'It's horrible. And the class is too silent' – A silent classroom environment can lead to a paralysing fear of being put on the spot, called-out, shown up, shamed or humiliated.

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Abstract

With the relentless increase in the number of new kinds of schools in the English education system, the already fragmented secondary school system is fracturing still further. Since branching points, partitions and choice are all known to contribute to inequalities, the urgency to fully understand the roots and effects of marginalisation has never been greater.

This ethnographic study sheds light on disengagement by giving a voice to marginalized students. The student participants are pupils who have spent some time being removed from the mainstream classroom setting, to work in a withdrawal unit, most commonly following a period of sustained low-level disruption. The research is primarily drawn from semi-structured interviews, with additional participant observation, as well as some small group or one-to-one teaching by the researcher within this unit. The data gathered was analysed through a process of grounded theory. Analysis of emergent categories indicates that students experience many barriers within the secondary education system. One such barrier is the silent classroom environment.

Through poignant first-hand telling of their experiences, these marginalized students exemplify enlightening instances of this silent

environment, as either constraining and tedious or as anxiety inducing, either of which may feed into academic underachievement.

The current trend for a strict classroom prioritises discipline, spawning many a silent classroom in the process. Reforms promoting a more nuanced approach to behaviour management, the greater application of a weakly-framed approach to learning and teaching, or the more comprehensive embracing of critical pedagogies are needed to mitigate the barrier to inclusion which the current silent classroom presents.

Keywords: *marginalisation, educational inequality, critical pedagogy*

'FSM[1]-eligible pupils have a lower chance of attending a good school in an area where choice is high than in an area where choice is low' (Burgess and Briggs 2006, p20).

There is a plethora of research - undertaken in England and internationally - that echoes these findings, arguing that choice, partitions and branching points all contribute to educational inequalities (Allen 2007; Ball 2003a/2003b; Gibbons and Telhaj 2006; Green, Preston and Janmaat 2006; Orfield and Frankenberg 2013; Wilson 2011). With the relentless increase in the number of new kinds of schools in the English education system[2] the already fragmented secondary school system is fracturing still further, making inequalities and marginalisation all the more likely to occur. Against this backdrop, the urgency to fully understand the roots of student marginalisation has never been greater. What can be done to pre-empt vulnerable and socially disadvantaged students from becoming marginalised and disengaged?

This ethnographic study[3] addresses the experience of marginalisation of a small group of secondary school students. It seeks to give a voice to these students as a way of understanding the triggers, causes, effects and consequences of disengagement from mainstream education. Moreover, in light of the fact that *'the absence of children and youth voices in the examination of neoliberal schooling is a common concern'* (Sonu, Gorlewsk & Vallee 2016, p9) this is an opportunity to learn from listening to the voices of the students themselves. These marginalised students are surely best placed to shed light on the possible roots of marginalisation and their stories and narratives, may not only give a voice to a few of the most vulnerable, disengaged and hard to reach students within the mainstream education setting, but also perhaps hold the key to understanding disengagement, disaffection and hopefully even point to some effective interventions. This is the reason for placing the students at the heart of this study, selecting an ethnographic approach (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007) and then seeing what emerges from their accounts, through the use of a constructivist grounded theory analysis of the data (Charmaz 2006; Strauss 1987; Glaser and Strauss 1968).

The student participants were selected from among pupils who have spent some time 'removed' from the mainstream classroom setting to work in an on-site withdrawal unit, most commonly following a period of sustained low-level disruption. The sense in which they are initially considered marginalized, then, is through spending time in this withdrawal unit. The research is primarily drawn from semi-structured interviews, with additional participant observation, as well as some small group or one-to-one teaching by the researcher within this unit (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007; Kvale 2008).

After informal discussion in the withdrawal unit amongst small groups and bearing in mind ethical considerations, volunteers were sought as a starting

point to finding participants for interview. From then there was some snowball sampling, with individuals suggesting their friends and peers. Also used was made of a key respondent, a popular and sociable girl, who was eager to assist in contacting further participants, several of whom had left the school previously. Later some theoretical sampling stemming from the analytical process was also utilised (Alderson and Morrow 2004; Hammersley and Atkinson 2007; Charmaz 2006; Strauss 1987; Glaser and Strauss 1968).

The data gathered was subjected to an ongoing scrutiny, through a process of qualitative analysis, based on principles underpinning the grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss 1968) and revised later by Strauss (1987), and subsequently Charmaz (2006), to allow for more flexible qualitative analysis of research where the procedures are less stringently applied and the researcher is more free, for example to record interviews, discuss the data and supplement the data analysis process with experiential data. An additional rationale for my preferring this constructivist version is that taking a constructivist approach to grounded theory methodology may: *'better align the methodology with social justice-oriented research'* (Keane 2015, p427). The accompanying processes of free-writing, coding, memoing and diagramming formed an integral part of this analytical procedure. Resulting processes emerging from this analysis of the data could then be identified (Charmaz 2006; Strauss 1987).

In what follows, I narrate what emerged pertaining to talk and silence - specifically that not only is talk an inherent part of an enjoyable and effective learning environment but also that a silent classroom can lead to a paralysing fear of being put on the spot, called-out, shown up, shamed or humiliated. Only after seeing what has emerged from the data, will I subsequently situate and reflect upon my findings with reference to salient literature. I take this approach to keep the voices of the marginalised students to the fore.

Emerging themes concerning talk or silence - Examining the data

When asked to talk about their experiences of school, broad likes and dislikes in the mainstream classroom feature heavily, with marginalised students themselves frequently jumping straight to matters of behavior management and control. One aspect of this pertains to the associated ideas of talk and silence, with talk being part of preferred, more enjoyable lessons and the lack of any permissible talk - the silent classroom - emerging as a dominant, vehement dislike for some individuals.

Talk as an inherent part of enjoyable lessons:

Eliot here describes one of his preferred classroom environments:

> ELIOT: When I was in her classes I was always, not jumpy but I was more… myself than I was in any other class. Coz she can handle me unlike the other teachers. They can't. So I knew I could talk a little bit more in there but she knew I would get the work done.

Eliot claiming that he can be himself is indicative of being in an environment which works for him - where he feels safe to be authentic - one where the teacher is able 'to handle' him yet also trusts that he could balance talk and work appropriately. For Eliot this environment where he felt most able to be himself is one in which some talking was permissible - the classroom was evidently not silent. It is also worth emphasising that he makes clear that he was working; this is not then a case of wanting to talk in order to avoid engaging in the lesson.

Bradley similarly recounts an illustration of his preferred classroom environment, one where talking is permitted and moreover this allows space for the students to have fun.

> BRADLEY: But Ms. Boone was quite a good teacher as well. Everyone joked around and then when she told you to do your work, you done it.

Again for Bradley, talk and work go hand-in-hand in his preferred classroom environment. He elaborates on this effective environment and in doing so, contrasts it with the set-up lead by more 'serious' teachers, whose authority it seems he would be likely to challenge.

> BRADLEY: She was up for a joke and a laugh and she let us talk and joke around with each other. I don't know I think with other teachers they either be really serious and that's when you start arguing with the teacher coz they want you to be really serious, or some of them are really just like "I can't be bothered" and then like no-one learns, but I don't know but when we, like even like Brandon and that, we all was all talking but when she told us to do something we all actually done it but then when she set up the other bits, the other part of the lesson we was all talking.

Bradley here is describing a teacher who he sees as creating an effective learning environment and commanding authority from all students – illustrated by *'even like Brandon and that'* referring to the peers he considers most likely to be disruptive and disobedient. He accredits this positive learning environment and effective authority in part to the fact that talking and joking around are permitted at times in the lessons, at transition points between activities, and then when attention is asked for it is forthcoming. In contrast, Bradley not only indicates that too strict and serious an environment may not work for him - indeed may lead him into confrontation - he also touches on teachers who he sees as not bothering, noting the ineffective learning environment he believes they construct. Again then talking and working are both features of his preferred classroom environment.

Bradley is animated when describing the classes he likes and enjoys, where talk is an inherent feature in the classroom, summarising:

> BRADLEY: I still done my work and still chatted a little bit.

Silence as detrimental:

For Bradley and Eliot a feature of the classrooms they like is that talk is permissible. Is there anything more said about where talk is absent?
Bradley contrasts the enjoyable, livelier classrooms where talk is allowed, with the tedium of enforced silence:

> BRADLEY: Coz if you go into class and the teacher drills it into your head and you've got to be quiet and all that, and you're sitting there for a whole hour and it goes slow, writing you're writing, you're writing, but if you're having a laugh and that, time flies. That's a good lesson and you do your work.

Bradley does not like a classroom where you have to be quiet all lesson, articulating that this is simply because it is not enjoyable and time drags. This, he is clear once again, is not about doing the work or not as he is contrasting two environments where the work is done. It is simply that in one, the work is achieved within an atmosphere that he much prefers.

In considering one teacher he did not like, who presided over just such a silent classroom, he notes:

> BRADLEY: She was a nightmare. Grumpy, miserable. Weren't fun to be in. The classroom was just like silent coz everyone was just like (shrugs….).

In fact through his tone and body language, Bradley makes clear that the students in this particular silent class are lethargic and uninspired, perhaps then

even being reluctant to join in if there were a possibility of any form of talk. For him, in that classroom, the negative atmosphere played into torpor, perhaps triggering or at the very least sustaining the silence.

Whether the silence comes about through strict enforcement on the part of the teacher, or arises from a lacklustre, dull or even negative tone set by the teacher; protracted silence is characteristic of a classroom Bradley and Eliot dislike.

Donna, by far the most vocal, articulate and passionate about the issue, first touches on silence when contrasting a class she enjoys with what it is not:

> DONNA: You didn't sit there awkwardly… like the whole class is silent and that.

The seed that her dislike of silent classrooms may stem from is hinted at here, namely that it is awkward. She returns to the same idea of awkwardness within a silent classroom, when explicitly talking about why she does not like them:

> DONNA: It gets really awkward and then you're embarrassed to go "right I need help". You get that attention where people are thinking, "what does she need help with?"

For Donna, the silence is considered awkward as it means that if she were to ask a question, to ask for help or clarification, the other students would be more likely to hear, bringing her not only a sense of embarrassment but also unwanted attention and even judgements about her abilities. There is feasibly an implication here for learning, if help is not being sought. There is another extract that again pertains to a reluctance to speak up in a silent environment because of worries about any impact on her reputation:

> DONNA: It's really embarrassing though, especially when you are looked at as being one of the popular-ish people and people know that you are quite smart. It is embarrassing to go, "I need help. I have no idea what I'm doing. I don't know what this means. I can't pronounce this word" etc.

In addition to a silent classroom not being conducive to speaking up, a further detrimental feature emerges when Donna describes another silent classroom environment she finds horrible:

> DONNA: Ms. Yates I had. She was very strict so the class was always silent and she'd put you on the spot going "right you read out this now' and you just get like "I can't do that". You were just put on the spot and then you'd freeze. It's horrible. And the class is too silent so when she does give people work to do and stuff and you have no idea where to even start, you are really embarrassed to go "right I need help," so you just sit there and you don't do anything. It's, It's… I don't know. I suppose it's the embarrassment that I'm scared of I don't like people thinking, "Well she needs help".

In this extract Donna is revealing her fears and speaking openly and passionately about her uncomfortable experiences – the negative affects. The potential for humiliation by being asked to do something you cannot do is present in the silent classroom, on top of the fear of asking for help. This silence for Donna fuels unhelpful worries and apprehension, as well as the more direct impact on learning stemming from not seeking help when needed. Is this a means through which Donna could become academically marginalised? Does this silent classroom impinge on her progress, with anxiety and not seeking help both playing into barriers of learning? This is a recurring issue for Donna and it doubtless speaks to how deeply she is disturbed by a silent classroom.

This silent classroom described by Donna seems to reflect a particular teacher-centred learning environment, where the teacher tightly controls the selection,

pace and sequencing of pedagogic activities in the classroom. Charlie's silent classroom may imply a similar teacher-centred learning environment. He also dislikes silent classrooms, particularly echoing Donna's sentiments about the embarrassment of asking for help, albeit in a less verbose manner.

> CHARLIE: Like some teachers they would like… they wouldn't even… they just write something on the board and you gotta figure it out… and like they don't tell you what you gotta do... Like everyone else… some people would know but others… like me and that… I don't know and I can't and I don't want to like say coz it's embarrassing…

For Charlie any potential exacerbation of being marginalised in terms of learning, through not seeking the help he needs when in a silent classroom, is compounded further by his reactions to the situation:

> CHARLIE: It was hard coz like in class I didn't speak up and when I got… like they said "oh could you read that" I couldn't so I got the hump.

He found this combination of being stuck yet fearful of asking to be so frustrating, and the potential humiliation so overwhelming, that it would trigger feelings of anger - negative affects again - and more often than not spawn a confrontation with the teacher, some similar disruptive behaviour, or indeed end with his simply walking out. In this way for Charlie the silent classroom held arguably even more risks in terms of becoming marginalised then – through not seeking help when needed, through feelings of anxiety and through his response of anger leading to disruptive behaviour and consequent sanctions.

The associated ideas of talk, lack of permissible talk and the silent classroom held so much sway for some individuals that it merits attention. For Eliot and Bradley, their disliking a silent environment as constraining and tedious is at the very least unlikely to nurture a desire for learning, and may possibly feed into

disaffection, disengagement and despondency with learning. Donna and Charlie have more severe reactions – a paralysing fear of being put on the spot, called-out, shown up, shamed or humiliated. This silent environment evidently causes negative effects (great anxiety and reluctance to seek help), both of which may feed into academic underachievement -- and that is even before the possibility of triggering anger issues is factored in.

Emerging themes concerning talk or silence - Situating the findings

Having seen from the data how talk is valued as part of a preferred learning experience and lack of permissible talk and the silent classroom are especially reviled, these findings need to be set within the context of pertinent research literature on relevant aspects of the current education system. Why is it that the silent classroom may be a timely concern in English secondary schools in particular? The main constituent with a bearing on any recent increase in instances of silent classrooms is the predilection for ever-greater classroom discipline and control which is exacerbated when coupled with a second constituent, namely recruitment and retention concerns and the associated teacher-shortage. The following sections reflect upon research literature pertaining to these concerns in light of the data.

Behaviour management and control in the classroom

Whether it is in order to climb in the league table rankings, to gain approval from the school inspectors or to appeal to parents in the education market-place, concerns around a strict, well-controlled, largely silent classroom environment, an effective system of classroom management and discipline within the classroom and what has sometimes been termed 'behaviour for learning' (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009), are long established as pervasive across the education sector and permeate a substantial section of

academic, professional and government commissioned literature (Powell and Tod 2004; Shaughnessy 2012; Shortt, Cain, Knapton & McKenzie 2017).

As an illustration, one of the core beliefs underpinning the government commissioned Steer Report into pupil behaviour and school discipline, states:

> 'Poor behaviour cannot be tolerated as it is a denial of the right of pupils to learn and teachers to teach. To enable learning to take place preventative action is the most effective, but where this fails, schools must have clear, firm and intelligent strategies in place to help pupils manage their behaviour' (Steer 2005, p2).

While this wide-ranging report and subsequent iterations reporting on progress in implementation recognise that preventative action is preferable and that issues surrounding behaviour are complex and intrinsically interwoven with good teaching – whatever that might mean -- one overwhelming message in terms of classroom practice is nevertheless about consistent application of overt strategies to control behaviour in the form of rewards and sanctions (Steer 2005; Steer 2009). This creates a situation where the strict - and even silent - classroom is well regarded.

In terms of elaboration on the detail of what 'preventative action' may look like in the classroom, there is recognition in these reports that some students may have more complex needs and require additional provision to assist them in improving their behaviour and adhering to policies - perhaps in the form of pastoral support, deployment of learning mentors or agreed tailored responses (Steer 2005; Steer 2009). Moreover, there is a recommendation that all schools:

> 'identify those pupils who have learning and behavioural difficulties, or come from communities or homes that are in crisis, and agree with staff common ways of managing and meeting their particular needs' (Steer 2009, p72).

This may be directly pertinent for students who struggle when their learning needs are not met in a silent classroom. Does this create sufficient space for their needs to be catered for differently, against a backdrop of strict rule-enforcement, or within a silent classroom? Notwithstanding, these caveats surrounding managing particular needs and perhaps allowing space for tailored implementation, make no explicit mention of interpersonal or 'social' control.

Furthermore, more recent government advice reinforces and emphasizes the need for robust approaches to discipline and behaviour in schools, noting that schools: *'must ensure they have a strong behaviour policy to support staff in managing behaviour, including the use of rewards and sanctions' (*Department for Education 2016a, p3). The emphasis on consistent implementation of a clear, firm policy is foregrounded, in order to *'regulate the conduct of pupils'* (Department for Education 2016a, p4), whilst the references to preventative actions are absent from this main document (Department for Education 2016a). The social is erased. A remaining gesture towards recognition of the role of preventative action - the only endorsed flexibility within otherwise strict rule-enforcement - can be found in a supplementary paper, within a discussion of checklists for effective behaviour strategies, where one suggestion is: *'making sure all adults in the room know how to respond to sensitive pupils with special needs'* (Department for Education 2016b).

Similarly in a recent review from the governments appointed 'Behaviour Tsar', there is reiteration of the need for consistent application of a firm behaviour policy: *'Schools must be careful to publicly and consistently apply consequences to students' actions'* (Bennett 2017, p41). These propositions seem to lack the complexity of the students' perception and experience of strict, silent classrooms.

Here once again control and rules are front and centre, with adaptive, preventative measures to cater for diverse needs arguably more of a grudging after-thought, which ought to be minimised: *'Rules and values that fluctuate too much confuse what the school stands for. Exceptions may be permitted, but they must be exceptional'* (Bennett 2017, p37). Bennet recognizes that some students with more complex needs are at greater risk of falling foul of the rules: *'those with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, autistic spectrum disorders or learning difficulties, are much more likely to break the school rules than other students'* (Bennett 2017, p41). He even acknowledges that: *'it is important not to sanction where help is the appropriate response'* (Bennett 2017, p41). Yet he returns time and again to the vital importance of compliance and the need to absolutely minimize any variations or allowances: *'It is unacceptable to accept misbehaviour from any student who is capable of modifying their actions'* (Bennett 2017, p41).

With a more adaptive, tailored approach at best reluctantly referred to as a side and the social essentially eradicated, the bulk of the narrow latest government advice promotes a one-size-fits-all, blanket approach to the implementation of strict rules - fostering a climate in which the silent classroom is respected and can thrive. Media coverage also reports an increasing occurrence of the application of 'no-excuses' strict discipline policies, highlighting instances where even talking in corridors is prohibited and where students have to listen silently in class, tracking the teacher with their eyes (Adams 2017; McAndrew 2017; Tickle 2017; Petre 2018).

A greater acknowledgement of the social and space for individual differences can be found when turning to academic literature concerning behaviour management in the classroom, in particular when the pragmatics of policy enactment are considered (Maguire, Ball, and Braun, 2010; Ball, Hoskins,

Maguire and Braun 2011; Ball, Maguire, and Braun, 2012; Maguire, Braun and Ball 2015). Indeed across this substantial project, Maguire *et al* looked at policy enactment across several secondary schools in England, considering as one illustration how behaviour policies are implemented in actuality. Despite all the governmental advice relating to consistency, these authors, in taking a policy sociology approach, argue that not only are issues of enactment heavily context dependent but also the sense making by different policy actors will vary considerably even within broadly similar contexts. *'The professional dispositions of various members of staff seemed to provoke differences in understanding and pedagogy in the field of behaviour management'* (Maguire, Ball, and Braun 2010, p159). If this is the case then even if there is a semblance of consistency sustained in terms of numbers of rewards and sanctions issued, there is certainly variety in understanding, which is likely to affect the classroom environment and tone set by the teacher. Furthermore:

> 'there was a pragmatic recognition of the need to establish and maintain order and control, but for some policy actors there was a need to enact discipline in a more holistic and student-sensitive manner – an enactment that was being practiced somewhat differently in different 'parts' of and places in the school' (Maguire, Ball, and Braun 2010, p161).

There is difference and variety, not only in understanding then but also in interpretation, sense making, and ultimately in delivery in the classroom. This is what the respondents here also indicate from their experience and would seem to make the blanket application of strict rules - and the instances of the perpetually silent classroom - less inescapable. Such a holistic, student-sensitive approach is certainly less likely to spawn a silent classroom. When different teachers implement policy across a school:

> 'What emerges, then to be enacted in practice at the classroom level, is a bricolage of disciplinary policies and practices, beliefs and values' (Maguire, Ball, and Braun 2010, p166).

Indeed, this recognition that values and beliefs are in actuality playing a role and feeding into the variety of enactments, resonates with the more varied, messier, mishmash of classroom environments found in the preferred classrooms where talk was an integral feature and where personal characteristics, social interactions, and 'the social' are far from erased. Just as the notion of a strong behaviour policy is prevalent across the range of literature, so is the accompanying idea that where there is weak discipline and a lack of control, learning and attainment suffer (Bennett 2017; Powell and Tod 2004; Steer 2005; Steer 2009; Department for Education 2016a). Indeed a core rationale for the emphasis placed by policy makers on behaviour, not to mention the coining of the term behaviour for learning, stems from this widely accepted association. Bradley here shows a dislike for weak discipline, as it is not conducive to a constructive learning environment, is in line with this thinking then.

Whilst a lack of effective control in the classroom is certainly acknowledged as undesirable, too strict of an environment - in which a silent classroom may be a part - does not seem to come under such scrutiny within much of the literature. One critique which is noted is that when schools are enforcing a new set of policies, including crucially a new behaviour policy, they do so with zeal and vigour, going to extremes and making greater use of sanctions in the short-term, which arguably disproportionally affects those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Beckett 2007; PricewaterhouseCoopers 2007; Wilson 2011). Increased use of many forms of sanctions, inequitably applied in this manner, may thus provide room for greater marginalisation in terms of withdrawal and

exclusion. Although the downsides of an overly strict environment are acknowledged here, the subtleties surrounding downsides of a silent classroom raised in the data (lethargy, disengagement, anxiety, fear and humiliation) remain absent.

The silent classroom

Specifically in terms of a silent classroom, the literature mostly explores the value of silence in contrast to the value of talking - whether as a means of student learning, or of a teacher gauging that learning. For instance, there is research concerning how to deal with silent students who do not participate in discussion (Townsend 1998), how to interpret student silence (Schultz 2009), and exploring silences on the part of non-native speakers (Tatar 2005). There is additionally some research on how different types of silence can indeed be used effectively in the classroom (Alpert 1987; Ollin 2008). This literature concerns itself with dealing with, interpreting, or reflecting on student silence and breaking that silence -- or using limited staff and student silence as effective features of learning. There is an absence within this literature of the potential negative affects of a silent environment, such as those so keenly articulated here – namely producing unease and anxiety in case students are asked to speak out, or are shown up in front of the class, and consequently being reluctant to seek help even if needed. There is - within literature based around student anxiety - a long established link between anxiety and lower academic attainment (Newbegin and Owens 1996; Wood 2006). The message here is that such anxiety is a side effect - albeit perhaps unintended - of an over strict, nearly permanently silent classroom environment likely feed into under-performance.

Teacher recruitment and retention issues exacerbate the problem

The ongoing recruitment and retention difficulties in secondary schools in England likely stem from many complex and interwoven causes across the

sector. Perhaps they come in part from issues of teacher stress due to performativity, workload or pupil behaviour and or from a lack of job satisfaction to name but a few (Barmby 2006; Crossman and Harris 2006; Perryman, Ball, Maguire and Braun 2011; Foster 2018). Whatever the origins, there is evidence of a staffing crisis in the English secondary school sector. Teachers are exiting the profession and since 2012 the recruitment of initial teacher trainees has consistently fallen short of targets in many subjects (Foster 2018; Sibieta 2018).

Within this climate, as many secondary schools struggle to fill posts, classrooms are increasingly staffed by younger, less-experienced teachers. Indeed, secondary schools in England - when compared with the rest of the OECD - have seen a more rapid fall in the proportion of teachers aged over 50, at the same time as having one of the highest proportions of teachers under 30; indeed just 48 per cent of England's secondary school teachers have more than ten years' experience, notably less than the 64 per cent average across the OECD (Sellen 2016; OECD 2016). This leads to a lack of experienced teachers within the profession. Furthermore, with schools filling posts as best they can, classrooms are not only increasingly staffed by younger, less-experienced teachers, but also by less well-qualified, non-subject specialists and supply teachers (OECD 2016; Foster 2018; Sibieta 2018). Teachers - in terms of experience and specialisms - are spread increasingly unevenly across the system, as are the rates of teacher turnover. This crisis, as is so often the case, is not equally visible everywhere. The chance of having and keeping a well-qualified or experienced teacher or specialist in a shortage subject to teach your children depends on where you live. Schools in deprived areas often struggle to recruit teachers and often lack high quality applicants. Secondary teachers in deprived areas are also most likely to leave. There is much more stability in affluent areas (Social Mobility Commission 2017).

The relevance of these teacher recruitment and retention issues when contemplating the silent classroom is that it takes experience in the classroom to be able to develop the full range of skills needed to teach well. These skills include pedagogical content knowledge, quality of instruction and proficiency at classroom management (Coe, Aloisi, Higgins and Major, 2014). Whilst developing these practices, less experienced teachers and non-specialists are more likely to fall back on prescriptive formats and less nuanced application of rules. Thus, in areas of deprivation where the recruitment and retention crisis is acutely felt, the greater proportion of teachers still learning the fundamentals of their craft will likely make for more rigid application of behaviour management policies, including greater use of a perpetually silent classroom.

Beyond silence - embracing critical pedagogy

The potential damage of a silent classroom seen here, the associated fear of humiliation, anxiety and the reluctance to speak up or seek help throws into question the following assertion: *'Directing students to behave in a specific way is often mischaracterised as an act of oppression. This is both unhelpful and untrue'* (Bennett 2017, p23). For several of the students here, they certainly appear to experience something that could conceivably be termed oppression within these silent classrooms. First and foremost, discouraging instances of the silent classroom is key. Raising awareness of its detrimental effects for some individuals is a part of this, as is disentangling the idea of enforced silence from any notion of effective behaviour management and control. A well-disciplined, studious classroom need not be unswervingly silent -- and this is crucial to emphasise.

Going a step further would likely look at classroom practise and pedagogy more widely and how this relates to the silent classrooms explored. In terms of pedagogy, the silent classroom as described by Donna in particular appears to

realise a specific version of how learning takes place – a teacher-centred environment, with strong framing and visible pedagogy, where the teacher controls the selection, pace and sequencing of pedagogic activities in the classroom (Bernstein 1971; Bernstein 1975). To alleviate or eschew the potential harm of this silent classroom adopting a more flexible approach would be a next-step.

It is also worth noting a further overarching structure - that of critical pedagogy - which could be adopted in conjunction with a weakly-framed stance in the classroom. Critical pedagogy (Freire 1972; Giroux 2011) also embraces talk and questioning and avoids sustained silence and as such forms a robust umbrella under which the negative effects - and indeed affects - of a silent classroom would melt away. In discussing such critical pedagogies Giroux notes:

> 'it is crucial to stress the importance of democratic classroom relations that encourage dialogue, deliberation and the power of students to raise questions' (Giroux 2011, p81).

The centrality of talk and discussion, debate and critique and specifically of encouraging advice-seeking and questioning, are integral to such a critical pedagogic approach in a classroom. The detrimental effects arising within a silent classroom for some students would disappear and be replaced by those desired features of a talkative, more inclusive and empowering environment - just as the students here advocate. The application of a critical pedagogic stance is thus worthy of seriously consideration.

Whether it is through the clear recognition of the distinction between good discipline and a permanently silent classroom, the greater application of a flexible approach to learning and teaching, or the more comprehensive

embracing of critical pedagogies, one thing is clear - the silent classroom has been seen to have detrimental and even devastating effects on students.

This should serve as a note of caution not only in England but wherever ideas of school discipline and control are being grappled with and where greater enforcement and authoritative approaches are being mooted (González 2012; Gregory, Cornell, Fan, Sheras, Shih and Huang 2010; Kupchik 2010; Osher, Bear, Sprague and Doyle 2010). This research suggests that the perpetually silent classroom should never be used.

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[1] Free School Meals eligibility is a readily available statistic within schools that is frequently used as a proxy for disadvantage.

[2] The on-going increase in the number of 'converter academies' is the latest significant fragmentation of the school system in England. Academy schools are state-funded schools in England, which are directly funded by the Department for Education, and independent of local authority control and converter academies are schools

that choose to make this change. As such academies - like many Charter schools in the US - are exempt from a variety of laws and regulations affecting other state schools. There are over 3,420 academies in England now, compared with 200 in May 2010. 41% of Secondary Schools have converted (Bolton 2015).

[3] This wider research constitutes my Doctoral Studies at IOE, UCL (Wenham 2019) and a separate emergent theme from this research is previously published (Wenham 2016).