course. He had complained (Chapter 8) that the tiering system had refused him the opportunity to aim to attain the higher GCSE grades. He was unhappy in school especially at the time of option choices because he did not know what career path he was going to follow and believed that little advice was given at the time. He decided to use his skills in sport and found out the entry requirements for a City and Guilds course in sports and leisure. He feels that he has regained his self-esteem whilst at college now that he has set career goals for himself and, because he is enthusiastic and determined to succeed, he finds that his literacy skills, an integral part of the course, have improved.

VM: are you better at practical things that you are on the theory side?
Mark: yeah I would have thought so. Mind you this year through college I’ve been getting top marks for my course work, which is quite surprising, but I suppose as its something I want to do my whole attitude is different towards it
VM: oh, right
Mark: in school anything practical I’d be top of the class, but when it came down to the theory side of it you wouldn’t hear of me
VM; do you feel better about yourself than you did at junior or secondary school?
Mark: yes much better, my reading and writing is gradually improving, sort of getting up to a pretty good level. At first I thought it was a bit difficult with all the reading and all about the body and all that, but once you get used to it all the words just stick in your mind, I can now write an exam paper and read through it and think ‘well I’m not going to lose many marks for spelling, and at least now I know what I am going to do, like before I hadn’t a clue, but now I know I want to do something in sport I just concentrate on anything to do with it.

He can now set targets for himself because he is well motivated to achieve. He enjoys the more relaxed atmosphere of college whilst at the same time recognising his own responsibilities towards his future achievements.
Mark; its more sort of laid back but you know if you don't try you're out. In school you were there it's the law, but at college you've gone there for your own choice so you want to try. I'm finding I'm doing ten times as much as I was at school.

Simon completed a DOVE (pre-vocational) course in engineering, followed by a BTEc National Part One. He was considering whether or not to go further as he realises the importance of 'good qualifications'.

VM: what made you want to have a good qualification?
Simon: you need it really otherwise you don't get anywhere these days, you need qualifications, if it comes down to two people and you've got better qualifications you're more likely to get the job and then its always something to fall back on

His comment that pupils believed themselves to be lacking in intelligence because of a lack of high grades is very pertinent to this study.

Simon: it's not written down, people think 'well I haven't got the qualifications it's not written down so I can't know it' but they do know it and they can do it.

In spite of these remarks I later discovered that Simon was running a fruit and vegetable stall in a large market, a job which had previously been a Saturday job. According to his brother, Simon was making 'loads of money.'

Andrew is on an apprenticeship YT scheme for carpentry, working mainly on building sites. When he left school he was unsure what he wanted to do and applied for bricklaying, then apprenticeships in carpentry or to be an electrician.

Andrew: I was going to do bricklaying then I thought, no I'll do carpentry so I put down for carpentry and then filled in a form for an electrician as well and I went for a test (...) and passed it and I went for an interview with T. Borough council for an electrical apprenticeship but they was looking for like Cs and above so I didn't get that and then at the last minute (...) I got a 'phone call asking me if I still wanted to do carpentry still and a building firm just up the road was looking of an apprentice [YT, VM] so I like went up there and got the job

He was very aware, when he first started the job, of the low status this work had in the eyes of society. However, he is now excited by the fact that if he can complete his third year (which he may have to fund himself), he can begin taking a series of exams, which will ultimately give him a high professional status.
Andrew: when I first went in to the trade I thought ‘ugh’, like you see all the builders and that like everyone knows he’s a builder he must be well thick, and then I heard about the IOC [Institute Of Carpenters] and like I went round my mates house and then I goes I’m going to get letters after my name ‘cos all my mates are doing A levels and that. One of my mates got six As in his GCSEs so like he’s a bit of a brain box and I goes I’m going to have letters after my name, boy (laughs)

Thus he believes that he might have an ‘acceptable’ career pathway, although the job he has now is of a lowly status, in time he could rise to become equal to his friends and have some degree of prestige. Unfortunately this happy situation may not come about as Andrew is unsure if his employer will keep him on because of either lack of work or the fact that at this stage of his training the employer has to pay Andrew at a higher rate. The risk is that a beginner and therefore a cheaper youth trainee will fill his job. Although he realises he may have to fund himself in the third year of his apprenticeship he has not yet investigated the costs of courses and the series of examinations he would have to take to reach the membership status. Andrew then is still reliant on the system to give him a continued apprenticeship without which he cannot move forward and thus is aware of the control of the system.

Louise had wished to do a BTec diploma in business studies but because of her lack of acceptable grades, settled on a foundation year. When she had completed this she appears not to have been offered the higher course and was offered a YT scheme.

Louise: because I didn’t get any Cs or anything I couldn’t do the BTec National. So I thought I could do the lower course and work my way up slowly. But then this year the college mucked up, sort of said that I couldn’t do the course because I wasn’t umm, I can’t think what he said now. He said that I was having a lot of trouble with my work, but I wasn’t really because I got a lot of merits and passes in my results officially so I could have done the higher one. But now I’m on the youth training working in an office. (p3)

Several months after the interview Louise telephoned me to say that her employer had ‘given her the push’. She was given a new placement in an insurance office and continued with her one day a week release as she ‘wanted to get on’

9.3.1 The ‘care’ girls
The idea of keeping a positive attitude to the situation the young people found themselves in appears to apply particularly to the group Bates (1993.) has called the ‘care girls’

Of the ten young women interviewed six of them found themselves after they had left school on the ‘caring’ course leading to BTec qualifications. This is a YT programme that trains participants mainly for jobs as care assistants in homes for the elderly. I cannot say ‘took up the option’ to go on the course or ‘chose to go on’ the course. The phrase that Sarah used ‘they put us on’ seems to describe better the situation they found themselves in. Four remained on the course whilst two of them had left. When they were 14 years old at school the four young women had had different plans (see profiles): working as a secretary, as a theatrical make up artist, in business administration and as a nurse.

Debbie had taken advice from a careers officer after leaving school. Then after she had finished the PVC course took advice from her college tutors and moved to a one year YT in caring for the elderly. Although she has hopes of becoming a social worker eventually she rationalises the decision to leave the full-time course by accepting what she says the college teachers have told her and explaining that she needs to gain experience in this type of work before she moves on.

VM: what made you decide to go to college?
Debbie: I don’t know really like a lot of people from school did go to jobs and a lot of people did go to college. My mum and dad though it would be better to go to college, but I did think about it and I did go to a careers officer and he said there’s a lot of courses you can do and I thought yeah I’ll do this course I’ll see how it goes and if I don’t like it

VM: so what made you decide to go on to youth training instead of going on to the next part of the caring course?
Debbie: well my teachers at college didn’t think it was worth me going on ‘cos I’d already done it, its all just based on all the same things. I’d worked at the H. Day centre before Christmas, they asked me to come back ‘cos they thought I was really good with people (...) and excellent in my job so I thought yeah I’ll go there (...) when I work at the Day centre and go to college one day a week you do get a qualification at the end of the year so I’ll be glad to get that, but I’d like to go to college again, yeah, I wouldn’t mind being a social worker but I’ll see how I go at the Day centre first

Debbie appears to gather some self-confidence in her abilities when she is working with the elderly people. She feels useful to them and they appreciate her involvement. Debbie’s mother in conversation (from field notes) believes that English has been her daughter’s ‘drawback’ because of her inability to express
herself adequately in writing but that the college has recognised her skills.
Debbie amplifies this view:

Debbie: you see people can’t believe that I got such top grades for doing so well in my work experience and then sometimes I’d be in the classroom and, I would be able to talk about it but I wouldn’t be able to write it down on paper

Vicki also has the long-term aim of a social work degree by means of a series of courses that will take six years to complete. Like Debbie she enjoys working with the elderly. And after trying out a number of work placements with the elderly she recognised the worth behind what she was doing:

Vicki: my mum kept saying why don’t you be a probation officer. I was going ‘no thanks’ and then it just clicked that I’d like to work, ‘cos I did a few work placements in elderly homes and I enjoyed that and I just thought that Aids victims and mentally and physically handicapped could do with a little help. (...) I really enjoy working with the elderly caring for them. I had to take them to the toilet and wash them and things like that and it was really worthwhile and at the moment I’m doing domestic at my mum’s place they’ve just offered to do me an afternoon as a carer.

Sarah, who says that she is a shy person also, has found that her confidence in herself has improved as she looks after the elderly and works alongside the staff. She had spent the majority of her school life with a hearing impairment; and although an operation when she was 14 had restored full hearing to her, she still finds it difficult to initiate conversations with other people. Sarah had put aside her ideas of work in business administration because she ‘didn’t know how to use the computer and instead ‘decided to work with the elderly and children’. She took guidance from a careers guidance officer. Although she had thought initially of working with children her first placement had been in the Day care centre for the elderly.

VM; how did he help?
Sarah: right oh well when I first left school I went on another course for eight week doing bricklaying
VM: bricklaying?
Sarah: yeah and Home Economics English things like that ‘cos [the careers officer, VM] put me on it and after that he said do you want to go onto another course for two years so I did working with the elderly and children and disabled. I wanted to work with children when I first left school but then they put me on this placement first [at the day centre, VM] and I was on it for six months and then I got to like it so I wanted to stay on it
VM: *did he* [the careers officer] *offer you any other courses besides that or did you ask about any?*

Sarah: *well I asked him about the BTec for the elderly but he said that would be too hard for me so he put me into the easier one YT ‘cos I wouldn’t like to have gone to college for a whole week, I go only for a day, I don’t mind that* (...) *last year we did City and Guilds and now I do NVQ in home care* (...) *in September I’ll have to go looking for a job that’s the hard bit* (...) *they say its easier to get a job with the certificate then it is to go straight from school and try and get a job with the elderly so if I have both them certificates I should have a fair chance.*

She still had worries that the next part of her course will provide with some problems:

Sarah: *The NVQs get harder, harder than last years work like the writing work, I have done some writing here* [at the day Centre, VM] *I ask my boss for spellings and punctuation*

She gives her reasons for working with the elderly:

Sarah: *well they’re kind and I like helping them with their dinners and teas and things like that, sometimes I’ve to take one of the ladies to the toilet and I like doing that as well so I enjoy being there yeah*

 Tracey did her school work experience in a nursery and applied to go on the NNEB course when she left school. Although it appears to be that her grades were not high enough to get on the NNEB course she hesitates to admit this. She justifies her acceptance of the BTec caring course by believing it is the route by which she can obtain her goal of getting into nursing

Tracey: *I had to go down to college for an interview and they took my grades and I don’t really remember because I couldn’t get on to the NNEB because there were too many people so they offered me a place on the BTec* (...) *I still wanted to get in to nursing but I couldn’t because I didn’t have the qualifications like all the Cs and As and everything like that so I thought well I’ll have to do something lower and go up, take it slowly and that’s what I’ve done.*

Her determination to succeed helped her at school when she was prepared to work at what she ‘hated’ in order to pass her GCSE exam:

Tracey: *I hate reading, by the end of the third year [Year 9] I really started getting into it saying how I’m going to do it how I’m going to pass and I did eight exams at the end and I passed each one of them; they say you need high grades get into things but I dunno you know, I can do it, just not brilliant.

VM: *yes you need high grades but, as you said, you’re getting there by different route aren’t you?*

Tracey: *yeah that’s what I was told, (...) I mean I’ve learned by the hard way but I said I was going to do it and that’s what I’m doing. I got the course I wanted*
to do, I passed it, next year I'll pass that course and I'll keep going till I get the grades I want

Tracey is still aware that her full potential has not been tapped. Just as in school during Drama when the written work belied her acting abilities so on this course her work experience gains for her higher marks than her written work. It is easy to recognise that Tracey has many capabilities and shows tenacity and determination, is able in many ways but she still finds that, as in school, these abilities do not get strong recognition.

Tracey; [in school] the teachers even said I was better at practical work than I am at actual theory work, in my work experience I got brilliant reports back because I'm actually working not writing (...) last year when I realised that I need real high grades to pass the course I started getting distinctions by the end, but it wasn't good enough, because at the beginning I was just getting merits and passes but the teachers were quite amazed that I was getting distinctions [but] then it was my practical work that I was writing about.

Just as in school she feels that others receive credit from her abilities.

Tracey; The same at college what I've done this year I've given ideas out and my friends got a distinction and I only got a merit for it which made me a bit mad

These four 'care' girls have it appears until this time in their training seen and had experience of the 'pleasant side' of the 'caring' role. They are useful to the elderly serving them meals, taking them to the toilet, and getting involved in the social activities. They see their role as positive and in return the elderly appreciate their efforts, which consequently affects the young people's self esteem. Their YT training places them on the Day centres that cater for the elderly who are fit and well enough to travel. The 'care' girls that Bates (1993) interviewed had, during their training, experienced behaviours from the elderly that show other perhaps 'darker' aspects of the caring role. They needed to cope with incontinence, violence, and death. The young women I interviewed were practised in the more social aspects of the role and had yet to experience these more unwelcome behaviours from the elderly community.

The two young women that left after beginning the 'care' course chose to reject it, believing that they that they deserved something better. Although this action could be regarded as a proactive stance indicating their wish to take some of the control over and responsibility for their own futures, it was more a reaction to a rejection and what they did not want to do and was not immediately replaced by a course that they felt positive about.
VM: right so could you not go on to the NNEB straight from school if you'd have wanted to?
Jane: no 'cos my grades weren't high enough to do it I went on to the DOVE but I didn't. I mean I was only there a week I didn't even give it a chance 'cos I knew it wasn't the course that I wanted to do 'cos its working with elderly people as well as children and that's not what I wanted to do I wanted purely children knowledge and they were going to be piling me with information on old people which wasn't going to be interesting to me I lost my interest and I was just I'd sort of given up basically 'cos it wasn't till sort of this year and the beginning of like last year that I really I got any motivation to really stick at anything in your teens there are times when you cant just be bothered with, sort of you hated everything in every way whereas this course is interesting me

Valerie's GCSE grades had prevented her from getting on an NNEB course. She was persuaded to take what she said was offered to her as a preparation course for the NNEB but when she realised that this was not going to be the case she left the course:

Valerie: I always wanted to be a nanny (...) when I left school I applied for the NNEB, they turned me down, (...) they sent me a letter they said to 'right you've been turned down for this but if you go on the BTec First in Caring its to help you with your English because you're like behind in it and you need to get up to date, then you go for an interview again' and they said 'it will more than likely guarantee you'll get a place [on the NNEB] this time.' So when we got enrolled and started going on it we started to talk to the teachers (...) and they turned round and said 'no it's nothing like that.' (...) The BTec first was mainly to do with elderly and handicapped people nothing to do with children really so it was a waste of time doing that course in the first place (...) because 'you'll get a place on the NNEB' well it's a load of rubbish they turned round and said well you can't go on the NNEB because your writing skills aren't up to standard.

It should be asked how important writing skills are in the caring of babies and young children. Valerie's skills were adequate enough to read any health or safety warnings and to write coherent sentences. During the interview Valerie appeared to be a vivacious young woman, thoroughly competent in oral skills who enjoyed the company of young children and looking after babies, (she had helped to care for her aunt’s premature baby). The problem for Valerie is that much of the NNEB course is taught and assessed through the medium of the written word and whilst she would probably have few difficulties with the practical aspects of the course she would have been at risk of failing the written parts. Consequently she decided to take a job that required only a basic level of literacy skills. Her self-confidence is fragile and she does not want to feel threatened by finding herself in a position which highlights her 'inadequacies.'
9.4 Meeting hurdles

In addition to the limited choices of training available to these young people some of them found that the training process itself was not without problems.

David, having enjoyed Home Economics at school initially found his own job through a friend as a temporary kitchen assistant but soon realised that this was not going to lead to acceptance on a trainee chef’s course which had been his plan. He then put his trust in the system and took a YT scheme for motor vehicle and body repairs, which, for the college based part of the course, he passed with credits. However, his work placement seems to have been fraught with difficulties that the college was unable to resolve. And he had to sort the problems out for himself. The problems were caused partly by the amount of money he was receiving and partly because his work placement employer was giving him little training in his specialist area but instead using him as a car mechanic:

David: I went to college and did motor vehicle training and crash repairs specialist (...) and I got credits but then halfway through my second year I was getting hassle from my work placement I couldn’t afford to go to college and get to work ‘cos they was mucking me round in wages ‘cos I was on a youth training scheme and I only got (...) twenty pounds, went to thirty pounds but my boss kept saying he would give me a pay rise and he went away for a couple of weeks and I never got nothing and he used to go through it with me like that four or five times a year so I had to leave there

VM: did you go to college and say that

David: yeah but they couldn’t do nothing about it ‘cos I could do my work there, but the governor that I was working for kept making me do mechanics (...) I knew bits and pieces on the engine and his mechanic left so he got me doing mechanic rather than body repairs. (...) I mean there was a lot of hassle going on at the time so (...) I’m just doing part time work now at the tyre shop so hopefully a job should come out of that soon.

David has taken the initiative and made his own decisions; he was confident enough to decide that his ‘governor’ at the garage was not treating him fairly. He feels let down by the TEC he was attending because he feels they did not support him when he asked for advice on payment from the garage. He was not impressed by either the college buildings or the course content:

David: the college I went to, the building basically its like an empty school building you’ve got classrooms you’ve got tables and it is solid writing for about four hours of the day and for the other four you’ve got practical
There is no guarantee that David will get full-time employment be it permanent or temporary. Although at the time of interview he was waiting to see if his employer would give him a permanent job he was prepared to take the initiative and if necessary take risks:

David: *if I could get the money I could set up my own mobile, you have a tyre fitting machine, a balancer, all your equipment, your hand tools your tyres, all your stock*  

VM: *would you like to set up your own business?*  

David; *yeah but there's no funds; no funds no job [laughs] (...) I mean I can do the books I know how the business runs, I know basically everything about it what I don't know I could learn its all just numbers basically with VAT books and I think I could do them as well*

So until he can be funded to start his own business which seems unlikely at present because he has no permanent work, he remains dependent on employers and the state whereas he could be far more in charge of his own life accepting the risks and responsibilities of running a business.

Stephen, like David had problems during his work placement. He enjoyed the practical elements of YT mechanics course, but his relationship with his employer caused problems and he also had difficulties at the training centre:

Stephen: *I would be doing a service on a car and he'd come out and say you're doing it wrong and I'd been told to do it this way by the mechanics and he goes and has a go at the mechanics (...) after the argument I had to make the tea and clean out the toilets (sighs) and I'm not there to do that I'm there to be like taught*  

VM: *do you go back to college and talk to them*  

Stephen: *no I was supposed to dunno I hated day release 'cos like I just didn't get on with anybody in the class and I was constantly in trouble with the teachers and they chucked me out and the training centre said I couldn't go back to them and so I lost out on my training*

John’s difficulties derived from the course he was put on. He had enjoyed his school work experience in car mechanics and decided to carry on with this type of training when he left school. His lack of ‘good results’ in English and Maths prevented him from taking a car mechanics course at college and he took a PVC course in engineering following the advice from the careers centre:

John: *I needed higher grades in English and maths to get into C. college and I didn't get them (...) so I went to S. college for about four months and I enjoyed the engineering side of it which was like crafting tools but you had to do English*
as well and computers and I didn't like that. I said I was happy but I wasn't really
VM: so what happened?
John: er (pause) I dropped out and that was it

At the time of interview his prospects had improved; he had gained an apprenticeship in car mechanics with day release at the college that had earlier turned him down. Again he enjoys the practical side of the training but had become frustrated with the college course:

John: it's a bit boring; cos we did what I did at work every day, I don't like the written side of it it's quite easy but It's not interesting they dictate, we fill in sheets and I can't keep up half the time; just before the end of term they asked me what the problem and I said that I'm dyslexic and they said I should have told them at the beginning of the year, I said that I wrote it on the entry form

He believes that he is learning much more now than he did at school he feels that there is purpose to his learning, although he does, like others, put the blame for his lack of learning in school on himself:

John: I've learned more being out of school than what I did when I was at school like reading and better writing its all sort if come to me but it didn't at school probably because I was messing about I've got a job to so so I just get on and do it. I'll take in anything practical, I did a course on the computer with diagrams and a bit like equations CO, CO2 and hydro carbons emissions KV's and spark plugs and such, and there is a diagnostic machine, diagnoses what is wrong with the car I've got the highest test [result] in my whole school life, seventy six percent which was a merit

9.5 Going it alone

The young people who decided to 'go it alone' without acquiring further qualifications or going on a training scheme were young people in the main who had either reacted against school or had rejected the courses offered to them after school. They had not planned a career pathway for themselves and thus were not behaving in a proactive manner but rather reacting against what they saw to be negative situations. They had thought that by working hard at a job they would find fulfilment and regain self-esteem. The problem for these young people was that, their self esteem being low and with low exam results, they had little power to influence would-be employers to persuade them that they were suitable to train for advancement. They soon begin to realise that getting a job and 'going it alone' did not bring the fulfilment they thought it would.
Valerie decided to ‘go it alone’ because of her experiences on the course that was offered to her after her GCSE results. (see 9.3.1) She decided to take up the full time post at what had been her Saturday job – working in the supermarket. But her rejection of the system has not brought with it any recognition that she is in charge of her life and that she can affect its direction. On the contrary she still feels trapped by the system; she hates her job but cannot see that there are any alternatives:

Valerie: *I hate it every morning I wake up and think, oh have I got to go to work today. I absolutely hate it; the customers are rude, oh. I can’t stand it I really can’t stand it. If, if, to tell you the truth I wouldn’t work there but I have to work there because I have to pay rent but other than that I wouldn’t work there I absolutely hate it the moneys not that good either so its not great*
VM: *so you really don’t want to do this*
Valerie: *no I want to be a nanny*

Having kept her head down in school so that she wouldn’t be noticed leads her to have the same attitude at work. Jane on the other hand with her mother’s involvement (see 9.7) was able to get on the course she wanted.

When he was 14 Peter had wanted to be a bricklayer, partly because that was the work his father was involved in and also because he knew that the further education college offered courses in this area. However when he left school he went full-time into the hardware store that had previously been his Saturday job. He left after six months as he found the job uninteresting and poorly paid and that his employer was difficult to please.

Peter: *I was just like getting told what to do, do this job and do that job all at the same time and then if it wasn’t doe I was getting like told off for it. He was saying ‘go and clear up the sheds, tidy them up a bit.’ I would be half way through doing that and he’d say ‘make the tea and do this job’ and then he’d say ‘is the shed done?’ and I’d say no ‘cos I’ve been doing this other job and he’d say why isn’t it done? And moaning all the time.*

He then worked in a pet shop but left as it ‘wasn’t very interesting’, could not find another job and has been ‘signing on ever since’

Stephen after, his negative experiences on his YT placement managed to get a job ‘off my own bat’ but this was’ off the books’ and ‘it just went downhill again’. At the end of these experiences he was dispirited, ‘I dunno, I was feeling a bit suicidal’ but his girlfriend had ‘straightened me out’ and had ‘seen it through’ with him.
9.6 Too old at 18?

Initially on leaving school the young people were not aware that the lack of qualifications would be so crucial in their lives after school. Once the young people are off the albeit tenuous route to work by means of college courses and youth training they believe there is little chance of getting back on to it. Chris who has been unemployed since he left school regrets his decision not to go to college:

Chris: I thought when I was at school if I give college a miss I would get a job straight away. I wish I'd gone to college now and then get a job, now I find getting a job harder than what I would at college

Peter had found his first job unsatisfying; Barry points out one of the possible reasons:

Barry: in business everyone wants a result they haven't got time to teach people. When you're working in a shop you do the work you're told to do, if you can't do it, goodbye

However by the time of interview at 18 –19 the realisation of the importance of qualifications had hit them, those who were out of work in particular and they regretted this lack more often than not blaming their lack of exam success on themselves. Thus the self-esteem remains at low ebb. A sense of helplessness becomes even stronger as the young people are hit by additional difficulties when they find that is not easy to return to training and education. This situation made them wish they could be given a second chance at school. Barry feels that qualifications are necessary to obtain decent employment but occasionally 'luck' may play a part and provide an interview.

Barry: that's what counts qualifications unless you can get an interview and (...) really impress them. You know I've been lucky with interviews (...) I've got nothing to offer really qualifications wise but (...) In an interview you've got to do everything to impress and be the best in that room 'cos if you're not you know your life is going to suffer, you know your ego just shrinks when they say 'sorry you haven't got the job'.

Stephen blames himself for his predicament of not having a job, he believes that it is his own fault he did not work at school and so did not obtain any decent qualifications. At the time of interview he saw no chance of getting back onto any kind of training pathway:
Stephen: *I mean I've learned a lot from my mistakes now but it's too late so if I could turn the clocks back it would be fine, I'd probably go back to school now, I wouldn't bunk at all, I mean I'd probably get a career.*

Barry accepts that he was irresponsible during his school years, that he made little effort and that his behaviour was disruptive and recognises that for him to have a chance at succeeding his reading and writing skills central to obtaining qualifications need improvement. He also sees that it is 'too late' and that he does not have any authority to influence the situation:

Barry: *because of my standard of reading and writing spelling what's happened at school has affected me all the way through life and will affect me until the day I die, there's nothing much I can do about it because when you get to a certain age you're expected to go out and earn money. If I told my parents I was going back to school to learn you know they wouldn't support me I would be left just by myself. I couldn't go back and do it now it's damaged me for life. I could try and do it but it wouldn't be right to just take GCSEs again I'd have to do the whole run up towards it. I'd basically have to go through secondary school again, that would probably help me but it could never possibly happen because of society and education's used to. It should be available but without money provided by me it couldn't happen, but what can I say, I can't tell the education department to do it.*

Barry is not complaining without some foundation of what happens in practice. State-run further education colleges do not run 2 year GCSE courses for young people who have not taken GCSEs or who wish to take a different range of GCSE subjects. They provide re-sits of the examinations that have been failed, Valerie too knows that to escape from her situation she needs to return to study to obtain qualifications:

VM: *how are you going to get to be a nanny then?*  
Valerie: *well I can't can I, how can I what go back to college and learn my English?*  
VM: *well I don't know maybe*  
Valerie: *well I could do that, but I feel if I go back to college now I don't know anyone they're all going to be younger than me and I'm going to be put in class with people who are younger but that are my standard and they're going to think oh God she's eighteen and I'm only sixteen look at her standard.*  
VM: *so you're very sensitive about what people think about you*  
Valerie: *oh yeah, yeah*  
VM: *but you're capable of doing it aren't you?*  
Valerie: *oh yeah I can do it (...) so I'm not saying I'm a failure. If I really wanted to get on the [NNEB] course so bad than I suppose I could go back to college and do all my English again if I really wanted to, but because of knowing that I'll have to go in a lower class with younger people I'm not going to do that*  
VM: *there's evening class*
Valerie: you have to pay for them though don't you?

Her poor self-image prevents her from going back to college and getting back on the track to become a nanny, work she still wants to do. Lack of confidence in meeting new people also prevents her from enjoying her hobby of athletics, a skill which she let lapse whilst at secondary school. Even if she had the opportunity to go on courses to gain more qualifications at this stage of her life she is hesitant as she would be with students younger than herself and she feels would appear foolish to them.

Darren went straight from school into work with his father on cleaning contracts in the winter and gardening in the summer, although grateful that he has a job nevertheless has some misgivings about his lack of qualifications and believes that he should do a course.

Darren: I might start going to night school or something on mechanics or do a day release in green keeping, to get a trade behind me (...) just in case something falls through, you like to have something behind you
VM: so if you had a course in car mechanics?
Darren: yeah, (...) I enjoy things, like, I should be good at that I'm quite intelligent when it come to things like that, well common sense really (...) I can't sit down and write things, I don't really enjoy writing

Michael has completed his second year as an apprentice plumber and though grateful for his job regrets his lack of qualifications

Michael: I may not have got any qualifications but I don't think I would be in any better position than what I am now. I've go a job, a good steady job as long as I take care of it, I'll be all right. That all anyone can ask for, it’s a good trade to be in I wouldn't have been any better off but I would have liked to have more qualifications

Peter, now regretting his past school behaviour and his friendships with the wrong people, expressed a wish to be back at school because he is now aware that qualifications obtained in school carry weight for the future.

Peter; yeah and I wish I was back at school now I know that sounds stupid but (...) I mean when I was at school I didn’t want to be there but now I would like to get better grades, some more things behind me that what you really need is the experience and the grades, better examination marks better GCSE levels A levels things like that that’s what you need to get better jobs.

He is now unemployed wishing that he had gone to college when he left school instead of working full time in a hardware shop. He worries now about getting a place now that he is over eighteen and that it would have been easier for him to get a place at college straight from school.
Paul I've sent loads [of applications] I've sent one off to C. College, I've been right over to H. one of the colleges over there. I've been all over the place for interviews and no one's replied. I've been to S. College sent application forms in and no one's replied.

But he has had no success; the fact that he has had no replies serves only to make him feel helpless and reinforce feelings of failure:

Peter: I sat down one day. I've got a typewriter indoors its only an old thing but I typed out a letter and took it up to the library and photocopied them, I sent them off to about five garages and I haven't got no reply from them
VM: were you not a bit angry?
Peter: yeah I do get a bit upset when they don't reply I mean 'cos you take, you sit down and you take some time writing it out planning it, what you're going to say and you've got to type it up and then when you send it off and you get no reply I mean it does make you a bit angry waiting all that time and no reply I mean even if they just phoned me and said 'no we don't need no one' at least I'd know where I stand then

He is equally frustrated by the fact that his unemployment status loses him valuable time in gaining any job experience and is beginning to lose enthusiasm for his sports activities and generally negative (another phrase) about his future prospects

Peter: there's nothing about for my age, I mean I've got no experience and that's what you need you need a job to get the experience before you can get like an upgraded job
VM: how do you spend your time?
Peter; its mainly dossing now oh it does get boring sitting around all day walking around the streets I mean 'cos there's nothing to do round here (.) I get fed up and bored and things like that; I don't really get angry. I mean I'm looking for work, I've done my best over the past years since I left school.
Peter: I'd like to get into, dunno, anything just a job (laughs) I want a job, something practical

Of all the young people interviewed Keith had experienced the most difficulties in his home background, school and personal life. Although he began a pre-vocational leisure course at college, he dropped out after his father committed suicide. This course would seem to have been particularly inappropriate for him as it is concerned with dealing with the public and Keith is highly conscious of his speech difficulties:

Keith: I wasn't really interested in education, I think I just went to college because my friends went there and we didn't like do anything practical we were always in a classroom working, it was always written work (...) I do the
occasional bit of work if it comes up I don't want to be on the dole all my life I haven't got any in the near future to get a job and sort my life out
VM: if you were going to how would you sort your life out?
Keith: well just get a job basically (...) probably work where it doesn't involve the public, probably factory work

A lack of reading and writing skills have pushed Valerie into a job she hates she still wants to be a nanny but does not foresees that there is any hope in that line for a future career she believes that she was duped into taking a lower grade course mainly caring for the elderly as she was promised that when her skills improved she would get on the course of her choice.

9.7 Parental Attitudes

In general the parents supported the work or training that the young people in the main group were following. The degree of support differed. Some left the responsibility for any decisions about the future to their offspring. With very few exceptions the young people I interviewed were living in the parental home (most young people were expected to give parents part of their wage or training allowance for their keep). The parents of some of the young people were very supportive of their children showing an interest in their courses and giving them encouragement. Several parents had positively intervened on behalf of their children. Other parents abrogated responsibility for their child once the age of 16 had been reached; by this I mean that the parents recognised the young person as an adult living his /her own life and contributing to the household expenses as a wage earner. Any decisions about their child's future career were left to the young person.

Sometimes however intervention by a parent or a chance happening can create enabling situations. (see Giddens, Chapter 2 fateful 'moments') In the case of these young people it was mothers who were being proactive in obtaining training for their child, they were making decisions for them. This was true in Michael's case. He had 'blown school out', leaving school in the early part of his GCSE year because he realised that he 'wasn't going to get much' in his exams. He was following a three year apprenticeship after his mother had answered an advertisement in the local paper and had arranged an interview for him with a firm of motor mechanics he feels that with motor mechanics he is in the best occupation for himself because 'even if I had been well intelligent at school that's what I would have done anyway.'

John was unhappy on the PVC engineering course that he had been put onto after being refused entry onto a mechanics course because of a lack of grades. Realising that he was unhappy his mother intervened on his behalf ('she
just I think like looked in the paper"), then when he was called for an interview for the apprenticeship she took him to the interview. Once there John's mother was called into the interview with him:

(from field notes)
John's mum: I actually just took him and waited in reception but they actually asked me to come into the interview (...) 'cos there were twenty eight applicants and they told him afterwards that one of the reasons he got the job was because his parents, his mother, had enough interest to go with him.

Mark mentions the involvement his mother has in his studies and attitude:

Mark: yeah I never used to muck about a lot [at school] as I knew my mum would kill me, (...) I should pass this course, I did enough revising for it, I think it was my mum I would write down notes and she'd ask me questions with the answers down beside her

Jane's mother too intervened on behalf of her child she was instrumental in getting Jane a place on an NVQ child based course she visiting the careers centre with Jane, getting 'stroppy' with them so that Jane was found a place in 'half an hour' after she had been visiting the centre on her own for eight months After leaving the 'caring' course, although working, had become dispirited after visiting the careers office:

Jane: I left the shop, I knew that wasn't what I wanted to do (...) I was going down to the careers office but they weren't doing anything (...) obviously its caused arguments with me and my Mum she said oh you're not trying but I was trying. It took my Mum to go down there and actually say to them 'help my daughter please come off it she's been coming down her for like eight months but you haven't helped her in any way and within half an hour they'd got me on this course so it took somebody getting stroppy with them for them too even think about helping someone

These were supportive parents who seemed to want to be involved in the decision-making for their child's future. With their own backgrounds as reference they encouraged their children to follow the working class tradition of obtaining employment in skilled manual labour. Barry, on the other hand, feels that his parents did not support him in his efforts to find a career for himself:

Barry: my parents were telling me to go out and get a job and leaving it at that, there was no encouragement; (...) parents should give encouragement to their children; I haven't had any encouragement form my parents, they would sit by ad say' right go out and get a job, that was wrong, because I was going out and getting jobs. I got to the stage where I was working in Burger King full time
that was my job. I sat down one night and thought about what I was doing, looked at my pay cheque and thought this is not me this is not good enough, and I thought its my parents fault because they rushed me into the situation, they said 'go out and get a job and then you can pay us rent, they were silly jobs that didn't mean anything to me.

The attitude shown by the parents of the young people seems to be on the one hand 'let them get on with it' with little discussion about or involvement in their work or plans. This does not necessarily mean that the parents are not interested what their children are doing; it is often an indication that the parents are treating them as adults respecting the decisions the young people have taken; these young people are expected to contribute to the household expenses because they are earning. On the other hand several young people in the study relied on their parents for advice, direction and assistance towards obtaining the goals they had set for themselves.

9.8 Young people: career advice and training opportunities.

Although there is a limited choice in the options available to young people at the age of 14 these young people chose arbitrarily with reason such as liking the teacher or their friends were taking it or they thought there might be less writing. At this time there appears to be no advice to the individual from the careers service; the young person, their parents and the teachers decide on the choices, although careers service officers may talk to classes or large groups in general terms.

The advice given to the young people appears to be dependent on the individual’s predicted grades for the GCSE examinations and space available in the courses that do not have sets in the GCSE programme, for instance, Home Economics. The decision takes regard of the pupil’s appreciation for the subject and whether the pupil has a positive attitude towards the subject.

Chris could not remember at school having any individual career guidance:

Chris: *I think before we left school a lady came over and said something about careers and college and what would you like to do when you left school and she handed round all these little booklets about college*

He has not had a full time job since he left school voices strong feelings about this lack of helpful guidance, after leaving school:
Chris: they just said 'see what's on in the vacancies and hope for the best'... yeah. I'm still here two or three years later. they didn't say nothing about going down there [to the further education college].

It could be that there was a communications problem in Chris's case; he appears not to have been to the careers advice centre but the job centre.

Valerie too complains about the lack of helpful advice that would steer her onto her chosen route and not only feels resentful towards the 'them' that put her on the course but also feels reinforces her own supposed lack of achievement. feels that she was deceived by the careers office so that she would go on to the caring course:

Valerie: well they didn't help me at all; I went in there to say what I wanted to do, they explained to me what I had to do and how to send off for it and that was it (...) if they said to me because you have trouble with your reading and writing its better you go on this course so we can give you help or even if they'd said 'well right you can do this caring course for a year but its only part time so you can go and study your English as well ' (...) but they just said to me 'right you haven't got on the NNEB go on and do the BTec (...) it goes on your grades doesn't it , if you get really rubbish grades you go on that course

Keith when he left school did visit the careers centre but he did not think that 'they got anything sorted out'.

9.9 The role of the local careers staff and job centre

The following section is a result of individual interview help with officers at the Job Centre, Careers Centre and with a teacher from the Further Education College in the area where the young people are located. These interviews as explained in the methodology chapter came about as part of the theoretical sampling process as the grounded theory approach moved forward. It is appropriate to include a perspective from the professional involved with young people in order that a balance of opinion is shown.

The Careers Centre deals with 16 and 17-year old school leavers; this is the area in which the government funding for training had most of its focus. A careers officer will ask the young people to fill in a Careers Action Plan, stating their current situation, future plans and skills and interests linked to these plans. This appears to be a positive move towards young persons being involved and pro-active in their futures. However skills and interests do not appear to have the value or worth of the GCSE results. A modern apprenticeship for instance demands 4 GCSEs at A-C grade. Some local employers may wish to take on
someone with the required qualifications as previously the employers have found them to be good workers but their wishes are thwarted by a lack of funding.

Careers Assistant: *they can take them [young people] on as long as they've still got funding from the Tec because it does vary; in black and white it says you should have four A to C grades to do a modern apprenticeship but we do have them advertised where you don't actually need that.*

Network training based in colleges and work placements aiming for NVQ qualifications is available to those without these GCSE grades. The local training provider receives funds from the TEC; the funding available is for the 16-17 year olds and they are the 'guaranteed' group to receive funding. Although the careers assistant felt that some training providers were 'wonderful', training opportunities for some young people appear to be limited because the offer of a training place may be subject to passing a literacy test:

Careers Assistant: *it is difficult for some people if they genuinely want to do Network; the training providers are getting very fussy (...) so for a lot of them [young people] when they do go and see the training providers to do business administration, even motor vehicle or plumbing or whatever some training providers ask you to do a test; if you don't pass the test you don't get the placement.*

Again the question arises as to why a literacy test is necessary to undertake such 'practical' courses, a task in which the young person could demonstrate their other forms of intelligence would surely be more suitable. However as the young people have indicated even the most 'practical' of courses is assessed through the written word to some extent. Some of the young people worry about taking the test maybe thinking back to school and their performance in test and examinations there. The careers assistant commented: *this test is really blocking them out and the [young people] say - oh we have to take this test.*

The reason for the necessity of the test appears to be funding. Training providers need to show the success rate of NVQs in order to receive funding from the TEC, so young people that are at risk if failing a course or need extra time may be taking the place of another more likely to pass. Training providers give a start of course payment for each student and an outcome payment. Provided that the student completes and passes the course in the allocated time all is well with the funding, however when the student needs more time or additional support problems can arise. The teacher at the Further Education College reflected that this might be the reason for the entry test of the local training provider:
Teacher: *the funding from government isn't necessarily matching the amount of time you have spent [on the students] and so the providers were losing out which is why maybe L. training centre is forced to set tests so that they get a standard of students they know are going to succeed*

More hurdles need to be overcome when the young person reaches eighteen and then applies for Network training because funding arrangements change:

Careers Assistant: *after eighteen it does get a bit tricky, it's a grey area because sixteen and seventeen year olds you know, they have guarantees, training providers love to see sixteen and seventeen year olds but the training providers don't get the same funding for eighteen year olds that's what its all about*

This careers assistant 'does her utmost' to get a placement for the eighteen year olds but once the young person reaches 18 the responsibility lies with the Job centre not the careers office:

Careers Assistant: *it's a terrible thing you can't just turn round to someone at eighteen and say well it's too late*

But the main problem in the local area according to this careers assistant was the lack of young people on their books. Although situated in a crowded urban area with 8 secondary state schools in a radius of eight miles, the careers centre is left with 'loads of vacancies'. During their school lives year 11 pupils are seen in groups and asked to complete an action plan and is up to the young person to contact the careers centre on leaving school. Once the young person had left school the careers centre found it difficult to make contact with them.

Careers Assistant: *we have awful trouble getting them to come in (...) we don't have a big register maybe sixty people I'm sure that there's an awful lot more young people, we don't advertise, it must be, maybe when you are sitting at home, and I've been unemployed my self, your self-esteem goes very low and you get a bit depressed, you think you can't do anything, maybe that's in a few extreme cases*

A lack of confidence in their abilities and with the knowledge that to get on a training course another hurdle has to be overcome may prevent then from taking a positive active stance in their situations. This attitude was evident in Peter and Chris's behaviour towards making applications for work and training places. Some, taking what seems to be to them an easy way out or at least causing them the least pain, operate the benefits system although, if they are under 18, they must see a careers officer:
Careers Assistant: some people we've got on our books would never come to us voluntarily they're here because they've been to the job centre to get benefits and realise that the have to come to us.

In the job centre, 18-year-olds looking for training and work are seen by officers whose role is to find employment and to provide training for adults. According to the officer I interviewed there is little training for work carried out by the local borough; it is with the neighbouring borough training provided that the TECS have agreements the job centre and careers office although close geographically operate independently of each other and appear to have little contact. For instance according to the careers assistant once a young person reaches 18, responsibility for them lies with the job centre unless there are extenuating circumstance a such as a special educational need or home difficulties. On the other hand the job centre officer believed that the careers centre could see young people up to the age of 21. Eighteen-year-olds with poor literacy and numeracy skills can be referred to a pre-vocational (PVC) two to six week computer skills course although according to the officer 'the problem is that they are very oversubscribed'. The jobs that young people age 18 and over who come into the job centre are seeking are generally at the lower end of the employment market:

Job Centre officer: general labouring, driving although that's hard because of insurance requirements cleaning catering work bar work the ones which don't require qualifications

The jobs are often temporary or seasonal and gender specific most especially in the area of the construction industry and caring (babies children and the elderly). The job centre would be aware of young people's skills and interests if they were applicable to the job search although officers did not ask to see Records of Achievement, qualifications were what employers were seeking

Job centre officer: it is the case that more and more emphasis is being placed on written or formal qualifications (...) employers are saying we need qualifications, many years of experience are not enough, it depends on the industry; if its one that involves or may affect the safety of others they tend to go the certified route others [industries] 'useful but not essential'.

9.10 Conclusion

These young people appear to have had little choice in the courses they followed. Although there is a wide variety of courses on offer at the local Further Education College, many are barred to them because of a lack of 'good'
qualifications, particularly in English. These young people are mostly on gender-specific training and work. This decision appears to be due partly to the expectations of their home background, their parents being in similar types of work and particularly by following the advice from college teachers or careers specialists. This latter group appears to rely on the school leaving qualifications in order to determine the training and jobs they steer the young people towards. At college they can either take what is on offer or reject it and run the risk of having to accept low-grade, low-skilled perhaps temporary jobs. Even when they accept training and conform to the system, complying with the demands of both college and employers, they still have no guarantees of being able to move forward with their training or to be offered employment. However once the young people become interested in the area of work the literacy involved is placed in a meaningful context and consequently their literacy levels improve and self-confidence levels can rise.

Some, having 'had enough of school' do not wish to put themselves at risk of failure for fear that they will be set up to fail again; therefore they have turned down training opportunities at age sixteen and seventeen. By the time they realise that qualifications are essential to get anywhere they find that it is 'too late at eighteen'. Most of the young people who have been in employment or training remain optimistic about their futures although this view is tempered with feelings of uncertainty and doubt. Some realise that they have been helpless in the decision making process concerning their futures. They did not take an active decision to join a specific course but instead it was a case of being put on a course. Once on a course, relationship difficulties with either the college or the YT employer caused some to 'drop out' while others conformed to the system showing a determination to succeed. Several who 'dropped out' got back on track but others remain unemployed. However, apart from those who are unemployed and Valerie who feels stuck in a job she hates, there remains a level of optimism about the future; this could be the optimism of youth. As Darren says:

*I'm still young, (...) I suppose I'm successful, got a job, going to train or something, (...) I'm new, I'm a fresh person out in the world aren't I? Really, I think I'll do all right*
Part IV: The final part of this study, contained in Chapters 10 and 11, begins to draw out the theoretical and practical implications of the phenomenon of young people with low level literacy skills. This chapter examines the effects felt by pupils with low levels of literacy during their school lives and how they continue to be affected as they move towards adulthood.

Chapter 10 Emergence of Theories: Young people and the controlling aspects of literacy and learning

10.1 The Grounded Theory: Integration of Theories

In Part III I considered a variety of hypotheses that emerged from the interview data and also reflected on other data that formed the early part of the study. The initial reflections, aided by the framework of questions, (see Section 5.9) formed open codes which encouraged the formulate of hypotheses:

Although the rich data led me speculate widely, as Strauss says:

The analyst does not remain totally bound within the domain of these data, but quickly jumps off to wonder or speculate or hypothesize about data, and the phenomena, at least a little removed form the immediate phenomenon. (Strauss, 1987 p63)

nevertheless I needed to concentrate on those themes that found answer to the main question. The purpose of this chapter is to focus on the main themes that have emerged and to integrate these into theories.

10.2 The controlling influences felt by the young people in the study

Central to this study are young people who share the phenomenon of low level literacy skills; their school experiences and the consequences of their low school achievement in the post-school environment serve to contribute to their adult identity.

As they moved into adolescence, the school acquired behaviours of the young people reflected their growing worries and fears about themselves as learners when they compared themselves with their peer group. Thus the behaviours they acquired: 'mucking about', being a 'trouble maker' or a 'goody good' were defence mechanisms as a response to being in the 'self destruction set' as described by one of the main group informants. School organisation and teacher expectations confirmed their views of themselves. As they progressed through the school system their failure in literacy was compounded so that they felt they were not able to learn and by the end of their school life were making such
comments about themselves as ‘never been too bright’ and ‘I’m not all that clever’ while several of the Year Nine pupils refer to themselves as ‘divs’.

In school the pupils found that they were controlled by the system of organisation. By being and staying in the low sets they gradually became aware that their future goals would have to be compromised. Thus the jobs that the main group were aiming for at 14, which in all cases appeared modest for the majority, were re-set downwards to more ‘realistic’ level by the time they were 16. Alan from the Year 9 group had already by fourteen compromised his aims to be a vet and had decided to work with his uncle. Paula had realised that her plans to be a beautician would be dashed because the set she was in for science would not, because of the tiering system, allow her to gain the necessary entry qualification. They had, once again, to adapt to the image of how others saw them.

By the end of their school lives most of them accept, ‘who they are’, taking responsibility for their ‘academic self’ and for their school failure. When subsequently they are out of work, or in work or forms of training that are below the level of their abilities or is of temporary nature, they tend to accept the situations believing themselves not to be capable of more demanding work. Or they may rationalise their situations by explanations of the fact that they need to earn money to contribute to household expenses and therefore further study cannot be justified.

Rudd and Evans (1998) have brought the term *structured individualisation*, into the terminology as a description for the process that some young people now experience in the passage to adulthood (see Section2.3). They compared the contributions of agency (input from young people themselves on an individual basis) with those of structure (inputs from organisations at a national and local level). They found that found that while individuals attempted to be proactive in making individual choices for their futures, they did still feel the influences of ‘structure’ which did not necessarily enable young people to acquire greater autonomy and make proper career choices. The young people attending Further Education college that Rudd (1996) studied were found to have ‘strong beliefs in personal choice’ and to ‘really believe they are shaping their own destinies’ (p.237). Their reasoning stems from the range of opportunities available but also that ‘generally young people seem to have a greater belief (Rudd’s italics) in choice than they had twenty years ago. Rudd identifies the difference between *agency* and *choice*
Agency involves making choices possible. Or at least in cultivating a belief that choices are possible. Agency is more active and stems from the individual, choices often come from outside and are presented to the individual. (p.238)

Rudd’s study finds evidence to support the individualisation thesis (Beck, 1992) in the students’ belief in choice and in the lessening influence of class on their futures.

However, as regards the young people in my study the choices appear to be severely limited because of the lack of qualifications. Some of the young people in my study believe that they do have some control in their own futures, Tracey for example is determined that that she ‘will get there in the end’. Perhaps some do have a sense of agency but within this they have little choice. Thus, agency is seen to be operating when Tracy and Vicki hold on to the belief that the one will become a nurse and the other a social worker, but the choice of courses that their literacy levels allow them to take will qualify them for solely the ‘caring’ environment. Neither are the qualifications transferable or flexible. The one-year YT course that Debbie and Sarah have completed qualifies them to look after the elderly in a ‘caring’ way not medically.

Some of the young people wished they were back at school ‘then it would have been different.’ Some young people were retaining an optimistic outlook, believing that hard work and patience would enable them to reach their goals. Others, particularly those who were out of work had begun to feel angry towards the system, but still held themselves responsible for their lack of success. The young people who decided to go it alone without the support of professionals had thought that by working hard at a job they would find fulfilment and regain their self-esteem. Just as in school they developed strategies for coping with the situations they found themselves in and rationalised their behaviours.

As far as their individual biographies were concerned, they still had hopes for where they wanted to be but had had to settle for less. They were treated as a section of the community rather than as individuals starting off their careers. They were judged on their lack of ability in their GCSE results rather than their other abilities or their willingness to work hard.

With these areas in mind the issue of control appears to have considerable influence on the degree of agency they are able to employ; control has affected the choices that were available to them. Thus the issue of control through the structures of education and training they have received emerges as the basis for the theoretical discussion in this chapter.
10.2.1 The effects of control felt by the young people during their school lives

Darren, by what he says makes clear that he does not realise how much control will have determined his current situation:

Darren: I could have tried harder but that's nothing to do with them [the teachers], if you want to learn you learn, if you don't they can't do anything about it really (…) if I'd wanted to learn more I could have really, you can do as much or a little as you want at school

Darren implies that he had a choice at school: to work or not to work. However the situation becomes more complex when the controls on learning during his school life that were in operation are put into the equation:

- that this group and the Year 9 groups were in the lower or lowest sets;
- that once placed in the low sets there were few chances of moving into a higher set
- that the written word offers one single route to learning;
- that self-esteem was affected by being in the low groups and that consequently this affected the behaviour and motivation;
- that the tiering system at KS4 did not allow them to aim for high grades, that some were aware of unfairness in the system which again affected behaviour and motivation;
- that teachers may have had low expectations for the group both in achievement and behaviour and thus a self-fulfilling prophecy operated;
- that teachers may have given more written work and less practical work to these lower groups because of the issue of control in these lower groups;
- that the schools' operation of a setting or streaming system, used for whatever reason or justification, did not work in a positive way for these young people;
- that schools may have used 'less effective' teachers or less specifically qualified teachers for these lower sets at a time when competition between schools and the league table of results become more important both in judging school and teacher success and in affecting parents choice of schools.

The controls that the young people have experienced emanate from a variety of sources from a teacher and school level to the controls which central government continue to impose.
10.2.2 Control by school assessment procedures

From their earliest school experiences these young people recognised the importance of acquiring school literacy, that it would be of central importance in their school lives (Bradley and Bryant, 1985). They recognised whilst attending primary school that their reading and writing skill did not match those of their peer group; Stephen, when he had to stand up and read aloud in class was afraid of being laughed at, – 'I used to try and get our of it 'cos like its what your classmates say'; David realised the importance of getting help in the early stages then a child wouldn’t be 'ruled out very much' that is alienated from the rest of the class mates because of the lack of literacy skills. The young people developed strategies at primary school age to lessen the risk of being ‘ruled out’. Valerie copied from her neighbour; some, at primary school concentrated on developing their other, stronger skills while others formed friendships with others that lacked the same skills in order to feel supported in their difficulties. All knew by the end of their primary school experiences that their difficulties would continue at secondary school so that while they felt excited about the prospect of secondary school there was also apprehension and tension.

The assessment procedures carried out through the written worked that placed them in their low sets reinforced the feelings of inadequacy. The methods of assessment which take place at age 5, 7 11 14 and 16 all mainly by written procedures, serve to select and deselect or discard pupils by the abilities or lack of abilities. However the methods of testing confirm the pupils achievement in gaining factual knowledge and their level of ability with the written word but not their abilities per se. The results of these tests enable some pupils to have choices when transferring to secondary school, the continuation and extension of selective secondary schools, thus for some the time of transfer is positive and enabling for others the test results give them no choice and may turn out to be disabling. According to Simon (1996) we are once again witnessing Burt’s legacy, a theory which ‘seemed to be legitimised by practice and practice by theory’:

What is proposed it seems, is a transformation of the current system of comprehensive education into a generally selective system enhancing differentiation, segregating ‘the chosen few’, and providing specific educational procedures targeted at these and these alone (p.6)

While many of the young people in this study accepted the results of assessment to confirm their suspicions that that they were regarded by teachers peer groups and school as ‘not very bright’ others knew they had other abilities that were not being developed. Chapter 7 confirms that in the secondary school the reading skills of the main group regressed. A clear message is signalled by
the comments of the young people that this is partly due to the school organisation and the work they were offered. Simon's words clearly illustrate a sense of unfairness and inequality:

'you feel as if you were lower than other people, it puts you on a downer that's what I think's wrong (...) I still think they should have given people the opportunity to do the same as the others (...) I could have done if I'd been taught and shown the ways.'

(Section 8.14) Gavin believes that by being in the bottom group 'they're making it harder for us not easier' (Section 8.6.1) while Catherine recognises that 'not everyone can learn in the same way, there should be a different choice (...) in the way its taught because everyone learns differently'.(Section 8.14)

The imposition of additional assessment procedures enables the government to justify policies that may create further divisions both among pupils and teachers.

10.3 Centralisation of control

Government has control of both learning and of those who distribute the learning. This has several effects. First the National Curriculum lessens teacher control over what will be taught in the area of content, methods of learning (for example the prescribed format of the literacy hour) and increasingly the assessment of learning. External assessment at Key Stage tests (at 7, 9, 11 and 14 years) which in addition to putting children through a series of examination conditions, make teachers feel that these are a judgement on them and their standard of teaching. Criteria for success are outside pupil and teacher control. However in spite of these externally set controls, it is the teachers and schools that are held to be accountable for the pupil's educational achievements, their behaviour and moral standards. While both teachers and pupils are warned that there will be a 'zero tolerance for underperformance,' (DfEE1997a) teachers can through a 'rigorous' system of appraisal and the assessment of achievement and performance by 'measurable objectives', have the opportunity to move quickly up the salary scale and receive further rewards once they pass the 'threshold' of performance and achievement (DfEE, 1999). Whilst these teachers may make the grade of Advanced Skills teachers (DfEE1997a, 5.19) other teachers will feel the effects of the 'streamlined procedures for dealing with incompetent teachers' (5.26). Thus within the school environment both teachers and pupils may feel that success is to be found by competition with others and gaining high scores in tests.

With the publication of the 1998 GCSE results the media reported that the gap between the highest achievers and lowest achievers was growing and that a possible cause of this was that teachers were focusing their attention and efforts
on those pupils likely to get A-C grades at GCSE so that the school would have a good showing in league table positions. (See Chapter 3)

10.4 Control imposed by within school organisation

The evidence presented in this study serves to show that 'setting' situations where there always has to be a 'bottom' group have negative effects, particularly for pupils considered to be of 'low ability' and thus conversely mixed ability situations would be a beneficial influence.

Although my study is not centred on the arguments for and against mixed ability teaching, the evidence from all the informants suggests that their experiences in the 'bottom sets' have affected their attitudes to learning, their self esteem and their career prospects and indeed has made a major contribution to their whole acquired adult identity. In spite of there being no unequivocal evidence that setting in schools is the best way of organising pupils in order to give everyone the maximum opportunities to achieve (Hallam and Toutounji, 1996), the Government appears to have reached the conclusion that setting is the best method for enabling all pupils in secondary school to learn. Recent research is beginning to show that mixed ability setting can be an advantage for the full range of abilities Boaler, (1997). In Section 3.4, I refer to the government's declaration that it was not prepared to 'defend the failings of across the board mixed ability teaching' and any debate about the area is 'sterile and provides no solutions'. (DfEE, 1997a, 4.1). Furthermore the government is planning to use setting as a method of organisation in the primary school and provides evidence that setting improves standards. (OFSTED, 1998). At primary age, especially, pupils need to be provided with a large range of opportunities to demonstrate their developing abilities and thus need constant teacher assessment to ensure that they are given opportunities to develop their skills. However the OFSTED inspectors found that although 'most schools after an initial settling in period will transfer upwards or downwards' those pupils who are wrongly placed, 'the vast majority of schools report that this is necessary for only a handful of pupils' (p6). Teachers once again can find themselves being judged as according to the inspectors: 'setting tends to polarise the quality of teaching: it is either very good or poor.' (p5). It appears then that the government can provide proof as to what constitutes 'good' or 'poor' teaching. I have commented earlier in this a study that the 'best' teachers, usually the subject specialists, were given the top sets while the weakest teaching was seen in bottom set maths and the middle science and English groups.
Those children who will best benefit by this method are pupils who have the skills that the curriculum demands those with a good level of skills in reading and writing. Other pupils may have different talents but the curriculum as it stands will not reflect them. The government, by continuing and expanding the range of schools and further developing the setting procedures in school and setting unrealistic targets (Foster, 1998) is actually creating more segregation and separation of pupils so that although this government reiterates the ideal of equality and continuing education, in practice selection, labelled as 'choice and diversity', serves to separate and segregate.

10.5 Aspects of control in the post school environment

In the summary of Chapter 8 I have noted that the main group of young people was largely grateful when they left school for what was offered them. Some, however, sooner or later rejected the offerings and hoped that 'something better would come along'. The young women from the main group who found themselves on the 'caring route' (six from a total of ten) had no plans to work in this area when they were 14. One of them had thought that when she left school she would go into 'nursing', not stipulating which type of nursing. None thought that they would be working with the elderly in a 'caring' environment. As observed by Bates (1993), the young women when at school had no intention of looking after elderly people. Many of them had other ideas, as did the group that Bates, (1993) studied:

The care girls at first wanted 'better jobs' than that of assistants in homes for the elderly but failed to gain acceptance because there were many others applying whose qualifications and qualities were deemed more suitable. (p.25)

As Bates (1993, p.25) has found, it is not easy to decide how these young women rationalise the decisions that set them on the route towards the 'caring' environment. Certainly in my study the 'care' girls appear to be in a learned helplessness situation (see Section 9.3.1); having accepted the control of teachers and school, they now were prepared to accept the decisions of other professionals for their own futures. For instance Sarah says that 'they put me on this placement'. The college tutors and careers officers appear to have a substantial input into the decision making process that puts these young people onto the 'caring' pathway. Also these young people had recognised that their low level GCSE results restricted their choices so much that if they wanted to receive any training at all they must comply and be controlled by others making the decisions for them. In school they were used to being told what to do; this
together with their lack of confidence in their abilities, appears to allow those with authority in the post school environment to make decisions for them.

It appears that they did not make decisions to be carers for the elderly as a positive career move. It was Vicki's mother who, together with careers officers, was influential in persuading that the 'caring' role would be a practical and realistic choice. Vicki then gave up hopes of becoming a theatrical make up artist and came round to 'their way of thinking'. Sarah, too, talks about 'they' and that 'he said that would be too hard for me' when rejecting for her a particular GNVQ. How did he decide this? From the GCSE results? These results reflect a small part of her abilities; they only reflect her potential academic ability assessed through the written word, not the other abilities that she might have. These seem not to have been discussed. In fact the careers officer would be correct in saying that the course would be too hard for her as, like the GCSE courses, BTec and now GNVQ contain much of the assessment though the written word. Thus these young women are not making positive decisions but leaving things to chance, seeing how things work out; they have developed a 'wait and see' transition behaviour into adulthood. (Evans and Heinz, 1994) They allow others to make the decisions for the future because they are aware of the limits of their choice. They retain hopes for the future but temper these by realising these are long term aims that may never be realised.

Bates (1993) in attempting to answer her own question as to why working class girls continue to enter working-class, gender stereotyped jobs, suggests that interaction between the labour market, family background and vocational training were the reasons for the decisions that the young women made. It is difficult to discover exactly how the young women in my study came to be placed on the 'caring for the elderly' course. However one possible explanation is put forward by Banks et al 1992. They suggest that the admittance tutors for courses assessed the prospective student not by ability but by social suitability: 'the possession of the appropriate qualities appeared to depend more on social class, family background and gender than on individual abilities' (p106). Possibly the course was 'sold' to the young women in my study on the basis that they would obtain a qualification in nursing which would be preferable to them taking on an unskilled job. An explanation from the college tutors to the young women that the role is badly paid, requires inconvenient hours and that the work can be difficult and distressing, and understandably seems not to have taken place. Certainly Valerie and Jane both had felt themselves 'duped' by the college staff into believing that by following the caring course first then they would be then able to take a qualification similar
to the NNEB. Although two (Tracey and Vicki) of the four still following the
course hope to continue with their studies, Tracey in the hope that she will be
able to work with children or be a general nurse, there will be a limit to their
achievements because without an initial higher qualification certain routes may
be barred to them. Sarah and Debbie are prepared to accept placements in the
day care centres although these positions are temporary.

Bates found a similar situation: most still hoped to work with children
rather than the elderly but gradually discovered that without an NNEB, secure
jobs were much more likely to be found in homes for the elderly (p.22)

As shown in Chapter 9 (Section 9.3.1) both Valerie and Jane took active
decisions to leave the course, and whereas Jane hopes to reach her goals through
a series of NVQs Valerie is determinedly unhappy with her job. Jane too, has
some misgivings because the remuneration she receives barely covers her
expenses; she lives at home but needs to contribute to the household expenses of
her single parent mother and pay for daily travel costs, which are high because of
work placements and the fact that the college she attends is an expensive long
train ride from home.
The others have come to terms with their new roles and say that they enjoy their
work (agreeing with what Bates has found) even though they were given little
choice.

Apart from the two members of the main group, Pam and Catherine, who
were studying for A-levels, those who were in training were following a form of
Youth Training, either the one-year or two year course. Several experienced
problems during the course and others left. On completion of the course there
was no guarantee of work and some were concerned to find themselves in this
situation.

The local TECs, because they now operate as privatised agencies with a
set term government agreement, need to be profit making enterprises and thus
have to show success levels that will bring in monetary allowances. The local
training provider gives entry tests in literacy and numeracy before young people
could get on any courses, including motor vehicle work. One careers worker
believes that the local TEC 'gets them in and gets them out' in the shortest time
available to keep it a profit making enterprise.

Another problem for young people is that the course they wish to do is
sometimes not available at the local TEC, so that even if they pass the (literacy)
test to get on it, they may have to travel to another area. Taken in conjunction
with a course being closed because of the lack of financial viability, the
problems become greater. A teacher in the Further Education College was aware of difficulties:

Teacher: we used to have students enrolling in September [on the PVC course] and finishing at Christmas then rolling on to NVQs level one, but we had to stop doing NVQs level one; on this course the profit margin wasn't enough so that's gone.

VM: where do they do the NVQ level one now?
Teacher: well where now? That is the problem. There is L training centres in G but L training give them a test to get in. I don't know how they deem whether somebody should be given a chance or not but they have to. There is C. college they do some NVQs like motor mechanics otherwise the other thing to do is to go out of [this area] and to another Tec area like T.
VM: but they're not mobile enough to do that they can't afford to go to T every day

A small minority of the young people had begun to feel that they had a degree of choice in the decision making for their own futures. They believed that by continuing to work hard, gradually climbing up the ladder of opportunity through the graduated courses, they would eventually reach their chosen goals. However they did not fully appreciate the amount of time and money that this would take, nor that they would still have a ceiling beyond which, without academic qualifications, they would not be able to go. The large majority was pragmatic in their approach to the working world and their career paths.

Most were aware that better GCSE qualifications than they had achieved were needed to make rapid upward progress:

Peter; yeah I would like to get better grades, some more things, behind me, that what you really need the experience and the grades (...) better examination marks O levels A levels, things like that's what you need to get good jobs

He has recognised that it is the GCSE examinations that are the valuable currency for any future success. The importance of GCSE results is highlighted by the Youth Cohort Study (Payne, 1995): first the young people themselves recognise the currency of the results, many by staying on in education to re-take GCSEs to obtain higher grades; secondly that the grades obtained crucially make the decisions for the young person's 'route' to adulthood:

The young people from the main group spoke of 'getting more qualifications behind me' but were finding these difficult to acquire. If they were working full-time there was no form of release to go to college and those who were unemployed found that after eighteen they could not get back into YT or NVQ training, as the careers office worked primarily for the 16 –17 year olds.
Once they were 18 they became the responsibility of the job centre whose major responsibility is to find people work. The local job centre took note of the young person's GCSE qualifications and experience, but not of their Record of Achievement. The job centre officer commented:

*it is the case that more and more emphasis is being placed on written or formal qualifications (...) employers are saying we need qualifications, many years of experience are not enough*

There is another problem here; employers appear to be deciding what they require from a young person mostly by their level of qualifications in GCSE and appear to take little notice of their other strengths. Peter has confirmed this in Chapter 9- ('you really need the experience and the grades that's what you need to get good jobs'). The job centre occasionally referred young people to ‘basic skills’ classes although since these were not held in the local borough some travelling would be involved:

Job Centre Officer: *training for work is to give them skills which are required to get them into the labour market either refreshing old skills which they haven't used for some time or perhaps learning new skills which are locally in short supply (...) unfortunately there's little training for work carried out in this [area] unfortunately there's little training for work carried out in this borough.*

Partly the reason for this is that the local TEC responsible for pre-vocational training is based in neighbouring area, and contacts and contracts with employers and colleges with this local area do not yet appear to be strong. Another reason is that the young people in this study have acquired ‘basic’ skill in reading and writing and would not recognise that such a course would either be appropriate for them or would help them; in any case some like Valerie would be too embarrassed to attend. For Valerie and others the thought of more ‘boring’ basic literacy work would certainly not be attractive. Some by this time were either doubting the benefits of training or hoping that their other skills and ‘practical’ abilities would be sufficient for some degree of success. The conclusions of Chapter 9 indicated that when literacy was placed in a meaningful context for the young people, such as that which is connected with the courses they are following, then standards can improve.

Some young people in the main group preferred college to school; several commented that at college they were treated differently, addressed more casually but treated with more respect than they has been at school. (Richer, 1968, see Section 4.6) However those were the young people who were spending most of their week in college based situations unlike the others that were attending on a
'day release' basis from their work placement. In practice some dropped out of their training and college courses. This is part of the problem, the young people having had little choice in deciding the course on which they were placed or the work placement, were not heavily committed to the YT courses. Sarah for instance had initially been placed on a brick-laying course. Darren, travelling daily on a long and costly journey found that he was regarded as a kitchen help rather than, as he believed he should be, receiving training to become a chef. Several others complained about the attitudes of employers on their work placements, Stephen’s comment illustrates that the employer appears to be treating him as an extra employee not s a young person to be trained. The employer also appears not to have called in or referred Stephen to the TEC when things were going wrong in the placement)

Stephen: I went to the ( .) training centre for about five months and then I got a placement [in a garage] and the boss didn’t like me at all he just, like everything I done was bad, I dunno as far as I could see it was all right, and I got sacked well (...) he said 'we just can’t keep you on any more' and I was going round to other garages like for myself.

Another part of Stephens’s difficulties was that, as he trailed round garages trying to get work, his level of self esteem became even lower than was apparent in school; his after school experiences served to show him that he was indeed low in the hierarchy not only the school but in the wider world. He was unemployed of the time of interview. Most of the main group had at some stage experienced similar feelings.

10.6 Aspects of control: family influences

The influence of family is also part of the picture, as indicated in earlier chapters (Sections. 4.3, 4.6, 4.10, 6.7, 9.7,). Influences on the family by external agencies and influences of the family and family background on the young person are apparent. The majority of the parents, mostly from a working class background, of the young people in this study were supportive of their offspring and encouraged them in their work or training (Section 9.7). All but two of the main group of young people from the main group were living in the parental home with one or two parents. Around the time of the interviews I made contact with more than half the parents, sometimes by telephone when I was trying to make arrangements to meet the young people but most often when I went to their homes for the interviews. Most appeared to have some anxieties about their child’s future, understandably, in this time of recession. The parents do have a problem giving the young people direction. If the young person was in college
they were unfamiliar with the course and seemed unsure where it was leading their child. Thus Tracey's parents did think that she would be a nurse eventually, [Tracey was on the BTEC ‘caring’ course] and were very proud of her achievements. When they did assist it was to advise towards occupations with which they had some familiarity. One parent, used to finding his own direction in life, who worked as a semiskilled builder- handyman- gardener employed his son (Darren), and would employ his other son when he left school. Similarly Michael’s mother found him a job in plumbing, John’s mother went with him for his apprentice mechanics interview, Vicki’s mother advised her to take up the caring role as she herself was a care assistant even though Vicki had wished to be a theatrical makeup artist. Other parents, again from their own background and experience, expected the young people to contribute to the household expenses once they had left school at16 (Jones and Wallace, 1992). Thus the expectations were that at this age the young people would be engaged in full-time work. A few parents, when I spoke with them usually before or after seeing the informants but occasionally on the telephone, explained that, as the young person was over 18 advice about work or careers was not expected to be given or received. One mother who shared a house with her daughter and son (one of the main group informants) said: ‘There are three people living in this house and we all lead our own lives’. During the young people’s school lives the parents similarly appeared to give varying degrees of support and encouragement but in the main tended to rely on the school to give their child what they considered to be specialised assistance with school literacy. For instance one parent said ‘I’m no good at spelling myself so it’s no use her asking me’.

Bynner, Ferri, Shepherd, (1997) in their study entitled Twenty-something in the 1990s: Getting on, getting somewhere, getting nowhere, which followed up respondents from the original ESRC youth cohort concluded that:

Rather against expectations family background as expressed by fathers’ social class still exercised strong influence on school achievements and occupational positions in adulthood. (p. 127)

Although their findings partly agreed with Beck’s premise regarding the loosening of structures, their evidence also showed that for young persons to be socially mobile in employment, they needed the support of the family to aid them in their extended education to enable them to take advantage of the extended education on offer. While most of the families in this study aimed to support their child, they had to rely on the school itself to develop those ‘school learning’ skills that they themselves lacked to varying degrees. Both the Bullock
Report 1975 and the Dearing report (1996) acknowledge the connection between reading problems and class background.

10.7 Aspects of control: routes to learning

Control is also implicit not only the content of the curriculum and school organisation but also in the fact that only one route to learning is offered, that of reading and writing – traditional literacy. This method proved to be unsuccessful as far as both groups of young people were concerned. Although the main group come across the written word in a work environment most of their job/working day does not require much reliance on the written word. These young people are at risk of losing the literacy skills that they do possess, and such are the requirements of their work that other skills they do possess lie dormant. Several young people do have the opportunity to use and develop the skills that they do have; thus Andrew, John and Mark may achieve skilled employment, (Career trajectory II of the ESRC studies) although there may be pitfalls en route. And Pam and Catherine aiming, for trajectory I similarly are already finding difficulties on the way.

The main group expressed clearly their lack of affinity with the written word. Their literacy experiences at secondary school have left them with no love for books; unsurprisingly most actively dislike reading and writing. When asked about the reading they chose as part of their every day lives the following responses were typical: of the main group:

Louise: I don’t think I liked reading, I don’t like reading now, [I read] just to see if there’s anything on telly or quizzes in there I read only the things I have to read, like at work I get memos and things I have to read those:

Simon: I don’t really like reading at all but if I have to read I do. (...) I don’t sit down and read a book (...) I cant be bothered to read (...) I haven’t read many books I’ve actually only read one actual book which was the Hobbit I’ve never been interested in reading actual books

Valerie: I’m not interested in going out and actually finding a book for myself and sitting down and reading it, to tell the truth I wouldn’t bother reading if I didn’t have to

Mark: read books and that? No, I can’t really get down to them; I get distracted and then lose where I was

David: I mean I haven’t deliberately picked up a book since I left school to read it if there’s a book sitting there and it looks good I like the cover I won’t pick it up

VM: so you’ve been put off reading have you?

David: yep, I don’t read at all
These young people have, or will have if they continue to have these feelings about reading, cut themselves off from a route to learning, that of the written word.

Although learning is now offered in other forms, in addition to reading and writing, these young people at the present time appear unlikely to use these as formal learning sources. Their acquired identity makes them believe that they are not capable of approaching what they consider to be any ‘formal’ learning course. As soon as they discover the reading and writing component of the course they are likely to dismiss it as not relevant for them. Even courses that choose other routes to learning do involve the written word. For example the Open University course which uses the medium of television to inform and explain also uses web sites and E-mail to communicate and the course assessment is by the written word.

Another reason that appears to confirm their convictions of a lack of ability is that, while these young people believe that they learn from television programmes, they have not acquired the belief that television is or can be a ‘proper’ source of learning; their school experiences have conditioned them that learning for qualifications is by a written route. Additionally they have not acquired any skills to critically analyse programmes that they see on television. (See Sections 6.8)

The use of television as an educational tool is often discredited, (DfEE 1997a, Kelley, 1998) instead it is regarded as a ‘low status’ activity and those people who would gain most by learning through that medium, i.e. those with low level literacy skills, are discouraged from believing that this can be a learning method. None are taught any critical appreciation of programmes and thus there can be a risk of a passive acceptance and a non-involvement. (McLuhan, 1970). This study has shown that these young people did learn and often felt they would have preferred to learn though the medium of television. Television was their main source of information and knowledge.

The computer

In Chapter 8, when discussing the young people’s school experiences, I made scant reference to the use of computers in school as learning tools. I commented that, for these young people, the computer did not play a part in their home or work lives to any significant extent; many avoided the computer because of they found the keyboard skills (rather than computing skills) an extension of the school literacy. Much computer knowledge and information is accessed through the written word; those with high literacy reading and writing
skills bring to their own repertoire of skill an extra dimension. Research is beginning to show that it is the young people with the highest formal qualifications who are acquiring the technological skills needed for the 21st century:

Notably, the skill, which showed the strongest relationship to highest qualifications, was using a computer – particularly amongst the men. Nearly two thirds of men with degrees claimed to be good at using computers, compared with less than one in ten of those without qualifications. Computing skills are, of course, central to obtaining and retaining jobs in large areas of modern employment. Thus, these figures point to the importance of extended education and higher level qualifications in acquiring such skills, either directly through education, or in the jobs to which extended education provides access. (Bynner, Ferri and Shepherd, 1997 p.27)

Selwyn’s findings (1998) accept that many factors influence students when they reject using the computer in school. They include students with a perceived inability to use computers, often based on negative experiences and usually due to a lack of experience with computers; others perceived the computer as inappropriate in assisting their educational aims. He interviewed students who were ‘still lacking the basic confidence to engage with computers in school’ after nine years of compulsory IT within the NC of schools. He concludes that the emphasis on computer use in schools should be in ‘changing nature of educational computing to fit the needs of students, not the other way round’. Developing his theme, Selwyn (1999) is concerned that educational computing should not emphasise technical skills but give pupils an understanding and an awareness of computers. Just as television can be used for learning by building the pupils’ critical analysis skills of programmes (Section 6.7, Coe 1994, Shafer1991) so Selwyn believes that the computer should be critically evaluated by pupils and its application and societal and cultural effects understood:

Computer use should be compared to any creative process; basic technical expertise is essential, but ineffective without an understanding or sense of what you are doing (p.15)

This statement appears to endorse the views of Papert when he enthuses about the exciting possibilities for the computer in school as it can be used by the child as an ‘instrument to work with and to think with’. (Papert, 1980 p.168, see Section 3.4). In the work place, financial firms and the sector that includes IT show the greatest increase in the number of employees and have larger
proportions of employees with the higher literacy levels. (Carey, Law and Handsbro p.9).

With little, if any knowledge of computers, and having little confidence in their abilities to gain any competencies, the young people such as those in my study will find another pathway to skill acquisition closed to them. Thus by lacking skills this new technological literacy they are in danger of being held down on the lowest societal stratum.

10.7.1 Using 'practical' abilities

The data from the young people indicate that although judged by society to be of low ability or low achievers, in fact they are able to achieve and gain success outside the school environment. Their hobbies and interests show (see section fig) that they do possess skills which could benefit society but which as yet have not been recognised. Catherine, when I interviewed her, had just returned from accompanying a group of primary age children on a week's activities holiday. Her role as a 'pack leader' meant that she was in charge of a group of children for all their activities during the week. John is as senior in scouting as his age will allow, while Michael has become a champion in kickboxing and more young people in the main group possess skills and expertise in a variety of areas. Others have given up their interests and hobbies for a mixture of reasons, for example Valerie now feels too shy to join an athletic club and so is neither furthering her skill nor meeting other athletes socially.

The subject in school that gave many of the informants enjoyment and satisfaction was Drama. Drama can, as HMI (1993b) have pointed out, be used to learn about language, including improving oral competence, and assist in personal and social and emotional development. Drama does not have full subject status in the NC, it is something of an add-on to English, so that the teaching of it can be patchy; for instance HMI had found that some schools had full drama studios while others did not teach 'any educational drama because of staffing and accommodation difficulties.' (HMI, 1993b, 80.). Additionally HMI found that few schools offered drama as a subject outside the N.C. as pressure on time for the key stage 4 curriculum has increased.

For the young people in my study Drama was a means of expressing part of the 'self'. They found that it increased their confidence, developed interpersonal relationships such as organising group work and working alongside the opposite sex, developed skills in using time efficiently, and generally assisted co-operative learning. However again this skill appeared to be denigrated, with the subject seen as low status, so that it was either not offered as a GCSE exam
or it was one choice with the other 'practical' subjects. Thus from the selection of 'practical' subjects offered including Drama, Art, Art and Design, CDT or PE pupils may have only been able to choose one or at most two of these subjects. Some young people dropped Drama because they had found out that the GCSE assessment was by the written word as well as by the 'practical' side:

Andrew: *I think I heard there was too much writing involved.*

The groups said over and over again that they were 'good at practical things' but 'not very clever'. They were aware that the skills that they had were not valued. Thus comments included:

Darren: *I'm quite intelligent when it come to things like that, well common sense really (...) I can't sit down and write things, I don't really enjoy writing*

John: *Even if I had been well intelligent at school that's what I would have done anyway.*

David: *from what I can remember yeah never been too bright*

Stephen: *erm not too bad really 'cos I knew that I wasn't all that bright but I knew that I wasn't dim basically I was just like half and half. I'm not a brainy person*

Tracey: *I'm very good at practical things (...) I like doing drama and art and things like that but they're not going to help me with what I want to do.*

However if we can accept the view that there are a number of different intelligences (Gardner, see Section 6.6), and regard them as having equal worth then these young people would be considered 'able', 'intelligent' and thus would be 'successful'. In addition the subject of Drama, which gave those who did take the subject their highest GCSE grade, was actually teaching them complex and sophisticated skills that would enable them and give them a measure of confidence that would be useful in the future. They were learning about human behaviour; for instance how relationships develop, how in given situations an argument by words and body language can diffuse problems or inflame them, ways in which we use different forms of the language in different situations for example with friends, at work on the telephone and many other skills that reflect inter-personal relationships. Skills such as these reflect the 'other core skills' that the Dearing report (1996) refers to and the CBI regard as part of 'foundation learning. (Section3.8).

10.8 The controlling aspects of literacy and the conditioning of young people
As regards all the young people in this study several control mechanisms have been put into operation, which influence the ways in which their identities have developed.

Past and present government macro policies concerned with secondary school organisation have served to disempower them in several ways: first they had no choice in the type of secondary school they attended, secondly they had no choice and no voice in the within school organisation; if the school had sets bands or streams these pupils were likely to find themselves in the lowest or lower sets. Thirdly during their schooling they realised their low status in the school hierarchy and this realisation in turn affected their developing identity. The family background generally served to reinforce their status; after school they accepted and continued to accept their positions of low status. In fact they became the young adults of the predictions that were made for them certainly by the end of primary school, when their reading ages showed that they would have difficulties with the secondary school curriculum. School and post school experiences have conditioned them to accept 'who they are', the persons they have become. In this sense Foucault's concept of the 'microphysics of power' comes in to play. His findings confirm his belief that 'power is exercised rather than possessed'. As Foucault continues:

it is not the 'privilege' acquired or preserved of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions - an effect that is manifested and sometimes extended by the position of those who are dominated. Furthermore, this power is not exercised simply as an obligation or a prohibition on those who 'do not have it'; it invests them, is transmitted by them and through them; it exerts pressure on them just as they themselves, in their struggle against it resist the grip on them. (p.174)

The controlling aspects of literacy, which are so central to pupils' learning in school serve to condition these young people with low literacy skills to accept what will be their future status in society. They continue to feel the effects of the conditioning they experienced in school and conform to the acquired identity that society expects, belonging to no socially cohesive group and remaining in a 'grey' area at the trailing edge of society.
Chapter 11: Conclusions

11.1 Introduction

This study has discussed, through the main question:

How does a lack of proficiency in literacy skills affect the lives of young people both during their school years and afterwards?

a variety of major influences that have consequences for young people with low level skills in literacy. I highlight in Chapters 1 to 6 aspects from the literature of research, policy and practice that have relevance to the area of literacy. Thus, in addition to the influences of the literacy of the family background and the importance of the early diagnosis and alleviation of any specific difficulties (See Section 8.2), other key influences on literacy development are found to be school based. This study has focused on school based influences such as: policy and practice pertaining to methods of assessment, types of schools, school and class organisation, the attitudes of teachers, the acquired attitudes and behaviour of young people and the input of 'significant others' for example personal tutors in the secondary school and careers officer s and recognised these as being influential factors in literacy development. In Chapters 7, 8 and 9 I discuss the data obtained from the various sources but mainly from the young people and illustrate the points made using the young people’s thought and feelings. The previous chapter has generated the theories of control and conditionings of young people who because of their low level literacy skills often find themselves in learned helplessness situations and are conditioned to accept their perceived societal role. This final chapter draws conclusions that illustrate the ways in which literacy as used in schools acts as a divisive instrument and used as a method of social control. Finally ways forward to create a more positive learning environment are suggested.

11.2 Traditional literacy: a definition reconsidered

In the early part of the study, I was concerned to define two aspects of literacy, reading and writing, as the ‘traditional literacies’. During the course of the study I have come to believe that reading and writing per se are not the ‘traditional literacies’; the ‘traditional’ element of literacy is the school based approach to literacy. Government reports (DfEE 1997a, 1997b) define literacy as skills in reading and writing (Appendix 9); thus literacy for the purposes of
teaching, learning and assessment in schools is defined and practised as reading and writing.

Yet reading and writing skills are only one part of the individual's whole repertoire of literacy skills based on the individual's own requirements and interests. Other aspects of literacy such as television, radio, films, videos, telephone, computer and internet, have a greater or lesser part to play depending again on the interests or requirements of the individual. Thus television has been an important element in empowering the people of the Chilean barrios (Archer and Costello, 1990); while the using the written word as a set of cultural practices encouraged independence and group membership in the participants of a north of England study (Barton and Hamilton 1998). It is the school approach to literacy that my study had regarded as traditional, an approach which particularly for the young people in this study has been limiting and has restricted their options and narrowed their life chances. They have had to respond to school, curriculum and teacher requirements concerning how to approach the learning involved in the curriculum, this had been mostly through the medium of text presented to them to which they have had to react. Rarely are their own interests reflected in their schoolwork (Cooper and McIntyre, 1996).

11.3 The divisive nature of school literacy

The emphasis on 'school literacy' ensures that little time can be spared for pursuing literacies that involve learning through other media such as radio, television and video. Teachers generally do not feel enthused by the use of television in schools nor do they believe that they are encouraged to use the medium. (Buckingham 1993, Kelley 1998, DfEE 1997a). The current emphasis on IT and ICT in school is a reliance on the written words, which tends to negate the importance of learning through other types of computer technology such as shared problem solving activities and graphics. Pupils with low literacy levels can be 'turned off' by computer learning if they are offered a wholly text based approach by teachers. Complaints have been made that the proposed National Learning Grid on the Internet uses only one text based approach; the justification for its use is that this is the system used in business therefore it is to be used in schools. Commercial rivalries are in play here but there is a fear that the types of computer learning will be restricted thus other learning approaches and ways of thinking will be stifled (BBC, Radio 4 18.11.1998).

Thus the school system by the continuance and the expansion of reliance on the written word rewards the high achievers in 'school' literacies for the advancement of learning. 'School literacy' serves to divide and to segregate
those who have not achieved the required level for advancement. This is the first divisive aspect of literacy as used in schools.

Another way that literacy serves to act as a divisive instrument is by a consideration of social background. Initially this study did not set out to consider low literacy levels and social class as the central theme; I wished to consider the other routes towards raising the level of achievement of pupils who I believed had the skills to make a contribution to society and find success in their own lives. My reasoning in the early stages was that the new technologies, especially television an everyday aspect of their lives outside school could be utilised more in the classroom to aid learning. Additionally I believed the computer in school could be used to aid learning especially of those pupils who had abilities different from those of reading and writing, to develop their ‘other forms’ of intelligence. I was not aware that the social background would have any relevance to the approach of the use of the ‘newer technologies’ Nevertheless as the study has progressed and as the application of the grounded theory has begun to explore the various dimensions and influences of literacy, I have been unable to ignore the importance of the social class background of these young people. The class background of these young people and the level of literacy skills achieved both exert an influence not just on the young people themselves but with all the people and organisations with which they are involved.

Teacher predictions concerning literacy development during reception year (age 5 and 6) were mostly well founded and accurate (Feiler and Webster, 1998 Section 6.11). Disturbingly they found that for the children expected to fail (mainly low income families) teachers ‘neither increased their efforts in compensatory work’, in fact they spent less time with this group than with the others, nor did they ‘engage with parents suggesting ways of intervening at home (p.193). For children with low level skills at primary school may not therefore have the opportunity to improve their skills in comparison with other pupils. The assessment procedures, tests in reading and writing at the end of the primary stage and the beginning of their secondary school ‘establishes them as not being as ‘intelligent’ as others. Thus on arrival at secondary school they accept the school organisation. An example of this is that although the young people in the study did not relish being in Set 4 in the secondary school, once they recognised pupils they knew from junior school who lived in the same or similar neighbourhoods they accepted reluctantly that they were in their ‘rightful’ place and, as their schooling progressed, became conditioned to the acceptance of their place. (See Foucault’s comment Section 10.11). The pupils were in a vicious
circle of poor behaviour and low expectations. Often ‘bottom set’ behaviours in
the classroom reflect what the group believe was expected of them, negative or
indifferent attitudes and a low standard of work. Thus the teachers are justified in
believing that the social class background has influences on both behaviour and
ability, and thus meeting the expectations of a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Thirdly the divisive nature of literacy separates and segregates pupils with
low literacy skills so that they are not exposed to the various influences that
could improve and develop their literacy and language skills. For example when
they are in the low sets they are not exposed to a wide range of both spoken
language and the written word from their peer group. Teachers, aware that the
sets they are taking are the low sets, may use both written and spoken language
in a simple more direct form than they would tend to use with higher sets. Nor
do they appear to experience as wide a range of activities as other higher sets,
individual reading and written tasks are given in preference to less formal group
activities because of the need for greater control.

Fourthly school literacy continues to divide young people as they move
through the system by the continuing use of assessment by the written word,
assessment procedures which affect them throughout their lives. More external
assessment by the written word and more pencil and paper tests at KS 1, 2, 3 and
4 (Section 3.7.1) in school ensure that these young people are not enabled to
experience success through the system. Although they may feel that have a
degree of agency what is far more in evidence is the amount of control. They
cannot work to be proactive in the decision making process and consequently
become less independent and rely more on the system. For young people such as
those in this study there is little flexibility in the curriculum framework of
supposed choice offered to them. Most subjects that they are required to study
and which they are examined in contain a high degree of school literacy. The
secondary school curriculum and examination system are weighted in favour of
pupils whose traditional literacy skills are progressing and handicaps those
whose skills may be more technical, practical or creative but whose reading and
writing skills are low level. In addition the latter group have limited option
choices; the choices that are available allows pupils with strong traditional
literacy skills to study all their chosen subjects yet a pupil whose interests are
more practical and artistically strong would only be able to choose one or two of
their strong subject areas. (Sections 3.7.2,10.7.1)

This latter point leads to a fifth aspect of the divisive nature of literacy as
experienced by young people with low level literacy skills is that the young
people equate their levels of school literacy with their levels of ability. The
members of the ‘self destruction set’ believe themselves to be less able than their
teen group. Bottom set behaviours and attitudes, which take up a ‘them and us’
stance, reflect the young people’s view of themselves. Thus low self esteem and
feelings of unfair treatment develops; being low in the school hierarchy with no
powers of negotiation lead to the young people believing that there are in their
‘rightful place. Assessment through the GCSE examination system leaves them
unable to gain the grades necessary to get onto either a higher education route
(Trajectory I) or a skills level route (Trajectory II) such as the modern
apprenticeship course. such are the demands for these courses that Tec at least
in the local area studied asked for C grades before the young person could be
considered (Section 9.9)

11.4 ‘School’ literacy and social control into adulthood

A far more serious accusation regarding school literacy is that, by
concentrating solely on a reading and writing route other methods of more
informal learning which are part of the pupils everyday social life, (Dewey,
1916) effectively prevent pupils whose reading and writing skill are not strong
from moving towards an emancipatory literacy. Literacy remains high on the
political agenda as it has done since formal school learning was introduced for
all children and whilst the government has recognised the central importance of
literacy in the school curriculum the interpretation of the term ‘literacy’ remains
narrow. The continuation of the ‘back to basics’ view of the previous
government, emphasising a fundamental level of literacy for all; instead the ‘rich
critical literacy’ creates has benefits for some (the chosen few?) rather than for
all. Freire (1972,1987) has shown that society should be aiming for a standard
of literacy that will enable all its members to gain control over their lives; in
order to achieve this a variety of literacies including the everyday activities of
speech and television as well as the written word should be included. Thus
literacy should be emancipatory, fulfilling the aims of the individual rather than a
utilitarian approach for a large group of people and used to meet the basic
reading requirements for everyday living. Whilst the former uses skills of
critical analysis to inform and empower, the latter is mechanical and copes with
day to day needs such as form filling (Freire and Macedo, 1987).

Hoggart 1998 (Section 6.5) maintains that the government aims of 80 per
cent of 11 year olds reaching the standard expected for their age in English (i.e.,
level 4) in the KS2 NC tests by 2002 is ‘depressingly inadequate’ –that the target
is a ‘vehicle without wheels’ (p.59). Instead he argues that a state of critical
literacy should be the aim for all the people and that that the basic level that the
government aims for can in no way equip people to take charge of their lives. He shows concern that ‘inadequately educated people’ are lured to spend money on technologies that they do not properly understand that they are being manipulated by the ‘mass persuaders of society’:

The level of literacy we accept for the bulk of the population (..) ensures that literacy becomes simply a way of subordinating great numbers of people. We make them just literate enough to be conned by the mass persuaders, for profit; truncatedly literate, two dimensionally literate. (p.59)

However instead of being used to ‘subordinate’ people this same argument can be used to reinforce the crucial importance of technologies in our schools. The use of technological skills, however, need to be taught including the ‘skills’ of critically watching television, listening to the radio, the different use of telephone conversation as well as the huge range of services and ways of learning that the computer can offer us. If these are used to ‘educate’ then they can encourage high degrees of critical awareness as well as imaginative understanding. Thus the standard of ‘critical literacy’ can be achieved which subsequently becomes a transferable skill to other media. (Buckingham, 1993, Kelley, 1998). This would include written text. My study has illustrated how the young people in my study could have become empowered if they had experienced other learning routes that include the other forms of literacy are available in our society.

At the same time society has to keep the majority of the population from feeling restless, thus, in using ‘school’ literacy as the learning core, society uses education to create a ‘functional’ population rather than a ‘critical’ population. It is in this way that thus it is that control is exercised over the population particularly sections of the working classes which keeps the status quo in place. A contributory reason by way of explanation may be that society does still need support workers in occupations that require low level skills and are low paid such as cleaners, care workers as of the elderly, in special schools and hospitals, refuse collectors and so on. Much of this work is on a casual part-time basis. These contributors are a necessary parts of the holding together the structure of society. This type of low-grade work is not attractive to an educated work force but needs to be done. What an official in the previous government has said could still apply:

When young people drop off the education production line and cannot find work at all, or work which does not meet their abilities or expectations, then we are only creating frustration with perhaps disturbing social consequences. We have to select; to ration the educational opportunities to meet the job opportunities that
society can cope with the output of education. (ESGS 16-19 subgroup Representative, Ranson, 1994, p. 67)

Clear parallels can be drawn between the current dramatic societal move towards a technological based society and the 19th century changes, which brought the Gesellschaft factory based work. The working classes then were concerned that their children should be able to move into a skilled life long job; some members of the working classes recognised the crucial importance of reading and writing skills, that these skills could enable them to become managers instead of workers or even aspire to become part of the professional classes. Now 'school' literacy does need to be acquired but this skill, as this study has shown, is only one part of the much wider field of literacy. In the 19th century those members of the working classes who were aiming to become literate had to struggle to overcome the inequalities apparent because they were seen as a threat to the political and economic power bases being constructed by the middle classes (Section 1.1). Now the context of society can prevent an emancipatory freedom because of poverty, political and social barriers or lack of appropriate education.

These latter stated literacy skills acquired through the much wider field of literacy are just as appropriate as are reading and writing, if not more so, to a 'learning society' of today.

11.5 Literacy and life long learning for the 21st century

Key skills needed for the 21st century encompass far more than the written word, other media and technologies play a part as do spoken language and relationships with other learners along the route of life-long learning. While we may regard the basic skills as being certain levels of attainment in reading and writing, key skills should be offered and obtained though a variety of means and methods. The Dearing report states key skills as: communication, the application of number and information technology (Dearing report 1996 1.10, see Section 3.8). If the term communication is defined and interpreted in terms of what is available through technological communication in current society as well as the spoken language of daily communication then it may truly be a key skill. The risk is that 'communication' can be interpreted narrowly as being 'school literacy'. The Dearing report's recommends that other core skills should also be acquired: personal and interpersonal skills, the ability to manage one's own learning and a positive problem-solving approach. Additionally the CBI acknowledges the value of foundation learning: respect for others, integrity and a
positive attitude to hard work basic and core skills, national qualifications, career planning. (CBI, 1994, Section 3.8)

These key skills (which include the core and foundation skills) should therefore be part of the school curriculum and what is offered to young people in the form of further of higher education and training in the post school environment.

Questions about curriculum appropriateness both in the area of its suitability for all pupils and whether it prepares all young people for their futures are regularly put forward by interested parties. Specifically one can ask if a curriculum of 10 mainly academic subjects and the way they are taught and assessed is suitable for the acquisition of skills and for the life long learning needs of 21st century citizens. The prescribed National Curriculum does not satisfy nor is it appropriate to the needs of many who are required to follow it but government instead apportions blame to schools, teachers and pupils. Teachers, now well versed in 'national curriculum speak' perhaps unwittingly are, like the government, 'hitting the target, missing the point.' (Foster, 1998). From my field notes I note that a student teacher, frustrated in his attempts after a long teaching practice to instil in his pupils a sense of knowledge in his set subject tasks, accuses not the curriculum but the pupils: 'What's the point of allowing them to do other subjects when they can't even read and write?'

Gardner has criticised the education system for not developing the skill of understanding in pupils. (Guardian Education October 12 1993). Gardner believes that education’s purpose is to produce understanding, that is the capacity to apply knowledge, facts concepts and skills in new situations to the various disciplines and also to the world in which we live. He maintains that pupils all over the world, when faced with situations which require the application of their ‘school knowledge’ (Gardner’s quotation marks), they do not know what to do.

Ranson (1994) suggests a curriculum designed of areas of ‘learning experiences’, reminiscent of the suggestions put forward in the 1960s and 1970s (Section3.5). The learning characteristics provided by such a curriculum content would create learner -centred, active learning with breadth balance relevance progression and continuity and that learning would be investigative. Importantly the curriculum would be negotiated (p.116). Similarly O’Hear (1994) suggests 3 areas of knowledge and understanding: scientific and technological, personal and social (p.59) The personal and social areas of: personal concerns- managing one’s own needs, pursuing personal projects, developing qualities of character;
social involvement and concern for others and critical and reflective awareness, form the crucial and central part of a curriculum framework (p57).

Evans et al (1997) propose work-based learning programmes so that young people of all abilities are given the opportunity to continue learning after the age of compulsory schooling. These programmes will: to prepare them for a future of rapid but uncertain change, to allow them to develop as people, and provide the foundation for life long learning (p.3). Michael Young (1998) whose professional life, research and writings have centred on education, schooling and post-compulsory education brings the concept of 'connective socialisation' into the curriculum arena. For Young, a person will in the future use connective specialisation in the curriculum to develop cross subject skills and develop an ability for innovation and for using learning in different contexts. Such a curriculum recognises a proactive stance on the part of the learner, including involvement, rights, responsibilities and a personal sense of agency, as do the suggestions of the writers cited above. Young develops the key skills concept to have a far wider definition and application than is envisaged at present.

My study has provided evidence that Records of Achievement and Drama can be used as major contributor in developing key skills. The Record of Achievement encourages the hobbies and interests of young people outside of school and gives credit for less academic achievements. The young people in my study found that Drama enabled them to: develop their spoken language skills, created a climate of confidence in relating with other people, acquire an empathetic view of others peoples views and opinions, practise the skills of debate and discussion and compare them with those of argument and confrontation.

The danger of highlighting more 'formal' learning through the acquisition of 'school' literacy whilst ignoring the importance of 'social learning (Dewey, 1916) still remain. Society can take the opportunity to harness the powers of technological literacy and use it to develop skills and provide ways of learning so that all its members can become empowered. Instead, what is often offered through television and some radio stations can be regarded as superficial 'mindless pap' (Attenborough, 1993) put there to entertain the masses rather than to educate them, (Hoggart, 1998) a 'bread and circuses' syndrome. There is a risk that we are witnessing once again a bifurcation of society, where each knows his or her place. One the one hand we have a group, the 'readers' and 'thinkers', who pay attention to what is happening in our society and the wider world, are involved in that society, the new meritocracy. On the other hand another group may be taking a different route, watching TV programmes
with little substance and who are in low skilled employment or unemployment; the members of this group do not see themselves as powerful within society, nor do they feel they contribute to society in any measure. A de-skilled work force feels disempowered, which would certainly not be the aim of a liberal democratic society. School achievements in school literacy remain the central method of division. Thus at present many young people are distanced from the curriculum and regard it as irrelevant to their present and future lives. Although this government espouses the ideal of equality and continuing education, in practice selection, labelled as ‘choice’ and ‘diversity’, serves to separate and segregate.

The implications are that the content of the school curriculum needs reconsideration and major reorganisation. A curriculum for the future needs a far greater flexibility than the National Curriculum with its fixed list of subjects can provide. A core curriculum consisting of the basic areas of English and maths would provide the necessary skills to approach a wide range of areas for study; a curriculum also needs flexibility for the individual so that avenues can be explored and skills developed. Additionally, if the key skills, interpreted in ways that I have suggested, can be recognised as crucial aims in the school curriculum and in the past school environment young people would thus be able to use a sense of agency in the transition process to adulthood. If these young people are to join the risk society then they need to be skilled and equipped to ‘navigate’ the ‘perilous waters’ (Evans and Furlong, 1997) of their futures.
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PAGE

NUMBERING

AS ORIGINAL
APPENDIX I

Pupil Questionnaire at age 14

1. Which subjects are you studying?

2. Which subject(s) is the most difficult?
   Why?

3. Which subject is the easiest?
   Why?

4. Which subject do you enjoy most?
   Why?

5. For each subject - what grades do you think you will get in GCSE's?

6. When you leave this school what are you going to do?
   Are you:-
   a. Going to college? If so what are you going to study?
   b. Going to get a job? If so what?

7. What do you do in your spare time?

Table 1 Proposed framework of national awards

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<th>National Award: Advanced Level</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AS and A Level</td>
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<tr>
<td>GNVQ</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advanced Level</td>
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<tr>
<td>NYQ</td>
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<td>Level 3†</td>
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<th>National Award: Intermediate Level</th>
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<tr>
<td>GCSE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grades A*-C</td>
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<tr>
<td>GNVQ</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intermediate Level</td>
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<tr>
<td>NYQ</td>
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<td>Level 2‡</td>
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<th>National Award: Foundation Level</th>
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<td>GCSE</td>
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<td>Foundation Level</td>
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<tr>
<td>NYQ</td>
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<td>Level 1‡</td>
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<th>National Award: Entry Level*</th>
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<tr>
<td>Common to all pathways:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Three grades A/B/C</td>
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</table>

NYQ Level 3 obtained by young people primarily through a Modern Apprenticeship/Employment.
NYQ Levels 1 and 2 obtained by young people primarily through Youth Training/Employment.
Entry Level at grades A, B, C equivalent in demand to Levels 3, 2 and 1 of the National Curriculum, but contextualised for the post-16 age group.
1. A Strange Story

The typist has made rather a mess of this story. Some of the words are not spelt correctly; some of them do not make sense. When you find a mistake, put a line through it, and write the correct word underneath. The right word always begins with the same letter as the one which is wrong.

Jack and Kate had gone to see Aunt Helen. Aunt Helen lived in a small house, far away from the town. One day, Kate looked out of the widow of the little county house. The sun shone, and birds sang in the sty. 'What a warm dog,' said Kate. 'Let's walk down Mill Lane.' The three children rang out just as a red sports car came spreading down the lane. The cart hit a huge tree, and the drover was thrown into the ditch.

'Look,' said Jack. 'Patrol is coming out.' Kate shouted, 'I'll telegraph for assistants. You help her.' Jack dashed to the unconscious man, and drugged him away from the wretch. He wondered whether to pull his father in case it exploded. 'I'd better love him now,' thought James. 'He seems desperately heart.'

Kate had furnished her emergency cell, and bought a thick blanket to Jack. Just as they were converting the driver, there was a great expulsion from the car, and flames surrendered it.
Dear Parent/Guardian,

Four years ago, as Advisory Teacher, I took part in a Borough Project to find a suitable reading assessment for children to participate in when moving from the primary school to the secondary school.

Now that these young people are beginning their GCSE courses, I would like, as part of my research to see again some of those who took part in the original assessment.

I would very much appreciate your agreement to my meeting with your son/daughter at to administer a short test (20 minutes); there will be very little interruption to his/her work at school and the school fully supports this venture.

Thank you for your co-operation.

Yours sincerely,

Vera Macrae

______________________________________________________________________

NAME OF PUPIL: ........................................ FORM: ............

BLOCK CAPITALS PLEASE

I *do/do not agree to my son/daughter taking part in Mrs. Macrae's reading assessment at

Signed.................................................. Date..................

* Please delete as appropriate

Please return this reply slip to the School Office at your earliest convenience and I shall collect it. Thank you.

The Community School

267
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section One: Organisation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. a. Pupils in Year 9 are put in sets of ability for this area of the curriculum.</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1. b. Pupils are in mixed ability sets in Year 7 for this area of the curriculum.</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. c. Pupils are in mixed ability sets in Year 8 for this area of the curriculum.</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
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Please tick the appropriate boxes

Always | Usually | Occasionally | Hardly Ever | Never |
--------|---------|--------------|-------------|-------|

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section Two: Lessons</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. a. During lessons pupils work individually.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. b. During lessons pupils work in groups.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. a. In lessons there is an element of teacher/pupil question and answer time.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. b. In lessons teacher/pupil question and answer takes up less than half the lesson.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. c. In lessons teacher/pupil question and answer takes up more than half the lesson.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. a. In lessons there is an element of written work.</td>
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<td>4. b. In lessons written work takes up less than half the lesson.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. c. In lessons written work takes up more than half the lesson.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. a. In lessons there is an element of oral work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. b. In lessons oral work takes up less than half the lesson.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. c. In lessons oral work takes up more than half the lesson.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. a. In lessons there is an element of practical work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. b. In lessons practical work takes up less than half the lesson.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. c. In lessons practical work takes up more than half the lesson.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**APPENDIX 5**

Questionnaire to teachers of Year 9 pupils

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Usually</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Hardly Ever</th>
<th>Never</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7. a. During lessons pupils are in groups for oral work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. b. During lessons pupils are in groups for written work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. c. During lessons pupils are in groups for practical work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. During lessons pupils copy work from the board or overhead projector screen.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. b. Pupils in the same class use different worksheets depending on their ability.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. a. In lessons pupils use textbooks.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. b. In the same lesson there may be different text books for different ability pupils.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. a. In lessons video films are used.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. b. In lessons video films are used for discussion.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. c. In lessons video films are used as a stimulus for written work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. d. Other Uses: Please specify.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. a. In lessons radio or audio tapes are used.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. b. Radio or audio tapes are for discussion purposes.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. c. Radio or audio tapes are as a stimulus for written work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. d. Other uses: Please specify.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Please state which area of the curriculum you teach
- Please answer all sections

**APPENDIX 5**

Questionnaire to teachers of Year 9 pupils
APPENDIX 6
Preparatory Questionnaire

1. Subject teaching area.................................................................

2. Please state length of lesson......................................................... minutes.

3. How much time (approximately) is usually spent on oral discussion in lesson time?
........................................................................................................ minutes.

4. How much lesson time is spent on question and answer (oral)? ..................... minutes

5. Are the learning outcomes i.e. what the pupils have learned in the lesson or series of lessons usually evaluated through:

   a written test
   an oral test
   other (please cite examples)

6. How much time is given for homework? ........................................ minutes

7. When setting homework, is this usually:

   a written task
   an oral task
   other (please cite examples)

8. Has the implementation of the National Curriculum affected the amount of time given over to written work each lesson?

   more
   less
   about the same

Thankyou for your participation.
APPENDIX 7

Letter to Heads of Year 9 groups

Department of Secondary Education

29th June 1994

Dear Head of Year 9

I would be very grateful if you could ask subject teachers of Year 9 pupils, one from each subject area to fill in the enclosed questionnaire. At first view it appears quite lengthy but the sheets are a series of tick boxes which can be filled in quickly; there is space allowed for optional comments.

There are 10 questionnaires, one for each subject for Year 9 pupils. The information obtained would be confidential and only used for research purposes.

I have also asked teachers to include a worksheet used with Year 9 pupils but this is not central to the study but rather to illustrate the variety of worksheets used.

When completed I would be grateful if you could collect them (see front sheet and alter if needed) and send then back to me in the enclosed envelope by JULY 15 or as soon as possible after that date. If you have any further queries please do not hesitate to contact me at college or if you prefer to telephone me at home my number is

Thank you very much.

Yours sincerely

Vera Macrae
Senior Lecturer in Education
APPENDIX 8

National Literacy Project (DfEE1997b): Definition of the term Literacy

DEFINITION

The NLP Framework is based on a broad definition of literacy:

The concept of literacy can be defined very widely. However within the aims and purposes of the National Literacy Project, literacy is defined simply as "the ability to read and write". Literacy is treated as a unitary process with two complementary aspects, reading and writing. This underlines a basic principle of the National Curriculum i.e to develop pupils' skills within an integrated programme and to inter-relate the requirements of the Range, Key Skills and Standard English and Language Study sections of the Programmes of Study.

Literate primary children should:

- read and write with confidence, fluency and understanding;
- be interested in books, read with enjoyment and justify preferences;
- know and understand a range of genres in fiction and poetry, and understand and be familiar with some of the ways in which narratives are structured through basic literary ideas of setting, character and plot;
- understand and be able to use a range of non-fiction texts;
- be able to orchestrate a full range of reading cues (phonetic, graphic, syntactic, contextual) to monitor and self-correct their own reading;
- plan, draft, revise and edit their own writing;
- have an interest in words and meanings, and a growing vocabulary;
- understand the sound and spelling system and use this to read and spell accurately; and
- have fluent and legible handwriting.

THE FRAMEWORK OF TEACHING OBJECTIVES

The framework has been carefully designed to help teachers interpret the NC Programmes of Study for reading and writing, and to set clear expectations for what should be covered in each term. It covers a full range of fiction and non-fiction work and throughout reading and writing are closely inter-linked. The programme of teaching objectives for each term is set out under three inter-related strands.

| word level | phonics, spelling and vocabulary |
| sentence level | grammar and punctuation |
| text level | comprehension and composition |

It incorporates a model of reading strategy which recognises the need for pupils to learn and be able to co-ordinate skills across all these strands in order to gain confidence and
Appendix 9: Profiles of the main group of young people

Andrew lives at home with his parents; his father is a stage carpenter and his mother a school assistant; his older brother is at university. In Year 9 he enjoyed PE as there was no homework with this subject and Art. When he was 14 he spent much of his time ‘dossing’ and ‘messing about’. He was arrested twice, although he did not go to court, and believed this trouble was because he was in the wrong place at the wrong time with the wrong crowd. His parents were involved in a programme with the school to set achievable work goals. After school he applied for an electrical apprenticeship but although he passed the interview he was refused a place because he did not have C grades. He obtained a YT placement for carpentry and at the time of interview was completing his second year; he enjoys the work and hopes that he will be able to stay with the firm, and become qualified through the Institute of Carpenters. However he feels at risk because at the next stage of training his employer would have to pay him at a higher rate and Andrew believes that a beginner and therefore cheaper trainee may fill his place.

When Barry left school he worked for a model-making company locally but after several months the firm closed down. Several jobs followed but the time of interview he was unemployed. He stays with his mother and stepfather when ‘they will let me’ and the rest of his time with his father in Essex. At school he had enjoyed CDT and had hoped to go to college to study model-making but his GCSE grades did not match the entry requirements. Although he obtained a B grade in CDT his English Maths and Science grades (F) were too low. He says he was ‘disgusted’ when he realised what the entry requirements were and that he wanted to say to the college, ‘I’ve done model making, I can do it’. He says that he should have gone on to further study but feels his parents rushed him into work so that he could pay rent. His hobbies include making model railways and he is a member of a local club, he works voluntarily on an enthusiasts’ railway line and is a member of the Boys Brigade.

Catherine at the time of interview was in the second year of two A-level courses in Classical Studies and theatre studies. Her GCSE grades four at level C enabled her to study at a higher level. At A level the theatre studies was a practical based subject, including acting, costume design and behind the scenes work. She had not yet obtained a C grade in English or maths and was about to do second re-takes. She was uncertain about her future plans. She was hoping to study at university although she had not applied for a place as she was going to take a year out and if need be re-sit her A levels to get better grades and possibly to take a third A level. Her father, a probation officer and mother a classroom assistant, were very supportive and were encouraging her to try for university. Her leisure time activities included a youth group environmentally based organisation and she had recently been on camp with them.

Chris at 14 had no intention of going on to college because he had ‘had enough of school’ and was determined to get a job. He gained 2 GCSEs -Drama and Technology. At the time of interview he was delivering local papers for one day a week. Since leaving school this is the only employment that he has had. He had hoped to find employment in a supermarket because he had worked in a
supermarket on his school work experience. After leaving school he went to the job centre, took tests and went for interviews but no one, according to Chris, showed any interest. Three years later he is still unemployed; at the time of interview he had just applied once more to a number of supermarkets in the area.

**Darren** in Year 9 had no plans to carry on studying when he left school. He lives at home with his parents and younger brother. When he left school he planned to ‘work with Dad’. He enjoyed CDT because he ‘liked making things’ and this was his only GCSE. At the time of interview he had been working with his father for two years; the younger brother was ready to begin work with them. They carry out contract work, cleaning offices in the winter and grass cutting in the summer. He drives a company van and maintains his own car. He is planning to take a course in mechanics because ‘I’m quite intelligent when it comes to things like that’; or possibly, as he played competition golf, a course in green keeping for golf courses. He thinks it important to have ‘something like a trade behind you in case something falls through’ and feels that he would cope easily on the courses because ‘its just confidence isn’t it?’ He feels confident about his own future ‘I’m successful I’m new, I’m a fresh person out in the world aren’t I, really I think I’ll do alright’

**David** lives at home with his mother and older sister. He enjoyed Home Economics, science and maths (he had a ‘brilliant teacher’) as well as PE whilst in school and had decided to go college to do cookery, aiming to be a chef. His work experience as a kitchen assistant was unrewarding — making sandwiches and peeling potatoes, so on leaving school he went to college and did a YT course on motor vehicle training and crash repairs which after his first year he passed with credit. During his second year he had difficulty with his employer who according to David was not only using him as a mechanic rather than on body repairs but also ‘mucking me about in my wages’. The YT money was £30 per week and David left the work placement when he was not paid for three weeks. He was unable to get a further placement on a YT scheme and a temporary job as a relief kitchen porter at Harrods followed, obtained through the assistance of a friend who worked there. David was hoping that this would lead to him being accepted on a trainee chef’s course but as he was only doing relief work there was little chance of this happening. Because he has to pay rent and contribute to the home expenses he has a part time job as a tyre fitter and is hoping to be taken on in a full time capacity

**Debbie** is the youngest of eight children; several of her older siblings work with horses either as trainee jockeys or stable-hands. While she was at school Debbie did not wish to follow them in their careers although she did work in a stables at weekends and lists her hobby as horse riding. As she liked business studies and humanities, because ‘we take it step by step’, she thought that she would like to be a secretary when she left school. After leaving school she completed a year’s City and Guilds course in caring (pre-vocational) which included helping with babies, children with learning difficulties and elderly people, and followed this with a year’s YT placement in a day centre for the elderly. At the time of interview she was hoping to work at a day centre for the elderly near her home.
Jane lives at home with her mother. At school in Year 9 she had wished to become a nursery school teacher but her results did not enable her to get on a higher level course. She accepted a place on the BTec First in Caring but became disillusioned with it when she realised the focus was on care for the elderly rather than on young children. Leaving the course she then worked in several clothes stores as an assistant but became increasingly unhappy. After visits to the careers office for 7 months had brought no work or courses her mother went with her to the careers office and a place was found for her at a college on an NVQ course. Although she has to travel to the college it is an easy journey and only one day week is in college; Jane has found her own placements one of 11 months one of 4 months and at the time of interview she was working at a Montessori school. Because it comes under YT scheme she does get a payment of £35 a week which she says she needs because of contributions to the household. She also baby-sits as a paying concern. At the end of the course she hopes to go to Canada, where she has relatives, to work for a year.

John enjoyed sports at school as well as Art. Always aware that he was ‘good with his hands’ and having, an interest in cars, he took his work experience in a garage and applied to go on a car mechanics course on leaving school. The local college did not provide a car mechanics course but he was refused a place at the neighbouring college because his GCSE English and maths grades were not high enough so he followed a pre-vocational engineering course in the local college. Although he enjoyed the practical side, he was unhappy with the written aspects which included English and computer studies. His mother saw an advertisement for car mechanic apprenticeships and John interviewed successfully (2 taken on from 28 applicants) and at the time of interview was halfway through this apprenticeship. Although he finds the written part of his day release course difficult, he is willing to ‘get on and do it’ as he accepts that it is part of his training and say that he is much happier now than he ever was in school. In his leisure time he is a Venture scout and trains the younger cubs to obtain their badges.

Keith. Of all the young people interviewed Keith had experienced the most difficulties in his personal life. He was born with a cleft palate which, although physically repaired when he was an infant left him with poor articulation and this made him feel shy and awkward. His chaotic home life meant that he did not receive speech therapy. His mother left home when he was a child, leaving him and his elder brother in the care of his father who was kind and loving but was an alcoholic and drug user. In Year 9 Keith predicted that he would obtain B and C grades for most of his subjects. He thought that Home Economics was his best lesson and ‘the easiest lesson going’. He did not wish to go to college; instead he had decided that he was going to be a truck driver. However, he did not take any GCSE examinations as he was on suspension from school. Keith began a pre-vocational (DOVE) course in Leisure, but left after several weeks when his father committed suicide. At the time of interview he was ‘just ‘dossing’ with ‘no plans to get a job or anything’; but when he did get a job he wanted one that did not involve working with the public.

Louise. Although in Year 9 Louise had thought she would go to college with the aim of being a child minder or children’s nurse, her work experience with young
children changed her mind. She had enjoyed business studies at school because 'we learn step by step'. Her GCSE grades did not enable her to get on to the BTec national course (she says, 'I didn't get any Cs) so she followed the foundation course. The following year she had hoped to get on the BTec National but the college according to Louise 'mucked up', telling her that she couldn't follow the course because she was 'having a lot of trouble with her work' although she had passed all aspects of the foundation course, some at merit level. Consequently she was put on an office YT placement, from which she was 'given the push' after seven months. A second YT placement in an insurance office was proving to be more successful although she was not sure if she would take the full time the office was planning to offer her because she wished to continue her one day a week studies to improve her skills. She 'wanted to get on.'

**Mark** lives at home, on a council estate, with his parents and younger brother. He had completed the second year of a sports and leisure course (first year pre-vocational). At the time of interview he had just returned from working at a summer camp for children at which he coached football and table tennis. He is trying to get as many coaching awards in as many different sports as possible and has, so far, gained coaching qualifications in football, hockey, gymnastics and canoeing and hoped to obtain awards in tennis, volleyball and aerobics. He has a bronze medallion for swimming and in athletics has run for the county. At school he had thought that he wanted to do business studies at college but 'as I came on I knew that me and computers didn’t get on so I got more interested in sport and I found out what courses they did at college and I haven’t looked back since.' He enjoyed Drama at school 'because it is the only subject (apart from PE) I think I’m good at'. The school did not offer PE at GCSE level.

**Michael.** Although Michael has a very happy home life with his mother, stepfather and younger brother, his early life had been disruptive and at times frightening because his mother had to flee from his alcoholic and extremely violent father. At secondary school he believed that he was unfairly treated, and having been 'branded' as a trouble maker decided to live up to that image. At the age of fifteen he 'blew school out' and joined an electronics company, a job that his mother had found for him. He was made redundant after a year and is now in his second year of a plumbing apprenticeship, a placement that again his mother had found for him.

**Pam** is Chinese. One of the main reasons that her parents came to England was so that their children could gain a good education. They both work in a relative's Chinese restaurant. In Year 9 Pam’s favourite subjects were art, graphics and design ‘because you don’t have to write much’. Her first language is Cantonese and her difficulties in English showed themselves in her written work particularly her use of tenses. Her hope was to study art at college; her GCSE grades enabled her to study at a higher level and she chose to study biology and chemistry at A level and Geography at A/S level, as well as re-taking her English GCSE. She enjoyed her subjects and was applying for university science courses but was anxious about which universities to apply to, her parents being unable to give her any advice. Between the ages of 14 and 16 she had made less improvement in her GLA assessment than many of the others.
in the group but made rapid improvement in the 2 years before GSCE examinations. Pam puts her success down to working hard and that at least 50 per cent of course were assessed by course work, and that there was a practical element in her subjects.

Peter, at school, had little interest in studying at college. His preferences were to get a job in a shop or on a building site, but if these plans did not work out was prepared to go to college to study brick laying. He enjoyed home economics and PE and had been a member of the school rugby team on a visit to Germany. At the time of interview he was unemployed. His first job, working in a hardware store, was the full time version of the Saturday job he did whilst at school. He left after 2 years as the money was ‘not all that good’ and because of the often-contradictory orders he received from the shop manager. His second job in a pet shop was obtained through the local paper. Peter found this work uninteresting and left. At the time of interview he had been unemployed for several months and trying to find ‘the right job’ was proving difficult. Peter finds that two or three years’ experience is needed to get an ‘upgraded job’. The local careers office is helping him and 2 months previously applied to a local college to follow a motor mechanics course but as yet has not received a reply; nor does he feel hopeful about getting a reply. He has, he says, ‘been all over the place for interviews and no one’s replied.’ Similarly he has written to five garages and has not received replies. He says that if he had the chance he would go to college but believes that at 18 he is too old. He wishes he was back at school, ‘I know that sounds stupid, I mean when I was at school I didn’t want to be there but...’

Sally lives at home with her parents and has three older brothers. She works in a large garage (part of a chain) as a telephonist / receptionist and has been there for over a year. At school she had wanted to be a hairdresser but after trying it for a day when she left school opted for office work instead. She was made redundant after almost 2 years in her first job. She believes that she has learned a great deal at work- filing, invoicing, word processing and other computer work, and whilst at school had taught herself to type at home. Her spelling and vocabulary have improved since she has been working because ‘you find new words and you use them daily.’ During Year 9 she was diagnosed as having rheumatoid arthritis which, at the time of interview, was in remission. During the 18 months of treatment she was often too ill to attend school. She wants to get a few more qualifications and she plans to go to evening classes for secretarial work with the aim of moving up to become a manager.

Sarah. In Year 9 Sarah had planned to go to college and follow a course in business studies and computers. Until she was 14 Sarah had a hearing loss that ran in the family but unlike other members of the family, her problem could be corrected by operation and consequently her hearing was fully restored. She believes that her reading and writing difficulties stem from her lack of clarity in hearing. She found it difficult to write things down properly; she had speech therapy to help her enunciation (she still has a lisp) and visits to hospital forced school absences. At the time of interview Sarah was completing a second year of YT in an old people’s day centre and hoped to get a job as a home carer or in a residential home for the elderly. She was finding the NVQ course, after the City and Guilds course the previous year more difficult because of the amount of
writing involved. Although when she left school she had wanted to work with children she became interested in working with the elderly after a 6 month placement in a day centre during which time she 'got to like it'. She says that she is still shy and quiet but that working with the elderly and the staff involved with them has given her confidence.

**Simon** enjoyed CDT at school, as he liked making things. He had opted to study PE for GCSE but found the written parts of the course difficult. He had planned to go to college to study art and CDT but his results precluded him from this and he completed a pre-vocational course in engineering, followed by one year of a BTec National course. He planned to be a fireman and was determined to get a higher qualification in engineering believing that not only was it useful to have a trade but also that qualifications were needed to get a decent job. At the time of interview he was living at home with his parents and younger brother and sister, his father is a police inspector and his mother a school meals assistant. Simon worked at a market stall selling fruit and vegetables in a large open-air market during the summer months, a job which, a year after I interviewed him, he took on as a full-time job.

**Stephen** had planned whilst at school to go on to college to study home economics and business studies. However, on leaving school he attended a training centre on a YT mechanics course and after a garage placement was unsuccessful, due Stephen says, to bad training, the 'boss' telling him one way to do a job whilst the mechanics were telling him another. When he found himself having to make the tea and clean the toilets he left. He did not return to the training centre but instead found his own placement and had to leave that because of bad timekeeping. At that time he was going to clubs and taking soft drugs; troubles with the family meant him leaving home and staying with his grandmother who lived several hundred miles away and working part time in a local café. At the time of interview he had been unemployed for three months but had ambitions to be 'a famous rock star'. He was learning the guitar and had written several songs, a result he says, of liking poetry at school. However he really wanted to get a full time job while he was making his plans because being unemployed 'gets to you'. He felt that he needed to 'get on my own two feet basically, it feels like I've been knocked sideways but I've got to get up'.

**Tracey** is an only child and lives at home with her parents. When she was 14 said that she would study nursing. Her secondary school work experience was carried out in a nursery. She found that she did not have high enough qualifications to get on to a 'nursing course', nor for the NNEB. She accepted a place on the pre-vocational course the BTec First in Caring, which she then followed by a two year BTec course for nursery and general nursing. She enjoys the practical aspects of her course but believes that the written parts bring her overall marks down. She also works part-time in a chemists shop. She is prepared to keep on studying until she has reached her goals. Her parents are interested in what she is doing on her course and are prepared to support her.

**Valerie** works as a supermarket checkout cashier, a job which had begun for her whilst she was at school. She 'hates' her work and she does not see her future
there maintaining that, even if there were a chance of ‘climbing up’ in the company she would not take it. However she needs the money to pay rent to her parents and to pay for driving lessons. She wanted to be a nanny whilst still at school and had applied for the NNEB course; her grades were not high enough for her to get place on the course. According to Valerie she was persuaded by the careers adviser to follow the BTec First (pre-vocational) in Caring for one year, to improve her standard in English after which a place on the NNEB course would follow. After joining the course her course teachers told her that this was not the case ‘so it was a waste of time doing that course in the first place’. She felt annoyed, as she believes she was given bad advice and says she would have found another course maybe ‘a few levels down’ in another college so that she would reach her goal eventually. At the time of interview although she wanted still to be a nanny, she saw little hope of attaining that goal. Her lack of confidence meant that she was unwilling to study with younger people because they would compare her (low) standard to theirs. She is a keen tennis and badminton player but will not join a club because she does not wish to meet new people.

Vicki at the time of interview had completed the first year of the BTec National in social care; the previous year she had studied on the BTec first in caring (pre-vocational) as her results had not been high enough to start on the BTec National. She hoped that eventually she would get a degree in social work in spite of the amount of time it would take. At school her preference was to be theatrical make up artist but after her work experience in a home for the elderly she changed direction. Her mother had encouraged her into the ‘caring’ area as she thought that there would be too much competition to be a theatrical make-up artist, and Vicki was soon convinced that also it was ‘not a very worthwhile job’. She attends church regularly, helps with the Sunday school and, at the time of interview, had just returned from church summer camp. She believes that the work she aims to do is worthwhile and hopes to work with people who have physical or mental learning difficulties or those with Aids. At school she enjoyed PE because of the lack of written work and had enjoyed the practical aspects of science. She obtained a C GSCE grade for Drama and believes that it helped to boost her confidence and bring her out of her shell.