

ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, MEDICINE AND SOCIAL
CARE

IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED, TRY, TRY, TRY AGAIN: THE
CASE OF GCSE RESIT STUDENTS, TEACHERS AND
POLICYMAKERS IN 2016-2017

JOANNE BOWSER-ANGERMANN

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ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, MEDICINE AND SOCIAL CARE

DOCTORATE OF EDUCATION

IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED, TRY, TRY, TRY AGAIN: THE CASE OF GCSE
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This research is an exploration into the D grade policy affecting current and future learners aged 16-19 in the post-16 sector in England. The research explores the effect of this policy in action. Current policy dictates that from 2014/2015 it is mandatory for all students aged 16-19, who have not achieved a grade A*-C (or grade 9 to 4 in the new style GCSE) in maths and/or English, must achieve these qualifications.

This is an embedded single-case design with the aim to explore one local college's experiences examining students and teachers experiences of a compulsory maths and/or English classroom. The data collected is through a range of methods to build a rich case study, which includes; detailed field notes, an online survey of students and teachers, unstructured interviews with teachers, unstructured group interviews with students and direct observations of classes.

Vignettes are used to present analysis of the rich data collected. The rationale for the choice of vignettes was to show the critical incidents that were observed or recorded during the data collection period of the study. It was the use of the vignettes as primary foci that allowed strong themes to emerge, including; compliance, coercion, conflict, mindset and voice. There are battles for power taking place in classrooms: some students are subversive and refuse to assimilate or accommodate new learning.

Consequences of imposing the D grade policy has resulted in a conflict between the policy's intention and what individuals are experiencing in reality, a conflict that is reflected in both the students and teachers who are invisible. This further exacerbates the conflict in top-down pressure from the government's policymakers, to senior leaders, to the teachers and students, who feel silenced and marginalised.

GCSE maths and English, Further Education, motivation, mindset, skills

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Chapter One

Introduction

Chapter One

1.1 Introduction to the thesis

This is a study of exploration into the educational policy and funding condition that is currently affecting learners and future learners aged 16-19 who are entering the next phase of their full-time education at a Further Education (FE) college in England. Current policy dictates that from the academic year 2014/2015 it is mandatory for all learners aged 16-19 years who do not hold a GCSE A*- C grade or a 4 to 9 in maths and/or English to continue to progress towards the required standard in the qualification (Wolf, 2011; ESFA, 2015; ESFA, DfE, 2017). However, critically, if a student has achieved a grade D or grade 3 it is compulsory for that student to be enrolled onto a GCSE resit rather than a steppingstone or bridging qualification such as Functional Skills (DfE, 2017). This policy is now referred to as the 'D grade policy' (DfE, 2017).

The debate about the importance of continuing to study the core subjects of maths and English in vocational education in England gained fresh prominence, in 2011, when Professor Alison Wolf published her government funded 'Review of Vocational Education' commonly referred to as the 'Wolf Report'. The then Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove MP, asked Wolf to carry out an assessment of Vocational Education to address, what he called, the continuing "failure to provide young people with a proper technical and practical education of a kind that other nations can boast" (Wolf, 2011, p. 4). This was when I was teaching GCSE English in FE.

I identify myself as an insider researcher. I am someone who has worked in FE with instinctive empathies into the lived experience of both the students and educators of the D grade policy. Therefore, the provocation for my research comes from within my lived familiarity with my participants, giving me implicit understanding, which will inevitably inform my research (Griffiths, 1998). I was faced with students on a day-to-day basis who were forced to absorb a subject they previously 'failed' and are now required to achieve. Although I have now left and am detached from FE, I wanted to go back and research to see if this view is still true of my colleagues continuing to teach resit courses of GCSE maths and English within FE classrooms.

Critically, when I was teaching in FE I was, and continued to become, increasingly concerned about the impact that compulsory GCSE maths and English resit classes were having on students' learning and attitudes to learning of these hugely significant subjects. These fears are not limited to the students who are forced to continue to study maths and English but also the teachers who have to teach them. The D grade policy has in turn put more pressure on teachers in FE to continue to motivate and engage

young people who potentially now have educational and social barriers to break through. The Director of Policy at the Association of Colleges, Joy Mercer, has said that it will now take “the most experienced teachers to motivate them” (Coughlan, 2013). The need for these more experienced teachers to break through students’ now preconceived thoughts about failure and past educational experiences, is putting more pressure on Colleges and teachers. The Skills Funding Agency also understand this issue and agree that Colleges need to be more innovative in helping young people achieve in maths and English (DfBIS, 2014). It is important as a professional, with lived familiarity to FE settings, to challenge any theory, practice and/or policy that I feel is detrimental to students’ learning.

The aim of this thesis is to explore the direct effects of the D grade Policy and compulsory learning on 16-19-year olds providing a detailed interpretation into the experiences of students and teachers across the academic year 2016-2017 in one FE college. There is a main research question driving the research forward:

How is the policy of compulsory GCSE maths and English for 16-19-year olds being experienced by students and teaching staff at one Further Education College?

The focus of the data collection explores the students’ experiences, motivation and engagement and the teachers’ experiences, motivation and engagement separately, before considering them together. In 2016-17 the impact of the D grade policy was felt more than ever in the FE sector and is showing no signs of letting up. Professor Sir Adrian Smith recently published his review of post-16 mathematics and requests that the policy be reviewed further “in particular the grade at which students are required to re-sit the GCSE and the role of alternative qualifications for weaker students” (Smith, 2017, p. 45). This thesis tells the story of the D grade policy in action in 2016-17 and presents detailed analysis of critical incidents across the academic year made accessible as vignettes. My usage of vignettes and critical incidents is further discussed in chapter four, within the section on ‘Data Analysis and use of Narrative writing’ and critical incidents as part under observations within the section on ‘Methods’.

In 2017 the Department for Education DfE published a report to support providers with strategies to ensure the successful and effective delivery of maths and English to students who have not achieved the required standard; the research was commissioned by the government and was undertaken by CFE research, University of Nottingham, Birmingham City University, and Edge Hill University. It is important to note that the research was commissioned by the government who want the D grade policy to be

successful rather than giving an objective viewpoint on its effects. In total 38 FE colleges took part in the research; however, the report provides a snapshot of teaching and learning strategies and admits that generally all providers are applying similar pedagogical approaches and therefore this cannot explain variation in overall exam results (DfE, 2017). Critically, my research tracks one FE college across an entire academic year giving a holistic view of evidence for variations in engagement, motivation and teaching and learning throughout the entire resit year. This is advantageous as my research shows FE providers that, although they may be providing similar teaching and learning experiences, there are clearly underlying reasons to account for the learners' success in achieving or not achieving a grade C/4, such as a refusal or inability to accommodate new learning, conflicts between students and teachers, FE providers and Policymakers, and ultimately the implementation of policy. These are presented in detail and offer a vital contribution to knowledge.

The D grade policy has presented an enormous change in tone and focus of maths and English in FE creating practical problems and the need and importance for FE providers to unite together for knowledge, experiences and research is vital.

Throughout my doctoral journey many opportunities arose for me to present my research, to a number of different audiences, however, the one I found most useful was the 3-minute thesis competition. The competition required me to produce a one slide attention-grabbing summary of my entire research, which can be seen in figure 1.1.

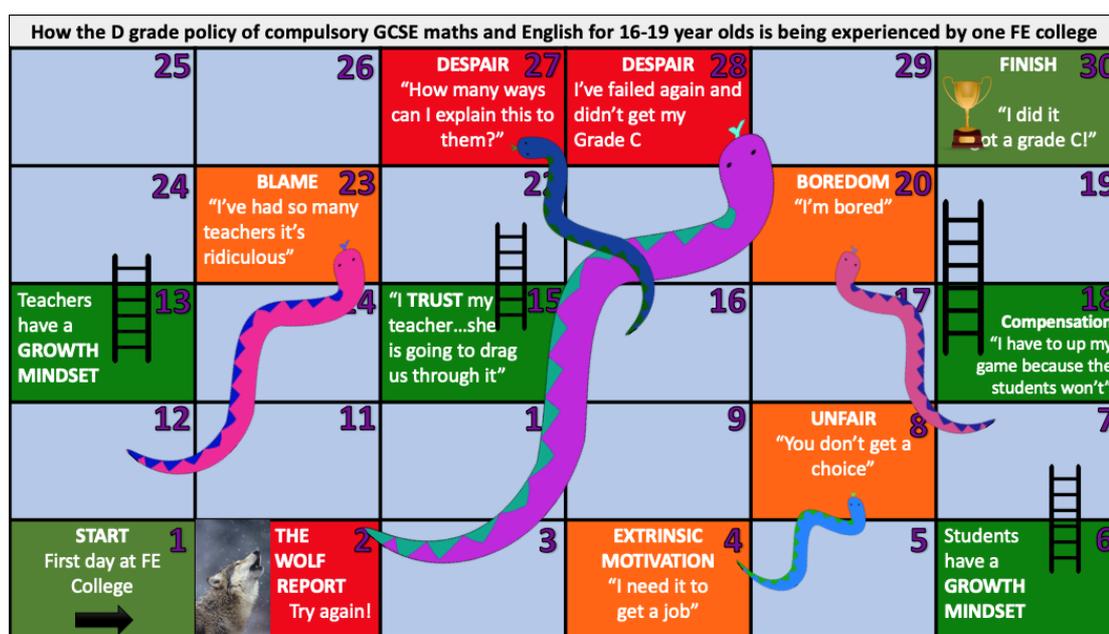


Figure 1.1: 3-minute-thesis PowerPoint slide presentation

It was a challenge to summarise all of my research into one legible interesting slide. When considering my research as a whole, I decided to use the analogy of a snakes and ladders board to represent both the ups and downs of the experiences of those I had researched. The themes scattered on the board above will be explored in more detail throughout the thesis, and in particular, in the findings and discussions chapters.

I also feel that the snakes and ladders board which I produced is a parallel to my own experiences in completing my doctorate. I have had moments of my own despair of slipping all the way down a snake, sometimes all the way back to the start, and then the elation of climbing a ladder and making real progress in my thinking. Therefore, I have chosen to use the idea of the snakes and ladders concept throughout my thesis to represent my personal reflections on specific situations and the ups and downs I have faced during my doctoral journey.

1.2 How is the thesis structured?

The thesis continues with chapter two, 'The context and background to my study'. This chapter provides the personal, political and historical context providing the background for my research.

Chapter three is a 'Literature review' with literature presented from three perspectives to show the layers and scope of the research. The literature tells the tale of the policymakers, teachers and finally students. Each perspective provides a theoretical backdrop for my findings.

Chapter four is entitled 'Research design, methodology and methods' and outlines my theoretical rationale and research design. It examines the methods I have used and how they answer my research questions.

Chapter five 'Findings – the story of 2016-2017' provides a narrative of the qualitative and quantitative data collected throughout the life cycle of my case study. It provides examples of the data.

Chapter six 'Discussions – Critical incidents' makes use of vignettes to present critical incidents of the data. These vignettes present themed analysis pulling the data together.

Chapter seven 'Conclusion' clearly articulates my contribution to knowledge and offers suggestions for further research.

Chapter Two

The context and background to my study

Chapter Two

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of the D grade policy is to “underpin the importance of English and Mathematics in helping young people progress in their education and employment” (DfE, 2017, p. 21). But is this what the students and teachers are experiencing? The reform of the D grade policy was implemented following the publication of the Wolf Report in 2011, Professor Alison Wolf’s assessment of vocational education, supported and backed by the then Education Secretary Michael Gove. Professor Alison Wolf (2013) has since publicly upheld her recommendations outlined in the report expressing her delight that we are now going to put a stop to students giving up maths and English and that it was national scandal that this was allowed to happen in the post-16 sector. This research explores the effects of this policy in action. The aim of this chapter is to set the different contexts for the study.

2.2 My personal context

I am a professional practitioner, an education professional, I am an advocate for my institution and my professional body. I am now a higher education lecturer, but I have been a FE lecturer, a teacher and a mentor. Sadly at times, when translated, this has meant that I have also felt used as a puppet, constrained, tangled and restricted. Education professionals are faced with many challenges, barriers and often find themselves bound by an “ideology of professionalism” (Eraut, 1994, p. 223), an ideology often placed on them by society, for them to be experts, uphold trustworthiness and service.

Educators are inherent researchers, seeking new and improved ways to educate students, but both a newly qualified teacher and a highly experienced educator, will see an extensive negotiation breach in praxeology and the juxtaposition between theory and practice (Roth, Lawless & Tobin, 2000). This is due to the disparity between theory and practice within education that is often not acknowledged. Yet, this truly needs to be observed when bringing in a new education policy or all educators will continue to live inside a conflicting battlefield of applying new theories to help us deal with the difficulties of the classroom and the stark reality of how to actually deal with the day to day stresses of the classroom (Roth, Lawless & Tobin, 2000). When I started this thesis, I was teaching GCSE English in an FE college trying to implement the D grade policy, this made me question the praxeology behind the policy change, vocational education and

the fear that the theory had been applied with little thought to practice. This was the motivation compelling my research.



When I first applied to become a teacher, I had visions of my future classroom and it was one with cooperative learning and teaching methods, whereby students share their ideas and thought processes, think critically and creatively, and develop an appreciation for equality. What I did not envisage was a classroom of young people so disheartened by their educational journey so far, that to simply motivate them to attend class would be a challenge, let alone think critically and creatively about the subjects. Yet, when I was a teacher of GCSE English resits in a FE college, this is exactly what I was faced with. To raise standards of maths and English in our young people we need to listen to them and understand how previous failure in maths and English impacts on the learning in the post 16 classroom.

The impact of failure on students also raises the equally critical question of what the inevitable impact is on teachers' motivation to teach, when they are teaching students who are forced to resit and are not motivated to learn. When I was teaching GCSE English in FE I felt the pressure of professional accountability and coercion to help them reach a Grade A*-C. I was restricted. If the true "test of good teaching is if students learn as a result of it" (Giusti & Hogg, 1973, p. 182) you can understand why I am concerned and disheartened by more and more students enrolling on a vocational course in FE, faced with yet another year of GCSE maths and/or English because they have not achieved the new desired 'pass' mark set. This happens to be a grade 4-9 or Grade A*-C at the current time. When students leave school, it is a chance for them to step onto a new educational path, one where they can choose what subjects or careers they want to focus on and pursue. However, the new message for students who now enter FE is; 'you can choose to study what want you want as long as you continue to study maths and English'.

For the students who continue to fall below the benchmark, is their achievement deemed worthless? There seemed to be no runner up prize for many students only to simply try, try and try again. My professional characteristics make me a lecturer, mentor, observer and a student and the values that I uphold in my teaching did not emerge when I was teaching in FE. I want to try and explore the current situation and show a true representation of what is happening in FE as a result of the D grade policy.

When I initially embarked on my doctoral journey, I could not fail to be mindful of my insider researcher position and the advantages and disadvantages that this positionality had on my research. Arguably, “The strength of the insider researcher is also potentially its greatest weakness” (Edwards, 2002, p. 77). I was investigating a professional practice and context that I was familiar with, which meant that I was able to observe a practical problem within FE and able to record the experiences of the individuals affected. Being an insider gives me strength to analyse data because I have lived it and experienced it, giving me intimate knowledge and understanding. Educational practices evolve over time as new strategies and new generations of students come through schools and colleges. They have their own pathways and their own progression at variable rates, therefore being an insider is an advantage to be able to capture an informed knowledge from their lived experience rather than waiting for outsiders to catch up (Griffith, 1998).

It is exactly because of my insider identity that I need to be cautious not to influence the outcomes of participant responses and interactions, which can be a disadvantage of insider research. Nonetheless, it can be said that influences on participants are not just a barrier for insider researchers to overcome, “Qualitative researchers, outsiders or insiders, cannot be assured that their observations, interpretations, and representations are not affected by their various identities or positionalities” (Chavez, 2008, p. 475). I believe some scholars take this view because of the ‘Hawthorn effect’ or the observer effect, which perceives the power dimension between the observer and the observed. Many educational researchers have predicted that several evidence-based research conclusions drawn from inexperienced researchers are affected by the Hawthorn Effect (Cook, 1962). This is important to acknowledge at the beginning of my doctoral journey and indeed throughout the entire process, especially when drawing conclusions and analysing qualitative and quantitative data: are my participants behaving the way they think I want them to behave because they know I am a researcher? How am I impacting on others’ behaviour, interactions and comments because of who I am? Many insider researchers (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007; Chavez, 2008; Edwards, 2002; Mercer, 2007; Taylor, 2011) have questioned the effects their position can have on their participants and whether they have unconsciously manipulated them through their shared knowledge of their research objectives.

From my previous professional context of teaching GCSE resit English in an FE college I observed first-hand the very practical problem that consistent re-examination caused. My institution like many others are faced with large classes of students who tend to be demotivated, disengaged, irritated and perplexed as to why, if they are studying a

vocational qualification in 'Painting and Decorating', for example, they must now also complete a compulsory GCSE in maths and/or English. In my previous position, I found myself defending through panoptic surveillance (Foucault, 1977) to explain to my students that the purpose of this is to help anyone who has previously failed to achieve a grade C or above in maths and English, to be able to do so and how this will be beneficial to all in their chosen careers, no matter how many previous attempts had been taken. Every time I said this to my students, I could feel the government's professionalism agenda leaking through me, detached from emotion. I knew that I must implement the new regulations to students but from my positionality, I could see what effect this was having on them and the consequential effect on staff battling to get them to complete their GCSEs once again.

One tool to counteract this was the use of mindset. Lister (2019) highlights the growing interest over recent years in Professor Carol Dweck's growth mindset theory (Dweck, 2006) with books now giving advice on how to become a growth mindset school (Hildrew, 2018) and articles on how to become a growth mindset teacher (Heggart, 2015). It was during my previous professional context where I was introduced to the use of mindset theory as an instrument and teaching tool that could help to improve learning, and this sparked my interest in the theory. Mindset is based on the fundamental idea that people hold either a fixed mindset, where intelligence is unchanging and innate, or a growth mindset, where intelligence is malleable with effort (Dweck, 2017). Schools and colleges believe that by breaking down a fixed mindset or negative approach to learning, teaching students that it is their effort that determines their achievements and not an exam grade, they will become better learners (Lister, 2019). In my previous practice I could see students carrying their perceived 'failure' around with them and teachers trying to utilise the key message in Dweck's work to focus on effort and not outcomes (Dweck, 2017). Growth mindset is discussed further in chapter three and chapter four.

My research into compulsory GCSE classrooms in FE gives an insider observation of the effects of government policy on teaching and learning in colleges. As an educationalist, I often wonder if the government studies praxeology or if it simply implements policy solely based on theory. It is often hard to spot the correlation between theory and everyday practice. I agree with Casey (2012) that many pedagogical theories which are recommended are non-representational of 'real' learning situations and are based on an ideological target that we must all aspire to achieve. Continual repression has turned educators into a docile workforce who are described as victims kept down through workloads, changes in policy and the determination to meet never ending benchmarks and targets (Snoek, 2014). Without practitioner resistance, this will not

change, and we are sure to continue on the path to achieve outcomes and fail to focus on affectivity and contentiousness.

2.3 The political context

In England the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 unites different types of colleges as providers of FE, with General FE providers being the largest group (Johnes, Bradley and Little, 2011). Following a merger of the Education Funding Agency (EFA) and Skills Funding Agency (SFA) all FE colleges in England are restricted by the same funding rules set out by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), and as a consequence all FE colleges are regulated by the DfE and bound by government educational policy, Ofsted standards and funding (ESFA, 2019; Ofsted, 2016). In 2015-2016 The Skills Funding Agency explained in their annual statement that they will fund all students who need to strive to achieve a GCSE grade A*-C (DfBIS, 2014). They explain that the reason behind this is to challenge all educational institutions to set high standards and expectations to help all students achieve a high grade in maths and English which is what employers want (DfBIS, 2014).

The spotlight on the state of maths and English in FE evolved from the Wolf Report which is an extensive review and analysis of the vocational educational system in England and was deemed “brilliant and ground-breaking” by the government (DfE, 2011). Wolf made in total 27 recommendations for reform of the current Vocational Educational practices, scrutinising in detail the quality of provision and funding. Of the 27 recommendations made by Wolf (2011), four were identified for immediate action by Gove. The further twenty-three were carefully considered for the best ways of implementing them at a later date.

One of the four recommendations of the Wolf Report that was immediately actioned states, “Students who are under 19 and do not have GCSE A*-C in maths and/or English should be required, as part of their programme, to pursue a course which either leads directly to these qualifications, or which provide significant progress towards future GCSE entry and success” (Wolf, 2011, p. 119). This suggests that the GCSE level a learner is awarded in maths and English now holds significant value in vocational studies, rather than ‘basic’ maths or English skills acquired at grade D level and the grade awarded in other subject specific qualifications. Wolf (2011, p. 8) states that the current system actively steers “16+ students into inferior alternative qualifications” which is having a detrimental impact on their future employment and education prospects which is shameful.

This is an enormous change in vocational education moving away from a Functional Skills qualification in maths and English which has been in place since 2000. By her own admission Professor Alison Wolf believes that out of all of her recommendations for vocational education, making GCSE resits compulsory so young people can continue to achieve an A*-C grade by the age of 19, was “the single most important one” she made (Wolf, 2013, p. 24).

The Wolf Report (2011) joins a long line of FE government initiatives which add to the confusion of the type of courses and qualifications in vocational education that forget the real purpose and value of FE (West and Steedman, 2003). This is perhaps an argument for why FE was termed the ‘Cinderella’ division of education (Baker, 1989), often viewed as less respected and prestigious than a traditional academic route (West and Steedman, 2003). In 1940 educationalist John Dewey used the terms ‘industrial education’ and ‘industrial intelligence’ and celebrated them, claiming that the study of this type of education allows individuals to master and gain knowledge of trades needed for society, giving the individual the power to map their own path for their own economic destiny (Defalco, 2016). With the continued focus on vocational education, this view holds and continues to hold, a valuable part of the educational system helping young people to prepare for their working lives, spring boarding their progression into the job market (West and Steedman, 2003).

However, the Department for Education and Skills DfES (2011) states that mastery of maths and English is one of the main functions of the education system and ensuring young people acquire skills in these subjects is crucial to the country’s equity and social justice. According to Durkheim the founding father of functionalism (1958, p. 71) the role of education is “the means by which society prepares within children, the essential conditions of its very existence”. For the functionalist education’s key purpose is to socialise individuals into societies norms and values, preparing them to play a specific role that will contribute to the effective functioning of the wider society (Boronski and Hassan, 2005). This includes the development of basic academic skills, such as maths and English which has gained new importance within educational policy in the post-16 sector, as they are key transferable skills needed for our future workforce (Bartlett and Burton, 2016).

Flint and Hughes (2008) highlighted when school leavers have achieved 5 A*-C grade GCSEs they go onto further study, but young people who do not meet this standard disengage very quickly. This could be because, as the DfEE identified in 1996, there are too many learners who are in their final compulsory school years and are uninterested and bored. It is now these learners who are being forced to conform back to compulsory

style learning, by automatically enrolling them onto a GCSE resit. It is important to note that since The Education and Skills Act 2008 the school leaving age has increased. In 2015, it was made mandatory for all young people to remain in learning until the age of 18. However, they cannot choose what that learning should look like, unless they have reached the required standard of maths and English.

Interestingly, Wolf seemed to have predicted correctly the concerns that educational professionals would have towards her recommendations for the compulsory continuing study of maths and English by purposely commenting, “pedagogically, it is pointless to keep trying to teach the same course, in the same way, to people who have not succeeded at it earlier” (Wolf, 2011, p. 85). She suggests that the answer to overcoming this pedagogical dilemma is in the hands of teachers by varying the teaching and learning strategies. Despite this solution to anticipated concerns from educational professionals, Wolf stands by her recommendation and argues, “the need for varied pedagogy is not an argument for abandoning content” (Wolf, 2011, p. 85). The problem with Wolf’s statement is that it is too narrow as it fails to take into account a number of possible barriers to learning that did, and could, prevent learners achieving a grade C in maths and/or English in the future.

A helpful insight and discussion on this viewpoint was presented by ‘A Secret College Tutor’ (2014) in *The Guardian*. An insider, native to FE states, “they only come to the college to learn their trade and have little interest in studying a subject that has caused them so much stress and anxiety”. This reflects my own experience of teaching in FE. The vocational students wanted to focus on their vocational studies rather than studies they associated with school and failure. We have to assume that, for a number of learners who have not achieved a grade C or above in maths and/or English, they have not achieved the required benchmark for a reason.

The Secret College Tutor (2014) has witnessed teachers tirelessly designing resources that contextualise maths and English into their main vocational programme to highlight the relevance of the subjects to the learners in an attempt to aid motivation. They admit that all this hard work is meaningless when you have a number of learners in a classroom who have to repeat a subject they have loathed throughout their school career.

A large number of 16-19-year-old learners repeating their GCSE in maths and/or English are demotivated and disengaged (DfE, 2017) and teachers are becoming demoralised by their determined efforts having little or no effect on learners’ confidence or success within the subjects, leaving only 6.5% reaching a grade C or above in English and only 7% in maths (AELP, 2015). The secret college tutor raises an insider’s observation to

the debate, that Wolf's recommendation is not only having a negative effect on the students, but it is also having a harmful effect on the teachers teaching them. Armstrong et al., (1998, p. 5) claims that "if teachers believe that their work is not valued, then their motivation to motivate their pupils will be reduced". This causes a difficult situation in our post-16 classrooms. If teachers feel demoralised by their efforts in helping learners to pass then they will be unable to re-motivate the learners to reach the governments' expected benchmark grade and the situation becomes a vicious circle.

A report published in 2017 by the DfE entitled 'Effective practice in the delivery of teaching English and Mathematics to 16-18 year olds' acknowledges the issues raised by the secret college tutor and others in the sector stating that providers do face "a number of challenges as a consequence of the characteristics of the student cohorts that affect how they approach teaching and learning" (DfE, 2017). It also provides suggestions and best practice to ensure that all learners reach the desired level. This report has further angered some in the sector including the assistant general secretary of education policy and research at the National Education Union, Nansi Ellis who has branded the policy as 'ridiculous' and claiming that it is harming students' self-esteem and adding to college lecturers already heavy workload (Belgutay, 2017a).

The DfE report (2017, p.7) also acknowledges an added pressure in managing the logistics of an increasing number of GCSE resit students. In 2015, it was reported that the number of students who sat GCSE maths rose from 100,587 in 2014 to 130,979, an increase of 30.2 per cent. The number attempting GCSE English went from 79,045 to 97,163, which is an increase of 22.9 per cent (Offord, 2015). This was evident again in 2016. It was reported by the Association of Colleges that there were 235,400 students sitting their GCSE resit exam in the summer of 2016 (Belgutay, 2016). This means that college lecturers in turn are faced with an ever-growing number of students who have previously failed in a subject they need to pass. This has sparked a recruitment crisis in the post-16 sector with 9 in 10 struggling to employ GCSE maths and English teachers (Belgutay and Martin, 2016).

Since writing her report, Wolf has continually defended her recommendation that a GCSE grade C or above in maths and English should be a minimum requirement for all post-16 learners. Wolf (2013, p. 24) maintains that "It is a national scandal that we have allowed millions of young people to give up maths and English without having acquired the two most important qualifications in the modern labour market". Wolf (2013) draws our attention to how that compared to other countries around the world. England is the anomaly, as we have allowed our post-16 learners to discontinue studying our native tongue and maths, and as a result, at age 15 our learners are simply average compared

to the rest of the world. What is most concerning in Wolf's (2013) discussion in *The Times* editorial piece is her own comment admitting "it is not as if we teach to such a high standard that a D at GCSE carries one through just fine". This comment suggests that she is more than aware of the failings in our secondary school teaching of maths and English and therefore in turn strengthens her reason for making maths and English compulsory for post-16 learners. It is remarks such as this by Wolf that spark further arguments by FE colleges defending the sector. There is an argument here that the secondary school sector and the FE sector need to work together more effectively and to explore other means of qualifications to show a grade A*-C or 4-9 in maths and English vocational education.

Gillian Hargreaves (2015) the Education correspondent for the BBC visited Coventry City College to shed some light onto the current picture in FE. In her timely investigation into how young people with low GCSE grades can catch up in colleges, Hargreaves (2015) found that colleges are developing and devising strategies in an attempt to get all learners aged 16-19 to achieve a minimum of a C grade. During her inquiry, she interviewed a number of students enrolled at the college, and one particular student admitted to being disengaged in maths and English sessions at school, but now they have been given the opportunity to study these subjects in conjunction with their apprenticeship they are progressing. The findings would have been more useful if she had included more student responses regarding being forced to continue to study maths and English in the post-16 setting; something my study hopes to rectify. With the benefit of my professional context, it is the intention for my study to be able to analyse the effects of a policy implemented as a result of Wolf's recommendation, from the learners' and lecturers' point of view, within one FE college.

The student highlighted in Hargreaves (2015) report, suggests that although FE providers are complaining about the reform, there are students who are now flourishing as a result of it. This was further supported in March 2016 by a spokesperson for the DfE as they could only see the advantages behind the compulsory GCSE resits, "Last summer 4,000 more students aged 17 and above secured GCSE A*-C grades in English, and over 7,500 more passed maths than the year before" (Wiggins, 2016a). No one could argue that this is positive news for those learners. However, this 'only' positive view of the D grade policy by the DfE has not changed and in April 2017 The Education and Skills Funding Agency confirmed that students will have to continue to be enrolled into a maths or English course to continue to reach a grade C or the new grade 4 equivalent (Belgutay, 2017b).



I acknowledge the positives in these statistics. The policy is an opportunity for those who may have given up on their chances of achieving a grade A*-C or 4-9 a chance to be able to reach the standard. This will no doubt have an impact on those students' progress in their future education and employment.

Wolf (2013), to further strengthen her justification that a GCSE grade C or above in maths and English is vital to survive in the current labour market, points out that organisations use a C grade in GCSEs to 'cherry pick' potential employees. This point very clearly demonstrates the catalyst for Wolf's recommendation in vocational education and supports her view that in order for our young people to compete in an aggressive labour market holding a grade C or above in maths and English is essential. The Department for Education (DfE) has had to answer many concerns from a number of FE providers who are concerned about the effects of forcing young people to continue to study maths and English, and the DfE has continued to support the recommendation made by Wolf. In 2014 a DfE representative was reported saying, "English and maths are the two most vocational subjects you can study. That's why employers demand them before all other subjects" (Evans and Exley, 2014). Then again in 2015 another DfE spokesperson stressed in *FE Weekly* the importance of post 16 learners holding high standards in maths and English, and this is why policymakers want everyone to continue to study these subjects until they reach the A*-C standard (Cooney, 2015). Such declarations are interesting in analysing the current view of the DfE and the high priority they now place on maths and English skills over functional skills, or any other relatable skill to employment or an occupation.

The FE commissioner David Collins has added, "employers would welcome more relevant maths and English GCSEs" (Evans, 2014). This statement highlights another critical side of the debate, challenging which maths and English qualification is most appropriate in FE and suggesting the current GCSE is not appropriate for all vocational learners who are seeking employment. This is mirrored by the Director of Policy at the Association of Colleges, Joy Mercer, who offers an alternative by developing a contextualised GCSE with input from employers, so they are fit for the post-16 setting (Evans and Exley, 2014). The number of FE providers asking for an alternative GCSE is extensive. The Director General of the employers' group, John Cridland has asked for GCSEs to be scrapped completely from vocational education and strongly argued,

“GCSEs are past their sell-by date and should be retired” (Coughlan, 2015). Mr Cridland goes as far as to intimate that for too long we have been fantasising that the GCSE exam system upholds vocational values and is appropriate for learners who are not intending to go into higher education. Mr Cridland questions whether the formal GCSE qualification taught in schools is simply a stepping stone to university and therefore does not recognise the important differences of students studying for a trade or apprenticeship.

Collectively these points of view outline not a dilution of standards but a more appropriate content in the post-16 setting. In a Times Educational Supplement TES report a further DfE spokesperson was quoted saying, “to make sure young people are ready for work, we want to make sure all those leaving education have high standards of maths and literacy” (Evans, 2015). In this important announcement in defence of Wolf’s recommendation the DfE are displaying that the ‘high standards’ in maths and English are measurable in terms of achieving an A*-C grade. Therefore, suggesting that the GCSE is inclusive for all learners which ironically seemed to be one of the major concerns of educational professionals when O-Levels were replaced by the GCSE (Roy, 1986).

2.4 Why the GCSE? The historical context

It was September 1986 when students began GCSE maths and English courses for the very first time. In 1987, Claridge Education published a collection of monographs written by a range of education professionals dedicated to current issues in Education, edited by Joanna North, entitled, ‘The GCSE: An Examination’. The aim of the book was to present an overview of the then new GCSE examination course making the O-Level and CSE non-existent (North, 1987), which was a huge change to the English education system and one that would change it forever. According to North (1987) the original request for the two-tier system to be replaced by a single inclusive qualification was due to a real discomfort in the way the exam system was being managed. Teachers had to judge before entering a student for an exam, whether they believed they were intellectually capable of passing. The GCSE was developed to allow the focus of education to be on equality rather than one that was preoccupied by achievement alone.

This is interesting when reconsidering the D grade policy and Wolf’s recommendation for all learners to achieve a A*-C or 4-9 grade as it no longer encompasses the egalitarian foundations that the GCSE was designed for, because a grade D or 3 is no longer an acceptable achievement. Therefore, by imposing this policy we are returning to a two-tiered system without making it explicit. There is also a contradiction in some messages

being shared in the media, the head of England's qualifications regulator, Ofqual, Amanda Spielman was quoted saying, "there is more to life than grades" (Stewart, 2015) and that the grades students are awarded in maths and English is a limited representation of their abilities. Although many educational professionals can agree with Ms Spielman's comments, they have been heavily criticised for being inappropriate given that the grade awarded in maths and English is being used as a complete representation of their skills in the subjects. The general secretary of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers union (ATL), Mary Bousted, accused Ms Spielman of being misleading allowing further doubt and mistrust about what a GCSE grade C represents about a person's abilities in maths and English (Harding and Correspondent, 2015).

At the time critics of the GCSE remained defiant for precisely the 'inclusivity' for all, which the GCSE was sold on. There seemed to be a genuine and real fear that the GCSE would dilute standards in its attempt to promote equality in an examination system. Worthen (1987) pointed out that the GCSE would not raise standards suggesting it would be simply easier to pass to ensure it was inclusive for all learners. Despite advocates for the new exam Worthen (1987) argues a genuine exam is about whether a person passes or fails and nothing more. Along with the new exam there was a concern that it represented a general move away from the conventional values of education. "Traditionally, individual pupils faced the teacher and listened. Now groups of pupils face each other around tables and talk" (Worthen, 1987, p.41). In the same vein, North (1987) warned that the GCSE is detrimental to the country's education system by damaging further the quest for excellence associated with Grammar Schools. These are elitist views and simply memories of an old-fashioned system. However, there is now a real fear amongst FE providers that we are damaging our vocational education with the presence of the GCSE and the expectation that every learner will achieve a grade C or above.

Coleman and Shepherd (1987) raised an interesting view on the core subject of mathematics admitting that it needs a formal teaching and assessment method and should not be weakened by hands-on teaching styles. They acknowledge "mathematics is a difficult subject and, as with anything difficult, it will be beyond the intellectual grasp of some people" (Coleman and Shepherd, 1987, p. 81). It could be said because the C grade has now been put on a pedestal maths and English are now seen as limiters rather than definers. Bruner (1966) a renowned theorist of educational psychology has argued for many years that anyone is capable of learning anything if the complex topic or subject is properly presented and structured and if so, the students' intellectual ability is immaterial in the learning of a subject. Many students who are defiant in appealing, "I'm

going to fail, what's the point in trying?" are contesting his claim (BBC Student reports, 2014).

In the analysis of all the expected effects of the GCSE, Debenham (1987) contributed to the discussion by calling for an alternative examination for the post 16 learner in a similar way to how teachers are calling for one today. He pre-empted many of the concerns that if the GCSE went ahead it would not be appropriate for learners aged 16 plus. In 1987 he made the bold claim, mirrored by many practitioners in the FE sector today, that post 16 learners enter a stage of making their own choices and therefore it is not feasible, nor appropriate, to continue education on a wider spectrum and it needs to be more specific to their goals and life choices. In his chapter entitled '16+: An alternative examination' he explains that young adults have to make their own curricular choices based on their personal interests and to study their chosen subject in depth so it, in turn, engages them sufficiently.

In his investigation into the philosophy of the GCSE education, O'Hear (1987) draws our attention to how the GCSE promotes varied teaching, learning and assessments and places a demand on teachers to make the subjects relevant to students' own lives. He argues that this will further erode learning for knowledge sake and "playing down to the lowest level is typical of the GCSE" (O'Hear, 1987, p.126). It was a common belief among practitioners that the introduction of the GCSE would continue to move our education system away from the traditional teaching styles and methods. In the previous year, Roy (1986) published his own book analysing the arrival of the GCSE as an examination 'system' that assesses what students know and understand rather than an examination designed to stretch and test their knowledge. Many practitioners have argued that it is for this reason that the GCSE is aiming at the lowest level and therefore students who are ultimately being disadvantaged are the gifted and talented. However, as a result of the D grade policy, the students who appear to be disadvantaged are G-D grade students who have little or no desire to continue to study the GCSE due to low self-esteem (Belgutay, 2017a). There is now evidence to suggest that students who come from the poorest parts of the country are likely to make the least progress (Exley, 2016) which is the group of students the GCSE appeared to be originally aimed at.

Roy (1986) carried out a very interesting small-scale qualitative study to gather responses from students' perspective before the new GCSE examination system was introduced. He asked students to answer questionnaires, giving Roy the ability to balance his insider biases as an education professional with being an outsider to the school in which he carried out his research. He argued that guidelines surrounding public examinations should publish evidence and thoughts from the students who actually sit

them. They do not highlight the contradiction between what our modern pedagogy preaches and some of our current practices, meaning students remain submissive receivers of their so called inclusive educational system. Vitaly, after conducting his research, he noted that “students irrespective of ability, age group, background and sex welcomed the opportunity of being consulted” (Roy, 1986, p. 106). However, Wolf (2011) in her extensive review of our current vocational education system did not consult or include examples of any students’ points of view confirming that even today’s learners, including those aged over 16, remain positioned as passive pupils on their educational journey.

In Roy’s (1986) study, questionnaire responses were collected from 139 students from a large comprehensive school in East Anglia aged between 12-16 years and students who were aged over 16 years who attended the school’s sixth form (Roy, 1986). He found that, regardless of the students’ understanding of the new GCSE examination system, their responses showed competition within the current two-tier system that the majority of students wanted to see abolished for the new fairer GCSE (Roy, 1986). One student’s response read as:

“I think this new exam will give the once C.S.E. people, a new surge of confidence. They won’t be put in a ‘thick’ category”. (Roy, 1986, p118)

Although this student aged 14-15 does not disclose what level of exam they had personally been entered for, this statement clearly demonstrates how the student felt about the then current system. This view from the student’s eyes expresses a stigma that surrounded students who were told to sit a CSE exam rather than its GCE counterpart. Students saw the new GCSE, as being a fairer system and one that endorses the view that everyone can achieve something. It is concerning, as an educational professional who taught the GCSE, that I was part of promoting a new stigma around students; one that now says that if you achieve a grade D or below this is now seen as a failure and one that you must correct. This is disconcerting when considering the foundations that the GCSE was originally built upon and the hopes the students placed on the new examination system. Roy’s (1986) study also offers views from students aged 16-18 who have had the opportunity to review the two-tier system and attended a sixth form college.

Most of the students’ responses were in a similar vein to the previous student and see major benefits to a fairer system, however one student in particular contradicts this view:

“The ‘O’ level has been specially adapted for people who are highly academic, while the CSE is designed for pupils of less academic ability... pupils taking CSE have the chance to gain high grades... even though they would not have the ability to take part in this exam” (Roy, 1986 p. 128).

This student offers a useful perspective seeing the examinations from both an insider’s and outsider’s point of view, and shows concern for learners who under the old system would have been placed into the CSE category. They are suggesting that a universal exam would place unnecessary pressure on some students who are not as academically minded as other students and it is for this reason that the new proposed GCSE is ‘unfair’.

Some of the concerns emerging from these findings relate to the current situation, occurring within the FE sector, especially when considering the added pressures placed on students who are achieving GCSE grades D-G and are expected to continue to achieve a higher grade regardless of ability or motive. However, Roy (1986) makes no attempt to further analyse the participants’ responses and only goes as far as to offer a limited explanation and summary of the students’ accounts. The findings might have been far more convincing in suggesting changes in the GCSE examination if he had considered a more sophisticated research project with deeper analysis and a broader sample to gain clearer refined results.

2.5 Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the personal, political and historical context surrounding my research. My personal context provides an important personal perspective as a former FE teacher, offering my own interest in the D grade policy and justification for my study. In my previous role as an English teacher in an FE college, I experienced teaching students who were bound by the D grade policy and witnessed the impact of making the GCSE resit compulsory for both students and teachers. Due to a growing interest in mindset theory in education, the FE college like many education institutions have drawn on Dweck’s mindset theory as a means to improve teaching and learning. By using mindset theory as an instrument and teaching tool many colleges aimed to relieve the negative impact compulsory maths and English resits were having on student and teacher engagement and motivation. I am an insider researcher which, although challenging, is also advantageous as I am able to provide an insider observation of the effects of government policy on teaching and learning with a greater understanding of the context than an outsider researcher.

The political context explores how compulsory GCSE maths and English resits for students who have not yet achieved a grade C/4 when they leave secondary school are the result of Professor Alison Wolf's recommendations, published in her review of the vocational education system. This means colleges are now responsible for the academic underachievement from schools causing a conflict in vocational education and contributing to FE being portrayed as the Cinderella sector. Students who attend FE colleges are entering post 16 education and are making life choices to learn a trade, but the compulsory nature of GCSE resits are affecting students' and teachers' motivation and engagement in maths and English. Wolf's recommendation for all students to continue to study GCSE maths and/or English to achieve a grade C/4 provided a base level qualification for all learners and therefore raising the educative level of vocational learners. However, in reality many are not achieving the qualification at all. There is an agreement over the importance of maths and English but disagreement about it being taught and measured through the compulsory GCSE, with a lack of research about whether the GCSE is fit for purpose, appropriate for 16-19-year olds and suitable to be re-examined again and again. Perhaps there is an argument that no matter what the qualification, we would always insert a threshold of pass or fail.

It is clear from the historical context that the GCSE remains as controversial now, for both educators and students, as it did when it was first introduced in 1987. The GCSE was presented as an inclusive assessment promoting equality and designed to eliminate an elitist two-tier system where teachers could make academic judgements on individual students. The GCSE promotes varied teaching, learning and assessments, however, many argued that the GCSE would be detrimental to the education system and believed that it was dumbing down academic standards and damaging the quest for excellence. In the traditional two-tier system, there was a growing stigma around the students who were told to sit a CSE exam rather than a GCE exam. However, by setting a grade C/4 as an acceptable benchmark achievement and suggesting that a grade D/3 is no longer acceptable, it is returning to a two-tier system without making it explicit and going against the egalitarian foundations the GCSE was designed on. This is similar to when the GCSE was first introduced and students' opinions have not been heard despite the impact on their education. The next chapter will build on the context chapter by reviewing and analysing the literature surrounding the research.

Chapter Three

Literature review

Chapter Three

3.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to build on each of the research contexts discussed in my introduction by bringing together key literature that has created the background to my study. The chapter itself is separated into three sections reflecting the differing tiers of involvement with the D grade policy within education. Therefore, the first section looks at FE from a wider political and policy perspective, specifically the impact policymakers' decisions have had on the sector. The second section critically evaluates the teaching of the GCSE resits and explores pedagogical practice to reflect the teachers who implement the imposed policy. Finally, the literature explored, turns to learning and motivational theory to reveal the outlooks of the students who are affected by the D grade policy.

3.2 GCSE resits – the tale of the policymakers

Following the commissioned Wolf Report (2011) the FE sector are commanded to implement the D grade policy to ensure that they meet the condition of funding and fulfil institutional contracts with the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA, 2018). The inflexibility of this funding condition is aligned with the government's intention to solve two main problems; 1) to ensure that all students have a better chance of entering further training, study or skilled employment, which is greatly increased by achieving at least a grade C or 4 (ESFA, 2018) and, 2) to ensure that the system actively encourages 16-19-year olds to achieve a minimum appropriate standard in maths and English before they enter adult life (Wolf, 2011).

However, the impact of funding decisions is not always fully considered before they are implemented. The Education Select Committee in 2015 reported on the financial sustainability of the FE sector, concluding that decisions are made without a thorough understanding of the impact and effects on learners, or on the institutions themselves. Making the D grade policy compulsory, exacerbated by the short deadline to implement the policy in an inappropriate context, policy makers have affected the FE sector's ability to solve the intended outcomes. It is ironic that the governments' aspiration that every young person who has failed GCSE maths and/or English will go on to show enthusiasm and appreciation to learn 19th century texts and Pythagoras' theorem, is having the opposite effect and turning students in the FE sector further and further away from the subjects (Davis, 2018).

In 2018 The Policy Consortium conducted a national survey to ask staff working within the FE sector whether they felt the Department for Education and the Education Skills Funding Agency produce conditions for success or failure. Overwhelmingly, the majority of the respondents stated that policy makers and stakeholders do not create successful outcomes for learners with the D grade policy, directly hindering both colleges' and students' ability to be successful (Davis, 2018). One of the limitations of the study is the lack of clarity of what constitutes 'success' or 'failure'. Instead the study allowed participants to write freely expressing their views of what prevents them from delivering high quality teaching and learning for all. Cripps (2002) argues that success should be measured not by how the learning was delivered but the way in which the student receives it. This could suggest a reason why the D grade policy itself was identified as one of the policies that has a direct impact on students and institutions, therefore contributing to their failure. The Policy Consortium (2018) call for educational experts and researchers to be responsible for the FE and Skills provision and put an end to policy volatility, recognising the damage it can cause. The policy volatility mirrors the volatility of the number of ministers who oversee the Education and Skills provision, with four ministers controlling Education since the Wolf Report was published in March 2011. This uncertainty and change from the highest level have consequences for FE colleges trying to successfully implement policy to ensure the best outcomes for learners.

The aim of this literature review is to focus on the key strands of policy and practice surrounding the D grade policy. Therefore, for reference and evidence of wider reading figure 3.1 illustrates chronologically the build-up of GCSE resits now affecting FE and the governments that were responsible. Blue is used to represent a Conservative government and red to represent a Labour government.

There is a high level of policy change and reform in the FE sector and according to Norris and Adam (2017) this is due to conflicting ideas surrounding the purpose of further education and ministers given the power to evoke change without consent of another body or overseer. By enforcing the D grade policy on colleges, policymakers are further adding to the confusion as to the purpose of Further Education. It is important that it is the enforcement of the policy and the qualification itself that has added to the confusion not the opportunity for students to have a second chance.

Following the Education Act 1944 colleges formed an integral part of society's reconstruction programme (Cripps, 2002). According to the Department for Education (2018), FE has two main aims, firstly to ensure that it creates skilled employees that the workforce need and secondly to help all students to achieve their potential.

1944	The Butler Act
1947	Leaving age raised to 15 - recommends GCE at O, A and S level
1951	O and A levels were introduced
1959	Crowther Report
1964	Industrial Training Act
1965	CSE and GCE running parallel
1969	First of the Black Papers published
1972	School leaving age raised to 16
1975	Black paper proposes exams at 7, 11 and 14
1976	Ruskin College Speech
1977	HMI model
1978	White paper
1986	GCSE introduced replacing O-levels and CSE's
1988	Education Reform Act
1992	The Further and Higher Education Act
1999	White Paper 'Learning to Succeed'
2004	White Paper 'Equipping our teachers for the future'
2005	Tomlinson Report rejected Foster Review
2006	The Leitch Report
2011	The Wolf Report
2012	Lingfield Report
2015	GCSE resit mandatory
2017	New GCSEs introduced

Figure 3.1: Timeline of educational events, reports and policies since 1944

It is clear how the D grade policy would meet this criterion. A grade C or 4 at GCSE level gives a recognisable signal to employers that an individual is capable of achieving at a good level and completing what is expected of them, which is an important skill the workforce needs to be successful (Feinstein and Sabates, 2008). Although, it is important to note that the qualification itself is only an indication of what an individual knows or has studied which can be misleading and measured with error (Feinstein and Sabates, 2008). Beneath the government's main overarching aims for FE, there are also potential wider benefits for 16-19-year olds who have previously not achieved a minimum grade of C or 4 in maths and English, to continue to study these subjects in FE.

In 2002, Preston and Hammond, for the Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning published a report outlining practitioners views on the wider benefits of FE. The study was conducted in collaboration with the Learning and Skills Development Agency and together they captured the views of over 10,000 FE practitioners via questionnaires. Preston and Hammond (2002) highlight that the students who have access to FE and its opportunities as a direct consequence of policy, benefit the most from FE as it raises their aspirations and encourages personal development. This is especially important for 16-19-year olds who have previously failed in a school environment and can find a FE college setting more suitable and enjoyable. However, motivation and self-efficacy play an important role in the student's ability to be successful. Preston and Hammond (2002) found that academic qualifications, such as the GCSE, can lead to efficacy benefits but only if the student chooses to study them as a result of their personal or career aspirations. However, if students are not motivated, they will not benefit as much as students who are.

As part of their research in 2002, Preston and Hammond found that there was a strong perception that FE picks up the pieces when students leave school and "mops up dropouts from the system" (p.27). Due to the D grade policy this has resulted in a continued perception that colleges are left to fix adult underachievement. Ainley and Bailey (1999) suggest that long before GCSE re-sits became compulsory, traditionally FE projected themselves as a second-chance provision with students given opportunities to catch up on what they had missed at school. In Helena Kennedy's Learning Works report (1997) she openly encouraged the FE sector to improve its widening participation to help students who had slipped through the secondary school education net, famously saying, 'If at first you don't succeed, you don't succeed' (p. 21).

It could be argued it is the compulsory nature of the D grade policy, rather than its wide-ranging opportunity and encouragement, that further devalues FE, by demanding that colleges take on the responsibility of underachievement once students have left school,

to ensure that they succeed where they have previously failed. In Sir Andrew Foster's review of FE in 2005, he argued that schools have a share in the responsibility for the high number of failing students and highlights that the number of initiatives has hindered rather than helped FE make enough impact. The FE sector has had to learn to be flexible and adaptable to not only the local and national needs but also adapt to a range of qualification systems and industry regulations (Hillier, 2006).

The Skills for Life strategy project funded by the DfES focused on disadvantaged adults. The Skills for Life policy 2004, is a whole organisational strategy to improve maths and English in post compulsory education by embedding maths and English in vocational subjects giving students 'skills for life', with no expectations of attainment levels. Ursula Howard writes for NIACE in 2008, although the Skills for Life policy put underachieving adults at the heart of government policy it is imposed from the top-down, concentrating on level two learners who are more likely to cross levels rather than the learners with the greatest needs at Entry Level. Howard (2008) suggests that the rigid timetabled FE model of maths and English continues to fail students who have the greatest learning needs. Arguably, the D grade policy has a similar feel, focusing on those who are the closest to a grade C/4, rather than focusing on students who have the greatest learning needs. Instead, students with the greatest learning needs who have a prior attainment of a grade E or below or grade 2 or below, are required to also study the GCSE or are groomed through an approved stepping stone qualification in order to take the qualification (ESFA, 2018), although they are the least likely to cross the threshold grades. The Education Endowment Foundation EEF (2018) noted that only 40% of students, eligible for free school meals FSM, achieved a grade A*-C in maths and English, compared with 66% of all other students. In 2017, the NUS President argued that the most recent DfE statistics show that those who come from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as those who are entitled to FSM, are disproportionately affected by the D grade policy and therefore will have a damaging impact on their social mobility (Belgutay, 2017b).

In 2006, Lord Leitch was commissioned to write a Review of Skills, in which he catalogued problems and solutions with our FE skills education, with an aim to improve post 16 skills and industry productivity and social justice. The term social justice is a concept which holds that everyone should be treated fairly with the aim of making society fairer for all (Smith, 2012). According to Finn and Jacobson (2013) social justice embraces values of equal worth, an increase of opportunities and life chances and eradicates inequalities. Leitch (2006) sought to improve students' prospects of success and life opportunities for all learners leaving post 16 education. In his review he outlined that for the UK to compete on the world stage it must commit to achieve a world class

skill set, highlighting the importance of maths and English, ensuring that 95% of adults attain basic functional literacy and numeracy skills by 2020 (Leitch, 2006). However, the D grade policy is asking students to achieve a minimum of a grade C or 4, which is far beyond a basic level of maths and English. The Leitch Review is an ambitious vision of Britain and in order to make it achievable, we must remove barriers to learning and create a culture of learning. This is easier said than done. O'Leary (2008) admits that FE is unable to make Leitch's vision a reality due to a paradox that is created of those with the lowest skill levels least likely to engage and benefit from learning.

This is not the only problem for FE, with the sector also being undermined and disjointed due to a lack of a strategic national role in education and society since post-1944 era, whereas it could take advantage of its key strategic position between schools, universities and employment (Green and Lucas, 1999). Instead, Unwin (1997) argued that FE has been a victim of political ideologies to correct youth disengagement in education and unemployment. The introduction of the D grade policy is no different with its aims to correct the high number of sixteen-year olds leaving schools without a Grade C or above in maths and English and therefore, in the government's view, hindering them from acquiring good jobs (DfE, 2013a). It is a policy that like many other policies in FE focuses on chasing the country's tail of adult underachievement, which is not always appropriate for individuals' ambitions or motivations, with choices being made about maths and English by a narrow plurality group of elites (Howard, 2008).

According to Miller (2006) social justice is contained within four principles, one of which is the fairness of opportunity, suggesting that someone's life chances should be dependent on an individual's capabilities and motivation, incorporating an equal opportunity to acquire new skills and abilities if desired. In 2008, Stott and Lillis (2008) argued for the right of individuals to make the wrong choices. They argued that for anyone who has failed at school it is incredibly unlikely for them to achieve as an adult learner and therefore, where is the real harm in giving students the freedom to choose their future, given our inadequate qualification system for less able learners? (Stott and Lillis, 2008). However, the issue of power and control of the education system over individuals in society has been argued for many years.

When critiquing comprehensive schooling, The Black Papers (1969-77) reveal the power of neoliberal forces in challenging earlier more people friendly liberal standpoints. Neoliberal is "political economic practices that propose that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms" (Harvey, 2005, p. 2), in other words, that market forces work in the interest of humankind, implying a universality that real life belies. The Black Papers sought to influence government to distance policy-

making from local government and strongly defended elite education (Ball, 2013). Then in 1976 the former Prime Minister, James Callaghan, gave his famous Ruskin College speech, which, whatever his intention, rearticulated the ongoing debate that students were not being armed with the skills and abilities that employers needed, initiating the debate about standards in basic maths and English (Ball, 2013). In 1992 the dialogue of policy ideas between practitioners, local governments and policymakers, the Further Education and Higher Education Act established Further Education and Funding Councils, resulting in FE colleges and Sixth Form colleges detaching from Local Education Authority control.

According to Hill and Kumar (2008) these are classic, underpinning neoliberal views of a Conservative government, where power and funding were removed from democratically elected Local Education Authorities and placed in the hands of schools and colleges encouraging competition and a display of a free-market ideology. This market ideology is motivated by the accumulation of capital (Giroux, 2008) in its original economic sense of reserves of wealth whether inherited or earned. Social scientist, Bourdieu (1986) considered that capital takes other forms, too: social, cultural and symbolic, for instance. He argued that, in similar fashion to the inheritance and accumulation of wealth, individuals were born with other types of dis/advantage that they could use to further benefit them. Bourdieu (1986, p. 21) claimed that “social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition”. Very simply, the symbolic status, social skills and cultural values that individuals inherit (or work for in times of social mobility) help to place them in particular strata of society, to access networks of those who are similarly privileged, enabling reciprocity among trusted others – ‘social’ capital – to draw on as necessary. In part it is the possibility of social mobility that both drives and shapes educational practices. Since 1944 the biggest transformation FE has undergone is the central idea that FE must continue to move further and higher, which has now resulted in ‘credential inflation’ (McKenzie, 2014). The D grade policy could be seen as an example of the latest cause of ‘credential inflation’ as the minimum requirement that students need to achieve is a grade C or grade 4 in maths and English in order to get a good job. However as highlighted by the Assessment Reform Group (2002) repeated testing can have a negative effect on lifelong learning.

The awareness of neo-liberal views of our education system producing a compliant skilled workforce with credentials is not recent (Hill and Kumar, 2008). Bowles (1972) argued that our education system has been built to meet the demands of capitalist employers to create a uniformly skilled labour force, and as the demand for a skilled

labour force has increased so has the inequalities in the education system to reproduce the class structure. Therefore, any policy imposed by the government will only scratch the surface of solving inequalities within our education system (Bowles, 1977). This view was supported by Bernstein (1977) and Bourdieu (1977) who claimed that there is interplay between the class structure and the education system through which the distribution of knowledge disseminates within society and reproduces the class structure behind an apparently neutral facade. According to the DfE (2013a) the D grade policy is driving up the standards of literacy and numeracy skills to ensure that England can compete in a global business market, which according to the government is the most important priority for employers. In 2016, 'The future of Jobs Report' by the World Economic Forum claimed that the most highly valued skills employers will require in 2020 will be creativity and cross-work functional skills rather than traditional maths and English and they ask that the government work with wider partners to re-think current curricula. However, according to Munn (2000), by ensuring all students achieve a new minimum attainment standard and remain in education the government is helping students achieve further social capital by benefiting from positive educational institutions where previous school settings have failed.

According to Wolf (2013), the compulsory GCSE resit in maths and English is the most important recommendation that she made and the head of Education and Skills Policy, Mike Harris, strongly agreed and welcomed the government's focus on maths and English (DfE, 2013a). Harris, spoke on behalf of the Institute of Directors and added that the increase in standards is imperative for businesses and having high numbers of 16-19-year olds without an equivalent grade C level of maths and English is socially destructive and economically unsustainable (DfE, 2013a). No matter how good the intentions, policy reform does not always look further than the end of its nose (Stott and Lillis, 2008). This is due to policymakers making decisions on the information they have in front of them, which is often not the entire picture, rather an incomplete picture of reality, with no way of predicting the consequences (Stone, 2008).

The D grade policy is the result of concerns about the standard of maths and English among our school and college leavers and their chance of getting a job and raising standards in industries across England (DfE, 2013a). The government and stakeholders create policy and then safeguard that policy by ensuring it is imposed the way they want at the organisational level. However, there should be continual interplay between educational specialists on the front line, and policy makers to ensure that any required adjustments can be made. If this does not happen it is certain that the policy will go off course and fail (Stone, 2008). Therefore, there is a real argument for better communication between policymakers, strategic agencies, unions and FE colleges to

ensure that the policy can be better implemented as the alternative appears to be conflict at each level. At the implementation stage of policy, the process develops into a complex chain of action, with the slightest uncertainty within the chain, risking in the failure of the policy (Cripps, 2002).

Through the use of shared dialogue, collective voices being heard equally, the government can ensure that legislation is implemented efficiently within the organisations and be effective for those whom the policy change was intended (Cripps, 2002). However, in the case of the D grade policy, there was little shared dialogue before the policy was imposed, giving the FE sector only nine months to prepare for the increased need for maths and English teachers, which could have been discussed and planned for. The lack of shared dialogue has resulted in a shortage of college teachers qualified to teach GCSE maths and English, leading to a poor learning experience with larger class sizes. Consequently, the policy has had insufficient impact on maths and English skills for learners (Davis, 2018).

Policymakers need to ensure that there is compliance from the sector through control of FE professionals, to guarantee that the policy and its intention are implemented correctly. This is simpler with authentic shared dialogue (Cripps, 2002). The government's resistance to the FE sector who are calling for the D grade policy to be scrapped (Belgutay, 2016; Wiggins, 2016a; Martin, 2017; Longman and Raikes, 2017) and the unceasing stance of control over FE colleges suggests a continued top-down challenge to FE professionals to determine their own language and thinking (Cripps, 2002). The top-down approach from government and policymakers has led to a lack of voice from FE professionals.

There is an argument for the attitude to be reversed, from the governmentality of a top-down approach to one that pushes from the bottom up. Pearce, Beer and Williams (2008) have argued that policy should start from the bottom-up, with the individuals, not with funders or employers and for learners to be given the choice to study what they want, even if this means studying qualifications that are uncertified. This bottom-up approach to educational policy would also result in a greater range and number of informed decision makers, which could further improve policy outcomes at an operational level (Stone, 2008). Feinstein and Sabates (2008) argue that due to the number of FE stakeholders and the position between school and university, FE is hard to fully understand and evaluate and therefore policymakers are making decisions in the dark. This highlights the importance of a shared dialogue and effective communication at every level to guarantee an understanding of a policy's intention and therefore, safeguard against an educational policy being implemented incorrectly (Cripps, 2002).

Gamarnikow and Green (2003) argue that in education, there are always winners and losers and New Labour promoted belief in the myth that 'everyone's a winner'. However, it was in 1984 under a Conservative government that Education Secretary Sir Keith Joseph announced that after twenty years of pressure, O-levels and CSE exams would be replaced by a fairer common examination system called the GCSE, which encompasses an egalitarian ideology (North, 1987). However, imposing a compulsory GCSE resit encompasses an elitist ideology, rather than egalitarian, demanding that standards increase for everyone regardless of ability and ambition, not taking the individual into account.

The D grade policy does provide an opportunity to correct social injustices and encourage social mobility by re-engaging school leavers in maths and English. Tett and Maclachan (2007) conducted a two-phase study using a grounded approach, to explore the interconnections between social capital and re-engagement as an adult, in maths and English in Scotland. They found that there is a link between social impact and participation in education by identifying variable levels of bonding capital. According to Baron, Field and Schuller (2000) bonding social capital is the bond between similar like-minded individuals sharing and building on common connections. Tett and Maclachan (2007) found that when bonding social capital in social circles is high in terms of re-engagement, then it is inevitable that reengagement will be high, whereas if the bonding social capital is low then re-engagement is unlikely. Therefore, in the case of the D grade policy, if the bonding social capital or culture in social circles is to resist, then more will resist. This is of course true for students in GCSE classrooms but also for the individual teachers who stand before them. It is key for GCSE resit teachers to show belief in the policy and remain a positive role model or students are likely to mirror their attitude and further conflict is felt.



Reflection: The aim of the first section of my literature review was to do more than just explore educational policy which has impacted FE but to discuss the conflict between policy and practice. There is a real argument that the D grade Policy has important and good intentions to help young people to achieve high standards in maths and English, but the implementation of the policy has fallen short of the FE sectors' needs and as a result caused a growing conflict between policymakers and FE colleges. From reviewing the literature there is a case for shared dialogue between the sector and policy makers, where a greater understanding can be reached, and all voices can be heard.

3.3 GCSE resits - the tale of the teachers

Once a policy has been agreed it is up to college leaders and then college teachers to implement those policies effectively. In the case of the D grade policy, college teachers are placed in a restrictive conflict, as like many adult educators, they are wedged between teaching on behalf of institutional interests over their students' interests (Collins, 1991). Czerniawski (2011) argues that policymakers and institutions channel their power through policy, which can leave them exposed to different types of accountability and can conflict with their own personal values and identity.

The Policy Consortium 2018 highlighted several consequences of the D grade policy, including its negative impact and the root causes to explain its lack of effect. Overwhelmingly, FE teachers voiced their concerns about teaching the GCSE in a short space of time, with staff shortages, to unwilling students who have failed in the school system and who have ingrained barriers to learning (Davis, 2018). Teachers of the GCSE resit in FE colleges need to evaluate pedagogically how best to implement the D grade policy to ensure that all students make the most of the opportunity to strive to achieve a grade A*-C. Wolf (2011) stressed within her review of FE the necessity to vary classroom pedagogy with GCSE resit students since simply repeating the process is not helpful. Therefore, the success or failure of the D grade policy is placed heavily on the teachers. This review will turn its attention to the students' role in section 3.3.

In 2017 Matilda Rose published 'How to Teach English GCSE Re-sits at Post-16' to offer practical support to GCSE resit teachers and leaders in FE colleges, with a clear purpose and understanding that teaching a GCSE to students who had previously failed presents distinctive challenges that need to be overcome. Similarly, to The Policy Consortium (2018), Rose (2017) states that teaching students who do not want to be taught is a major cause for FE teachers now leaving the profession. The consequence of teachers leaving their students shows students that they have been rejected and therefore, can confirm their original beliefs about themselves and their ability (Dreikurs, Grunwald and Pepper, 1971). Rose (2017) identifies a key characteristic of the resit students in the post-16 sector, which is that in a matter of six months school children are propelled to adult learners and as a consequence they bring with them a clouded perspective made up of previous knowledge and experiences, that acts as a barrier to learning. Students who have had negative relationships with previous teachers will wait for confirmation of rejection therefore acting as a further barrier or obstruction to learning (Dreikurs, Grunwald and Pepper, 1971).

GCSE resit teachers need to ensure they provide a different experience to the one held at school in an attempt to break down barriers to learning. Of course, students have an enormous part to play in the learning process. As adult learners it is the student who takes on the key role rather than the teacher as learning becomes self-directed and less restrictive compared to compulsory education at school (Collins, 1991). However, in the case of the D grade policy, students have not chosen to study the subject and therefore are less likely and reluctant to engage due to feeling insecure and unconfident (Rose, 2017). Consequently, the student-teacher relationship can be harder to build as the expectations of student and teacher roles are blurred with many teachers assuming students will conform back to a traditional compulsory schooling model (Rose, 2017).

Freire (1971) described the traditional compulsory schooling model as using the 'banking' concept, which is a characteristic of oppression, as it prevents learning as a process of inquiry. The banking concept places students as inactive passive recipients of knowledge, which is a gift, bestowed upon them by a knowledgeable educator who is the one who cognises rather than the student, whose role is simply to memorise the content narrated to them (Freire, 1971). This view visualises students who are being 'filled' with knowledge and they then store or deposit the information accordingly. This traditional model of teaching and learning lends itself to teaching in a short space of time, for example on a resit course, as it does not ask students to cognitively engage which is perhaps why many FE GCSE resit teachers expect students to sacrifice their adulthood and conform back to this teaching and learning model (Rose, 2017).

A key consequence of this style of pedagogy is the student's lack of voice and partnership in the learning process, as they are merely spectators. In 1986 Belenky and colleagues examined 'Women's Ways of Knowing' by conducting one hundred and thirty-five in depth interviews with women who describe how they feel silenced in their lives including their education and schooling. Belenky et al (1986) uses the metaphor 'deaf and dumb' to describe how the women feel. As they feel they cannot learn from the teaching, they merely listen but don't hear and they are unable to voice themselves against authority and are therefore, voiceless. Some of the accounts by the women, revealed the banking concept in their education: they were not privy to a teacher's thinking process, only the answers were shared. Arguably, students effected by the D grade policy are oppressed and controlled by the elites that determine what they will learn; teachers, exam boards and policymakers all have the power to outline the rules of the game and then rate learners according to their performance (Belenky et al, 1986).

Practitioners must reflect on how they can improve teacher-student relationships in compulsory GCSE resit classrooms to ensure that as a consequence of the D grade

policy students do not feel 'deaf and dumb'. Much research has been conducted to explore teacher misbehaviour which can be identified as behaviour that exacerbates student resistance to learning (Kearney et al, 1991; Gorham and Millette, 1997; Chory-Assad and Paulsel, 2004; Goodboy, 2011). Kearney et al (1999) explored specific teacher behaviours which resulted in a negative response from college students. They analysed 1800 responses from 250 college students to compile a set of teacher misbehaviour categories. Significantly the data collected was from college students who had chosen to study their vocational courses but still had resistance to learning as a result of actions from their teachers. Therefore, it seems that teacher misbehaviour is directly reflected in student behaviour causing students to have a further resistance to learning.

There are a number of the teacher misbehaviours identified by Kearney et al (1991) that all teachers are guilty of committing more than once during their teaching profession, but there are some that GCSE resit teachers are more likely to commit due to the nature of the D grade policy. These include 'unfair testing', 'unfair grading' and 'information overload'. The GCSE itself provokes complaints from students and parents concerning its unfair grade boundaries often prompting Ofqual, the examination regulator to step in, and on occasion change grade boundaries, resulting in fewer students achieving the 'grade C' depending on the exam board and examination year (Jadhav, 2017; Wiggins, 2016b). GCSE resit teachers are also committing the 'misbehaviour' of 'information overload' due to condensing the GCSE into one year. This is a key factor The Policy Consortium (2018) outlined as the root cause which prevents students from developing their maths and English skills and therefore the success of the D grade policy. It is also important to note that Kearney et al (1991) also reported that a teacher having a negative personality is an example of another teacher misbehaviour, which is understandable when there is evidence of behaviour being reflected between students and teachers (Murphy and Dweck, 2010; Rattan; Good and Dweck, 2011).

As discussed, some teacher 'misbehaviours' can cause resistance to learning and trigger a reflection in behaviours between student and teacher. However, disparity between teaching and learning approaches can have the opposite effect and can cause conflict between teachers and students. Fox (1984) identified four basic theories of teaching; transfer, shaping, travelling and growing, in an attempt to resolve confusion in the roles and perceptions of teaching and learning between teacher and learner, revealing self-theories of teaching and learning. The theory of teaching employed by the teacher reveals their philosophy of education and therefore will determine the pedagogical strategies they will use in the classroom, which will have an effect on the learner who may have a differing outlook on learning. Consequently, a mismatch between the

teacher's perspective and the student's perspective of teaching and learning can lead to frustration for both and therefore can be a further barrier to learning (Fox, 1984). An example of when this frustration can arise is when a learner craves a 'transfer theory' of teaching asking to be pumped full of knowledge but the teacher does not. Therefore any practical or experimental teaching activities will be viewed by the learner as detrimental to their learning (Fox, 1984). In contrast this frustration can also occur when a learner leans more towards 'growing theory' where they need less restrictive and more experimental teaching methods, but the teacher utilises a 'transfer theory' of teaching, therefore leaving the learner irritated and restricted (Fox, 1984).

Vocational pedagogy by nature is experiential and purposely varied to mirror the profession being taught, with the need to learn through practical application (Lucas, 2014). Students who are bound by the D grade policy, spend the majority of their time, learning through vocational pedagogies using complex activities which demand the engagement of both body and mind together to reach higher order thinking (Lucas, 2014). Consequently, students resitting their GCSE could become irritated and show resistance to learning as a result of shifting from a practical style of teaching and learning to a simple controlled transfer of subject matter in order to pass a written exam (Rose, 2017).

In 1999, Ainley and Bailey explored the student experience of learning in FE, noting that students were actively discouraged from resitting the same GCSEs that they had previously failed as results gained in GCSE resits were usually not improved. This questions that although there is understandable importance placed on maths and English, why would the resit results be any better than in any other GCSE subject that the student had previously failed? The students interviewed by Ainley and Bailey (1999) revealed a conflict of feelings as they admitted their success or failure is their own responsibility but disclosed that they need to be pushed by their FE teachers. These contradictory views have to be resolved and mediated by FE teachers who want to motivate students to ensure that they stay on track and achieve the target qualification (Ainley and Bailey, 1999). This mediation can only be achieved with an authentic student-teacher relationship, understanding individual student needs, barriers to learning and previous experiences. It is important that adult teaching practice is communicated through considered pedagogy with aims for social justice and equality (Collins, 1991).

The aspirations of the D grade policy are to ensure that all young people secure their Literacy and Numeracy skills no matter what their previous school experience, however, the manner in which the policy was implemented is criticised by the sector (Davis, 2018). This frustration is reflected in both the teachers teaching in the sector and in the students

themselves. Students who are bound by the policy show their dissatisfaction and lack of motivation by rebelling against the system and not attending their lessons (Rose, 2017). The danger of attendance gradually declining from a seemingly positive start means the remaining students and teachers are left disheartened (Ainley and Bailey, 1999). With students voting with their feet, teachers are forced to question and reflect on their teaching practice to improve attendance and in turn improve the students' chances of achieving a GCSE grade C.

A teacher's priority is the students they teach, ensuring that they all achieve their full potential. That desire to guide and support students throughout their learning can be a strength but can also be a hindrance labelled a professional handicap by Rudolf Dreikurs (1968). It is a fear that the pedagogy used in the classroom is somehow unsuccessful in helping the students learn, therefore leaving the teacher feeling frustrated and fearful of not being a good practitioner. This pressure to ensure success in teaching and learning can be placed on the teacher by themselves or by other external demands but can result in classroom conflicts where the teacher is left fighting with their students increasingly irritated and angry and becoming more self-centred rather than child-centred (Dreikurs, 1968).

Based upon Alfred Adler's principles of understanding children's behaviour motivation, Rudolf Dreikurs recognised four mistaken goals of misbehaviour; to gain attention, acquire power and control, to take revenge for previous pre-conceived injustice and displays of inadequacy as a safeguard against defeat (Dreikurs, 1968; Dreikurs, Cassel and Ferguson, 1972). Recognising these behaviour goals is beneficial for teachers in order to help and understand discouraged students, and can be applied to help students, such as the disaffected students resitting their GCSE in FE. A corrective measure for students displaying any of the four misbehaviour goals is encouragement, vital for students pursuing avoidance due to their discouragement being at such a level they do not believe they can achieve and therefore make no effort (Dreikurs, 1968). However, constant encouragement relies on a motivated teacher and a strong student-teacher relationship to ensure that the student trusts the teacher's encouragement, to guarantee it comes across as authentic and genuine. This can be achieved by the teacher accepting that learning is not just at an intellectual level but must also acknowledge barriers to learning, personal traits and emotional responses (Dreikurs, 1968). Once a teacher's pedagogy accepts a student's previous experiences, the relationship can be built on mutual respect therefore in turn improving relationships, atmosphere and encouragement, all key to ensure learning takes place. According to Mead (2019) there is a direct link between building and maintaining positive relationships between teacher and student and encouraging positive behaviour and educational outcomes.

In 1971, Dreikers, Grunwald and Pepper, described a war between adults and teenagers where college students can be labelled as anti-adults as they rebel against authority. This conflict can currently be seen in FE GCSE resit classrooms as a result of the D grade policy since policymakers and educators dictate the minimum standard regardless of individual student motivations and aspirations. Teachers must understand student motivations to learning, which can only be extracted with a trusting relationship helping the student to find their place within the group and settle, accepting the learning (Dreikers, Grunwald and Pepper, 1971). If this fails to happen then Dreikurs, Grunwald and Pepper (1971) argued that students will withdraw or interrupt the learning process by gaining attention from their peers and the teacher. Therefore, students practise and pursue the four goals of misbehaviours in classrooms disrupting their own and others learning.

This behaviour and conflict from discouraged students places the teacher in a challenging negotiating situation that must be tackled professionally with care. Pedagogically the teacher must avoid appealing to the student's goals by ignoring attention-seeking behaviour, refusing to engage in a power struggle and withdrawing from the conflict (Dreikurs and Soltz, 1964). What is perhaps more important is for a teacher to understand the need for the student to misbehave in the first place, to support these students to progress in their learning. A student who is misbehaving is projecting their belief in their own ability, their level of self-worth, their discouragement and demonstrating through their deficiencies (Dreikurs and Soltz, 1964). A further misbehaviour to be considered with students, who are being forced to resit their GCSE, is their possible refusal to accept their responsibility for their learning as a consequence of the compulsory nature of the policy (Dreikurs and Soltz, 1964). As pointed out by Collins (1991) learning by its very definition is, and in terms of adult education, should be self-directed therefore there is a need for students to acknowledge and accept their responsibility in the learning process. If a student who is resitting their GCSE does not accept responsibility to pass, this will cause the student to misbehave and essentially reject the learning, leaving the teacher demotivated as their pedagogical attempts become meaningless.

When teachers use traditional and ineffective teaching strategies with students who are unresponsive to their attempts, the teachers in turn feel frustrated and defeated risking a continuous cycle of despair (Dreikurs, 1971). This suggests that teaching and learning is a two-way process, with the risk that if both are not fully invested in the learning then they are likely to mirror one another in their lack of engagement and motivation. A teacher in authority who is defeated and does not admit to that defeat is distressing for students and teachers (Dreikurs, Cassel and Ferguson, 1972). Dreikurs (1971) argued that

teachers are often not aware that they are using strategies and acting in the interest of their own critically crushed authority rather than in the student's interest. Collins (1991) claimed that teachers should use pedagogical practices that are only in the interest of the student in order to empower them, a pedagogy that is free from bureaucracy and professionalised interventions.

Seidel and Tanner (2013) notes that a potential strategy to deal with student resistance to learning is to give all students a forum to voice and reflect their ideas and share their opinions. Similarly, Dreikurs, Grunwald and Pepper (1971) claimed that college students have a lack of voice causing conflict with adults due to their voice being excluded from any decision-making. Students who are trapped in the GCSE resit cycle have a lack of voice in their own education and decisions for their own future. Seidel and Tanner (2013) argue that giving students a voice should be used at the very beginning of the course as a preventative strategy to student resistance. However, Starkey (2018) argues that if you ask for students' voices you should be prepared to listen. Voices should not be heard through a lens, not guided or manipulated to justify what would be an unpopular decision. There needs to be conscious step away from a synthetic trust that embodies pupil voice initiatives to one that epitomises authentic trust (Czerniawski, 2012). Students need to see their opinions leading to real change.

Giving students a voice is one of the potential strategies to eradicate student classroom resistance to learning, which is a key element of the student-teacher relationship. However, Rose (2017) also warns of the risks of using differentiation in a GCSE resit classroom as the outcome is teaching to middle ability, placing limits on some students learning and ultimately portraying that you expect less in terms of students' capabilities. This is not the only danger, with general expectations of students who are disengaged also being a potential barrier to their learning. Dreikurs, Cassel and Ferguson (1972) claim that a teacher's anticipation of a student's attainment and attitude to learning will result in the student only meeting those expectations not exceeding them. This suggests that students will mirror their teachers' preconceptions meaning if a GCSE resit teacher treats their students, as only a Grade D student who has failed to achieve a grade C, they will simply remain a grade D.



Reflection: The aim of this section of the literature review was to look at the pedagogical issues with teaching the GCSE resit to students who have previously failed. Teaching GCSE resit students places challenges on teachers within FE classrooms, which can result in conflict. Establishing a strong and genuine student-teacher relationship is vital, as a teacher must take the student's previous educational experiences into account. The literature suggests that behaviours can be reflected between student and teacher, which can be detrimental to the learning process to the point where students will be resistant to learning. Once students are resistant to learning, power struggles can occur due to lack of voice. The result is not just disheartened students but also disheartened teachers.

3.4 GCSE resits – the tale of the students

Students who have previously failed their maths and/or English GCSE will undoubtedly bring their previous educational experiences and barriers to learning into their FE GCSE resit classroom which can not only cause additional pedagogical challenges for the teacher but also their perception of students' abilities (Tett, 2006). Therefore, FE teachers need to reflect on students' prior learning experiences, evaluate students' process of learning and challenge their own perceptions in order to help them achieve. The learning process is multifaceted, determined by the interplay of a child's social and emotional development influencing their cognitive processes. Thinking is a fundamental mental ability and a key aspect of growing up. Arguably, the process of thinking is the most significant cognitive ability children develop (Doherty and Hughes, 2014). The development of these cognitive processes refers to the transformations of mental abilities that continue to adapt and change throughout someone's life (Doherty and Hughes, 2014). Cognitive development theories attempt to explain the notion of intelligence and how we acquire knowledge under one coherent theory, whilst drawing on all areas of development.

Marton and Säljö (1976) explored the difference between shallow and deep learning, concluding that students who applied deep tactics to learning by actively searching for hidden meanings achieved higher learning outcomes through greater understanding of the subject compared to shallow learners who settle for memorisation and remained on the surface of knowledge. Arguably, learning that requires students to simply memorise

answers or methods in order to pass an exam encourages shallow learning and not deep intelligences. The concept of shallow or surface learning can be explained under Piaget's concept of assimilation (Piaget, 1952a), as a student uses current schemes to try to understand new knowledge, while deep learning is accommodative as a student uses old schemes as a foundation to build new schemes to engage with new knowledge.

Meeks and colleagues (2013) compared shallow and deep learning between different generations, from Baby Boomers to Millennials, hypothesising that older generations will apply a deeper approach to learning than younger generations. Meeks et al (2013) argue that the generation of Baby Boomers are the last of the deep thinkers with younger generations settling for shallow or surface level approach to learning due to their impatience for information and reliance on technology. The reduction in deep approaches to learning can have potential impact on organisations and employment (Leonard and Swap, 2005). Meeks et al's (2013) research claims sociological changes have directly impacted how younger generations approach learning in the classroom. Therefore, it is important that pedagogy is varied to encourage deeper learning. This suggests that generation Z, who are now currently resitting their GCSE, may be more likely to approach learning on a shallow or surface level and need to be engaged through more mixed teaching strategies and opportunities to apply higher order deep level thinking. Bloom's taxonomy sheds light on the cognitive domain and therefore may help students affiliate educational objectives with assessments being used, using his six-levelled structure, which encourages students to move from shallow lower level thinking, such as recalling or recognising information, to deeper higher order thinking, such as evaluating information (Bloom et al, 1956).

Piaget's theory of cognitive development (1952b) states that cognitive growth occurs at different development stages which are universal and have an invariant order. The formal operational stage is recognised as the end point of cognitive development as it is expected that by this stage adolescents are able to think using hypothetico-deductive reasoning and is reached around the age of 11 years (Piaget, 1952b). It is argued that Piaget did not fully explain how or why progress from the concrete operational stage, to the formal operational stage is quicker or slower than expected in some children (Gray and MacBlain, 2015). Sutherland (1992) argues that Piaget's description of the final stage of cognitive development is too vague and unclear. Crucially there are doubts that all children and indeed all adults ever reach the formal operational stage (Gray and MacBlain, 2015). Keating (1979) explored cognitive thinking in adolescents and revealed that between 40%-60% of college students have failed to reach Piaget's formal operational stage by failing his formal operational reasoning tasks.

Understanding how adolescents learn is a vital part of the puzzle in supporting students to achieve their full potential in a GCSE resit classroom. We must invest in adult learning. Bolsin (2008) argues that investing in adult learning adds to wider public value, including investing in well-being and self-confidence, although determining the public value of adult learning is difficult to prove as the value lies in individual stories. It is a lack of self-confidence and belief that can act as a barrier to learning and the achievement of qualifications (Feinstein and Sabates, 2008). The lack of self-confidence and belief as an adult learner can be a consequence of a previous experience or recurrent experience. If a child is made to believe they are a failure their self-worth will be damaged, resulting in a lack of self-respect (Dreikurs, Cassel and Ferguson, 1972).

Research conducted by Bellamy (2017) captured voices of 350 GCSE resit maths students in 2017 from an FE college which Ofsted graded 'good' with a passionate GCSE maths team. Yet this showed forced resits resulted not only in a low pass rate, compared to free choosing evening students, but also in causing the resit students harm (Bellamy, 2017). Students shared previous negative experiences of learning maths in schools, which has left feelings of fear, anxiety, anger and a lack of motivation all causing barriers to learning (Bellamy, 2017). The research found that although students claimed that anyone has the potential to learn maths, this was not reflected in what was seen in the classroom and contradicted in student performance or exam results (Bellamy, 2017). This suggests that although students are outwardly acknowledging that 'anyone' is capable of learning they are in conflict with themselves, as there is something impeding their performance and they do not believe that they personally can succeed.

Dreikurs (1971) argued that disgruntled adolescents can carry with them strong inferiority feelings and an inability to see their strengths and abilities, which results in a self-prejudice that helps them to prove that these negative self-beliefs are true. Therefore, any small successes that the student experiences can be explained as a fluke or accident as they are still unable to see it as a genuine achievement. According to Dreikurs (1971, p. 7) "our habitual underestimation of ourselves is both a cause and a consequence of deep-seated inferiority feelings". This suggests that students who harbour prejudice against themselves are caught in a negative cycle that will obstruct their ability to achieve their full potential. When mirrored with the confirmation of an exam mark as further evidence of not reaching the required standard, the student's under-estimation is proven correct. The student needs to experience positive recognition, respect and acknowledgement of their ability (Dreikurs, 1971).

Students need to fully commit to the learning opportunities available to them. This commitment is acknowledging and trusting in the potential learning that can be gained from success and failure and a need to be willing to experience that success and failure

(Dreikurs, Grunwald and Pepper, 1971). Unfortunately, the failure students see in poor grades is unlikely to help the learning process (Dreikurs, 1968). Rose (2017) argues that although it is not possible to force students to learn what they choose not to, teachers can support students to see there is another way, by changing students' mindsets. Dweck, Walton and Cohen (2014) explain that focusing on pedagogy and the curriculum is not enough and understanding student psychology to improving student mindset and belief is key.

Professor Carol Dweck (2006; 2012) has spent her career studying mindset psychology and the impact a student's implicit theory of intelligence or mindset can have on their attitude and motivation to learning. She argues that a fixed mindset sits within an entity theory of intelligence, and a growth mindset sits within an incremental theory of intelligence (Aubrey and Riley, 2019). To date several studies have explored implicit theories of intelligence and beliefs about intelligence (Ablard and Mills, 1996; Quihuis et al, 2002; Gonida, Kiosseoglou and Leondari, 2006; Murphy and Dweck, 2010; Rattan, Good and Dweck, 2011). According to Dweck (2006) there are two types of mindset; fixed, meaning you believe that when you are stuck it is because you are not intelligent enough to learn and not capable of change, or a growth mindset, meaning you believe that no matter what, you can change your intelligence and grow.

However, Ablard and Mills (1996) state that implicit theory of knowledge should not be dichotomous, and mindset should be on a fluid continuum to allow for instability. Quihuis et al (2002) combined quantitative and qualitative approaches to measure the theory of intelligence of fifty-seven adolescents of Mexican descent to examine the degree of different theories across different subjects. Similarly, to students trapped within the D grade policy, the first-generation Mexican American adolescents from low-income families are a marginalised group. Quihuis et al (2002) found that students could also be mixed theorists meaning they held a different mindset belief in different academic domains. They also call for researchers to use a range of methods to gain a richer understanding of students' theories of intelligence.

On the understanding that mindset is on a continuum (Ablard and Mills, 1996; Quihuis et al, 2002) and that someone can be a mixed theorist or present a mix of mindset beliefs, it is possible for a teacher to intervene and to move them towards a growth mindset, which means they are capable of achieving more (Dweck, 2006). Students need to be shown that the brain has plasticity, building neural pathways that move towards an incremental theory of intelligence (Aubrey and Riley, 2019). Many educational institutions have now adopted Dweck's mindset theory, including GCSE resit classrooms in FE, to help students believe that progress is possible. Otty (2018) wrote in the Times Educational Supplement a plea for FE colleges themselves to adopt a growth mindset in

order to help students mirror positive outlooks on success and eradicate self-limiting beliefs. This could be a key element as many students who report having a fixed mindset approach often blame their teacher (Dweck, 2012). Therefore, there needs to be a positive, optimistic student–teacher relationship where growth is reflected in both rather than defeat (Rattan, Good and Dweck, 2012).

Dweck (2014) discusses the power of the word ‘yet’ and shared her concern that we are raising young people who are focused only on the now and exam grades rather than learning and simply dreaming big in life. Dweck (2014) identifies a high school in Chicago that refused to give their students a failing grade, which makes them feel like they are nothing, preferring to give the grade ‘Not Yet’ to help them understand that they are on a learning curve and there is hope in the future. However, Dweck’s theory has come under much criticism, since 80% of teachers who have adopted Dweck’s theory in the hope their students will improve, have not been able to make an effective change in their classrooms (Yettick et al 2016).

Blackwell, Trzesniewski and Dweck (2007) found that students who were taught that the brain could form new connections and forming these new connections could eventually help them to become more intelligent over time, had a noticeable improvement in their grades, compared to students who were not taught growth mindset. A student who has a growth mindset will have a higher drive and determination to succeed therefore there will be an increase in their level of achievement. This is achieved by teaching students that their brain is malleable and capable of neural growth. In a series of interventions and studies, Blackwell, Trzesniewski and Dweck (2007) accept that although students differ in their speed of intellectual growth and capacity, their mental belief and prior experience are the barriers they cannot hurdle in order to achieve, which must be changed to improve motivation.

In a report by the Education Week Research Centre in 2016, teachers celebrated the use of Dweck’s mindset theory as a useful pedagogical tool in helping students to perform better in class and in tests. Acknowledging that teachers’ pedagogical practice has a huge impact on where a student mindset sits on the continuum, with the correct praise being a key element. Aronson, Fried and Good (2002) explored how the growth mindset intervention would impact two control college student groups. One group was taught Gardner’s (1983) ‘Multiple intelligences’ model and the other group were given no mindset intervention whatsoever. The control group who were given mindset intervention consequently achieved higher grades. However, when Li and Bates (2017) replicated Dweck’s research tasks with their student participants, they claimed that they failed to prove that holding a fixed mindset belief or that a teacher praising intelligence is harmful

or holding a growth mindset, believing that the brain is malleable, is directly linked to successful grades.

Boaler (2013) reviewed scientific evidence of brain plasticity and how growth mindset can have a positive impact on a student's achievement, especially its potential impact in England where ability grouping is used and can limit attainment. If students undergo mindset intervention where they are taught that the brain has plasticity, they have the potential to improve their intelligence and they will develop a determination to learn and not see failure as a threat. However, Boaler (2013) argues that differentiated ability groupings used in English classrooms only reaffirm to fixed mindset students where they are in terms of achievement within the classroom. This suggests that teachers' mindsets also come into question to not view their own classrooms as limiters. Both teachers and students need to mirror one another's growth mindset perspective on learning to ensure that everyone learns in a positive environment where everyone believes their intelligence can grow to ensure higher levels of attainment (Boaler, 2013).

According to Dweck (2012) fixed mindset students see exams and homework as a threat as they have the potential to unmask their weaknesses. Therefore, they cause fear and anxiety and result in a low effort syndrome. This implies that students, such as GCSE resit students, are particularly prone to low effort syndrome as they are under constant judgement and scrutiny to improve and perform well on tests and homework. However, if students are taught in a growth mindset classroom and are rewarded with the grade 'yet' the fear of failure will decrease, and their confidence will grow.

Dweck's mindset theory offers an appealing opportunity for teachers and students to improve learning. Therefore, her theory was quickly embraced and implemented by schools and colleges across England, trying to improve everyone's self-belief. However, in 2015, O'Brien compared Dweck's theory to nothing more than a fairy-tale and cautions educators that "mindsets aren't magic wands". O'Brien (2015) discusses how mindset intervention from a teacher could be seen as 'try-harder medicine' which can be a very difficult medicine to swallow for disaffected students. The risk is that some students who are finding Dweck's 'try-harder medicine' bitter in taste, will become further disgruntled and this will result in conflict with the one person who is trying pedagogically to help them. Although, Dweck's mindset theory has been celebrated as a teaching strategy that could improve equality (Dweck, 2014; Boaler, 2013), O'Brien (2015) argues that the opposite could be true with mindset giving teachers yet another tool for labelling students. Otty (2017) reminds educators of GCSE resit students that they should not give up the recently criticised mindset theory and it is up to teachers to never limit their students: it is their professional duty to keep them on track and to keep going.

Despite some criticism, Dweck's mindset philosophy is a respected motivational theory that continues to be used within education. Although, Dweck argues that students can develop a growth mindset through teacher interventions she also identifies that growth mindset learners by nature are intrinsically motivated and not extrinsically motivated by an external stimulus (Bates, 2016). This suggests that no matter the pedagogical interventions, in order for a student to improve they need to have an inner aspiration to improve and an external force is not enough and ultimately will not change their inner learning beliefs. This could be a further obstacle for students who are studying compulsory GCSE resits as attending lessons, doing homework and learning the subject does not come from an intrinsic desire to improve their grade because they believe they can do it but rather an extrinsic control dictating the behaviour.

This highlights the distinction between growth mindset and self-efficacy. According to Bandura (1986) self-efficacy is someone's inner belief about his or her capabilities to achieve a set or desired goal, meaning they will embrace challenge rather than avoid it and if failure should occur their sense of self-efficacy is quickly restored. Bandura (1986) believed that students' ideas of their own self-efficacy could be strongly influenced, the most crucial influence being mastery experiences; this is because failing undermines self-efficacy whereas achievement builds a strong sense of efficacy. Self-efficacy is a key concept within Bandura's Social Learning Theory, meaning it can be improved through social models and is an important part of a child's early learning observations and experiences that will impact teachers working with learners in schools (Gray and MacBlain, 2015).

This suggests that students who have not observed positive role models, through comments on behaviour or goals and experienced failures will have low self-efficacy. Bandura (1994) argues that the effects of failure on self-efficacy can be worse if the sense of efficacy was not firmly rooted and established first. Therefore, students' own beliefs about their abilities and competence to achieve a result of their self-efficacy will determine how they approach learning. According to Bandura (1994) students with low self-efficacy see failure as a direct reflection of their own intelligence and therefore lose faith in their competences and are extremely susceptible to stress and depression. This is a concern for GCSE resit students who may have low self-efficacy due to repeated failure, with stress and depression on the rise in FE colleges (Ryan and Belgutay, 2018).

Self-efficacy is a strand within John Hattie's Rope model, a metaphor for the levels and processes of self-concept (Hattie, 2004). The Rope Model is designed to build on and connect theories of self-concept, self-esteem and self-efficacy to embrace current cognitive psychology and interpret cues and challenges of everyday life in valuing our self-concept (Hattie, 2004). It is important to note that self-efficacy is not self-concept but

rather an important motivation to protect and maintain our belief of success or failure in everyday life (Hattie, 2004).

The strength of the Rope Model is in each individual strand and in the combination of over-lapping strands; therefore, if one strand becomes tethered or weak, the student will quickly become disengaged from learning and unable to cope (Bates, 2016). This suggests that self-efficacy is only one piece of a structure that affects an individual's self-concept. However, it can be argued if a student's self-efficacy strand becomes damaged or weakened then they will resort to avoidance and challenging behaviour as a defence mechanism since they do not want to reveal themselves as a failure (Bates, 2016). This suggests that a teacher should support students' self-belief, observe and look for signs in their behaviour that a strand in the rope is tethered or weakened, especially by exposure and reaction to failure.

The Assessment Reform Group (2002) argue that high stake testing is damaging to student motivation to learning and should be reduced. It is the very nature of success or failure that makes any learning a threat to students' self-belief, self-efficacy and in turn their engagement in the classroom and motivation to learn. Therefore, it is the teacher's responsibility to support learning opportunities and minimise the threat of failure. Genuine encouragement rather than praise is an important part of improving self-concept. According to Dreikurs, Cassel and Ferguson (1972) praise only offers an external motivation to obtain approval from a teacher but the student needs an internal motivation to learn which does not occur through praise, but through a satisfaction and fulfilment of achievement. Consequently, placing external sources of engagement and motivation on students' learning cannot give internal desires or beliefs to achieve a set goal.



Reflection: Students who are caught in a cycle of GCSE resits have previous experiences of failure, which will impact their behaviour, how they think, feel and act. These behaviours can be seen through lack of self-confidence to conflicting misbehaviour with authority. Although, there are pedagogical strategies that can be employed to support learning for disaffected students, there needs to be interventions to support self-belief, self-efficacy, mindset and internal motivations. However, social models and previous experiences may mean that the barriers and feelings of inferiority are deep rooted and challenging to correct. GCSE resit students are likely to use previous failings as limiters on themselves.

3.5 Summary

The aim of this chapter was to review the literature at the differing levels of involvement surrounding GCSE resits, including, the wider political and policy perspective, the pedagogical perspective and finally the perspective of the students. The policy has placed challenging consequences on each of the tiers discussed, suggesting there is evidence of frustration being experienced. A review of the literature suggests there is a real argument for equality between policymakers, the FE sector, teachers and students in shared dialogue. The D grade policy aims to improve maths and English in students but due to the challenges felt through its implementation the students are resisting and resenting the opportunity and in turn so is the sector. This further cements the belief that FE colleges are not aspirational and a second chance provision (Bailey, 1999), mopping up schools' underachievers (Preston and Hammond, 2002). As suggested by Cripps (2002) this creates a conflict between policy and practice and is evidence that voices need to be heard and realised, which this research aims to achieve.

From the literature there is evidence that teachers in adult education feel caught between policy and practice and there is a need for pedagogical strategies that are thoughtful with the aim of emancipation, justice and equality for learners (Collins, 1991). However, adult educators are restricted by policy and institutional interests above the students' needs, therefore to shift away from compulsory style schooling, to student centred self-directed learning, is challenging. This can lead to teacher and student misbehaviours and a mismatch between student and teacher expectations with differing perspectives on teaching and learning. Students who are resitting their GCSE maths and/or English in FE colleges come with their own previous experiences of learning which will impact the teachers' pedagogical approach and perception their students' ability.

As outlined by Dweck (2006) and Feinstein and Sabates (2008) it is both a students' previous learning experience and mind-set that is preventing them from achieving more, including qualifications such as the GCSE. Therefore, the consequence of forced GCSE resits can be seen in the challenges faced by students and teachers, which this research will explore and evidence of behaviour reflection between student and teacher (Murphy and Dweck, 2010; Rattan, Good and Dweck, 2011). The next chapter will discuss the methodological practice and theoretical framework of the case study.

Chapter Four

Research design, methodology and
methods

Chapter Four

4.1 Introduction

According to Punch and Oancea (2014, p.50) “There is no such thing as a ‘position-free project’”. All researchers, no matter who the researcher is, or whatever the focus of the project, will have a specific way of seeing the world and therefore a set ‘position’ in their approach to conduct the research. It is consequently inevitable that as much as a researcher may claim to be a disconnected outsider from their research, they will bring their own world view and beliefs of reality to the study, the design, the analysis and explanation of their findings. I am explicit from the outset in the way in which I perceive the world to set a clear scene for my research.

My positionality and paradigmatic stance sits firmly within the interpretive paradigm, which has impacted my chosen methodology and research design. I believe that research should start with individuals. This is possibly unsurprising given that I am an educational practitioner, and that my research questions and aims come from my experiences and observations of individuals from my previous teaching practice as an insider within the context of a FE College. The purpose of my research is to explore individuals, gaining an understanding of their lived experiences. The interpretive researcher believes that, “theory should not precede research but follow it” (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011, p.18), investigating and understanding individuals from their experiences. If there is any theory to be discovered, it will be meaningful to the participants studied. Findings are not used to test a theory or hypothesis. Ontologically I agree with Preissle (2006, p.636) who states that our research “makes sense to the public and to those we study” and because I believe that we create knowledge based on our experiences we form part of our research tasked to convey the reality studied appropriately. In contrast, when studying individual human behaviour through a positivist ‘lens’, the researcher is presented with complex elusive social occurrences and multifaceted human nature that arguably ‘science’ is not able to always successfully explain in terms of knowledge.

Due to my interpretivist beliefs and views of reality I will be using inductive reasoning, which is in line with my positionality, meaning that my research starts with something I have previously observed in my practice and I want to explore further. Using inductive reasoning will allow me to draw conclusions from available information, compared with deductive reasoning used within a positivist paradigm where conclusions are drawn logically from premises.

4.2 Conceptual framework and research questions

My research explores the effects of the D grade policy on individuals. The D grade policy emerged from recommendations made in the Wolf report (2011) which gives a comprehensive review of post-16 compulsory education but does not give a perspective of the staff and students affected. It is perhaps concerning that this has not changed since the GCSE was first introduced when Roy (1986, p.106) noted, “literature relating to public examinations contains practically no examples of what the pupils who take the examinations think of it all”. The Policy Consortium (2018) are also only listening to College leaders and teachers and not the students when investigating issues surrounding the D grade policy. It is for this very reason that my research begins with the individuals who are directly affected by the D grade policy and explores their experiences and voices in comparison to the one heard in the Wolf Report.

To reiterate, it is for this reason that the main research question driving the research is:

How is the policy of compulsory GCSE maths and English for 16-19-year olds being experienced by students and teaching staff at one Further Education College?

This raises two sub-questions:

- 1. What are the 16-19-year-old students’ experiences of the compulsory GCSE resit and its effects on student engagement and motivation to learn in maths and English?*
- 2. What are the teachers’ experiences of teaching the compulsory GCSE resit course in maths and English to students who have previously failed to achieve grade C or 4 and its effects on the teachers’ motivation to teach the subjects?*

I created a conceptual framework for my research to pull together visually, the main concepts to be explored and the relationships between them. To ensure that my map was most useful to my research it demanded constant re-working of my thoughts and ideas during the study. According to Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 18) a conceptual framework “explains either graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied – the key factors, constructs or variables – and the presumed relationship among them”. Figure 4.1 represents my conceptual framework.

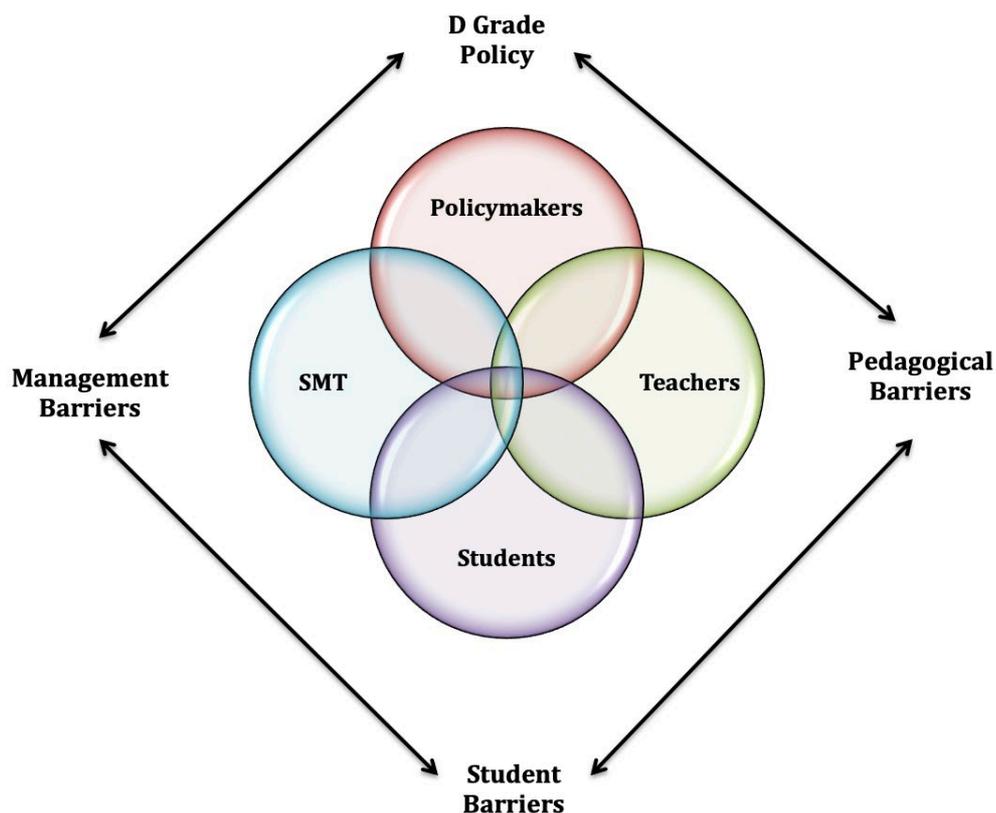


Figure 4.1: Conceptual Framework

The most useful concept map to progress my understanding of the main principles being studied was in a Venn-style diagram (as supported by Miles and Hubermann, 1994), showing the overlapping relationships of concepts. However, rather than my overlapping circles displaying the concepts, I used them to show the relationships between the individuals who have experience of the D grade policy, which embodies the aims of my research. Therefore, they are labelled policymakers, senior management team (SMT), teachers and students. This is to give clear distinctions between the individuals and groups who have experience of the D grade policy as also shown in the structure of literature review. The separation of SMT from policymakers, teachers and students is important as the Principal, 'Philip', and Head of Teaching and Learning, 'Tracy', made operational decisions at a senior level impacting on the teachers and students. Therefore, it was important to label a circle SMT to show a distinction between those in a management position, and the teachers and students at the FE college. However, all are impacted on or involved in the D grade policy in some way.

I was satisfied that the Venn-style diagram successfully revealed the relationships between the individuals and groups that are affected by the D grade policy, but, on its own it failed to also show other key issues that contextualise what is being studied and impinge on everyone involved. Therefore, I set the circles in a frame comprising of D grade policies, management barriers, student barriers and pedagogical barriers. These labels reflect key concepts within the literature review which are linked to how policy is implemented and therefore its success and failure. It was important to show that the relationships between policymakers, SMT, teachers and students, are framed and measured by the college's practical management barriers of the policy, the student barriers to learning and the teachers' pedagogical barriers to teaching.

Although, I have outlined my 'position' within the research paradigms in order to clarify my metaphysical view and to give a framework for my research, my research is not paradigm-driven. It is question-driven from my professional practice as an educational practitioner. Ethnography could have been a potential design for my research; however, an ethnographer is concerned with shared patterns and a cultural theme of the group (Creswell, 2014), whereas, I did not want to define a cultural theme from the outset of the study. Yin (2013) argues that although it is important to be able to recognise circumstances where different research approaches are appropriate, it is equally as important to identify situations where a particular approach has a definitive advantage when answering the research questions. In terms of a case study this is when a research project is asking 'why' or 'how' questions about a current experience or phenomenon over which the researcher has no control (Yin, 2013).

My research centres on exploring a social phenomenon, focusing on a particular group of students and staff in one FE setting. Stake (1995) points out that by using a case study, a researcher can explore the reality of their participants in an identified 'case'. This allowed me to describe their realities, whilst using a range of data collection methods to generate rich data to analyse. According to Yin (2013, p.4) the "distinctive need for case studies arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena" and in turn research questions which ask 'how' or 'why' a social phenomenon is happening. The more the case study researcher wants to achieve an all-encompassing 'in-depth' picture, the more advantageous the case study method will be (Yin, 2013).

However, my research has echoes of biographical or narrative research designs. My research lent itself to a narrative approach, becoming clearer during the data analysis and writing up stage. The use of the narrative research design in writing up my findings is fully explained in section 4.7 'Data analysis and use of Narrative writing'.

4.3 Case study as a strategy

According to Thomas (2016, p.23) a case study can be an investigation “of persons, events, decisions, periods, projects, policies, institutions or other systems”. The aim of my study is to investigate a little understood phenomenon which is affecting individuals within FE. Therefore, I could potentially define a number of entities as my case; the students, the teachers, the GCSEs, the policy or a FE institution itself. After conducting a thorough review of the current literature surrounding the D grade policy, teaching theory, learning and motivation theory to help develop my research questions, it also guided me in defining my ‘case’ as the FE college and the different groups of individuals as subunits of analysis, bound within my case (Yin, 2013).

Yin (2009; 2012; 2013) states that there are four basic types of case study designs which need to be considered once the ‘case’ for the research has been defined; (holistic) single-case, (holistic) multiple-case, (embedded) single-case and (embedded) multiple-case designs. Following consideration of Yin’s (2013) designs, I elected to use an embedded single case design. The main rationale for using a single case design is that the FE college is a representative case of experiences of the D grade policy (Yin, 2013). My case design is embedded rather than holistic, as I have identified my different participant groups studying GCSE maths and English as subunits of analysis (Yin, 2013). To illustrate my case study design approach, I have adapted a figure from Yin (2009; 2012; 2013). *Figure 4.2* shows the type of case study approach I will be adopting for my research, with the dotted lines showing the limits that can occur between the context and the case (Yin, 2009; 2012; 2014). The context for my embedded single-case design is a General FE College in Essex.

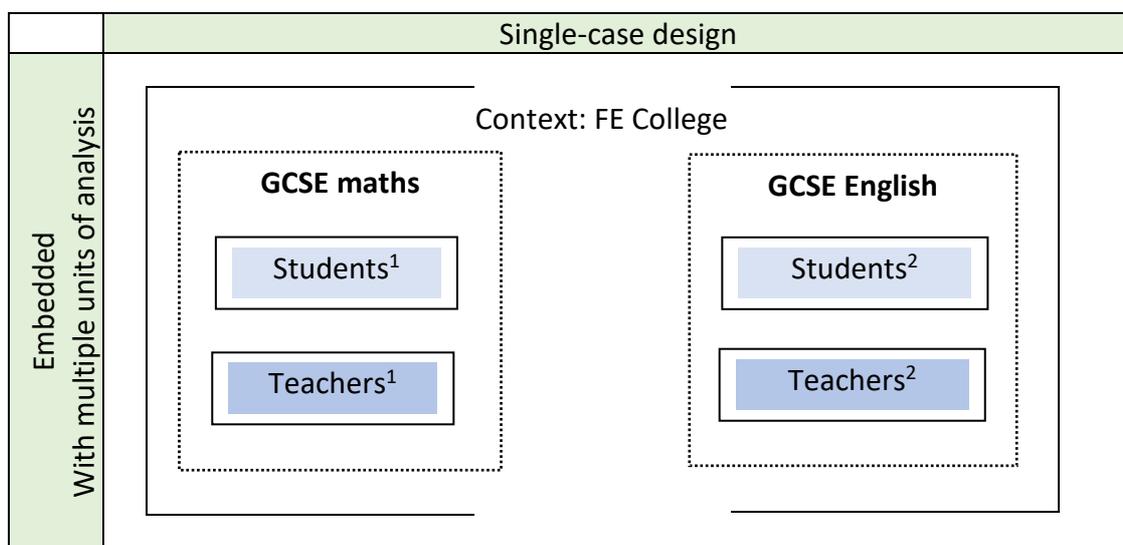


Figure 4.2: Case study design for this project, based on Yin (2009; 2012; 2013)

Figure 4.2 demonstrates that within my case there are two embedded units of analysis, which have been defined as students and teachers. GCSE maths and English are duplications of the same intervention or educational policy being imposed upon students and teachers, and therefore gives a strong rationale for my use of an embedded single-case design. Linking the findings within GCSE maths and English will add a comparative element to my investigation. In my view focusing on individuals in only one subject would devalue the overall usefulness of my research because the D grade policy affects individuals in both maths and English. An embedded case design is necessary to avoid narrowing my research, restricting the data I could collect or limiting the individuals I could explore. Outlining my single-case design in explicit terms, as shown above, is vital so that others, who are interested in post-16 compulsory learning in GCSE maths and English, can consider whether they can find similarities and differences in their own situation and/or context and make any links.

This also poses inevitable questions regarding the limitations of my case study design. Mine, like many, fits within an interpretive paradigm, therefore there is no expectation for the outcomes of my research to be generalisable to any other setting. Lincoln and Guba (2000) claim that conclusions drawn from case studies cannot be generalised in any way, because they are unique to participants being studied. However, as previously stated, there are many FE colleges in England that are also implementing the D grade policy, therefore it is entirely conceivable that other colleges may find value in my research findings and be able to make connections between my case study and their own setting. Bassey (1999) argues that conclusions and general statements drawn from case studies encourage reflection and discussions between anyone who is involved in similar settings; he refers to these statements as 'fuzzy generalizations'. In order for others to draw any 'fuzzy generalization' as Bassey (1999) suggests, from the data I have collected, the research needs to be transparent, credible, robust and rich. The boundaries of my case study design must be clear and explicit from the outset.

According to Flyvbjerg (2011, p.305) "formal generalization is only one of many ways by which people gain and accumulate knowledge". He defends the generalisability of the case study methodology, claiming that any knowledge gained from a case study can still be of clear value and even if it is not fully generalisable it can still be transferred to others in the field of research. Moreover, Flyvbjerg (2011) defends many of the misconceptions surrounding a case study research approach including the value in the form of knowledge gained from these types of studies and the difficulties in summarising and the inability to develop and test theories.

Although, my research is an embedded single-case study of one FE college I looked at outcomes from both quantitative and qualitative analyses, which is supported by Yin (2009; 2012; 2013). According to Creswell (2012) qualitative research characteristics include being reflexive, which obliges researchers to consider their place within the study, reflecting on their preconceptions, expectations and beliefs, and knowingly interweave them into their research. One of the concerns surrounding case study methodology, which is of particular interest to me, is the assumption that most case studies verify the researcher's bias. I am mindful that I am an insider. I have been a native to FE having previously worked in the sector and I am fully aware of a perceived power that I may hold as a researcher in a familiar context.

I call on Guba and Lincoln (1994) to support my epistemological view by accepting that we cannot detach ourselves from our knowledge and our understanding of our lived experiences and therefore we are inevitably linked to our research. Nisbet and Watt (1984) list the advantages and disadvantages of case study research arguing that one of the weaknesses is that, despite the researcher being actively reflexive, they are prone to bias. I have been highly aware, from the outset, of how my bias, my perceptions and my previous experiences have shaped my research throughout (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011).

This implies that a researcher's bias, or subjectivity, is a drawback of case study research and therefore one that needs to be removed. However, this view is not shared by Preissle (2008) who believes that subjectivity should be openly included within the research and goes as far as to suggest that jotting your subjectivity in a research journal, for example, is a key part of being a novice researcher and without this reflexive evidence, you can draw suspicion towards trustworthiness of the research. Quality reflexivity undertaken by the researcher and regular review by others of the data, data analysis and subsequent conclusions can help to eradicate bias in case study research and aid its credibility (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). This is the approach I have taken in my research.

Flyvbjerg's (2011, p.311) counter argument to the concerns of bias in case studies is well-defined, "The case study contains no greater bias toward verification of the researcher's preconceived notions than other methods of inquiry". Flyvbjerg (2011) goes as far as to say that in his experience the case study researcher will have a greater bias toward disproving their ideas rather than verifying them. Either way, bias was of concern for me embarking on a case study research approach. It is my view that bias is unavoidable. Therefore, to make my research trustworthy I have acknowledged bias from the outset. Trustworthiness of my research has been demonstrated at every phase from the purpose and aims, to the planning stage, to carrying out my research and then

finally in the presentation and write up to make the findings of my case study as robust as possible. To ensure that there is consistency a range of data collection methods are used.

4.4 Research setting

I identified the FE College to conduct my research through my previous working relationship with the Principal. The college is a large general FE college with approximately 4400 students studying across three campuses, offering a variety of both vocational and professional courses. The large number of students means that there is a substantial proportion of the student body that is affected by the D grade policy, placing requirements on the college, teachers and students. I made one preparatory visit to the college in order to explain my case study research to the Principal and consequently gained gatekeeper consent. Following consent, I was then able to make a number of visits to collect data within my time boundaries across the life cycle of my case study.

My chosen FE college has embraced maths and English as a key priority which is outlined clearly in its maths and English strategy. The strategy summarises the relevant areas linked to maths and English detailed in Ofsted's further education and skills inspection handbook (2017) to ensure the college remains focused on Ofsted's priorities. According to the college's strategy, as of September 2016 it will no longer offer Functional Skills level 2. Students who have achieved a Functional Skills level 1 will therefore enrol onto a GCSE resit course. The college are also clear that in the first six weeks of the academic year a student's personal circumstances and initial assessment scores will be taken into account.

Upon entry to the college, as a new or recurrent student, all students are required to undertake a Basic and Key Skill Builder (BKSB), initial assessment in maths and English, a popular online assessment used by colleges, to track and determine their current level in maths and English (BKSB, 2012). Results from these initial assessments, along with outcomes from classwork are necessary to inform appropriate needs and support in and out of the classroom. Due to the importance of maths and English, it is the college's expectation that all staff will embed maths and English skills in all vocational study programmes, using a consistent college approach.

In November 2015 Ofsted conducted an inspection of the college and judged the college as 'requires improvement'. They commended the college's rebranding of maths and English and stated that the campaign is raising awareness about the importance of the

subjects, although they argue that strategies are not making sufficient impact. In order for the college to improve further, the Ofsted report (2015) stated that the college needed better outcomes for learners in relation to maths and English and there needs to be a higher proportion of students achieving their GCSE.

According to Ofsted there were inconsistencies in good teaching, learning and assessment and many students found lessons 'uninspiring' and 'dull', hence summarising teaching in GCSE maths and English as not effective. In GCSE English Ofsted made specific comments relating to the poor quality of written and oral work and in GCSE maths they remarked on the lack of support for individual needs of learners. In both cases teachers were accused of not setting high enough standards in lessons or appropriate targets to improve learning. It was also noted that class sizes were too large, did not always start on time and punctuality was insufficient. Ofsted argue that for the college to improve their GCSE results they need to ensure that students' specific skills gaps are identified and tackled and importantly, students need to do more independent work to reinforce their learning.

Ofsted also focus on senior leaders and managers and their role in the insufficient number of 16-19-year olds achieving their GCSE. They specifically commented on an oversight made by the leaders and managers of GCSE maths and English in 2014-2015, which resulted in an inadequate number of students achieving a grade A*-C. Governors are criticised for not monitoring the college's performance and senior leaders for not holding managers to account for the slow progress made by learners. Ofsted's view of the college in November 2015 was that there were clear areas for all staff at all levels in the college which needed to be tackled to improve outcomes for learners.

4.5 Participants, sampling and ethics

In line with most qualitative research my sampling was purposive and represented the individuals I wanted to explore. The participants who took part in the case study were selected through homogeneous sampling (Creswell, 2014). This is because I needed to choose individuals who would be subjected to the GCSE resit policy and share similar characteristics, such as the number of attempts to achieve a grade C, and were all in the same GCSE maths or English class (Creswell, 2014).

Once my student participants had been identified I attended their college induction to introduce myself, talk to them about my research and give them the chance to give consent to take part using my participant information and consent forms. It was made

clear that they were under no obligation to take part in my study and had the right to withdraw at any time. It was explained that this would mean that I would not give them the surveys to complete, I would not interview them, and I would not include them in any observations or any of their college data. However, all students were happy to give consent to take part.

Table 4.1 below shows the criteria my participants had to meet in order to take part in the case study and which group they corresponded with in figure 4.2.

Students		Teachers	
Studying GCSE maths¹	Studying GCSE English²	Teaching GCSE maths¹	Teaching GCSE English²
- Aged 16-19. - Have attempted to achieve the GCSE grade C at least twice. - Hold a grade D currently in the subject.	- Aged 16-19. - Have attempted to achieve the GCSE grade C at least twice. - Hold a grade D currently in the subject.	Currently teaching GCSE maths at the general FE college.	Currently teaching GCSE English at the general FE college.

Table 4.1: Sampling criteria for student and teacher participants

Therefore, maths¹ group were all in the same maths class and English² group were all in the same English class. However, it was through this sampling that a further sub-group was created and utilised in the case study to gain further insight into the individuals of the case. It came to light that some members of maths¹ and English² groups shared membership to both groups, as they were studying both the maths and English GCSE together. This is because some students had failed to reach the required grade C in both GCSEs and had been timetabled in the same class. This allowed me not only to explore students who were studying GCSE maths and English as separate subjects but also a selected group in the classes who were studying both subjects. To illustrate this, figure 4.3 has been created to show how the case study design looks with the new sub-group added, labelled Students³.

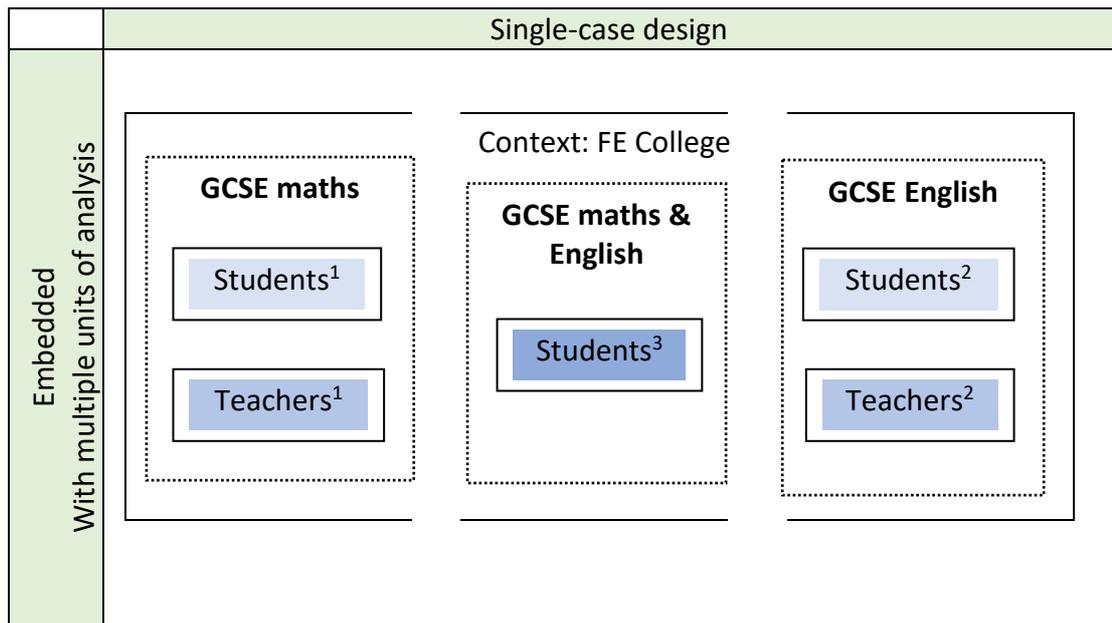


Figure 4.3: Revised Case Study design based on Yin (2009; 2012; 2013)

Students³ allows my case study to explore and examine selected students who are arguably some of the most affected by the D grade policy. This is because on top of their chosen vocational course, Students³ were also timetabled for their GCSE maths and/or English classes and had to attend three hours of maths and three hours of English per week adding an extra six hours to their contact time at the college. Using an embedded single-case study I have been able to focus on the realities of the situation or ‘case’ I want to explore. This has allowed me to be flexible within the social phenomenon and investigate my participants’ stories (Stake, 1995).

Table 4.2 below outlines who my participants are in relation to the groups identified and labelled in my single-case study design in figure 4.3.

Students¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maths class completed mindset surveys took part in interviews and observations. • Attempted to achieve grade a grade A*-C at least 2 times. • Highest achieving grade in GCSE English was a grade D, although this may not necessarily be the last grade they achieved in the subject. • Mixture of vocational students; majority studying BTEC Art and Media. • Maths 3 x a week; 2 formal lessons with their teacher Michelle on a Wednesday morning at 9am till 10am and Friday afternoon 2:15pm till 3:15pm and a 1 hour workshop. • 28 students enrolled at beginning of academic year, this number fluctuated as the year progressed as some students withdrew from the vocational course, there were attendance issues and 3 students achieved their grade C in the November resit.
Students²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English class completed mindset surveys took part in interviews and observations. • Attempted to achieve grade a grade A*-C at least 2 times. • Their highest achieving grade in GCSE English was a grade D, although this may not necessarily be the last grade they achieved in the subject. • Mixture of vocational students; majority studying BTEC Art and Media. • English 3 x a week; 2 formal lessons with their teacher Elsa on a Wednesday morning at 10am till 11am and Friday afternoon 3:30pm till 4:30pm and a 1 hour workshop. • 15 students enrolled at the beginning of the year but as this was one of the smaller English groups this increased to 18 to even out class numbers in other classes.
Teachers¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 maths teachers; Mae (Deputy Head of Department), Mark, Mick and Michelle. • All teaching GCSE maths • Have taught GCSE resits for at least one year.
Teachers²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 English teachers; Emily, Elsa, Ezekiel Emma and Eloise (Head of Department). • All teaching GCSE English. • Have taught GCSE resits for at least one year.
Students³	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small group of 5 students who were in both groups student¹ and student² since they required their GCSE grade C in both maths and English. • 3 hours of maths and 3 hours of English per week. • They attended Maths lesson at 9am-10am on Wednesdays and then their English lesson at 10am-11am. On Fridays they attended their maths lesson at 2:15pm-3:15pm and then attended their English lesson 3:30pm-4:30pm. • Not interviewed as a whole group but were interviewed on a 1:1 basis to share their more unique situation in comparison to their peers.

Table 4.2: Participant details

All the teaching staff who participated in my research met the criteria outlined in table 4.1 and are further described in table 4.2 under groups teachers¹ and teachers². It is noteworthy that Ezekiel at the time of my research was on a continuing capability action plan to support his teaching. Although Eloise is the Head of the Department, she also teaches one group GCSE English and is therefore included in group teachers². She held dual perspectives, Head of Department and classroom teacher, making her an interesting participant within my research. Philip, the Principal of the College, was an

additional member of staff who participated fully in my research. Philip was entirely supportive of my research and also agreed to be interviewed.

Since my research involves human participants, I took great care to gain their consent voluntarily, ensuring that the nature of the research was transparent, so they were fully informed and had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Although I am working with students aged 16-19 years old, not a group normally viewed as vulnerable, I was conscious that some of my participants could have a physical disability and/or learning difficulties. From consultations with Eloise, the Head of both English and maths, I established that there were no vulnerable students within my student groups. If this had been the case, I would have ensured that special considerations were taken into account regarding consent, confidentiality and relationships (Thomas, 2016).

I obtained informal consent from my teacher participants in August 2016 to ensure that everyone was aware of my research. This was followed by written formal consent the week before the college academic year began 2016. All teachers were told that they were under no obligation to take part in my study and every effort would be made to ensure anonymity, including the use of false names and the college being unnamed, although job roles would be identified. In the case of my research I had an ethical consideration for a perceived power relationship between my participants and myself and was careful not to allow this to influence my research in any way. I am a previous employee of the FE College in which I conducted my case study research. This has notable advantages, in terms of access and gatekeeper permissions but equally poses issues such as those associated with insider research. Although I am no longer an employee of the college, the provocation for my entire research comes from my lived familiarity with the topic of the research and I have been immersed in the institution and have contextual knowledge, therefore making me an insider researcher (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007).

As I am no longer employed, I do not have a duality of roles, which made it simpler, and allowed me to establish myself as a researcher, independent from the college. Knowing the college and my experience as a teacher at the FE College enabled me to form positive working relationships with students and staff quickly. The students were fully aware of my role, but quickly forgot I was there sitting in their classroom as an observer as they began to see me regularly throughout the year. This is a benefit of case study observations, as they often take place over long periods of time, therefore the researcher is able to build more relaxed relationships with those they are observing, resulting in more realistic evidence in a more informal setting (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011).

This was certainly the case for me, meaning I could appear less and less as an outsider and appear more as a native.

All staff throughout the college were able to speak to me knowing that I understood the context in which they were working and were aware that I acquired gatekeeper permission from the principal of the college. Although the staff understood that Philip granted permission for the research to take place, this did not appear to impact on the teachers' or students' participation in the research. This judgement is based on the level of detail and information that was shared over a prolonged period of time, as relationships between participants and myself were established. The participants showed and expressed a genuine interest in the topic of the research and wanted to share their experience and views regardless of the principal's attentions.

The nature of my research has purposefully involved the personal opinions, emotions, stories and data of my participants, all of which has been stored securely and dealt with in a professional and confidential manner. Anonymity has been upheld throughout the study by not identifying the FE college and changing the names of my participants with English teachers/students having names beginning with 'E' and maths teachers/students having names beginning with 'M'. Therefore, although work roles such as, 'Head of Department' or Head of Teaching and Learning are titled they are unlikely to be identified in the anonymous college. Students studying both maths and English have names beginning with 'B'. My ethical considerations led me to make a judgment that my case study poses a medium risk. I made this judgment based on understanding that I could potentially be working with vulnerable participants. There is a power-relationship between myself and my participants and personal issues, and memories and tension may emerge from my data methods (Thomas, 2016).

4.6 Methods

Wertz (1984) argued that when researchers are at the data collection stage they should actively and strongly reflect on their data collection practices. Meaning that I needed to carefully reflect not just on the raw data but also on the issues in collecting the data to ensure trustworthiness and limit biases. Case studies strive to portray the case in its genuineness. To produce a strong, robust case study, the case must be given life through the narrative, rather than suppressed through evaluations, analyses and conclusions. This does not mean in any way that case studies are unsystematic or simply paint a picture of what it is like to be in a particular situation. The data collected is systematic, organised and demanding (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). My data

collection phase was planned in the same vein. Case studies often rely on a range of methods to help provide breadth and depth to a study; my research was no exception. The data was collected using a range of methods summarised in figure 4.4 below.

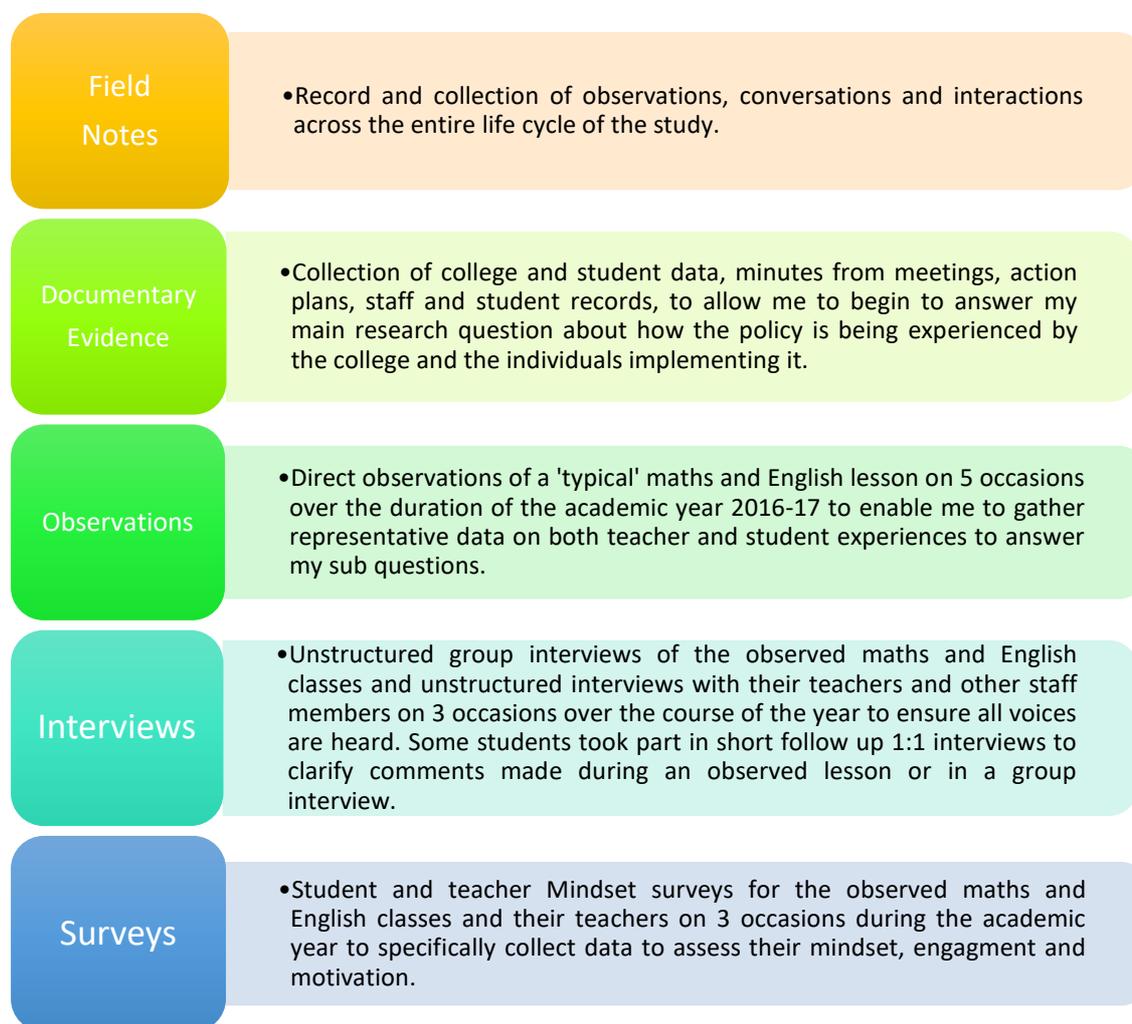


Figure 4.4: Summary of each data method used

The luxury of using a mix of methods to collect evidence allowed for the combination of both quantitative and qualitative data to be gathered, which in turn has added to the trustworthiness and credibility of my findings. However, using a range of methods is more than collecting quantitative data and qualitative data as two separate entities but 'mixing' the two ensuring they are entwined and interlinked (Creswell, 2012). Collecting both quantitative and qualitative data, in whatever mixed methods approach a researcher uses, is time-consuming, demanding and requires suitable organisation of the data (Creswell, 2012). Yet, as a novice researcher I was naïve in understanding just how demanding and time consuming these research methods would be.

Throughout the entire life cycle of the case study, I added to and collected field notes in a separate journal. Keeping field notes records informal data and 'other' contextual

information which may be relevant information that may not be collectable via other methods (Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier, 2012). As I have previously discussed I spent a considerable amount of time in the college in order to absorb the culture. During this time I was also able to absorb the naturally occurring talk that took place within the educational setting between varieties of individuals. Silverman (2006) points out that researchers should remember that conversations are the main method in which social interaction occurs and therefore, the researcher should not assume that conversation is insignificant or just talk. It was from taking in some of the naturally occurring talk and conversation whilst sitting in the staffroom that I gained important insight into the top-down perceptions of the staff in the college, which would not have been collectable via any other method but which was only directly used when I had formal consent. I will now discuss my research methods in turn in more detail.

Interviews:

The majority of qualitative researchers make use of interviews, because they are good for gaining realities of participants personal experiences, opinions and attitudes (Peräkylä and Ruusuvuori, 2011). I have used interviews with all of my participants at strategic points across the academic year. Yin (2009) argues that a key strength of interviews is the insightful responses gained from seemingly casual inferences and descriptions. However, interviews can take on many forms due to the multiplicity of their use and therefore there are many different types that can be employed in qualitative research (Fontana and Frey, 1994). Minichello et al (1990) suggest there is a continuum that interviews sit upon, depending on the level of structure applied to the methods ranging from structured to unstructured interviews. Unstructured interviews in particular work well in an interpretative study like mine since the participants discuss the issues as they see them (Thomas, 2015).

However, there is also a wide range of unstructured interviews that can be used, the most conventional being the ethnographic interview, identified as non-standard, open-ended and in-depth (Punch, 2009). Using unstructured interviews is one way of counteracting some of the weaknesses of using interviews in case studies, such as biases in questioning (Yin, 2009). Therefore, unstructured interviews are used with all participants using Fontana and Frey's (1994) seven key aspects to consider when carrying out unstructured interviews. These aspects acted as a checklist which was useful when planning my interviews due to the range of participants I was interviewing including: presenting oneself, establishing rapport and the language and culture of participants (Fontana and Frey, 1994). I was very conscious of not appearing as an authoritative figure with my participants. I did not want students to see me as one of their

teachers and I did not want the teachers to see me as a colleague, therefore I purposefully dressed more casually when conducting my research. This also helped me get into my role as the researcher, establish rapport more quickly as I was more relaxed and make me appear less threatening. Although, my interviews were unstructured, I had a planned interview schedule which I followed for my student (Appendix I) and teacher (Appendix II) participants for each interview.

My teacher participants were interviewed on a 1:1 basis to listen to their individual opinions, voices and experiences. My student participants were interviewed as groups since I wanted to compare the group attitudes to individual attitudes extracted from surveys and observations (Thomas, 2015). I then had the opportunity to follow up on the group interviews and ask individual students further questions if appropriate. Although conducting group interviews has advantages and the chance for further discussions to develop and insights into relationships, they also have the disadvantage of one participant dominating the group (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). This could also become useful to understand student relationships and behaviour.

It is important to note that the number of students present during each group interview varied throughout the year due to which students attended class on the chosen interview days. Although, this was disappointing as I was not able to interview all the students in the class as regularly as I had planned, their lack of attendance was interesting in itself. This added a richness to my data as it helped me to make further links between student engagement and motivation throughout the academic year. This also raised discussions with teaching staff about the challenges of low attendance in a resit year. Similarly to Yin (2009), I see my interviews as verbal reports which can provide invaluable insights into behaviours, events and situations. I chose to record my interviews on my own Dictaphone and write my own notes, which according to Seidman (1991) are advantageous methods to use in unstructured interviews.

Surveys

My case study makes use of surveys as a tool to capture data at specific moments and establish my participants' attitudes in regard to my research questions (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). My surveys are structured, with questioning that is designed to collect attitudes from multiple choices to assess their mindset, beliefs and attitudes (Quihuis et al, 2002; Thomas, 2015). The questions used in my surveys were created and adapted from research by Professor Carol Dweck (2006; 2012), designed to determine where on the mindset continuum students and staff sit (Quihuis et al, 2002; Ablard and Mills, 1996; Gonida, Kiosseoglou and Leondari, 2006). I planned surveys at

three strategic points across the academic year to determine if there were changes in participants' mindset depending on contextual information of interest as this could have had an effect on teaching and learning.

My research is influenced by mindset theory, which is used as a way of identifying or recording a participant's attitude or approach to the teaching and learning of maths and English (Ablard and Mills, 1996; Quihuis et al, 2002; Gonida, Kiosseoglou and Leondari, 2006; Murphy and Dweck, 2010; Rattan, Good and Dweck, 2011). My research is by no means stating that the answering of my survey questions, based on Dweck's mindset research, was a precise way of measuring someone's motivation to learn or teach. However, it was useful as a guide to paint an holistic view of engagement across the life cycle of the case study and is used as an analytical frame.

All participants were reminded of the purpose of completing the survey. I explained that it was to gain an understanding of how strongly they felt about the statements. It was also made clear to them that by completing the survey they understood that they were giving their personal responses based on the class they were in or were teaching and that the data would be used in the case study. My participants were also reminded before completing each survey that they were not obliged to take part and completion of the survey would be taken as consent.

For my student participants, the surveys were handed out during a maths and/or English lesson at three separate moments during the life cycle of the case. This meant that for my participant student³ group, they completed the mindset survey during their maths lesson and their English lesson to see if there was a difference in their mindset depending on the subject they were studying (Quihuis, et al, 2002). Students could respond with: agree a lot, agree, disagree or disagree a lot (See appendix III). As with the interviews the number of students who completed the surveys at each point during the academic year varied depending on class attendance on the survey days. This again, told me something interesting about students' attitudes to learning.

For my teacher participants, the surveys were handed out in the morning at three separate moments during the life cycle of the case and were returned at the end of the day. This allowed my teacher participants time to sit down and complete the survey at an appropriate time for them. As with student surveys, teachers could respond with: agree a lot, agree, disagree or disagree a lot (See appendix IV). The statements used in the teachers' surveys were similar to the student surveys however they were designed to not only capture their own mindset beliefs but also their attitude and beliefs about their GCSE resit students.

Observations:

Yin (2009) argues that direct observations are advantageous to a case study researcher as they reveal the reality and the context of the case in real time. However, observations, like interviews can be structured or unstructured. In the same vein as my interviews, I did not want my observations to be structured and purely led by the nature and situation of the case. Therefore, I also made use of unstructured direct observations, which formed a key part of my research, because case studies “should take place in the natural setting of the case” (Yin, 2009, p. 109). My observations allowed me to use a combination of measurement and narrative to enrich the evidence collected (Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier, 2012).

It is important for the researcher to prepare for the process of observing, including carefully considering your role as the observer. However, Creswell (2014) argues that not one observation role taken on by the observer is better suited for any particular setting or reality. According to Yin (2009), considering your role is an important pre-observation step. A distinct disadvantage of direct observations is how your presence or participation can result in events occurring differently because they are being observed.

Mindful of the need to withhold judgement when recording events, my observations of the teaching and learning in the college were unstructured and I identified myself as a non-participant observer. Although I am familiar with the setting, I felt it was important to remain an ‘outsider’ during observations. Being a passive observer allowed me to write notes to record the GCSE maths and English lessons as they occurred. To try to prevent my presence from distorting the lessons, I conducted several observations across the case study, eight in total, which helped me to achieve a good understanding of the individuals and experiences (Creswell, 2014). This time, combined with time spent with students and teachers in interviews and surveys across the entire year, also helped to define my role as a familiar visiting researcher. This helped me to identify incidents of interest. According to Tripp (1993; 2011) this would make them ‘critical’ in my analysis. The meaning of critical incident is discipline and paradigm dependent (Halquist and Musanti, 2010; Spencer-Oatey, 2013). My usage assumes a degree of subjectivity. Like Tripp (1993; 2011) I believe that an element of observer discernment is necessary to identify such ‘incidents’. They become ‘critical’ to research narratives as a result of value judgements about their significance for the research context; judgements made by the researcher when reflecting on what has been observed.

For the purposes of this thesis Tripp's (1993; 2011) approach and definition of critical incidents is most useful. Tripp (1993; 2011) argues that incidents often happen but 'critical' incidents are created by our interpretations of a situation looking for underlying meanings. Therefore, even the smallest event could become 'critical'. The critical incidents identified in the research narrative are made accessible through the use of vignettes, which is discussed further on in the chapter.

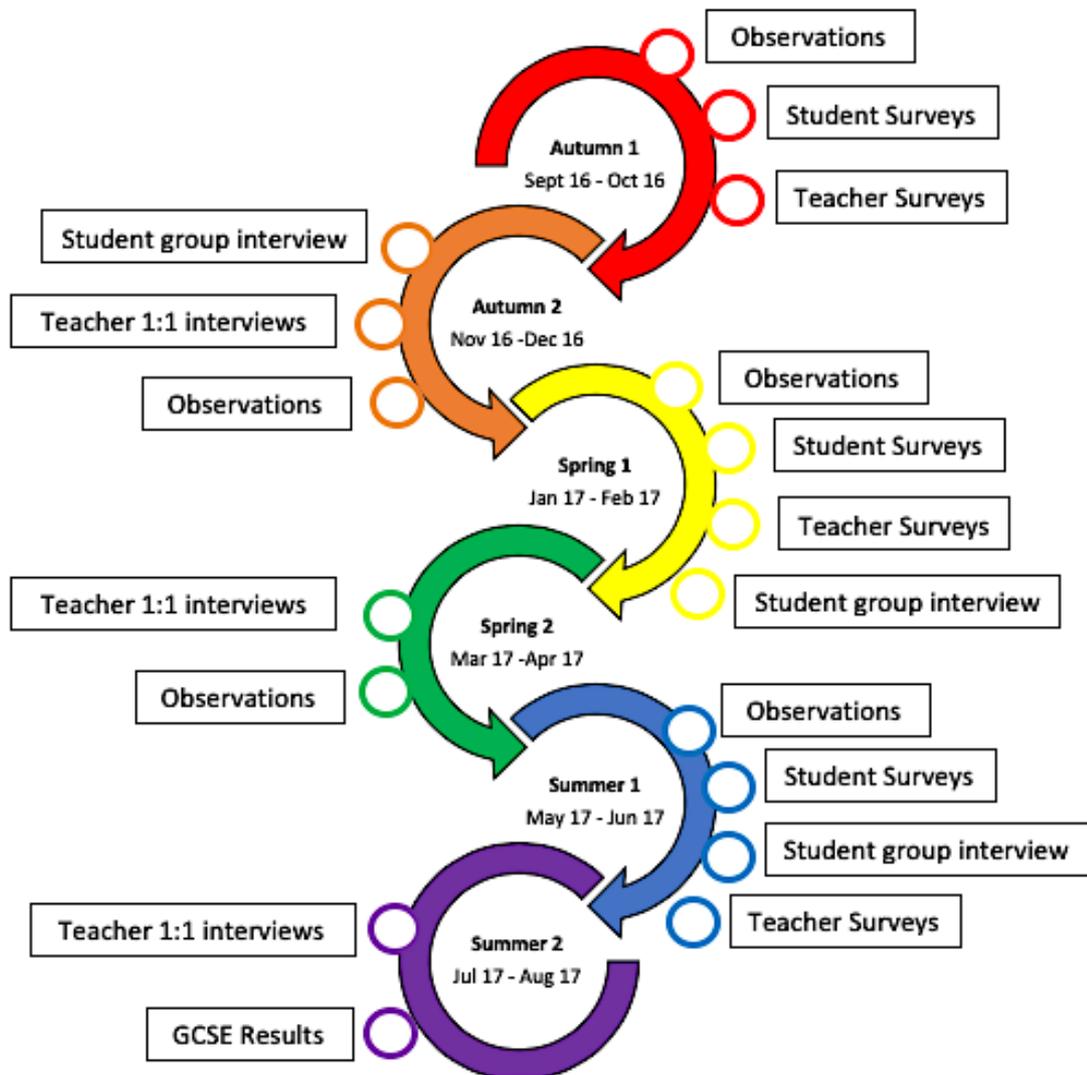
I define my observations as unstructured. The aim was "hypothesis-generating rather than hypothesis-testing" (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011, p. 257). This means I did not go into the observations with a set plan of what I was looking for but I wanted to see what occurred naturally in the everyday setting and simply take note. Therefore, I recorded my observations in note form as they occurred, including as much contextual information and detail as possible such as, words from conversations between students and teachers, verbal and non-verbal behaviour, silences and any unexpected behaviours. Crucially I did not have pre-coded categories or expectations set out in advance that would then be used as a comparison against another observation (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011).

Table 4.3 summarises the data collection methods and how they link with the research questions.

Research Questions	Type of Data Collection method	Group(s) of participants engaged	Number of times used throughout the life cycle of the case 2016-17
<i>What are the 16-19-year-old students' experiences of the compulsory GCSE resit and its effects on student engagement and motivation to learn in maths and English?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unstructured observations of both maths and English lessons • Documentary evidence including formative assessment marks • Unstructured group and follow up 1:1 interviews if necessary • Survey responses • Field notes 	Students Documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maths lesson observations x 5 • English lesson observations x 5 • Group interviews x 3 • Surveys of 27 maths students x 3 • Surveys of 18 English students x 3
<i>What are the teachers' experiences of teaching the compulsory GCSE resit course in maths and English to students who have previously failed to achieve grade C or 4 and its effects on the teachers' motivation to teach the subjects?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unstructured observations of teachers teaching both maths and English lessons • Unstructured 1:1 Interviews • Field notes • Survey responses 	Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maths lesson observations x 5 • English lesson observations x 5 • 1:1 interviews with 8 lectures x 3 • Surveys of 4 maths teachers x 3 • Surveys of 4 English teachers x 3

Table 4.3: Table to show how research methods answer research questions

The methods were deployed at strategic points during the academic year 2016-2017, to try and capture any change in opinions, mindsets and the fluidity of an academic year in an education setting. This can be clearly seen in table 4.3. The time boundaries of my case study coincided with students starting their GCSE re-examination courses in September 2016 until they collected their results in August 2017. In order to fully answer my research questions, my case study was designed to consider both students and teachers through an entire academic year, from beginning the course, to finally collecting the award at the end. It is these time boundaries that have enabled my case study to give a true overview of GCSE resit courses for the students, teachers and the FE College.



*Documentary evidence and field notes to be collected throughout the entire life cycle of the case study (Sept 2016- Aug 2017)

Figure 4.5: Map of timings of data collection points

I devised the map to give an overview of the sources of evidence used and my time boundaries. This was also used to tell the story of the data in chapter five: Findings. These methods of data collection were in line with Yin's (2012; 2013) six sources of evidence, which are considered to be the most frequently used in case study research due to the complimentary relationship between them. He argues that a comprehensive and successful case study will make use of as many sources of evidence as possible as they all have a range of strengths and weaknesses and are beneficial to the researcher in different ways. Analysis of the range of data enables the production of deeper understanding of the case, as I am not relying on one source of evidence. It is these well-considered strategies that enabled me to successfully tell the 'story' of my case study (Yin, 2013).

A strength of the case study methodology permits the researcher to be involved and “observe effects in real contexts, recognising that context is a powerful determinant of both cases and effects, and that in-depth understanding is required to do justice to the case” (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011, p.289). Exploiting case study methodology as my approach, allows me to explain, describe and explore holistically the findings of my research in context, using both a reflective and linear process.

I had decided that documentation such as administrative documents and formative and summative assessment of the students would be collected throughout the study. This is because educational settings generate a wide range as well as large amounts of documentary evidence which is invaluable in validating information. This is especially true when documentary data is studied in combination with other data collection methods in case study research (Punch and Oancea, 2014). This type of information was difficult to organise and collate because at different periods of the study there would be a variety of different documents that related, and potentially validated, different aspects of data. I carefully organised a research folder where copies of documentation could be stored and added to as the study evolved. These documents were then categorised depending on what information they were supporting, such as students’ previous GCSE results in maths and English, their formative assessment or mock examination marks.

What soon became clear was how many of the documents I collected were not as easy to categorise, as the story they told was not clear from the outset. To tackle this, I began by writing position papers, which I produced on a one to two-monthly basis, outlining the picture of maths and English at different times in the year. They allowed me to let the data I was collecting breathe and speak for itself whilst still being systematic in the way the data was being collected. For example, illustrating students’ attendance rates and staffing issues in the teaching teams, linking this data and looking at how this related to the students’ experience in the classroom following an observation. Yin (2013) suggests exploiting both qualitative and quantitative data as a strong analytical strategy, scrutinising data at the same time that qualitative data is analysed and kept at the forefront of the case study. Although, these position papers have allowed me to gather invaluable snap shots of the case of the GCSE resit experience for the individuals in the college, these were challenging in their production.

Collecting documentary data was an on-going feature of my data collection phase. However, the other methods employed such as observations, interviews and surveys were strategically scattered across the academic year (See figure 4.5). The timings of the observations were carefully placed to capture the atmosphere, motivation and engagement at the start of the academic year, either side of the Christmas break, before

the Easter break and before the GCSE exams. This was strategic in its approach to try and capture events, situations and opinions that could vary across an academic year due to exam preparation and holiday periods. It was also to allow myself time to collate and to begin to analyse the different types of data across the study. These complementary methods allowed deep layers in my data collection and improved the consistency in my analysis allowing for connections and links in my evidence.

4.7 Data Analysis and use of Narrative writing

Geertz (1973) describes the data that we collect as 'thick' and inevitably the researcher's reproduction of the phenomena being studied, therefore in the analysis of the data, we must sort the significant from the insignificant. Analysis by its very definition is to pull units apart and when your data is 'thick' this can be a very complicated task. Stake (1995) points out that within case study research there is no set time to begin and/or conclude the analysis and interpretations of the data. Throughout the life cycle of my case study, my data analysis was continuous and not timetabled; it was a fluid process where I deconstructed the data I collected, as I collected it.



Reflection: The continuous data analysis caused me to be overwhelmed not just by my data but also my interpretations of the data, and this wave of information washed over me unceasingly throughout the data collection phase and I often felt like I could not hold back the tide. Again, it was naivety as an inexperienced researcher that did not prepare me for the amount of data that I would inevitably collect but it was done purposefully to produce large amounts of both quantitative and qualitative data. Although I found collecting, collating, interpreting and reflecting on the data difficult to manage, I am pleased I did it in this way. The range of data collection methods allows for a variety of findings and interpretations across qualitative and quantitative strands at all levels of the research, and it is this diversity within the findings that helps researchers gain a greater multifaceted meaning and understanding of their data (Teddie and Tashakkori, 2011).

Yin (2013) suggests that one way case study researchers can begin to go about analysing their data is by starting with their research questions then begin to draw conclusions and think about how the evidence could be displayed. This is because data analysis strategies have not been defined clearly yet in case study research due to case study researchers using different approaches. Therefore, my data was analysed in the first instance using my research questions as a starting point.

Miles and Huberman (1994) recommend analysing data early on in the research and propose a thorough collection of analytical manipulations that can provide a qualitative researcher with a useful guide to be able to adapt and order evidence, so it can be analysed successfully. This view is supported by Yin (2013) who writes that following the suggested analytical manipulations can prevent a case study researcher from holding onto data not knowing what to do with it. Throughout my data collection phase, I had regular supervisory meetings with either one or both of my supervisors. The aim of these meetings was to explore the data collected over time and to engage in dialogue to interpret this data. This process was invaluable in assisting both my data analysis and reflexive analysis.

The advantages of collecting a large amount of data is the wonderful richness of that data. However, this is also the disadvantage. After some initial data collection, I constructed this data into a large mind-map, shown in figure 4.6, which I presented to my supervisors. This allowed me to begin sorting it, helping me to gain further awareness and understanding of my research and provided me with a method for reflexive analysis. This prompted my supervisors to question me, probe me and extract from me the information that was not shown... 'What was going on when that happened?' 'Where were you?' 'What was the context?' 'What was the relationship like?'

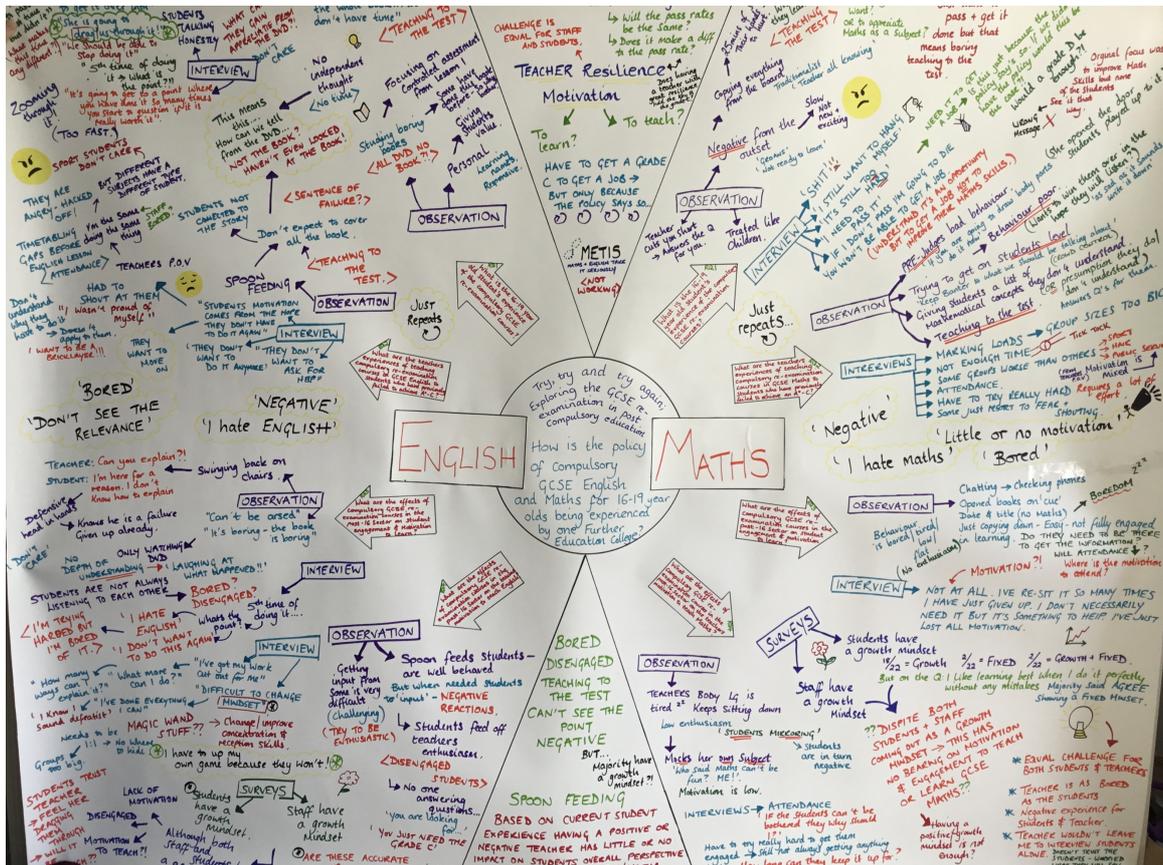


Figure 4.6: Mind-map of data collected in first two months

It was through these conversations that I was forced to reflect and engage in reflexive analysis whereby I had to lay bare and uncover the process and outcomes of the data. Although incredibly difficult and painful at times, this assisted my reflexive practice to ensure more valid and robust data. From this point I viewed my poster as the ground sheet, the foundations: it was missing the poles to start building upwards and interconnect the main themes, or stories the data was trying to tell me. In his review of case study research methods Gillham (2000) suggests that it is completely natural for a researcher to bring their prejudices to their research as long as they are acutely aware that these are based on a lack of evidence, but we should be more concerned with our 'preferences'. To avoid this, researchers must not try to find out what they want to find out, but the 'reality', by challenging and questioning themselves constantly. I have been reflexive throughout my research but no more so than during the data collection and data analysis stage.

The key in case study research is that trustworthiness is demonstrated throughout. Using Creswell's (2014) guide to analysing and interpreting qualitative data I designed and adapted my own process for my data analysis as shown in figure 4.7.

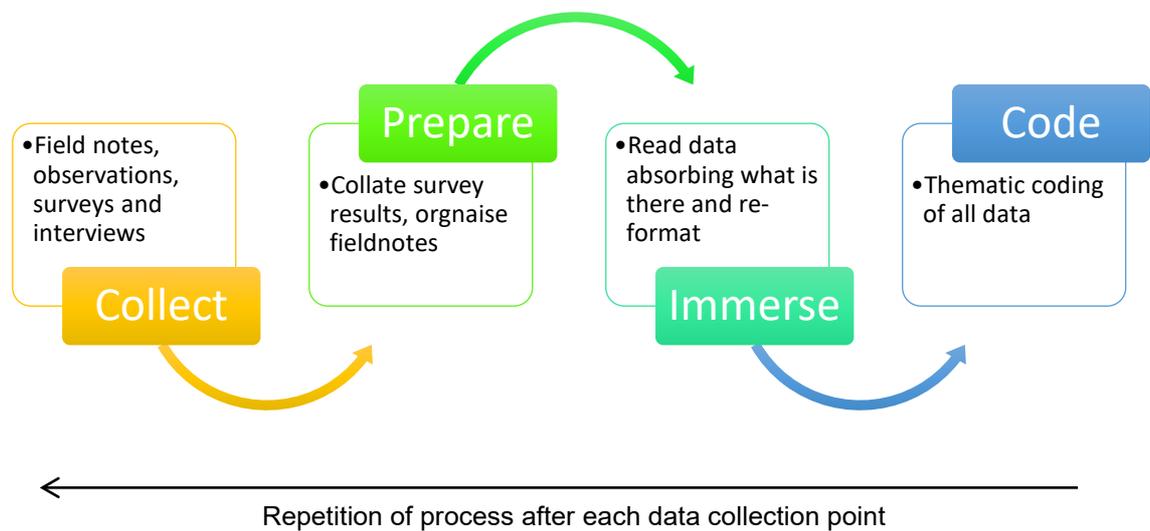


Figure 4.7: Data analysis process

The process shown in figure 4.7 showed that my data analysis was a continuous process across the life cycle of the case. Having a continual data analysis process was vital for my case study as it generated a large quantity of data at various different points and took on different forms (Creswell, 2014). It was crucial to prepare and analyse the data across the whole academic year as the research progressed. Data was collected and then was taken through my data analysis process shown above. It is important to note that although I continually looked at my data, I did not jump to conclusions too early, to ensure that I didn't, the analysis process above meant that I was systematic, and allowed me to observe emerging themes over time.

After data was collected it went through a 'preparatory' stage where all data was organised depending on the method employed. I had a 'fieldnotes' book and two large folders with numerous dividers that allowed me to file my written notes from observations, interviews and surveys and to file documentary data. Audio files were stored on my password protected computer. As surveys were completed, I collated their responses to show clearly any changes in mindset. Therefore, I developed different tables and eventually created an excel spreadsheet for each participant group, which successfully demonstrated the name of the participant, the round of surveys and response to each statement.

The next stage was 'immersing' myself in my data and then coding accordingly. Stake (1999) argues that, the act of transcribing in large case studies demands a considerable amount of the researcher's time and this is not always the best use of their time. In line with Stake (1995) I wanted to be efficient in answering my research questions rather than being submerged in data sets. Therefore, I made the decision to not transcribe my interview data and dedicate my time to the best data. Yin (2009) recommends

systematically listening and re-listening to all audio recordings whilst making notes. My study makes use of direct interpretations from the raw evidence, to safeguard against any data being missed through the lack of transcription (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011).

Many researchers have argued about the value that can be placed on a transcript, the transcription process itself and the future of transcription within educational research (Ashmore and Reed, 2000; Bird, 2005; Carroll, 2000; Have, 1999; Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998; Pomerantz and Fehr, 1997; Tilley, 2003; Wilson, 1999). Ashmore and Reed (2000) argue that an audio recording should be considered as a new custom version of a transcript, as a transcript alone without its counterpart recording has an inability to engender confidence and has a lack of 'evidential utility'. Bird (2005) offers personal reflections on the act of transcribing and argues that with better training transcribing is a valuable and effective tool. However, she also highlights that in reality any multidimensional communication does not lend itself to a two-dimensional transcription on a page. Also, many qualitative researchers do not rely on a regimented procedure to analyse their data. They read and re-read and search for meanings by drawing a picture and pinning down themes (Peräkylä and Ruusuvuori, 2011). Therefore, rather than transcribing my 1:1 or group interviews I listened and re-listened to my recordings repeatedly and read and re-read my notes and annotations. According to Pomerantz and Fehr (1997) this allows the development of further analysis and a return directly to the action in the recordings with fresh analytic interest when needed.

I remained immersed in the data enabling me to search for meanings and identify common themes between all of my participants (Peräkylä and Ruusuvuori, 2011). My case study makes use of 'thematic coding'. As defined by Gibbs (2007) thematic coding involves the researcher coding their data which embodies the same theoretical or descriptive idea and will result in a framework of thematic ideas. However, it was only by collecting data from all my methods across the academic year that I was able to recognise reoccurring themes which allowed me to code my data. These themes were identified by looking for connections from the discursive data and remaining focused on the research questions, with some themes running across both the maths and English groups, but others were specific to each subject. The purpose of my thematic coding was to support conceptualisation within my case, allowing me to bring emerging themes and concepts together holistically, supporting interpretations of the critical incidents (See appendix V).

Using Charmaz's (2003) questions to help support my rigorous reading and immersion of my data, I re-read my descriptive notes and wrote further annotations around them

asking myself; What is going on? What are they doing? What are they saying? How does the context impact their situation? As my data analysis was a continuous process, I began to be able to categorise my themes in my initial analysis and could then summarise my themes under student barriers, teacher barriers and practical barriers as shown in my conceptual framework (figure 4.1). I was able to use thematic coding when analysing my fieldnotes, interviews and observations.

When I came to analyse my survey results, I used a specific red or green colour-coded system to clearly indicate the mindset of each participant. Each statement created in my survey required the participant to answer with either a growth or fixed mindset response, in line with Dweck's research (2006; 2012). Therefore, I colour-coded the student and teacher responses to show where they were on the mindset continuum, red to illustrate a fixed mindset and green to illustrate a growth mindset. It was from my colour-coding of their responses that I was able to determine a reported growth mindset, a fixed mindset or a split mindset. A split mindset was represented by the colour orange to show they are showing neither a growth or fixed mindset at the time of the survey.

A key aspect of my data analysis process was the constant comparison of all data including quantitative documentary data. According to Thomas (2016) the constant comparative method of data analysis is the process of extracting themes from intensive re-reading of your data and comparing each element of your data to other elements. This process allowed me to compare critical incidents in all of my data from my fieldnotes, documentary evidence, observations, interviews and surveys. Further to this, an advantage of my embedded single-case study design allowed me to not only look at and compare data across students and teachers from one subject, but I was also able to compare across the case of maths and English to gain further justification or refute evidence and to gain synthesis.



Reflection: When I came to write my findings chapter, I struggled to present my data in a meaningful way. I initially started to write my findings as a list of what was found under each method. However, I soon learned that not only was the chapter incredibly challenging to write in that way, but it did not present the data in a meaningful way

to the reader. Following weeks of struggling to find a way to bring all my data together, I went back to my aim and my questions. It became clear to me that the only way I could present my data was as it happened chronologically, in order to accurately tell the story of the case study and the academic year 2016-17. This writing progress allowed me to

bring all of my quantitative and qualitative data together as it occurred in time. The process of writing in this way allowed me to further develop my qualitative analysis and learn from the process of writing.

Although I have not conducted narrative research, I have made use of a narrative approach to shape my writing which was more than just a descriptive strategy. It is not uncommon for case studies to use a narrative that allows the researcher to integrate the data collected, evidence and discussions (Thomas 2015). However, I would argue that my thoughts came through my writing. Richardson (2000) argues that writing is a method of inquiry, a process of innovation and analysis that can uncover new aspects of your research. My narrative approach allowed me to indulge in a research practice that helped me to explore my own and my participants' worlds and not take the writing up of my thesis for granted. It is a method of analysis that will allow me to learn from it (Richardson, 2000). Bruner (2009) argues that there are two modes of thought; the paradigmatic mode is logical in its aim of formally categorising forms and systems to find meaning and the narrative mode which is recognised as looking for meaning through individuals' stories. Although these two modes of thought have distinct cognitive functions in constructing realities or experiences, they are complex and equally complimentary to one another.

This is a similar view that is held by Elbow (1983) who discusses the reciprocal relationship between writing and thinking and that we should teach thinking through writing. According to Elbow (1983) there are two types of thinking; first order thinking which is intuitive and creative and second order thinking which is what many call critical thinking where we are encouraged to think carefully. Elbow (1983) claims that when we write, we should be encouraged to not think carefully. It is in our first order thinking, that our narrative will lead to better conceptual insights. It is the result of just writing the story embedded in experience that led to the conceptual insights in the findings and discussions chapters.

According to Humphrey and Simpson (2012) the process of learning from writing could be identified as a threshold concept. Meyer and Land (2003, p. 1) argue that threshold concepts are "akin to a portal, opening up a new and previously inaccessible way of thinking about something". Writing my findings chapter not only allowed me to think about and learn about my data in a way that I couldn't before, but it allowed me to write the findings chapter freely with creativity. This resulted in me having a transformed integrated view of my research and data, as it revealed a previously hidden interplay of

my thinking and my research themes. By using a narrative approach to my writing, I was able to build a complex mosaic of narrative descriptions, using what Elbow (1983) terms as my second order thinking through revising my language and therefore gaining more power over my thinking.

Frank (2010) suggests in his socio-narratology, researchers of social science should be less preoccupied with finding themes in their stories but should be more concerned with how they inform life. Although I do not use a dialogical narrative analysis study in my research, my story of the academic year of my participants provides insight into their experiences but also a sense of meaning and form to voices previously unheard (Frank, 2010). My findings chapter uses coherent narrative descriptions of my participants' stories, which married well with my case study design and theoretical framework as Stake (1995) argues that case study researchers want to voice the stories of their participants. Like many narrative practices my findings chapter aims to present the big story of the academic year, gathered from the small stories of my range of methods approach, which has allowed me to analyse my data in context (Bochner and Riggs, 2014).

I have used a narrative lens to strengthen my analysis to give my data the respect it deserved. According to Hunter (2010) narrative analysis means that data is analysed in its context and from its differing perspectives. This was a key advantage to my embedded single-case study design as the data needed to be contextualised across the case of both maths and English and from students and teachers. My findings chapter is entitled 'The story of 2016-2017' using a narrative approach to ensure that the storyline of the findings of the case study is clear. Thomas (2016) goes as far as to compare the key fibres of a story to that of a case study and therefore suggests that using narrative within case studies is important to help to make sense of the whole. The written style used in my findings chapter has similarities to action research that also has natural chronology showing research taking place in real time but taking place in phases. My findings chapter is written chronologically and is split into sections to show what occurred at different points in the academic year (see figure 4.5). However, these are not phases and are designed to move from the fragmented to the coherent.

Throughout my thesis I have written personal reflections at various stages which are represented by images of snakes and ladders. The images and reflections act as a larger metaphor for how I felt during my research, which was also reflected in my participants' experiences at different points over the course of the year. My thesis therefore portrays a 'confessional tale' within the field of ethnography (Van Maanen, 2011). My reflection points scattered throughout my thesis could be seen as confessional thoughts that make

my biases and flaws visible to demystify my research. This helps to ensure my research is trustworthy and transparent.

According to Van Maanen (2011) confessional tales are often used to decorate realist formal accounts of the data collected which enable the ethnographic writer to elaborate on the stories gathered. Although I have firmly used the case study methodology for my research, my approach to my writing has elements from ethnographic and narrative writing; I have used Ethnography but with a little 'e'. My writing is descriptive and makes use of narrative of my own and my participants' stories which has strengthened my data analysis. Therefore, when writing up my thesis, I have made use of a narrative approach and used an ethnographic writing style expressed as a confessional tale supporting the reality captured in my data.

The process of my data collection was capturing the experiences of my participants, from simply absorbing the culture and ethos of the college and my informants, and catching the genuine language and terms used by real people. An important initial aspect in my data analysis strategy was to 'immerse' myself in my data, shaping it in order to categorise it and order it. This involved re-formatting my evidence into images and graphics, for example, to be able to scrutinise it, make connections and understand any complex patterns or relationships. I felt the richness of the experiences of my participants and I was able to capture that, through their own words. The natural language and values of the participants is unique to each setting and the challenge for the researcher is to be able to frame those selections of evidence to make sure the case study is accessible for everyone and is genuine (Lincoln and Guba, 2002).

One way this was achieved was through producing a series of vignettes. A vignette is a short story about theoretical characters in a specified scenario often used as a technique to elicit interpretations, clarification or discussion as part of a data collection technique (Finch, 1987). However, according to Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014) vignettes can also be used as a data analysis technique allowing researchers to be creative in their writing, straying from traditional discourse whilst staying fully embedded in the data. Case studies can make use of vignettes to illustrate a snapshot of what is going on within a case and can be produced in episodes or themes to illustrate a particular issue (Stake, 1995). I decided to make use of vignettes in my discussions chapter to reveal the genuine aspects of my case study, to portray specific themes that come through from my data and to present the analysis of the data collected. The rationale for the choice of vignettes was to show a focused description of key moments that were observed or recorded during the data collection period of the study, that exposed the thematic codes from my data analysis (Miles, Huberman and Saldaña, 2014).

Vignettes can be used to describe an action or extended moments, stories within fieldwork, capturing these moments, into descriptive prose rooted in the data giving a detailed picture but with a wider perspective (Miles, Huberman and Saldaña, 2014). Ely et al (1997, p. 70) states that “vignettes are composites that encapsulate what the researcher finds through the fieldwork”. It was the use of the vignettes as primary foci that allowed strong themes to emerge during my discussions chapter. Blodgett et al (2011) make use of vignettes in their research specifically to present the voices of marginalised community members and argue that vignettes should be in a qualitative researcher’s methodological toolkit. Blodgett et al (2011) support the use of vignettes as a narrative approach arguing that the genuine words or stories presented allow others to understand their lived experience. This is exactly what I wanted to achieve for the reader to gain a sense of what was being experienced by my participants. However, Blodgett et al (2011) warn that a difficulty when using vignettes is that they will naturally encompass interpretations by the author in their construction.

As part of my data analysis vignettes were used to illustrate the critical incidents. Each vignette was presented on card to my supervisors, with one side clearly illustrating the critical incident, gathered from a method of data collection, and the other side outlining the contextual information and my initial analysis. This was to minimise my interference or bias in the construction, interpretation or analysis, as recommended by Ely et al (1997) and Spalding and Phillips (2007). My initial analysis of each critical incident was essential to ensure that my first thoughts were recorded before presenting to my supervisors to observe and make comment with fresh eyes. However, my supervisors did not look at my first thoughts until they had read the vignettes through themselves and made their judgments. By presenting my vignettes to an audience I was able to gain an independent viewpoint on the incidents and was then able to challenge their views and my own initial analysis.

This challenge and fresh look at my identified critical incidents was fundamental in helping me to see my case study with a renewed perspective. Our collaborative discussions enabled me to deepen my analysis and add to my initial first thoughts. It was only by using this method that I was able to see that each incident could be observed as sitting on a continuum; a continuum that encompasses and mirrors the individual themes and issues presented in each individual vignette. I initially perceived my vignettes as independent snapshots bringing my data analysis together from a combination of methods, but it became clear that there was a previously unseen element of evidence, a transition of behaviour that mirrored the chronological approach of my findings chapter that could be explored (Ely et al, 1997). After the meeting I decided to look to see if there

was a chronological pattern between the critical incidents. This was not the case. They did not necessarily occur in chronological order but rather the vignettes began to thread thematically.

4.8 Summary

My positionality sits firmly within the interpretivist paradigm since it is my view that research should start with individuals. The research is question-driven from my professional practice to explore the experiences of individuals. The chapter states the research questions driving the research forward and provides my conceptual framework as a strategy to help advance my project. A Venn-style diagram presentation of the conceptual framework was used as an illustrative structure of the relationships to be explored as recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994). The distinctions made are a result of the literature suggesting that policymakers, teachers and students are affected and bound together as a result of the D grade policy. However, it is the SMT that have a direct influence on teachers and students through their decision making and policy implementation.

In line with Yin (2009; 2012; 2013), I have argued that an embedded single case study approach was most appropriate for my research. The research setting was identified as a general FE college in Essex. The participants form different groups as subunits of analysis; maths students¹, maths teacher¹, English students², English teachers² and maths and English students³ (see figure 4.3). All student participants had to be aged 16-19, hold a GCSE grade D in the subject and have attempted to achieve a GCSE grade C at least twice before. All teacher participants had to be currently teaching GCSE maths or English at the FE college.

My embedded single case study uses a range of methods to capture the experiences of my participants including; interviews, observations, surveys and collection of field notes. Table 4.3 clarifies how each data collection method directly contributes to answering a specific research question. In figure 4.5 a map of timings of each data collection point is presented explaining how the data collected in this way helped to synthesise my findings across my embedded single case design. My data analysis process was explored through my continuous repetition of the method of collecting, preparing, immersing and coding the data as shown in figure 4.7. In agreement with Richardson (2000) and Elbow (1983) I discussed the link between thinking and writing which not only advanced my own understanding of my research by also enhanced my data analysis. The narrative approach to make sense of my participants' experiences and tell their stories is detailed and aligned with Thomas (2016) in case study research. The use of vignettes is justified

to ensure that my case study moves from the descriptive to the analytical and shows how the little stories in the fieldwork build the big story of the case study (Miles, Huberman and Saldaña, 2014; Stake 1995).

Chapter five tells 'the story of 2016 – 2017' as it occurred. It brings together all the data collected from my fieldnotes, documentary evidence, observations, interviews and surveys using a narrative approach.

Chapter Five

The story of 2016-2017

Chapter Five

5.1 Introduction

Having set out the design for this research in chapter four it is now appropriate to turn to the data so this chapter provides a full narrative account of participants' experiences during the academic year 2016-17 as a result of the D grade Policy.

The findings are presented chronologically and are broken down into the academic terms to show key events across the year clearly.

The chapter is outlined as shown below;

- Part One: Autumn term 1st half: *September 2016 – October 2016*
- Part Two: Autumn term 2nd half: *November 2016 – December 2016*
- Part Three: Spring term 1st half: *January 2017 – February 2017*
- Part Four: Spring term 2nd half: *March 2017 – April 2017*
- Part Five: Summer term 1st half: *May 2017 – June 2017*
- Part Six: Summer term 2nd half: *July 2017 – August 2017*



Reflection: After many months of struggling with various structures I was still unsure as to the best way to present the large quantity of data I had collected for my case. Until a supervisory meeting with large sheets of paper and many post-it notes where I had a eureka moment. I could finally see through all the data and view it not just as the researcher but as a reader. It became clear to me that I owed it to my research and the reader to tell the story of 2016-2017 showing clearly what was experienced within that year. Therefore, this chapter is written with a narrative approach, intending to provide an interesting and thought-provoking true account of the data collection year.

The diagram (Figure 5.1) was created to summarise and act as a reference point for the life-cycle of the case study and what data collection methods were used during those time periods.

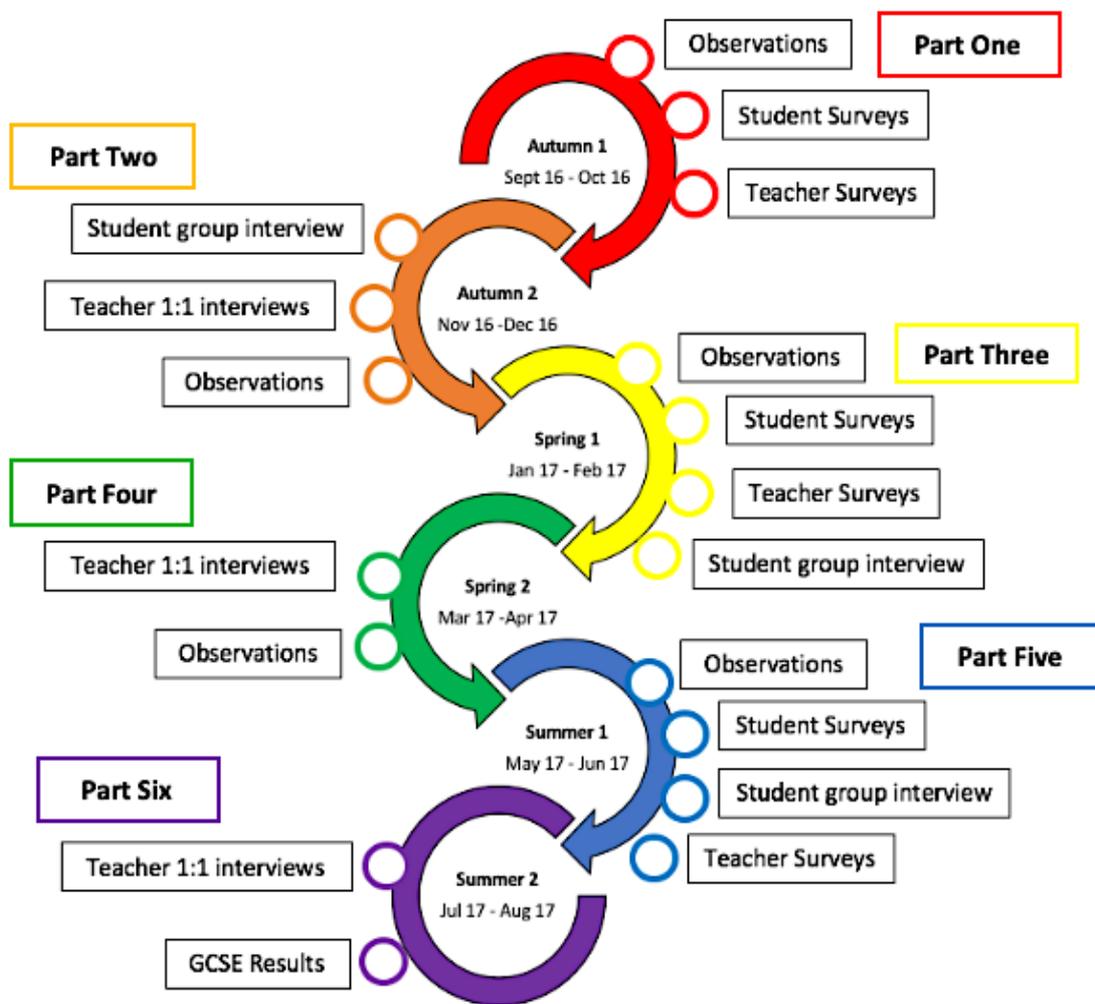
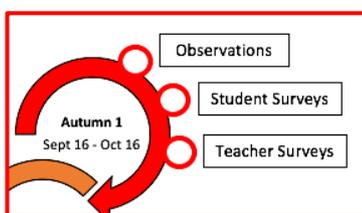


Figure 5.1: Data collection timeline

Each section of the data collection timeline has been presented in turn outlining results from the data methods employed.



5.2 Part One: Autumn term 1st half
September 2016 – October 2016

I joined the college staff on GCSE results day on Thursday 25th August 2016 to see their previous 2015 – 2016 cohorts receive their GCSE results. At the start of the academic year 2016-2017 staff at the college were feeling optimistic as there was evidence from the results (Table 5.1) of an improvement on last year’s grade C pass rate.

	% of students in 2015 - 2016	% of students in 2014 – 2015
Achieving grade C in maths	25.1%	6.9%
Achieving grade C in English	14.2%	5.1%

Table 5.1. Comparison of % of Grade C's in 2015 to 2016

Eloise the Head of maths and English and her Deputy Head, Mae, were very happy about the results and described it as a “big” improvement on last year’s results. It was clear to see why they would feel that way as they had more than doubled their percentage of students achieving a grade C or above. They had already identified 40 maths and 28 English students who will be put forward for the GCSE November exam resit to boost the 2015 results.

However, I cannot fail to reflect on the fact that their “big” improvement shows that only 25.1% of maths and only 14.2% of English students managed to achieve the C grade threshold in 2015 and in reality this is a low percentage of students. Figures 5.2 and 5.3 show how the case study college compares with other colleges in the locality of the East of England, all General Further Education providers (GFE) and all providers, including Sixth Form Colleges, who are bound by the D grade policy.

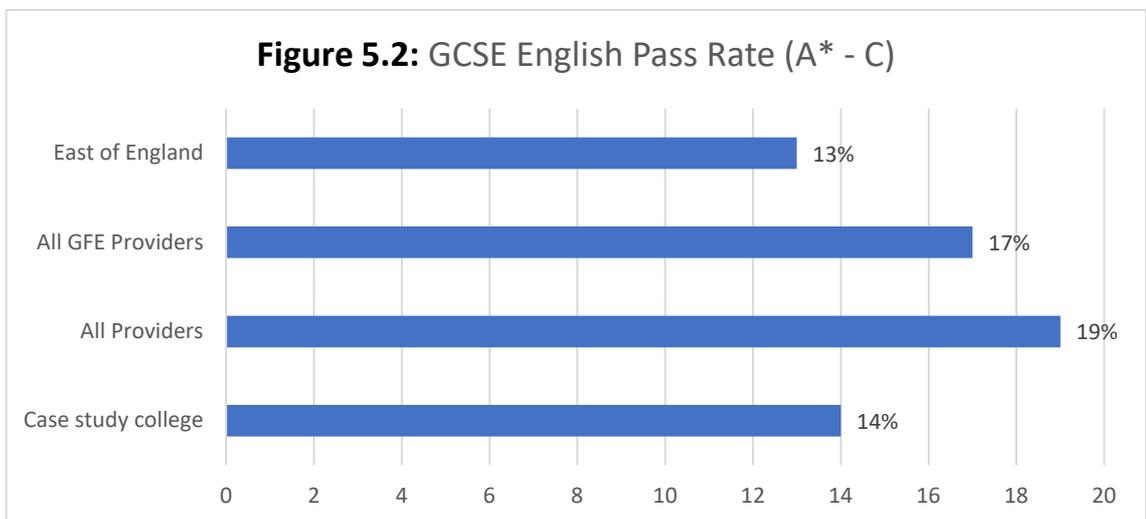


Figure 5.2 GCSE English Pass Rate (A*-C) Source: MiDES ILR R14 2015/16

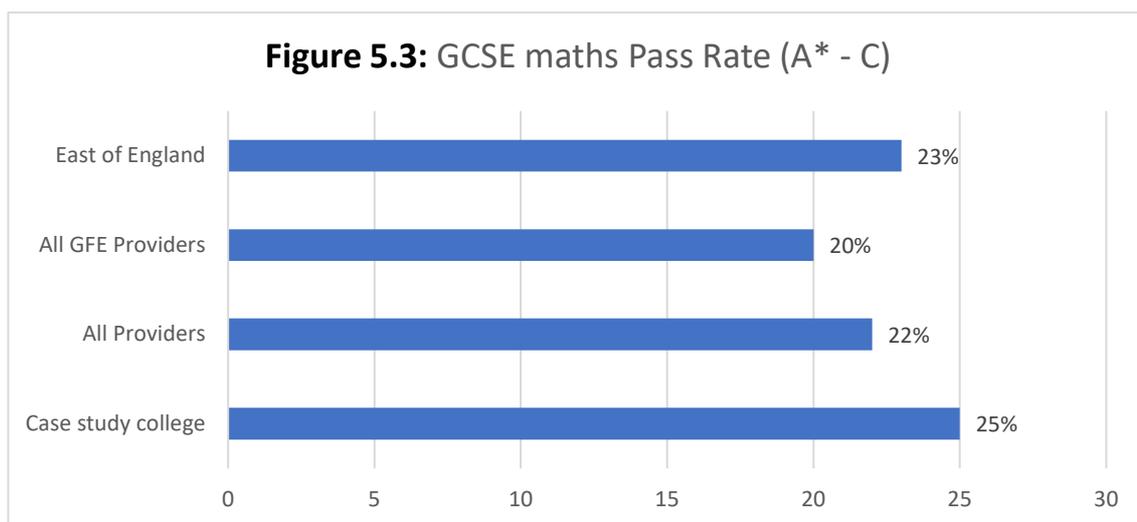


Figure 5.3: GCSE maths Pass Rate (A*-C) Source: MiDES ILR R14 2015/16

When compared to other providers, it can be seen why the teaching staff at the case study college started the year feeling very positive. In maths their pass rate is above the average not only for all providers in the East of England but all providers across England. In English though there is clearly still a lot of work for them to do in order to meet the average pass rate for all providers but they are still above average for the East of England. Again, the figures show there is a low pass rate for all students resitting their GCSE in maths and English and the probability of achieving a grade A* - C is very small. Although, it is reported that motivation in mathematics is lower and largely gets a more negative reaction than English, mathematics has the higher pass rate (DfE, 2017, p. 8).

Despite the college's improvement in GCSE pass rates its Level 2 Functional Skills results were low, therefore it has made the decision to enrol all students who have a level 1 Functional Skills straight onto the GCSE resit course rather than complete a level 2 Functional Skill or a bridging course to work towards the GCSE. Their justification for this decision is that;

Eloise: It will help to improve our value added and ultimately show a bigger improvement in our levels of achievement

This decision presents curious consequences. A level 1 Functional Skill is equivalent to only "half a GCSE at grade D/E" (Pearson, 2018) therefore this presents the question of whether is it fair or ethical to enrol a student, who is potentially only achieving half a GCSE grade E, for a GCSE exam in order for the college to show an increase in value added data or if indeed it is feasible for a number of these students to achieve a grade C/4. This decision will also result in the college having yet another increase in the number of students who need to resit their GCSE giving the college practical and logistical

problems. Nonetheless, the decision will also result in many students who would not necessarily have had the opportunity to sit a GCSE, getting the chance to achieve the required grade C.

The students returned to college in the week commencing Monday 5th September 2016 to begin their GCSE resit year and were welcomed by confusion in their first week. Due to some timetabling and grouping errors students walked in and out of rooms unsure where they were supposed. Some class sizes were too large and some too small. Eloise and Mae sent out messages and emails to the students to correct the situation but many students did not attend their first GCSE sessions and Eloise was worried that “it is too late - there are now negative impressions of maths and English at the college for those students”.

I observed the maths group’s first lesson of the year.

The maths class was due to start at 14:15, however Michelle, the teacher did not leave the staffroom until 14:15 and students came to the staffroom door to ask if they should be expecting her as she was not in the room yet. There were twenty-one students present but there were twenty-seven expected. The twenty-one students sat at their desks, still with bags on their backs or scattered on the tables. Michelle handed out exercise books and asked the students to get their pens out and write the date and title. There were some groans from some members of the class, but they opened their books on cue and began to copy from the board as if they were back in school. Instead of standing at the front of the room Michelle sat down and progressed by going through a PowerPoint presentation of mathematical terms, which the students passively and quietly copied from the screen. From time to time, Michelle asked short questions, apparently to check understanding. However, the students were more concerned with copying as many notes as they could from the overwhelming information on the slides, before Michelle pressed the key to move to the next slide. They were not fully engaging in the learning. After 25 minutes the students were bored and checking phones and Michelle was beginning to answer her own questions as only one student tended to offer a response. No-one was giving the impression that they wanted to be there.

In a bid to change the mood Michelle handed out mini-whiteboards and asked questions about place value. There was some low-level chatting as she explained some of the rules and she felt compelled to declare “I have to tell you this because the scheme of work says so, but I don’t really want to”. She then played a song about Place Value to the music from a Taylor Swift song, to which the students responded with roars of laughter. Michelle also began to laugh and joked, “download on iTunes now!”. To end the lesson

Michelle asked the students to draw a diagram by displaying negative encouragement such as, “As sad as it sounds... write it down”.

All in all, during the observation the students were bombarded with mathematical terms which they rushed to copy down. Learning was not consolidated by the teacher who mocked her subject in a bid to empathise with her students. Michelle was observed by the Teaching and Learning team at the college in October 2016 and was graded as unsatisfactory.



After reflecting on my observation of Michelle’s, I couldn’t help but acknowledge that the lesson itself was unsatisfactory and there was little maths learning taking place. Was this Michelle’s fault? During the lesson Michelle was apologetic to the students about what they were having to do and gave the message that she didn’t want to give them these things to do but it was in the scheme of work, so they had to. Are teachers not trusted to teach in their own way or do they have to follow the scheme of work exactly? The top-down approaches resonate in the classroom. Michelle felt bound to teach maths in a specific way set out by the scheme of work, which she clearly did not feel comfortable to do as the observation shows.

In October I handed the students a survey to complete to capture their mindsets early on in the academic year. The students were happy to complete the survey. It seemed to be a welcome distraction from maths work and they were excited to tell me what they thought.

Table 5.2 shows a colour-coded overview of their survey responses.

Colour-coded student responses to maths mindset surveys (1) (See appendix III) *student = is in maths and English group										
Red = Fixed Mindset Green = Growth Mindset Orange = equal split of fixed and growth mindset (Blue = Absent)										
22 out of 27 maths Students responded	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10
Name										

Marie	Disagree	Disagree	Agree a lot	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree a lot	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree
Malcolm	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Disagree
Melissa	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree a lot	Disagree
Maria	Disagree a lot	Disagree a lot	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree a lot	Disagree a lot	Agree a lot	Disagree a lot	Disagree
*Belle	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
Megan	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree a lot
Madison	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree a lot	Agree	Agree
Molly	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree a lot	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree
Maddie	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree a lot	Disagree a lot	Agree	Agree	Agree	Disagree a lot
Matt	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Disagree
*Bettina	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree
Mason	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Disagree
*Barak	Disagree	Disagree a lot	Agree a lot	Agree a lot	Disagree a lot	Disagree	Agree a lot	Agree	Agree a lot	Disagree a lot
Monica	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree a lot	Disagree	Agree a lot
Mikayla	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree a lot	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree
Melanie	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree a lot	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree
*Brandon	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree a lot	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree a lot
Maggie	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree a lot	Agree	Agree a lot	Agree a lot	Disagree	Agree a lot
Marcus	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
Mary	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree a lot	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree a lot	Disagree
Max	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Disagree
Mitchell	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Disagree
Miranda	Absent									
Marissa	Absent									
*Bart	Absent									
Moses	Absent									
Myra	Absent									

Table 5.2: maths mindset surveys (1)

It is apparent from table 5.2 that the majority of students in the maths class who took the survey are recording a growth mindset towards maths at this time, with only two students showing a fixed mindset and two displaying neither a fixed or a growth mindset towards maths. One of the students showing a fixed mindset, Brandon, is one of five students who is in both the maths and English groups and in particular is disengaged during the maths lessons he attends before attending his English lesson. On the day he took the mindset survey in maths and displayed a fixed mindset, he was expected to attend his English lesson with Elsa at 15:30 but he did not turn up and was absent from the English lesson when the English mindset surveys were taken.

The table is quite revealing in exposing where the students are showing more of a fixed or a growth mindset by presenting individual responses to the questions. Closer inspection of the table shows that the majority of the students responded with a fixed mindset to question eight with 73% agreeing 'I like learning best when I do it perfectly without any mistakes'.

This is interesting since it shows that the majority of the students are sensitive to the fact that there is a right or a wrong answer. When they get something wrong, they are taking

it personally as a lack of their academic ability, therefore revealing their level of academic self-efficacy. In comparison, the majority of the students responded with a growth mindset to question seven, with 95% agreeing '*I like learning from my mistakes*'.

If we consider the difference in the two statements above, we can see that the students are being clear that they prefer learning with no mistakes and just getting everything right because it shows that it is easy. However, they still do like learning from their mistakes because they do want to improve. This attitude is also reflected in the growth mindset responses to question four, with 95% agreeing '*No matter how much intelligence you have, you can always change it quite a bit*'.

By agreeing to this statement, the students are showing that they are open to learning and do not see a limit to academic ability, which is vitally important when resitting a GCSE because they have not reached the desired pass mark. Only one student, Belle, disagreed with the statement declaring that she sees intelligence as something that is fixed and cannot be changed. Like Brandon, Belle is one of the five students who is in both the maths and English groups.

The first English lesson began with a starter activity whilst the register was being taken and the teacher, Elsa, attempted to learn the students' names. There were twelve students present at the start of the lesson with Erika and Erum arriving shortly after. However, there were sixteen expected on the register. Two students, Ewan and Eamon, were very vocal complaining "I can't be arsed", "It's boring". Elsa remained enthusiastic and upbeat ignoring the students' negativity and focused the students on their future exam and the controlled assessments they will need to complete in a short space of time. The lesson focused on the book 'Touching the void', but the book itself did not feature in the lesson at all. Instead Elsa used a DVD explaining "We can't go through the whole book, we don't have time". The teaching continued with Elsa playing the DVD and stopping at key moments to spoon-feed information to the students which they will need for their first assessment. The questions were answered by just two students, Eric and Elton. Elsa and the rest of the group were happy to rely on them for answers and were daydreaming, looking at their pens, hands, papers or chewing gum.

The students appeared entranced while the DVD was on, but most were not writing notes and Eamon still had his head in his hands. Despite the story having a serious subject of a man facing uncertain death, many students were laughing and not taking it seriously, especially Ewan and Eamon. Elsa challenged this behaviour and remained positive as she reminded them of the seriousness of the story. Fourteen students were in the lesson in total meaning three students were absent. Elsa created a positive atmosphere for the

students but there were clear protests from some students in the form of not taking the work seriously or only engaging on a superficial level. Elsa was observed by the Teaching and Learning team at the college in October and was graded as satisfactory.

In the same vein as the maths mindset surveys, in October during an English lesson I handed the students a survey to capture their mindsets. I had some students who were taking the survey for the second time, as they were also in the previous maths group, so I made it clear that they should respond in the way that they honestly felt at that moment and they should not try to remember what they had answered previously. For the students taking it for the first time, similar to the maths students, they were again happy to complete the survey and read the questions with interest. Table 5.3 presents a colour-coded breakdown of the English group’s mindset survey responses.

Colour-coded student responses to English mindset surveys (1) (See appendix III) *student = is in maths and English group Red = Fixed Mindset Green = Growth Mindset Orange = equal split of fixed and growth mindset (Blue = Absent)										
13 out of 16 English Students responded	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10
Name										
Ella	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Disagree
Eric	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree
Ethan	Disagree a lot	Disagree a lot	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree a lot	Disagree	Agree a lot	Disagree
*Belle	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree a lot	Disagree
Edward	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree
*Bettina	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree
Ewan	Disagree a lot	Disagree a lot	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree a lot	Agree
*Barak	Disagree a lot	Disagree a lot	Agree a lot	Disagree a lot	Disagree a lot	Agree	Agree a lot	Agree a lot	Agree a lot	Agree a lot
Elton	Disagree a lot	Disagree a lot	Agree a lot	Agree a lot	Disagree a lot	Agree	Disagree	Agree a lot	Agree a lot	Disagree
Evander	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Disagree
Eamon	Agree a lot	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree a lot	Agree a lot	Agree	Disagree
Erika	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Disagree
Erum	Disagree	Disagree	Agree a lot	Agree	Agree a lot	Agree a lot	Agree a lot	Agree a lot	Agree a lot	Agree a lot
Enrico	Absent									
*Bart	Absent									
*Brandon	Absent									

Table 5.3: English mindset surveys (1)

Similar to the maths surveys, the majority of the English students are recording a growth mindset with only Eamon showing a fixed mindset and Erika showing neither a growth or a fixed mindset towards English. This is interesting when we consider their individual behaviours so far in this half of the Autumn term. During my first observation of their English lesson Erika was one of the students who arrived late and since then has become a serial late attender including the day of the mindset survey. Eamon was very disengaged at the beginning of term and has continued to complain and protest during his English work, therefore when reflecting on his behaviour it is not surprising that he is reporting a fixed mindset. What perhaps is surprising is that his partner in crime during lessons, Ewan, is not reporting a fixed mindset but clearly believes that his intelligence is not fixed and that anyone can learn new things (Gonida, Kiosseoglou and Leondari, 2006).

Data from table 5.2 can be compared to the data in table 5.3 which shows similarities in the students' responses to particular questions. Question eight, as in the maths surveys, sparked the most fixed mindset reaction from the students with 85% (eleven out of thirteen) of the students agreeing '*I like learning best when I do it perfectly without any mistakes*'.

Maths is quite often referred to as a black or white subject, the response is either right or wrong but the way that the majority of students had a sensitive reaction to not making mistakes in English is intriguing since it is a creative subject in which the 'right' answer may take a variety of forms. This allows students more freedom in their individual answers but this is clearly not how the majority of students feel about the subject (Ablard and Mills, 1996).

What stands out from table 5.3 is that all of the students who took the survey responded with a growth mindset by agreeing with Q9: '*The harder I work at something, the better I become*'.

By agreeing, or agreeing a lot with this statement, the students are clearly showing that when they were in that English lesson with Elsa at that moment, they believed that their hard work would pay off. All of the students are showing a positive attitude to their work and a belief in improving, which is fundamental when working on something where you have previously failed. This unanimous positive attitude is reflected in Elsa's enthusiastic attitude to her teaching, which is in stark contrast to Michelle's unenthusiastic attitude (Rattan, Good and Dweck, 2011). Teachers are role models and although Michelle means well by empathising with the students and apologising for the fact that they have to do the work again, the learner is likely to mirror this negative attitude to the work.

Whereas, in English, Elsa’s positive attitude and refusal to acknowledge the students’ protests is being reflected in the students’ attitude.

A perfect example of this is when we look at Belle’s mindset responses in more detail. Belle is taking her maths and English GCSE for the fourth time. Table 5.4 compares Belle’s responses in her first maths and English mindset surveys.

Belle’s colour-coded responses to maths and English mindset surveys (See appendix III)										
Red = Fixed Mindset Green = Growth Mindset										
Subject	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10
Maths	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree a lot	Disagree
English	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree a lot	Disagree

Table 5.4: Belle’s responses to maths and English mindset surveys

When we compare Belle’s reactions, we can see a strong fixed negative response when she is in her maths lesson. This is very interesting and we can see that Belle believes that, in maths, her intelligence is fixed, she can become better with hard work as seen in question nine, but her maths aptitude cannot change. In contrast Belle believes, in English, intelligence can change. Quihuis et al (2002) identified these students as mixed theorists as they display different mindsets in different academic domains. It could also be argued that Belle’s mindset is reflected in the contrasting teaching styles of her teachers. It is perhaps more concerning that Brandon’s fixed mindset in maths, then results in him often missing his following English lessons entirely. Rattan, Good and Dweck (2012) identified how teachers’ pedagogical approaches can affect students’ achievement.

If we now turn to the results from the teacher surveys in table 5.5 we can see some interesting responses to specific mindset questions. Teachers are positive role models for their students who support and facilitate learning. They see students grow in confidence and achieve, so it is fair to expect teachers to answer questions positively to reflect a more growth mindset. As noted by Murphy and Dweck (2010) a person’s mindset can affect behaviour towards others. What is clear from table 5.5 is that at the beginning of the academic year the GCSE teachers are self-reporting as holding a growth mindset overall but are identifying with a fixed mindset towards the students’ ability to learn and overall views about intelligence.

Colour-coded teacher responses to mindset survey (1) (See appendix IV)										
Red = Fixed Mindset Green = Growth Mindset										
Name	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10
Maths Teachers Mindset responses										
Michelle	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree
Mark	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Disagree
Mick	Disagree a lot	Disagree a lot	Agree a lot	Agree a lot	Disagree a lot	Disagree a lot	Agree	Disagree	Agree a lot	Disagree a lot
Mae	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree a lot	Disagree a lot	Agree	Disagree
Marco	Disagree a lot	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Agree a lot	Disagree
English Teachers Mindset responses										
Elsa	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree a lot	Disagree a lot
Emma	Disagree a lot	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree a lot
Emily	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
Ezekiel	Disagree a lot	Disagree a lot	Agree a lot	Agree a lot	Disagree	Disagree a lot	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree a lot
Eloise	Disagree a lot	Disagree a lot	Agree a lot	Agree a lot	Disagree a lot	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree a lot

Table 5.5: Teacher responses to mindset surveys (1)

By focusing attention on each subject individually it is clear that the English teachers have more of a fixed mindset conceptualisation of intelligence when they start to consider their students directly, rather than their views on learning and intelligence in general. Question seven is particularly interesting as four out of the five English teachers disagreed with Q7: ‘*Students like learning from their mistakes*’.

This shows a direct conflict with the responses gained from both the maths and English students who were surveyed with a significant 89% of them agreeing with the statement in Q7, declaring that they do like learning from their mistakes. Elsa is one of the teachers who disagreed with the statement affirming in her view that her students do not like learning from their mistakes. However, 77% of her students oppose her view as they responded by agreeing with the statement showing that they have a growth mindset approach and like learning from their mistakes so want to improve and get better. However, their positive outlook to their learning is clearly not being perceived by Elsa and the other English teachers. This is interesting when we think back to the observations in Elsa’s lesson and we can see that the protests by some students are having a direct impact on Elsa’s mindset and her view of her students learning. She is feeling those protests, confirming a mismatch between student and teacher reactions.

This view also appears to be echoed by Eloise who only teaches one GCSE English class a week but is the Head of Department for maths and English. Eloise is responsible not only for her one class but for the results of all the students across the college and it is noteworthy that her survey responses showed a fixed mindset perspective when considering the students learning, the most telling being her response to Q9 where she disagreed that ‘*The harder students work at something, the better they become*’.

Eloise was the only member of staff out of the maths and English department to disagree with the statement. This is illustrative of her management perspective of the overall results and the despair that she feels. She is stuck between the pressure of the D grade policy itself and the pressures of senior management, and her maths and English colleagues and the students themselves. It is interesting to consider how the fixed mindset view and negative opinion of the students' abilities to learn may manifest itself throughout the rest of academic year. We are seeing evidence of how students' behaviours are reflected in their teachers. Therefore, it stands to reason that attitudes of senior management and curriculum managers like Eloise, are also being reflected.

During the first half of the autumn term the college made use of its twitter account knowing that this was a way to communicate with its students about maths and English which was likely to reach students. However, the college was sending what can only be described as mixed messages to the students by retweeting the ongoing debate about the D grade policy:

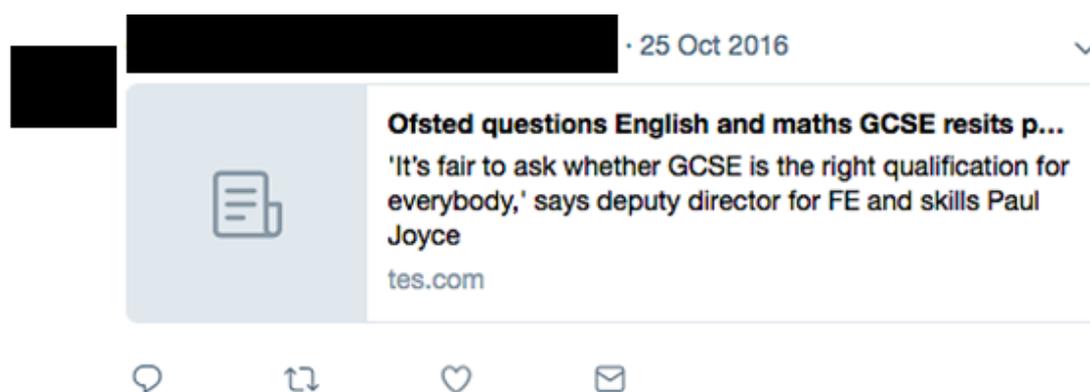
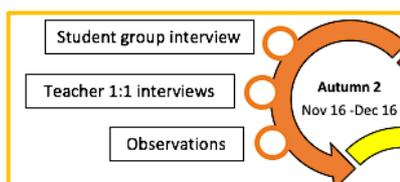


Figure 5.4: Tweet from Colleges twitter account

This tweet was flashed directly to the students suggesting that higher powers, such as Ofsted, are questioning the resit policy along with others such as the Deputy Director of FE and Skills. Many of the students would not have chosen to resit their GCSE and have doubted why they need to keep resitting, so by showing the students information such as the tweet above, the college is showing that the students are not alone in doubting why they are doing it, further adding to any negativity that surrounds maths and English.

The current position shows that the college currently has 494 students aged 16-19 years old taking their GCSE English and 489 students aged 16-19 taking their GCSE maths. The focus of senior management and Eloise is to improve behaviour in maths and English lessons by being visual to the students and conducting drop-in as well as formal observations. Maths and English teachers view this as a mistrust in them personally and

they perceive it as a form of surveillance. In staff meetings Eloise reminds everyone that they need to continue to get to know their students, set and monitor targets and keep on top of their marking. In one particular meeting Eloise had explained that all maths and English teachers need to be teaching twenty-four hours and that everyone should expect more hours to appear on their timetable. These extra hours would be a mixture of workshops and teaching entry level maths and English. This issue changed the tone of the meeting since it was a sore point with staff who felt as though they already had too many hours because of the types of learners and subjects they teach. However, compared to the rest of the college, the maths and English teachers are under hours; for example a teacher teaching a BTEC vocational qualification is expected to teach thirty hours.



5.3 Part two: Autumn term 2nd half: November 2016 – December 2016

As the second half of the Autumn term began the English department was reflecting on attendance in GCSE classes overall and how the students had performed in their first controlled assessment which contributes 15% towards their final GCSE English grade. Eloise made the decision that any student who had not completed their planning sheet or was absent from the assessment, would not be chased to do so, unlike in previous years when they would have been. Her hope was that it would “send a message to the students that the college has high expectations when it comes to the English GCSE and that it is their responsibility to work hard and put in the effort to achieve the grade C”. This decision however, resulted in fewer completed assessments than the college was hoping for but overall the assessment marks were at a higher standard than it had seen in the previous year. Attendance rates were low in GCSE maths and English lessons across all departments compared to the attendance in chosen vocational areas, which is at 90%. The numbers in red highlight in which subject the attendance was lowest.

Department	Department Percentage (%) in GCSE maths	Department Percentage (%) in GCSE English
Science & ICT	80	88
Hair, Beauty and Hospitality	81	81
Health childcare	79	80
Business and Travel	81	83
Art and Media	85	87
Sport and Public Services	74	80
Electrical and Engineering	79	78
Construction	77	78

Table 5.6 Attendances for GCSE maths and English by Department in November

What is apparent in the table is that attendance is regularly lower in GCSE maths than in GCSE English although attendance is low in both subjects. This is in line with what I have found in my individual maths and English groups. Closer inspection of table 5.6 also shows that the lowest attending students come from the vocational areas Electrical and Engineering and Construction which have been reported by teaching staff as some of most disengaged and worst behaved classes. Eloise described her feeling of conflict that she is battling with in her position, in a conversation with me in the staffroom, Eloise explained:

“Everything has to go well, the controlled assessments... the attendance... the lesson observations... otherwise it will look bad. If it goes wrong, it is my fault. But I’ve had a lot of students in tears this year already saying, ‘I can’t do it, I can’t do it!’”

We can see from Eloise’s comments that she is struggling with the position in which finds herself. She is feeling the pressure from senior management in their expectation of improving results, but she has empathy for the students because she is on the front line facing emotional students who are fraught and distressed about having to resit their GCSE. Eloise finds herself in conflict as professional accountability and trust is being tested due to problematic top-down approaches (Czerniawski, 2011a). Eloise can be seen as passing her ‘test’ of professional responsibility as she feels obliged to notify all Curriculum Area Managers that it will become their responsibility to chase and increase attendance in their departments for maths and English and try and bring attendance in line with vocational areas. Eloise’s reaction is evidence of the control from the top-down and high-trust accountability (Czerniawski, 2011a).

Behaviour in classes had also been a problem with one hundred and forty-three Cause for Concerns (CFCs) being sent to students' homes, most of which were construction and sport students. Due to the cocktail of poor behaviour and low attendance, Eloise had considered going back on her decision made at the beginning of the year, to offer students who have a grade E-G the opportunity to sit a Functional Skills level 2. However, through her enquiry she identified that this would affect too many students and therefore she said further analysis would be needed and the Level 2 functional Skill option would still not be offered. Eloise has an interesting and complex set of conflicting demands in her position leading to uncertainty about how she should proceed and questioning whose needs must be prioritised.

The main aim of the case study is to explore how the D grade policy is being experienced by 16-19-year olds in an FE college. Therefore, at the start of each unstructured student interview I started with the statement 'I would like you to tell me about your GCSE maths/English resit...' depending on whether I was interviewing the maths or English class.

On the day of the first maths unstructured group interview, I reminded Michelle that I needed thirty minutes to interview the class in their usual classroom at the end of her lesson. There were eighteen students present out of the twenty-seven students on the register. Michelle was happy for this to happen and helpfully agreed to finish her lesson early to allow me plenty of time with the students. The students were also aware of this arrangement. However, when there was only ten minutes left of the lesson it was clear to both me and the students that Michelle was not going to finish the lesson early. What was also clear was that Michelle was not comfortable or willing to leave the room. She wanted to hear what the students had to say, declaring loudly, "Its ok, I don't mind what you say". As a result, the students were very disgruntled, some started to leave as Michelle wasn't leaving and the interview felt uncomfortable and rushed.

Despite Michelle being present when I used my leading sentence, 'I would like you to tell me about your maths resit', Brandon wanted to be vocal and honest and whispered loudly for all to hear the word "Shit". This was followed by laughter and nodding of agreement from the rest of the group. I was surprised at his raw honesty in front of Michelle. Michelle was defensive and before any further student could add their own comment she sarcastically joked, "yeah but my teaching is amazing" trying to confirm that Brandon is referring to the GCSE resit itself not her teaching. I turned to Michelle and asked her to leave so I could have some time with the students on my own. She again responded with, "no honestly I don't care what they say, its fine". I decided to continue with the interview, despite the rushed and negative atmosphere in the room and asked my leading sentence again.

Interviewer: So, sorry ok could you all tell me about your maths resit...

(There seemed to be a lot of conferring, whispering and chatting amongst themselves before a few spokespeople felt happy to share their views with me)

Melissa: Its better than last year but it's still not great

Maria: Yeah it is but I still want to hang myself

Barak: *(laughter)* bit dramatic

Maria: Well I do.

Melanie: I find it better but it's still too hard, it's killing me

Matt: It's ok

Molly: I just need to pass it

Marcus: Let's face it we don't really have a choice anyway so that's it

(Students rushed to get their things together and go – Michelle sat at the front of the room listening)

Mikayla: I just really need it cos if I don't, I'm just going to die

Monica: Also, you need it cos if you don't you won't get a job so literally everything depends on it

Mason: I just can't be bothered, it's too hard

Out of the eighteen students present, eleven students in total made a comment during the interview. The rest didn't make a comment but just a series of short utterances such as, 'yeah', 'dunno', 'whatever' and ultimately voted with their feet and left the room. Michelle continued to pretend to shuffle paper and not listen to the comments. Three of the students, Mikayla, Melanie and Maria, shared exaggerated views of their resit using language linking to death; "I want to hang myself", "It's killing me" and "I'm just going to die". The students dramatic use of language is an indication of the level of despair they are feeling, and this is being further exacerbated by the presence of the maths teacher remaining in the room. The students on the whole had a shared despair, exposed through the repetition of the word "need" and lack of choice. What is particularly interesting is that the overall response to my leading statement focused on the effects of achieving the end requirement of a pass or grade C not on the subject itself or the teaching, which is clearly what Michelle was predicting.

I decided to see if I could speak to Brandon on a one to one basis to delve deeper into his initial shocking comment ("shit") at the beginning of the group interview.

Interviewer: Brandon, thank you for your honesty earlier.
Brandon: Sorry, I just hate it
Interviewer: So, how motivated are you to get your grade C?
Brandon: Not at all
Interviewer: Not at all?
Brandon: I'm not. I've resit it so many times I have just given up
Interviewer: How many times?
Brandon: Waaay too many times... I don't even need it, I get it is something to help but I don't need it, I've just lost all motivation its horrible, I hate it, I can't take it anymore

Brandon was resitting his GCSE maths and English alongside his Media vocational course. At the start of academic year Brandon achieved a Level 2 in maths and English on his entry diagnostic tests. However, his latest GCSE grade in both subjects was a grade E. His highest achievement was a grade D. Therefore, under the D grade policy Brandon had no choice but to continue to retake his GCSE exam over and over again and would be taking his eighth attempt this year. Brandon was also present in the English group interview but was not vocal and thanked me for listening to him.

In direct contrast to the maths interview, when I conducted the English unstructured student group interview the teacher wanted to leave the room, allowing the students to feel they could open up and be honest. Elsa explained to me that she didn't want to make the students feel they couldn't say anything to me and agreed to give me as much time with the students as they needed. Elsa clearly felt confident in herself. There were twelve students present for the interview out of the sixteen expected on the register. Again, I began with my leading statement:

Interviewer: I would like you to tell me about your English resit...
Eric: Easier than last year and I am pleased that I have an extra year to work on it
Eamon: Terrible... this is my fifth time, I've had so many different teachers, it's ridiculous
Belle: I don't want to do this again
Barak: I wanted to pass last year but I didn't
Ewan: I just want to get it done
Elton: Yeah, me too
Ethan: It's a good thing that we get a chance to do it again but it's getting to the point where you have done it so many times you do start to question if it's really worth it

Erika: I'm eighteen... I should be able to stop and choose
Interviewer: How do you feel it is going generally?
Edward: Yes, ok she said she is going to drag us through it
Interviewer: Do you believe her?
Edward: Yeah...

(Many other students in the room nodded along in agreement... 'yeah')

Ella: Yeah, we are doing the controlled assessments really fast
Evander: She is zooming through everything
Eamon: I'm trying harder with her, but I am still bored of it. I hate English

Although my introductory statement is met with negative statements, the students do not use dramatic language and their responses focus more on their motivation. A recurrent theme in the interviews is a sense amongst the students of a lack of motivation and a resistance to doing the qualification again. They are also expressing a desire to get it all over as quickly as possible as if it is a painful process. When they turn the interview towards their English teacher specifically, they speak of having trust in her and believing that she will be the one to 'drag' them through it, with a sense of belief and hope.

Overall there is a clear atmospheric difference between the maths and English interviews and analysis of the interview data demonstrates that the students are perceiving a different experience, depending upon whether they are studying GCSE maths or GCSE English. Arguably this might be expected as students often like some teachers and some subjects more than others. However, the data demonstrates that these experiences occur across the whole group and reflect in the behaviour of the teachers of the groups. There is a strong sense that although the majority of the students are resentful and unhappy about resitting their GCSE again, the students feed from the teacher's enthusiasm and positivity therefore their overall experience of the resit is very different. According to Raufelder, Scherber and Wood (2016) students who like a specific teacher are more likely to be intrinsically motivated and this type of motivation can buffer students against weaker student-teacher relationships and in turn the teachers negative impact on their learning.

If we now turn to the first interviews with the GCSE maths and English teachers, it is clear that they each have their own little ways of dealing with teaching and motivating the students, but this is having an effect on their attitude to teaching and motivation. Table 5.7 gives the individual responses from teachers unstructured 1:1 interviews and

the main recurring themes presented. Each interview began with the leading statement 'I would like you to tell me about teaching the maths/English resit...'

Teacher	Interview Data of maths teachers: Colour-coded themes: Student Barriers , Teacher Barriers , Management Barriers
Mae	<p><i>Fine with me,</i> <i>the size of the groups are 30 in a group so differentiation is a challenge,</i> <i>I really don't understand how some of them got a grade D they can't even subtract,</i> <i>I can't move on until they have the basics but running out of time,</i> <i>I'm up late marking,</i> <i>Certain groups are really negative, I have the challenge.. the worst behaved,</i> <i>Generally, they are quite positive but not high motivation but they will pass if they are positive do the work, grade D students should go up if motivated to work, it doesn't matter how hard I try, its got to come from them</i></p>
Mick	<p><i>Not bad, could always be better,</i> <i>Because of the students we have to deal with I need to keep improving what I'm doing,</i> <i>No motivation from the students they are either like... 'I'm really good at maths but can't be bothered' or they are like... 'I'm not good at maths so I can't be bothered', they generally feel like they can't do it,</i> <i>I want to improve my results, I'm going to do it or die trying basically and I've developed a hard skin and I'll keep trying to motivate them.</i></p>
Mark	<p><i>Not bad, ok, I got them settled now,</i> <i>I've told them all why it's important and I use myself as an example I tell them 'I didn't want to do it again either, but I did it and so can you',</i> <i>In the first few weeks I didn't do any obvious maths, I did Mindset stuff and how to deal with frustration and mistakes,</i> <i>There are attendance issues, you know I tell them everyone in the college thinks construction are a bunch of wankers, they think you're stupid and thick,</i> <i>I want to prove them wrong but you are living up to the stereotype!</i> <i>The marking is intense, I have 134 GCSE students have to do targets all the time for them, classes are too big, 26 is too many.</i></p>
Michelle	<p><i>I am trying to keep them entertained,</i> <i>I am trying to make it different and trying really hard not to bore them with algebra and things like that,</i> <i>I told them you can't just sit and coast like last year,</i> <i>they see it as hell they need to get through,</i> <i>there is not enough time we have 28 weeks and 4 weeks of that is mocks, just don't have time to go over things,</i> <i>I am working on building their confidence by only going over question topics they know and then build on them.</i></p>

Table 5.7: 1:1 interviews with maths Teachers (1)

A number of management barriers are identified as issues by the maths teachers which they are collectively struggling to overcome, including a lack of time, large group sizes and heavy workloads. However, concerns regarding the students' motivation and ability are more widespread amongst all the maths teachers and these concerns are reflected in their barriers to teach the students. All of the teachers have their own approach to teaching the resit course but all are clearly committed to teaching the students and have their own way to motivate them.

Two divergent approaches to teaching the resit come from Mick and Mark. Mick's interview focused on his determination to improve his own teaching and trying harder to motivate the students. He even exaggerates this by saying, '*I'm going to do it or die trying basically*'. His motivation appears to stem from improving his own results rather than making sure his students improve their maths skills or make the most of their chance to achieve the grade C. While Mick is focusing on improving his own teaching Mark is passing the responsibility firmly onto his students by trying to equip them with skills they will need to improve their resilience but also by quite forceful motivation techniques. Mark is using himself as an example to give the students a role model to aspire too but also, he is using emotional blackmail:

'you know I tell them everyone in the college thinks construction are a bunch of wankers, they think you're stupid and thick, I want to prove them wrong, but you are living up to the stereotype!'

Mark is being forceful here by trying to manipulate the students to believe that the rest of the college have a very negative perception of them. This is amplified by his strong use of language in order to motivate them to want to achieve their GCSE. It could also be perceived that Mark wants or needs to identify with the class cultural stereotypes in order to be accepted. It is interesting that Mark answers 'I want to prove them wrong' rather than assuming that the students would want to prove everyone wrong themselves. He is hoping that the students will become motivated by wanting to help him to prove everyone wrong, because he believes in them even if they don't believe in themselves. The 'stereotype' Mark is referring to is alluded to by Mae in her interview 'Certain groups are really negative, I have the challenge... the worst behaved', with the majority of her timetable comprised of construction and sport students. As we have seen in table 5.6 'Attendances for GCSE maths and English by Department in November', construction have some of the lowest attendances to their GCSE classes and combined with having the lion's share of Cause for Concerns, they have developed a reputation for themselves in the college. Mark is hoping that by making the students aware of this, they will find the motivation to want to challenge this stereotype.

Turning now to the interviews with the English teachers we can see some similarities to the maths teachers in their perception of the teaching and learning barriers. Table 5.8 lays out the interview responses of the unstructured 1:1 English Teacher interviews.

Teacher	<p>Interview Data of English teachers:</p> <p>Colour-coded themes: Student Barriers, Teacher Barriers, Management Barriers</p>
Emma	<p>Yeah, its ok, they are not really motivated though, Last year I felt like I had something to work with... this year they don't know what a verb is, I got my work cut out for me, The motivation comes from the fact that they might not have to do it again, They are full of excuses... 'I wasn't taught properly', got students who are on their 4th attempt, it's difficult to change their mindset... I have got to get around their mentality.</p>
Emily	<p>Mixed... the ethos is different in different groups, Hair are motivated, Sport don't care... construction don't care... I mean its alarming! Its complex... for some of them its just hard and easier not to try, you think to yourself... ok you're the same, it's the same lesson but they are different. I've got loads who are on their 4th time, they're angry... hacked off that they are still doing it, they have a 3^{hour} break before our lesson – this alone makes them angry,</p> <p>Interviewer: How would you change things? What? Magic wand stuff?? I would improve their concentration... reception skills, Its really hard, you know they are perfectly bright to follow instructions, its just there is something in them, you think 'how many ways can I explain it? I've done everything I can... there is just something in them I can't get round, I know it sounds really defeatist from my point of view. Because like my sports group for example, you know, you stand at the front and you have made it as clear as possible...it's on the board...you say it to them...you give them a sheet with it written on...get them to write it in their books and then 10 minutes later someone says...'What is it?' and they just haven't taken it in and just think but I have done everything I can to ensure you've got this instruction in four different formats but you just haven't taken it on board. I mean take their controlled assessments, I am more worried than they are, I shouted at the sports group – I wasn't proud. It would be better one-to-one so there is nowhere to hide, classes are too big, This is actually quite therapeutic (laughs), I am so sorry (laughs)</p>

Elsa	<p>Um, there is a couple of challenging groups, I joke around with them on purpose, but the motivation from them is dropping, most are just acting out. They don't want to do it anymore they are on their 3rd, 4th 5th time... I have to up my game because they won't.</p> <p>We are doing everything quite fast because we have too but it's good we are doing in a short amount of time because they have had enough, maybe not to pass but want to move on.</p> <p>They don't understand why they have to do it again and again... you know, it doesn't apply to them.. 'I want to be a bricklayer' what does this have to do with it.</p> <p>I would love more time, you know some one-to-one stuff but it's <u>outrageous</u> it would never happen.</p>
Ezekiel	<p>It's not different than any other resit year, some know why they are doing it but a lot don't so motivation is very hit and miss.</p> <p>The groups are too big they need to be smaller, the larger groups tend to react off each other you know - I've got 30 in one and they are hard to manage especially when some want to be there but most don't.</p> <p>You have a tiny amount who panic and want to do well, some that just don't care and most just turn up and do what they want.</p>

Table 5.8: 1:1 interviews with English Teachers (1)

The English teachers on the whole are more descriptive in their responses during the interview and express the same concerns as the maths teachers about the size of the classes and the lack of motivation from the students. Both Emily and Emma suggest that the students have a problem with their reception and concentration skills and that there is something within them that they are struggling to break down or get around.

Emma: *It's difficult to change their mindset... I have got to get around their mentality.*

Emily: *It's really hard, you know they are perfectly bright to follow instructions, it's just there is something in them, you think 'how many ways can I explain it?' I've done everything I can... there is just something in them I can't get around*

The responses from their interviews suggest that this 'something', whether it be their mentality or their reception skills, is clearly seen as a huge barrier that the English teachers are struggling to break down. This is echoed by Elsa who explained that she has no choice but to 'up her game' in order to engage her students.



Reflection: Following the interviews, there was a clear conflict emerging around where the responsibility lies for passing and engaging in the resit courses. Is it the students' responsibility to simply work harder and to improve and break down that 'something' themselves? Or is it up to the teacher to get around that 'something' to show them that they can achieve? Emily's interview was by far the longest out of all of the unstructured interviews I conducted. Once she started, she didn't want to stop, and I allowed her to control the conversation, she made a point of saying:

'This is actually quite therapeutic (laughs), I am so sorry (laughs) you never really get a chance to sit down and really reflect on what it is like and really think about everything, thank you'

This point made by Emily also highlights her lack of time and how busy she is. She found the whole interview experience therapeutic as it allowed her space to reflect on her teaching and to reflect on the experience that the students face. Reflection is a key element of successful teaching and learning and good practice. The process of reflection not only supports professional expertise but also improves the quality of education (Pollard, 2014). Without the space to do this Emily is not able to support herself and her students which is detrimental to their teaching and learning experience.

Overall the responses from the teacher interviews show that there are some real active battles taking place in the classrooms, which can be seen as the battlegrounds, making teaching and learning challenging. To support maths and English teaching staff to improve and develop their own performance with teaching, learning and assessment, the Head of Teaching and Learning has conducted both formal and informal teaching observations, and governors have completed learning walks and marked work audits in order to create differentiated support and targets for the teachers. These surveillance opinions made by the Head of Teaching and Learning, and the governors are being measured against the college priorities for teaching and learning as showing in table 5.9.

College Priorities for Teaching and Learning
2. Continue to raise standards of teaching, learning and assessment , and improve learners' progress further by ensuring teachers have high expectations , plan and enable their learners to develop higher order thinking skills and provide detailed feedback .
5. Further increase the proportion of learners who make good progress, excel and achieve their qualifications at higher grades across all types of provision.
7. Ensure that work-based tutors and teachers effectively review the progress apprentices make, and that targets set, and feedback given challenge and inspire apprentices equally to make good progress and achieve .

Table 5.9: College priorities 2, 5 and 7 that relate to teaching and learning

The results of these actions by the Head of Teaching and Learning identified that three of the maths and English teachers were meeting the key expectations of the college priorities and therefore outlined what the individual teacher's training needs are; as shown in table 5.10 below:

Teacher	Are they meeting all key expectations?	Training needs
Mae	Yes	None identified
Mick	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written feedback/Marking • Target Setting • Differentiation
Mark	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written feedback/Marking • Target setting • Assessment methods
Michelle	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written feedback/Marking • Target Setting • Differentiation
Emma	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written feedback/Marking • Target Setting • Differentiation
Emily	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differentiation
Elsa	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questioning technique
Ezekiel	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written feedback/Marking • Target Setting • Differentiation

Table 5.10: Results of College's own observations of maths and English Teachers

The college findings that Elsa meeting the college priorities and Michelle falls short of these, is in line with my own findings from my observations of the two members of staff. However, table 5.10 shows that the training needs are similar across all the teachers which further supports the issues that the staff previously highlighted in their interviews. The majority of teaching staff express a lack of time, high workloads and large groups. All of the issues that the staff identified have a direct impact on their ability to provide quality written feedback, to be able to differentiate work appropriately and successfully and therefore to be able to set meaningful targets for each individual learner. This calls into question whether these are 'training needs' or more cries for help and more practical support.

Following some of my 1:1 interviews with the teachers in the staffroom, Eloise, Emily, Elsa, and Michelle were having a chat over coffee. Emily shared the comment she made to me about having a magic wand and how she would want to change things and the subject turned to the senior management of the college:

- Eloise: *Well, I just wish management would see what actually happens*
Michelle: *Yeah, give them a go at actually managing a group, the classroom...*
Emily: *The marking!*
Michelle: *Why doesn't the 'Head of Teaching and Learning' teach? Why?*
Elsa: *I know, it means they just don't understand what it is like and how hard it is to get them to actually engage! It's exhausting!*
Eloise: *The expectations are too high on all of us and they wouldn't be if they had to do it.*

This casual conversation between the maths and English team shows the frustration they feel towards the managers in the college. The teachers are acutely aware of management's judgements towards them and feel they are misplaced and unfair due to their lack of experience with maths and English resit students. There is a direct attack on the Head of Teaching and Learning in the fact that she does not 'teach' and therefore is not eligible to cast judgement on what they do. This is further evidence that the top-down approaches are not working, with a lack of trust on both sides and consequently creating further conflict for the maths and English teams. There is a clear culture of managerialism leading to division and distrust on both sides, where teachers are left feeling marginalised, invaded and under surveillance for their performance (Robson, 1998).

As the academic term raced towards the Christmas break, I carried out another observation of both the maths and English classes.

At 08:55 some of the maths class were already in the classroom. Michelle came in shortly after, turned on the computer, wrote up a list of activities for the session and handed out a bulky pile of marked work and asked, 'Does anyone have any work to hand in?'. This was met with silence to which Michelle responded, 'That's good – it's not like I don't have enough to do'. There were nineteen students present at 09:07. Michelle asked the students how they felt about their mock exam and reminded them about another one coming up. She had not had time to mark the mock they had already completed. Michelle explained that today's lesson was going to focus on algebra. She went through several definitions and posed numerous algebraic equations. The majority of the students were copying things off the board but not actually engaging with the tasks and working the answers out. Three students continued to arrive between 09:07 and 09:30 with no apology or explanation. Occasionally Michelle circulated and asked the students what they were struggling with. There was a lot of chatting amongst the students who felt the need to shout out their frustrations: 'I don't get it', 'I can't do algebra to save my life', 'some people just can't do it', 'let's just go home' and many others had their phones out. At the end of the session students were asked to choose a smiley face to put onto their work to represent how they felt about their learning that day.

Reflection: During this observation, I witnessed several battles between Michelle and the students. Michelle was very negative and was almost fearful of teaching algebra to them. Her negativity was met with defeat by the students.



Michelle: *Who likes algebra?*

Conner: *Algebra is the voldamort of maths!! (laughter)*

Michelle: *I know you don't like it.. that is why I have avoided it on your behalf! So stop talking and write this down in your books: 'Algebra is about letters not numbers'*

Belle: *What if you have failed English as well? (laughter)*

Maria: *Algebra... what's the point? Why do we use it?*

Brandon: *This is like Japanese to me*

Mikayla: *This is stupid*

I could see that Michelle felt apprehensive. She was trying to be kind to the students by not teaching them the 'dreaded' infamous topic of algebra, but this has led to an increased level of anxiety from the students where the students are refusing to engage in the learning and cannot see the relevance. The students are battling for power during the session.

Elsa's English lesson started on time with the students handing out the books to one another. Elsa was absent from their previous lesson so was keen to check up on what they had been doing; 'I think we are a little behind, but I still think we can do your next controlled assessment on Friday'. Hence the focus of the lesson was on the students completing their planning sheets in readiness for their assessment. There were thirteen students present for the lesson and all were particularly talkative. The further she got into the lesson, the more Elsa spoon-fed the students with what they needed to have on their planning sheets to help them and she was encouraging them to write key points. She remained positive and enthusiastic throughout despite the students' negative pragmatic gestures including huffing, yawning, slumping and checking their phones.

In an attempt to boost the students' confidence for their next assessment and encourage them to do well, Elsa handed back their results in a sealed personal envelope with a lollipop attached. As observed by Rattan, Good and Dweck (2012) Elsa can be seen to be comforting students with the risk of further demotivating them. However, this was met generally with a positive response by the students who could see that she had put some effort into the gesture, which was appreciated, but some did not want to open their envelopes and just sucked their lollipops. Despite Elsa's efforts the lesson came to a close on the students say so as they packed their things away ten minutes before the end of the lesson. Elsa asked them to make sure they completed their planning sheets in their workshop, so they would be ready for their assessment.

There continues to be a distinct difference in the teaching approaches and therefore learning experiences in the maths and English classes observed. What is interesting is that despite this, the battles faced in terms of behaviour and attendance are no different and the students are still negative towards the resit and subjects in general. Although the negativity is less verbal in the English lessons and more outspoken in the maths lessons.

As the Christmas break drew nearer, the stress continued to grow, and it felt as though the maths and English team were as desperate for the Christmas break as much as the

students were. In some of the last email communications, before Christmas with Eloise, see figure 5.5, she asked that I be understanding of the way the departments stood at the time.

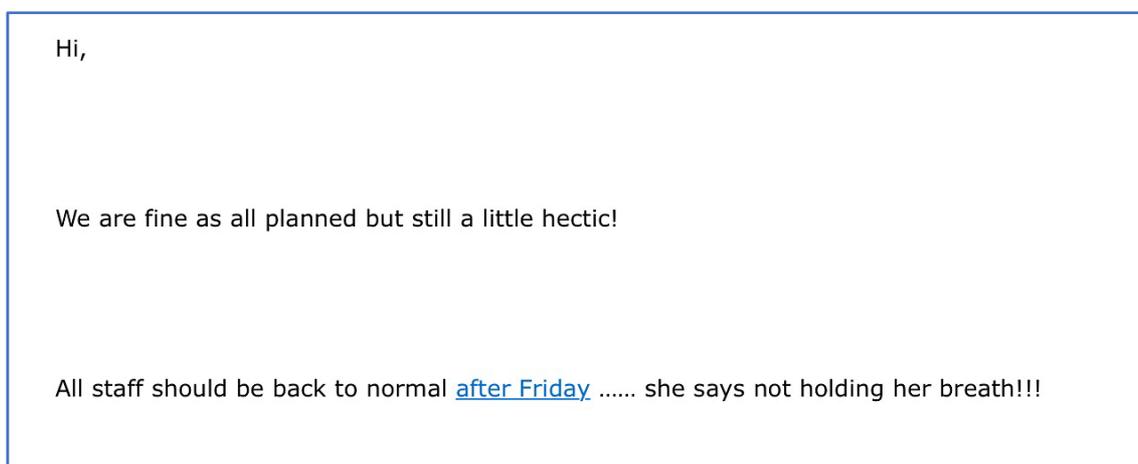
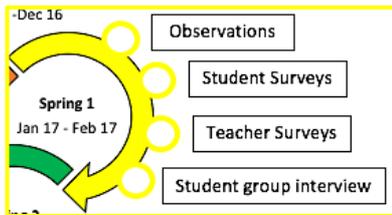


Figure 5.5: Screenshot of email communication from Eloise

Eloise seems to be cautious of the state of the department at this time. Michelle and Ezekiel are both absent and the team are having to cover for one another, adding to their already heavy workloads. The staff are currently all having to mark the controlled assessments in English and the mock exams in maths on top of the classwork. Eloise is keen to reassure but her last statement, 'she says not holding her breath!!!' shows her cynicism towards the staff's ability to get back to 'normal' before Christmas.



5.4 Part three: Spring term 1st half:
January 2017 – February 2017

As Christmas became a distant memory and the first half of the spring term began, I visited the college on Friday 13th January, the day lived up to its name for the department as issues with staff retention could be seen. Mark was currently off sick and Eloise had to get an agency teacher in to cover Mark’s teaching and marking until he returned. Unfortunately, Mick also had to leave college early that day due to feeling unwell and his classes had to be covered by Mae. This had left the department with a shortfall of two full-time members of the maths team putting extra pressure on both Mae and Michelle.

The English team were also missing a full-time member of staff since Ezekiel was on temporary leave due to on-going capability issues and continually being unable to meet the college’s key expectations for teaching and learning (See table 5.9 and 5.10). Therefore, there was an agency teacher covering his classes until a more permanent contracted agency teacher could start on 25th January 2017. Unfortunately for the English Department and its students, Emma decided to hand in her notice on the day of my visit as well. This meant that in May 2017 there will be a shortfall of two full-time members of staff.

Eloise was uneasy about the current position of the department. In particular she was concerned about the lack of attendance of the staff and how this would ultimately impact the attendance of the students, *“When staff are off sick or not in, the students just don’t bother, or bother even less, and just don’t turn up because they think... what is the point if my teacher can’t be bothered”*. This echoes some of the previous points made by some students and staff in their interviews, where teachers expressed the need to ‘up their game’ because the students will not, and the teachers are having to ‘drag them’ through the work because they will not do it for themselves as they are not intrinsically motivated. When their permanent teacher, in whom they have invested a certain amount of trust is not there, they believe even less that they can pass and therefore do not attend and feel let down.

Eloise is noticeably feeling the pressure to lessen the impact of the turbulence in staffing on the students. This could be due to the success the team had in the Autumn term with thirteen students achieving a grade C in GCSE maths in the November resit exam and

nine students achieving a grade C in GCSE English. Therefore, despite the staffing issues Eloise is determined to keep the students on track by continuing to hold GCSE English and GCSE maths mock exams in January. She had also asked that all previous mocks and controlled assessments be marked and up to date and that English students would be given the opportunity to complete any missed controlled assessments in the February half-term. Eloise carried out a GCSE work audit on the students' class books and identified inconsistent practice across both the maths and English teams and all staff had been set clear targets to improve their performance. Although, the teaching staff were under more pressure due to staff being absent and off sick, Eloise was increasing the workloads of the teachers who were still present. So, too, were the Cross College Senior Management Team (SMT), who had requested that more informal and formal observations take place in maths and English lessons and that an additional workshop hour be added to students' timetables. Although, these workshop hours will be manned by Learning Support Coaches, the work will be set and marked by the full-time maths and English team.

As a result of the added pressure on staff, there was a clear focus in Michelle's maths session on the results of her students' mock exams and getting the students to set targets to help their progress. Although Michelle had been a consistent figure for her class, this was not reflected in her students' attendance with only ten students present for her lesson at 09:00 though twenty-three were expected on the register. Michelle stood at the front of the room and asked the students to stick the Independent Learning Plan (ILP) Target (Figure 5.6 below) in their books and to work on the target, explaining to them that this was for 'revision purposes'. Michelle then proceeded to hand back the students' work which she had marked.

ILP Target 3 GCSE

Using **BOTH** the papers returned to you in maths for December MOCK assessments, produce a detailed set of *model answers* to ALL the questions YOU got wrong and ALL the questions YOU missed out, to enable you to further your skills/knowledge in these particular areas.

Figure 5.6: An example ILP target used in a GCSE maths lesson

The ILP Target is clearly a generic target for all GCSE maths students at the college with a clear strategic choice of which words in the target should be underlined, in capital letters and in bold. Although, the target is not personalised, what the target is asking the students to do is personal to them, which is highlighted by the emphasis on the repetition of the word 'YOU'.

Students were still arriving late with a total of sixteen present at 09:25 twenty-three students were now on the register since Bart had withdrawn and three other students had acquired their target Grade C in the November resit. None of the students acknowledged Michelle and she did not acknowledge them. The students sat down and started watching videos on their phones until Michelle eventually asked them to get their books out and work on the ILP target. One of the students, Maggie, arrived late and forgot her book and therefore could not complete the task. She sat for the remainder of the lesson doing nothing with no further challenge from Michelle. The atmosphere in the room was very divided; nine students were doing what the ILP had asked them to do but the remaining seven students were talking or playing on their phones and sitting in their own world. Michelle circulated the room and sat with specific students for 1:1 support and reminded everyone what they 'should' be doing. However, as soon as Michelle moved on the noise levels rose and the students remained distracted.

From this observed lesson it is clear that the students' attitudes have changed, resulting in some of the students becoming more focused and dedicated to work hard in their maths GCSE and some almost giving up completely by refusing to do the work being set. This attitude again seems to be paralleled in Michelle's behaviour, where she is happy to work 1:1 with the students who she can see are motivated and neglects to see or help others who are not showing any motivation to learn. With this in mind I handed the maths group a mindset survey to complete to see if the behaviours being observed would be reflected in their responses.

Table 5.11 shows the colour-coded responses from the GCSE maths group.

Colour-coded student responses to maths mindset surveys (2) (See appendix III) *student = is in maths and English group										
Red = Fixed Mindset Green = Growth Mindset Orange = equal split of fixed and growth mindset (Blue = Absent; Yellow = Achieved grade C; Grey = Withdrawn)										
16 out of 23 maths Students responded	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10
Name										
Maria	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree a lot	Disagree a lot	Agree	Agree	Disagree
Myra	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree
*Belle	Agree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
Madison	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree
Maddie	Disagree	Disagree a lot	Agree	Agree	Agree	Disagree a lot				
Matt	Disagree a lot	Disagree a lot	Agree a lot	Agree a lot	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree a lot	Agree	Agree
*Bettina	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree
Mason	Disagree a lot	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
*Barak	Disagree a lot	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree a lot	Disagree	Agree	Agree a lot
Monica	Disagree a lot	Disagree	Agree a lot	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
Moses	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Disagree
*Brandon	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree a lot	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree a lot
Maggie	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree a lot	Agree a lot	Agree a lot	Agree	Disagree	Agree a lot
Marcus	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree a lot	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree a lot	Disagree
Mary	Disagree	Disagree a lot	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree a lot	Agree	Agree a lot	Disagree
Max	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Disagree a lot	Disagree	Disagree	Agree a lot	Agree a lot	Agree
Marie	Absent									
Malcolm	Absent									
Melissa	Absent									
Marissa	Absent									
Molly	Absent									
Mikayla	Absent									
Melanie	Absent									
Miranda	Achieved grade C in November resit									
Megan	Achieved grade c in November resit									
Mitchell	Achieved grade C in November resit									
*Bart	Withdrawn									

Table 5.11: maths mindset surveys (2)

It is clear from table 5.11 that nearly a third of the students are absent (seven out of twenty-three). This increase is also reflected in some of the concerns shared by Eloise. The increase in the number of absent students suggests that the students have a lack of motivation, shown by non-attendance at their lessons and a refusal to engage. Bart, who was resitting his GCSE maths and English, withdrew himself from the college and decided it was not for him. His attendance was consistently low in his maths and English lessons but was better in his main Media vocational course.

On closer inspection of the table fifteen out of sixteen students are reporting a growth mindset response to Q9: *'The harder I work at something, the better I become'*.

This is an apparent improvement compared to the first mindset survey (See table 5.2) carried out when only eighteen out of twenty-two students agreed with the statement, but the number of positive students is smaller. What is also clear is that similarly to the Autumn term mindset surveys in table 5.2, the majority of the students have a growth mindset when they are in their maths lessons and Maria, who previously showed a split mindset when they are in their maths lessons and Maria, who previously showed a split mindset is now reporting a growth mindset. Table 5.12 shows the comparison of Maria's Autumn Survey to her Spring survey.

Comparison of Maria's colour-coded responses to maths mindset surveys (See appendix III) in Autumn Term and Spring Term Red = Fixed Mindset Green = Growth Mindset										
Subject	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10
Autumn (1)	Disagree a lot	Disagree a lot	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree a lot	Disagree a lot	Agree a lot	Disagree a lot	Disagree
Spring (2)	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree a lot	Disagree a lot	Agree	Agree	Disagree

Table 5.12: Comparison of Maria's mindset survey responses

Although her responses to questions six, seven and eight remain unchanged her responses to questions five and nine have changed from a fixed mindset response to a growth, suggesting that mindset is on a continuum (Ablard and Mills, 1996). This indicates an improvement in her self-efficacy. She trusts that if she is not reaching the standard required it is not because she is not capable but she believes that if she works harder at something she can improve. However, her response shows that she is now convinced that she cannot change how intelligent she is, which demonstrates a fixed mindset view towards her intellect. While Maria's mindset is improving, Brandon's and Maggie's remain unchanged overall with both of them frozen with a fixed mindset view towards GCSE maths, which again is reflected in their attendance, their lateness to lessons and disengagement with the work set, as seen in my observations. However, this behaviour is also seen in the students who reported a growth mindset.

Turning now to the first English observation in the Spring term the attendance appeared to be better in Elsa's class. At the start of the lesson at 10:00am there were thirteen students present out of the expected sixteen on the register. In comparison to Michelle's maths group, none of Elsa's students successfully passed their GCSE resit attempt in November but equally she had had no withdrawals.

The session started promptly with a starter activity and the lesson focused on another controlled assessment which they would be sitting in the hall at the end of the month. Elsa announced that "we are going to be working at a fast pace today so try and keep

up, but we will be doing this in your workshop as well". Despite her firmness and urgency with the students at the beginning of the lesson the students remained un-phased and relaxed about the work they needed to do. In turn, Elsa's serious tone was diluted as the session went on and her enthusiasm and cheerful attitude shone through and further relaxed the students enabling them to take the work less seriously. As a result of this, Elsa spoon-fed the students by telling them exactly how to structure their work, how to plan their writing and what they should include; much to the delight of the students. The students are leading the session and manipulating Elsa, so the lesson progresses in the way they want, which results in being spoon-fed what they need and not actually learning English.

The atmosphere as the students were completing their planning sheets under Elsa's close supervision was happy and positive. There was constant low-level chatting from Eamon, Eric and Elton and Elsa tried to keep them on task:

Elsa: *Ok, how about you Eamon?*

Eamon: *Well, I'm thinking of a number between 1 and 10...*

Elsa: *Ok, how about you think about one of these instead.*

Eamon: *{Laughter}*

The majority of Elsa's time and focus was on the students who were outwardly showing they were disengaged and much less so on the students who appeared to be engaged and keeping their heads down and working. The session concluded at 10:55am as the students packed up their work and bags and Elsa was left with no choice but to shout reminders about their controlled assessment to the students as they left the room.

As with the maths group, I handed out the second mindset survey to the English students and this is illustrated in table 5.13.

Colour-coded student responses to English mindset surveys (2) (See appendix III) *student = is in English and maths group										
Red = Fixed Mindset Green = Growth Mindset Orange = equal split of fixed and growth mindset (Blue = Absent; Grey = Withdrawn)										
13 out of 15 English Students responded	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10
Name										
Eric	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Agree a lot	Agree a lot	Agree	Agree
Ethan	Disagree a lot	Disagree a lot	Agree a lot	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree a lot	Disagree
*Belle	Agree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree a lot	Disagree
Edward	Disagree a lot	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Disagree
*Bettina	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree
Ewan	Disagree a lot	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree a lot
*Barak	Disagree	Disagree a lot	Agree	Agree a lot	Agree	Disagree	Agree a lot	Disagree	Agree a lot	Agree
Elton	Disagree a lot	Disagree a lot	Agree a lot	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree a lot	Disagree
Evander	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Disagree a lot	Disagree a lot	Agree	Agree	Agree	Disagree
*Brandon	Disagree	Disagree	Agree a lot	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Agree a lot	Agree a lot	Agree a lot	Agree
Eamon	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree a lot	Agree a lot	Agree a lot
Erika	Agree	Disagree a lot	Agree	Agree a lot	Disagree	Disagree a lot	Agree a lot	Disagree	Agree	Disagree a lot
Erum	Disagree	Disagree a lot	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree
Ella	Absent									
Enrico	Absent									
*Bart	Withdrawn									

Table 5.13: English mindset surveys (2)

It is apparent from the table that in ‘agreeing’ to question nine, all the students who responded still believe that the harder they work at something the better they become. Overall, there has been some improvement in particular students’ attitude towards GCSE English. Both Erum and Erika are recording a more undivided growth mindset response in this round of surveys. Erika is now portraying a growth mindset where previously her mindset was divided.

Although table 5.13 shows an improved picture for some, it also shows a transformation in attitude for Eric, who had previously shown a growth mindset (see table 5.3). At this stage in the academic year Eric clearly has a new view towards GCSE English and has recorded a fixed mindset, the opposite end of the mindset continuum. There is further evidence of Eric’s transformation in attitude in my observations of the class, where Eric joined in the bravado, which is out of character when compared to previous observations, surveys and interviews.

In the autumn term during the student interview Eric declared that the resit is “*easier than last year and I am pleased that I have an extra year to work on it*”. Therefore, for Eric to now show a fixed mindset attitude is concerning as he started the year with a very positive outlook. Another interesting insight into the variation of students’ attitudes

towards their resits is when we look closer at Brandon, who is studying both the GCSE maths and GCSE English resit. On closer inspection of his survey results we can see that he is recording a fixed mindset in maths but a growth mindset in English. This is summarised in table 5.14 below.

Brandon's colour-coded responses to maths and English mindset surveys (See appendix III) Red = Fixed Mindset Green = Growth Mindset										
Subject	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10
Maths	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree a lot	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree a lot
English	Disagree	Disagree	Agree a lot	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Agree a lot	Agree a lot	Agree a lot	Agree

Table 5.14: Brandon's responses to maths and English mindset surveys

The results from Brandon's surveys show that he has a very different attitude when he is in his GCSE maths resit compared to his GCSE English resit (Quihuis et al, 2002). Brandon has previously been very honest in his interview about his frustration at having to resit his GCSEs, complaining specifically that *"I don't need it, I've just lost all motivation it's horrible, I hate it, I can't take it anymore"*. However, that interview was following a maths lesson. In the interview after an English lesson, he chose not to make a comment, remaining silent and allowed the group to speak. He responded positively when the group were discussing whether they trusted Elsa to help them pass this year and he nodded in agreement. This evidence suggests that although he is unhappy about resitting his GCSEs, Brandon's attitude and mindset is imitating the mood and attitudes portrayed from his different teachers, Michelle and Elsa. From my observations, it is clear that Michelle and Elsa have different pedagogical approaches to teaching the resit and it appears that with Brandon specifically, Elsa's more positive and enthusiastic approach is helping him to have a more positive outlook to his English resit. However, Michelle's harder and unenthusiastic style is contributing to his negative opinion of maths which is in line with findings by Murphy and Dweck (2010) and Rattan, Good and Dweck (2011).

If we now turn to the mindset responses from the teachers, we can also see some unexpected changes in attitudes towards teaching and learning of the GCSE resit. The responses from the GCSE maths and English teaching staff is presented in table 5.15.

Colour-coded teacher responses to mindset survey (2) (See appendix IV)										
Red = Fixed Mindset Green = Growth Mindset										
Name	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10
Maths Teachers Mindset responses										
Michelle	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree
Mark	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
Mick	Disagree a lot	Disagree a lot	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
Mae	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Agree a lot	Disagree
Marco	Agree	Agree	Disagree a lot	Disagree a lot	Agree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Agree a lot	Disagree
English Teachers Mindset responses										
Elsa	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree a lot
Emma	<i>Absent</i>									
Emily	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Disagree
Ezekiel	Disagree a lot	Disagree a lot	Agree a lot	Agree a lot	Disagree	Disagree a lot	Agree	Disagree	Agree a lot	Disagree a lot
Eloise	Disagree a lot	Disagree a lot	Agree	Agree	Disagree a lot	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Disagree a lot

Table 5.15: Teacher responses to mindset surveys (2)

It is evident from the table that there is a change in attitude amongst the teaching staff from having a unanimous growth mindset in the autumn term to now having three out of eight members of staff reporting a fixed mindset. Mark, Marco and Emily have all agreed that intelligence is something that is fixed and something that cannot be changed with hard work. This sudden change in attitude and belief is disheartening to hear from teachers who are there to inspire their learners.

From the findings discussed so far there is evidence to suggest that the teachers' attitudes are reflected in the attitudes of their learners including low motivation and engagement. The combination of the students' attitudes, lateness and low attendance is beginning to impact the teachers' belief in the students' ability to learn and essentially pass their GCSE. From discussions the team have had regarding the added pressure and surveillance from the SMT and the challenging students, the maths and English team are beginning to show a negative view to learning. It is becoming increasingly clear that the atmosphere surrounding the teachers and students is very different compared to the atmosphere before Christmas. There is an increasing absence from both teachers and students, and they are all finding the GCSE resit more challenging. There are strong parallels between their behaviours, with the teachers wedged between pressures from SMT and pressures from the students.

On 22nd February 2017 I conducted further group unstructured interviews with both the maths and English students. Unfortunately, following the February half-term the attendance at GCSE resit lessons was at its lowest so far. On the day that I conducted the GCSE maths interview there were only seven students present out of the twenty-three students who should normally be in the class. Although the attendance had consistently been low in this particular group, this is the lowest attendance I had observed.

As with previous maths interviews, Michelle did not want to leave the room and the students were reluctant to expand on their views. All seven of the students who took part in the unstructured interview below recorded a growth mindset in both of their mindset surveys.

Interviewer: *I would like you to tell me about your maths resit...*

Bettina: *It's ok*

Matt: *I feel like I'm getting there now*

Monica: *To be honest I can't believe the difference in my marks*

Marcus: *Yeah, I know when you do look back at things you think why I did I do that... it was really stupid but I can see it clearer now*

Maddie: *I feel like I am improving but sometimes I still forget things*

Mary: *I feel a bit confused... I've got an offer for uni but they haven't mentioned GCSE maths, just functional skills, so do that mean I don't need it?*

Interviewer: *I am not sure...*

Mary: *I feel like if its true it has taken the pressure off and help me mentally*

Max: *I know, but that's the thing, you don't need maths GCSE for everything*

Mary: *Yeah, it's strange but maybe I don't need it*

Monica: *Do you think you'll get your C though?*

Mary: *Yeah, I think so... you?*

Monica: *Dunno*

Bettina: *I don't think I will*

Max: *Yeah me either but I'll try*

The students who are present offer a more positive outlook towards GCSE maths than had been expressed previously, with Matt, Monica and Marcus expressing a noticeable improvement in their work. Mary highlights the issue of the relevance of the GCSE and whether she needs to achieve a grade C to progress to university, suggesting that by removing the pressure of having to reach the expected standard of a grade C will improve her mental well-being. The D grade policy has been criticised by the sector as harming both students' and teachers' well-being and this is reason enough for it to be scrapped (Bushby, 2018). Max responds by confirming with Mary that it is not necessary to achieve the grade C standard for 'everything'. This adds to Mary's confusion and the debate about whether the GCSE is the correct vehicle for these students or whether the Functional Skill qualification would be a better medium for students to show their ability in maths and English. This confusion is reflected in policymakers, unions and employers with the debate about the policy continuing, confirming that the FE sector is not being heard (Bushby, 2018)



Reflection: Although Michelle is still present in the background the atmosphere in this interview is more positive than the interview conducted previously with the maths group. As a smaller group, the seven students are generally more positive about their experience and comment that they feel they have made progress in their maths skills.

What is possibly more revealing of the current state of the students' attitudes to the GCSE maths is the silence of those who were not in attendance. There were sixteen students who were absent and they are consistently low attenders who are not making the most of the resit opportunity.

The English students' group interview showed an unusual negative atmosphere with the students appearing unenthusiastic. Despite the students being at the stage in the year where they had finished their controlled assessments and were now moving on to their main exam preparation the students seemed low in mood before the interview. Again, Elsa left me alone with the students. There were twelve out of the sixteen students present.

Interviewer: *I would like you to tell me about your English resit...*

{Silence}

Is it going ok?

Eric: *I guess...*

Belle: *I'm probably going to fail again*

Erum: *I'm feeling ok at the minute*

Erika: *It should be ok... I did ok in my controlled assessments anyway*

Interviewer: *You seem to all be a bit quiet today...*

Brandon: *Yeah, it's because we are all really motivated! {Laughter}*

Evander: *Er no*

Ewan: *You know, I came in for a whole day over half-term and my controlled assessment went up by 1 mark! What a waste of a whole day*

Interviewer: *But what if you miss one mark in your exam, that extra mark might make the difference for you...*

Ewan: *It was a whole boring day*

Mohammed: *Plus, Elsa is leaving us to go back to Canada...*

Interviewer: How do you all feel about that?

Eric: *Whatever... {the students shrug their shoulders}*

Eamon: *It's like I said to you before... I've had so many teachers... I'll just have another*

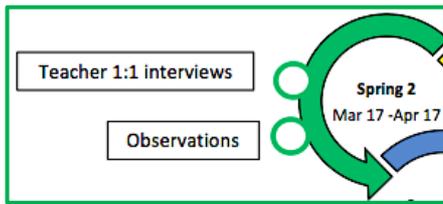
The sudden drop in the students' motivation is directly linked to the news that Elsa, the teacher who they declared they trusted at the beginning of the academic year, is leaving the college to return home to Canada for family reasons. Although Elsa has external reasons for not being their teacher any more and is not leaving until May 2017, the students are seeing it as a betrayal of their trust. Whilst, students like Erum and Erika are able to focus on their positive controlled assessment scores and remain positive, others, like Eric, have taken the news badly and this may explain his sudden change in mindset (see table 5.14). It is also clear from Eamon's comments at the end of the interview that the news that Elsa will be leaving has only reaffirmed Eamon's thoughts and beliefs which he expressed at the beginning of the academic year. In the interview, Ewan also refers to the chance to attend college over the half-term period to improve his controlled assessment score. It is clear that Ewan does not appreciate that this is a useful opportunity. It is clear that he values his half-term holiday and days off more than the one extra mark he achieved. However, it is hard to know whether he would have valued the opportunity more if he had achieved a greater improvement, but the fact that he only improved by one mark is reaffirming to Ewan that his efforts are a waste of his time.

The first half of the spring term was turbulent in the maths and English departments, in terms of staffing and student attendance. The English department had an agency teacher replacing Ezekiel and would have to replace Emma and Elsa at the end of the spring term in April 2017. The maths team still had their full-time members of staff but had suffered consistent short-term staff shortages due to sickness from Mark, Mick and Mae. Eloise had expressed concerns that staff retention was affecting attendance in maths and English classes. The table illustrates the situation of attendance in maths and English compared to November 2016 (See table 5.6):

Department	Department Percentage (%) in GCSE maths	Department Percentage (%) in GCSE English
Science & ICT	78 ↓	87 ↓
Hair, Beauty and Hospitality	81 -	81 -
Health childcare	74 ↓	80 -
Business and Travel	78 ↓	81 ↓
Art and Media	81 ↓	85 ↓
Sport and Public Services	72 ↓	78 ↓
Electrical and Engineering	75 ↓	78 -
Construction	74 ↓	76 ↓

Table 5.16: Attendances for GCSE maths and English by Department in Feb 2017

It is noticeable from the figures in the table above that the attendance has decreased across the majority of vocational areas in both GCSE maths and English, which supports Eloise's concerns that staff absence and staff sickness are having a direct impact on attendance. What is perhaps surprising is that the attendance has been affected more in maths than in English, considering the number of English teachers leaving. On the whole it is clear that the students are voting with their feet and choosing not to attend. Ultimately, whether for sickness reasons or more permanent reasons, there is a direct relationship between teachers' and students' attendance; the less the teachers are attending the less the students are attending.



5.5 Part four: Spring term 2nd half:

March 2017 – April 2017

The stable fully staffed maths and English department that I met at the beginning of the study became a distant memory. The start of the second half of the spring term still had all of the concerns and tribulations of the previous half term and more.

Although, the maths and English department had inconsistencies in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, particularly in maths, the team was fully staffed, and the students had reliability in the teacher who would appear at the front of the room. However, there were severe staffing issues within the English team. Eloise sent me a text message (see figure 5.7) at the beginning of March 2017 to warn me of how the situation has changed since the February half term.

Hi need to text. Emma left us last week. Her notice was 12th May but she walked. Elsa had to go to Canada early and now not due back until the exam date. Ezekiel is still with HR. That leaves Emily and me and 430 GCSE English students!!! Fun fun fun!!!

Figure 5.7: Text message from Eloise received 05.03.2017

Of the four full time GCSE English members of staff Elsa had left on long term compassionate leave, Emma had left early breaking her contract of employment and Ezekiel was currently suspended. A new English teacher had been employed to cover Emma and there were two agency teachers already in post. Emily was now the only remaining original GCSE English teacher in the team and was already showing signs of the extra pressure and fatigue and had been on sick leave due to stress. To ensure that the lack of English staff during this time caused as little disruption to the students as possible, Eloise and Mae made the decision to collapse the timetable. However, the instability in English had had a huge effect on maths and the maths team. Mae explained

to me that she felt that all the students had used it as an excuse to not attend GCSE classes, *“any excuse and they take it!”*. Mae had been so concerned that she took it upon herself to alert the SMT that this would directly affect the GCSE results this year. However, in a short conversation I had with Marco, a member of the SMT, he had a more positive outlook on the position of GCSE maths and English at the college clarifying to me the situation *“we have recruited well so I am really pleased, and staff retention is good generally across the college”*. A recurrent theme through the interviews with staff was the lack of understanding between SMT and the teachers on the front line. This comment from Marco further emphasises this fact in that he is pleased they managed to recruit two new GCSE English teachers and therefore the problem has in their eyes been resolved and is not a true representation of retention across the college.

Since the college was still graded as ‘requires improvement’ by Ofsted, the staff had regular meetings and support from an allocated Her Majesty’s Inspector (HMI). During their support and challenge meetings the HMI had expressed several concerns to the SMT and Eloise about specific areas which needed further work, such as to urgently improve attendance and swiftly secure staffing. Focus was needed on developing higher order thinking skills in sessions and training was needed for teachers to enable them to develop resilience skills amongst learners. It is interesting that the HMI identified the need for teachers to promote and improve the resilience of their students. This theme and crucial concern can be evidenced throughout the recent observations, interviews and surveys. However, due to the number of staff who have been either on sick leave, left or received poor feedback from lesson observations, there is additionally a strong argument for the HMI to also advise SMT to receive training to enable them to develop resilience in their teaching staff. Overall, the findings by the HMI are in line with my own.

At the beginning of March 2017, I went to interview the teaching staff in maths and English to capture their opinions as the exams were drawing ever nearer. However, due to the disintegration of the English team and the extra stress and pressure this had placed on the students and remaining teachers, many of my teacher participants were not able to take part in this round of interviews. Table 5.17 gives the individual responses, from the staff who were available, to the GCSE maths teacher’s unstructured 1:1 interviews, and the main recurring themes presented. Each interview began with the opening statement ‘I would like you to tell me about teaching the maths/English resit...’

Teacher	Interview Data of maths teachers: Colour-coded themes: Student Barriers , Teacher Barriers , Management Barriers
Mae	<i>Absent</i>
Mick	<p><i>Yeah... ok... going ok...</i></p> <p><i>Sorry, I'm just so busy, Mae and Mark aren't in today and Eloise is really busy.</i></p> <p><i>Sorry, it's very mixed you know. Some are still very motivated, but most have dipped off now.</i></p> <p><i>It's hard, it's a battle everyday but I am not giving up and I keep pushing, it's just hard.</i></p>
Mark	<i>Absent</i>
Michelle	<p><i>Um... yeah... ok</i></p> <p><i>After half term it takes me a good half an hour to hand all the work back that I've been marking. Then my box is full again and I have even more marking to do.</i></p> <p><i>I've got tennis elbow, which I honestly think, is down to doing all this marking over and over again.</i></p> <p><i>Because of everything, staff and students, we are having stretch and challenge workshops, which will focus on the students who are likely to get a grade C, but some students stand no chance so we are not focusing on them. But actually, they are the ones who need the most help!</i></p> <p><i>There is no time, its crazy.</i></p>

Table 5.17: 1:1 interviews with maths Teachers (2)

It is clear from the table above that attendance and resilience is not just an issue for the students, but also the teaching staff. Mae has been off sick for the last few days due to stress and severe toothache. Her groups have been split or covered by an agency teacher. Mark is currently on sick leave and his attendance has been inconsistent across the academic year so far, currently his groups have either been split or covered by extra hours within the team. Therefore, Michelle and Mick can be forgiven for their rushed and strained 1:1 interviews with me, as they are coping with hundreds of students with just each other and an agency teacher.

Issues related to attendance were particularly prominent in the interview data. Mick seems the most anxious and the most apologetic for not being able to sit down and talk to me for too long. He is the youngest and most inexperienced member of the team only teaching for 3 years. Although he confesses that the students' motivation has declined

and he faces an everyday confrontation with the students, he is still engaged and motivated to teach them, but admits that it is getting increasingly more difficult.

There was a sense of pressure shared between Mick and Michelle during the interviews. Michelle is clearly still overwhelmed with the demands from SMT and the students to keep up with the marking of all the students' work and feels as though she is on a never-ending carousel, one so severe it is the cause of her elbow injury. As well as emphasising the extreme issue of current workloads, Michelle also highlighted a conflict that she is feeling within the teaching and learning taking place in the maths department. Eloise has taken the decision to run stretch and challenge workshops, which only specific students will be invited to attend depending on their mock results. However, although Michelle understands that some students are unable to potentially achieve their grade C this year, she feels a battle within herself as she is focusing on grades, not the students who truly need her time and help to improve their maths for their careers and the rest of their lives. Michelle is questioning the purpose of the GCSE resit; is it to help them to pass an exam or to support their academic life-long maths learning?

Looking at the second round of interview data with the teachers, the themes being portrayed are focused much more on the practical barriers that they feel they are facing as teachers. This is prominent and causing a further barrier to learning.

Turning now to the interviews with the English teachers we can see a number of similarities to the maths teachers, in their perception of the barriers to teaching and the effects of the staff attendance. Table 5.18 lays out the interview responses to the unstructured 1:1 English Teacher interviews.

Teacher	Interview Data of English teachers: Colour-coded themes: Student Barriers , Teacher Barriers , Management Barriers
Emma	<i>Absent</i>
Emily	<i>Um.. They have been very chatty, some of them are driving me nuts! I swear some are just doing it wrong on purpose. They are giving things a go, but they don't want to, I'm saying to them come on... let's give it a go – I'm just trying to keep things light. I'm so sorry but I have 7 hours of teaching today! I have 1 hour break and in that 1 hour break I have to go over to Princes Road and oh yeah eat! I guess it's not so bad, 2 hours are workshops but it's still bad.</i>
Elsa	<i>Absent</i>
Ezekiel	<i>Absent</i>

Table 5.18: 1:1 interviews with English Teachers (2)

Table 5.18 emphasises the sheer collapse and breakdown of the original English team at the beginning of the case. Emma has broken her contact of employment and left, Elsa has returned to Canada due to family bereavement and Ezekiel who has been on long term capability, has been suspended. Emily alludes to the notion that the students are turning the learning into a game and intentionally getting things wrong even though she has corrected them. She clearly remains committed to helping the students' progress and is keeping the teaching and learning light hearted and optimistic by encouraging them to keep trying.

However, from looking at both the maths and English interviews (See tables 5.17 and 5.18) the recurrent theme of practical teaching pressures is becoming clear. Emily is expressing an obvious frustration about her workload at the moment and finding it very difficult to cope with. In a previous interview Emily was grateful for the time to sit down with me and reflect on teaching the GCSE resit, but on this occasion Emily did not have the time to discuss any issues in the same depth. She previously had accused herself of sounding 'defeatist' (see table 5.8), whereas she now appears more accepting of her views and perhaps the experiences of the last few months have given her justification to speak without self-judgement.

To echo the attendance issues seen with staff, the table below shows how this has had a profound effect on the attendance in maths and English classes in March 2017 compared to February 2017 (See table 5.19).

Department	Department Percentage (%) in GCSE maths	Department Percentage (%) in GCSE English
Science & ICT	78 -	85 ↓
Hair, Beauty and Hospitality	78 ↓	81 -
Health childcare	72 ↓	78 ↓
Business and Travel	77 ↓	80 ↓
Art and Media	77 ↓	80 ↓
Sport and Public Services	70 ↓	78 -
Electrical and Engineering	73 ↓	71 ↓
Construction	73 ↓	74 ↓

Table 5.19: Attendance data for GCSE maths and English by Department in March 2017

Table 5.19 clarifies that the attendance rates are continuing to decrease in the majority of departments in maths and English and there is no sign of improvement; only Science and ICT, Hair, Beauty and Hospitality and Sport and Public Services managed to prevent their already low attendance rates from dropping any lower. The low attendance from the students confirms the ever-decreasing lack of engagement and the declining lack of motivation in the GCSE resit.

It is becoming increasingly clear that there is a convincing relationship between the consistency in the teaching and the consistency in the students' attendance and attitude. They are reflecting one another and therefore affecting the experience of the resit for one another. This is also true when we have previously seen Elsa's enthusiasm transferring onto the students and Michelle's less enthusiastic harder teaching approach having an impact on the students. The relationship between student and teacher cannot be underestimated in terms of the experience of the resit.

Meanwhile, the discussion surrounding the effects of the D grade policy on students and FE colleges has continued to rage on between Ofsted, unions and policymakers and little did anyone know that a complete about-turn was going to be announced.

On 28th March 2017 the FE sector were given the news that many had been asking for since the D grade policy was introduced. It was reported in FE Weekly 'Exclusive: DfE to scrap forced GCSE English and maths resits'. Clarification of this was to be confirmed in the funding guidance which would be published in April (Offord, 2017). Also, on 28th March 2017 a letter was published from Justine Greening to Neil Carmichael, chair of

the Education Select Committee, outlining that the new grade 4 will be equivalent to the grade C rather than their original plan of a grade 5.



Reflection: When I read the announcement I had mixed emotions. On the one hand I had collected considerable evidence about the distress that the policy was causing and therefore I was pleased that others had also taken note, but also, panic set in regarding my project. I had been researching the effects of the D grade policy on a FE college and if the U-turn was to take place, what relevance would my research have in the sector? I emailed my supervisory team immediately and was quickly reassured, that a U-turn by the government on the policy did not need to mean a U-turn for my project. I already had an extensive and detailed case study of the ramifications of the D grade policy in practice, but I now had the unique opportunity to see the change and U-turn happening, including the reactions of the individuals involved. Although, this is not what I thought would happen, as the government seemed adamant about the importance of the D grade policy, the situation mirrors how other individuals in the sector feel, where changes are made at speed without consideration. Therefore, my case should also discuss how we implement policy change.

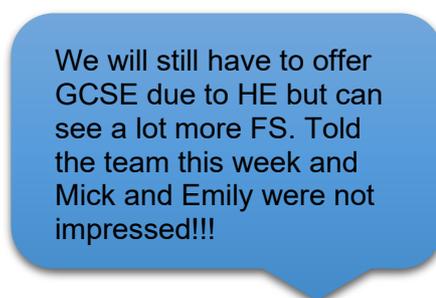
Following the anticipated news that the Skills Funding Agency would confirm the reports of a government U-turn on the D-grade policy, I emailed Eloise and Mae to capture their instant reactions before returning to the college to talk directly to the Principal, Philip, on 30th March 2017. Figure 5.8 and 5.9 show the reactions from Mae and Eloise about the news on 29th March 2017.

The government U turn is great for FE.

I am all for trying to stretch the students understanding of maths and develop their skills, but as usual the thing that will hold us back is the curriculum planning – how many hours we will get for delivery – if you don't have time to properly have a conversation and discussion with students on the ins and outs of different concepts they will not have the time to develop their deeper thinking skills and underpinning knowledge as this is what will hold FE students back – as many of our students struggled with the concepts in school and therefore need more time to explore misconceptions help and then extra time to address and discuss.

Figure 5.8: Email received from Mae following U-turn announcement 29.03.17

Mae is clearly pleased with the news, not just for her students but what this means in general for the sector. It is however, obvious that in her view there are still other issues that policy change does not solve such as time restraints and the support level these students need. Due to the students finding many mathematical concepts difficult in school (Loynd, 2014), Mae desires more time to ensure deeper learning and not shallow learning to take place (Marton and Säljö, 1976). Behind the D grade policy there is a good moral need and aspiration for all young people to continue to develop their skills in maths and English. By removing the requirement to continuously retake the GCSE in order to reach a specified level, whatever that level might be, teachers like Mae are hopeful that they can focus on correcting students' misconceptions and develop their skills for life. Figure 5.9 below shows a text message I received from Eloise giving her reaction to the news.



We will still have to offer GCSE due to HE but can see a lot more FS. Told the team this week and Mick and Emily were not impressed!!!

Figure 5.9 text message received from Eloise following U-turn announcement 29.03.17

Eloise is foreseeing what will happen as a consequence of the U-turn and what it will mean for the college, staff and students. If colleges no longer have to continue with forced GCSE resits Eloise predicts that the college will have to offer more Functional Skills in maths and English. This will mean that current GCSE teachers will teach less GCSE but more functional skills or equivalent qualification. Although the staff have been vocal about how hard it is for them to teach the GCSE to disaffected students and how hard it is for students to be stuck in the cycle of resits, the news that they would not have to teach the GCSE resit has not received a positive reaction.

Eloise states that Emily and Mick are not happy at the news and when I visited the college on 30th March they were not the only ones who were unhappy about the thought of teaching more Functional Skills. None of the staff seemed worried about redundancy but they appeared angry about teaching Functional Skills, as this is not what they are employed to do. Michelle stated, "I am not teaching more Functional Skills, no way. That's not my job" and Mick believes, "it's not as interesting to teach. It's easy". None of

the maths and English team expressed their relief that the GCSE resit cycle would be stopped despite the challenges both staff and students have faced so far this year.

There appears to be a status battle between teaching the GCSE and Functional Skills. Eloise admits that Michelle, Mark, Mick and Emily all have at least one hour of Functional Skills on their timetables and they do not enjoy teaching this. This perceived, 'negative' view of Functional Skills is reflected in the students. I asked two the GCSE maths group; would you rather do Functional Skills maths or GCSE maths? Marcus said, '*What's Functional Skills?*' and Matt said, '*no it's crap*'. It's clear that although the GCSE resit it is causing challenges, it is still more favourable to studying Functional Skills.

Mae: Functional Skills is not fit for purpose. Does that mean if it is taking the place of GCSE resit that it is no longer a stepping stone to the GCSE?

Mae and the team highlight a key point, that if the functional skills qualification is to take the place of the GCSE it will need an overhaul in order to develop deeper learning, as Mae outlined in her email (see figure. 5.8). She is suggesting that the students need to be better prepared for their vocational areas and careers as she believes this is what is holding them back. The news of the U-turn is unsettling in that the government will also have to announce to the sector what the alternative is, as clearly Functional Skills will not be enough to make FE colleges happy. Just going back on the policy is not enough. The sector, the colleges and the students need clarity and reassurance that the policy will not be changed to something else that will not work. The department has again chosen to share the confusion of the GCSE resits with the students by tweeting a link to the TES asking for clarity on what will happen to the D grade policy.

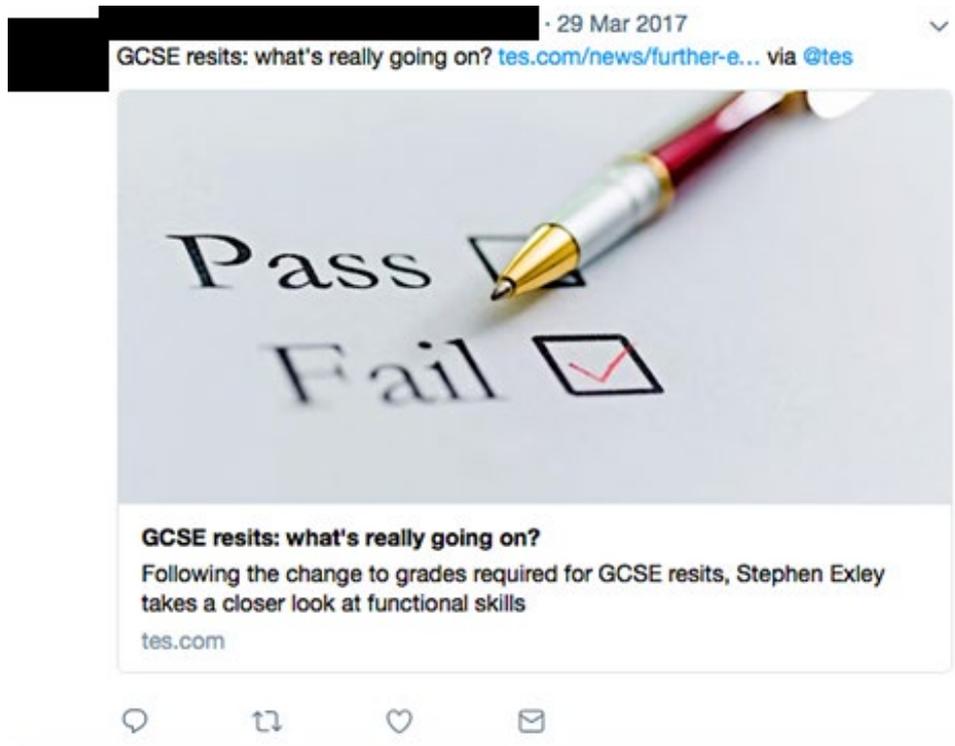


Figure 5.10: Tweet from Colleges twitter account

While sitting in the staff room the atmosphere is very tense and the staff generally seem irritated. The staff are in limbo, following the announcement of the U-turn and are not sure what will happen and what direction the college will go in terms of its teaching and they are so busy that they do not have time to think about it because they are short staffed and rushing around. Whilst in the staffroom, I have seen student after student come in and ask Emily about their exams and controlled assessments. She has not stopped, and Eloise is also rushed off her feet. Despite the department tweeting about the debate, none of the students coming to the department are asking questions about the U-turn or asking for clarification on the situation.

On 30th March 2017 at 12:00 I conducted an unstructured interview with Philip, the principal of the college, to capture his reaction to the news of a U-turn on the policy and his view of the possible confusion that this is causing. It was important that Philip led the interview to ensure that he could discuss all the different ways he perceived the situation, without being steered by me in any way. We conducted the interview in his office, and he spoke clearly and honestly with me, and his comments are collated in the table 5.20.

Philip:	<p><i>There has been a slight change in direction over the last few months. Everyone agrees that English and maths needs to improve but it is the tool that is wrong.</i></p> <p><i>Policy was needed because employers understood the GCSE but there has been a softening with Justine Greening. Ofsted have also had their say and Ofsted don't normally comment on policy.</i></p> <p><i>Paul Joyce made a comment about the policy at regional level which I think was laying the groundwork for the U-turn. We need clarity on what it means for the condition of funding for students graded 1-3.</i></p> <p><i>You can say you can change it but to what???</i></p>
Interviewer:	<p>[What do you think of the announcement?]</p>
Philip	<p><i>I think the U-turn is good, it means we are going back to what is right for the learner, however, does that mean they are going to re-vamp FS?</i></p> <p><i>At the moment, because of the condition of funding, all are doing the GCSE as it is a question of money.</i></p> <p><i>The GCSE is a difficult sell and we are being judged on our ability to churn out A*-Cs, you know we have to do this because of that. I hope they make the right decision for young people.</i></p> <p><i>It will change the landscape of the English and maths teams as we have GCSE teachers not FS. If the situation changes we will have to look at how we deliver English and Maths. I'm a fan of proper embedding of English and Maths.</i></p> <p><i>The GCSE is the wrong vehicle for improving English and maths.</i></p> <p><i>They launch it, there are problems with it then gets painful along the way, we need to stop that, they need to listen to us as professionals.</i></p>

Table 5.20: Unstructured interview with Principal 30.03.17

The interview with Philip touches upon a number of key issues with the D grade policy and the implementation of policy in the sector. He had an idea that the change was coming through regional meetings and a 'softening' following input from the 2016 Ofsted report and in his view, it is a welcome change. He repeats his view of the GCSE by explaining that the GCSE is the wrong 'tool' and the wrong 'vehicle' to help improve maths and English in young people. This is why it is a 'hard sell' to students and 'proper' embedding of the maths and English is vital. He welcomes the return to what is best for the learner, which the D grade policy is clearly not in his view.

However, with the GCSE being removed, Philip is clearly concerned about the gap it will leave and ultimately what will be in its place and how that will affect the college's funding

and teaching staff. He alludes to the problems of implementing policy in the way they are 'launching' the policy and then 'fire fighting' the problems along the way. He argues that professionals need to be listened to in order to avoid a 'painful' experience for everyone involved. The use of the word 'painful' is significant as it emphasises his view that this is what the D grade policy has been. Philip was optimistic about the changes but wants clarity for the colleges, staff and students.

That clarity arrived soon after our interview on 10th April 2017 in the Skills Funding Guidance (ESFA, 2017) and then highlighted in media reports but it was not the news the sector was expecting. It appeared there had been yet another U-turn.

The latest published guidance which was reported to 'scrap' the D grade policy does nothing of the sort. In no uncertain terms it clarifies that any student who has a grade D or grade 3 GCSE in maths and/or English must be enrolled on a GCSE course and not a stepping stone qualification (ESFA, 2017). It also unhelpfully raises some of the sectors hopes again, as it further promises that maths and English provision for 16-19-year olds is under review and any change as a result will be communicated accordingly (ESFA, p.51, 2017). The breaking news that the 'English and maths GCSE resits not scrapped for 2017-18' was reported in the TES (Belgutay, 2017c), along with reactions from the sector. The chief executive of the Learning and Work Institute, Stephen Evans, was reported to have said, 'retake after retake is not the answer' along with Catherine Sezen from Association of Colleges who said that the sector will be 'disappointed' with today's news (Belgutay, 2017c). The news was also retweeted from the TES twitter account to counteract the previous message that there was change on the way, as shown in figure 5.11 below.



Figure 5.11: Retweet from Colleges twitter account



Reflection: I had less panic about yet another U-turn. I felt that the news that they will return to the D grade policy only strengthens my discussion and confirms that no one appears to know what to do with the policy, including the policy makers themselves. The fact that there could have been a major U-turn on a policy without a suitable alternative being in place made me feel the real instability in the sector and how it is at the mercy of policy makers. What if the sector faces a similar problem further down the line? This consolidates the importance of my research in providing evidence on a policy in action and its effects. Policy can easily be reversed (as I have seen) especially if there is no real evidence that it works. My research can provide that verification.

Indeed, there was disappointment from both the principal Philip and Eloise. Philip in particular, during our interview had said he was pleased that we were returning to 'what was best for the learner'; therefore, the news that this was not the case was discouraging.

Philip: *I still don't think the GCSE is the right tool for our learners and FE in general. But we will continue to support students and staff to ensure they reach their full potential.*

Compared to our original interview, where Philip was speaking openly and honestly, his statement above, feels pre-rehearsed. It is as though he is more guarded and feels it is something protocol demands of him. It has an acceptance that it is business as usual. Eloise, although disappointed with the about-turn, is pleased to have clarity for the department regarding what will happen in September 2017.

Eloise: *At least we know now, easier in a way, we will just continue as we have done. It's a shame. The GCSE is also changing next year to the new style and not sure how that we will go down with everyone.*

The maths and English teachers also feel disappointed with the news that the GCSE resit cycle is set to continue, despite being equally disappointed at the prospect of teaching more Functional Skills as an equivalent qualification. It appears that although the staff are unhappy with the GCSE qualification, they are equally unhappy with the Functional Skill qualification.

Michelle: *I am glad that we are not going to have to teach more FS, cos I am not doing that, it's not right, it's bland, but don't get me wrong I don't think the GCSE is right either. In fact, I think the new style of GCSE is even further in the opposite direction for our students.*

In summary this policy quake has provided a valuable insight into the ramifications of policy change and rumours. Being able to capture those reactions has provided another layer of insight into the D grade policy and some of the wider problems faced. Therefore, if a U-turn were to take place the sector will only be satisfied with a qualification that is suitable for the sector and learner and this would involve the government listening carefully to FE professionals. The removal of the D grade policy can only take place when a suitable and viable alternative can be implemented immediately. Equally, the sector does not want to be in limbo while these decisions are being made and needs a well thought out and timed transition to ensure that minimal distress is caused.

With the dust settling, following the clarification that the D grade policy was set to stay for at least another academic year and the debate continuing, the staff and students took their much-needed Easter Holidays. When they returned, I observed both the maths and English classes on 21st April 2017.

The GCSE maths class started on time at 09:00 with only seven out of the twenty-three students in attendance. The low attendance rate could be partially explained by a number of Media students being on a trip, although Michelle had not been told about this officially. Michelle began the lesson, again handing back copious amounts of marked work to the students and explaining that the focus of the lesson was to work through past exam questions. The students were unenthusiastic and disengaged with their bags still on the tables. Michelle reassured them by explaining, 'we will go through it, don't panic', to which Mikayla replied, 'yeah, we will go through them till death!'. This was followed by laughter. Michelle became increasingly frustrated as the lesson progressed and changed her teaching style very quickly from reassuring to more aggressive, which became more and more evident.

At 9:15am a student arrived late and Michelle decided to challenge him:

Michelle: Why are you late?

Malcolm: I left late... {mumble} what? Sorry!

Michelle: You left late? Do you think that is a reasonable excuse?

Malcolm: No but it's all I've got {shrug}

This interaction further exacerbated Michelle's unhappiness at the low attendance due to the Media trip and Michelle felt the need to share her feelings with the group whilst some were trying to work through the exam papers.

Michelle: I'm not marking them as authorised because no one told me... so no! It's not an authorised absence. In fact, I think I might tell Media that all maths classes are cancelled from now on!

[A number of students shouted 'Why?' back to Michelle to get clarification and challenge her stance and mood]

Michelle: Well, because it's obviously not that important is it. I'm here!... I always turn up.

Michelle changed the subject of the lesson back to the maths exam papers and started to circulate the room attending to the students who appeared to be the most engaged. Michelle goes on to explain to the class that some of them had been selected to attend what she termed as 'elite' workshops for stretch and challenge and asked them to check when they were on their timetables. The term 'elite' is not an official college term and therefore Michelle's use of the word could be seen as poor judgement on her part or a possible misunderstanding regarding the purpose of the 'stretch and challenge' workshops. Whatever the reasons it appeared to make the students angry, with Mary being the first to shout out 'wait, I've got a worse grade than her, don't I need it?'. The atmosphere of the GCSE maths class remained unconstructive and negative as Michelle called each student up to the front of the room to remind them how much work they needed to do.

With Elsa now gone, the GCSE English class was being taught by an agency teacher called Esther. Esther began the lesson by going through 'facts' of the exam and taking each exam question one at a time. There were only nine out of the expected sixteen students present. This was the lowest attendance I had seen in my observations of the group. Again, the lower attendance could be partially explained by the Media trip and partially by the change in teacher. Indeed, three students arrived late to the lesson the last student arriving at 10:20. As Esther went through question 1a on the exam paper, students had a go at answering the question themselves. On the whole this was done in silence.

Esther followed up the question with more tips on how to save time and what to do before moving onto question 1b of the exam. She appeared happy and enthusiastic about the focus of the lesson:

Esther: This is good for me because it's a chance for me to see how much you remember...

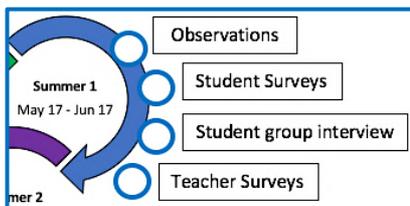
Ewan: I remember it all cos I've failed it so many times before

Esther: Yeah but we are going to fix that...

Ewan: yeah, right!

Despite Esther trying to be positive with the group and go through helpful exam tips, the students are not fully engaged. Ewan highlights the issue of trust again, he does not believe or trust that Esther is able to 'fix' or change his situation so that he is finally able to achieve a grade C. Esther is fresh to the group and decides to challenge the atmosphere and asks, 'come on, who wants to get a grade C this year?' Of the twelve students present only five responded and put their hands up. Esther avoided further interaction and continued with the exam preparation.

The lesson has had a clear focus on 'how to pass the exam', 'teaching to the test' and not to developing their English knowledge, thinking or ability. Esther remains positive with the group, but the students are less so however they still complete their work.



5.6 Part five: Summer term 1st half:
May 2017 – June 2017

During the exam season the pressure was on for staff and students. The first GCSE maths exam was on 25th May 2017 and the GCSE English exam on 6th June 2017. As the college turned its attention to the upcoming exams, I considered the position of maths and English at the time. Table 5.21 below illustrates the student progress update and comparisons with the outcomes to previous years.

	GCSE English	GCSE maths
Current number of live students	419	440
Number of students achieving a grade C in latest Mock exam Jan 2017	86	108
Number of students achieving a high-grade D in latest Mock exam Jan 2017	43	101
A* - C grades based on latest Mock exam 2017	21%	25%
A* - C grades in 2015/16	14.2%	25.1%
A* - C grades in 2014/15	5.1%	6.9%

Table 5.21. Student progress update – outcomes May 2017

Despite a number of students withdrawing, the college still had a large number of students entered for both the impending GCSE maths and GCSE English exams. The college had a high withdrawal rate of students who are also resitting their GCSE exams. Since September 2016 this had resulted in the withdrawal of one hundred and fourteen students who were resitting their GCSE maths exam and one hundred and twenty-five students who were resitting their GCSE English exam. If the mock exams which the students took in Jan 2017 had been the 'real' exam the GCSE English results would have shown a very healthy improvement on the previous year. However, the mock exam was completed when the team was only missing Ezekiel as a full-time member of staff. Contrastingly, in GCSE maths if the mock had been the 'real' exam the department would have decreased its number of A*-C grades.

In light of these figures Mae had stepped up the 1:1 support with selected students in the stretch and challenge workshops. As a teacher who consistently met the college's

key expectation (see table 5.9), she was running the workshops designed to target students who were currently high Ds and are potentially within reach of the grade C. The team seemed confident about the maths results. There was not an equivalent stretch and challenge workshop in English and Eloise gave the impression that, due to the staffing problems, the department would be pleased to simply make it to the exam date without any more major issues, but she was concerned about the potential results. However, Emily was running differentiated English workshops in the holidays and providing exam packs for students. With both the GCSE exams just around the corner, the attendance rates were another concern for the team since the focus on teaching is exam preparation. Table 5.22 below shows the comparison of attendance in GCSE maths in English from March 2017 to May 2017.

Department	Department Percentage (%) in GCSE maths	Department Percentage (%) in GCSE English
Science & ICT	75 ↓	82 ↓
Hair, Beauty and Hospitality	76 ↓	79 ↓
Health childcare	70 ↓	77 ↓
Business and Travel	76 ↓	79 ↓
Art and Media	75 ↓	79 ↓
Sport and Public Services	67 ↓	77 ↓
Electrical and Engineering	70 ↓	69 ↓
Construction	69 ↓	72 ↓

Table 5.22: Attendance data for GCSE maths and English by Department in May 2017

For the first time this academic year, the attendance rates in maths and English have fallen across every vocational area. This is alarming as the students are missing out on crucial exam preparation. With the English department just coasting along with a majority of agency staff and only selected maths students receiving tailored 1:1 support, it is perhaps unsurprising that the attendance rates have continued to fall.

The day before the GCSE maths exam on 24th May 2017, I carried out an observation of the GCSE maths group. The lesson started at 09:00 with fourteen students present. A further three students turned up late, making this the highest attendance I had seen in Michelle's class for some months. The lesson began with Michelle handing out a passport sized photo of herself to everyone in the class, which they could have with them on their desks during the exam. Michelle explained that she had read somewhere that

having a picture of your teacher was supposed to help support students as they would associate specific questions with her, and they could think about what she would say or they might remember a classroom experience. The students took the photos in good taste with Myra saying, 'I'll try anything!'.

Michelle then progressed to handing out example exam questions for the students to complete. Most were engaged and tried to work on the activity set. However, a few were struggling with the questions, but for the first time during my observations, I saw the students helping each other.

Monica: I dunno how to do this

Myra: I know how to do it, but I've forgotten how to do it

Molly: Sorry if I confused you

Brandon: The way I'm feeling at the moment, don't worry about it.

Michelle tried to dedicate her time to supporting as many students as possible but with fifteen wanting specific help she was finding it hard to dedicate time to everyone. As Michelle became conscious that some students might be progressing faster than others, she handed out more exam questions for students to complete, 'Just carry on with past questions. If you need help, then let me know'. However, when the students could not get her attention, some were turning to the calculators on their phones even though were practising for a non-calculator exam. Michelle told Madison to stop texting on her phone when actually she was using the calculator feature to work out the answer because she was struggling.

As the last lesson before the exam continued, it became more and more frantic in order to cram in as much as possible and there was nervous excitement from the students. Michelle spent the remaining twenty minutes of the lesson going through as many different types of exam questions as possible and the students were desperately trying to write everything down and learn it. The students clearly cared that their exam was the following day despite the low-level chatting. Generally, the mood in the classroom was positive and happy. There was a sense that no matter what, the GCSE course was coming to an end.

Before the students left the classroom, they had the chance to complete the final mindset survey, to capture a sense of their mindset belief before the exam. Table 5.23 shows the colour-coded results of that survey.

Colour-coded student responses to maths mindset surveys (3) (See appendix III) *student = is in maths and English group										
Red = Fixed Mindset Green = Growth Mindset Orange = equal split of fixed and growth mindset (Blue = Absent; Purple = Declined survey; Yellow = Achieved grade C; Grey = Withdrawn)										
8 out of 24 maths students responded	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10
Name										
María	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree a lot	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree
Myra	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
Molly	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Agree a lot	Disagree a lot
Maddie	Disagree	Disagree a lot	Disagree	Agree	Disagree a lot	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree a lot
*Barak	Disagree a lot	Disagree	Agree a lot	Agree a lot	Disagree	Disagree	Agree a lot	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
Monica	Disagree a lot	Disagree	Agree a lot	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
Moses	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Disagree
Maggie	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree
Marie	Declined survey									
Malcolm	Absent									
Melissa	Declined survey									
Marissa	Declined survey									
*Belle	Declined survey									
Madison	Declined survey									
Matt	Absent									
*Bettina	Absent									
Mason	Declined survey									
Mikayla	Declined survey									
Melanie	Absent									
*Brandon	Declined survey									
Marcus	Declined survey									
Mary	Absent									
Max	Absent									
Mitchell	Absent									
Megan	Achieved grade C in November resit									
Miranda	Achieved grade C in November resit									
Megan	Achieved grade C in November resit									
Mitchell	Achieved grade C in November resit									
*Bart	Withdrawn									

Table 5.23: maths mindset surveys (3)

Only eight out of the seventeen students who were present completed the mindset survey. This is the lowest rate of response the survey has had across the case and for the first time, some of the students preferred to opt out of the survey. It is significant that the day before the GCSE maths exam was the only time seven students declined to take the survey, when previously the students were more than happy to do so. On the day of the survey, the students were worried about their upcoming exam and resorted to using Michelle, each other, or their phones for last minute help and support. The students were aware of the questions in the survey, since they had previously completed it on two separate occasions, and there are questions which push the students to reflect on their beliefs about their own learning and their ability to cope with failure. To be able to face

these types of questions the day before their previously failed exam, is mentally challenging and is asking them to face up to the likely possibility of failure.

Also, due to last minute panic and revision cramming, some students could not take the time out of the lesson to reflect on the survey questions and preferred to remain focused on past exams and Michelle's sample answers. Previously, for some of the students, taking some time to answer the survey had been an excuse not to do maths. However, the realisation of the impending exam means they now would rather focus on their work and get on. The survey is simply another distraction and asks the students questions they would rather not answer at this time.

However, of the eight students who did take the time to reflect the day before their exam and complete the survey, three have reported a fixed mindset. This is the first time that either Maria or Moses have expressed a fixed mindset towards maths and significantly is on the day before their maths exam. It suggests that mindset is a continuum on which students can swing depending on the context or situation when answering the questions. Maria has answered in a fixed mindset way to every question on the survey possibly evidencing her frustration and doubt about her ability to face her exam tomorrow. Maggie has taken the survey on three separate occasions across the academic year and has expressed a fixed mindset on each occasion; evidence that her belief in her ability has remained unchanged even before the GCSE exam.

On the day of the first GCSE maths exam I asked if anyone from the maths group would be happy to talk to me. On 25th May 2017 at 08:30 waiting to go into the exam hall at 09:00 seven of the GCSE maths group sat down with me in the refectory to take part in an unstructured group interview. They were nervous and jittery:

Interviewer: So... how do you all feel?

Mikayla: I dunno... I um... I dunno, not good

Molly: I really don't know... It's getting to the point when, you know, oh I don't know

Brandon: I mean I am 20 years old and still haven't passed so I am not holding out much hope

Conner: Yeah, me to, it's a joke, I don't even care anymore

Mohammed: I'm really nervous now... just want it all over and done with you know

Melissa: Yeah, I'm really nervous now!! It's my last chance... I want it so bad.

Maria: It's only a GCSE how can I be that thick!

The fact that the students could be honest with me and themselves about how nervous they felt, shows that they do very much feel the stress of the exam and the anxiety of achieving the grade C. They have all sat it at least twice before and know exactly what to expect, therefore students like Mason and Brandon have utter disbelief in their ability to pass based on their previous experiences. What is perhaps most concerning is Maria's comment, where she has come to the conclusion that because she has not achieved the C grade yet at GCSE level, then she is 'thick'. This is a damning assumption to make and possibly one of the most harmful effects that the D grade policy is having on the students. As we saw Maria's belief is also evident in her recent mindset survey (see table 5.23) reporting a unanimous fixed mindset.



Reflection: I could not help but feel saddened by the interview with students before their maths exam. They were seconds away from walking into the exam room believing that they were unable to pass it. They have come to that conclusion based on several previous experiences and therefore why should this time be any different? The group were either completely demotivated or they were on edge, extremely anxious. Mikayla and Marie looked like they hadn't slept and confessed that they hadn't eaten.

Turning to the GCSE English group, the mood in Esther's GCSE English class was quite low and the students appeared fed up, with students sitting back on their chairs, looking on their phones, chatting amongst themselves and yawning. The lesson began at 10:00 and there were thirteen out of the fifteen students present. Predictably, the lesson was all about exam preparation, focusing specifically on presentational features. Esther was using a variety of activities and video clips to try and engage the students. A handful were engaged and joining in the discussions, but the majority were daydreaming. Eamon had his head in his hands, Erika was fiddling with her pen and Mohammed had his headphones on.

Following a short video, Esther explained how to write a good paragraph to answer question 5 in the exam and then asked the students to have a go themselves, giving a time limit of ten minutes. As the students were working, Esther circulated the room offering help and support.

Esther: Ewan what have you done?
Ewan: Not a lot
Elton: What's another word for suggests?
Esther: Well, have a think – what is another word you could use for suggests?
Elton: I don't know, that's why I'm asking you!
Erum: How is this?
Esther: Your answers are above what you need for a C grade, so well done. Keep it up!

There are silent and verbal protests taking place in the session and subversive battles taking place with students refusing to answer Esther. Following Esther's perseverance, praise, motivation and support, the activity took a total of twenty-five minutes to finally complete rather than the required ten minutes deadline. For the remainder of the lesson Esther decided to take the students through an example exam answer, to which the students were more receptive and by 10:53 there was a noticeable silence from the group as they were listening to Esther and taking notes.

When the students are being given the 'answers' or suggested 'strong answers' to questions they generally listen to the teachers in both maths and English. However, when they are told to work independently, work things through or have a go first they are reluctant and refuse to engage until they get the answer. Therefore, the teachers are held to ransom as they often do not get a quiet, engaged classroom until they spoon-feed and provide the solution. Ultimately, the focus of the students taking their GCSE is to achieve a grade C. It is not to learn and develop skills in maths and English, but it is to know the right answers to exam questions. Therefore, this is their need.

Being one of the final lessons before their GCSE English exam on 6th June 2017, the students were given the chance to complete a final mindset survey. Following the low response rate in the maths survey the day before the exam, the GCSE English students were asked to take their survey a week before their exam in the hope that there would be a higher response rate. Table 5.24 shows the students' colour-coded responses.

Colour-coded student responses to English mindset surveys (3) (See appendix III) *student = is in maths and English group										
Red = Fixed Mindset Green = Growth Mindset Orange = equal split of fixed and growth mindset (Blue = Absent; Purple = Declined survey; Grey = Withdrawn)										
8 out of 15 English Students responded	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10
Name										
Ella	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree a lot
Eric	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree
Ethan	Disagree a lot	Disagree a lot	Agree a lot	Agree	Disagree	Disagree a lot	Agree a lot	Disagree	Agree a lot	Disagree
*Belle	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree a lot	Agree	Agree a lot	Disagree
Edward	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree
Ewan	Disagree a lot	Disagree	Agree	Agree a lot	Agree a lot	Agree	Agree	Agree a lot	Agree a lot	Agree
Erika	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Disagree
Erum	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree a lot	Agree a lot	Agree a lot	Agree	Agree a lot	Agree
Enrico	Absent									
*Bettina	Declined survey									
*Barak	Declined survey									
Elton	Declined survey									
Evander	Declined survey									
Brandon	Absent									
Eamon	Declined survey									
*Bart	Withdrawn									

Table 5.24: English mindset surveys (3)

Similarly to the maths group, only eight of the thirteen English students who were present took the opportunity to complete the final mindset survey. Again, this is the lowest response rate the survey has had across its entire life cycle in this group. The students are only a week away from their exam and are particularly frustrated with the inconsistency in teaching as well as the exam itself. The atmosphere on the day of the survey was low and quite negative with exam revision taking priority with everyone. There were signs of silent protests from the students throughout the lesson. Therefore, the students were also protesting against the survey by simply not completing it. This was mirrored in the maths group and it cannot simply be a coincidence that so close to their exams, both groups could not face questions about their mindset.

Despite the generally low mood in the group, of the eight students who did complete the survey only one student, Eric, is expressing a fixed mindset. This is a positive outcome a week before the exam, with most students now believing that intelligence is not fixed. It may only be the students who felt optimistic who were prepared to complete the survey. Eric began the year in a positive frame of mind, he engaged well in class and recorded a growth mindset, but when Elsa announced that she was leaving, his mindset changed to fixed and has remained fixed ever since.

Although Belle declined the opportunity to complete the mindset survey in her GCSE maths class, she took the opportunity to take the survey in her GCSE English class and recorded a growth mindset. Through declining the survey in maths, we could assume that Belle's belief in her mindset in maths is perhaps not as strong as it is in English. Belle is in both the English and the maths group and has therefore taken the survey on four separate occasions, so she knows what questions will be asked. It is interesting that she is not happy to answer those questions when related to maths but is when relating them to English.

Similarly to the GCSE maths group, I asked anyone from the English group if they would be happy to talk to me on the morning of their exam. On 6th June 2017 at 08:30 seven of the GCSE English group sat down with me in the refectory to take part in an unstructured group interview, before their exam at 09:00. Although, Eamon and Evander declined to take part in the final mindset survey, they wanted to take part in the interview.

Interviewer: So... how do you all feel?

Eric: Do you know what, it's been really hard... Elsa left... we then had Elliot for a while, now we've got Esther.

Erika: It's my last chance to pass – I'll try and that's all I can do.

Erum: That's all any of us can do really

Eamon: It won't be our fault if we do rubbish, we have had classes cancelled, different teachers...

Ewan: Crap teachers!

Eamon: Nah, to be fair Elsa wasn't crap

Evander: Yeah but she left!

Belle: I dunno... I did feel confident but now I don't... don't think I will ever pass them

In the interview Eamon, Ewan, and Evander have clearly prepared a list of people or events to blame if they fail to achieve the GCSE grade C again, a reaction Dweck associates with fixed mindsets (Dweck, Walton and Cohen, 2014). This topic was set early on in the interview as Eric wanted to express his disappointment, again, in Elsa leaving the group and therefore how hard the inconsistency has been as a result. Elsa leaving the group has had a profound effect on the students, with them suffering consequences of cancelled classes, distrust and a variety of teachers with different approaches. This has resulted in students like Belle, who began the year feeling confident in English and in her teacher Elsa, now, on the morning of her exam, feeling that achieving a grade C is simply impossible.



Reflection: Again, it was sad to see the GCSE English group enter the exam hall feeling as though they will not be able to pass. With the inconsistency in teaching it has made it easy for them, again, to place the blame of failure somewhere else, in this case on the teachers and the college. The students have a fixed mindset trait. They already have their excuses ready because they believe that they won't achieve the grade C.

For teachers, it can be incredibly stressful watching their students enter an exam, which they have had the responsibility of preparing them to sit. They are willing them to do the best they can do and remember everything that they have been taught. Michelle goes as far as giving her students passport sized photographs in the hope that it would trigger something in them during the exam. On the morning of both the maths and English exams, I asked the teachers to complete their final mindset survey now that the end is in sight and there is no more they can do for the students. The colour-coded responses from the teaching staff is presenting below in table 5.25.

Colour-coded teacher responses to mindset survey (3) (See appendix IV)										
Red = Fixed Mindset Green = Growth Mindset										
Name	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10
Maths Teachers Mindset responses										
Michelle	Disagree	Agree	Agree a lot	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree
Mark	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
Mick	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
Mae	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Agree a lot	Disagree
Marco	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree a lot	Agree a lot	Disagree a lot	Agree a lot	Disagree a lot
English Teachers Mindset responses										
Elsa	<i>Long-term compassionate leave</i>									
Emma	<i>Terminated contract of employment</i>									
Emily	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Disagree
Ezekiel	<i>Suspended</i>									
Eloise	Disagree a lot	Disagree a lot	Agree	Agree	Disagree a lot	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Disagree a lot

Table 5.25: Teacher responses to mindset surveys (3)

What is clear from table 5.25 is that on the morning of the exam the entire maths team are conveying a growth mindset. This includes both Mark and Marco who have changed from fixed mindset (see table 5.15) in the first half of the spring term, reverting back to a growth mindset. This suggests that for the first time in the life cycle of the case the maths team are feeling more optimistic about the learning that has taken place, to the point where they unanimously agree that 'students like learning from their mistakes' and 'the harder students work at something the better they become'. However, it is disappointing that Mick, Mae and Marco have all agreed with Q6: 'Smart people don't have to try as

hard'. Out of the seven teachers who completed the survey, four agreed with the statement. This is indicative of how hard they feel they have had to support the students in preparation for their exam.

Table 5.25 illustrates again how the English team have been completely decimated, due to a range of different reasons. However, from the students' perspective they see that their appointed teacher at the beginning of the academic year, is no longer there. The inconsistency in the English team has put more pressure on the department to provide teaching cover and help agency teachers in order to plug the gaps. In particular, this has fallen to Emily, who is the only member of staff who has remained consistent in the English team. Therefore, it is perhaps unsurprising that Emily has remained unchanged and is expressing a fixed mindset. The fact that Emily has remained unmoved is further confirmation that most of the pressure has fallen on her and it has impacted on her belief in teaching and learning.

Although, generally the teachers appear optimistic at this stage in the academic year, it is clear from the interviews with both the GCSE maths and English groups that many of them lack confidence in their chances of achieving the grade C. Logistically, the high number of students resitting their GCSE has placed added pressure on all staff in the college. On the morning of each GCSE exam, the college had to cancel all of the normal classes on all their sites in order to accommodate the hundreds of students entered and all the students who required additional time and support. I witnessed hundreds of the students reluctantly entering the examination hall and sitting down for the exam which they had taken numerous times before. The atmosphere was like any other exam, a mixture of nervousness and uncertainty.

All anyone can do is wait for the results to be published on 24th August 2017.



5.7 Part six: Summer term 2nd half:

July 2017 – August 2017

The teaching of both GCSE maths and English ended as soon as the last exam took place in early June 2017. Perhaps this was indicative in itself that for the college the aim was simply to complete and pass the GCSE exam rather than develop and teach further maths and English skills to its vocational students. In July the academic term was winding down for all subjects across the college and coming to an end. As the maths and English team were preparing for the next academic year and waiting for the results to be announced in August 2017, I wanted to interview Michelle and Esther to collect their final reflections. Despite Eloise originally thinking Elsa would be returning from her long-term compassionate leave in June 2017, Elsa had still not returned.

Table 5.26 gives the individual responses to the unstructured 1:1 interviews for both Michelle and Esther and the main recurring themes presented. Each interview began with the opening statement 'I would like you to tell me about teaching the maths/English resit...' which is even more relevant now the GCSE course had come to an end.

Teacher	Interview Data of Michelle (GCSE maths Teacher) and Esther (GCSE English Teacher): Colour-coded themes: Student Barriers , Teacher Barriers , Management Barriers
Michelle	<i>Well, what can I say, a rollercoaster! It has been a lot of hard work, I have won some battles lost some others.</i> <i>The attendance has been atrocious.</i> <i>The ones who turn up stand a chance and can pass the ones who don't turn up know that they won't pass so don't bother.</i> And do you know what, when they don't turn up, it makes my life a lot easier. <i>I think the marks in the mocks have been going up... and I am fairly confident that a lot of the group are going to get a grade C.</i> <i>I have done everything I can do. But it has been really hard, and it has impacted on me a lot, I am exhausted, mentally and physically.</i>
Esther	<i>I joined the college in Easter so to be honest everything here still feels very new, but it has gone ok.</i> <i>The students seem nice. Although they have been hard to win over. They just assumed that I was going to leave like everyone else.</i> <i>We have just been going over revision for the exam as all their controlled assessments were completed. Which has been quite dry for them.</i> <i>Not everyone engaged with it, but I tried to push everyone. It has been hard but there is only so much we can do.</i> <i>I couldn't tell you how many will get a grade C... a few... I think?</i>

Table 5.26: 1:1 interviews with Michelle and Esther GCSE Teachers (3)

Esther has only been a member of the English team for last few months and therefore cannot offer a holistic reflection of the GCSE resit year. However, her comments do show the struggle she has faced taking over from Elsa. She has had to win the trust of the group, to make them believe that she will be a consistent teacher for them and see them through the exam. As they had lost Elsa, whom they trusted, and then had agency teachers who have come and gone, it is not unsurprising that they doubted Esther's resilience to stay. During the interview, Esther refers to the curriculum content being as being 'dry' and therefore affecting the students' engagement. This is because she has been 'teaching to the exam', rather than teaching 'English' as a subject. Esther is implying that if she were able to teach English in its own right rather than English to pass the GCSE, the students would be more engaged. This again questions the ultimate purpose of the D grade policy.

As Michelle has been a consistent member of the GCSE maths team, she is able to give a holistic reflection of the GCSE resit year at the college in 2016-2017. She has chosen to describe the year as a 'rollercoaster'. This is a seemingly appropriate analogy for the resit year as a whole for the teachers, students and policymakers alike. The fact that Michelle goes on to describe the battles that she has won and lost, is representative of the battleground that she has faced within the classroom. It is also possible that Michelle is also referring to some of the 'battles' that she feels she has encountered with Eloise and the SMT in listening and understanding the challenges faced throughout the year. Michelle admits that the year has had an impact on her 'physically and mentally', showing how draining she has found teaching the GCSE resit course to the students.

Although Michelle describes the attendance as 'atrocious', she does not suggest this has had a negative impact. She is implying the opposite. The students who are the most disengaged are not turning up to lessons and this has allowed her to focus her teaching on the students who are more likely to pass and who want to be there. Michelle is making the assumption that the students who are turning up to her lessons are the ones who are motivated and therefore she is able to tailor the teaching to their needs. When students who 'know they are not going to pass' turn up, they make teaching and learning difficult for her and the other students. The students are voting with their feet and are not intrinsically motivated to learn and attend. Michelle feels that she has been able to focus on the more motivated students who have been consistent attenders, and this may explain her confidence in her students achieving the grade C.

On 24th August 2017 the students were allowed to arrive at the college as early as 8:30am to receive their results. When I arrived the atmosphere in the staffroom was very positive and this was not surprising as the positive mock results (see table 5.21) had been shown to be very accurate and the number of A*-C grades had increased in both maths and English.

	GCSE English	GCSE maths
Exam completers	367	388
A* - C grades based on latest Mock exam 2017	21%	25%
A* - C grades 2016/17	21.8%	28.4%
A* - C grades 2015/16	14.2%	25.1%
A* - C grades 2014/15	5.1%	6.9%

Table 5.27: GCSE maths and English A* - C grades August 2017

Table 5.27 shows crucially that despite the turbulent year, the number of A*-C grades in both GCSE maths and English has increased and therefore explains the positive mood in the staffroom. However, what is perhaps surprising is the actual percentage success rates in the subjects. GCSE maths, where staffing has been consistent, has only increased the pass rate by 3.3%, whereas GCSE English, who have had the most inconsistent teaching, has increased the pass rate by 7.6%. Although the maths team have had a consistent full-time team, they have not always been present in the classroom, with each of the maths teachers being on sick leave at some point throughout the year and therefore their teaching has not always been consistent. The difference in the A*-C grade pass rate suggests that the intermittent sick leave from the teacher is more damaging than long term absence of the teacher (Miller, Murnane and Willett, 2007). The results also suggest that having a consistent teacher is not sufficient in ensuring the success of the students in achieving their grade C. The students also need to be intrinsically motivated and engaged in deep learning. If the grade C could be achieved with consistent teaching alone, the number of students needing to retake the GCSE exams would be lower since they would be more likely to have passed in secondary school.

Despite the confident atmosphere, Eloise was not feeling as positive. Whilst sitting in the staffroom, Eloise pulled me to one side and asked to speak to me alone.

Eloise: *I'm sorry but everyone is really positive but I'm a bit heart-breaking, I don't want them to hear. Do you know 41 students in English were within 5 marks of the grade C! But they had no staff! Just agency so they all thought, well what's the bloody point! It's heart-breaking but I don't want to appear negative.*

Out of the staffroom and away from the team, Eloise was quite emotional and careful that the rest of team did not hear her. The repetition of the word 'heart-breaking' is emphasising how upset Eloise feels about the results. When one of the 41 students she mentions came into the college to collect his results Eloise was there to offer some reassurance;

Eloise: *Don't worry, you will be put in for a re-mark*
Student: *Oh my god! I weren't close enough though was I {Crying}*
Eloise: *You were so close!! You did so well.
The worst case you will have to do the new GCSE, but you get another chance.*

Student: *Great! I will just start from scratch on something I can't bloody pass anyway!*

Unfortunately, being a high-grade D is not enough to make this student believe he can pass and achieve the grade C standard, whether that is on the old style of GCSE or the new style GCSE. Eloise is not focusing on the improved success rate of A* - C grades but on the students, who are borderline grade C students and who were so close to achieving the grade C. She lays the blame on the lack of staff and suggests that this, specifically within the English team, has had a knock-on effect with the students not engaging and turning up to lessons. This is further evidence that the teachers and students reflect each other's behaviours. It appears that this view is also shared by others in the college. Whilst waiting for the students to collect their results I had an informal interview with Emily and Georgie; Georgie is the exam and timetable officer for the college.

Georgie: *I honestly think that if staff hadn't imploded it would have been a different story. They wouldn't have had inconsistency! There were so many students in English for exam who were so close; 41 that's the story!!*

But it's still positive.

Emily: *I agree, we still haven't got the secret.*

Similarly to Eloise, despite the improved results, Georgie and Emily were very upset with the news of the number of students who were close to achieving the grade C. In summary Eloise, Emily and Georgie are all blaming staffing problems for the reason the students did not achieve the grade C in English. However, no-one has offered an opinion about the small 3.3% improvement on A* - C grades in maths, as there has been such a high number of students sitting on a high-grade D in English. Mae and Eloise are both very happy with the GCSE maths results. This is because looking at the success rates for GCSE maths and English across all ages, and not just 16-19-year olds, there is a different and more positive story for the college data.

	2015-16	2016-17	AOC DfE pass rate 2015-16
GCSE English 16-19	14.2%	21.8%	
GCSE English All ages	17.2%	25.6%	22.8%
GCSE maths 16-19	25.1%	28.4%	
GCSE maths All ages	27.6%	30.1%	22.4%

Table 5.28: GCSE Success Rates for GCSE maths and English

Table 5.28 shows that overall the college can broadcast that 25.6% of their learners achieved a grade C or above in GCSE English and 30.1% of their learners achieved a grade C or above in GCSE maths which, when compared to the Association of Colleges DfE pass rate in 2015-16, is something of which they can be proud. The college's pass rate in GCSE maths is particularly high when compared to the other providers. Therefore to make a further improvement by 3.3% for 16-19-year olds is still a good achievement for the department.

If we now turn to the specific students in the GCSE maths and English groups whom I have followed throughout the case study, we can understand a personal interpretation of the college data. The table 5.29 shows the students in the GCSE maths group, the highest achieving grade in GCSE maths, their last grade achieved in the previous year and what they have achieved this year.

	Highest achieving grade in GCSE maths	Grade achieved 2015-16	Grade achieved 2016-17
Maria	F	G	E [↑]
Myra	G	G	E [↑]
Molly	D	G	F [↑]
Maddie	D	E	C [↑]
*Barak	D	D	D ⁻
Monica	D	E	D [↑]
Moses	D	D	C [↑]
Maggie	D	D	D ⁻
Marie	G	G	E [↑]
Malcolm	D	D	D ⁻
Melissa	D	E	E ⁻
Marissa	D	No result	No result
*Belle	D	D	E [↓]
Madison	D	D	D ⁻
Matt	E	E	D [↑]
*Bettina	D	D	C [↑]
Mason	D	D	F [↓]
Mikayla	D	E	F [↓]
Melanie	D	F	E [↑]
*Brandon	D	E	E ⁻
Marcus	D	D	D ⁻
Mary	D	E	E ⁻
Max	E	E	D [↑]
Mitchell	D	<i>Achieved grade C in Nov resit 2016</i>	
Megan	D	<i>Achieved grade C in Nov resit 2016</i>	
Miranda	D	<i>Achieved grade C in Nov resit 2016</i>	

Table 5.29: GCSE maths group results 2016-17

What is surprising from table 5.29 is that only three of the twenty-three students who sat the GCSE exam achieved a grade C. For Maddie, who has gone from a grade E to a grade C, this is a huge achievement. Despite Moses reporting a fixed mindset on his last survey the day before the exam, he managed to go from a grade D to a grade C. Although there are the three students who have achieved the grade C there are three other students, Mason, Mikayla and Belle, who have gone the other way and have dropped one or two grades. In reality nine members of the group went into the exam at grade D

level and only two of those students achieved a grade C. The results show that only three students of the twenty-three, can now stop taking the GCSE and under the D grade policy the others will have to continue and resit the maths exam next year.

Turning to the GCSE English group we can see quite a positive picture despite the complaints about the English staffing and results.

	Highest achieving grade in GCSE English	Grade achieved 2015-16	Grade achieved 2016-17
Ella	D	E	D [↑]
Eric	D	D	D ⁻
Ethan	E	E	B [↑]
*Belle	E	E	D [↑]
Edward	D	D	C [↑]
Ewan	D	E	D [↑]
Erika	D	D	C [↑]
Erum	D	E	D [↑]
Enrico	D	E	G [↓]
*Bettina	E	E	E ⁻
*Barak	D	U	C [↑]
Elton	D	D	C [↑]
Evander	D	G	E [↑]
Brandon	D	E	D [↑]
Eamon	D	E	D [↑]
*Bart	D	E	Withdrawn

Table 5.30: GCSE English group results 2016-17

Table 5.30 shows that out of the fifteen students who sat the GCSE English exam, five students have achieved a grade C or above, with both Ethan and Barak jumping a number of grades to achieve a grade B and a grade C respectively. The table also shows positive outcomes for seven other students who have also gone up at least one grade. Out of the fifteen students only one student, Enrico, has gone down, going from a grade E to a grade G.

The most unanticipated aspect of the data is that, there is a more positive outcome for the English group than the maths group. The English group had Elsa an enthusiastic

teacher for the majority of the academic year but then had a few agency teachers before having Esther who remained with them till the end. Whereas, the maths group had Michelle a less enthusiastic teacher and teaching style, for the entire academic year. The English group have performed better and made the most improvement.

When focusing specifically on the students who studied both GCSE maths and English, only Barak achieved a grade C in English and only Bettina achieved a grade C in maths. Table 5.31 shows the outcomes for students enrolled on both maths and English.

	GCSE English 2015-16	GCSE English 2016-17	GCSE maths 2015-16	GCSE maths 2016-17
Belle	D	D	D	E
Bart	D	<i>Withdrawn</i>	D	<i>Withdrawn</i>
Bettina	E	E	D	C
Barak	U	C	D	D
Brandon	D	D	D	E

Table 5.31: GCSE results for maths and English groups

What is clear from all the data I have collected and the final GCSE results is that when students have to resit both GCSEs it does not necessarily affect their ability to achieve a grade C in at least one of the subjects. Most of the students have either improved their grade or remained at the same level, except Brandon and Belle who have gone from grade Ds to grade Es in maths. Again, what is significant, is that the subject in which they have down is GCSE maths rather than perhaps the more expected GCSE English with its recent staffing issues. However, it may be that having the enthusiastic Elsa at the beginning of the year had an impact on the students learning.

In summary, for the thirty-eight students in the maths and English groups who sat their GCSE exams in 2017, only eight achieved an A* - C grade. In turn, that means thirty students still have to continue to study their GCSE maths and/or English in order to try to achieve the required standard. Of the thirty students who have to continue to study their GCSEs fifteen of them have made progress this year and have gone up at least one grade, but fifteen of them have either remained at the same level all year, gone down a level or have no result.

Therefore, the results in this chapter indicate that for every success story of a student achieving a grade C there are even more students who have not achieved and must repeat the cycle again. Also, despite achieving the grade C, many of the successful students I have followed, reported a negative experience to resitting their GCSE,

discussing and showing their despair and distress at retaking the GCSE course. Although the English group had a tide of different teachers towards the end of the year, they generally had a more positive experience of English teaching due to having an enthusiastic teacher whom they trusted.

The next chapter moves on to discuss the critical incidents of the data collection year. It illustrates the key stories of the year as vignettes, allowing for deeper themed discussion and analysis of the data collected.

Chapter Six

Discussion – Research vignettes

6.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines a number of vignettes which have been used as part of the analysis of the rich data collected throughout the duration of the case study. The vignettes helped the data to transition from the descriptive to the analytical. The rationale for the choice of vignettes was to show the key moments that were observed or recorded during the data collection period of the study (Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, 2014). It was the use of the vignettes as primary data that allowed strong thematic analysis to come through the discussion.

The chapter presents each vignette in turn. Following each vignette are my first thoughts of the incident, then building on this my analysis is presented. Shown as a reflection point at the end of each vignette, is an illustration of how the findings extracted from the vignette directly link and affect my conceptual framework (See chapter four, section 4.2 Conceptual framework and research questions).



Reflection: I felt the richness of the experiences of my participants and I was able to capture that, through their own words. The natural language and values of the participants are unique to each setting and the challenge for the researcher is to be able to frame those selections of evidence to make sure the case study is accessible for everyone and genuine (Lincoln and Guba, 2002). One way this was achieved was through producing a series of vignettes. Case studies can make use of vignettes to illustrate a snapshot of what is happening within a case and can be produced in episodes or themes to illustrate a particular issue (Stake, 1995). Therefore, my case study makes use of vignettes to portray the critical aspects of my study and to portray specific themes which come through from my data.

Prior to a supervisory meeting to discuss my research vignettes I had carried out my initial analysis and written my initial thoughts. Therefore, when presenting my research vignettes to my supervisors we could discuss them without influencing my original thoughts. However, the result of this meeting was further discussion and thought about what the critical incidents portrayed, seeking explanations greater than a series of isolated episodes. Together we tried to sort them into a logical order, which helped us

to recognise a transition which could assist the structure as well as the analysis. Although not chronological, there was a theme of transition in individuals from engagement to disengagement seen through distancing. At another level I identified a theme of a reflected conflict and behaviour that could be seen between individuals. These behaviours could be seen throughout the whole setting from students, staff and the principal. Therefore, the vignettes are presented as critical incidents which build upon one another in terms of transition and conflict.

6.2 Stretch and Challenge incident

During a maths lesson Michelle handed back the latest mock exam results to her students. Michelle announced to the entire class that the college has made the decision to run some ‘elite workshops’ to provide further support for ‘some’ of the students. However, Michelle failed to explain what the criterion was for the students to be able to attend the workshops or the purposes of the workshops.

Michelle: *Some of you have been moved to elite workshops for stretch and challenge so make sure you know when your workshop is.*

Melissa: *Wait... I’ve got a worse grade than her... don’t I need it?*

The words ‘stretch and challenge’ suggested to one student in the class, Melissa, that the extra workshops were something that would be helpful to her as she was struggling, and her friend was already doing well so did not require the further support. Therefore, she questioned Michelle about why she had not been selected, but Michelle did not provide Melissa with a clear explanation. Following the maths lesson, I asked Michelle to explain to me what exactly the extra sessions were. She explained; *“The stretch and challenge workshops will focus on students who are likely to get a grade C. Most students stand no chance”*.

Figure 6.1: Stretch and challenge vignette

My First thoughts

The college’s introduction of the ‘stretch and challenge’ workshops is reaffirming to the students that the college remains focused on getting the best results possible in maths, by targeting students who are the most likely to achieve an A*-C grade. Despite Ofsted (2018a) publishing a myth-busting page online outlining that maths and English will not be seen as limiters on some institutions’ awarded grades, the college is concentrating on and investing more time and resources in the students they believe to have the best chance of achieving a grade C and inviting only these students to the workshops. This is because, despite Ofsted’s reassurances, the Further Education and Skills inspection handbook differentiates between the number of students making progress in maths and English in their grade descriptors for 16-19 study programmes (Ofsted, 2018b).

Therefore, with the number of A-C grades being at the forefront of the college's priorities, the individual learners who are less likely to achieve a GCSE grade C feel as though they are being pushed aside. This brings the purpose and aims of the D grade policy and GCSE back into the spotlight. According to the Department for Education (2017) the purpose of the D grade policy is to represent the value of maths and English in helping young people advance in both their education and future employment. However, the vignette demonstrates that the D grade policy has devalued the importance of maths for some learners due to the focus on results.

From my conversation with Michelle I was given an understanding of which students the college identified as eligible to attend the 'stretch and challenge' workshops. The college has chosen not to put on extra workshops for students like Melissa to further support them in their maths skills, which is ironic as it is students like Melissa that the D grade policy was intended to help. The D grade policy has become less about the individual learners and less about the embedding of maths and English skills but more about results. This could arguably be because of the standardising nature of assessment the GCSE qualification was originally celebrated for, as it provides a comparable assessment level for all learners (Politics, 2018) which focuses on one examination score at the end of the year.

Analysis

A possible interpretation of the stretch and challenge incident is that Melissa is protesting against the college's policy to provide extra workshops for those whom the college feels would benefit the most. There is a dissonance between who is getting the help and who needs it. Michelle chooses to use the word 'elite' to inform the students that some have been selected to attend different workshops. This is not an official college term, but added by Michelle, possibly due to a misunderstanding on her part about the purpose of the additional 'stretch and challenge' workshops but it could also be seen as her poor judgement. An alternative interpretation might be that Michelle is being intentionally inflammatory knowing that further demoralisation might encourage some students to stop attending, thus giving Michelle a smaller class size and potentially making the students responsible for their own failure. However, I believe that Michelle is sending hidden messages to her students and I feel her choice to use the term 'elite' exacerbated Melissa's reaction. By suggesting that some students are 'elite' she sends the message to the others that they are not worthy of further attention. Melissa feels she should be able to attend the workshops as she needs the support more than others and therefore challenges Michelle. Melissa has a perception of her own ability in maths and is comparing herself to her peers, which is suggestive of an entity theory of intelligence

(Dweck, and Master, 2009). Melissa's outburst suggests that she is not coping with the reality of her comparison and sees herself as someone in a greater need of support than her peer who is achieving higher scores in the mock exams. Therefore, Melissa is requesting further help and sees the college as offering this 'help' to her peers, whom she perceives as performing higher in the subject.

The college has created an opportunity to take identified students who are achieving the highest grades in mock exams into smaller groups to allow individualised teaching and learning to take place. Smaller group sizes are recommended for disaffected students but due to budgetary and logistical constraints this is not always possible, therefore running tailored workshops is a logical compromise for the college (Rose, 2017). The college does not want to make the majority of disaffected learners feel as though they are less likely to achieve than anyone else, therefore there is an element of dishonesty in its message to Melissa. According to Dweck, Walton and Cohen (2011) outstanding teaching institutions promote 'belonging' to encourage everyone to grow and excel. Unfortunately the college is effectively doing the opposite of this. There is coercion between the policymakers, the college and the teachers, which is resulting in any extra support and focus going to students who are a borderline grade C/4 and not to those who are still only achieving low grades.

When Melissa challenged Michelle, I observed Michelle walking away to avoid entering into a discussion. It appeared that she did not want to explain to Melissa that she was a student who "stands no chance" and therefore was not identified to attend a workshop. By distancing herself from Melissa it seemed as though she was anxious about being honest with her students regarding their likelihood of achieving a grade C. In terms of good practice, it is important not to place a glass ceiling on students' attainment through any form of differentiation (Rose, 2017). Unfortunately, the college's chosen operational strategy is limiting the majority of its students by explicitly only selecting individuals who are deemed to be of higher ability. The impact of the workshops has further disheartened an already disaffected student.

Reflection:

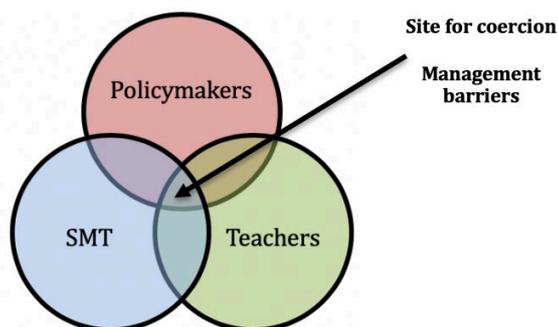


Figure 6.2: Reflection 1

6.3 The Lollipop incident

As part of the current GCSE English resit course the students are required to complete controlled assessments. The marks that students are awarded are carried forward to give them their final grade when added to their exam mark. During an observation of an English class, the teacher Elsa was giving students the marks they were awarded for one of their assessments. To do this Elsa prepared individualised envelopes for each student in the class.

Each envelope had the students name, an attached lollipop, a stamp saying, 'very good' and a smiley face sticker.

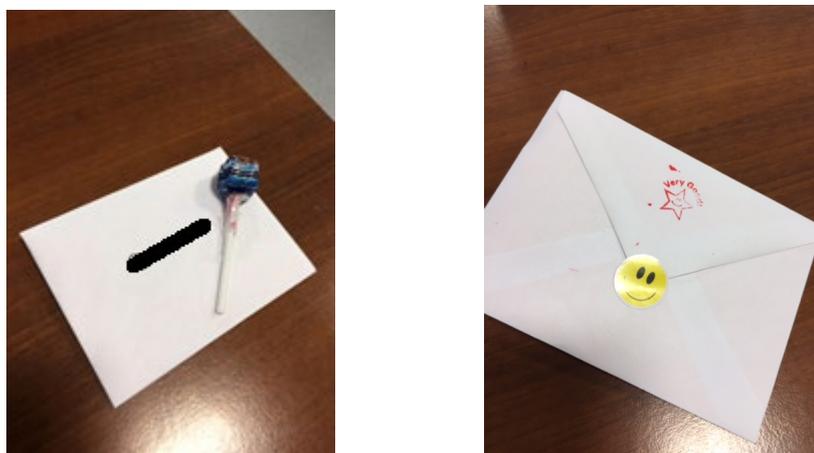


Figure 6.3: Lollipop vignette

My first thoughts

Elsa had clearly spent a considerable amount of time preparing how she wanted to let the students know their marks. When Elsa handed the students their envelopes, I observed two different reactions from the students.

Belle, who has reported a growth mindset in English throughout the case, received her envelope and responded positively. Belle opened up her envelope, looked at her result

and smiled. Belle scored twenty out of a possible thirty marks, which is equivalent to a high-grade C. She turned to her friend and said, "It's really sweet" as she took a picture of her envelope and lollipop to send to a friend who was not in class.

However, Eamon who has reported a fixed mindset in English throughout the case, didn't acknowledge the fact that they were receiving any marks back and was not listening. When Elsa handed out the envelopes and placed Eamon's on his desk, he questioned what she was giving him;

Eamon: What's this?

Elsa: Your result

Eamon: I don't want to look at it. Can I have my lollipop now?

Elsa: Yes of course you can

From my previous conversations with Eamon he feels he already knows that he is still not working at the required C grade, but he was not aware of this as he did not open his envelope. This could be interpreted as a defensive strategy by ignoring the envelope and asking Elsa "*can I have my lollipop now?*". However, it was evident that Eamon, on some level, does care about his mark as he opened his envelope later on in the session and looked at his grade; once opened there was no emotion. Unfortunately, his fears were realised as he only scored thirteen out of a possible thirty marks, which is equivalent to a grade D.

Analysis:

Elsa's choice to present the marks in this way has the implication of being an act of dishonesty as she is sending the students mixed messages with the entire class receiving an envelope which says, 'Very Good'. From my observations of the class it appeared that this act led the students to believe that they had all done well, leaving many disappointed once their envelopes were opened. According to Rattan, Good and Dweck (2011) this approach is a form of comfort feedback, and shows Elsa inadvertently communicating her low expectations of the students. This is evidence of Elsa's true entity theory of intelligence rather than the growth mindset she has been recorded to have (See tables 5.5 and 5.15). Elsa's attempt to conceal the students' results is not only a form of comfort feedback but it is also possible that she is fearful of the effects on the students of receiving a mark which shows they are not working at the required standard.

During my conversations with Elsa she shared the tremendous effort she had made to conceal the students results to avoid a possible battle. As in the previous vignette there

again appears to be teacher anxiety around honesty in relation to the students' results. This implies that she is not coping with the reality and her choice of presentation can be seen as a purposeful pedagogical behaviour strategy, such as positive reinforcement or token reinforcement strategies as described by Woolfolk, Hughes and Walkup (2013). However, Elsa is using the positive phrase 'Very Good' and the token reward of a lollipop to shield herself against the reaction from the students.

The decision to hand out a lollipop to every student is especially interesting within the vignette. Lollipops are generally associated with children, and therefore Elsa's use of them could be seen as a patronising gesture to some students. However, most were not offended by their gift or reward. A possible interpretation is that Elsa is 'sweetening the students up' by literally giving them sugar, but metaphorically she could be 'sweetening them up' to get them to like her. It could also be seen that she is literally 'shutting the students up'. Elsa is silencing them in two ways, emotionally and physically. Something to suck is an established pacifier for babies – a substitute for emotional support – but it also acts physically to render protest difficult. For the students, the act of sucking a lollipop makes speaking difficult, it literally takes their voice away and by the students accepting their silence there is passive acceptance as described by Belenkey, et al. (1986). There is power in words and in the students' voices so giving the students lollipops to conceal or compensate for their test scores is making the students voiceless (Belenkey, et al. 1986). All in authority and who are working with the students within the D grade policy need to give the students a voice.



Reflection

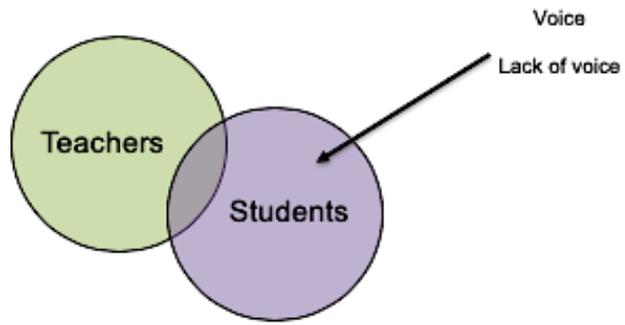


Figure 6.4: Reflection 2

6.4 The 'Magic Wand' incident

Interviewer: How would you change things?

What? Magic wand stuff??

I would improve their concentration... reception skills, it's really hard, you know they are perfectly bright to follow instructions, it's just there is something in them, you think 'how many ways can I explain it?' I've done everything I can... there is just something in them I can't get around, I know it sounds really defeatist from my point of view.

Because like my sports group for example, you know, you stand at the front and you have made it as clear as possible...it's on the board...you say it to them...you give them a sheet with it written on...get them to write it in their books and then 10 minutes later someone says... 'What is it?' and they just haven't taken it in and just think but I have done everything I can to ensure you've got this instruction in four different formats but you just haven't taken it on board.

I mean take their controlled assessments, I am more worried than they are, I shouted at the sports group – I wasn't proud.

It would be better one-to-one so there is nowhere to hide, classes are too big, Sorry I am really ranting now. This is actually quite therapeutic (laughs), I am so sorry (laughs)

Figure 6.5: The magic wand vignette

My first thoughts

This vignette presents a snapshot of an interview with Emily who is a GCSE English teacher at the college. The interview took place during her lunch break. She spoke with honesty and was very open about her experiences of teaching GCSE English to resit students. During the 15 minute interview she admitted that she was surprised with how defeatist she sounded and went on to make the comment that she found the experience of the interview 'therapeutic'. This is testament to her honesty throughout the interview

and highlights how little time Emily gets to sit down and reflect and talk to someone about her current teaching practice and situation.

Following the interview with Emily I felt that she had a good understanding of the barriers that both she and the students face on a day to day basis and she clearly has given this some thought. From her experience of teaching the GCSE resit she feels that she has identified that there is 'something' within them, something that she can't get around. The 'something' could be the students lack of motivation, their negativity or fixed mindset but as shown in the findings chapter this is certainly not true for everyone.

Emily's cry for her 'magic-wand' to change the students' reception skills suggests that they 'hear' but do not listen and the 'something' is their inability to listen. There is a conflict of teacher-student self-theories of teaching and learning (Fox, 1984), as discussed in my literature review. It is possible that by the students not being 'receptive' there is a refusal or a failure of the students to assimilate or accommodate new learning. By the students being forced to accommodate new learning they enter a state of cognitive disequilibrium but their lack of receptive skills and their refusal to assimilate means they do not regain cognitive equilibrium (Piaget, 1952b). This therefore results in the students not reaching equilibration and it is this process that leads to much more efficient cognitive structures being constructed (Lutz and Sternberg, 1999).

Analysis

During the interview Emily offers an interesting perspective of the students' inability or refusal to learn, but on closer examination of the survey data and my field notes there is an indication that she is in a critical state of transition. Emily goes into detail and lists the number of different pedagogical strategies that she is implementing to try to help the students assimilate or accommodate the new learning, but is nevertheless in transition. Unlike the teachers in the two previous vignettes, Emily sounds defeatist and labels herself as such. She feels she has got around everything else pedagogically but cannot get around the problem that the students are not receptive and open to the learning. Dreikurs (1968) argues that no pedagogical solution will get around someone's resistance to learning. This inability is starting to have a direct effect on her attitude where she is sliding down a continuum into a more negative state of mind.

Emily admits at the end of the interview that she found the discussion quite 'therapeutic' which suggests that she found the interview beneficial. Emily, like most teachers, spends the majority of her day behind the classroom door dealing with everyday classroom stresses and has little opportunity to de-stress and off load to her peers, putting her at

an increased risk of teacher burnout (Larrivee, 2012). This risk is further heightened because of the increased pedagogical problems interplaying within a GCSE resit classroom.

What is particularly notable is Emily's choice of words when asked, "How would you change things?" and she replies "What? Magic wand stuff?". It is significant on two levels. Firstly, her response to the open-ended question about how she would change things reveals her view on the likelihood of any changes happening. Emily does not take the opportunity to request any plausible changes within the institution or from policymakers. Instead she jumps straight to a magical fairy-tale answer, which is completely impossible. This implies a belief that nothing can or will change so it is pointless asking for it and she is saving her wishes for something much bigger.

Secondly, Emily's choice of the word 'magic wand' is also significant as the term now has a direct link to mindset theory. In June 2015 Tim O'Brien wrote an article for Times Educational Supplement critiquing Dweck's Mindset theory and warning all teachers that mindsets are not 'magic wands'. The article cautions educators to study the theory closely, as it is not a solution to better learning and cognitive ability for all but is more suited to a classroom in a fairy-tale world rather than one in reality (O'Brien, 2015). Hence the term 'magic wand'. Emily's use of the term could suggest that she has read the article and is therefore making a word association with another magical request to fix problems in education that will not work. Alternatively Emily could be unaware of the article and is like many other teachers who are also just wishing for 'magic wands' and solutions within the classroom.

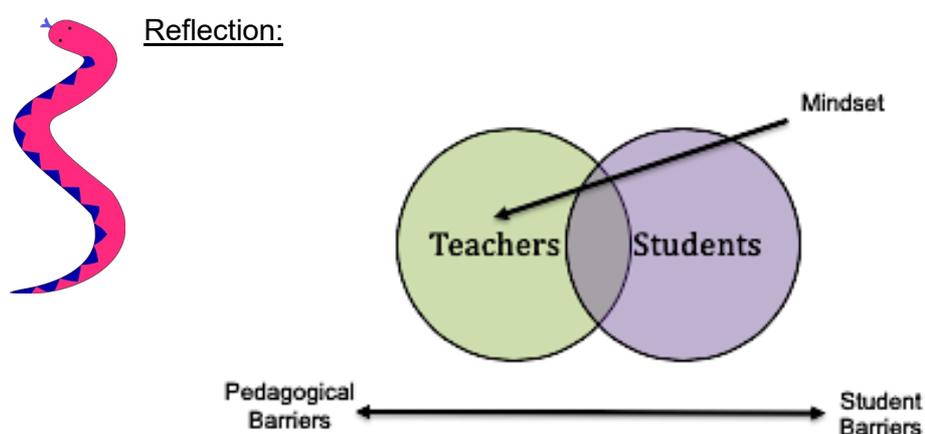


Figure 6.6: Reflection 3

6.5 The incident of Emily's transition

Throughout the life cycle of the case all students and teachers completed mindset surveys. At the beginning of the academic year Emily recorded a growth mindset and answered the survey generally with a more growth mindset way of thinking. This attitude was also projected in her teaching where she commented in conversations about trying to help students in as many ways as possible (see 6.4 'magic wand incident'). As staffing within the English team became more of an issue, Emily became the only permanent member of staff in the English team. This resulted in extra pressure to support agency teachers and students calling on her more and more. This was evident in her sudden change of mindset and this remained fixed for the rest of the academic year.

Questions	Mindset survey 1	Mindset survey 2	Mindset survey 3
Q1. Your intelligence is something very basic about you that you can't change very much.	Disagree	Agree	Agree
Q2. You can learn new things, but you can't really change how intelligent you are.	Disagree	Agree	Agree
Q3. You can always substantially change how intelligent you are.	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree
Q4. No matter how much intelligence you have, you can always change it quite a bit.	Agree	Disagree	Disagree
Q5. Students fail because they are often not smart enough to perform successfully.	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree
Q6. Smart people don't have to try as hard.	Agree	Agree	Agree
Q7. Students like learning from their mistakes.	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree
Q8. Students like learning best when they do it perfectly without any mistakes.	Disagree	Agree	Agree
Q9. The harder students work at something, the better they become.	Agree	Agree	Agree
Q10. When students don't succeed, it is because they are not good enough.	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree
Result: Growth or fixed mindset	Growth	Fixed	Fixed

Table 6.1: Overview of Emily's mindset survey responses

Figure 6.7: The incident of Emily's transition vignette

My first thoughts

The vignette shows that in a small space of time, Emily has progressed from having a growth positive outlook to one which is negative and fixed. One way to account for this is to look deeper at the changing environment around her. At the beginning of the Spring term when 'Mindset Survey 2' was completed members of staff across maths and English were falling sick, Ezekiel was no longer working in the English team and Emma had handed in her notice. By the time 'Mindset Survey 3' was completed Emily was the only full-time member of staff remaining in the English team. This placed noticeable added pressures on Emily as the students and college relied on her more and more because she was the only remaining 'recognisable' face in the English team. This in turn has tested her resilience and Emily has been on a downward spiral as shown in table 6.1.

As noted by the Economic and Social Research Council ESRC (2011) resilience is much more than an individual personality trait but is an ability which arises from the environment, cultures and practices set in place by a nurturing leadership. However, the environment and culture in the college is a direct result of the D grade policy put in place by policymakers and although SMT has seen the detrimental impact of this on teaching staff they are compliant with the policy, and Emily is feeling the effects. The demands of teaching have long since been recognised and a lack of resilience leads to an increase in teacher absence, reduced productivity and generally a decline in a teacher's mental well-being (ESRC, 2011). Emily's responses to the mindset surveys are suggestive that her resilience is indeed being tested and in turn this is having a detrimental impact on her mindset and well-being. This is understandable as resilience occurs and increases through support and interactions with colleagues (ESRC, 2011), but Emily's support is fast disappearing. As more of her support network disappears, she may start to question her own place within the organisation and her motivation to stay and teach. The college and leadership team have a responsibility to protect Emily and improve individual and united resilience amongst their staff (ESRC, 2011).

The vignette shows that her mindset is unstable and there is a clear transition in Emily's mindset across the course of a year of teaching under the D grade policy. It is evidence not only of the effect this has had on her theory of intelligence, but it is an indication that mindset should not be viewed as dichotomous but should be on a continuum which allows for instability (Ablard and Mills, 1996).

Analysis

As seen in part two of my findings chapter, Emily was identified as meeting all of the college's key expectations and from my knowledge of the English team she was considered a consistently good teacher. This incident captures a positive attitude to teaching at the beginning of the academic year slowly transforming into a negative view that things are not going to change. According to Dweck (2007), being a growth mindset teacher at the beginning of the year would mean that Emily's approach to teaching could unleash the students' potential in an environment that celebrates the process of learning. However, in the return to college after the Christmas break, it appears that Emily's mindset has swung to fixed, resulting in Emily's teaching approach adopting a static view of intellect and learning and so producing an environment of judgement (Dweck, 2007).

A possible interpretation is that Emily has lost her resilience, meaning she may only be going through the motions of teaching, which can have a detrimental effect on students' learning (Larrivee, 2012). Emily's answer that she agrees that *'intelligence is something... you can't change very much'* indicates that she will have set low standards and expectations on her students based on her presumed limitations of their abilities (Dweck, Walton and Cohen, 2011). The effect of this attitude to teaching and learning could place her students at a higher risk of giving up due to feeling under-challenged (Murphy and Dweck, 2010). The implication of Emily's transition, as shown through her responses to the mindset surveys, is that she is demoralised, which could be reflected in the students.

Despite Emily's negative or fixed mindset when answering specific questions about the students she disagrees with question 10 that 'When students don't succeed, it is because they are not good enough' showing that she blames at least some of their failure on factors other than their intrinsic abilities. However, this belief does not deny the influence of personal characteristics – or even ability – and in her interview she suggests that there is *'something'* within them which stops them from achieving that she cannot get beyond (See the magic wand incident). It is important to note that mindset should be seen as a continuum as it goes beyond two mental states of fixed and growth (Quihuis et al, 2002). Mindset is centred on the idea of growth and change (Dweck, 2007). With support from her peers and senior management to improve the culture and environment in the maths and English team Emily could improve her mindset and in turn what happens in her classroom (ESRC, 2011).

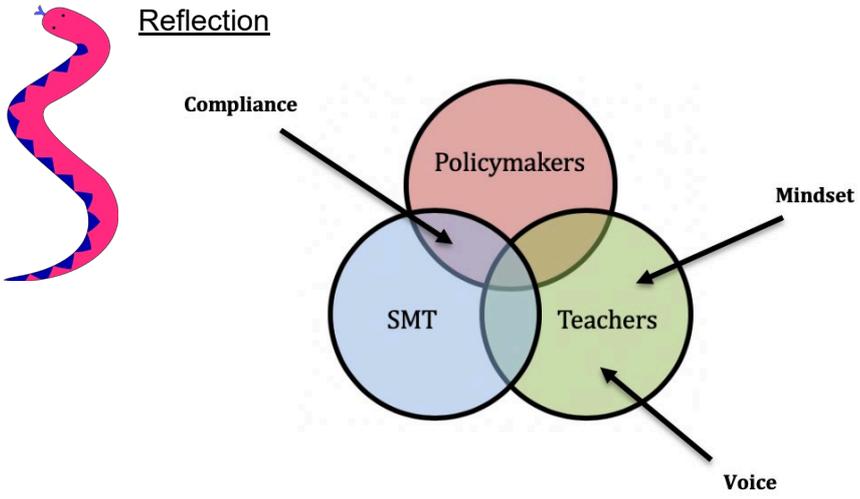


Figure 6.8: Reflection 4

6.6 The incident of 'Ethan'

The first unstructured group interview, with the GCSE English students, took place in their timetabled classroom, with twelve students taking part. Their English teacher, Elsa, left the room and was not present. This was to ensure that the students could speak freely on the understanding that any comments would not be passed on and were anonymous. Elsa was supportive of this and believed it was important that she was not present. During the unstructured group interview, the students were prompted to respond to the statement, *'I would like you to tell me about you GCSE English resit...'*. During the discussion various students spoke out whilst others chose to nod when they felt in agreement with their peers' statements. Presented below is the statement Ethan expressed to the rest of the group and myself. He was quite emotionless as he said it and the majority of students nodded along in agreement.

Ethan: *It's a good thing that we get a chance to do it again but it's getting to the point where you have done it so many times you do start to question if it's really worth it*

Figure 6.9: The incident of Ethan vignette

My first thoughts

Ethan's response shows that he feels a conflict within himself about the resit policy. He clearly understands the reasons for the D grade policy and agrees that it is positive that they are given the opportunity to take the GCSE again. However, deep-down he feels that there is no point. Due to his repeated experience of failure Ethan has concluded that he is unlikely to pass and therefore has no faith in his ability to achieve a grade C. 'Why would I pass this time if I haven't previously?' Ethan will be sitting his fourth attempt in summer 2017.

From my conversations with Ethan and his survey results it is clear that he is trying and has a willingness to try because he is grateful for the opportunity, but he is bored and starting to be unable to see the point in trying anymore. This was reflected in Ethan's lack of emotion as he spoke and the feeling of the situation becoming soul destroying. Just as with Emily, the English teacher, Ethan is in a state of transition and there is a risk that he could become more and more disheartened as his doubts about his ability grow

and grow. His focus is no longer on learning but his ability to achieve a grade C in English (Assessment Reform Group, 2002).



Reflection: Throughout the life cycle of the case study Ethan's statement, 'It is a good thing that we get a chance to do it again' was the most positive remark about the effects of the D grade policy, from both staff and students. It is important to note that the positive statement came from an unstructured group interview with his peers, and Ethan felt confident enough to have this view in front of the group. Although the students are largely negative about the D grade policy, it brings into question, to what extent was this Ethan's view or is he a spokesperson for a view which is regularly voiced by the others? Although the students may feel as though it is unfair at times and they should be able to stop taking the GCSE, they see the good intentions behind it.

Analysis

At first glance Ethan appears to be in a negative state of mind therefore suggesting a fixed mindset. However, Ethan has only ever recorded a growth mindset at each survey point across the entire academic year. Ethan only answered with a fixed mindset view to one question, once, by agreeing with the statement '*I like learning best when I do it perfectly without any mistakes*' in the spring term. This supports the view that mindset is on a continuum with varying points of holding a growth or fixed attitude towards a variety of different scenarios (Ablard and Mills, 1996; Quihuis et al, 2002). However, it is clear that the majority of the time Ethan has a growth outlook towards learning. Therefore, how can a student who sees learning as a chance to grow and develop, doubt his ability and start to question 'what is the point'?

A likely explanation is that Ethan, much like his teachers, is in transition, despite what he may be recording in his mindset surveys. He appears to be beginning to give up on his English resit due to the number of times he has had to repeat the same exam and not reach the expected standard. Ethan may have a positive approach to life and learning but this seems to be not enough to keep him going in GCSE English and perhaps he is letting his grade D define him. This is because the D grade policy forces students to be

perfect right now, in the moment, while at college and not allowing time and space to grow. The more Ethan repeats and is levelled as a grade D the more it will be a measurement of his ability (Dweck, 2007; Assessment Reform Group, 2002).

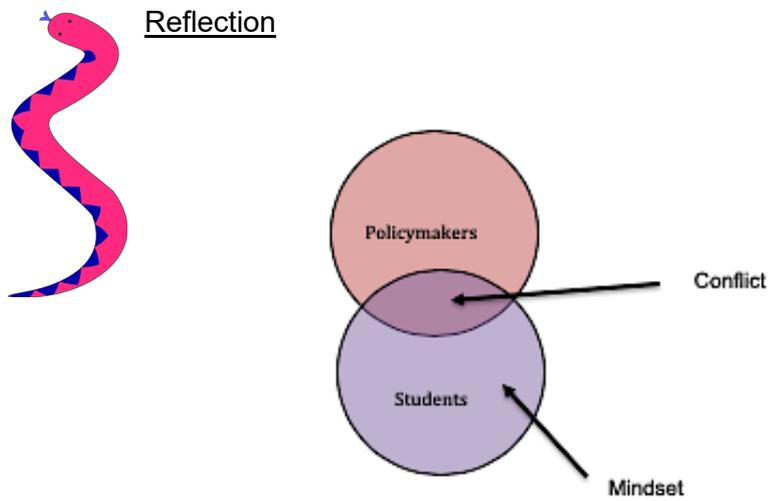


Figure 6.10: Reflection 5

6.7 'Explain' incident

As part of the resit course at the college the English students are required to complete controlled assessments, one of which is based on a response to the non-fiction text 'Touching the Void' by Joe Simpson. Due to the time constraints of the resit year the English teacher, Elsa is using video clips of the DVD 'Touching the void' to cover the story more quickly. Below is an exchange between Elsa and a student, Ewan.

Elsa is trying to engage the class in a discussion about the main points seen in the clips. In an attempt to encourage the quieter students to participate, she asks the questions directly of some students to get them to explain what they have just seen. After one particular clip, Elsa asks Ewan to elaborate on the class discussion. Ewan is sarcastic in his reply.

Elsa: So, can you explain? [looking at Ewan]

Ewan: (*Sarcastically*) I'm here for a reason. I don't know how to explain.

Figure 6. 11: Explain vignette

My first thoughts

Ewan, like the majority of the students in his English class recorded a growth mindset at each survey point across the entire academic year. However, Ewan's response to Elsa's question is not one that shows him embracing challenge (Dweck, 2007). It appears that Ewan becomes defensive. Once he had given his sarcastic response, he put his head in his hands. Elsa very quickly moved on to ask the question of other students in the class, and so reflected the defensive response by Ewan. Ewan remained quiet for the remainder of the lesson, but he did write in his book and completed the tasks set, which questions the extent of his defensive response.

I believe that Ewan was defensive for two reasons. Firstly, he found himself put on the spot by Elsa and did not want to be humiliated in front of the class, especially in front of Eamon, by not giving Elsa the 'correct' response. Ewan has learnt through his experiences of GCSE English that there is a 'correct' answer and not one he gives very often so why would this now be any different? His response is a sophisticated closing down strategy and pushes the responsibility of 'explaining' the correct answer back onto the teacher.

Secondly, Ewan is also defensive because he is angry that he has to do the resit for the fourth time. Throughout the case Ewan has displayed on several occasions his anger at his situation;

'I can't be arsed'... 'It's boring'... 'I just want to get it done'... 'I came in for a whole day over half-term and my controlled assessment went up by 1 mark! What a waste of a whole day'... 'I've failed it so many times before'... Ewan even blamed his *'crap teachers'* in advance if, at the end of the academic year, he fails the GCSE again.

Analysis

Upon closer inspection, Ewan is subverting Elsa's teaching. There is evidence that Ewan is still engaged in his work and the lesson as he is observed completing the set task, however he is showing signs of being in transition. Ewan is being subversive by undermining the learning experience and opting out of the question. There is a contradiction between the teacher's expectations, and the student's expectations. This mismatch between the teacher and student creates a conflict that cannot be met or solved because Ewan is purposely not meeting Elsa halfway. This conflict can be seen clearly in Dreikurs (1968) four goals of destructive behaviour.

According to Dreikurs (1968) the four goals of destructive behaviours in children are, seeking attention, gaining power, seeking revenge and avoidance of failure. However, they can also be applied to adolescents and even adults. When applied to the 'explain' incident, it suggests that Ewan is fighting to gain power over Elsa and seeks revenge through his sarcastic response for having failed his GCSE English again. Ewan's physical reaction of putting his head in his hands and his avoidance exhibits him hiding behind his real or imagined inferiority (Dreikurs, 1968). This behaviour highlights how the imposition of the resit denies him his adult freedom of choice and therefore infantilises him.

Elsa's question aimed towards Ewan appears well-intended. In her 2017 book entitled 'How to Teach English GCSE Re-sits at Post-16', that was quite evidently written to support teachers like Elsa, Rose suggests the use of cooperative learning models. Perhaps in using this strategy, Elsa is revealing her search for appropriate ways of teaching the classes she is finding difficult. However, as a teacher it is necessary to understand each individual student and build strong relationships to successfully resolve any conflicts or challenges that occur (Kidd and Czerniawski, 2010). This is particularly true of students who are in a cycle of GCSE resits and are defensive, angry and disaffected.



Reflection

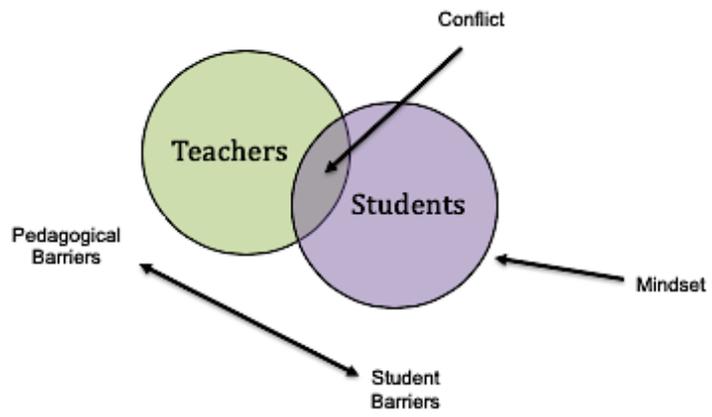


Figure 6.12: Reflection 6

6.8 'Shit' incident

Prior to the first unstructured group student interview, the GCSE maths teacher, Michelle, agreed to finish the maths lesson early to allow me time to interview the students. However, Michelle did not finish the lesson early and did not want to leave the classroom. She wanted to stay and hear what her students said. The result of this was that the interview felt very rushed and the students did not go into detail about how they felt.

Michelle: *I don't mind. Say what you want.*

Brandon: *Shit*

(Other students showed their agreement by laughing and nodding)

There seemed to be a lot of conferring, whispering and chatting amongst the students before a few spokespeople felt happy to share their views with me, but most students were rushing to get their things together and go. Michelle was sitting at the front of the room listening and watching the students leave, ignoring Brandon's 'Shit' comment.

Figure 6.13: Shit vignette

My first thoughts

Michelle's refusal to leave the classroom had a noticeable escalatory consequence on one student in particular, Brandon, who uses the opportunity to openly protest. Despite Michelle remaining in the classroom Brandon does not hold back and is blunt about his experience of doing the GCSE resit. Michelle's failure to leave the classroom strongly suggests that she has anxiety and fear surrounding the students' feelings about her. This openly displays her distrust of the students and the conflict that exists between students and teachers.

Michelle is probably aware that the feedback the students will give will be negative rather than positive and therefore wants to be present. By being a figure of authority in the room she is showing that she is still exercising her power over the students (Belenky et al., 1986). Michelle has reported at each survey point that she has a growth mindset view to teaching and learning, but her behaviour is more fixed and shows a desire to dominate

the students and emit power over the students to control or veto any negative feedback. I felt that Michelle told me in her survey what she thought I wanted to hear and not what she honestly felt, bringing into question the use of mindset surveys as truthful representations of participants' mindsets.

From their reactions it appears that there is dissension within the ranks of the group. Brandon appears to show clear signs of subversion but the group as a whole shows some acknowledgment of Michelle's presence, and my own, albeit through very limited engagement. From my fieldnotes it appears that the class is in a transitional state and the students are at different stages.

Analysis

On closer examination, and despite Brandon's peers showing their approval of his unpleasant outburst by laughing in agreement, they do not escalate the situation by adding or expanding their views. Instead the students choose to leave the interview quickly and do not feel comfortable to go into detail about their feelings or experience of the GCSE resit. From my perspective during the situation I could see that the students felt disempowered by Michelle's presence in the interview and as a consequence it silenced the group. There is passive resistance, the students' voices have been silenced and they refuse to engage (Belenky et al., 1986).

In terms of behaviour, this is important. There is power in the students' words and Michelle, by her presence, took away the students' opportunity to use their words to represent their experiences, thoughts and feelings (Belenky et al., 1986). Yet there is evidence in the literature that giving students a voice may help them to achieve better results because voice improves the engagement and motivation of learners (Kidd and Czerniawski, 2011b).

Brandon's outburst could also be viewed as an attention seeking strategy, which is often seen to be more prevalent when young people are not given the opportunity, or perceive that they have not been given the opportunity, to make a useful or valued contribution (Dreikurs, 1968). Brandon is a confident eighteen-year-old student who values the chance to be heard during the interview, despite his teacher being in the room, and uses it as an opportunity to share his opinion of the GCSE resit as being 'shit'.



Reflection

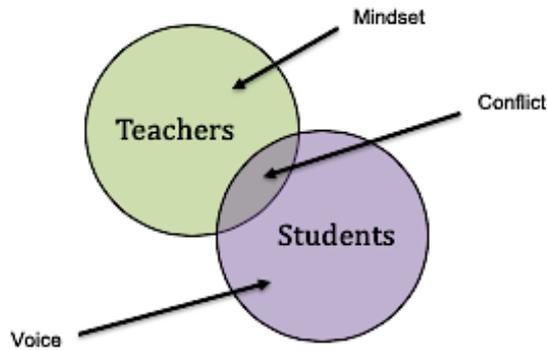


Figure 6.14: Reflection 7

6.9 'Brandon' incident

Following on from the 'shit' incident, I wanted to speak to Brandon on a one to one basis to extract a deeper understanding of his experiences and how he felt as his outburst could be seen as a cry for help. Brandon was enrolled on both the GCSE maths and English resit courses. The interview took place after his maths lesson and before his English lesson later that day. I thanked him for being honest in the group interview by speaking up. The conversation below is a poignant part of our exchange, where Brandon spoke openly and honestly with me.

Interviewer: *Brandon, thank you for your honesty earlier.*

Brandon: *Sorry, I just hate it*

Interviewer: *So, how motivated are you to get your grade C?*

Brandon: *Not at all*

Interviewer: *Not at all?*

Brandon: *I'm not. I've resit it so many times I have just given up*

Interviewer: *How many times?*

Brandon: *Waaay too many times... I don't even need it, I get it is something to help but I don't need it, I've just lost all motivation it's horrible, I hate it, I can't take it anymore*

Figure 6.15: Brandon vignette

My first thoughts

Brandon has already sat his GCSE exams seven times and will be sitting his eighth attempt in order to achieve the grade C in 2017. Although, his highest achieving grade to date is a grade D he has achieved a range of grades over the years ranging from a grade D to ungraded. The reason for Brandon's unusually high number of GCSE exam resits is because his school put him in for his GCSE exams early, in 2014 when he was only fifteen years old, and resulting in a grade D. In a bid to stop the rise in children sitting their exams before the end of Key stage 4, the government announced in September 2013, with some exceptions, that schools could record only a student's first achieving grade into their performance tables (DfE, 2013b). As a consequence of the school's decision, Brandon sat his first resit attempt of his GCSE in 2015 and due to the government's D grade policy and his failure to achieve a grade C, he has been caught on a continuous cycle of resits ever since. Brandon is now eighteen years old and on his final attempt to achieve a C grade before he is released by his nineteenth birthday. Gonida, Kiosseoglou and Leondari (2006) found that previous academic outcomes set students' implicit theory of knowledge, therefore it is understandable that Brandon displays an entity theory, or fixed view and is a victim of his previous experiences.

Schools and colleges in England are judged and ranked on the successes of their students. Therefore, there is an undeniable need for schools and colleges to drive up their standards. Colleges are now held accountable for their GCSE resit results which are used as to benchmark successful outcomes and consequently, as a strict condition of funding (DfE, 2018). These practices and high standards serve only the system and not the students who perceive them as unobtainable and therefore it further discourages them (Dweck, Walton and Cohen, 2014). The D grade policy is a self-defeating practice imposed from above, for the benefit of policymakers only, and not for the benefit of individual students like Brandon, but colleges remain compliant with this policy.

Analysis

A key theme emerging from the analysis of Brandon's interview is despair. He lacks motivation as he has no choice but to study and sit an exam which he has failed several times before and he 'can't take it anymore'. The only means of escape is to pass the exam or turn nineteen. This indicates that for students like Brandon, the GCSE resit is not about acquiring maths and English skills, which is how the D grade policy is sold (DfE, 2017), but about taking a pot-shot at passing the exam.

Brandon's lack of motivation has two origins. Firstly, Brandon does not see that achieving a grade C will enhance and help his long-term goals; therefore, he is not intrinsically motivated and does not see the point in continuing to learn maths and English. Failing to see the grade C as a long-term goal means that Brandon will not actively engage with the subjects because the purpose does not serve him and his life choices and he only sees it as serving someone else (Dweck, Walton and Cohen, 2014).

Secondly, Brandon has no motivation because he has given up. He sees the grade C as unobtainable due to his past experiences of failing to meet the government's required standard. According to Dweck, Walton and Cohen (2014) motivational factors can have a greater impact on academic performance than cognitive factors and this is certainly the case for Brandon. Due to the effects of the D grade policy and Brandon's experiences of the resit cycle, his motivational skills and self-efficacy have been having a direct impact on his cognitive ability (Bandura et al., 1996) to achieve the grade C. This lack of motivation and enthusiasm to learn and grow is especially evident in his fixed maths mindset survey results. The Assessment Reform Group (2002) argue that tests are only motivating for those who expect a successful outcome but for those who do not, the effects are damaging to the individual's self-esteem and motivation, leading to a widening gap between higher and lower ability learners.

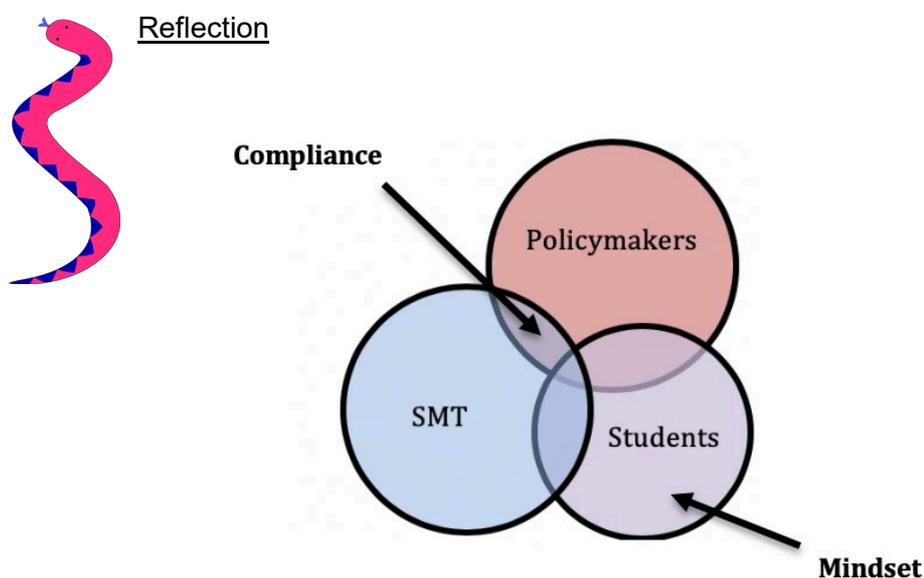


Figure 6.16: Reflection 8

6.10 'I was wrong' Incident

During a maths lesson, which focused on revising algebraic style questions, the maths teacher, Michelle set a series of questions for the class to answer on their own in the classwork books. Once the questions were written up on the board, Michelle took the time to circulate the room to give help to anyone who needed it. She went over to Mikayla who had her hand up and appeared distressed.

Mikayla: *I don't get it*

Michelle: *You need to get out of this negativity*

Mikayla: *My brain doesn't work like that*

(Michelle then proceeded to walk away after writing the 'correct' answer in Mikayla's classwork book)

Mikayla: (To her peers) *I was wrong*

Mikayla then shakes her head, hides her head in her hands and cries.

Figure 6.17: I was wrong vignette

My first thoughts

After Mikayla had calmed down, I asked her if she was ok and how she felt her progress was going. She said, *'I just don't get it'...* *'Why do we need it?'...* *'We just need it for the exam'*. Mikayla was very disheartened and was emotional. In a similar way to Brandon, Mikayla is struggling to engage cognitively with the subject because in her mind she does not have a valid purpose to commit to the learning goals (Dweck, Walton and Cohen, 2014). During my conversation with Mikayla she explained that she could not understand how the maths she was learning related to a real-life context and her future; needing to learn it to pass an exam is not an adequate enough goal for Mikayla.

The help provided for Mikayla from her teacher Michelle, was not one of a successful student-teacher relationship, which is highly important when teaching disaffected students (Rose, 2017; Kidd and Czerniawski, 2011b). The help provided for Mikayla was the 'correct' answer. The help that she was given was not a supportive explanation and demonstration of the skills needed to correctly answer a question like the example but

instead a suggestion to get rid of her 'negativity'. The recommendation that Mikayla needs to '*get out of this negativity*' is a direct attack on her mindset and a suggestion that it is her attitude that is stopping her understanding. Although not suggested as easy, this view is supported by Dweck, Walton and Cohen (2014) who state that a student's beliefs and personal feelings can have a larger impact on that student's ability to achieve than any cognitive factor. When Mikayla completed her first mindset survey, she reported a growth mindset, but she was absent on the other two occasions. This could suggest that despite on a surface level agreeing that she has a growth mindset view to learning, on a subconscious level she is voting with her feet and does not have a growth mindset view.

Analysis

Mikayla's reaction to the algebra maths lesson and her interaction with her teacher Michelle, shows a weak student-teacher relationship and a strong feeling of despair. However, this suggests both the teacher and the student are feeling despair and reflecting one another's attitude and behaviour. Rattan, Good and Dweck (2012) identified a correlation between teachers displaying an entity theory and students' theories of intelligence. By walking away from the situation in the classroom, I believe that Michelle is revealing that she despairs of Mikayla succeeding. Michelle is giving up on Mikayla in a similar way that Mikayla is giving up on maths; she is giving up explaining and ultimately teaching Mikayla how to answer the set maths question herself because she cannot help her.

The despair is systematic of the distancing. This distancing behaviour shown by Michelle is a form of avoidance because she does not know what she can do. There is a clear lack of emotion from Michelle and she does not cope with Mikayla's distress or with the reality of the effects this is having on Mikayla. In my view Michelle's lack of support for Mikayla is not that she does not care but it is an admission that she cannot change Mikayla's situation, because she knows that Mikayla has to endure the resit experience, which is considered, even by supporters of the D grade policy, to be a 'painful necessity' (Simons, 2016). Therefore, Michelle can be seen distancing herself and not coping with reality, which could also be seen as defensive behaviour.

Michelle's reaction to Mikayla gives her unhelpful messages. Mikayla does not perceive Michelle's advice and the 'correct' answer as guidance; the only message that Mikayla receives from Michelle is, 'you were wrong'. Therefore, Mikayla's response 'I was wrong' is reinforcing the idea that this is inherently the student's fault. The incident presented shows that both student and teacher are reaching the end of their resilience for coping with the situation that has been created due to the D grade policy.



Reflection

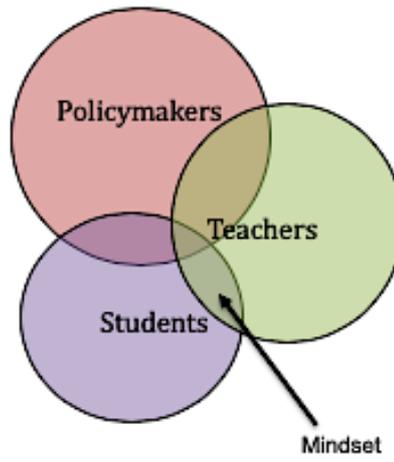


Figure 6.18: Reflection 9

6.11 'Participate!' incident

When Elsa left the English team, the college employed Esther, an experienced agency teacher to cover her classes. Five minutes before the end of an English lesson, Esther shared her frustration with the class about the lack of interaction and engagement with her, the subject and in answering questions. The English lesson focused on exam revision and how to answer the exam questions to receive the most marks. Throughout the lesson Esther had been asking for the students' input to give examples and share experiences of these types of questions, but most had been reluctant and had not engaged. There had been low level chatting and disruption and Esther had not been able to progress the lesson as far as she wanted to.

Esther: *It worries me that Eric is the only one who answers and when I tell him not to the chances are Elton will answer.*

I know you [pointing at Brandon] understand it... I know you [pointing to Belle] mostly understand it because you will answer when he doesn't.

You [pointing to Erika] know it but don't want to share

I think it's the same for all of you... but I'm not sure because you don't talk to me!

You have to participate!

As Esther pointed at each individual student and made a comment the students were smirking and giggling. Esther had frustration in her voice and her anger came across to the group. However, they all left the room as normal, unmoved by her outburst.

Figure 6.19: Participate vignette

My first thoughts:

There is again evidence in this vignette of both the teacher and the students reflecting one another's behaviours and both feeling despair. Where the students' despair is shown through their refusal to participate, assimilate or accommodate their learning, and appearing withdrawn, Esther's despair is shown through her break in resilience and her outburst. This outburst shows that due to the students' lack of participation in the learning process, she has been drawn into a power contest owing to their increased antagonism towards their situation (Dreikurs, 1968).

In an attempt to regain power and fight back Esther resorts to directly attacking individual students through pointing straight at them and demanding their participation which, according to Dreikurs (1968), is an important step in showing the students that she will not accept their behaviour. This sign of aggression towards the students results in further lack of response and silent protests from the students.

From my knowledge of the English group I suspect the silent protests from the students are not a direct antagonistic behaviour towards the D grade policy itself but resentment towards their original English teacher Elsa, for leaving them. Elsa had a positive teacher-student rapport but had to leave the college due to family circumstances. However, from the students' perspective, another GCSE English teacher has left them and it will be another contributory factor which will result in them not passing their exam. Raufelder, Scherber and Wood (2016) argue that higher levels of intrinsic motivation are possible when students like a specific teacher. Due to the demand of the D grade policy on colleges, the number of full-time degree qualified teachers, teaching GCSE maths and English is not adequate (Haywood and Homer, 2015). Teaching students who are passive recipients and not buying into the learning process is demotivating and clearly having a negative impact on Esther, since despite her best efforts, she is met by continued protest and sabotage from the students (Dreikurs, 1968).

Analysis:

Whatever the reasons for the students not participating and not engaging with Esther or the learning process by staying silent they are subverting the teaching. Esther's outburst is evidence that even students who know the answers and are cognitively able, are in silent protest and do not want to share their thoughts or opinions. Although, the students are disengaged and passive, there is evidence of student differentials and student variety. Eric and Elton were identified as students who do actively engage; however,

Brandon is dissenting as are Belle and Erika. The students appear to be using their relationship as a whole group to purposely sabotage their teacher and the activities by simply not responding (Schwartz, 1981). I believe that 'No voice' is the only voice the students have left in this situation. In connection with previous vignettes and as someone who was present during the academic year, this incident made me feel that the college does not give the students enough voice and needs to refocus its attention on the learners and what is best for them, as suggested by Flutter (2007). In order for the student voice to be successful there needs to be authentic trust between policymakers, institutions and teachers where all professional relationships are developed (Czerniawski, 2012).

Dweck (2012) argues that students who can see that what they are learning is important for them and can see that it will help them to grow and develop, will not disrupt the learning process by not participating and not trying. The students may be frustrated that Elsa left, however, the deeper cause for their sabotage is rooted in the wider issues of not being intrinsically motivated in the GCSE resit. Esther's outpouring of frustration is reflected in the frustration felt by the students, which results in conflicts creating a classroom battleground.

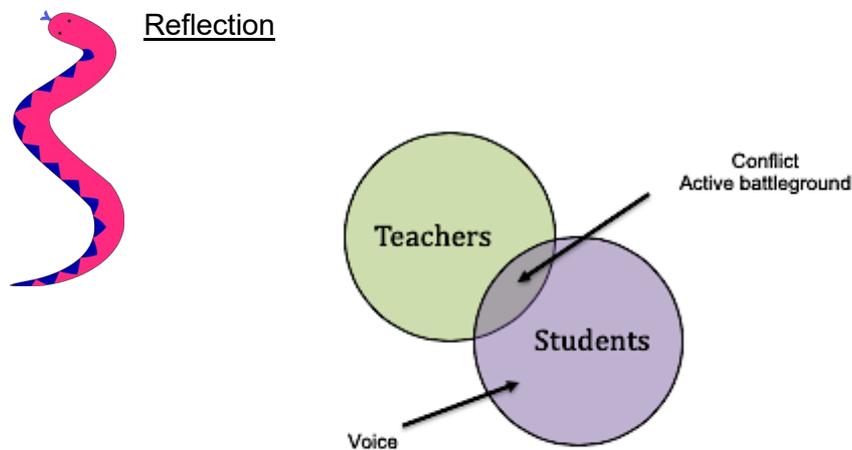


Figure 6.20: Reflection 10

6.12 'Laughing' incident

In a GCSE English lesson observation, students were preparing for a controlled assessment to respond to the non-fiction book 'Touching the Void' by Joe Simpson. Due to the time constraints, the English teachers were using DVD clips to show the students the key moments of the story and ultimately cover the book in a shorter amount of time. During a series of observations most students were happy to sit in the classroom and watch the DVD and were not concerned or requesting to physically look at the book.

During one particular observation the English teacher, Elsa showed a clip of a crucial scene in the story. The scene showed the main character, Joe, falling off the side of a mountain and breaking his leg, therefore putting his life in immediate danger.



Some of the students started laughing and found it very funny. As Joe the, character, screamed in pain the students continued to laugh out loud.

Figure 6.21: Laughing vignette

My first thoughts

When the clip of Joe falling off the mountain and the distinctive loud snap of bones breaking sounded in the room, the traditional reaction would have been 'shock' and 'horror', knowing that Joe was in a life or death situation in a remote location. However, the students' reaction was laughter. It was clear from being present in the classroom that this reaction surprised Elsa and therefore she challenged the students' understanding of the reality of the story by trying to relate the situation to real life and posing the question '*What if that was your friend?*'. However, the students still found it funny and sarcastically responded with '*I wouldn't care*'. My interpretations of events, mindful of Dreikurs's (1968) stages is evidence of the students fighting for power and claiming a victory over Elsa and the system. The students are proving that they can do what they want to do

and can protest by not taking the story seriously. Despite Elsa's efforts to gain control, the students do not back down, and the victory is theirs.

By the students laughing they are not showing empathy towards the characters and no true understanding of the story, which is a learning outcome for GCSE English (AQA, 2018). The distinct level of superficiality in terms of the students' treatment of the book could be credited to the fast-paced teaching approach caused by the nature of the resit year and the need to use DVD clips rather than studying the book. This therefore results in the students debating the reality of the story presented to them. Teaching disaffected students through visual clips alone is not appropriate as they need a range of learning materials to help engagement (Rose, 2017). When teachers are resorting to exclusive use of DVD clips in their lessons rather than texts it brings into question the purpose of setting the GCSE as the requirement and measure of success in English language.

Analysis

The college's decision to use the book 'Touching the void' for the GCSE resit year came from an external adviser to the department as it was suggested the book 'would appeal to boys and its themes are more obvious', i.e. a stereotypical attitude. The GCSE resit is a difficult 'sell' creating a classroom of disengaged learners who have found themselves in a situation they thought they had escaped (Rose, 2017). This incident suggests that the more the teacher Elsa tries to engage the students by using media and the harder she tries to 'sell' the GCSE, the more she sets herself up for active subversion.

I could see that Elsa has clearly spent considerable time planning these sessions and purposely avoiding reading the book in an attempt to engage the class in the story rather than let the book take students further away from the subject and reaffirming the low expectations of the students. The resit year places an increased pressure on teachers to engage disaffected learners and ensure that they succeed in a subject in which they have previously failed (McGregor, 2017). However, despite Elsa's efforts the students are choosing to protest and fight against the learning by subverting the teaching. Arguably, subversion is the only 'choice' the students have left.

The D grade policy ensures that students continue to be enrolled in maths and/or English lessons in a bid to support them to achieve a GCSE grade A*-C (DfE, 2017), however, it does not make it mandatory for students to sit quietly and behave. When some or a few students disengage they are actively subverting the teaching by successfully

distracting the teacher and disrupting everyone in the lesson. The class as a whole is demotivated and this in turn is demotivating the teacher Elsa (Murphy and Dweck, 2010).

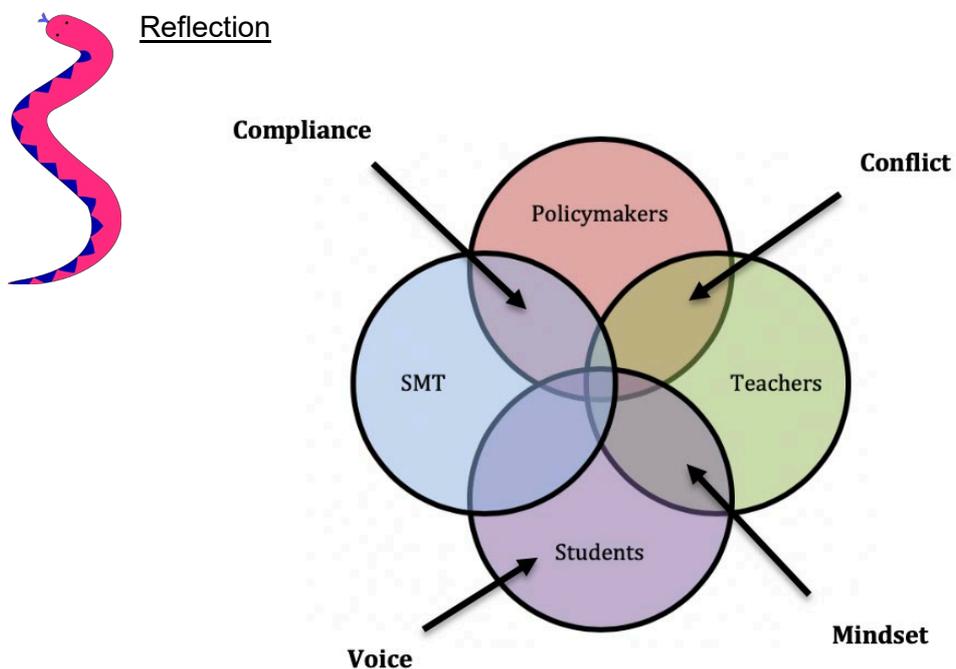


Figure 6.22: Reflection 11

6.13 The incident of 'Attendance data'

The table below showed the comparison of attendance data from the beginning of the academic year, in November 2016 once classes had settled, compared to the end of the academic year in May 2017, just before the first GCSE exam. The table showed all the vocational areas of study within the college and the attendance percentages from each area in maths and English.

Across all departments, attendance in GCSE maths and English was reported by staff to be dropping. The arrows and numbers illustrated the percentage drop in each vocational area. Throughout the academic year the SMT demanded that all staff do more to improve attendance.

Department	GCSE maths attendance in Nov 2016	GCSE maths attendance in May 2017	GCSE English attendance in Nov 2016	GCSE English attendance in May 2017
Science & ICT	80	75↓ -5	88	82 ↓ - 6
Hair, Beauty and Hospitality	81	76↓ -5	81	79 ↓ - 2
Health childcare	79	70↓ -9	80	77 ↓ - 3
Business and Travel	81	76↓ -5	83	79 ↓ - 4
Art and Media	85	75↓ -10	87	79 ↓ - 8
Sport and Public Services	74	67↓ -7	80	77 ↓ - 3
Electrical and Engineering	79	70↓ -9	78	69 ↓ - 9
Construction	77	69 ↓ -8	78	72 ↓ - 6

Table 6.2: Comparison of attendance percentages (%) across departments showing difference from November 2016 – May 2017

Figure 6.23: The incident of attendance data vignette

My first thoughts

It has been reported that low and in-frequent attendance is a contextual factor which affects teaching and learning in the GCSE resit classroom (DfE, 2017). The students are voting with their feet. The incident of attendance clearly shows that attendance progressively decreased across all vocational subjects in both maths and English. There appears to be a stronger protest against attending GCSE maths than GCSE English, which was also observed by the DfE's report into effective resit practice where maths was seen to evoke a stronger reaction (DfE, 2017).

Although the D grade policy dictates that students have to continue to study maths and English until they achieve the required grade C, the students are protesting against it by not attending. This suggests that the students are making the only choice they feel they can; they are taking control and fighting against the forced requirement to study their GCSE again and again as dictated by authority, by simply not turning up to the lessons.

As observed previously, there is evidence to suggest that behaviours are reflected between the teachers and the students. As the academic year progressed there were a number of staff shortages due to staff members leaving, capability factors, sickness and stress. The progressive decline in students' attendance could be a contributory factor in the staffing problems faced across the department, which further suggests that both staff and students are feeling despair leading to further conflict.

The low attendance data from the students is a further indication of a low resilience and motivation to learning GCSE maths and/or GCSE English, which gets worse as they get closer to the exam date, suggesting that the students' experience of the resit year is a negative one. The resit year is not succeeding in giving them the confidence in their ability to pass their exam this time round and leaves students doubting that they are any more competent just before the exam than they were at the beginning of the year.

Analysis

Although attendance decreased across all vocational areas in both maths and English the decline was worse in specific vocational areas. Attendance was particularly bad in Sport and Public Services although this was expected as staff had alluded to there being problems in these areas (See 'Magic Wand' incident). On closer inspection it is curious that the attendance was worse in Health and Childcare when compared to many of the other vocational areas, considering these students will need a grade C/4 or higher in

GCSE maths and English to enter higher education. These students would be expected to be more highly motivated and intrinsically driven to attend maths and English than some of the other vocational areas, but this is not the case and strengthens my argument of how previous experiences can impact the motivation and ability to learn, in line with the literature (Gonida, Kiosseoglou and Leondari, 2006).

In the previous vignette entitled 'I was wrong' there was evidence of the teacher Michelle distancing herself from the students and the situation. The 'attendance data' presented in this vignette is further evidence of distancing, but by the students rather than the teachers. Whatever the reasons for students not attending their maths and English classes, their distancing behaviour is hugely subversive and destructive towards their learning and their chances of achieving the grade C/4 in their GCSE exams. The incident of 'attendance data' supports the interpretation of previous incidents which have shown a transition in disengagement, with the data evidence now showing total disengagement and non-attendance. According to Dreikurs (1968) the nature of testing and repeatedly achieving low grades reinforces an individual's ability and limits, and therefore in turn, discourages the learner further. The fall in attendance over time, across both subjects and all vocational areas, raises the possibility that the students have made a conscious decision to walk away as a symbolic act of revenge or a voice against authority and D grade policy or for self-preservation.

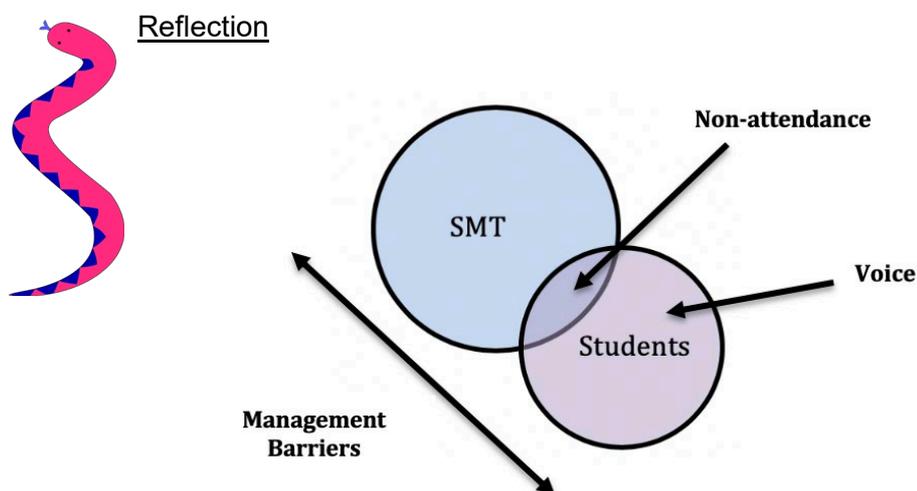


Figure 6.24: Reflection 12

6.14 'Impossibility' incident

During a break between lessons in the staffroom, Mark, one of the GCSE maths teachers, was looking very busy and unhappy, putting paper and books into piles. I asked him if he was OK? The conversation focused on his workload and his lack of time to teach all of the maths topics needed for the exam, and for him to mark the classwork, the mock exams and the students' homework.

Mark: *I thought I had 28 weeks of teaching and actually I haven't because we are now doing mocks in the half term, so you can take another 4 weeks out of my heads work, you know what I'm covering, cos they're doing 4 lots of mocks 5 maybe 6 papers before the sit. They've got one coming up week after half term – the whole paper!! not just what I have covered with them.*

Figure 6.25: Impossibility vignette

My first thoughts

Mark highlights an important contributory factor which could impact the students' mindset and consolidation of their learning in GCSE maths. The Head of Maths and English and the Head of Teaching and Learning made the decision that when the students sit a mock exam, they are required to sit the entire GCSE maths paper rather than sitting a focused mock on the maths topics which have been covered in class.

This decision means that the data generated from the mocks is not an accurate representation of what the students know since many of the topics would not have been covered in class. I believe that this in turn will demoralise the students further, as many will look at some of the exam questions which have not been covered and doubt their ability. The college is missing key opportunities to break down learning, consolidate previous learning and importantly build its students' confidence by testing them on taught topics. In order for the college to ensure it builds its students' motivation rather than disengage them further, it needs to help them to experience more successes (DfE, 2017). Allowing students to sit focused mock exam questions would be one way of providing this.

By the college choosing not to use mock exams which are focused on selected taught topics, it is lessening the chances of the students scoring high marks. Therefore, the chance of achieving a grade C in the exam mocks at the college is significantly reduced, especially at the beginning of the academic year when not as many topics have been covered.

Analysis

Upon closer inspection Mark appears to be in conflict as he shows recognition of the impossibility of the situation. He is acknowledging reality and confessing that the situation does need to change although he does not feel that professionally he can express his perspective to the SMT. This implies that the professional relationship between senior leaders and teachers is as weak as it is between teachers and students. Mark's situation is multi-layered at an institutional and a policy level, a view supported by Hyland (2013) who argues that the post-16 sector has been greatly affected by the obligation of top-down policy agendas which have burdened colleges with resit exam preparation and should be challenged.

The 'impossibility' incident captures Mark's top-down perception of the leadership approach within the institution due to the SMT's decisions regarding volume and frequency of mock testing. Mark's statement is suggestive that there is some passive resistance from the staff who, like the students, also feel as though they have a lack of voice within the organisation. Czerniawski (2011) argues that teachers can feel empowered or disempowered within their institutional setting, determined by their identity. Mark's lack of voice over the decision regarding the volume and type of assessments disempowers him and weakens his identity as a maths teacher within the college. A recent government report identified that effective leadership and management practices surrounding the D grade policy provide trust and value experienced teachers, encouraging vocational staff members to up-skill to teach maths or English (DfE, 2017). Mark, originally a teacher of Engineering, used his A-level in maths to further train as a maths teacher. From my conversations with Mark he explains that he does not feel that the senior college managers are acknowledging what happens at classroom level and there is a suggestion that there is a lack of trust in their professional experience. This lack of voice and frustration in top-down approaches is also reflected between college leaders and unions who are calling out to the government to review the D grade policy since statistics show the policy affects a high number of students but low numbers succeed because of it (Belgutay, 2018).



Reflection

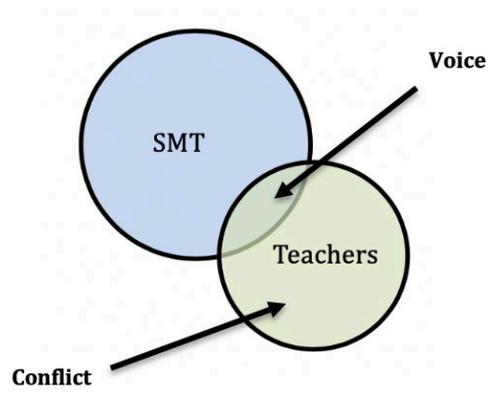


Figure 6.26: Reflection 13

6.15 The incident of 'wishing'

In the staffroom, Eloise, Emily, Elsa, and Michelle were having a chat over coffee before afternoon lessons were about to begin. The atmosphere in the room was cheerful and open. Emily took the opportunity to share a comment she made to me during an interview, imagining if she had a magic-wand how she would want to use it to change things and make the GCSE resit experience better. However, the subject quickly turned to pointing the finger at the SMT of the college. Eloise explained, *“Well, I just wish management would see what actually happens”*. The topic of SMT then dominated the conversation with Michelle taking the subject further by asking SMT to do more than ‘see’ and asking, *“give them a go at actually managing a group, the classroom...”*. Before Michelle could finish her list, Emily helped by adding in “the marking!” as well.

This was followed by laughter from everyone in the room, Eloise included, although she did appear to be more aware that someone could walk into the staffroom and hear their conversation. The laughter turned to resentment when Michelle asked the group, *“Why doesn’t the ‘Head of Teaching and Learning’ teach? Why?”*. Elsa also felt this disbelief, *“I know, it means they just don’t understand what it is like and how hard it is to get them to actually engage! It’s exhausting!”*. Eloise was becoming more and more uncomfortable with the conversation and started to look at the paperwork on her desk and disengage herself from the conversation. She concluded the discussion by summarising, *“The expectations are too high on all of us and they wouldn’t be if they had to do it”*.

Figure 6.27: The incident of wishing vignette

My first thoughts

During breaks and between classes the GCSE maths and English teachers often sit in their office which is separate from other vocational staff areas. It is a space that also acts as a staffroom where other staff members can come to ask specific questions and students also. As I collected field notes, I often found myself sitting in the maths and English office, absorbing the logistics and day-to-day activity. The wishing incident presented in this vignette is one such occasion, where there was the Head of Maths and English, two teachers of maths and English and a learning support assistant.

The vignette frames general comments within the conversation that were made by the different staff members. The relaxed discussion was prompted by various members of teaching and support staff discussing their perceptions of current issues within the teaching of the GCSE maths and English resit. The conversation covered the unfair list of duties and needs required by staff as a minimum expectation from the senior leadership team including;

- Controlled assessments – management and marking of first and second attempts
- Numerous mock exams carried out throughout the academic year
- Completion of targets for every student throughout the academic year; the average number of students per teacher in maths and English is 200
- Completion of individual Independent Learning Plans (ILPs) on the college systems and on exercise books with each maths and English teacher averaging 200 students each.

The dialogue was informal and relaxed which resulted in the staff explaining their key perceptions of a conflict between themselves and senior college leaders. The discussion shows agreement amongst the staff who hold different positions of responsibility within the organisation, but the same messages of conflict and lack of support were coming through. It is notable that Eloise, the Head of Maths and English, who first turned the conversation towards more senior management, also feels conflict and a lack of voice. Eloise was also the most concerned that senior management could hear their conversation, which implies that she has some fears and anxiety about sharing the reality of the situation with leaders. The conversation is evidence of an overwhelming agreement between all maths and English teaching staff about their perception of their workload and the demands placed upon them.

Analysis

The 'wishing' incident directly builds upon the 'impossibility' incident previously presented, as this demonstrates evidence of acknowledging the reality of the situation. The discussion shows that more than one teacher recognises the reality of the situation and it appears that the entire department, including the head of the department, wishes that senior management could see what happens at ground level. They are all wishing for 'magic wands' and beginning to blame management and college leaders for making their job harder because unlike them, they are not acknowledging or experiencing reality.

The discussion shows that the top-down approaches, demands and actions are not working and are inappropriate for the context (Hyland, 2010). Kezar (2012) argues for convergence between top-down leaders and bottom-up leaders as top-down leadership alone is limited in driving change. Tracy, the Head of Teaching and Learning comes under direct attack in the conversation as she no longer teaches within the college and therefore the staff feel that she cannot possibly acknowledge what is happening in the GCSE resit classroom because she is too far removed from the situation. This direct attack on Tracy shows the staff's frustration and a loss of belief in the college's system.

This loss of belief in senior leaders is emphasised by the laughter shared at the mere prospect of the SMT trying to do what they do, day in day out, if the same expectations were placed on them. The laughter underlines the belief that should this role reversal ever happen the SMT would not be able to meet the expectations any more than the staff can. On the whole the 'wishing' incident is emphasising that staff on the ground feel undermined and not supported by senior college leaders and have no faith in them and feel that nothing will change. It has been accepted that teachers of the GCSE resit do vary in their teaching and colleges now need to learn more about the difficulties in implementing the D grade policy in order to impact outcomes (Haywood and Homer, 2015).



Reflection

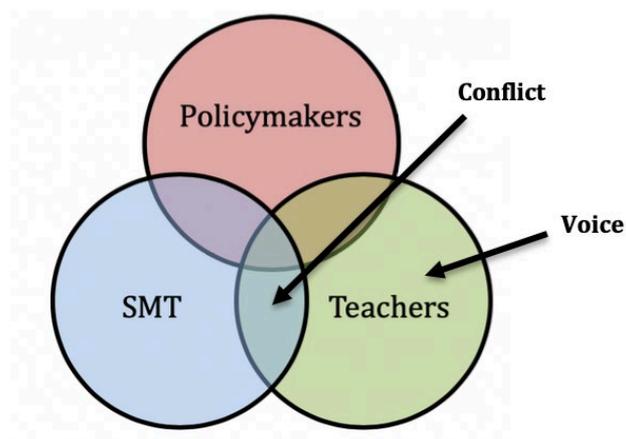


Figure 6.28: Reflection 14

6.16 'U-Turn' incident

On 28th March 2017 news reports announced that there was due to be a U-turn in the D grade policy. The principal of the college agreed to a meeting with me on 30th March 2017 to discuss the news of an imminent change and how he felt about the news and the policy itself. The principal was very happy to talk to me and invited me into his office. He has been incredibly supportive of my research and was keen to add his own comments about the D grade policy. We met in the boardroom over coffee and I explained that I just really wanted to have a conversation about the FE landscape surrounding the policy at the moment. He was very relaxed and led the conversation. However, it was announced shortly after our discussion that the U-turn would not take place and the government confirmed that the D grade policy is here to stay.

Philip: *There has been a slight change in direction over the last few months.*

Everyone agrees that English and maths needs to improve but it is the tool that is wrong. Policy was needed because employers understood the GCSE but there has been a softening with Justine Greening. Ofsted have also had their say and Ofsted don't normally comment on policy. Paul Joyce made a comment about the policy at regional level which I think was laying the groundwork for the U-turn. We need clarity on what it means for the condition of funding for students graded 1-3. You can say you can change it but to what???

[Interviewer: What do you think of the announcement?]

I think the U-turn is good, it means we are going back to what is right for the learner, however, does that mean they are going to re-vamp FS?

At the moment because of the condition of funding all are doing the GCSE as it is a question of money. The GCSE is a difficult sell and we are being judged on our ability to churn out A-Cs, you know we have to do this because of that. I hope they make the right decision for young people. It will change the landscape of the English and maths teams as we have GCSE teachers not Functional Skills. If the situation changes, we will have to look at how we deliver English and maths. I'm a fan of proper embedding of English and maths.*

The GCSE is the wrong vehicle for improving English and maths.

They launch it, there are problems with it then gets painful along the way, we need to stop that, they need to listen to us as professionals.

Figure 6.29: U-turn vignette

Due to the uncertainty of a possible U-turn in the D grade policy, Philip was able to speculate and reflect honestly on its effects on the students, staff and sector. The indecision in the U-turn itself is evidence of doubt that the D grade policy is the best option for students. This doubt was further exacerbated by Ofsted (2016) who have advised the government of the challenges and effects of the policy and as Philip pointed out, it is unusual for Ofsted to directly comment on policy. This doubt places further distrust in policymakers and the policy itself. Philip is asking for clarity that the D grade policy is right for the sector and its students, otherwise it gets 'painful'.

With the uncertainty that the D grade policy will be removed, Philip felt comfortable to state that his opinion is in support of the removal of the mandatory GCSE resits. He strongly believes that we should be doing the right thing for the learner and no one else, which in his view is not what is happening with the D grade policy. This is because producing results has now become the main focus of the policy (DfE, 2017), and not to improve the students' maths and English skills which was the policy's original aim (DfE, 2017). The exam pass mark being the important factor is not serving the best interests of students or staff in the FE sector and certainly not doing the right thing for the students for whom the D grade policy is directly demotivating (DfE, 2017). The D grade policy means that the students who previously did not fit within academia and wanted to study a vocational course, now do not 'fit' in the FE sector either.

A recent government report outlining effective practice when implementing the D grade policy states that contextualising maths and English is important and influences learning in the resit classroom (DfE, 2017). These findings further echo the doubts in the sector that the GCSE is the wrong 'vehicle' for improving maths and English as the students need these skills in a professional context not a theoretical perspective. Philip is calling out for a policy that 'fits' with the vocational sector and the 'proper' embedding of maths and English skills not the GCSE (Leitch, 2006; O'Leary, 2008).

Analysis

It is notable that the Principal of the college, Philip, like previously identified students and members of staff, expresses a conflict. Much of this conflict comes from him also reflecting his frustration in top-down approaches not working, where in his case, policymakers are not listening to the sector. The D grade policy emphasises and exposes a curious multilayer conflict between students and teachers, teachers and senior leaders, and senior leaders and policymakers. At each layer individuals are feeling despair.

Philip discloses that he feels that policymakers and the government are not listening to him and the sector, which in turn creates a conflict for Philip in implementing a policy with which he disagrees. Philip feels this disagreement with the system and the structure that is at the heart of the D grade policy. However, Philip is compliant and feels enormous accountability to influence staff and students to ensure the policy is implemented (Czerniawski, 2011b). He wants to be listened to as a professional, in the same way his staff do and in the same way the students do. Despite the maths and English department's concerns (see 'the incident of wishing'), Philip does acknowledge the reality of the situation and recognises that the policy does not work but he feels powerless to stop it.



Reflection

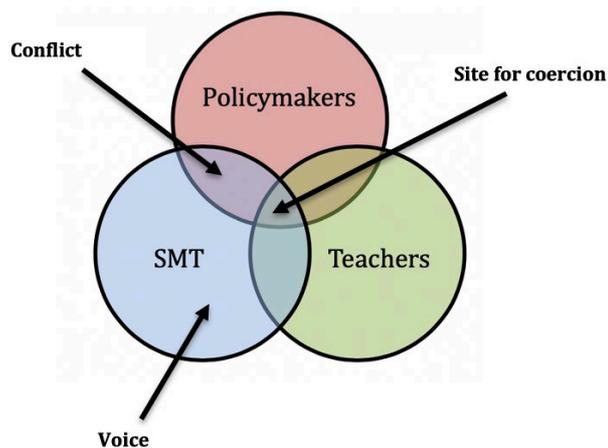


Figure 6.30: Reflection 15

6.17 Summary

In summary this chapter has presented multiple critical incidents offered as research vignettes, followed by my initial thoughts, analyses and finally my reflections, which helped my data move from the descriptive to the analytical. The vignettes are events from the case study and build on one another showing a transition in thoughts and behaviours from student to Principal level. My reflections at the end of each vignette are presented as diagrams which are directly linked to my conceptual framework.

The vignettes themselves are thematic and cut across the lifecycle of the case study. They have presented material from observations, interviews, surveys, attendance data and field notes. From my analysis a strong argument has emerged that by imposing the D grade policy on my participants a curious conflict is being created where individuals feel a lack of voice and as a result the policy's intention of raising standards in maths and English is not what is happening in reality. As a consequence, the participants show evidence of internal and external conflicts which result in power struggles within the classroom and subversion of the teaching (Dreikurs, 1968), whether this be directly or in-directly by not attending sessions. There is data showing how the resit year 2016-2017 has impacted the mindset of both staff and students with evidence of transition and instability (Ablard and Mills, 1996; Quihuis et al, 2002). However, the imposing of the D grade policy is implemented with compliance and coercion from the top down (Hyland, 2013). A number of barriers have been identified which impact the successful implementation of the D grade policy including, pedagogical, student, and management barriers.

Following on from this discussion of the findings in relation to the literature, in the next chapter I will discuss my amended conceptual framework as a direct response to my findings. The next chapter will clearly outline the conclusions of the case study and what further work needs to be done in this field of research.

Chapter Seven

**Further discussion, conclusions and
recommendations**

Chapter Seven

7.1 Introduction

This case study has explored the experiences of individuals at a FE college in England as a direct result of the D grade policy, which has been in force since the academic year 2014-2015. The D grade policy has meant that FE colleges have been required to enroll all students under nineteen years of age onto a resit GCSE maths and/or English course, if they have not achieved a grade C or above at the point of entry. This is intended to continue to develop their skills in literacy and numeracy and give them the best chance to gain employment after they leave college (ESFA, 2018). The focus of my study is justified due to the increased pressure from FE colleges and unions, on the government to scrap the policy following recurrent complaints of increasing numbers of disgruntled students (Belgutay, 2016; Wiggins, 2016a; Martin, 2017; Longman and Raikes, 2017).

My research has revealed a conflict that exists between the policy intention and the policy's implementation and this will be discussed in detail in my conclusion. Through its participants, the case study has exposed how this significant conflict is also reflected in the students' and teachers' behaviours. This can be seen in the story of 2016-17 within the classroom, within the FE college's operation of the policy and also through its attitudes to and perceptions of teaching and learning. This case study has discovered from the voices and interactions of participants that there are groups of students who feel as though they simply 'do not fit', who are silenced by a recurring cycle of re-assessment until they reach the government's required standard (See 'The Brandon incident', vignette 6.9).



Reflection: As a case study researcher, I have been putting my personal research skills to the test as the research has involved a mix of methods and collation of rich data. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) the success of my research in its ability to answer my research purpose and aims, is resting with my skills to continually strive further by inferring meanings, being an efficient questioner and listener, and being able to gather a range of data, from a range of sources and then analyse it. If this is true, then I am proud of what I have achieved as this has been a complex and demanding case study to take on as novice researcher.

In this final chapter I will reflect on the research sub-questions set out at the beginning of my case study to answer the main research question, outlining the answers drawn out by my analysis. The answers to my research questions are also presented in my revised conceptual framework (figure 7.1). The chapter continues by commenting on how my research makes an original contribution to knowledge before acknowledging its limitations and concludes with a discussion of the identified further research possibilities.

7.2 Answers to research questions

The aim of my research was to explore the complex experiences of those affected by policy and policy implementation with a specific focus on students and teachers. The overarching question on which the research was founded was: *How is the policy of compulsory GCSE maths and English for 16-19-year olds being experienced by students and teaching staff at one Further Education College?* In addition to the main research question there are two sub-questions, inquiring into both the students' and teachers' experiences:

1. *What are the 16-19-year-old students' experiences of the compulsory GCSE resit and its effects on student engagement and motivation to learn in maths and English?*
2. *What are the teachers' experiences of teaching the compulsory GCSE resit course in maths and English to students who have previously failed to achieve grade C or 4 and its effects on the teachers' motivation to teach the subjects?*

When embarking on my research I thought I would need to focus separately on the teachers and students, but the observations centred on interactions answering both my sub-questions often making the teachers and students difficult to isolate. Therefore, the research sub-questions will be answered together.

Answer to research sub-questions:

The students and teachers experience of the D grade policy and its effects are interlinked, and defined by their previous experiences, which is having a detrimental impact on teaching and learning of maths and English.

The vignettes show that the student and teacher experience of the policy and its effects are interlinked, with constant interplay between them. Although the experience felt by my participants is a direct effect of the D grade policy, the converse is also true and the effect of the D grade policy is the result of their experience. Both students and teachers are in a cycle constantly battling against previous experiences of the GCSE resit of maths and English and its effects on their motivation and engagement. Also, the reflexive relationship seen between students and teachers matched with my narrative approach and use of vignettes, highlights the constant interplay between what is the 'effect' of the D grade policy and how it is being 'experienced'.

I have found that students and teachers carry their previous experiences with them into the GCSE resit classroom, as also identified by Rose (2017) in her guidance for GCSE resit teachers in FE on how to teach disaffected students. My research found evidence that teachers' and students' previous experiences have an impact on their perception and approach to teaching and learning. This behaviour and attitude is sometimes reflected by students and teachers (see 'Shit' incident, vignette 6.8). This is in line with previous studies which have also found evidence of reflecting behaviours between students and teachers (Murphy and Dweck, 2010; Rattan, Good and Dweck, 2011; Boaler, 2013). The reflecting of student and teachers' attitudes is most evident when comparing Michelle's negative approach to teaching maths GCSE resit and Elsa's positive approach to teaching English GCSE resit. Michelle's negative approach resulted in a consistently more negative reaction from the students, as seen in the 'Brandon incident' (vignette 6.9) compared to Elsa's positive approach in English. Kearney et al (1999) found that teachers having a negative personality or attitude would arouse a negative attitude in their students and therefore they categorise a teacher having a negative personality as a teacher misbehaviour. A teacher needs to be a positive role model and someone who is motivating as students have shown signs of reflecting behaviours and attitudes. This is perhaps an explanation for the GCSE English results being more successful and seeing a better attainment than the maths in my observed groups (See GCSE results in chapter five, part six).

The experiences and effects of the D grade policy on teachers are interlinked with those of the students, and the teachers' experiences are also heavily entwined with the students' experiences. My research has shown that teachers can reflect students' behaviour and vice versa, which leads to conflict in the classroom and teachers feeling despair (See 'I was wrong' incident', vignette 6.10, and 'Participate!', vignette 6.11). However, some research has shown that having a teacher with a positive attitude is still not enough to improve engagement and motivation (Bellamy, 2017). Research carried out by Bellamy (2017) explored 350 students resitting their GCSE maths with a strong and passionate maths team. Students shared the burden of previous negative experiences of learning maths in schools which had left them unmotivated and angry. This is evident in the students using overly dramatic language in unstructured interviews (see chapter five, part two) and Brandon sharing his previous experiences and current despair.

The feelings of despair are generated from the teachers' experience of disengagement in student behaviour, whose lack of attendance and further conflicts in the classroom show that their efforts to teach and support their disaffected students are not effective (Dreikurs, 1971). Therefore, teachers have a negative experience of teaching GCSE resit students and have become demoralised as highlighted in my vignette, 'The incident of wishing' (vignette 6.15), where teaching staff discuss their frustration with their difficult situation and attack the senior leaders of the college for not understanding

In turn, the effects on the participants' motivation play a key part in their experiences of the GCSE resit. The reality is the effects of the GCSE resit year have impacted the student experience and in turn the student experience has affected their motivation and engagement; they are caught in a cycle of cause and effect. Across the academic year students appear to be in transition, moving on a continuum of motivation that leads them to disengage at different points during the year, as do the teachers. As a result, students express feelings of despair due to a lack of motivation to keep trying to pass an exam which they have previously failed, and experience has taught them there is no point in trying (Assessment Reform Group, 2002). These are clear barriers to learning that the students have to face when engaging in the GCSE resit, but as shown in my findings and vignettes, rather than break through their barriers to achieve their GCSE, the majority of students show avoidance, through subversive behaviour and distancing by voting with their feet.

My research shows that the effects of the D grade policy often lead to conflict in the classroom, which can be seen as an active battleground where there is open hostility, with students struggling to battle for power and the chance to be heard (See 'Laughing

incident', vignette 6.12, and 'Participate!', vignette 6.11). Child psychiatrist and educator Rudolf Dreikurs (1968) developed four goals of misbehaviour in children, attention, power, revenge and displays of inadequacy. Dreikurs's book 'Psychology in the classroom' (1968) offers teachers a manual on understanding the child and themselves to help improve learning and cooperation with challenging children. Although his work dates back to the 1960s it is still relevant and valuable to teachers to understand reasons for children's behaviour with the aim to respond to a child's negative behaviour in a better way (Castle and Buckler, 2018). His work gives insights into social discipline and focuses on social belonging which resonates well with the day to day reality of the classroom. Although Dreikurs' theory is based on numerous observations of young children he later extended his theory to adolescents and the consequences of carrying "deep seated inferiority feelings" (Dreikurs, 1971, p. 7). My research shows evidence of students holding deep rooted inferiority feelings and teachers trying to overcompensate in feedback to correct their feelings.

I have observed that GCSE maths and English classrooms in the FE college are battlegrounds in which battles are won and lost, as identified by Michelle in her 1:1 interview (See chapter five, part 6). In 'the lollipop incident' (see vignette 6.3) Elsa uses lollipops as her defence, providing comfort feedback (Rattan, Good and Dweck, 2011) in an attempt to try to distract the students from their marks. She is fearful of a battle occurring when the students see their marks and their feelings of inferiority are reinforced. Elsa shows fear and anxiety when talking to GCSE resit students about their marks and results and tries to disguise and minimise the students' failings. This suggests that teachers fear that the experience of the GCSE resit would be made worse by engaging with students about their progress and therefore they use avoidance. Like the students, teachers show throughout the resit year that they are in transition, on a continuum of varying behaviours and motivations to teach (See 'The incident of Emily's transition', vignette 6.5). There is evidence of this transition as teachers become further demoralised through their classroom experience, engaging in classroom conflicts with students, and teaching becomes increasingly inconsistent.

Mindset surveys were utilised in my research as a practical instrument to compare and contrast teachers' and students' attitudes and beliefs. Despite some students stating they have a growth mindset throughout the case study, they did not go on to achieve the required grade C, questioning whether they do truly hold a growth mindset. Dweck (2017) warns of a false mindset in students, where they want to declare they hold a growth mindset (incremental theory of knowledge) but this may not be an expression of their true beliefs. However, some studies have gone further claiming they have found that having a growth mindset is not effective in improving achievement in classrooms and

they caution its use (O'Brien, 2015; Yettick et al, 2016; Li and Bates, 2017). My research has used mindset surveys as a practical tool which does not claim that the mindsets recorded in surveys are a true representation of a students' or teachers' beliefs, however they helped to reveal a complex, insightful understanding of the ideal learner's attitude, values and beliefs.

Some students who did report a growth mindset in surveys did, arguably, have a more positive experience of the resit year compared to those who reported a fixed mindset, shown by students engaging more with their teachers and attending a higher number of lessons. However, the majority of students who reported a growth mindset did not show the characteristics of a student with a growth mindset. Their approach to learning in the classroom was shown by students becoming increasingly disaffected and not attending the majority of their lessons. Dweck (2012) argues that students with a fixed mindset will see exams as a threat and as a consequence they do not engage and display low effort. Therefore, simply recording a growth mindset at a surface level is not enough to help students to change their perception of learning from their mistakes or to see them as a way to improve. The students' barriers to learning are deep rooted through previous experiences and although they may have a surface level motivation to obtaining a GCSE grade C this is not enough to overcome their barriers (Dreikurs, 1971).

Throughout the academic year the FE college had a number of staffing issues and although my research suggests that having a consistent teacher is not sufficient to ensure the success of students achieving the grade C/4, it does however suggest that the students have a better and more positive experience of the resit year. The retention of GCSE maths and English teachers had been challenging and teaching was inconsistent across the academic year. As seen in mindset surveys, teacher interviews and my observations, the maths team reported having a fixed mindset and have had an unenthusiastic attitude towards their subject when compared to the English team (See teachers' responses to mindset surveys, in chapter five, part 5). However, positive and enthusiastic, pedagogy becomes increasingly challenging for teachers who are reflecting students' disaffected behaviour and encounter greater conflict and barriers in their classroom.

The compulsory GCSE resit has the intention to help students develop their skills in maths and English (DfE, 2018). However, because of the fast-paced lessons, which focus on passing the exam they have previously failed in school, they do not trust their GCSE lessons to help them learn or develop (See 'Laughing incident', vignette 6.12). They know what to expect and experience has shown them that their GCSE lessons are now forced upon them to achieve a grade standard set by the government, therefore

students become subversive as described by Dreikurs (1968). The students are not intrinsically motivated and do not engage with the GCSE and en masse this has numerous consequences on the staff and the students' well-being and overall engagement.

Following this discussion, the main research question is answered by highlighting four key findings. My main research question asks, ***'How is the policy of compulsory GCSE maths and English for 16-19-year olds being experienced by students and teaching staff at one Further Education College?'***

Key finding one:

The experience has tested both the students' and teachers' resilience to teaching and learning.

Drawing on the discussion earlier on in the chapter, the college experienced student attendance issues in compulsory maths and English classes across the entire academic year (see 'The incident of attendance data', vignette 6.13). At the beginning of the year attendance in maths and English was lower than in the students' chosen vocational courses and continued to decrease leading right up to the exams in May. The student attendance problems are intrinsically linked to the number of staffing problems in maths and English experienced by the college. Teachers within the maths and English teams were observed as consistently requiring improvement in their teaching and assessment strategies. There were staff absences resulting in a growing need to rely on agency teachers to cover permanent staff members. Indeed, as consistent teaching fluctuated and teachers became absent, the student attendance decreased further. This is further evidence that the behaviours between students and teachers are interlinked (Kearney et al, 1999).

Georgie, the exam and timetable officer at the college, directly blamed the pressures on staff and their absence, for students who did not achieve a grade C/4.

Georgie: *I honestly think that if staff hadn't imploded it would have been a different story. They wouldn't have had inconsistency! There were so many students in English for exam who were so close; 41 that's the story!!*

By choosing not to attend the students are sabotaging their own chances to prove their inferiority feelings are wrong (Dreikurs, 1971). Their consistent decline in attendance is evidence of how the students used distancing and became increasingly disengaged from learning maths and English. By not attending their lessons students are subverting the teaching and the D grade policy itself, placing increased pressure on teachers. However, when students are in attendance, they can be seen to purposely sabotage their teacher. Despite their best efforts both Elsa, in the 'Laughing incident' (vignette 6.12), and Esther, in 'Participate!' (vignette 6.11), are met by protests and sabotage from the students who are purposely subverting their teaching. As suggested by Dweck (2007) this has a negative impact on their view of their students' intelligence and according to Larrivee (2012) this additional pressure tests their resilience to teach. Whether the students' subversion of teaching is by attending and purposely disrupting the teaching, or by not attending and inadvertently sabotaging the teaching, the impact is the same and tests the students' and teachers' resilience to teaching and learning.

Teachers are caught between policy and practice as seen in some of the comments made by teachers in my unstructured interviews with teachers;

- Mae: *Certain groups are really negative, I have the challenge... the worst behaved.*
Generally, they are quite positive but not high motivation, but they will pass if they are positive do the work, grade D students should go up if motivated to work, it doesn't matter how hard I try, it's got to come from them
- Mark: *There are attendance issues, you know I tell them everyone in the college thinks construction are a bunch of wankers, they think you're stupid and thick, I want to prove them wrong, but you are living up to the stereotype!*
- Elsa: *Um, there is a couple of challenging groups, I joke around with them on purpose, but the motivation from them is dropping, most are just acting out. They don't want to do it anymore they are on their 3rd, 4th 5th time... I have to up my game because they won't.*
- Michelle: *Well, what can I say, a rollercoaster! It has been a lot of hard work; I have won some battles lost some others.*
The attendance has been atrocious.
The ones who turn up stand a chance and can pass. The ones who don't turn up know that they won't pass so don't bother. And do you know what, when they don't turn up, it makes my life a lot easier.

I think the marks in the mocks have been going up... and I am fairly confident that a lot of the group are going to get a grade C.

I have done everything I can do. But it has been really hard, and it has impacted on me a lot, I am exhausted, mentally and physically.

There is an argument that these issues are due to the FE college struggling to prepare and plan for the demands of the policy and its consequences (Davis, 2018), such as, the increasing number of students required to resit GCSE maths and English, and the subsequent need for extra teaching staff to allow for smaller manageable classes. The Policy Consortium (2018) argued that the policy was short sighted from the outset by giving college leaders only nine months to prepare, therefore not sufficient time to plan, recruit qualified staff and understand the full effects of compulsory GCSE resits. However, the FE College explored in my research, had started to prepare for the policy early by enforcing compulsory GCSE resits from academic year 2014-2015 a year before the policy came into force. Therefore, the tests on student and staff resilience, seen in the attendance and teaching and learning issues, are not the result of policy short sightedness but the real demands of implementing a policy in practice, which takes considerable time and preparation.

Key finding two:

The experience of the D grade policy is stressful and difficult and made worse by top-down pressures.

In 2018, following a national survey of staff within the FE sector, the Policy Consortium concluded that policymakers and stakeholders directly hinder good outcomes for learners in relation to the D grade policy and called to put an end to the volatility of policy in FE (Davis, 2018). The top-down pressure of policymakers imposing their decisions on FE is not new (See Cripps, 2002; Feinstein and Sabates, 2008; Pearce, Beer and Williams, 2008; Hyland, 2013). During the discussion earlier on in the chapter, my case study documents an example of the policy volatility in FE in the 'U-turn incident' (vignette 6.16) where there appeared a real chance that policymakers had made the decision to amend the policy, only to change their minds again. This is evidence of how SMT, teachers and students are at the mercy of policymakers' decisions.

My study demonstrates that the SMT and teachers feel top-down pressures from policymakers in the implementation of the D grade policy. Mark's perception of the

'impossibility' of his situation (see vignette 6.14) and lack of voice in how he would manage the situation differently, and staff 'wishing' for an answer or a magic wand (see vignette 6.15) to change their reality, is evidence of the top-down pressure felt by staff. However, my interview with Philip, the Principal of the college, is further evidence of how he also feels the top-down pressure from policymakers (see 'U-turn incident', vignette 6.16). Philip shares his perception of the uncertainty and lack of confidence caused by policymakers and the negative impact this has in trying to 'sell' the GCSE to students. My research shows that as a result of top-down pressure at each level of implementation, staff and students feel an internal and external conflict. Teachers of the resit are not only faced with conflicts and subversive behaviours from the students in the classroom but are also at conflict with themselves, recognising the impossibility of helping their students to achieve the required grade C within the college's current implementation. This shows there is compliance and coercion from the top-down.

My case study has shown that teachers face pedagogical barriers as a result of being coerced in the implementation of the D grade policy and therefore feel controlled by the GCSE qualification itself and the SMT. Adding in the disengaged and demotivated students makes the teaching of maths and English unpleasant and frustrating as shown in my interview with Emily during 'The magic wand incident' (vignette 6.4). Emily found herself wishing for an impossible solution to an impossible problem. Professionally teachers feel restricted and disheartened that their pedagogical strategies are ineffective and do not address a student's resistance to learning as described by Dreikurs (1968). Due to the top-down leadership approaches the teaching staff feel they are unable to resolve the conflict and the situation is made worse. This is seen in their pedagogical barriers but also in management barriers. Teachers, like Mark, feel as though they do not have a voice and cannot be heard. As with the students, this results in passive resistance from the staff because they feel they have no voice within the college and are unable to find a resolution for the students who they cannot help.

Key finding three:

The experience shows a lack of voice at all levels of implementation

The experience of the D grade policy is stressful and entrenched in difficulty exacerbated by the force imposed by government policy. This pressure creates a number of obstacles that must be overcome including management barriers, pedagogical barriers and student

barriers. It is these daily difficulties which create stress and anxiety for the college, the teachers and the students, generating conflict and despair that are conveyed in open battlegrounds in classrooms and meetings. This is made worse by individual voices not being heard at all levels of implementation.

Cripps (2002) discussed the impact of policy within the FE sector over time, highlighting how government power within policy action was softly killing the paradigm. My research strengthens the argument that there needs to be better shared dialogue at every level of policy implementation and like Cripps (2002) I have found that without good communication at each level, any uncertainty in the policy is exacerbated and implementation of the policy is likely to fail. My research demonstrates that the uncertainty experienced during 2016-2017 and the lack of confidence in the policy was made worse by the governments rumoured U-turn (See 'The U-turn incident', vignette 6.16). In 2016, Ofsted suggested that the D grade policy was not being effective at raising achievement in maths and English. Then as a result of no clear communication with unions and FE colleges there was further confusion and lack of confidence in and around the D grade policy's future.

The FE College in this case study is experiencing a lack of voice as a direct result of the D grade policy. The students, the teachers and senior leaders, all feel they have a lack of voice and not being heard by one another (See 'The impossibility incident', vignette 6.14 and 'The incident of wishing', vignette 6.15). This stems from the top-down leadership approach within the college, which is strongly influenced and reflected in the top-down approach by government and policymakers in enforcing the D grade policy on FE colleges.

The students have a lack of voice because the choice of continuing to study for their GCSE is taken away from them. They take opportunities within lessons to challenge authority and disengage purposely from the lessons, meaning they may sit and listen but do not necessarily hear or learn as described by Belenky et al (1986) (See vignette 6.7 'Explain' Incident). Students embark on a silent protest where they accept that they are being made to attend maths and English lessons, but it does not mean they have to engage in it and they are purposely subversive. This leads to further conflicts with teachers and a reflected frustration leading to a cycle of cause and effect. This is clearly illustrated in the 'Participate! Incident' (vignette 6.11). However, my research also presented evidence of total disengagement and distancing by the students in the form of voting with their feet and not attending their maths and English lessons (See 'The incident of attendance data', vignette 6.13). It raises the possibility that not attending their lessons is the only way they have left to voice their frustration of resitting their maths

and/or English. A strategy to help fight against student resistance is to ensure they have a voice and a way to air their ideas and opinions and have their voices heard in decision-making as suggested by, Dreikurs, Grunwald and Pepper, (1971), Czerniawski, (2012), Seidel and Tanner, (2013), Starkey, (2018).

If there is top-down pressure from policymakers, there is a lack of voice felt from the bottom up. Students feel as though they are silenced by their lack of choice in resitting their GCSE over and over again. With no personal investment in the course, students feel trapped and angry often leading to subversive behaviour in the classroom. The teachers also feel a lack of voice and a frustration that they cannot teach their subjects in the way they feel they should be taught. Teachers express this through discussions of practical barriers in everyday teaching and routines. The result is a passive resistance from staff and can impact their teaching experience. The senior leaders at the college also feel unheard with the Principal revealing in an interview (See chapter five, table 5.20) that he is left feeling as though he does not have a voice or a seat at the policymakers' table to discuss how the D grade policy should be implemented or indeed, how to improve maths and English in 16-19 year olds.

It is therefore important to note that a lack of voice is multi-layered and results in conflict and frustration at each level.

Key finding four:

The experience of the D grade policy does not match the desired intentions of the policy

As a result of previously discussed top-down pressures, there is compliance between FE colleges and policymakers to implement the D grade policy. This compliance results in a site for coercion between policymakers, FE colleges and teachers. Wolf (2013) argued that ensuring all students reach the required grade C standard in maths and English was the most important recommendation she made for the post-16 sector with the intention of ensuring that the country can compete in the global labour market and improve education in core subjects. However, in reality the experience is a short number of weeks of teaching to the test and students relearning what they have previously been taught in school, making them feel like failures. The intentions and aspirations of the policy are not disputed, however the way it has been implemented has been criticised (Davis, 2018) and my research has shown clear evidence of its negative effects on

teaching and learning. I have shown that the experience of teaching and learning maths and English through compulsory GCSE resits does not match the intended experience and desired intentions of the policy.

In 2017 Brandon sat his GCSE maths and English exams for the eighth and final time to try to achieve the governments required grade C/4 (See 'Brandon incident', vignette 6.9). Brandon has been caught in the resit cycle for a number of years and has no motivation to pass and has had no choice. Research carried out by Gonida, Kiosseoglou and Leondari (2006) explored implicit theories of intelligence and the perceived academic competence of 187 children who were tested and then retested the following year. They found that previous educational experiences have a significant impact on a persons perceived academic competence and their fixed or growth mindset belief was determined by school achievement and their perceived academic ability. This is contrary to Dweck and Leggett (1988) who argue that there is a casual role in implicit theories of intelligence, saying that students accepting their ability is fixed does not ensure that they will believe that this is true. However, my research shows that Brandon is a victim of his previous experiences (Gonida, Kiosseoglou and Leondari, 2006). Rather than see Brandon learn maths and English skills to help him in his future employment, as the D grade policy intended, it has pushed Brandon further away, to the point where he says, *"I hate it, I can't take it anymore"*.

My research presents evidence of a gap between intention, implementation and reception and as a result we see evidence of conflicts (internal and external), barriers to teaching and learning and power struggles (See 'Impossibility', vignette 6.14, 'Incident of wishing', vignette 6.15 and 'U-turn', vignette 6.16). There is a conflict between students' choice to study vocational qualifications and the requirement to study GCSE academic qualifications, leaving students failing to see the relevance. Although the GCSE gives future employers a consistent level to judge job applicants, due to the nature of a resit year, the students are not improving their maths and English skills and are not embedding these skills in a way that is relevant to the workplace. Instead they are learning how to pass a previously failed exam and students are resisting and resenting this opportunity. The GCSE is a vehicle that does not fit within vocational education or with vocational aged students (Debenham, 1987). To resolve the conflict a new 'vehicle' must be used as argued by Philip, the college Principal (See 'The U-turn incident', vignette 6.16).

The experience and effects of the D grade policy are fuelling the long-held debate that FE is a Cinderella sector (Baker, 1989) and less prestigious than a traditional academic route (West and Steedman, 2003). Rather than improving maths and English the D grade

policy can be seen to be ‘mopping up’ schools’ underachievers who have failed to reach the required standard (Preston and Hammond, 2002).

7.3 Revised conceptual framework:

Arising from the key findings my conceptual framework needs to be revised. This conceptual framework has provided the basis for my research and illustrated the participants’ relationships, and the barriers which confine them all. The data analysis in chapter five revealed key themes, issues and difficulties experienced and faced by my participants. With the combined use of my vignettes in chapter six, I was able to expose detailed snapshots of reality. It was the development of my data analysis which prompted my conceptual framework to grow and change from its original form, seen in my Methodology chapter, (see Fig 4.1, in chapter four, section 4.2 Conceptual framework and research questions) to the more comprehensive framework seen in figure 7.1.

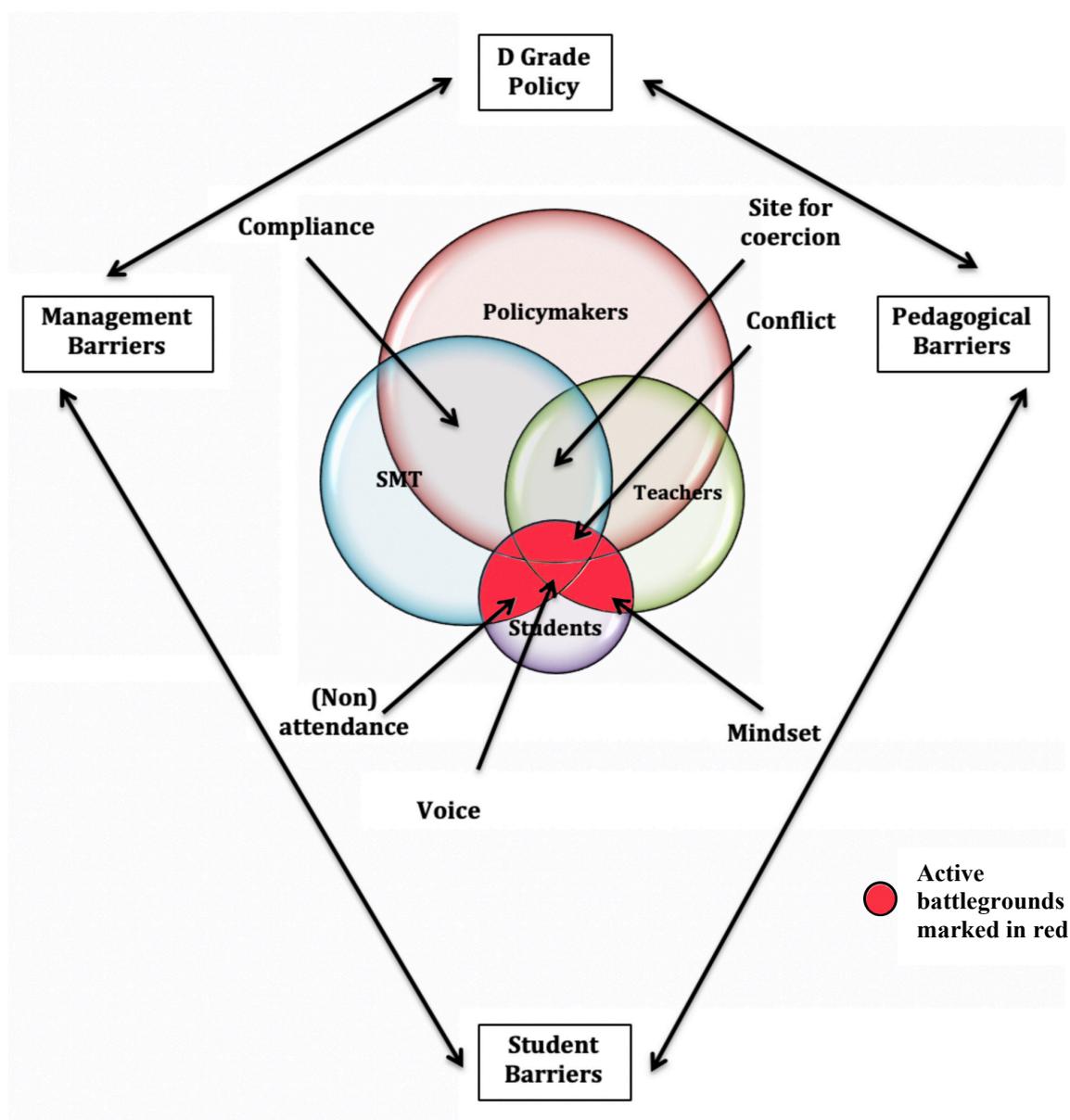


Figure 7.1: Updated conceptual framework

My conceptual framework is sophisticated in its design because it is able to show how the framework has been re-worked, following evidence from my key findings and my own learning and understanding of what my findings had discovered in reality. Following the progressive analysis of the story of 2016-17 and the vignettes presented in chapter six, the framework (figure 7.1) is now able to display visually the findings of the case study.

Drawing on key finding three, the size and shape of the spheres have altered within the framework signifying that not all the spheres are equal and confirming that not all the individuals are equal in terms of power or voice. The variation in size represents the difference in the proportion of power held by the individuals affected by the D grade policy, with policymakers being the largest sphere and symbolising that their power encompasses the strongest voice and greatest influence over FE colleges, teachers and students. The spheres continue to decrease in size as the power which they represent also decreases, leaving the students with the smallest sphere, representative of their oppression. The student sphere is the lowest to demonstrate that the influence of the D grade policy is filtered down from Policymakers through SMT and teachers.

The significance of the spheres being unequal and decreasing in size reveals a further level of analysis that is presented within my vignettes showing the downward pressure felt from policymakers at the top through to the students at the bottom. As shown in key finding two, there is pressure being experienced from the top-down, where each sphere is crushing the next as a consequence of the D grade policy being imposed on FE colleges, the teachers and the students. The configuration of the spheres gives the impression of the hierarchy of control, showing the students with the least at the bottom. As well as deliberately sized spheres, my revised conceptual framework (figure 7.1) makes use of a kite shape to symbolise the pressure felt from the D grade policy which weighs down on the college, the teachers and the students. The change in the structure of the conceptual framework is significant as it identifies the top-down issues experienced by my individual participants and the barriers they face.

The discussion around key finding one and key finding four, and the analysis of my findings and vignettes, added essential material to expand my conceptual framework by providing further detail to the coloured intersections showing common areas in my original conceptual framework (Chapter four, figure 4.1). My updated conceptual framework therefore presents a reflection of my analysis across the case study with specific thematic labels identified between common participants. These are, compliance, site for coercion, conflict, mindset, voice, and (non) attendance. As a consequence of the D grade policy's top-down influence, there are also intersections marked in red representing the 'active battleground' seen in the classroom. This reflects the evidence

of conflict and battles between participants and participant groups, which has winners and losers (see chapter five, part 2, part 6 and 'Participate!', vignette 6.11). These conflicts are internal (see 'The incident of Ethan', vignette 6.6) and external (see 'Explain incident', vignette 6.7), causing battles for power which directly (see 'Laughing incident', vignette 6.12) and in-directly (see 'The incident of attendance data', vignette 6.13) subvert the teaching. It is within these areas marked 'active battlegrounds' on the updated conceptual framework that individuals' experiences can be represented by my snakes and ladders metaphor as they experience feelings analogous to climbing up a ladder or sliding further down a snake.

7.4 Contribution to knowledge

This research offers a considered interpretation of the experiences and effects felt in the FE GCSE resit classroom, suggesting reasons for the effects and how these in turn influence the student and teacher experiences. This is particularly evident in my vignettes as both teachers and students feel downtrodden as a result of the pressure from the policy and top-down approaches. The policy weighs heavy on both students and teachers revealing that they both share a similar problem of being silenced and marginalised, as shown in my revised conceptual framework (figure 7.1). The consequence of students and teachers feeling marginalised results in them turning against one another and we see open conflict in the classroom. Therefore, my research offers teachers in particular, a thoughtful reflection on how they could reconsider the student emotions and behaviours which are portrayed in the classroom to limit the conflicts observed in active battlegrounds. This study documents explanations for why students ultimately withdraw from the GCSE resit and how a teacher's attitude and behaviour influences and therefore affects the students' overall experience. My case study has exposed how the GCSE resit cycle has created in turn a cycle of cause and effect for teacher and students, which is further exacerbated by lack of voice and top-down leadership approaches within the institution.

Drawing on Davis (2018) and the Wolf Report (2011) my research has shown that the D grade policy's intention does not match what is being experienced in reality with students resisting and resenting the opportunity. This indicates that the FE sector is not being aspirational but instead the imposition of the D grade policy is contributing to perceptions of the FE sector as a second chance provision, catching students who do not meet educational standards set by the government (Baker 1989; Bailey, 1999; Preston and Hammond, 2002). My research demonstrates the effects of the D grade policy on students and teachers in an FE college, from the point of view of the individual

participants who have experienced it and providing a key platform for their real-life situation. My research has given a voice to the voiceless, the silenced, and the invisible.

This study contributes in-depth, rich descriptions offering an original context and focusing on telling the story of the individuals who experienced the GCSE resit in academic year 2016-2017 specifically, including the effects of government updates of the policy from policymakers and the ripples of impact this has had on individuals. This study documents how the D grade policy was experienced by an FE college and argues that there is a gap between intention, implementation and reception. The findings of my case contribute directly to the evidence gap surrounding the D grade policy by adding further pressure on policymakers (Belgutay, 2016; Wiggins, 2016a; Martin, 2017; Longman and Raikes, 2017) to review the policy and reflect on the effects compulsory GCSE resits are having on teaching and learning in the FE sector. Through my research the policy is exposed as having a sole focus on the assessment of a student's academic ability and not the development of the learner's literacy and numeracy skills, which does not match the policy's original intention, as outlined by the ESFA (2018). In practice the policy is not resulting in an improvement in maths and English skills to support future employment. There is a damaging mismatch between the academic GCSE and vocational courses in the FE sector creating further conflict and disengagement from the subjects.

As a result of being known to the profession, I have been able to present a comprehensive view of the reality and understanding of the case, making the implicit, explicit. Rather than simply focusing on attainment and trends of the GCSE resits my research crucially presents more than the data and results. It importantly contributes a story behind the outcomes and explores the D grade policy to a deeper level, making individuals' experiences explicit. The story told through my research is one of marginalisation and it is only through the rich data collected that my participants have been given a voice.

It is important to note that my case study is bigger than the D grade policy itself. It also highlights the difficulties and conflicts that imposing policies such as this, in an authoritative top-down approach, has on individuals who are implementing and experiencing the policy. My research has exposed the consequences of imposing a policy which has not been embedded within practice with consultation between educational professionals and policymakers. During the unique year of 2016-2017 the FE sector felt a policyquake as a result of doubt and pressure to change policy. My research revealed the effects of doubt and a lack of confidence in policymakers and Ofsted at an institutional level and the importance of a fully embedded policy with shared dialogue and support from educational professionals before the policy is implemented.

7.5 Limitations of the study

Case study research is often criticised for its limitations due to the research outcomes being un-generalisable because the findings are unique to one specific case (Punch, 2009). It is important to note that my research is specific to one FE college in England and therefore its results will not be relevant or generalisable to all colleges who are experiencing the D grade policy. However, it was not the intention of my case study to generalise its findings, but rather to explore and understand a social phenomenon and the experiences of individuals. Nevertheless, my case study will be of interest to others who want to understand how post-16 compulsory learning in GCSE maths and English is being experienced. My findings could be applicable to other cases as they could find similarities and differences in their own situation and/or context and make their own connections and generalities. It is worth noting that compulsory re-examination courses of GCSE maths and English currently are affecting a large number of students, teachers and senior management in FE colleges and sixth form colleges; therefore, it needs a substantial case study approach.

Although being an insider has been advantageous to my research, I am aware that a consequence of being known to the profession results in researcher bias and could be interpreted as a limitation of my work. However, it is important to note that I was actively reflexive throughout my entire research project, using a research journal and a snakes and ladders analogy to present my reflective points in how my learning and understanding had developed across the study. I also used my supervisors to regularly review and reflect on my data to ensure my analysis was robust to give my research credibility.

Further limitations in using the case study methodology, there were some restraints in the methods employed in the study such as interviews and the mindset surveys. My case study made use of a number of unstructured interviews, which were led by my participants with minimal direction from myself. The limitation of using this type of interview technique prevented a consistent structure and duration in each interview, meaning the length of interviews differed as the contributions by participants differed. This ultimately resulted in varying contributions in interviews by participants at different points across the year. In addition, a limitation of using an unstructured interview design in group interviews with my student participants, meant not all voices were heard in each interview, necessitating follow up prompts and sometimes further interviews which were time consuming. However, my research is a qualitative study and contributes to a body of knowledge about lived experiences and how to analyse them, so a flexible approach is appropriate.

It is also important to note the limitations of using mindset surveys and I suggest that they should be used with caution in terms of research and in classrooms as a motivational strategy. This case study gave its participants mindset surveys at strategic points during the academic year, to attempt to capture their mindset attitude and to determine if this fluctuated at different points during the year. However, findings show that despite the students reporting a growth mindset on surveys, their attitude in the classroom showed characteristics of a fixed mindset and those that reported a growth mindset did not necessarily go on to achieve an improved grade. Dweck (2017) warns of the false growth mindset where individuals simply declare that they have a growth mindset because it sounds good. Therefore, because individuals want to be judged as good and they see that having a growth mindset is a positive characteristic to have in life and learning, there is a fear that people are declaring that they have a growth mindset when they do not (See 'Shit incident', vignette 6.8 and 'I was wrong incident', vignette 6.10). False growth mindset is a concern which could limit some of the validity of the mindset surveys within my case study. Growth mindset is a journey and any fluctuations in the findings from my mindset surveys are more likely to be a result of how students approach their trigger points, how they react in various situations and their behaviours and emotions rather than a judgement of their lifelong mindset (Dweck, 2017; Gonida, Kiosseoglou and Leondari, 2006).

7.6 Recommendations and Future research

The intention of this case study was not to make specific recommendations but there are some implications which have been highlighted, namely, the negative effects of how policies are implemented in reality. The D grade policy has been challenging for FE colleges and my findings show that the top-down authoritative approach and implementation of the policy has caused a barrier for the teaching and learning of maths and English. Therefore, I make a case that policies, such as the D grade policy should be better embedded within practice, with the support of professionals within the sector before they are implemented. Based on the evidence presented, this allows individual voices to be heard at varying levels and therefore there is a greater trust in a policy's effectiveness. My case study shows that the sector is very sensitive to any changes in policy, and this led to a further lack of confidence in the original policy causing confusion and frustration.

The case study findings, prompt me to argue that better communication and investment from professionals in the sector will lead to a more successful policy. Policymakers need to listen to the individuals who are implementing the policy in reality. Consequently, my

research suggests that there should be a greater focus on shared dialogue at all levels, and a greater awareness of the consequences of top-down leadership approaches on staff and therefore on students who also feel the effects. Better understanding of student behaviours, attitudes and experiences, will in turn improve the teacher's experience and motivation to teach.

As this study focuses on a single English FE college, it is recommended that further studies be carried out in other settings, to check whether the findings travel beyond boundaries of this one case and enable the establishment of a broader range of insights. To gain a better insight into how the D grade policy is being experienced, I recommend that my research design be repeated in other FE settings. This would allow specific colleges to evaluate how they are implementing the D grade policy and to ensure the best outcomes for learners and teaching staff. I do not recommend that a large-scale national project be used, as it is important not to lose in-depth thick descriptions such as those gained from my research. With further FE colleges reflecting on their own settings and practices the evidence gap of understanding how the D grade policy is being implemented and experienced, could be filled. It is important to ensure that the D grade policy's intention matches reality and consider how the impact of relationships can support this. Further research needs to be carried out to demonstrate that perhaps the lack of achievement in maths and English is not best addressed by GCSE resits in colleges. Such a finding would justify requests for a viable alternative to be proposed, one with the full support of the sector.

7.7 Concluding Remarks

At the beginning of my thesis I presented my 3-minute thesis snakes and ladders slide with a range of themes that were extracted from my findings, as an analogy of the ups and downs of the experiences of my participants.

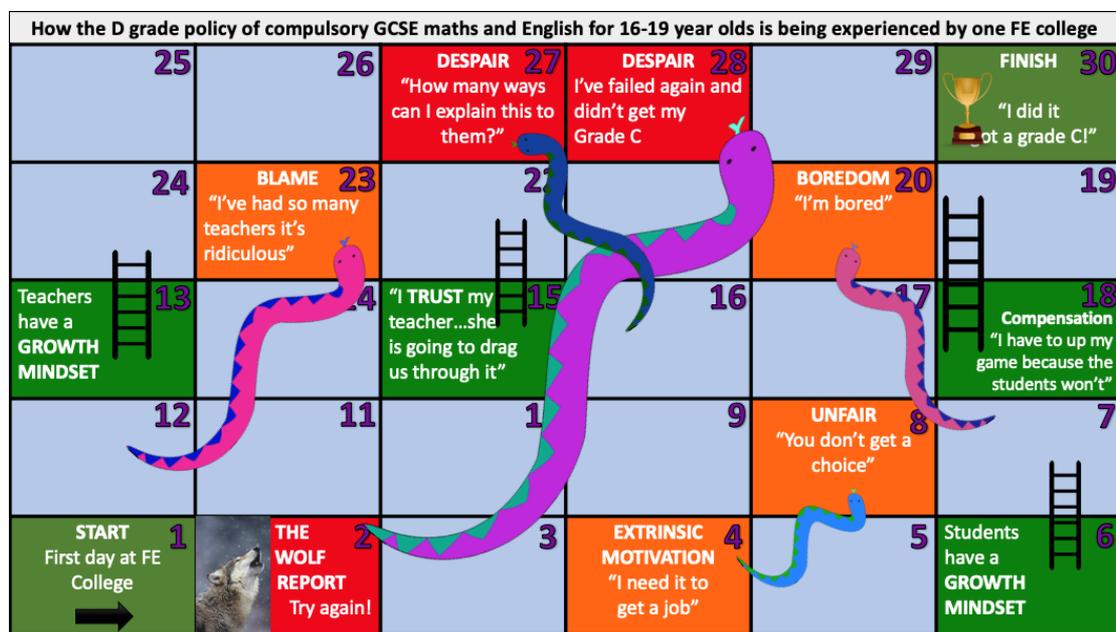


Figure 7.2: 3-minute-thesis PowerPoint slide presentation

The snakes and ladders analogy is also applicable to my own doctoral journey, representing my own ups and downs before completing this thesis. I have used the snakes and ladders throughout my thesis to identify my reflections and confessions as my research progressed.

Therefore, I choose to end my thesis with the same image of the snakes and ladders board demonstrating a summary of some of the key themes in my research and representative of the story of academic year 2016-2017 for my participants.

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Appendices

Student Groups Unstructured Interview Schedule

⇒ Build rapport – Welcomes – Introductions

Overall question/topic:

I would like you to tell me about your GCSE English or Maths resit....

Prompts if required:

- ⇒ Do you understand why you are doing your GCSE resit?
- ⇒ How are you feeling about doing your GCSE again?
- ⇒ What is it like doing your GCSE again?
- ⇒ How do your GCSE classes fit into your college timetable?
- ⇒ How is your GCSE re-sit course going?
- ⇒ How are you feeling as we get closer to the GCSE exam?

Teacher 1:1 Unstructured Interview Schedule

⇒ Build rapport – Welcomes – Introductions

Overall question/topic:

I would like you to tell me about teaching the GCSE English or Maths resit to 16-19 year olds...

Prompts if required:

- ⇒ Do you think students understand why they are doing their GCSE resit?
- ⇒ How would you describe the students' motivation to passing their GCSE?
- ⇒ What do you think are the barriers to students achieving a grade C?
- ⇒ How are you feeling as we get closer to the GCSE exam?
- ⇒ What is it like teaching students who have to achieve a grade C?
- ⇒ If you could change one thing what would it be?

Appendix III – Student Survey

The purpose of this survey is to gain an understanding of how strongly you feel about the following statements. By completing the survey, you understand that you are giving your personal responses and that the data will be collected for the study. You are not obliged to take part in the survey and completion of the survey will be taken as consent.

Name _____ Date _____

	Your intelligence is something very basic about you, that you can't change very much.	Disagree a lot	Disagree	Agree	Agree a lot
	You can learn new things, but you can't really change how intelligent you are.	Disagree a lot	Disagree	Agree	Agree a lot
	You can always substantially change how intelligent you are.	Disagree a lot	Disagree	Agree	Agree a lot
 LEARN MORE NOW	No matter how much intelligence you have, you can always change it quite a bit.	Disagree a lot	Disagree	Agree	Agree a lot
	When I fail at something, it is often because I am not smart enough to perform successfully.	Disagree a lot	Disagree	Agree	Agree a lot
	Smart people don't have to try as hard.	Disagree a lot	Disagree	Agree	Agree a lot
	I like learning from my mistakes.	Disagree a lot	Disagree	Agree	Agree a lot
	I like learning best when I do it perfectly without any mistakes.	Disagree a lot	Disagree	Agree	Agree a lot
	The harder I work at something, the better I become.	Disagree a lot	Disagree	Agree	Agree a lot
	When I don't succeed, it is because I am not good enough.	Disagree a lot	Disagree	Agree	Agree a lot

Appendix IV – Teacher Survey

The purpose of this survey is to gain an understanding of how strongly you feel about the following statements. By completing the survey, you understand that you are giving your personal responses and that the data will be collected for the study. You are not obliged to take part in the survey and completion of the survey will be taken as consent.

Name _____ Date _____

	Your intelligence is something very basic about you, that you can't change very much.	Disagree a lot	Disagree	Agree	Agree a lot
	You can learn new things, but you can't really change how intelligent you are.	Disagree a lot	Disagree	Agree	Agree a lot
	You can always substantially change how intelligent you are.	Disagree a lot	Disagree	Agree	Agree a lot
 LEARN MORE NOW	No matter how much intelligence you have, you can always change it quite a bit.	Disagree a lot	Disagree	Agree	Agree a lot
	Students fail because they are often not smart enough to perform successfully.	Disagree a lot	Disagree	Agree	Agree a lot
	Smart people don't have to try as hard.	Disagree a lot	Disagree	Agree	Agree a lot
	Students like learning from my mistakes.	Disagree a lot	Disagree	Agree	Agree a lot
	Students like learning best when I do it perfectly without any mistakes.	Disagree a lot	Disagree	Agree	Agree a lot
	The harder students work at something, the better they become.	Disagree a lot	Disagree	Agree	Agree a lot
	When students don't succeed, it is because they not good enough.	Disagree a lot	Disagree	Agree	Agree a lot

OBSERVATION NOTES	ANALYSIS / CODES
<p>OBSERVATION: 9/9/16 ENGLISH</p> <p>Teacher spent first part of the session going through the register - trying to learn names 1 student late (settled in quickly) Students responsive - opening books writing dates/titles</p>	<p>→ Wants to get to know students. Important to her ↳ PERSONAL.</p> <p>Teacher Mindset</p> <p>→ control</p>
<p>STARTER ACTIVITY → "Discuss the quote"</p>	<p>→ Active learning encouraged.</p>
<p>"Can't be arsed" one table Students swinging back on chairs (considering this is an activity involving talking → not very loud)</p>	<p>(Toby/Daniel)</p> <p>Student Barriers</p> <p>→ Not fully engaged.</p>
<p>"I don't care miss" "Whatever" → Head in hands Teacher moved on to someone else Student then started doodling in their book</p>	<p>→ Knows he has failed given up already.</p> <p>Students Mindset</p>
<p>"It's boring" "The book is boring"</p>	<p>(TOUCHING THE VOID)</p>
<p>Focus of teaching is on their controlled assessment → "Can't do the whole book - we don't have time. (Assessment date 10/10/16.)"</p>	<p>→ Teaching to the test.</p> <p>Practical Barriers</p>

Students copying from the board
- Responsive / generally behaviour
has been good.

AS LONG AS ANQ WAS DOING THE WORK
WHEN STUDENTS WERE ASKED TO DO
OFFER REAL INPUT → NEGATIVE REACTIONS

Teacher showing good level of
enthusiasm - walking around the
room - checking on what students
were writing

"Don't expect to cover the whole
book"

Teacher going through each clip
from the DVD

While clips are playing all students
generally engaged.

Teacher stops clip & asks Qs

Same students answering all the time

↳ As they answer most others
write in their books.

But Toby is sitting with head in
his hands not doing anything.

During video clips about half the class are jotting down
notes while they are watching - other half not.

Teacher working
harder than
students.

(PASSIVE RECIPIENTS)

Pedagogical Barriers
- teacher working harder
- not co-agents of Learning

Even when they were
negative - she ignored
the behaviour.

(EFFORT)

Teacher Mindset

TEACHING TO THE TEST
(sentence of failure)

SPOON-FEEDING

(Don't have to think)

LITTLE EFFORT.

Practical Barriers
- no time
- teaching to the test

Letting them do all the
work - not thinking for
themselves.

Students Mindset

Are they engaged?

Teacher encouraging interactions
→ asking Qs but again same student answers.

Continues to show enthusiasm.

Clear who is engaged / committed.

Teacher Mindset

But she is only going through key facts about the story → teaching specifically to the assessment
"This means..."

"How can we tell from the DVD..."

TEACHING TO THE TEST
Haven't look @ the book.

Practical Barriers

Clip shows Joe breaking his leg
→ students laugh

Q) Does this mean they are not connected to the story?

Q) Don't care?

Q) What can they (not) appreciate from the DVD?

Not taking it seriously

SURFACE NOT DEEP LEARNING?

Pedagogical Barriers

Teacher poses a Q → lots of looks around & Silence

Students aren't listening to each other

→ looking @ their hands / sheets / pens

→ chewing gum

All hoping someone else will answer.

BORED

DISENGAGED.

Student Barriers

Same student offers answers → teacher not pressing anyone else

"You are looking for... to get a grade C"

Management Barriers
- who chose the book?
- why?

NB: Half the class have done this book before & the other half haven't.

Q) What effect does this have? Some have to learn super fast. Some done it before & don't feel like they need to learn it again.

Q) Are the students who are disengaged the ones who have done it before?

→ Generally Yes.

"Do you really want to keep hurting your friend?"

Try to get students to empathise.

→ "yes"

→ For effect.

Teacher challenges this but student is purposely trying to annoy / not give the teacher what they want

Subverting Teaching

→ Obvious answer.

Teacher picked on the table that hasn't contributed yet → Takes them a long time to answer but they eventually do.

→ Was the answer sensible? Not really → very surface level.

"Show of hands" → most don't show their answers by putting their hands up → chatting & laughing to each other.

UNRESPONSIVE

Student Mindset

Some students checking phones
whilst supposed to be working

Student Mindset

During clips → most just happy
to watch.

EASY

Students start packing away
before Ang has finished.

SUMMARY

- Teaching to the test
- 1st week of term & already signs of boredom.
- More engagements from students who don't know the book.
- 2 boys very disengaged → Treating it like a joke.
- All DVD No Book
- All surface level teaching & learning
- Teacher working the hardest & trying to be upbeat & enthusiastic.