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**'A sustainable journey to school: global issues,
local places, children's lives'**

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PhD Thesis

University of Durham

2010

Declaration

This thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of PhD of the University of Durham.

Both the composition of the thesis and the research on which it is based are entirely my own work.

Signed.....

Date.....

Acknowledgements

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Children's Song

*We live in our own world
A world that is too small
For you to stoop and enter
Even on hands and knees,
The adult subterfuge.
And though you probe and pry
With analytical eye,
And eavesdrop all our talk
With an amused look,
You cannot find the centre
Where we dance, where we play,
Where life is still asleep
Under the closed flower,
Under the smooth shell
Of eggs in the cupped nest
That mock the faded blue
Of your remoter heaven.*

(R.S.Thomas)

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Abstract

This research is located in the fields of the geographies of childhood, social and environmental policy and urban transport studies. It adds to geographical thinking about children's choices in their everyday mobilities. My thesis makes an original contribution by filling in large gaps in knowledge about the journey to school experiences of the children, commenting on household circumstances, public space policy, social exclusion and children's participation in decision making (Hillman, 2006; Jarvis, 2005; McDonald, 2008; Pain, 2006). Children's choices in their everyday lives are found to be influenced by a complex mix of factors including gender, age, household structure, residential location, health, social culture, urban design and school culture. The research is timely in light of current high profile public and political debates about childhood health, access to public space, social exclusion, sustainable transport policy and children's rights (Barker, 2003; CABE, 2008; Lolichen, 2007; SEU, 2003; Unicef, 2007). Despite heightened interest in these issues, little is known about the individual experiences of children's journeys to school at a fine-grained level. My thesis therefore brings together a number of isolated debates and investigates the opportunities and constraints shaping children's everyday choices; provides policy-relevant insights into the ways in which they reconcile their everyday mobility behaviour within overlapping spheres of impact; provides a theoretical framework within which to understand the sustainable mobility choices available to children in contemporary British society with relation to their journeys to school; and highlights how children view sustainable policy and practices and the relevance and application to their individual circumstances.

The research employed a participatory action research approach whereby the children and young people themselves helped specify the range of qualitative methods (interviews, discussion groups, photography, videos, art, drama, statistics and poetry). This dynamic process revealed the fluid and ambiguous nature of children's journeys to school. It showed that high levels of understanding exist amongst children and young people concerning health and environmental issues associated with the journey to school, yet circumstances located within the key spaces that children occupy (the home, public space and school) limit individual choice, leading to less healthy behavioural patterns of unsustainable travel. Despite ongoing strategies employed at national and local levels to encourage sustainable travel, modal shift has proved negligible. Possible reasons advanced in this thesis are a lack

of understanding on behalf of policy makers of the complexities inherent within the spheres of influence that impact on children's decision making capabilities, policies and strategies proving to be ambiguous or ineffectively communicated and unsuitable for localised situations and the lack of active, meaningful child participation within the decision-making processes. This research therefore provides a critique of some of the more positive assumptions underpinning current concepts regarding children's participation within policy debate and argues for more micro- research on individual children's lives.

This research highlights the importance of the social aspects of sustainable policy. This relatively neglected dimension of sustainable environmental policy suggests the possibility of an alternate model of sustainable travel with respect to the journey to school, which accounts for the web of interconnecting influencing structures involved in the formation of children's everyday lives, and which also considers the importance of children's agency. Providing a physical structure for sustainable travel is insufficient and a progressive, holistic model encompassing the social and cultural dimensions of sustainability is required. Interventions at the school level to encourage more sustainable journeys to school need to be matched by changes in the social and cultural contexts found within the home in particular, as well as within public space, so benefits can be enhanced and healthier choices, with regards to everyday travel behaviour, can be made.

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Why do research on the journey to school?

The journey to school is a high profile public and policy issue, given its connection with a number of academic, policy and public debates surrounding childhood and youth, transport, mobility and environmental sustainability (DETR, 1999a, 1999b, 2000b; Barker, 2003; DfT, 2005a; Lolichen, 2007; Stradling and Anable, 2008). As an everyday mobility, it has significant implications for the child, the family, the community and the environment. The changing structure of children's journeys to school over the past two decades mirrors shifts within the physical, economic, social and cultural environments that have taken place within British society (Pooley, 2005a), with the key issue being the increased use of private cars for the journey to school (Mackett, 2004, DfT, 2010) and a resultant decline in the number of children walking or cycling.

A key challenge facing policy makers in the 21st century is how to address the insatiable demand for increasing levels of road traffic (Farrington, 2007; Krueger and Gibbs, 2007). Rising levels of traffic create environmental problems at local, national and global scales, damaging air quality and contributing to climate change through increasing carbon emissions. Additionally there is an economic impact as congestion is regarded a barrier to future growth and subsequently has a negative constraint on many people's lives. There is also a social impact, as increasing traffic has historically demanded urban design be focused towards road use, which has inevitably led to less of a focus on other modes of travel which are deemed more sustainable. The need to balance economic growth, social inclusion and environmental preservation is critical and the issue of individual mobility is an increasingly contested debate (Agyeman *et al*, 2003; Foley, 2004). The journey to school is therefore a significant part of the integrated transport policy aimed at reducing car dependency, particularly for short journeys.

Aside from the link with climate change and global warming, and localised congestion impacts, there has been considerable interest in the school run for a number of other reasons. Measures to encourage non-car travel to school by children are also perceived to be important because sustainable patterns of travel behaviour may be carried into adult lives. Conversely, children who never travel by bike or bus are less likely to switch to these

modes in adult life (Garling, 1995). There may also be health benefits from encouraging walking and cycling, an issue which is gaining particular interest given concerns about the growth in childhood obesity. Travelling to school by car is also linked to a decreasing level of children's independent mobility (Hillman, 1990), reduces their amount of daily exercise and detracts from their awareness of road safety and community integration (DfES, 2006b). Promoting walking, cycling, use of public transport through sustainable travel policy is therefore suggested to have wide ranging benefits, from relieving traffic congestion and increasing levels of safety for children, improving children's health and offering greater opportunity and access to educational, social and community experiences.

This thesis comprises a participatory action research project that focuses on how children experience their everyday journey to school at a micro-level. Past research seems to largely focus upon quantitative measurement of children's mobility experiences to and from school (Pooley *et al*, 2005a; McDonald, 2008) and the nationwide strategies aimed at changing people's travel behaviour in a hope to reduce car dependency for the journey to school (DfT, 2008). However, making broad-based assumptions based on statistics and broad patterns of behaviour tends to ignore the rich complexity and diversity in everyday childhood mobilities and fails to recognise the many different conceptions of the 'journey to school' as understood, experienced and explained by the children themselves.

Perceptions of a *sustainable* journey to school intersect with the geographies of societal values, personal knowledge and experience and other contextual factors, such as past behaviour, institutional trust, feelings, socio-economic demographics and social networks. Within these barriers, significant challenges lie ahead for environmental policy advocates in an attempt to alter current travel behaviour. Although research suggests that walking, cycling and public transport offer a sustainable alternative to using the car on the journey to school, providing a valuable boost to children's fitness levels, increasing their cognitive and emotional development and instilling positive habits for life within a sustainable society, patterns of children's independent mobility seem slow to change. Barriers to change in consumption practices have been well researched and focus upon the complexities of knowledge production and reproduction and how individuals make connections between different forms of knowledge that link their own, everyday experiences to broader environmental concerns (Bickerstaff and Walker, 2001). This research offers some insights into the forms of knowledge that children hold and how this impacts upon their journey to school. It also looks at what and why travel practices are selected by the children

themselves, as children feedback which practices they are most likely to positively respond to. Conversely, they offer insight into which strategies are unworkable within their local context.

1.2 Introducing the theoretical framework

The journey to school embodies a number of spatial and social forms, depending on many interrelated factors and influences found within spaces in which children occupy, move through and experience on a daily basis. The theoretical framework underpinning this research suggests there are three interconnected spaces of childhood - the home, public space and the school.

Each childhood space is examined as having a physical dimension, in terms of the concrete, built environment, as well as a social dimension as it is recognised that space not only has a material aspect, but also a perpetual fluidity changeable over time and circumstance due to relationships and interactions that take place within this space. This theoretical framework mirrors what Lefebvre (1991) distinguishes between the visualisation and administration of public space on the one hand and the materialisation of public space on the other.

In Lefebvre's terms, the term representation of space is used to describe public space that is controlled by institutions and whose use is *regulated*, whereas public space that is physically used and accessed by a variety of social groups is called *representational* space. This is an important distinction as it highlights the difference between the official status of space and the actual physical ability for it to be used by individuals and groups (Arefi and Meyers, 2003). This difference highlights the underlying contestation of public space which shows that it is:

*'not merely an empty container waiting for something to happen, but **is both constructed by and the medium of social relations and processes** (Cope, 1996: bold italics in original).*

For the purpose of my research, I have adapted this theoretical understanding of public space to examine the other key spaces of childhood, namely, the home and family and the school. Mobilities of children and young people are impacted upon and structured by the institutional fabric of their everyday lives – the home, work, school, family, community, cultures, religion, the political nation and global socio-economic and political processes. Subsequently, given that the journey to school encapsulates how children and young people interact with their local environments, it is important to understand the contexts through

which it is framed at a micro-level. Each journey is unique given the fluidity and variance of localised, contextual frames. As children's experiences, opportunities and attitudes are both spatially and socially constructed (James *et al*, 1998; Holloway and Valentine, 2000), understanding the physical, cultural and socio-economic micro- environments of the child is fundamental to the overall appreciation of the journey to school. Of particular significance for this thesis is highlighting the ways in which children's agency is manifest through their social and environmental experiences and behaviours. Drawing on past literature, it is argued that childhood experiences and everyday practices are constituted through 'spaces of engagement', where children's agency is foregrounded through social relations, play and engaging with place, and 'spaces of control', within which social structures seek to subdue children's agency through techniques of surveillance and regulation. It is argued that it is in the interplay between spaces of engagement and spaces of control across the sites of the home, public space and the school – critical sites through which the journey to school operates – that children's mobilities are forged.

The past two decades have been an exciting and productive time in the study of children's and young people's geographies, with a continued call for more inclusion of children and young people into meaningful, participatory research on issues that affect them in their everyday lives (Barker, 2003; Cahill *et al*, 2007; Chawla *et al*, 2005;). The principal aim of this research is to contribute to this growing field by presenting the findings of participatory research with children and young people on their experiences of the journey to school. Children's agency and their ability to lead and influence change is a central paradigm in this research. The theoretical and methodological underpinnings of this research lie in deliberately centring the children's voices. It is they, after all, who experience this journey every day.

1.3 A summary of research aims

The central research questions are as follows:

- How are the journeys to school experienced by the children and what meanings are attached to these journeys?
- What are the structural determinants of the journey to school choice?
- What constitutes a 'sustainable' journey to school from a child's perspective?

At a broader level, these research questions engage with three underpinning theoretical aims:

1.3.1 To understand the differences in children's everyday experiences of their journeys to school?

Children experience the journey to school in different ways, depending on a range of factors and there is therefore a continued need for qualitative research on children's mobilities in different locations and at different times. Past research has tended to focus on quantitative measurement of the journey to school (Hillman, 1990; Yeung *et al*, 2008) and policy measures used to address the journey to school and frame it as a sustainable mobility (DfES, 2003b) are historically nationwide strategies. Such a broad-based approach ignores the rich texture of the individual micro-experiences. My research therefore aims to focus on a local scale and critically highlight environmental, cultural and social structural factors which impact on the nature and structure of the journey to school. Structural determinants of behaviour show that travel choice is not a linear, rational decision, but one made in conjunction with a number of complex factors present in a child's life.

Given the variety of participatory methods chosen by the children participating in this research, I am able to illustrate the rich diversity in every school journey and the emotionality connected with these journeys (Chapters 5, 6 and 7) in order to represent as close as possible the experiences, opinions and feelings of the children in the research findings. The journey to school means very different things to different children. It is acknowledged that children's experiences are multiple and geographically varied and so the focus was to highlight two different geographical contexts – Oxford and Gateshead – in view of highlighting the importance of utilising localised knowledges in understanding mobility behaviours and informing local policy.

A key underlying message is that the determinants and decision makers of travel mode choices regarding the journey to school are framed within what I term 'spaces of control' within which children and young people live, move through and experience which are based within the three spheres of influence of the home, public space and the school. The key aim of this research is to advance the understanding of children's experiences of mobility in an everyday setting by providing a nuanced account of negotiated children's geographies, addressing the tensions that exist between accepting children's agency and employing regulation and control. The active, creative role that the children play in moulding their own geographical experiences are hence set within these contexts of parenting and household

cultures, societal discourse and policy on child protection (especially within the sphere of public space) and current constructions of childhood.

The research is also pressing in that it situates the journey to school within the increasing 'moral panic' around childhood (Brooks, 2006). At a level of individual experience, this moral panic is having implications for unaccompanied mobility levels of children imposing a range of spatial and social constraints on children restricting opportunity, choice and freedom. The tensions between allowing children the space to experience their everyday mobilities and the need to protect them is currently being played out in what we experience in contemporary British cities. On the one hand they are encouraged to be 'outside' in order to learn and understand the notions of risk and autonomy, yet on the other hand they are actively encouraged not to be outside due to the perception of risk and levels of safety associated with public space.

1.3.2 To conduct child-centred participatory research focusing on the journey to school

Underpinned by a re-conceptualisation of childhood and adult-child relations (Jenks, 1996), Geography has witnessed how more participatory research has proved helpful in contributing to discussions around spatial development, mobility, place and scale (Alexander *et al*, 2007; Barker, 2003; Cahill, 2007; Lolichen, 2007; Pain and Francis, 2003). This paradigm shift over the past decade has had significant implications for developing appropriate, meaningful research design and methods. The participatory methodological approach to this research engages with this challenge.

Participatory action research is a methodological framework which is anchored in the views and responses of the participants. This thesis shows the differences in childhood experiences of the journey to school as told by the children themselves. They are active agents and solution-based researchers who are knowledgeable and reliable in their own experiences and therefore make a significant contribution to local policy making.

Discussions about the journey to school lie at the heart of geographical contributions to understanding the meaning of place, spatial distribution, mobility, time and scale to children and their parents. In assessing the interplay between the home, public space and school, an understanding of children's micro-geographies is gained. Due to the methodology, this research offers a detailed micro-perspective on the economic, social, environmental and institutional challenges facing children and their parents resulting from local trends in

geographic mobility. It also aims to explore the relationship between children's everyday mobility and wider geographic concerns – sustainability, social inclusion, accessibility, community and spatial development.

Children are a highly differentiated group and the methodological framework used in this research has led to the development of preferred methods which are appropriate for a range of age groups. Working with children ranging from 4 to 16, the grounded research has had significant implications for considerations such as power, trust and understanding. Past research illustrates that children have unique and worthy geographies requiring attention, which are widely relevant to connect with and contribute to the broader discipline (Holloway and Valentine, 2000). As Punch (1998, 2002) notes, methodological innovations that provide meaningful and fun participation with children may also be useful to use in research with adults.

1.3.3 Linking the global sustainability debate to the local journey to school – from a child's perspective

The research aims to understand how the journey to school has been subsumed under the national sustainable travel agenda and seeks to explore which strategies aimed at the journey to school have proved effective from a child's point of view. It also highlights what specific practices schools have selected in combating increased localised traffic and congestion and provides insight into their effectiveness. More importantly, the research findings hope to provide insight into how children respond to specific policies or strategies proposed by national government, local authorities and individual schools to address the '*sustainable*' journey to school and more importantly, to listen to what strategies are suggested from the children themselves. Essentially, it offers a unique view on how children view a '*sustainable*' journey to school and argues that listening to their suggestions and strategies could prove theoretically insightful and practically useful. I argue that children demonstrate high levels of competence, awareness and knowledge about their local environments and therefore play a critical role in policy development and planning. Such engagement with children may help deliver a more progressive, integrated framework for promoting sustainable everyday travel.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

Chapter 2 examines the context within which concepts of childhood have been developed. By examining the dominant developmental psychology approach which assumes that

childhood is a linear, staged progression of children's cognitive and moral development, the discussion highlights the importance of structure and agency. Whilst childhood is shaped by the social structures of culture, age, class, ethnicity and gender, as well as local social practices, children are also active in constructing their own social and spatial lives. Children experience their everyday lives through spaces of engagement as well as within spaces of control (both of which are manifest in the childhood sites of the home, public space and the school) and it is the balance or tension between these which moulds childhood experiences and practices. This chapter discusses the tension between agency and structure and illustrates how childhood as a social space is framed.

Chapter 3 further situates the journey to school within the political structures and processes of the national policy framework. Childhood exists in a social space that is defined by laws, politics, religion and economics and is therefore shaped by them. Childhood as a lived experience needs to incorporate such an analytical perspective. The chapter begins by providing an overview of key literature about the journey to school and then highlights policies, strategies and schemes which over the past decade have focused on transport, urban design, health, education and social justice. Through an explanation of all of these policies, the Travelling to School Initiative (DfES, 2003b) is framed. This initiative is the central policy structure which frames the journey to school as a sustainable mobility. But is it effective? I look at the evaluation that has been done on the initiative and discuss the barriers of action that have been raised which suggest why a more holistic view of sustainability is required.

Chapter 4 introduces the participatory action research (PAR) methodology that was central to this research. Using an ethical participatory approach, children were active partners in making decisions about the research direction and process rather than merely being passive respondents. The children devised and conducted a wide array of preferred methods, lead discussions, set their own agendas within the research framework and presented the findings after analysis and verification. The research was emergent, through a process of constant negotiation and discussion with the children. It emerged out of the grounded experience of the children and out of collaboration between them, teachers, families, local policy makers, key stakeholders and me. The research settings were in four schools – two in Gateshead and two in Oxford – and the ages of the children ranged from 4 to 16 years. The chapter highlights the importance of the approach of centring the child within the analysis which in turn required the development of evolving methods that the children themselves chose to undertake. The four geographical areas were varied in terms of economic, political,

socio-spatial and cultural environments. The national figures naturally conceal the localised problems associated with traffic congestion. The numerous reasons why children are driven to school are multifaceted, complex and contextual which explains why modal shift to more sustainable travel choices varies in space and time.

Chapter 5 is the first of three empirical chapters. Focusing on 'the child's voice', the chapter examines the children's experiences by thematically analysing their data and findings. The evidence suggests that children and young people experience varied journeys to school depending on their mode of mobility, showing varying levels of environmental interaction, social networking, local area knowledge and development of risk strategies. The chapter centres the importance of the child's voice in their independent and collective experiences of their journeys to school and looks at different modes of mobility and children's feelings and experiences of them. It highlights the importance of this everyday experience to the children and young people, as a microcosm of wider mobility experiences.

Chapter 6 discusses the negotiated geographies of the journey to school, using the conceptual framework, namely, the interrelated spheres of the household, school and public space. Their positive and negative experiences are framed by various interrelated factors negotiated within these spheres of influence. A small number of parental views are also analysed within this chapter to assess the levels of negotiation that take place between parent and child, in view of their interaction within the school, public space and the home.

Chapter 7 addresses the children's views on a 'sustainable' journey to school. I place the journey to school within the wider debates of environmental sustainability by addressing initially the children's views of the concept of sustainability and how it relates to their travel behaviour. Strategies employed by the individual schools in order to encourage ongoing sustainable travel behaviour are then discussed, which takes into account those strategies that have proved effective as well as those that have failed to make an impact, according to the children.

Chapter 8 provides the main conclusions set against the key research questions, personal reflections on the successes and challenges of the research and the opportunities for future research.

Certain terms need to be defined at the outset. Firstly, by 'journey to school', I mean the journey *to* and *from* school. I recognise that the children's experiences to and from school may differ, yet for ease of reading I have used this term to cover both journeys. Secondly,

the terms 'children' and 'young people' are constructed as synonymous and are used interchangeably, although I do understand that there are differences between (as well as within) both groups. The choice to use the term 'children' in my writing is purely for simplification purposes.

I have tried to represent the children's views as direct as possible and use their own language, spelling and grammar in the empirical chapters.

Lastly, I think it is important to state my own individual position within this research. It is written by someone who was once a child, who is now an adult, but who is also a mother, a chair of governors, a member of a small village community and someone who lives in an increasingly restricted world where the children are sometimes highly visible yet sometimes strangely invisible. It is written out of my own experiences of childhood in a family, in a school, in a community with friends, and of parenting, as well as academic practice and professional work experience. I am a sum of all these things – as is my research.

Chapter 2

The nature of childhood

2.1 Introduction

In order to understand the context within which concepts of childhood have been developed, Section 2.2 examines the dominant developmental psychology approach, which defines childhood as a staged and linear progression of children's cognitive and moral development in relation to chronological age. It suggests that children are only capable of specific behaviours at specific ages, which in turn shapes their experiences and attitudes. Understanding this dominant discourse is important as it influences the way in which we think about children and impacts upon the ways in which their lives are structured and restructured over time and space. In the past few decades, other disciplines have sought to question this deterministic model and to promote the importance of social structures and children's agency in shaping children's geographic experiences. Section 2.3 reviews this work and its emphasis on children's social relationships and cultures as worthy of study in their own right. This body of literature suggests that while childhood is shaped through relational social structures, including age, gender, class, ethnicity and culture (Woodhead, 1997; Connolly, 1998; Mayall, 2002), as well as social practices and political processes, children are active in the construction and determination of their own social lives, and the lives of those around them and the societies in which they live. Rather than conceiving of childhood as a uniform experience of particular age groups, these approaches draw attention to the multiplicity of childhood experiences. Geographical research on children and childhood has adopted this approach but, as Section 2.4 demonstrates, has sought to show the important ways in which this multiplicity is constructed through different socio-spatial relations.

Of particular significance for this thesis is work that analyses the ways in which children's agency is manifest through their social and environmental experiences, views, attitudes and behaviours. While children's active engagement with space, the meanings that they attach to it and their environmental capabilities has been researched over the last thirty years, it has been over the past two decades that this work has been extensively explored within the discipline of geography (Philo 1992a). Drawing on this literature, it is argued that that childhood experiences and practices are constituted through 'spaces of engagement', where children's agency is foregrounded through social relations, interaction with place and their patterns of play, and 'spaces of control', within which social structures seek to subdue

children's agency through techniques of surveillance and regulation. It is argued that it is in the interplay between spaces of engagement and spaces of control across the sites of the home, public space and the school – critical sites through which the journey to school operates – that children's mobilities are forged. In conclusion (Section 2.5), the core research agenda established in this thesis and its contributions to the field are outlined.

2.2 The developmental psychology approach and its limitations

Development psychology has, since the early twentieth century, had a greater influence over how our views of and attitudes towards children and childhood have been formed and reformed than any other discipline. This might be explained by the fact that developmental psychology emerged within a historical context, at a point in social history when children began to be identified as a separate social category which had certain needs, in terms of protection and welfare in comparison to adults (Hendrick, 1997). Strongly associated with the French psychologist, Piaget (1932), the developmental concept is derived predominantly from psychological research and is based on the empirical observations of child behaviour. He noted that different age groups approached playing marbles in different ways. The youngest did not seem to follow any rules at all, but the older boys started playing according to the rules of the game and argued if the rules were broken. Even older boys started to challenge the rules and began to negotiate about how to devise a new game. From these observations, theory about how a child's thinking capacities and moral reasoning typically develop with age was formed. The assertion is that children progressively evolve and grow through various linear, natural developmental stages due to increasingly complex interactions with their environment, with the child growing in competence, complexity and rationality until the end point of adulthood was reached (Prout and James, 1990). As children are viewed as incomplete and unfinished, the assumption is that they are not intrinsic to the adult world around them. Specific roles are assigned to children depending on the stage of their natural biological growth, with children being prepared for their roles in adulthood. They are often regarded as simply part of a family, separate from mainstream society and as passive recipients to the socialisation process which takes place within the household, the school and within society as a whole (James and Prout, 1996; Alanen and Mayall, 1990). The underlying assumptions of dependency and incompetence justifies the level of adult control which is often displayed in contemporary legislation and regulatory policy, as discussed in Chapter 3, as well as within dominant adultist approaches in research methodology covered in Chapter 4. The end result is that children's lives are constrained and excluded, albeit protected ostensibly for their own good (Scott, 1998).

This early work focused on sequential stages of cognitive competence and moral reasoning has been controversial. In the early 60s, the enormously influential work of Philippe Aries, a French historian, highlighted the inadequacies of developmental and contextual theory by asserting that childhood should be analysed in terms of its social context. Aries (1962) studied historical cultural artefacts and pictorial representations of children and deduced that children were in fact no different to adults. His analysis argued that children in the Middle Ages were regarded as mini-adults, rather than conceptually different. Such a viewpoint suggests that childhood as an experience is not universal, but is varied across time and space. For Aries, childhood did not exist as a separate phase, as he states that there were few distinctions marking childhood as a distinctive phase in the life course within medieval society. Whilst his assertions have been disputed by other historians, his claim that childhood is culturally relative was important, and is the core to the paradigm of cultural politics of childhood (James and James, 2004) which refers to a combination of cultural contexts, social practices and political processes through which childhood is uniquely constructed. His work set the context for research into the history of childhood and initiated debate surrounding conceptions of childhood held at different stages in history. Gergen and Graumann (1996) agree and argue that cultural beliefs held at specific times affect local parenting practices and child development patterns. Similarly, the contribution from philosophy through the work of Archard (1993, 2001) has been notable as he identifies Piaget's ideal of adult cognitive competence as particularly western, and also of Matthews (1994) who argues that children are moral agents in their own right, who possess the capacity for moral reasoning at an early age. In the last two decades, sociology as an academic discipline has subsequently focused on the influence of structural determinants of behaviour such as culture, gender, class, age, ethnicity, institutional policy and geographic context which lead to variations in behaviours. Emphasising the social construction of childhood, there is therefore a call for everyday context and academic research to respect and acknowledge the significance and competing views of children's own understandings of their worlds given the variations in their lives. As Qvortrup explains:

'Childhood is a life-space which our culture limits it to be i.e. its definitions through the courts, the school, the family and also through psychology and philosophy' (1994, 3).

The notion that children can be regarded as independent social actors in their own right is therefore core to the development of a new paradigm for the study of childhood that emerged in the social sciences during the 1970s which focused on the social construction of childhood. Social constructionism draws attention to the influences of culture, history and

social processes on the way people behave and think. This paradigm introduces the agency-structure debate which emphasises the ways in which children's agency is manifest through their everyday behaviours and experiences, as well as the structural determinants which shape these behaviours and experiences.

2.3 Constructing childhood between agency and structure

This section looks at how structure and agency are linked in shaping the experiences and practices of childhood. The concept of agency is significant for a study of children's experiences in that it highlights that children and young people are capable of making informed choices about the things they do and can express their own ideas and thoughts. This emphasises children's control over their behaviours, actions and attitudes and also highlights that children have an important voice in promoting change within society. As Mayall describes:

'A focus on children's agency enables explorations of the ways in which children's interactions with others makes a difference – to a relationship or a decision, to the workings of a set of social assumptions or constraints' (2002, 21).

Discussions of agency within sociology emphasise the extent to which individuals are able to act independently of social structures, institutions and value systems that make up the societies in which they live. A focus on agency suggests that children may therefore have a degree of choice over their everyday mobility. This recognition may be particularly important given that there is an increasing amount of research which shows that:

'children are capable of exercising agency and utilising their own resources and strengths in developing strategies for their protection...(p)rotective approaches that make children dependant on adult support leave children without resources when those adult protections are withdrawn' (Lansdown, 2006, 147).

Rather than seeking to understand how children's mobilities are shaped by other actors, as Mayall describes, a focus on children's agency suggests that attention needs to be directed towards an exploration of how children interact and negotiate with others (Mayall, 2002) and how this in turn shapes their experiences and everyday practices.

Further to this debate is the idea that suggests that children cannot act independent of the social structure, institutions and value systems that make up the societies in which they live, move and play. Collective morals and social institutions determine various constraints on children's actions and behaviours and frame the way in which children are collectively

thought of, either by themselves or by others. By recognising that different images and understandings of childhood exist in society, attention is on the cultural factors which may shape children's behaviours and experiences. For example, the actions of school shootings in 1999 at Columbine High in the USA, or the murdering of James Bulger here in the UK in 1993 ignited global debates around the killer's home structure, parental values, family circumstances and relationships within the household in order to provide a framing for such events. Therefore, focusing on the historical, cultural, political and social relations that structure childhood has been critical to the shift away from the linear and determinist view of developmental psychology.

Structure relates to the ways in which societies are organised due to the social institutions and relational components of the social fabric. These institutions and components delineate the processes through which social relations are organised and alter over time, and from which society gains a particular identity. Understanding the nature and composition of social structure is a complex debate, but when social structure is used in the context of childhood, it is important to understand that every society is built around certain social institutions, for example, legal policy organises children and their spatial range through curfews and surveillance, there are rules for governance and citizenship and there are society's religious beliefs. There are also moral or ethical systems within the family that influence how it is organised according to a held ethos or value system. These social structures have an influence on a child's mobility experience. Childhood exists in a social space defined by law, politics, economics and religion, thus a child and his or her behaviour is a product of the forces which shape the socialisation process. Within this social space, the nature of childhood is further influenced by relational elements such as generation, social class, age, gender and ethnicity. Therefore childhood is a product of external socialisation forces as well as relational elements and any understanding of childhood, both as a lived experience and a social status, must incorporate both perspectives. The major limitation of such a perspective is however, that it seems largely deterministic, similar to the developmental psychology approach, and the child is regarded as simply an end product of the combined effect of the social structural forces, although it does provide a more holistic analysis of how childhood is experienced.

This long-standing debate about the effects of structure on children's capacities to act freely has led to the recognition that both structure and agency are therefore intertwined. Understanding the relationship and tension between agency and structure is important and central to our understanding of the production and reproduction of childhood, of the

different lived experiences of childhood and the cultural politics of childhood. Whilst the study of structure emphasises the commonalities within childhood, the notion of agency recognises the differences and diversity on children's lives.

Giddens (1979) work on structuration theory has particular relevance here as it suggests that the two concepts of agency and structure cannot be separated as they are irrevocably intertwined. Social structures provide the means through which children act, but the form these structures subsequently take is a direct result from such actions. In this way, social lives are not only reproduced but are transformative. Children therefore possess agency and thus have the power and ability to change the very social structures and institutions through which they live, move and experience. Critical realists, such as Bhaskar (Archer *et al*, 1998), argue that such a view underestimates historical context and suggests that the capacity of structures may act as material constraints upon the ability to act, as the opportunity for change may not be present.

The importance of these different theoretical discussions surrounding the capacity of children for agency in view of their structural determinants is highlighted in James *et al's* (1998) schematic model. This identifies the different ways in which agency and structure influence how children are imagined and treated. In traditional socialisation theory children were viewed as passive receivers of societies messages, however it is important to regard the different ways in which children's agency is conceptualised. For some researchers, children are regarded as social actors who are independent and fully capable. In research on gender and ethnicity, Connolly (1998) shows how race is a social and cultural marker of identity which is transformed by children across and within varying contexts of their everyday lives. He asserts how:

'competently and with what complexity the children are able to appropriate, rework and reproduce racist discourses in relation to a variety of situations and contexts' (1998, 5).

Connolly particularly explores how cultural ideas of race are articulated by girls and boys within the school context, leading to black boys showing masculine assertiveness whilst black girls use the ideas of femininity to downplay racial stereotypes about the aggressive nature of Black girls (1998, 15). Ethnicity signifies social identity due to the differences of social practices that ethnic identities may produce and what they elicit as social responses from others (Bradshaw and Mayhew, 2005; Madge, 2006). In understanding the social child, it is argued that ethnicity is a source of difference as well as a common link with others. A child born in an ethnically homogenous society will experience a childhood bound by social

class, although not in a deterministic way, as they learn to exercise agency within the context of these structural influences. A child born in an ethnically diverse society may find that their ethnic identity makes additional and complex contributions to and opportunities within their daily lived experiences (Madge, 2006). Research by Scourfield *et al* (2006) shows how ethnicity has a profound effect on the ways in which children are able to exercise their agency. In their study of ethnic children living in Wales they illustrate how children negotiate their everyday social relations and in an attempt to fit in, often downplay their ethnicity and take on a different identity.

Other research situates agency within the context of structure's constraining influence which subsequently shapes children's position within society as a minority group. Mayall (2002) concludes that children often do not give themselves credit for their own moral agency which reflects their subordinated position within society with regards to adults, which renders children perceiving themselves as relatively powerless and incapable.

Understanding how childhood is constructed between the tension of agency and structure is particularly critical in relation to how we understand childhood identities and their competencies particularly in relation to age and gender providing a means through which to revoke the dominant paradigm that children's capacities are linear and determined and to explore their multiple and diverse nature.

2.4 Constructing childhood identities: A focus on age and gender

The concept of agency highlights children's subjectivities as independent social actors in their own right within the social, moral, economic and political structural constraints within society. An insight about the relation between structure and agency is therefore particularly critical in relation to work on how age and gender shape childhood experiences, behaviours and attitudes. This is of particular importance on this research given the wide age gap of the participants, from age 4 to 16 years.

Clearly, children share a common trajectory of physical development and change over time that is largely age-based, so that children have different motor skills and physical abilities at certain times. The physical process of growing up and ageing makes age a key factor in how we differentiate a child from an adult. However, when used to describe the everyday experiences of a child, age is revealed to be a less useful concept. We must acknowledge that childhood does constitute a particular biological phase in the life course of all members of a society, therefore regardless of the differences within children's lives, children's

competencies and skills are to some degree shaped by their physiological development. Although this development takes place within and is no doubt conditioned by the child's cultural context, it also takes place despite the context, and in this way children share this common process of maturation. However, to map the age-based categorisation schema onto children's social and psychological development is more problematic as not all children reach the same stage at the same time due to their social context. Children's lives are structured according to age, especially in relation to the school system which uniformly categorises children according to numerical age with little relation to their social realities. This process of age-based standardisation (James and James, 2004) leads to some children 'failing' or 'exceeding' pre-set standards. This age based standardisation in school leads to a situation whereby some children are judged as failing and others are excelling due to their respective levels of assumed achievement. Such a universal age-based definition implies a commonality of experience.

Age can be regarded as one of the ways in which the passage of time across an individual's life course is socially constructed. The historian Gillis (2003) argues, for example, that in Western Europe it was only in the late nineteenth century that chronological age as a marker of social identity became important. It is used to relate certain kinds of experiences and expectations that people have of others. As Aries (1962) notes, the term 'child' was traditionally not an age-related term, but was used to describe the level of social dependence upon another individual. Hockey and James note that in contemporary society, age is a key defining characteristic:

'From legal imperatives through to consumer practices, age consciousness has intensified, such that what it means to be a child, for example, has become highly contextualised in relation to the age of criminal responsibility, consensual sex, leaving school, consent to surgery, access to contraception, participation in work and the right to vote' (2003, 64).

One effect of the institutionalisation of chronological age is that it is used to define the spatial boundaries of children, and this has relevance within this research on children's independent mobility patterns and behaviours. Certain permissions or restrictions are placed on the child in terms of where they can go and with whom can they go with, although a certain degree of negotiation may take place to redefine their geographical boundaries both within the home and public space. Children's independent mobility seems to be determined by the levels of negotiations that may or may not take place within the household as protections on, or restrictions from, certain activities are given and may also exclude children from specific social and environmental spaces. In relation to children's rights, for

example, the United Nations Convention on the Rights to the Child (UNCRC) defines a child as a person under the age of 18, regardless of social, economic or cultural contexts and circumstances. This implies a commonality of experience and ability across different cultures. Also age is problematic when seen from a child's viewpoint, since it may restrict children's behaviours and activities without considering the child's level of agency. Solberg's (1997) study of Norwegian children shows how 10-year old children can negotiate their parent's perceptions of age by carrying out household tasks with competence leading to parents trusting them to remain in their homes alone. In this way the children transformed age into a relative concept and circumvented the restrictions placed on them, thus altering the way in which adults view them.

Much of the controversy surrounding the protectionist and participatory perspectives on children's rights highlights the issue of children's competence. Archard (1993) distinguishes between child liberationists and caretakers in relation to children's rights. The former group argue that children are imprisoned in childhood and are recognised as incompetent by adult attitudes (Holt, 1975). The latter group argues that children do not have full autonomy and may not be able to understand their rights depending on their age (Archard, 1993). The question then is at what stage can children genuinely participate in society and make competent decisions about their lives? Therefore, the link between age and competence is a difficult one as there is no chronological age when all children achieve the same levels of competence.

An additional linked debate is about the universalism of childhood and the notion that childhood is disappearing (Postman, 1983) as children are forced to 'grow up' quicker. All children grow up therefore in a way they share experiences and characteristics of this period in their lives. As Qvortrup *et al* (1994) argue, childhood is a social space that remains both a constant and universal component of the social and structural space in every society (Qvortrup *et al*, 1994). It is acknowledged that the character of childhood changes over time in response to a shifting cultural politics of childhood – it is a consequence of laws, policies, public and private discourse and social practices through which childhood is defined and redefined over time. Postman (1983) examines childhoods in contemporary western cultures and concludes that changes in technology and children's increased access to consumer goods, the boundaries between childhood and adulthood are disappearing and such a collapse is detrimental to children's well being. He states that this change is not welcome, as children will not have the opportunity to develop slowly the morality and civility required for a decent society. Buckingham (2000) disputes this claim of a hurried childhood, as he views

childhood as simply changing and not disappearing. These arguments about the nature of childhood changing over time are further developed by Lee (2001) who regards childhood as a relational concept through the notions of 'becoming' and 'being'. He argues that the traditional view of childhood is associated with notions of dependency and futurity, with adulthood being the end point and focus. However, according to Lee, as 'adulthood' can never be regarded as a complete and stable state, then there is no definite distinction between mature adults and immature children. In a time when there is uncertainty about the nature of adulthood, the concept of childhood becomes more complex and ambiguous and cannot be characterised as a state of dependency and incompleteness. The traditional representation of childhood as generational suggests that children undergo a socialisation process as part of their preparation for future adulthood, although this seems to undermine their levels of agency.

Children cannot be viewed as a homogenous group which is age dependent. Most societies would therefore recognise distinction between infants and toddlers on the one hand and adolescents/youth on the other, both in terms of age criterion and the biological development indicators. For example, the emergence of the 'tweenagers' (Wyness, 2006) reflects a change in western industrial societies in which the process of physical maturation occurs at a younger age. Age is frequently associated with levels of competence, even though a substantial body of research demonstrates that there is a spurious connection between the two. Even young children are capable of making informed moral choices. Research by Lansdown (2005) illustrates that adults consistently under estimate children's capabilities and as a result children are denied certain experiences and opportunities. In more affluent countries, this seems to be linked to the notion of protection of the child and adults acting in the best interests of the child. Evidence suggests that the assessment of children's levels of competence has more to do with the type of testing employed which merely serves to inhibit rather than demonstrate children's levels of understanding. As Lansdown (2005) suggests, the development of child-friendly tests is essential in order to understand more fully children's levels of competence.

Gender also determines how members of societies and communities perceive and treat children, how children see themselves and treat others and what children have the opportunity to do. Whether gender differences are said to be caused by biology or by society, or as some would argue a mix of both (Richards, 1974), they remain significant differentiating factors in children's lives. Their differences seem to alter the way in which adults view children and understand their needs. The gendering of childhood occurs across a

wide range of social settings and media, in the home, the school and in public space. This research raises the question as to whether gender plays a part in structuring the journey to school experiences. Recent research in the USA into children's engagement with the media illustrated that websites created by adults for children reinforced cultural stereotypes of gender in terms of the play opportunities which were offered (Mitchell and Reid-Walsh, 2002). Danby and Baker (1998) revealed the importance of gender in studies of children's play and friendships. Drawing on findings from their research in a pre-school in Australia they reveal that gender is not an 'established social identity but a dynamic practice built and shaped by ongoing interactions' (1998, 178). They showed how older boys dominate certain spaces in the classroom through the display of powerful hegemonic masculinity, which consists of threats of violence and initiation of younger boys into what it is to be a boy. Thorne's (1993) research similarly shows different behaviours amongst boys and girls and suggests that boys by nature are more aggressive than girls. Goodwin (2006) however, shows that this is not merely a masculine trait as the research concludes that girls also exercise power to exclude other girls from participating in particular social activities or relations. This research is significant as it challenges the biological essentialist viewpoint that boys, by nature, are more aggressive than girls. How a child views himself or herself also has value in this discussion. A child's experience of himself or herself as a boy or a girl has to be seen in relation to other identity traits, for example, age, ethnicity and class. Gender is enmeshed in wider social structures, as Walkerdine *et al* (2001) argue, growing up as a girl differs due to social class. They relate aspiration and achievement to femininity and the opportunities available in the ways of education and the labour market.

So how might the structural determinants of age and gender influence the way in which children live, move and play in geographical space? Childhoods are produced through a complex interaction of structure and agency producing distinct but multiple, historically and culturally specific, childhood identities, experiences, behaviours and practices. Research on space and place within childhood draws attention to the importance of structure and how it seeks to shape children's geographical experiences and practices. It also enables an exploration of children's agency which shows how children appropriate different spaces for a range of activities and in doing so transform them into places for themselves. The following section moves the agency-structure debate towards a geographical level by demonstrating how childhoods are constructed in relation to space and place, as well as how children's agency shapes these geographical experiences.

2.5 Spaces of Childhood

Research into children's spaces has come from a wide variety of disciplines with the main contributors coming from geography, sociology, anthropology and psychology. While there is an overlap in approaches in terms of the way the discipline addresses the conceptual relationship between children and space, there are some notable differences. Developmental psychologists are interested in the impact of the physical environment on young children's physical and cognitive development, anthropologists on the affect of cultural practices and geographers and sociologists in understanding the meaning children give to particular spaces and the way in which they are used. This research is interested in how children access and appropriate certain spaces on their journey to school, what affects their choices, how do they experience their mobility and what levels of negotiations take place within the home, public space and school. As discussed in Section 2.3, issues around children's identities, practices and competency are central to the relationships which exist between children and adults and between children themselves. The following section is separated into two. The first section looks at the practices of engagement which take place within the key sites of childhood, highlighting the formation of childhood identity through engaging in place, and the importance of social relations and children's physical play. Secondly, I discuss those spaces in which children are controlled and regulated which subsequently may shape and structure their everyday mobility experiences. The discussion places control within the physical spaces of the home, the school and public space.

2.5.1 Childhood Spaces of Engagement

Within the key spaces of childhood, children actively engage and interact with space and with others, which in turn shapes their everyday experiences and behaviours. This section does not look specifically at each childhood space, but rather focuses on childhood practices that take place within these sites which highlight children's agency – the interaction with place and children's friendships and play. These practices of engagement are visible in all key childhood spaces – the home, the school and public space – and therefore inform the discussion surrounding the nature and structure of the journey to school. Thinking about childhood through the spaces of engagement supports the notion that children are independent social actors, able to exercise agency. Children have the capacity to make choices about the things they do and to express their own ideas. As Mayall (2002) describes, a focus on children's agency enables an exploration of the ways in which children interact with others and how this makes a difference in their lives.

Engaging in place

Place is more than simply a physical geographical location, as it is a space imbued with social and cultural meaning. Spencer and Blades (2006) make an important distinction between environments *for* children and environments *of* children. They draw attention to the fact that although some places are designed for children, there are other spaces that children may prefer to use and appropriate with their own meanings. Schools, for example, are institutional spaces intended for educating children, yet some children may see this space as social, whereas urban streets and wasteland which are not particularly designed for children's play or engagement but are often used for such. Children use, experience and interact with space differently from adults. Researchers such as Ward (1978), Sibley (1995, 2001) and Lynch (1997) have shown that when children are given the choice between formally designed playgrounds and more flexible landscapes, such as waste ground or open unstructured space, they preferred the latter to play in. Children liked to create their own play spaces and movement within public space. This is an important distinction, as it shows how space is afforded meaning and how this meaning can change over time (Fog Olwig and Gullov, 2003). Research on children's spaces draws attention to their levels of agency which enables an exploration of the many ways children use innovative means of appropriating space for a range of activities and in doing so appropriate and transform them into children's spaces in which they can actively engage.

Much of the past research on childhood spaces has focused on the relationship between space, place and environment (Matthews, Limb and Percy-Smith, 1998; Valentine, 1997), concluding that children have an acute place-based sensitivity to a range of significant community issues through having well-defined levels of environmental cognition and mapping skills which have been developed through independent mobility. Human geographers have increasingly recognised that children have complex and varied experiences of public space (Skelton and Valentine, 1998).

Two major projects carried out by Bunge (1973) and Blaut and Stea (1971) appear to have provided a foundation for much of the subsequent research on children's geographies. The central thesis of Bunge's (1973) work in Detroit and Toronto asserts children as victims of political, social and economic forces which in turn mould the physical form of the built environment. Seminal research conducted by Roger Hart (1979; 1984) on children's environmental experiences involved direct observation, interviews and questionnaires, highlighting children's first hand environmental and social experiences and how they attach

meaning and value to places. Concluding that environmental competence is directly related to environmental experience, Hart recognised that whilst the level of experience is regulated by parental control, the way children negotiate and interpret space depends upon the levels of individual inquisitiveness and risk taking of a child. A major study by Hart (1979) was significant in that it helped shape the understanding of children's environmental competence. His research of children's use and experience of space demonstrated that their use of space is a product of negotiation between themselves and their parents. Fears about traffic, 'bad influences' and strangers shaped the nature and range of their spatial interaction with their environment which parents, particularly mothers, imposed on their children. These limitations or licences were varied according to age and gender of the child. Despite these limitations on spatial interaction, Hart's study showed that much of the daily use of space was independent of adults and that children explored and experienced space differently from adults. His findings indicated that children's spatial activity was influenced by parental controls which were shaped by a dualism between protection from harm and encouragement to explore their local environments. This suggests that agency is not something that children possesses individually, but is created in the relation between different sites – in this case the home and public space. The ability for children to actively negotiate their access to public space within the home space is critical to understanding their levels of independent mobility. The meanings attached to places highlighted the ways in which children experience and value space and how this may differ from how adults attach meaning to and have experiences of space. Hart concluded that environmental competence was related to environmental experiences.

Research suggests that access to public space is also culturally specific. Katz (2004) asserts that although the children in a Sudanese village were constrained due to household chores, they were spatially much freer to explore their natural environment compared to New York children whose access to public space increased with age and was much more constrained. Similarly, Punch (1998) found that children in Bolivia exercised spatial freedom to gain control over their own time, for example, due to their household and agricultural chores the children took their animals further away so to return home later.

'Public places are places for the mundane, the expected and the banal' (Holland *et al*, 2007, 68) and children's everyday experiences within them should not be overlooked, nor underestimated, in relation to children's levels of agency or the formation of childhood identity. Young people in their teenage years, for example, have a particular need to be able to gather in public spaces where they can practice sociability to develop youth identity and

hierarchy-based relationships (Brooks, 2006; Malone, 2002; Stevens, 2001). Observations show that young people selected specific public spaces to socialise which comprised of seclusion or separation and also a sense of security from the threat of what they perceive to be 'dangerous others' (Holland *et al*, 2007). It is also a place where children and young people can construct a form of privacy away from the control and surveillance of the home, which highlights the linkages between behaviours between childhood spaces - the home, the school and public space. Storr (1997) argues that the capacity to be alone in public space is fundamental to creative development.

A relatively new space is cyberspace and as Valentine *et al* (2000) argue, children's ability to learn and use new technology provides them with alternative ways in which to communicate with their friends from within the home space. Whilst adult fears often focus on the impact of using such technology, for example, facebook or MSN, on their wellbeing, research suggests that those who use this networking facility may indeed have wider friendships than those who do not (Valentine *et al*, 2000). Therefore far from it being an isolating activity, it demonstrates children's ability and competence in changing communication methods. Adults fears about children's innocence and vulnerability seem misplaced as Valentine's research further shows that children use ICT in a sophisticated way which, in general, is not harmful or putting them at risk.

The whole debate about children's safety and the need to protect them by isolating them from public space, as discussed in more detail in Section 2.5.2., is often counteracted by research suggesting that it is in their best interests to be outside. Parts of urban space are deemed safe space (Soja, 1996) where young people gather to affirm their sense of belonging and identity. They meet their friends and gather in social groups which share common likes and dislikes, as well as dress code and behaviours. Over the past decade, a number of researchers have also looked at the link between direct experience with natural places and health (Chawla, 1992; Davis, 1998; Kahn, 1999; Moore, 1997a, 1997b). Reports about increasing social and geographically spatial restrictions and mental health (Mental Health Foundation, 2008) provide compelling reading. It is reported that 1 in 10 children in contemporary Britain have mental health problems. A number of studies have suggested that exposure to nature may reduce the symptoms of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and that it helps in improving cognitive functions to deal with stress and depression (Louv, 2006). Kahn's (1999) study showed how significant decreases in blood pressure were monitored simply by watching fish and Delate *et al* (2004) track the decreasing levels of depression against increasing exposure to nature.

Louv's (2006) assertion that children suffer from nature-deficit disorder has merit in this research. He asserts that:

'reducing that deficit – healing the broken bond between our young and nature – is in our self-interest, not only because aesthetics or justice demands it, but also because our mental, physical and spiritual health depends on it' (Louv, 2006, 3).

Our visual environment profoundly affects our physical and mental well being and direct experience to nature is essential for children's physical and mental health. Growing evidence suggests that *'children live through their senses'* (Moore, 1997, 203), so that imagination and inventiveness is nourished in early years and is rooted in experiences with nature. There have been many studies that demonstrate how important nature experience is to creative thought (Moore, 1997; Malone, 2003). It seems that imagination and inventiveness is nourished in early years and is rooted in experiences with nature. As a result, there has been a recent wave of increasing the amount and quality of natural surroundings within urban regions, particularly in Scandinavian cities where green design is increasingly popular and ethical and are integrated in community design (Beatly, 2000).

However as further research shows that children have an affinity with the natural world that is somehow inherent to them being a child, is an assumption often used by policy makers to promulgate the benefits of health and well being that children gain when in contact with nature. A range of experimental and correlational studies show little evidence to support this assumption (Taylor and Juo, 2006). They assert that whilst contact with nature is undoubtedly supportive of healthy child development, they caution that any causal relationship has yet to be proven. It may be that the kinds of activities that children can do in the natural world lead them to having healthy development, rather than the space in which these activities are conducted. The Norwegian Nature Kindergarten movement provides a good example here, as does the emergence of Forest Schools throughout Europe. Nielsen (2008) describes how outdoor kindergartens that have been established for pre-school children, spend their days learning nature-craft skills that teach self reliance and independence, regardless of the weather conditions. For Nielsen, this is not just a matter of health, it is about teaching of culture and a way of life. Other research (Holloway and Valentine, 2000) has explored how discourses of the rural idyll shape other adults attitudes towards children in industrialised societies as parents regard the countryside as a better place for children to group in. Tucker (2006) notes that when rural teenagers talk about life in rural areas, they say they are bored and feel restricted due to lack of transport services, and independent mobility.

There is a link here with Corsaro's work, whose focus on the transition between childhood and adulthood challenges traditional thinking about how children socialise, using the concept of 'interpretive reproduction' (Corsaro, 1997, 18). He states that children are interpreters of their social world, who learn about what goes on in their society through a process of interpretive reproduction. Corsaro rejects the deterministic accounts of children's socialisation that gave little credence to the child as an 'active agent and eager learner' (1997, 8) and positions the child as taking an active part in their own development. Children learn about culture through interactions with others and may reproduce it in numerous innovative and creative ways through their own interpretations and meanings. He argues for the importance of language and cultural routines in this process of interpretive reproduction as he stresses that children are not merely internalising society and culture, but actively contributing to change and reproduce it. He argues that through this process children make sense of their worlds and learn how to hold friendships and the rules of play. This leads Corsaro (1997) to develop what he terms the orb web of social relations which, in a spiral form, reproduce cultural knowledge. At the centre of this web is the family. As a core social institution through which children learn how to participate in society, individual development is embedded in a collective experience. The merit of this viewpoint is that it regards the child as an initiator of social action. One of the critiques of this viewpoint is that it fails to adequately deal with the constraints that social structure places upon children's interpretive and reproductive actions. It is therefore important to recognise the way in which age can become a classificatory marker of identity which is used to separate children out a group in society which requires restrictions on social spaces to which they have access.

This notion is profound, as it signifies that children are creative and innovative agents in their own development, and in their own spatial mobility and social practices. He asserts that in order to develop their own identity, they need to appropriate space in which to socialise, and in doing so contribute to cultural production, reproduction and change.

Children's Friendships and Play

Children's friendships have been a focus of research since the 1930s and in researching friendship groupings it shows how children engage with others and in doing so possess agency in order to shape their experiences. The research summarised in this section shows that the different categorisations of age, gender and class are forged through the processes of friendship and rather than being structured or pre-set, children can show levels of agency in developing friendships. Research has sought to explore how friendships change over time

according to age (Bigelow and La Gaipa, 1980). Young children's friendships are based on proximity and similarity of interests. They suggest empathy is not present until the age of 11 or 12, when during adolescence, loyalty, trust and respect become valued aspects of friendships. However, the meanings which children give to their social relations, rather than simply the form their friendships take, needs also to be considered (James, 1993). Corsaro (1985) suggested that even quite young children of 3 to 4 years can be involved in close relationships. The significance of gender on friendships has also been a focus of research, and often contrasts the closeness of girl friendship groups in relation to those experienced by boys. Thorne's research (1993) however suggests that this is a generalisation as boys can have close friendships. More recently, Frosh *et al* (2002) argue that it remains difficult for boys to develop close friendships with other boys given the stereotype of masculinity which pervade boy's culture. Comparably, Connolly's (1998) work on race and gender in children's social relationships concludes that amongst young black and South Asian boys, the former were seen as aggressive and good at sport, whilst the latter were forced into an excluded male role, akin to the position of girls. Goodwin's (2006) study of girl's social relations in a North American school reveals how the most popular girls formed a dominant clique within a particular peer group, with recognised leaders, and as a group they shared common social characteristics which worked to exclude others:

'while clique members would permit girls in the inner circle to munch potato chips from their bag, Angela, the girl who followed the group but did not belong to it, was not granted even a single chip' (2006, 79).

The term 'peer group' is commonly used to refer to youth groups and the high visibility of the various styles, cultures and social practices associated with such a group. Youth cultures have been increasingly linked to patterns of youth consumption and identities (France, 2007). Such groups are important for the socialisation process. Peer groups influence young people and promote uniformity, conformity and obedience (Nicholson *et al*, 2006). In many societies, peer groups are based on gender. They can however be viewed as negative in that peer group pressures are blamed as a source of deviant behaviour and delinquency (Nicholson *et al*, 2006), as can be seen by the implementation of social control measures such as ASBOs. Buckingham and Bragg (2005) have observed that there seems to be a moral panic about children and young people and their access to sexual knowledge via the media and that a peer group provides a space within children and young people regulate themselves access to what they deem as appropriate for their age group. Thus whilst peer

groups are often viewed as negative by adults, it seems to offer positive support to children and young people.

From the perspectives of childhood studies, play is an important concept as it is heavily linked to the definition of childhood and the child, and it provides one of the most important contexts for child-focused research which allows insight into the social world of children. Play theorists highlight the number of important functions play performs in children's development, from problem solving, to development of motor skills to improving health and fostering social relations. In the childhood context, play is associated with freedom and spontaneity, play is regarded as integral to children's social worlds. Research shows that the activity of play provides a way in which children's friendships and peer cultures are developed and redeveloped into ritualised patterns of behaviour, especially within the school space (Corsaro, 2003).

The extent to which play facilitates the expression of gender differences during childhood (Goodwin, 2006) is illustrated in her analysis of girls playing hopscotch in a North American playground, which shows how keen girls are to spot and call out mistakes others make, since this will afford them the chance to get a turn to play. Moreover, she shows that despite stereotypes of Latina girls as being hapless victims of a patriarchal society (2006, 72), they are just as vocal and demanding as English-speaking girls. As Goodwin shows, these games involve conflict and negotiation as well as cooperation and negotiation. This encapsulates what Mayall (1994) refers to as *children's childhoods* – recognising children's differences and their relative autonomy.

Ethnographic research conducted by Iona and Peter Opie (1969; 1977) into childhood games and folklore called for an autonomous children's community to be recognised – for children to occupy their own spaces without constraint from adults, which offer independence and show structured social action with its own rules, rituals and traditions. This is the world of the school playground, community clubs and gangs (Opie, 1969,1977). This approach highlighted children's language, language games, language acquisition and increasing confidence and ability of children to form social groupings within their own rules. Paradoxically, in doing so, this pre-empted a situation where adults can enter the world of the child and therefore inevitably bring the threat of control strategies with this intrusion.

The importance of physical play within public space in particular has been well researched (Corsaro, 2003; DCSF, 2008; Matthews *et al*, 2000a). Emphasis is placed on the development of social and life skills and the unstructured learning experience gained

through interacting with nature and the environment. Education reforms over the past decade have increasingly alienated children from nature, with a focus on target-setting and classroom - based learning. Recent proposed changes in the Government's education mandate are encouraging however. It is proposing that children spend more time learning in, and experiencing the outdoors (Malone and Tranter, 2003). Experiential learning through the senses promotes a place-based education, and grounds children in a creative learning environment. Research has discussed the changes in children's play, and the decrease in independent play in developed countries (Valentine, 1996, Karsten and van Vliet, 2006). The decrease in play in natural environments has been linked to a loss of children's experiences - the inability to walk to friends houses alone leads to a loss of social, emotional and cultural experiences of direct interaction with their local environments (Tranter and Pawson, 2001; Kytta, 2004). It is recognised that play is fundamental to the successful holistic development of every child - encouraging creativity, teaching children to learn about risk, helping with their physical development and raising self-confidence. A Unicef (2007) enquiry placed the UK bottom in a league of 'child well-being' in 21 industrialised countries. More recently, the University of York carried out research on behalf of the Child Poverty Action group (CPAG, 2009) which compared the well-being of 11 and 12 year olds throughout Europe, based on a range of social and economic factors including education and health. The survey found that British children came in near the bottom of the table. The reasons for this were given as a shortfall in services, high levels of unemployment and low levels of education and training. This particular report however seems to focus upon material circumstances as a key link to emotional well-being. Another recent survey paints a different picture however. A recent report by Ofsted and the DCSF entitled 'Tellus3' (Ofsted, 2008) asked 150,000 teenagers aged 15 and 16 across England to fill in happiness questionnaires, and the results proved somewhat counter-intuitive to the Unicef and CPAG reports. This is the second national survey of children and young people, asking participants to report on how healthy they are, how safe they feel, whether they enjoy school, if they are happy, and if the advice they receive on matters concerning relationships is sufficient. They were also asked what would make their lives better. The majority of children and young people (69%) said they are happy, and almost all (95%) said they have one or more good friends. Fewer than last year answered that they were worried about friendships. Of concern however, is the small, yet significant number of children and young people (8%) who report that they are unhappy about life. Thirty two percent of 10 to 15 year olds when asked what worried them most responded that they are worried about their body. Better information and advice about sex and relationships was wanted by more than a third of children and young people. Most

young people say they give some of their time to charity work or help others in their neighbourhood. Although an improved figure from the previous year (Ofsted, 2007), three in five still feel their views are not listened to in the running of their school. The picture of bullying, which is linked to a child's mental and physical health, is a mixed one. Thirty-nine percent of young people said they had been bullied at school. An increased number (11%) said that bullying was not a problem in their school. Despite these more positive findings, over a quarter said bullying was a significant worry for them, and fewer young people (35%) said their schools dealt with bullying well. Although a smaller number than last year, there is still one in nine who responded that they felt unsafe in school, or going to and from school. As in previous surveys of this kind (Ofsted, 2007), the survey found that the vast majority of children consider themselves to be quite or very healthy. Over 90% report that they eat at least one portion of fruit and vegetables each day, two thirds at least three or four portions, while only a quarter report eating the recommended five portions per day. More than nine out of ten said they took part in sports or other physical activity for at least 30 minutes in the last week. Just over one third of children and young people spent at least 30 minutes doing sport or other active things almost every day in the last week. Four percent of 10 to 15 year olds said they did not take part in these activities at all. Interestingly, those children who came out happiest were those living in areas of social deprivation due to the reported fact that they felt they have strong friendships and closer family ties. Such benefits are also linked to the opportunity for children and young people to have space and time to just be themselves, and play within their local community.

However, although children engage actively in the different spaces of the home, school and public space, and in doing so, demonstrate agency, either individually or as a collective, these childhood spaces may also be regarded as spaces of control and regulation. This next section looks at this which highlights the structures present in childhood which may serve to restrict or alter everyday experiences.

2.5.2 Childhood Spaces of Control

This section looks at how childhood is controlled within and between the three key sites of public space, the home and school. Different from the section above which focused on the practices of engagement and how children's agency shapes their behaviours and experiences, this section focuses more specifically on the physical spaces of public space, the home and the school and how practices within each space can structure, regulate and control children's behaviours and experiences. This is significant when framing the journey

to school within these key spaces as it is suggested that this mobility is subsequently determined and shaped by the structures within.

Control in public space

The regulation and control of children's independent mobility through public space is well researched, especially in relation to the journey to school (Hillman *et al*, 1990; Lolichen, 2007; McMillan, 2007). Research has focused on four sets of related processes which regulate children's use of public space. First, the practices of parenting are both a public and policy discourse which has been well covered in the media. Second, there are concerns over the presence of children and youth in public space. Thirdly, the supervision of children's mobility through public space is of particular relevance to the thesis. Fourth, the lack of community engagement and local neighbourhood interaction is well documented.

It is suggested that the increase in levels of 'paranoid parenting' (Furedi, 2002; Pain, 2006) have left children with fewer opportunities to freely experience public space, reducing opportunities for fun, creativity, exercise and learning. There are a number of reasons behind contemporary parents' reluctance to let their children be outside. One key reason is due to the parent's assessment or perception of risk. The perceived risks are twofold – firstly, that children themselves are at risk to dangers within public places, be it abduction, crime, pollution and traffic, or secondly, they themselves conceptually embody the risk by their unruly presence in public space being equated with criminality. In terms of the former perceived risk, the widespread construction of private space as safe, leads to the assumption that public space is dangerous (Sibley, 2001) and private space is constructed in terms of safety, with the home being seen as a safe retreat away from an outside world of 'traffic, molesters and abductors' (Sibley, 1995). The child is gradually allowed entry into this risky environment with adult supervision due to levels of negotiations that may take place. As Valentine (1997) asserts, these negotiations of competence take place at a number of levels – both through explicit discussion between parent and child and between parents and their friends and relatives, but also with reference to popular conceptions of what is deemed appropriate for children to do at different ages. This can change over space and time as in certain circumstances, particular negotiations between the adults and children in the household may reshape attitudes and behaviours (Solberg, 1997). The physical geographical boundaries that parents establish appear to depend on age, gender, perceived maturity level and competence of the child. Other factors that seem to establish and re-establish home boundaries are the social and physical characteristics of the local

neighbourhood, the seasons of the year, the time of day and their knowledge of local incidents and their own social values and cultural values. A parents' understanding of their child's competence is continually under negotiation and renegotiation depending on all of these factors. Through processes of developing spatial boundaries, parents may waver between being overprotective and not granting independence due to fears about safety, whilst others may grant independence with conditions when making certain journeys. Through these parenting practices, understandings of children's competence and therefore what is construed as being a good parent are performed and contested over space and time (Chapter 4 looks at this in more detail in relation to the journey to school). The physical separation of public space and the home is connected in this regard as parenting practices held in the home site are practiced in the public arena. As Valentine's (1997) research discusses, peer pressure to impose spatial restrictions encourages parents to treat their children as incompetent, incapable and vulnerable, more so than the parents believed they were. The threat of being labelled a neglectful parent exerts pressure to maintain particular childcare boundaries and practices. If parents are highly anxious about allowing their children to move independently through public space, there is equally a risk of being thought irresponsible (Furedi, 2002). In an increasingly risk-averse society, it seems to be the mark of a good parent to keep children under constant scrutiny at all times. As 'responsible' parents have become averse to allowing their children to engage in public space, it has followed that the general public has then become less tolerant of children being in public space due to their presence being construed as uncommon. Children are not allowed to play games in certain areas (as evidenced by signs showing "no ball games here") and children are asked to move on if they are found to be 'loitering'. It seems that adult citizens have civilised themselves out of a sense of shared humanity (Palmer, 2007b). These negative discourses appear to have accounted for contemporary children being more home-bound with the lure of computer games (McNamee, 1998), so children have been increasingly confined to spaces where they are deemed acceptable by adults, and hence spatially and visibly removed from contemporary society. The implication to the journey to school is that they are increasingly being driven to school, as the car is an extension of the private space in which to encapsulate and protect children. In contrast, other parents argued that a less protectionist strategy allowed their children greater spatial ranges due to these parents regarding their children as competent. Importantly children's spatial ranges appear to expand or contract either because a child failed to live up to the level of responsibility as Solberg (1990, 120) points out, 'conceptually, therefore children may 'grow' and 'shrink' in age as negotiations take place', therefore, concluding that children do have

the ability to bargain with parents about their spatial ranges, as discussed in the previous section.

There is a rich body of geographic research which shows how place and space intersect with the construction, practice and politics of gender (Staeheli and Martin, 2000; McMillan *et al*, 2006). Understanding the daily life experiences of young girls, for example, is especially significant given fears for girl's safety and how this fear (be it by parents or promulgated in the media) imposes a greater spatial restriction in public space which leads to a loss of environmental experience which has an effect on their life choices (Katz and Monk, 1993). Such a view considers the street as a principle venue for boys but not for girls as they retreat to private spaces such as shopping centres (Pearce, 1996) to play out their femininities. Early research showed how girl's use of public space is more restricted than that of boys (Hart, 1979). Research also suggests that parents are more lax when enforcing boy's spatial ranges as 'boys will be boys'. Girls were described as sensible and logical and consequently more able to negotiate public space. These gendered representations of competence appear to be borne out of research suggesting that boys are less sophisticated problem solvers than girls (Stanton Rogers, 2003).

The increasing invisibility of children within public space (Hillman, 2006) is centred on the notion that children are simply not safe when they are in it, which has led to an increased level of accompanied, dependent mobility of children through public space and has led to a progressive re-conceptualisation of the link between children and space:

'...the locality is more likely to be experienced from the car, necessarily in the company of adults, rather than alone or in the company of other children. The car then functions as a protective capsule from which the child observes the world but does not experience it directly through encounters with it' (Sibley, 1995, 136).

In terms of the latter perception, their non-conforming usage of public space coupled with their visibility is often regarded as threatening by other public space users, conceptualising them as nuisances and criminals, whilst the former perception regards children as innocent and naïve and in need of constant protection (Cahill, 1990). Children's fears are equally well recognised (Pain, 2006), including their fear of being within public place and encountering 'dangerous others'.

Whether or not public presence of children and young people is encouraged or discouraged is strongly influenced by the way in which public space is designed, managed and regulated as 'the publicness of public space is conditional and contingent' (Holland *et al*, 2007, 45).

Their presence is unwelcome and a growing volume of literature points to the fact that they are provided only with token spaces, often inappropriate to their needs, wants or aspirations (Travlou *et al*, 2008; Ross, 2005) and often purposely designed out of public spaces. This is at least in part because the visions of environmental designers and architects commonly reflect the dominant perceptions in society, as well as adult values and usages (Sibley, 1995). Lees' (1999) research identified adults' deliberate attempts in constructing landscapes unattractive in the city, in order to discourage the presence of children, for example. Certain strategies, for example, ASBOs and child curfew zones developed under the 2003 Anti-Social Behaviour Act, are used to promote heightened surveillance and control, and semi-private usage of public space is increasingly commonplace, often targeted towards the control of children and youth in public space. Increasingly, common acts of regulation; policing, containment and disciplining of children in public space are becoming the norm as children have restricted access to public space. In June 2005, a report by the Council of Europe's Human Rights Commissioner Alvaro Gils Robles criticised the Labour government's 'ASBO-mania', stating that an ASBO was regarded as a miracle cure for urban nuisance by children or young people, as half of the antisocial behaviour orders were being served on juveniles (Robles, 2005). Ruth Lister (2005), a former director of the Child Poverty Action Group, noted that authoritarian policies, such as ASBOs and curfews, circumscribe children's rights. Indeed, there has been a case in which a 15 year old boy successfully challenged the legality of Richmond council's child curfew zone stating that it breached his freedoms under the European Convention on Human Rights (The Independent, 2010, 42). This has profound implications to a blanket approach which implies that all children or young people are suspected of creating a public nuisance and need to be removed from certain public spaces after a specific time.

However, whilst this example illustrates children's agency at a broad level, it is in their everyday lives that children's levels of agency is visible through their own management of their mobility patterns, within the structures of control, as Valentine (1997) states:

'Paradoxically, children also perceive their parents to be incompetent in many situations and manage their 'naive' or 'overemotional' parents in order to extend their personal geographies, often 'protecting' their parents from information which they think they would not be able to cope with or handle' (1997, 83).

Such a paradox however illustrates how levels of children's competence are not stable, but rather shifting and fluid over time and space. The adult-child binary is therefore problematic in terms of assuming levels of understanding, knowledge, maturity and self-awareness:

'A reinvigorated geography that takes children seriously would be better positioned to challenge social discourses concerning public space which continue to marginalise and exclude young people' (Valentine, 1997, 83).

Research has focused on changing levels of children's independent play and the decrease in independent roaming of children to provide space for this play in their immediate neighbourhoods (Cunningham, 1996; Valentine, 1996, Karsten and van Vliet, 2006). Children's loss of free play and a subsequent loss of their related experiences have been well noted in these studies. Childhood licences (the licence to walk home alone with friends) and affordances (physical, social, cultural and emotional experiences and opportunities) have received much research attention (Transter and Pawson, 2001; Kytta, 2004). Increasing recognition is also being given to children's mobility as it relates to their other leisure activities. In a Swedish survey of 357 parents, it was reported that 88% of children participated in organised leisure activities, on average one to three times a week where 50% of the journeys were made by car, 25% by walking and 3% by public transport (Johansson, 2006). The European Commission study, 'Kids on the Move' (2002) reports a similar finding. Therefore not only are children experiencing greater car dependent journeys, these patterns of mobility are reflected across many of their other their life experiences. Karsten and van Vliet (2006) reflect the pattern with children's lives revolving around an extended urban territory as they have access to parts of the city and beyond to attend school, sports, social, educational and cultural activities. For many families, the local environment is no longer the primary focus of their daily activities as children and other family members commute to school, work and for leisure.

A critical theme that has emerged from literature is concerned with the lowering levels of community involvement (Furedi, 2002), which highlights the lack of social cohesion within a community, and the impact of this on independent child mobility. Increasing levels of car ownership facilitate social and physical dispersal, which leads to what Furedi (2002) notes as increased anonymity of individual households, a decline in awareness or integration with neighbours and a less child-friendly community environment. This breakdown of adult solidarity (where adults assume a degree of public care and responsibility for the welfare of children regardless of whether they are related biologically) has significant implications. Research suggests that if the socialisation of children relies upon a network of adults within the community to collaborate (Furedi, 2002), then a disintegration within community (fuelled by suspicion and parental paranoia of 'stranger danger') breeds a climate of mistrust and individualisation. This holds credibility with regards to household decision making

regarding children's experiences of their journey to school. If a parent does not think that their child would be 'looked after' if an incident occurs during a school journey, a vicious pattern of mistrust and ignorance develops, and children are increasingly accompanied to school by parents in the 'safety' of the family car.

Control in the home space

How the home is conceived as a social site has significance in understanding children's experiences. Far from it universally being a haven, the home is a regulated space for children and one which can also be the site for sexual and physical child abuse (Jenks, 1996) and hence a site of violence, fear and control (Pain, 1994). The domestic space within the house may be controlled, for example, with the child not being allowed in certain rooms or on specific pieces of furniture. Children's views on their home as a place for socialising can alter depending upon household structure, parenting styles, rules and physical space, as highlighted in the previous section. Household behaviours, attitudes, norms and values shape a child's attitudes and resultant behaviours. How these behaviours and attitudes are adopted over time, depends on a child's independent level of agency and the ability to demonstrate this within the family structure and the decision-making patterns within it.

Solberg (1997), illustrating a cultural variation on the nature of childhood, looked at the use of time and work in a group of Norwegian families and found that variations between levels of responsibility, degrees of autonomy and the perceived maturity and competence of children were negotiated between adults and children in the household. She asserts that time spent alone without adult supervision was constituted as an opportunity – countering the conventional 'latch-key children' notion – and conceptualised the home as a space of freedom and personal development. This has significance regarding school travel, as depending upon the ability for children to add to negotiations and hence decide on their journey, it may be that children have very little say in their everyday mobility.

The past thirty years has seen a radical restructuring in the shape of family life, as the traditional concept of the 'family' has significantly changed. The household has become the research focus of a wide range of socio-economic and cultural processes, including the changing of traditional patterns of marriage, cohabitation and divorce, increasing complexity around the transitions through the life course and changing dynamics of consumption practices and mobility patterns (Buzar *et al*, 2005). For example, it is estimated that almost one in four children (24%) now lives with one parent compared with 14% in 1986 (Mental Health Foundation, 2008) and this has significant effects on their everyday mobility patterns,

attitudes and behaviours. Ethnicity is an important variable since children from a minority ethnic background in the UK are still more likely to grow up in a household where two or three generations live together (James and James, 2008, 57).

One of the most significant social transformations over the last fifty years to impact the household has been the growth in women's employment:

'A combination of increased job insecurity and exposure to economic risk motivates the majority of couples to believe that both partners have to work if living standards are to be maintained' (Somerville, 2002, 6).

The rising number of dual-earning households, multi-job households and single-parent households has subsequently increased pressure for workers to be geographically mobile. Much geographical work on the home as a '*locus of power relations*' (Sibley, 1995, 92) falls within feminist geography and questions gender differences within the household. The dynamics of gender come into play when it comes to choices made within the household with regards to work patterns, which have an impact on the choices made around everyday mobility (McDonald, 2008). Women are popularly observed to experience 'role strain' carrying a 'dual burden' (Jarvis, 2005) of paid employment and unpaid domestic duty. Everyday activities are culturally constructed by what society expects women and men to be and do. There is some evidence in household narratives using time-use diaries to suggest that men in dual-income couples are more willing than in the past to share with tasks like childcare and that differences which once existed between working class and middle class are diminishing (Sullivan, 2000). Literature suggests that change is slow however, and that women have made greater progress towards equal breadwinning than men have increased their share in caring, cooking, cleaning and organising the household.

The family provides the site and the space in which children are born and brought up in and for many years the child has been researched as *part* of the family and not as an individual in its own right. A high level of child dependency within the family also reflects reluctance on behalf of the State to interfere with the private space of the home. The family provides the category in which a child is subsumed. Underpinning this dependency paradigm is that children are inherently incomplete and incompetent and continuing to locate the child in such a way may deny the child agency and assumes dependency and incompetence in decision-making. These views of the family have profound implications for the social construction of childhood and the way in which children experience their everyday lives. Research into children's own views of family behaviours and practices would reveal not only

generational power imbalances (Butler *et al*, 2005, Punch, 2001) that are integral to household practices and behaviours but also children's perceptions about their own contributions to family life and their experiences of parenting.

Control in the school space

The school space is conceptualised as that space in which negotiations take place within the school site and the physical aspects of the school itself. The school is an important space, not only due to the fact that children share physical and social space, but due to the fact that the policy framework focused towards encouraging more sustainable school journeys is largely channelled through this site (see Chapter 3). Interestingly, there is not a wide variety of literature available which highlights the importance of the school space with regards to children's mobility patterns. This research aims to provide some level of critical debate in this regard. The core themes discussed here are increasing standardisation of schooling, the notion of conformity, identity formation within the school site and the design and management of the school.

As a space for children, Maden (1999) argues that for many children increasing levels of standardisation increases demands on them and some find it difficult to fit in with a system demanding conformity and rigidity (1999, 83). This is especially true if the kinds of experiences they have outside of school differ markedly to those they have within it. Connolly (2004) shows how some children experience school differently because of the ways in which it takes place. Through ethnographic research, he shows that working class boys in Northern Ireland are unable to fit in with the school due to a mismatch between the levels of authority experienced at home with those at school. Secondly, drawing from their experiences with other adults or their parents, many of whom were unemployed, the boys did not see any advantage to education; and thirdly, there was a mismatch between the school's desire for boys to be diligent, passive and hardworking' (2004, 217) and the dominant types of masculinity they held which revolved around strength and physical prowess. Connolly asserts that there is more of a match between middle class values and ethos and the school system.

It is also argued that schooling is not just about the formal educating of children, but encompasses the notion of children's conformity through the authority invested in adult teachers and management teams. The school is therefore regarded as an authoritarian hierarchical experience. Children's experience of school depends on the ethos of the school. In research carried out in Northern England, Christensen and James (2001) showed that

many 11 year olds experience school as a treadmill and can be boring. They suggest children lack control over their day as lessons are organised by the teachers, and if they are punished they are deprived of play time – the only time they are able to exercise a level of control within the school space (Blatchford, 1998). Thus whilst children appreciate the value of education, the experience of getting an education may be less than enjoyable. Blatchford (1998) shows that breaktime is a key aspect of the school experience during which friendships flourish and a time when, to a certain extent, conformity is not as rigidly imposed by teaching staff. This is especially true if children leave the site for their lunch hour.

How children and young people are expected to behave in school space has a profound impact upon how they view their positionality within public space and the household. In concurring with Fielding, the dynamics of children's geographies can be utilised to improve pedagogic practice (Fielding, 2000) in order to realise schools impact upon constructing childhood. A connection between space, schooling and identity development is important for policy and decision makers and woven into policy affecting children's mobilities. Children are firmly established within a school system, and teacher expectation and general cultural ethos of the school shapes individual thinking and behaviours. The Learning through Landscapes scheme is a school grounds charity, and is built on the notion that improving the physical school grounds plays a vital role in children's learning and development. A 2003 survey found that of 700 schools that had improved their outdoor spaces, over 70% had seen an improvement in pupil behaviour, 84% had seen better social interaction between children and 66% regarded increased parental and community involvement as a direct result of better school grounds (Learning through Landscapes, 2010).

Schools are institutional spaces which provide an ordered, linear passage from child to adult status, regulated within a rigidly timetabled curriculum that is temporally, culturally, socially and politically constructed. Ansell's (1999) work in Southern African schools illustrates how schools are sites of gender identity reproduction, as well as sites of control. Working within a disciplined system of control, children's behaviour is moulded, with the end result being a successful passing of examinations to launch the child into adult status. As Palmer states:

'...attempts to speed up cognitive and emotional development almost always ends up in tears. Perhaps many years down the line. Antisocial behaviour and mental health problems in the teenage years (such as binge drinking, drug abuse, depression and anorexia) usually have roots in childhood stress. It is no coincidence that Britain now has the worst problems among teenagers than any other country in Europe' (Palmer, 2007b, 7).

The school cannot be looked at in isolation however. As Pollard and Filer (1996) assert in their discussions of spatial and temporal contexts of British schools, there is a conceptual relationship between the school and home. They note that the National Curriculum fails to acknowledge the changing of other spatial contexts of children's learning. The focus of learning may then ignore children's own identities which are shaped by their own unique experiences. Equally it fails to recognise that the spatial structures of school are not beneficial to all children. As Aitken notes:

'A major purpose of school control is to socialize children with regard to their roles in life and their places in society. It serves the larger stratified society by inculcating compliant citizens and productive workers who will be prepared to assume roles considered appropriate to the pretension of their race, class and gender identities' (Aitken, 1994).

Focused on playgrounds, Gagen (1998) for example, posits that as site of social transformation, they are significant social and cultural spaces. Play in this setting is not only about playing, it incorporates identity setting, hierarchy-defining and gender-constructing relationships (Malone and Tranter, 2003). It is equally argued that they are also spaces of social control (Gill, 2007) with some children and adults exerting more power and control than others.

The design, organisation and management of schooling as well as the structure of the teaching and learning is constructed by the moral codes accepted by senior management teams (head teachers and senior staff along with governing bodies), the local education authorities, Ofsted and central government. Clear messages are sent to the children as to what constitutes acceptable levels of children's participation within school space as well as what is expected of them in terms of acceptable behaviour. The Education and Inspections Act 2006 (2006a) gives schools the additional power to exercise discipline on children during their journey to and from school if it is deemed that it is inappropriate. Children are therefore set within a series of negotiated expectations as to how they should act during school, as well as during the times on the fringe of the school day. Alderson (2008) regards childhood as controlled and confined into childcare and educational institutions. She asserts that they are surveyed, regulated and tested at unprecedented levels. Certainly the children in the UK are the most tested in Europe, and with the government's 'wraparound' services providing breakfast clubs and after-school clubs, some children are in school for longer than the adult limit set down by the EU working-time directive. The obsession with measurable outcomes reinforces a child-rearing culture of rigid control. Whilst some commend the government's extended schools agenda which provides care for children at the school site

from 8am to 6pm, arguing that this provides recreational care and opportunities for poorer children, others may ask if this is an advance (Brooks, 2006).

2.6 Conclusion

There has been exponential growth in the levels of conceptual and methodological engagement in research concerning children from a geographical perspective over the last ten years in particular examining both how children's lives are structured from without and experienced from within (Philo, 1992). The theoretical importance of space and place recognises the contributions of geographers and the production of the journal *Children's Geographies* in 2003 shows how pivotal research about, and with, children has evolved. Research illustrates that children possess agency and have unique and worthy geographies requiring attention, which are widely relevant to connect with and contribute to the broader discipline (Holloway, 2000). It is equally acknowledged that childhood is a social structure and therefore the practices and behaviours of children are structurally determined at both a social and spatial level. Children's everyday experiences are framed within social and spatial contexts. Departing from the notion of childhood as a linear development process, this thesis draws on literature which demonstrates the social and spatial construction of childhood identities, experiences and practices. Understanding how children engage in or are regulated by physical and social spaces is therefore essential when researching their journeys to school. What children experience, whilst contingent on social structures, culture and societal values (and hence subject to immense variation), merits acknowledgment and investigation in its own right. It is suggested that we should think of age, gender, ethnicity and class not as essential attributes of children but as constructed through the interplay between the social structures and children's levels of independent agency. This leads to an approach inspired by structuration theory that can be used to understand childhoods which situated the tension between agency and structure within the construction of childhood debates. In order to develop an appropriate framework in which to situate children's mobilities, there needs to be an explicit engagement with social spatial relations through which structure and agency are constituted. For the purpose of this thesis, and core to the research agenda, the childhood spaces of public space, the home and the school are all key socio-spatial localities within which to frame childhood, as each represents a space of engagement and/or a space of control which may or may not structure children's experiences, depending on differing levels of agency of the children themselves. As childhood is so intrinsically linked to the family and the household, the institution of school and social settings within public space, their journeys to school are therefore located and

structured within these spaces. Many writers suggest that in order to facilitate the integration of children into public space, the environment needs to be investigated from the point of view of the children themselves (CABE, 2004; Cahill, 2000; Chawla, 2002; Clarke and Uzzell, 2006), however only focusing upon how children interact in and with public space would be to ignore the other key sites of childhood, namely the school and the home. What their journeys to school mean to them and how they are framed within these three sites are important questions which this research seeks to address. Involving children in planning and decision making within research requires key stakeholders to acknowledge children's problem-solving capabilities and competencies and listening to matters that affect them in order to provide practical, workable solutions within a sustainable urban environment. It is now generally acknowledged that children are autonomous in their own right, able to make informed decisions that affect their everyday lives. Global and national policy, as well as academic research, actively advocate for children to be involved, consulted and given the opportunity to be involved in their everyday decision making, as they are capable, willing and vital in the debate (CABE, 2004; DCSF, 2007; DfES, 2004b; Lolichen, 2007). A significant principle informing this research's participatory methodology is that children are actors in their own lives and possess agency. Their views of their own mobility experiences are valid in their own right and illustrate the significant links and contributions that this thesis has with wider theoretical debates regarding childhood experiences within the social sciences. Whilst this chapter has particularly focused upon the socio-spatial structures which produce, construct and define childhood, the following chapter looks more closely at the political mechanisms and processes, such as the framing of social policy and subsequent legislation, through which the representations of childhood are given practical expression in everyday lived experiences, in specific relation to the journey to school.

Chapter 3

A child's journey to school

3.1 Introduction

Whilst Chapter 2 focused on the wider theoretical discussions in relation to the changing nature of childhood, this chapter focuses more specifically upon the journey to school as a childhood mobility. Children's journeys to school have become a particular research focus over the past twenty years (Hillman *et al*, 1990; Tranter and Pawson, 2001; Pooley and Turnbull, 2005; Pooley *et al*, 2005a; Kerr *et al*, 2007, McMillan *et al*, 2006; Mackett *et al*, 2007, McDonald, 2007). As an integral part of the everyday household routine, the changing nature and structure of the journey to school has major significance, for the family, the child, the state and the urban environment. The structure of today's children's journeys to school mirrors economic, social and cultural changes that have taken place within wider western society over the past thirty years (Pooley and Turnbull, 2000).

Section 3.2 discusses research which has been conducted specifically on the journey to school and it is clear that this focus of research has gained momentum in the last ten years. Section 3.2.1 specifically charts the decline of children's independent travel over the last thirty years and looks at the reasons why whilst Section 3.2.2 highlights the benefits of encouraging children to walk or cycle to school independently. Research suggests that when the journey to school is undertaken by car, increased traffic is generated, urban congestion is amplified and children's health, social independence and ability to safely interact with public space are impacted (Collins and Kearns, 2001; Kearns *et al*, 2003) and therefore the benefits to adopting more sustainable travel behaviours are promoted through policies and strategies. More recent research however has begun to offer a more detailed understanding of the journey to school from the viewpoint of the children themselves (McGuinness, 2006, 2007; McDonald, 2008a) which mirrors both society's interest in the concept of childhood as well as recognising that for change to take place, children's experiences of their journeys need to be understood and valued.

In light of the theoretical analysis in Chapter 2, Section 3.3 provides an analysis of social and political policies and practices which structurally determine the journey to school experiences. In this way the agency-structure debate is situated within the institutional legal framework of local and national government policy to highlight what shapes and reshapes this everyday mobility over time. The journey to school has come to be a central issue

within policy and it is indirectly linked with a number of related key, high profile public and political agendas – transport, sustainability, health, education and community development and social justice. Within each of these policy areas, the journey to school is structured as a ‘problem’ given the underlying fact that an increasing number of children are being driven to school, and appropriate strategies and schemes have been proposed to resolve the resultant issues linked to car dependant journeys.

Section 3.4 focuses specifically on the policy on the journey to school and discusses whether the current framework of strategies is working. The final section looks at four barriers that may prevent people adopting more sustainable journeys to school - individual choice, the difficulty in providing a definition of ‘sustainability’, levels of stakeholder involvement and responsibility and the difficulty in linking policy to actual practice.

3.2 Research on the journey to school

Academic and policy research into the journey to school is twofold. Firstly, it charts the decline of children’s independent travel over time and provides the reasons why. Secondly, research is interested in the benefits of a more active lifestyle for children due to the link of independent mobility with physical, social and cultural health as well as behaviours and attitudes which are mindful of environmental implications of increasing car usage. Each of these areas of research will be discussed in this section.

3.2.1 The decline of children’s independent travel over time

Increasing attention is being paid to school journeys within research and policy as an indicator of children’s independent mobility. Results of a recent survey conducted by the Department for Transport (DfT, 2010) are illustrated in Figure 1. As Figure 1 shows, in 2008, 48% of 5 to 10-year-olds walked to school, which is 5% lower than those walking to school in 1995–1997 (53%). The proportion of those aged 11 to 16 walking to school in 2008 (40%) was similar to those walking to school in 1995–1997 (42%).

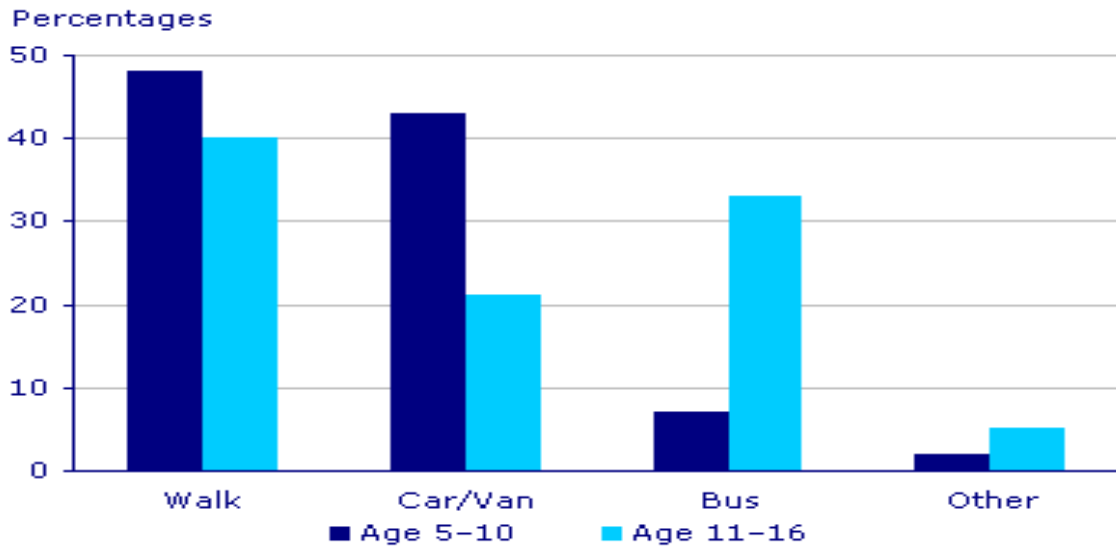


Figure 1: Journeys to school 2008 (DfT, 2010)

In 1995–97, 38% of trips by 5 to 10-year-olds were by car, as illustrated in Figure 2. This rose by 5% to 43% in 2008. Among those aged 11 to 16, 21% travelled to school by car in 2008, a similar proportion as in 1995–97 (20%).

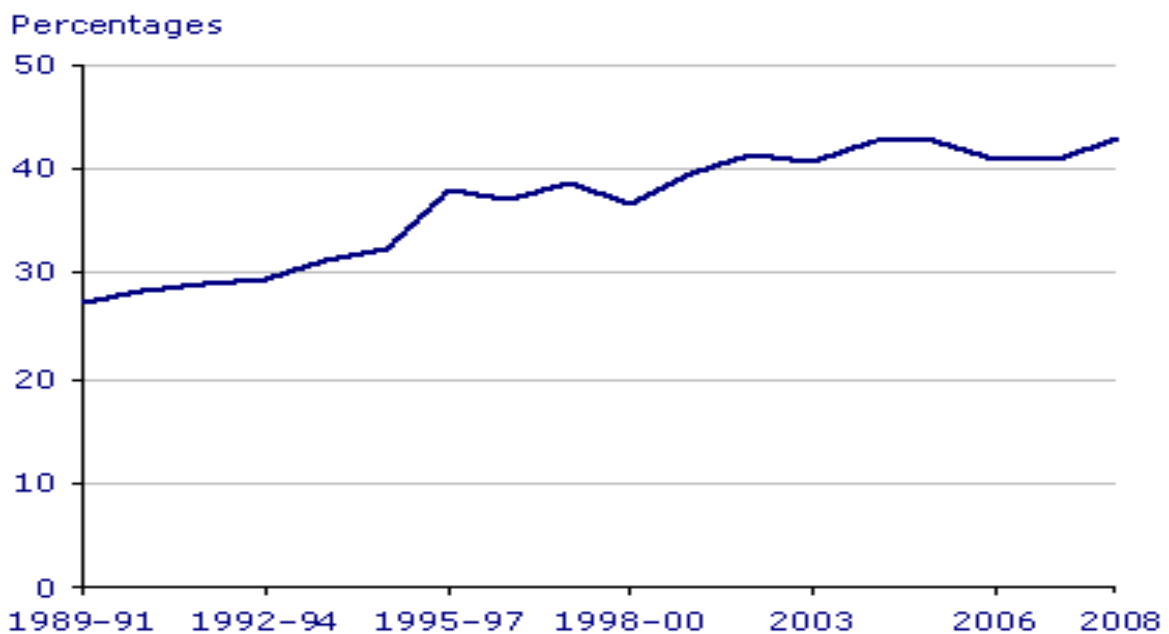


Figure 2: Trips to and from school by car: by children aged 5 to 10, Great Britain (DfT, 2010)

Research by the Department for Transport (2010) shows that secondary school children are far more likely than primary school children to go by bus or rail to school. Private and local bus travel accounted for 7% of journeys to and from school by those aged 5 to 10 in 2008 and 33% of trips by those aged 11 to 16. Only 2% of primary school children cycled to school in 2008, the same proportion as secondary school children. Primary school children travelled to school alone (unaccompanied by an adult) for 6% of trips to school in 2008, compared with 9 % in 1995–97. Among secondary school children, this figure also decreased from 41% in 1995–97 to 36% in 2008. The average length of a journey to school increased from 1.3 to 1.6 miles among younger children between 1995–97 and 2008. It increased from 2.9 to 3.4 miles among 11 to 16-year-olds. Since trips to school take place at around the same time each day, they have a major impact on levels of congestion in some local areas. At the peak travel to school time of 8.45 am on weekdays during term time, two in ten (20%) car trips by residents of urban areas were generated by the 'school run' in 2008. Over eight in ten (86 per cent) children aged 7 to 10 were usually accompanied to school by an adult in 2008, compared to 78 per cent in 2002.

The focus of academic research on the journey to school has been largely on charting the reasons why there has been a decline of children's independent travel to school. Hillman *et al's* (1990) classic study centred upon the declining number of children walking to school and discussed the decline of usage on public buses, play grounds and crossing roads. The research showed that children had less travel freedom in 1990 than in 1971. More recent research also found a decline but has shown that context moderates the effects. O'Brien *et al* (2000) concluded that children's freedom was higher in a low-density new town than London. Similarly, Kytta (1997) showed that Finnish children in rural areas have more travel freedom than peers in a city or a small town. Research also suggests that the built environment appears to exert a small but significant effect on walking to school. Schlossberg *et al* (2006) found that urban form – as measured by higher intersectional densities and fewer dead-ends – was associated with walking to school. McMillan (2007) found a modest relationship between urban form and walking by elementary students in California. Staunton *et al* (2003) have shown that changes in the built environment such as streets and road crossing improvements can encourage children to walk to school. Similarly, an analysis of children aged between 5 and 18 in the Atlanta region in the USA found that the effect of urban form factors such as intersection density, residential density, and mixed land uses on walking was moderated by household vehicle access and income (Kerr *et al*, 2007). Interestingly, in this study, it was found that those families with a higher income and more

access to a car exhibited stronger associations between walking and urban form. Empirical evidence from research conducted in Taipei proposed that three strategies be used for reshaping the built environment to encourage walking and cycling to school – compact structure, pedestrian friendly design and frequent bus services (Lin and Chang, 2010).

Pooley *et al*'s long term research shows how mobility has changed over time in relation to changing family life and competing demands within daily life (2005, 2006). He identified the causes of increased car journeys to such factors such as the dispersal of the family unit as increased rates of divorce and family separation necessitates increased travel between two homes. The most obvious example is the increasing separation between home and work. Access to work opportunities can be dependent on having access to a car (Pooley and Turnbull, 2005) resulting in long commutes on a daily basis. Further factors exacerbate mobility differentials such as the closure of local services and their replacement of larger agglomerated centres such as large shopping centres.

In terms of the journey to school, arguably, the changes that have occurred in recent decades in employment, gender relations and urban structure are mutually co-constructive (Jarvis, 2005). As mentioned in Chapter 2, the increasing trend for dual-income households tends to increase individual mobility. The composition of the household, differing transport needs and little time to exercise choice in travel implies a decreasing sense of agency with regard to tackling the environmental and social consequences of travel patterns. Research by McDonald (2008c) shows that the household interactions, particularly the coordination between parents' work and children's' school schedules affects the decisions to walk and bike to school. She asserts that understanding such constraints is critical in creating effective interventions aimed at increasing walking to school. She also finds evidence that the working status of the mother, not the father, is associated with walking and biking to school. Greater maternal workforce participation also leads to more car journeys as the school journey forms part of the everyday household mobility routine. Time compression (where more activities are fitted into each day) leads to a process known as 'trip chaining' where taking children or collecting them is linked with journeys to other locations (Johansson, 2006; McMillan, 2007). Similarly, travel models that incorporate household interactions have shown that the presence of children affects adult activity and travel scheduling (Gliebe and Koppelman, 2005) however whilst this research is significant, it is largely adult focused. Alternatively, research conducted by Vovsha and Petersen (2005) found that 40% of children are escorted on the way to school and 35% on the way home

and household females were more likely to escort the children. They concluded that even having a school within walking vicinity did not reduce the demand for escorting children to school, although it seemed to play a part in the afternoon for the journey home. This analysis however only considered trips made by the car. In a sample of San Francisco Bay Area households, Yarlagadda and Srinivasan (2007) found that mothers travelling to work were less likely to walk to school with their children and more likely to drive them on their way to work. The research also suggests that fathers had less influence. McDonald's research (2008c) reflects findings from other studies which show that mothers have primary responsibility for children's travel (Rosenbloom and Burns, 1993) and that parental convenience is an important criterion for mode choice (Bradshaw, 1995; McMillan, 2007).

Household factors such as levels of car ownership affect mode choice (Bradshaw and Atkins, 1996) and research shows that car ownership is increasing in the UK (DfT, 2010). Increased household income allows an increase in car ownership thus research suggests that walking trips are highest amongst low income families (Pucher and Renee, 2003, cited in McMillan, 2007). Research suggests that walking rates seem to be affected by individual factors as well, particularly age and gender. Girls are less likely to walk than boys with the differences being more prominent in younger children (Evenson *et al*, 2003; McMillan *et al*, 2006; O'Brien *et al*, 2000) and within suburban areas (Vliet, 1983).

Linked with the discussions in Section 2.5.2, the decrease in children's independent travel is also linked with parental fears and concerns about localised traffic dangers and the risk of abduction or harassment (Beuret and Camara, 1998; Martin and Carlson, 2005; Tranter, 2006). Safety fears have resulted in parents withdrawing children from what is perceived to be a threatening and dangerous environment (Freeman, 2006; Karsten and van Vliet, 2006). Research suggests that parents of younger children (5-11 years) may be more concerned with these issues. For example, 40% of the parents of a primary school-aged children reported that their children faced traffic obstacles; closer to 30% of parents of older children listed this as a concern (Dellinger, 2002). Geographers have noted that safety concerns have led parents to limit the amount of time spend playing outdoors and these restrictions seem more severe for girls than boys (Valentine, 1997).

Research has found that in many countries, pedestrian injuries are a leading cause of death amongst children (Roberts *et al*, 1992, cited in Kingham and Ussher, 2007). The higher congestion levels now associated with school locations are exacerbated by what Tranter (2006) calls a 'social trap'. As more cars congregate around the school, the environment

becomes more dangerous for children, which in turn encourages more parents to choose to chauffeur their children thus further enhancing the danger and congestion. Lack of active independent, physical access to the environment has been identified as an inhibitor of children's developing mental mapping activities and their ability to negotiate risks within their environment (Halseth and Dodderidge, 2000).

In terms of children's well being, a number of studies suggest that missing out on what Mackett *et al* (2005, 15) terms the 'therapeutic value of everyday travel'. The research states that children's spatial behaviour is affected when they are with an adult. They tend to walk faster, more energetically and straighter and 'without an adult, they tend to potter about in a much more exploratory way' (2005, 15). As research by Freeman and Quigg (2008) illustrates, it is harder for children to determine the journey, its timing the routes used, places accessed and its overall speed and length. The adult has control even when the primary purpose of the journey is for the child. Their study shows that children's conceptions of their environment are car dominated given the dominance of roads in children's maps. It also shows that children lack the spatial understanding of where certain features are in relation to their house for example.

Focusing more on the home, research into the *geographies of mothering* relate to the social construction of what it is to be a good mother (Aitken, 2000) and how this links in with how the journey to school is made. Interesting research conducted by Sanger showed how the car has become a cultural and social class symbol within western society as she states that '*driving provide(s) evidence of good parenting, and mileage the measure of maternal contribution to familial welfare*' (1995, 719).

Similarly, research conducted by Robyn Dowling (2000) of women in Sydney, Australia, found that car use was regarded as a factor of 'good mothering' – a cultural practice which involved managing the complex multi-purpose car journeys, linking the drive to work with taking the children to school, to the daily routines of providing as many extra-curricular opportunities for them as possible.

In discussions about the journey to school, a question needs to be asked on negotiations that take place with respect to the moral reasoning of the household on the issues of sustainability. Whether this is deemed important for the household obviously depends on a number of interrelated circumstances, yet decisions of travel mode can be made due to moral obligations and inclinations (see Section 3.5). Environmental psychology has linked environmental behaviour to complex relationships between attitudes, values, norms,

intentions and individual contexts (Brandon and Lewis, 1999; Tanner, 1999). Hence, a decision to walk or cycle may be made out of a moral reasoning (possibly coupled with the material ability to choose this mode). This choice in travel behaviour depends on how families make moral decisions and how moral values are formed, and this largely depends on whether there are any perceived benefits attached to a particular modal choice.

3.2.2 Benefits of a more active lifestyle

There has been significant attention paid to methods used to readdress the decline in children walking, in particular through extolling the benefits of an independent journey to school. The focus has largely been on the contribution of walking to school to overall physical activity levels, with much interest coming from the health professions (Sallis *et al*, 1998; Hohepa *et al*, 2004; Kerr, 2006). The rising level of overweight and obese children has been given particular mention. The International Obesity Taskforce highlights that changes in children's travel habits may be contributing to the growth in obesity, and that measures to encourage more walking and cycling to school should be part of the solution (IOTF, 2002). Research has examined the role of the school journey in quantifiable levels of children's daily physical activity (Mackett *et al*, 2003). The work involved 149 children from Hertfordshire schools from years 6 (age 10/11) and 8 (age 12/13). These children were fitted with activity monitors, and monitored over a 4-day period. Key results of this research showed that children are typically over 20% less active on weekend days compared to weekdays which may partly reflect the lack of travelling to school. It also showed that a typical one-way trip to school by car (18 activity calories) gives less than half the amount of physical activity of travelling by bus (40 activity calories) or on foot (48 activity calories). Equally significant is the finding that on average, children gain 9% of their physical activity travelling to and from school. On average children use more calories travelling to or from school than they do from the government requirement of two hours of physical education per week within school. This is particularly true for older children who do not travel to school by car.

It is not only the physical health implications that are of importance as research shows that there are social impacts linked to increasing car usage. Research published by the charity Living Streets (2010) shows that parents who walk their children to school instead of driving are spending more valuable social time with their family and peers whilst being physically active. Over two thirds of parents who drive their children to school say that they don't socialise with any other children until they arrive at school. Children who are driven are also

far more likely to shun socialising en route with their parents or siblings, instead opting to participate in lone activities such as listening to their MP3 players, playing on inactive video games or reading during the journey. As a result, 44% of parents of children who are driven to school admit that they spend 5 minutes or less engaging in quality conversation with their child on the journey to and from school. The research also showed that 90% of parents who walk their children to school recognise that the journey is an important time for them to socialise with their children. Over a third of those that walk their kids to school state that the journey to school is where they find out the most about their child's life. Also, walking is more sociable for parents too - only 39% of parents who drive their children to school speak to other adults at the school gates compared to 69% of those who walk their children to school.

When children lose their independent access to their local neighbourhood they lose many opportunities that naturally occur when going to school and engaging in their local area (Holland *et al*, 2007a, 2007b). A study in Zurich found that children who play in their local neighbourhood have a wider circle of friends and their parents know more people (European Commission, 2002). Children who lead car dependent lives depend more on their parents to take them out which delays their ability to develop autonomous decision making and risk avoidance. Physical activity has been identified as a positive factor in enhancing a child's self-esteem, self-image and sense of achievement and independent mobility such as walking to school can be instrumental in this regard (European Commission, 2002).

Of course, access to car journeys is not always negative as it does enhance children's lives in providing additional opportunities (Johansson, 2006). Research shows how children recognise the value of cars and put pressure on their parents to take them places which would be otherwise inaccessible (Handy *et al*, 2005). There is also evidence however which suggests that children's travel behaviours and attitudes closely follow those of their parents as they internalise parental attitudes, therefore a car dependent child becomes a car dependent adult (Mitchell *et al*, 2007), which has consequences for prolonged unsustainable travel behaviour rooted in the household. Alternatively, parental attitudes about the environment combined with higher levels of independent mobility can serve to enhance children's environmental experiences (Johansson, 2006). Interesting research conducted by O'Brien (2006) how few parents understood the impact of car travel on children and through education and effective communication, they would be motivated to adopt more sustainable travel behaviours.

Aside from the health and social benefits of walking to school, research shows that avoiding the daily school run is an excellent money saving option. New data by Change4Life (2010) calculates that the average cost of the school run by car per primary school child is £367*, which equates to £612 million for transporting all primary school children to school per year. In the current economic climate, they advocate that this could be money saved or better spent on other fun family activities and treats.

Having considered the main findings of the past research on the journey to school, it is apparent that although contemporary society's car-culture is not the only cause for such health concerns, it may contribute to increasing the number of inactive children and adults. It is suggested that these health impacts are subject to geographical variation and are related to urban versus rural lifestyles, culture, accessibility to transport links, place of home, work and school, income, education and age and it is recognised that these relationships are neither 'straightforward nor static' (Griffiths and Fitzpatrick, 2001) which naturally requires contextual and fluid policy decisions and actions. Recent literature in the geography of health has underlined contextual processes important for health inequalities and advocated relational perspectives for understanding the importance of place, neighbourhoods, communities and social networks (Dunn and Cummins, 2007). Therefore, the political structures (most of which are developed at a national level) which shape the local policy and strategies surrounding the journey to school are significant to this thesis, which the next section discusses.

3.3 Placing the journey to school in a policy context

The journey to school has become a central public and policy debate as it is indirectly linked with many high profile political frameworks over the past fifteen years. As a childhood mobility, the journey to school is structured by the political processes which in turn shape social practices. These social practices in turn are manifest through the spatial and environmental experiences and behaviours of the journey to school. In Table 1, I have grouped the five key agendas, namely transport, sustainability, health, education and social justice to explore the myriad of policies, strategies and schemes that have evolved over time which indirectly link with the journey to school. I will then discuss each policy agenda in more detail to illustrate how the journey to school, as a policy framework, has been developed.

| | Policy | Aim | Relation to the journey to school |
|-----------------------|--|--|--|
| Transport | Planning Policy Guidance Note 13: 1994 | Introduce land use policies to reduce car dependance | Encourage public transport, cycling and pedestrian initiatives as well as new school locations |
| | Transport White Paper: 1998 | Integrate health, education and transport strategies to reduce car dependency | Introduction of school travel plans and support for Safe Routes to School Strategy; linked with STAG; national Cycling Strategy |
| | National Road Safety Strategy 2000 | Achieve road safety targets to reduce deaths and serious injuries due to road accidents. | Hard measures proposed, for example, speed limits, parking restrictions and safety zones aqround school sites |
| | The Future of Transport White Paper 2004 | Maximising benefits for travel whilst acknowledging the negative impacts for people and the environment | Understands the complexity of everyday mobility as it provides a more holistic view on school travel and promotes transport management linked to other policy areas. |
| | Walking and Cycling: An Action Plan 2004 | Promoting healthy and convenient ways to travel | Promotes children's independent mobility to school to encourage fitness and safety |
| | Smarter Choices: 2005 | Promoting interventions on travel demand, for example, marketing the benefits of public transport | Encourages sustainable options for school travel which are aimed at soft factor interventions which target the journey to school as a lifestyle choice |
| Sustainability | The Urban White Paper, 2000 | Promoting sustainable urban design and planning, public space safety and accessibility and environmental management and protection | To encourage greater use of public space through active design and therefore encourage children to use public space on their independent journey to school. |
| | Sustainable Communities Plan, 2006 | Spatial policy promoting sustainable communities which balance employment, residential and social facilities that are | A more holistic view of the journey to school as it recognises the barriers to sustainable mobility as being linked to urban design and household choice |

| | | | |
|------------------|---|--|---|
| | Sustainable Schools: 2006 | <p>accessible and managed</p> <p>All schools to operate as a model of good practice in sustainable development</p> | Encourages the link between the school and it's local community in promoting sustainable mobility |
| Health | <p>Healthy Schools Initiative: 1998</p> <p>Healthy School Standard</p> | <p>Raise awareness of individuals, teachers, families and communities of how health can be encouraged through school policies</p> <p>Reduce health inequalities, promote social inclusion and raise educational standards</p> | <p>Initiatives such as Safe and Sound Challenge which encouraged healthier journeys to school and reiterated that daily exercise gained from the journey to school is essential for children.</p> <p>Positive link with the journey to school in encouraging healthy exercise for everyone.</p> |
| Education | <p>Every Child Matters</p> <p>Schools White Paper: 2005</p> <p>Building Schools for the Future and the Private Funding Initiative</p> <p>Children and Young People's Plan 2007</p> <p>Education and Inspections Act: 2007</p> | <p>Five key outcomes for children: Be healthy; Stay safe; Enjoy and Achieve; Make a positive Contribution; Achieve economic wellbeing</p> <p>To improve home school transport and travel arrangements</p> <p>Promoting sustainable design of new schools considering the local environment and transportation network</p> <p>Empower children and provide life skills for active and contributing adulthood</p> <p>Local Authorities have the duty to promote sustainable transport choice</p> | <p>School travel plans contribute to the 5 outcomes and promote integration of health, education and social care through the school site</p> <p>Strategies include providing free home-school transport to low income families, supporting school choice and increase safe routes to school</p> <p>New schools built were to encompass schemes to encourage sustainable journeys to school, for example, bicycle sheds, safe routes to school and other facilities in favour of walking, cycling and public transport</p> <p>Places children at the centre of school planning, encompassing independent travelling to school as a key life skill</p> <p>Strategies promoted to encourage improved accessibility to schools and empowered school management teams to have control of the journey to school in the case of unacceptable behaviour</p> |

| | | | |
|-----------------------|--|--|--|
| | Eco-Schools: 2007 | Raise environmental awareness through the school site though promoting a holistic approach linking the school to the local community | Promote sustainable journeys to school in order to be classed as a school with an Eco-School status |
| Social Justice | Putting Passengers First: | Encouraging local bus companies to provide accessible public transport | Encourage children as passengers on public transport through specific schemes such as timetable alterations and pricing strategies |
| | Extended Schools Strategy | Encourage spatial concentration of social services at the school site to increase and promote accessibility and inclusion | The school site also houses such facilities as clinics so the journey to the site is regarded as a multi-end use journey |
| | 'Working together: giving children and young people a say'; 2004 | A statutory guidance for developing a culture of participation in schools and local education authorities | To encourage participation in a variety of forms which influence school and community life. Mechanisms to be established for involving children in policy development linked to school travel through school councils and task groups. |
| | Respect Agenda: 2006 | Tackling anti-social behaviour in public space by proposing strategies aimed at the root causes | The Government will continue to address anti-social behaviour by ensuring young people are given opportunities and by challenging 'problem families' to accept support to change their behaviour. Work will continue to strengthen communities and ensure that public spaces are clean and safe, and victims and witnesses of anti-social behaviour are protected and supported. |

Table 1: National policy framework influencing the journey to school

3.3.1 Transport policy - the 'problem' of the car

At a broad scale, concern about the transport sector's contribution to global warming and climate change has become an important topic of research (Baggott *et al*, 2005; Treasury, 2006). Over the past decade transport policy has been informed by a greater emphasis on efficiency and sustainability. The need for sustainable travel policies are rooted in the

general acceptance that although contemporary society's dependency on the car is neither environmentally nor socially ideal, there is an acceptance that it provides opportunities, accessibility and choice (Grayling, 2001; Vigar, 2000).

In the early 1990s, the Department of Environment and the Department of Transport jointly published Planning Policy Guidance Note 13 (PPG13) (DETR, 2001) on transport. The primary focus of the document was the introduction of using land use policies to reduce dependence on the private motor car, whilst reducing the need to travel. Section 1.8 of PPG13 states that the requirement for local authorities to adopt policies which, 'maintain and improve choice for people to walk, cycle or catch public transport rather than drive between homes and facilities which they need to visit regularly'. Section 3.15 of the document addresses the location of new schools in that they should be located so ...'that they are accessible on foot or bicycle.' This was a landmark document integrating land use and transport, although it was only focused on new urban developments. It formed part of the 1990s package approach, in that the emphasis of local transport schemes funding diverted away from new road building towards a combination of approaches to reintroduce public transport, cycling and pedestrian initiatives allowing authorities to use a range of transport measures depending upon their individual physical, social and economic context.

The Transport White Paper (DETR, 1998b) entitled 'A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone' further states the government's intention "to take further initiatives to encourage more children to get to school other than by car". It sets out the government's reasons for highlighting the school journey as an area for action within its integrated transport strategy. It signalled the introduction of travel plans for schools and prioritises the journey to school through the provision of support for the Safe Routes to School strategy. The travel plans were suggested to be simple practical measures in order to encourage the use of alternatives to the car for the journey to school. Following on from the White Paper, a school travel advisory group was set up (STAG). As a group of experts in the field of health, education and transport, the main role of STAG is to 'raise awareness of the profile of school travel issues, to lead dissemination of best practice, to identify methods to reduce car usage for school journeys and to advise on the integration of the transport, health and education policy initiatives (DETR, 1999b). STAG reported to Ministers in 2000 with a series of recommendations about reducing travel to school by car, and subsequently monitored implementation. It also oversaw an extensive research programme. However, a rather different kind of panel with more focus on implementation and rather less on advice and

research was needed going forward and ministers decided to disband STAG and set up a smaller panel - the School Travel Expert Panel (STEP). A number of key external stakeholders are represented on the new expert panel, and it was anticipated that the new panel would have two functions - firstly, to provide a source of ad hoc advice in dealing with difficult issues and secondly, that members would attend termly meetings with officials from the Departments for Transport and for Education and Skills to review implementation and emerging results. Membership includes representatives from such bodies as the Confederation of Passenger Transport, Sustrans, Local Authority School Travel Forums, the National Governors Council and the National Association of Head Teachers. The make-up of this panel highlights the complexity within the journey to school in view of the fact that it is interrelated in many political frameworks and changes to policy affects a number of different groups.

The link between the journey to school and road safety policies highlights the broad impacts of promoting a sustainable journey. The 10-year target of the National Road Safety Strategy (DETR, 2000a) was intended to help everyone to focus on achieving a further substantial improvement in road safety. By 2010 the target to achieve was, compared with the average for 1994-98, aimed at a:

- 40% reduction in the number of people killed or seriously injured in road accidents;
- 50% reduction in the number of children killed or seriously injured;
- 10% reduction in the slight casualty rate, expressed as the number of people slightly injured per 100 million vehicle kilometres.

The policy paper concerning the road safety strategy reiterated the government's desire for schools to develop individual travel plans and highlighted the need to increase levels of personal safety for children around school sites. In particular, there has been interest in the safety benefits that can be achieved from the engineering work that often takes place as part of school travel plans, for example, speed limit restrictions, parking restrictions and safety zones.

In July 2004, the government further outlined its latest long-term strategy for transport in a White Paper entitled 'The Future of Transport' (DfT, 2004). The White Paper focuses upon factors that will shape travel and transport over the next thirty years and sets out how the Government will respond to the increasing demand for travel, maximising the benefits of

transport while minimising the negative impact on people and the environment. The policy acknowledges that whilst additional infrastructure will be necessary, simply providing ever more capacity on our roads and railways, ports and airports is not the answer in the long term. There are three main aims – to apply sustained investment over the long term, to improve transport management in order to gain more value from public spending, for example, measures such as tolling on new roads and the introduction of carpooling (High Occupancy Vehicle) lanes and thirdly, to plan ahead through working with stakeholders to establish how and when road pricing, for example, might provide the reliability and standards road users want. Transport decisions are therefore taken alongside related decisions on liveability, sustainable communities and other policy areas. This strategic aim seems to account for the complexities in school travel choice and acknowledges that everyday mobilities are not merely a rational, linear choice but are part of wider issues linked to lifestyle and household management and mobility patterns (see Section 3.2.1).

The Department for Transport (DfT, 2004) also announced a package of new measures to increase levels of cycling and walking. The measures form part of 'Walking & Cycling: an Action Plan' which aims to promote these modes as healthy and convenient ways to travel and encourages local authorities to pay particular attention to journeys to school. This builds on earlier strategies aimed at increasing the number of trips by cycle, for example, the National Cycling Strategy (DETR, 1998b). This early strategy document laid down plans to encourage cycling and guidance to local authorities was given to improve safety, fitness and independent mobility of children on their school journey.

In an effort to investigate the impact that soft factor interventions can have on travel demand, the Government published 'Smarter Choices - changing the way we travel' (DfT, 2005a). Smarter choices are techniques for influencing people's travel behaviour towards more sustainable options such as encouraging school, workplace and individualised travel planning. They also seek to improve public transport and marketing services such as travel awareness campaigns, setting up websites for car share schemes, supporting car clubs and encouraging teleworking.

3.3.2 The Rise of the Sustainability Agenda

The sustainability agenda has risen as one of the most debated political and public debates. Over the past decade there has been a general trend to make urban environments more attractive places in which to live, work and play. The rational link between urban spatial

design and the journey to school is that if urban places are more accessible and attractive, children and their parents would opt for sustainable choices of travel. The Urban White Paper (DETR, 2000b) suggests an integrated action response involving better urban design and planning, promoting new investment and enterprise, improving environmental protection, providing accessibility for community socialisation and improving safety and attractiveness of public space. In each case, the aim is to provide an environment which promotes 'good urban living' (Stead and Hoppenbrouwer, 2004) as reflected in such reports as 'Living Places: Cleaner, Safer, Greener':

'We need stronger communities and an improved quality of life. Streets where parents feel safe to let their children walk to school. Where people want to use the parks. Where graffiti, vandalism, litter and dereliction is not tolerated. Where the environment in which we live fosters rather than alienates a sense of local community and mutual respect' (ODPM, 2002).

The general message is that if the local environment was designed in such a way that children felt safe and able to access public space, more of them would choose to walk, cycle or use public transport on their journey to school. The central aims of pro-urban strategies are further reflected in the Sustainable Communities Plan which proposes that:

'people want to live and work now and in the future. They meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents, are sensitive to their environment and contribute to a high quality of life' (ODPM, 2005, 1)

The government's twin goals of sustainable development, defined in the UK Sustainable Development Strategy, are: living within environmental limits and ensuring a strong, healthy and just society. The government note that they will achieve this through a sustainable economy, good governance and using sound science responsibility (SDC, 2006), as illustrated in Figure 3.

Sustainable communities have become the objects of spatial policy. These have become guiding principles which attempt to link social, economic and environmental issues with urban development and planning. As a geographical construct, a sustainable 'place' must have a balance of employment, mixed housing and social facilities which are accessible to a range of socio-economic groups:

'The role of spatial planning...(orders) space and place so that they become more functional, cohesive and competitive' (Raco, 2007, 218).

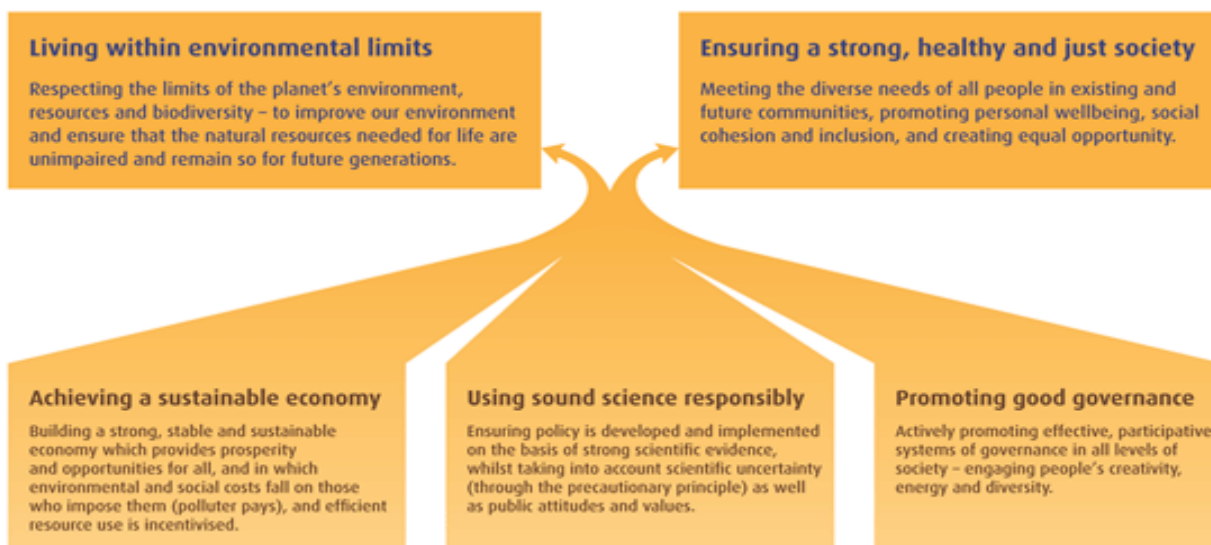


Figure 3: Five Guiding Principles of Sustainable Development (SDC, 2007)

The sustainability agenda is promulgated through school sites as well. The recently published Sustainable Schools (DfES, 2006b) report calls for all schools to operate as models of good practice in sustainable development principles which includes integrating high standards of achievement and behaviour with the goals of healthy eating, environmental awareness, community involvement and citizenship (included under the goals of the Every Child Matters policy framework).

'Our students won't just be told about sustainable development, they will see it and work within it: a living, learning place in which to explore what a sustainable lifestyle means' (Tony Blair, September 2005, as quoted in Sustainable Schools report (2006b)).

Environmental sustainability is a cross-cutting theme within the National Curriculum and is linked to four statutory subjects – Citizenship, Design and Technology, Geography and Science although links seems to be present in other subjects too, for example, Mathematics. The school site is therefore regarded as the key space through which to educate children about the importance and urgency for sustainable development and many of the policies aimed specifically at the journey to school are driven through this site, therefore specifically targeting children and their travel behaviour. Over the past decade the government's vision has been to pass greater power and responsibility towards the individual schools and the emphasis has been upon self-assessment and self-improvement. The Local Education Authorities have therefore become an information providing site which the school's

management team uses at will. In this regard, however, the vision of having all schools sites of sustainable travel by 2020 may mean that some naturally choose to opt out.

Travel plans are constructed on the school site and the local authorities do urge the committees responsible for collating and managing actions to encourage more sustainable journeys to school to be as representative as possible and contextually-driven. Children's participation in the development and management of school travel as a school focus will therefore vary according to the nature and structure of individual schools.

Although there are many factors driving change within education, it is a complex interplay of government policy, economic imperatives, social trends, the impact of technology and changing pedagogy that have led to issues regarding the message of sustainability being prioritised. The environment is used as an integrative context grounded in issues, people and places (DfES, 2006b). As illustrated in Table 2, The National Framework for Sustainable Schools introduces eight 'doorways' through which schools may choose to initiate or extend their sustainable school activity. It focuses on ways in which sustainable development can be embedded into whole-school management practices and provides practical guidance to help schools operate in a more sustainable way. Each doorway may be approached individually or as part of a whole school action plan, though undoubtedly schools will find that many of the doorways are actually interconnected. For example, an interest in food and drink may see schools start growing their own fruit and vegetables in the grounds, which ties in to composting and conservation, both of which are features of the buildings and grounds component. This, in turn, may spark an interest in other activities such as waste and recycling (relevant to consumption and waste) or collecting rain water and renewable energy watering systems (the energy and water component). While a collective, whole-school approach is recommended, either track offers opportunities for improvement across the school's curriculum and campus, and in its relationship with the local community.

| Doorways | Purpose | Government Target |
|------------------------------------|--|--|
| | | By 2020 we would like.... |
| Food and drink | An unhealthy diet contributes to obesity and poor pupil concentration. Healthy, ethically sourced food can reverse these effects while protecting the environment and supporting local producers and suppliers. | ...all schools to be models of healthy, local and sustainable food and drink produced or prepared on site (where possible), with strong commitments to the environment, social responsibility and animal welfare, and with increased opportunity to involve local suppliers. |
| Energy and water | Rising demand for energy and water is storing up problems for future generations. Energy and water conservation can tackle this problem while saving schools money | ...all schools to be models of energy efficiency and renewable energy, showcasing wind, solar and bio-fuel sources in their communities and maximising their use of rainwater and wastewater resources |
| Travel and traffic | Rising vehicle use adds to congestion, road accidents and pollution. Car-sharing and public transportation help ease these concerns, while walking and cycling also boost fitness and well-being. | ...all schools to be models of sustainable travel, where vehicles are used only when absolutely necessary and facilities for healthier, less polluting or less dangerous modes of transport are exemplary |
| Purchasing and waste | Waste and the throw-away culture that encourages it, can be addressed through sustainable consumption. Schools can reduce costs and support markets for ethical goods and services at the same time. | ..all schools to be models of resource efficiency, using low impact goods that minimise 9or eliminate) disposable packaging from local suppliers with high environmental and ethical standards, and recycling, repairing and reusing as much as possible. |
| Buildings and grounds | Good design of school buildings and grounds can translate into improved staff morale, pupil behaviour and achievement, as well as opportunities for food growing and nature conservation. | ...all schools to be regarded as living, learning places where pupils see what a sustainable lifestyle means through their involvement in the improvement of school buildings, grounds and the natural environment. |
| Inclusion and participation | Schools can promote a sense of community providing an inclusive, welcoming atmosphere that values everyone's participation and contribution and challenges prejudice and injustice in all its forms. | ..all schools to be models of social inclusion, enabling all pupils to participate fully in school life while installing a long-lasting respect for human rights, freedoms and creative expression. |
| Local well-being | With their central locations and extensive facilities, schools can act as hubs of learning and change in their local communities, contributing to the environment and quality of life while strengthening key relationships. | ..all schools to be models of good corporate citizenship within their areas, enriching their education mission with active support for the well being of the local community and environment. |
| Global dimension | Growing interdependence between countries changes the way we view the world, including our own culture. Schools can respond by developing a responsible, international outlook among young people, based on an appreciation of the impact of their personal values, choices and behaviours on global challenges. | ...all schools to be models of good global citizenship, enriching their educational mission with active support for well being of the global environment and community. |

Table 2: A National Framework for Sustainable Schools (DCSF, 2006)

| AREAS OF SCHOOL LIFE | | | | |
|-----------------------------|---|--|--|--------------|
| DOORWAYS | Curriculum (teaching provision and learning) | Campus (values and ways of working) | Community (wider information and partnership) | EXPECTATIONS |
| Food and Drink | Schools use the..... | Schools review the... | Schools use their... | By 2020.... |
| Energy and Water | Schools use the..... | Schools review the... | Schools use their... | By 2020... |
| Traffic and Travel | Schools use the..... | Schools review the... | Schools use their... | By 2020... |
| Purchasing and Waste | Schools use the..... | Schools review the... | Schools use their... | By 2020... |
| Buildings and Grounds | Schools use the..... | Schools review the... | Schools use their... | By 2020... |
| Inclusion and Participation | Schools use the..... | Schools review the... | Schools use their... | By 2020... |
| Local well-being | Schools use the..... | Schools review the... | Schools use their... | By 2020... |
| Global dimensions | Schools use the..... | Schools review the... | Schools use their... | By2020... |

| | | | |
|---|---|--|--|
| Schools use the curriculum to cultivate the knowledge, value and skills needed to address traffic and travel issues and reinforce through positive activities in the school and in the local area | Schools review the impact of their behaviour and establish policies and facilities for promoting walking, cycling, car sharing, and public transport use to lessen their environmental impact and to promote healthier lifestyles | By 2020 we would like all schools to be models of sustainable travel where vehicles are used only by necessity and facilities for healthier, less polluting or less dangerous modes of transport are exemplary | Schools use their communications, services, contracts and partnerships to promote awareness of travel decisions among their stakeholders |
|---|---|--|--|

Figure 4: Doorway 3: Traffic and Travel (DCSF, 2006)

Figure 4 above shows Doorway 3: Travel and Transport and the integrated approach of curriculum, campus and community is highlighted. The requirement behind promoting a sustainable journey to school is for an active engagement between the education curriculum, the individual school's ethos and it's local community.

The child is theoretically centred within the approach to sustainable travel. In order to secure the future of the child there is also a need for long-term joined-up thinking across a number of interrelated policy areas. The logic of this approach is that this information will prompt individuals to alter their daily behaviours, lifestyles and practices and become more 'sustainable' in their actions. Therefore in reference to the journey to school, it is argued that the provision of this information via nationwide policy and practice documents disseminated through the school site will naturally lead to a modal shift in everyday transport behaviour of the household. Freeman and Quigg (2009) suggest that due to children's daily lives becoming more car dependent, they are largely overlooked as

significant contributors to climate change (although the research does not delineate between it being their choice or whether they have no choice).

3.3.3 The Health Agenda

There has been mounting political and public concern about the detrimental physical health effects of increasing road traffic emissions in the UK. The 1998 Transport Policy White Paper (DETR, 1998b) noted that up to 24000 people were at risk of dying prematurely each year in the UK because of exposure to air pollution, much of which is due to road traffic. A report issued in 2005 by the Department for Transport highlights the fact that nearly three-quarters of the UK's transport CO₂ emissions come from road transport (DETR, 2005a). The journey to school by car is regarded as a 'problem', as discussed in Section 3.3.1, not only due to localised congestion and inherent safety issues, but also due to associated localised pollution levels around schools.

Another related health impact, the 'obesity epidemic', is a high profile media and policy discourse, and highlights the current trend that will reportedly lead to one million children being clinically obese by 2012 (DoH, 1999). Lack of exercise is one concern and the journey to school is often cited as a mobility that aids in providing children with the recommended daily exercise. The 2003 Health Survey for England is quoted in the Department for Education and Skills' report 'Travelling to School: An Action Plan':

'The amount of daily exercise taken by children has decreased in recent years, which has contributed to the growing proportion of children who are overweight and obese. Childhood obesity – now affecting 8.5 per cent of 6 year olds and 15 per cent of 15 year olds – often leads to obesity in adulthood. Adults who maintain their correct weight and are physically active have a reduced risk of chronic conditions such as Type 2 Diabetes and heart disease.' (DfES, 2003b, 4).

The Healthy Schools Initiative was launched in May 1998 as a joint initiative between the Department of Health (DoH, 1998) and the then Department for Education and Employment (now The Department for Education and Skills (DfES)) with the objective to raise awareness of children, teachers, families and local communities, to the important opportunities in schools for improving health. The scheme encourages schools to improve their ethos, curriculum, environment and home-school links. Strategies that followed from this initiative included the 'Safe and Sound' Challenge which proposed ways of encouraging healthier ways for children to travel to and from school. A Green Paper on public health entitled Our

Healthier Nation (DoH, 1998) also set out the agenda to improve the population's health and to reduce inequalities in health by addressing the wide range of factors that affect health and highlighted that transport, mobility and education all have a major role to play. The Green Paper identified four target areas including coronary heart disease and stroke, and accident prevention. It also highlighted the importance of improving the health of school children as a priority group.

The National Healthy School Standard (DoH, 1998) which is part of the government's drive to reduce health inequalities, promotes social inclusion and raise educational standards. There are positive links with school travel planning within this guidance. A 'Healthy School' is defined as a school that actively seeks to promote and improve the health and well being of the whole school community through all aspects of school life, so that pupils are enabled to maximise and enrich their aspirations, levels of attainment and personal development. The Public Health White Paper (DoH, 2004) entitled 'Choosing Health; making healthy choices easier' sets out the target for all schools to be a 'Healthy School'. A key commitment of the National Healthy School Standard is to promote and enable children and young people's participation. Raising levels of participation in schools and their communities is identified as a priority area and states that schools need to build on current good practice to improve the involvement of children and young people in order to enhance their role as decision makers at national, regional, local community and school levels.

3.3.4 Education Policy

The Government's Every Child Matters policy framework (DfES, 2004b) is aimed at the well-being of children and young people from birth to age 19. It is the Government's aim that for every child, whatever their background or their circumstances, support is required to:

- Be healthy
- Stay safe
- Enjoy and achieve
- Make a positive contribution
- Achieve economic well-being

The development of school travel plans and the promotion of sustainable travel contribute to the outcomes. The outcomes are to provide a blueprint for child-centred sustainable development and focuses upon health and safety as well as sustainable contribution to local

community and economy. Central to this policy is the integration of education, health and social care services around children's needs through the associated strategy of Extended Schools. It is envisaged that each 'extended school' will offer a core of childcare, study support, family and adult education, health and social care, parenting support, sports and arts facilities and access to information technology (DfES, 2005a). Essentially, in practical terms this means the focus is that by 2010 all children (and parents) will have access to these facilities and services at the site of their school from 8am to 6pm all year round. With increasing pressures of parent's employment and rising numbers of lone parents, schools will be increasingly taking on the role of pre-school and post-school childcare. The findings of the report *Every Child's Future Matters* (SDC, 2007), suggest that it may not be possible to deliver the aims of *Every Child Matters* without placing sustainable development, and particularly the environment, at its core. The three priority areas for action highlighted are road traffic, green space and climate change.

The Schools White Paper (DfES, 2005b) 'Higher Standards, Better Schools For All' proposes legislation to improve home to school travel and transport arrangements. Duty is placed on local authorities to support choice and flexibility of educational provision, to assess the travel and transport needs of all pupils, and promote safe and sustainable travel to school. Local authorities also have to extend entitlement to free home to school transport for low income families (for secondary aged pupils to any one of the three nearest suitable schools, where the distance travelled is between two and six miles; and for primary aged pupils aged over eight, to their nearest school where this is more than two miles from their home). Schemes to test innovative approaches to home to school transport, to support school choice and to reduce the distances pupils are expected to walk to school are encouraged and there is a duty to increase the proportion of pupils travelling by sustainable means.

The Government's vision for sustainable development also encompasses the Private Finance Initiative and Building Schools for the Future programmes (CABE, 2006), which focuses upon the building of school buildings, grounds and facilities that support sustainable behaviours among pupils, parents and local communities. Plans under this scheme are to be conversant with the aims of the School Travel Plan programme. By 2020 the aim is to have all schools *models of sustainable travel* where vehicles are used only out of absolute necessity and facilities for healthier, less polluting or less dangerous modes of transport are exemplary. Potential school visions that can be achieved include: accessible cycling facilities, integrated community cycling routes, grant-funded walking buses, and public transport

availability to children and young people and well-defined safe routes to school planning (DfES, 2003b). It is hoped that all schools are to have walking routes set out covering 1.5km radius of the school in order to discourage car use.

The overarching vision of the Children and Young People's Plan (DCSF, 2007) is that children and young people are empowered and be supported in developing their full potential and possess life skills and opportunity to play an active role in their community and society. Policies and practices proposed through school space have begun to take into consideration what evolves through the home and outdoor spaces. The Children and Young People's Plan sets out the Department for Children, School and Families' policy plans for the next ten years and aims to strengthen support for all families, take the next steps in achieving higher achieving schools, bring about change in parents' involvement in their child's learning and make sure that young people have exciting things to do outside school, and more places for children to play, both within the school and in the community. The implementation of the Children and Young People's Plan relies on a high level of inter-agency governance encompassing social care, education, health, learning and skills councils, and the police, for example.

Aligned to the overarching objectives of the Local Transport Plan and the school travel plan programme are new duties under the Education and Inspections Act which came into force in 2007 (DfES, 2006a). Under the provisions of the act, local authorities have a duty to promote the use of sustainable travel and transport for journeys to school. This general duty assesses the children's journey needs and requires an audit of the level of sustainable travel and transport infrastructure that may be used for the journey to school. It also requires a school travel strategy be aimed at improving accessibility to schools and to ensure that travel and transport needs for children and young people are better cared for (Gateshead City Council, 2008). The Act empowers Head Teachers to take action when unacceptable behaviour takes place outside the school premises on the journey to and from school. This is to enforce a level of positive behaviour in public space and on public transport services.

The Eco-Schools (DCSF, 2006) programme promotes environmental awareness in a way that links to many national curriculum subjects, including citizenship, personal, social and health education (PSHE) and education for sustainable development. It is also an award scheme that will raise the profile of your school in the wider community. The Eco-schools process is holistic. It works by involving the whole school (pupils, teachers, non-teaching staff and governors) together with members of the local community (parents, the local authority, and

the media and local businesses). It is designed to encourage teamwork and help to create a shared understanding of what it takes to run a school in a way that respects and enhances the local environment and community.

3.3.5 Social Justice and Inclusion

Critical reviews on accessibility, mobility and social justice has been historically focused upon quantifiable method, predominantly looking at origin and destination, mode choice and travel time (Halden, 2002; SEU, 2003). A key goal of more recent transport governance has been to intervene in the provision of transport infrastructure and services so that a range of social policies can be achieved given the need for accessibility, social inclusion and justice. Specific policies such as those aimed at bus travel are regarded to increase levels of accessibility and promote social justice and inclusion. But why the need for accessibility? Halden (2002) suggests that three key elements define accessibility: the first is the group of people, the second is the activity supply point and the third is the availability of transportation (of various means). People are therefore not necessarily deprived of accessibility solely as a function of a lack of mobility, as accessibility may be limited due to a number of interrelated factors, such as gender, race, financial means and lack of available services. Much of the previous research has focused upon assessing accessibility needs and the extent to which these are ignored or met in various geographic localities (Farrington, 2007), for example, the walking distance to the nearest bus stop for specific groups of people. This has been driven predominantly due to the desire to integrate land use decisions with levels of transportation investment as well as ensuring greater social inclusion. Research has also highlighted the notion of accessibility 'rights' and has illustrated the role of social capital and networks in providing both mobility and accessibility (Jarvis, 2005). This kind of research illustrates the role of the individual's personal circumstances which play a significant part in everyday mobility and accessibility levels.

The highly contested concept of social justice (Boucher and Kelly, 1998) has merit here, given its connection with transport, mobility and accessibility (Farrington, 2007; Foley, 2004;). Numerous transport studies have demonstrated the link between lack of accessibility to goods and services and social exclusion (Hine and Mitchell, 2001; SEU, 2001; 2003). There is a broad agreement in the literature that social exclusion represents a conceptual shift away from thinking that it merely explains disadvantage. It is recognised that an individual's personal characteristics, lifestyle, geographic area and dominant institutional

structures can affect their ability to participate in society. In relation to transport Church *et al* (2000) recognise seven categories of exclusion:

- Physical exclusion – where physical barriers prohibit accessibility, for example, mothers with children in prams
- Geographical exclusion – poor transport provision, augmented by fixed-route timetables not matching with work schedules
- Exclusion from facilities – due to distance between the home and services, for example, education and unavailability of any method of transport
- Economic exclusion – costs of travel are prohibitive
- Time-based exclusion – demands of time restricts access
- Fear-based exclusion – anxiety and fear influence how public space and services are accessed
- Space exclusion – space-management strategies exclude people to specific spaces

Additionally, a number of processes add to social exclusion, for example, the nature of time-space organisation in the household given the many competing demands of the members, the nature of the transport systems themselves in terms of timetables and routes, and the nature of the facilities that people are trying to access, for example location and opening hours of school sites. Transport disadvantage seems to affect those on low incomes, ethnic minorities, women, the elderly and disabled, and children (Hine and Mitchell, 2001).

Evidence also suggests that there is a high correlation between transport deprivation and factors such as low income, low levels of car ownership and public sector housing. For example, people on low incomes make fewer journeys overall, but about twice as many on foot and three times as many by bus compared to those households which fall within the two highest incomes deciles (Grayling, 2001; Hine and Mitchell, 2001). More journeys and greater lengths of the journeys are made by those households with higher incomes. The number of carless households has declined by 20 per cent over the period 1989/90 to 2004 (DfT, 2005b). Over the same period the availability of bus services remained static. Low income families are increasingly purchasing cars as a response to rises in public transport fares and poorer accessibility levels to public transport given increasing distances between work and home (Donald and Pickup, 1991).

Bus use has been falling for many years for a variety of reasons – not least deregulation (DfT, 2006) - and the car remains the dominant transport mode. One barrier to increased

bus usage is reported to be the image of the bus service as it has become an image of 'a mode of last resort' (Bus Partnership Forum, 2003) associated with young people, elderly people and people on low incomes. A recent study in Edinburgh listed concerns about safety, service provision problems, levels of crowdedness, discomfort, self-image and cost (Stradling *et al*, 2007) associated with bus travel. These factors show a concern for social issues regarding the quality of the experience. The same report note that groups of youths on buses were associated with threatening behaviour and safety concerns. Government policy to improve accessibility to public transport and tackle congestion and broadly is outlined in the *Putting Passengers First* report (Bus Partnership Forum, 2003). The proposals in this progress report are designed to enlarge the tool-kit of measures that are available to local authorities. The report states that all communities will benefit from the proposals to strengthen voluntary and statutory partnerships, that there will be an enforcement of bus punctuality, and recognises the different contributions of operators and local authorities. It also states that rural communities and other specific groups will benefit from the enhancement of availability of community transport. This is intended to be a balanced package of measures in order to provide increased opportunities and obligations.

Mass car ownership has, for some, brought with it unprecedented transformations in personal freedom and increased choice over where to live, work, spend leisure time and send children to school. Widespread car dependence dominates people's lives who now have come to require high levels of mobility in order to maintain the complex fabric of their daily lifestyles. Increasing levels of personal mobility have however come at a cost and the negative impacts of car use have dominated transport debates:

'The consequences of these changing geographies and sociologies of mobility are two-fold: firstly, increasing demand for travel throughout Western nations, particularly by car, a trend that no country has managed to arrest; second, the knock-on consequences of increasing travel demand on cities, local environments, social networks and ecological conditions' (Vigar, 2000, 1).

The physical design of transport infrastructure can reduce levels of public service access, especially for women with young children. The adaptation of street infrastructure, including raised platforms, upgrading bus shelters and the enforcement of parking controls in bus lanes in and around bus stops can also go some way in promoting accessibility (York and Balcombe, 1997). Local and national governments seem to accept that social justice influences normative policy aims although the practice of transport choice and the consequences are given little thought. Different dimensions of cost, time and space need to

be considered to appreciate what transport can do to address such policy goals. In practice, while the goal of encouraging modal shift is regarded as promoting travel choice, it does not take into consideration the wider issues involved as discussed above.

Environmental and social concerns about transport are closely related. The question is how do you promote social justice whilst encouraging modal shift on sustainable grounds? The government's policy to manage car restraint and implement pro-public transport policies – how do we maintain the economic and social benefits of mobility whilst solving the apparent problems caused by this increasing mobility? However, a singular, broad-brush transport policy seems too simplified, as Potter and Bailey assert:

'Although environmental and social concerns overlap to a large degree, they often arise from different causes, produce different kinds of effects and thus require different policy responses' (2008, 30).

The development and implementation of sustainable transport policy and practice requires an understanding of the environmental, social, economic and cultural contexts as well as the integrated input from a range of stakeholders – planners, politicians, engineers, developers, academics and transport users (Purvis, 2004).

The key challenge facing policy makers is to balance the need for improved levels of accessibility and mobility against the environmental concerns. The re-emergence of the concept of connectivity (Docherty *et al*, 2008) may address this tension. Encouraging land use patterns (new urbanism) that make more activities available within a geographical area – the importance of density of economic activity as a means of to focus mobility. Several examples demonstrate the achievements of mixed use zoning (Bae, 2001) which highlight city centre regeneration, repopulation and increasing public transport usage. The Extended Schools framework (DfES, 2005a) is also an example of how specific services are provided in one area so as to encourage people to use a range of services without having to travel widely.

In an age where social inclusion is a central political aim, it is tempting to suggest that greater mobility allows for more inclusion in society as it affords physical access. Yet some commentators argue that this increased mobility leads to a more restrictive exclusive society especially in light of the spatial distribution of goods, people and services in contemporary planning and a car is therefore vital to reach them (Kenyon, 2003). Children and young people are entitled to participate. The 'Working together; giving children and young people a say' strategy centres the concept of participation and consultation. Within a concept of a

healthy school, the report suggests that participation promotes respectful relationships and mutuality between children, their peers and teachers and prepares them for adulthood.

Letting children play out on the streets may be regarded as neglectful parenting (Sutton *et al*, 2007), as discussed in Section 3.2.1 and in light of the previous government's Respect Agenda focus on specific communities, has underlying implications on the impact of different class structures on parenting styles and children's visibility in public space. The explicit goal is the setting out of a framework of powers and approaches to promote respect positively: bear down uncompromisingly on anti-social behaviour; tackle its causes; and offer leadership and support to local people and local services. As regards the law, anti-social behaviour encompasses any behaviour that causes a member of the public to be: intimidated, harassed, alarmed or distressed (Section 30, Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003). Whilst the strategy sets about finding ways to reduce anti-social behaviour within 'at risk' groups, such as children and young people, it aims to embed a cultural change of respect, by supporting respectful behaviour such as participation in schools, sports, leisure activities and communities (Gaskell, 2008). Gaskell's paper explores the motivations of the Respect Agenda and argues that it leads to exclusionary, rather than empowering politics. The Respect Agenda has particular significance for maintaining this dominant concept and for the everyday experiences of children and young people themselves. It seems to reflect the notion that children and young people are potentially dangerous, and require constant control (Aitken, 2001a). It also addresses the need for respect to be child-driven, yet with increasing evidence that children feel as if they do not belong within local communities, the agenda does not seem to address the need for children to be shown respect in return.

3.4 Focusing on the journey to school policy framework

The central policy framework developed to specifically focus on the journey to school is the Travelling to School Initiative (DfES, 2003b). This initiative is a joint Department for Transport (DfT) and Department for Education and Skills (DfES) scheme covering a series of measures to reduce congestion and increase the use of sustainable modes of transport for pupils' travel to and from school. The initiative was announced in September 2003 and funding has been available to Local Authorities to appoint School Travel Advisers since April 2004. The role of School Travel Advisers is to work with schools to develop School Travel Plans, and carry out additional work that, whilst not resulting in an approved School Travel Plan, does contribute to the Travelling to School Initiative's wider aims. In addition to making funding available for the School Travel Advisers within local authorities, the

Travelling to School Initiative allows schools who develop travel plans that meet specific criteria to apply to the DfES for capital grant funding.

The initiative has a collaborative strategic aim to reduce car use on the school run in order to cut congestion and pollution and encourage many more children to take regular exercise. Funding was available for the three year appointment of travel co-ordinators to work in local authorities on school travel. An advice scheme, whereby schools could request five days of free advice on their situation, was also established. Local authority schools with an authorised travel plan have also become eligible for capital funding (approximately £5000 per primary school and £10,000 per secondary school) to fund their travel work. It is the government's aim that all schools have a school travel plan by 2010.

Initially work on school travel primarily focused on physical street and road improvements such as traffic calming, 20mph zones, cycle lanes and safe crossings. Over time, the approach has developed to include a greater concentration on consultation with the school and local community, education and information measures, road safety training, changes within the school and initiatives such as 'walking buses' and, more recently, 'cycle trains'. These involve volunteer parents escorting groups of children by foot or by bike on a fixed route. Measures to encourage public and school bus use are also often promoted: for example personalised timetable information, discount tickets, new bus services and dedicated school buses. The current focus includes each school drawing up a 'school travel plan' in partnership with their local authority, as part of developing their own, individual long-term strategy to address their unique, context-driven school travel issues.

The school travel plan is conceptually a *whole* school initiative which includes the children, parents, governors, staff and the wider community. It is suggested that a lead member champion the area of sustainable travel for it to be workable and practical. The integrated approach also provides commitment and support from each local authority in a variety of ways. School travel officers have continued to be funded and additional support is now provided by a range of experts - road safety officers, environmental strategy officers, child pedestrian training officers, traffic engineers and cycling officers for example. It is also recommended that a police liaison officer and local councillor be informed and integrated into the wider team.

The *walking school bus strategy* is a particular strategy which has been adopted by a number of local authorities (Engwhicht, 1999; Kearns and Neuwelt, 2003; Collins and

Kearns, 2001; Kingham and Ussher, 2007). The original goal was to increase independent mobility for children, yet Kearns *et al* (2003) assert that walking buses do little to increase children's independent mobility, due in part to the way in which they have been put into practice. Children are walked to school but in a fashion which still offers little opportunity for independent thought and flexibility. Paranoid parenting emphasises the vulnerability of children within public space and has been criticised as a discourse of control, which merely allows children to be confined and supervised (Valentine, 1996b). Research on the walking bus initiative (Kearns *et al*, 2003) found that whilst it allowed children to engage in exercise, environmental exploration and social interaction, as it is controlled and managed by parents, it served to reinforce aspects of adult authority and notions of child vulnerability, thus limiting children's freedom to experience and make autonomous decisions. The walking bus physically controls children, wearing high visibility jackets, together in order to fulfil health and safety regulations, with the result of children experiencing less autonomous freedom of movement in their everyday mobility.

Evolutionary adaptations of walking buses have therefore been suggested, such as Red Sneaker Routes in the USA, and should provide a wider range of choices about how much independence is given to each child. Red Sneaker Routes seeks to give parents greater choice and flexibility - the child may walk as part of a Walking Bus or they may walk with friends or they may walk alone. Regardless of which choice is made, Red Sneaker Routes provides a safer walk environment and an overall increase in community surveillance of walking routes. Red Sneaker Routes starts by mapping walking routes that are most likely to be used by kids. These routes become known as Red Sneaker Routes. Parents, citizens, businesses, organizations, and school classes are invited to adopt street corners and crossing points along this route. Residents along the route are also encouraged to adopt the space outside their home. These people and groups are encouraged to have a human presence at their adopted points whenever possible. But more importantly, they must do something to personalize this space. This may be a special chair, a garden, a sculpture, something to display children's art, etc. Those who adopt the space outside their home put a red sneaker on their front gate or fence. Those adopting a space are given training materials about how 'intrigue' and 'uncertainty' can be used to slow cars and make streets safer. Red Sneaker Routes is a static form of the walking bus approach. Instead of one adult walking with the children the entire length of the route, multiple individuals provide surveillance for very short sections of the journey (the adults stay static, yet aware). It works actively on creating the kind of environments (social and physical) in which children

can enjoy independent mobility for a whole range of trips. It is therefore much more consistent with the end goal of increasing independent mobility.

The other major benefit is that it actually helps create the kind of environment that motivates children to walk (and adults as well!). Personalizing the Red Sneaker Routes with interesting seats, art, and gardens makes the journey even more of an adventure. (Interestingly, it also helps to slow down the traffic, making streets safer.) Adults tend to treat the journey to and from school as a utilitarian transportation task. For kids walking it is everything but this. Walking is a chance to talk with their friends, have an adventure, interact with nature, let off steam, make discoveries and learn, be independent from adults, etc. In this regard the current fad of calling these programs 'Safe Routes to School' betrays the adult-centric way that this issue has been approached from a policy perspective. 'Safe Routes' is transport-oriented and utilitarian in its focus. This means the best routes are not those that are the shortest distance between home and school, but those that provide the most opportunities for adventures, learning and stimulation. The Red Sneaker Routes may therefore be the longest way to school and must involve the kids in mapping the most interesting way.

So, are all of these strategies and policies aimed at encouraging a more sustainable journey to school actually working at a local level? An initial evaluation of the initiative which was held (DfT, 2008) addressed four areas:

- An investigation of the number of School Travel Plans implemented before and after the availability of funding for School Travel Advisers;
- Analysis of the extent to which there has been a statistically significant change in modal split in schools with an School Travel Plans since the implementation of the School Travel Plan, in particular looking at reductions in car use;
- A comparison of modal shift in schools with and schools without School Travel Plans;
- A series of case studies to illustrate the potential wider, non-modal shift benefits of School Travel Plans, and to give examples of successful walking or cycling initiatives in place in schools that do not have a full School Travel Plan.

Schools and local authorities collated the data for the evaluation. Analysis showed that there had been an increase in the number of travel plans completed between 2003/04 and 2004/05, following the introduction of funding for School Travel Advisers. However, it is not possible to differentiate the impact of School Travel Advisers from other contributing factors, for example the availability of capital grant funding from DfES, the impact of other local or national initiatives, economic factors or fears about safety. Evidence from a survey carried out by UKLAST, as reported in the document, on a selection of schools suggests that the vast majority of schools would not have been willing or able to write a School Travel Plan without the assistance and guidance of a dedicated and specialist School Travel Adviser within the local authority.

Analysis of 'before' and 'after' data provided by schools with travel plans was carried out to investigate whether there was a statistically significant reduction in the proportion of pupils travelling by car, following the introduction of their travel plan. In the majority of schools with travel plans included in the analysis there does not appear to have been a statistically significant reduction in car use (defined as a statistically significant decrease in the proportion of pupils travelling to school by car among pupils included in the school's 'after' survey compared with pupils included in the 'before' survey) since the school travel plan was implemented. Only 14% of primary and 40% of secondary schools included in the analysis saw a significant reduction in car use. At the same time, 14% of the primary and 56% of the secondary schools analysed saw a significant increase in car use.

'There does not appear to have been a significant reduction in car use (defined as a statistically significant decrease in the proportion of pupils travelling to school by car) since the STP was implemented' (DfT, 2008, 3)

At a regional level, negative modal shifts in primary schools included in the analysis outnumbered positive ones in four regions, whilst for secondary schools this was the case in seven regions. For primary schools, results at regional level ranged from 4% of the schools analysed achieving a significant decrease in car use in the North East to 28% of schools analysed in the North West. For secondary schools, results varied widely across regions from none of the schools analysed in London seeing a significant decrease in car use to 80% of the schools analysed in the North West. For primary schools included in the analysis, schools with a significant increase in car use outnumbered schools achieving a significant decrease in car use in 27 out of 71 LAs analysed, whilst for secondary schools the same was true in 26 out of 50 LAs. Analysis of 10 local authorities' area-wide modal split surveys was carried

out, to investigate whether there has been a significantly different modal shift in schools with STPs and schools without STPs. Each local authority provided different data (for example, from different years, or with different modes asked in the survey) and it was reportedly difficult to compare the results.

When comparing schools with and without School Travel Plan, there was one group (those secondary schools in Redcar & Cleveland who provided data suitable for analysis) where there was a reduction in car use among pupils surveyed in School Travel Plan schools but not among pupils surveyed in schools without a School Travel Plan. A further group of schools with School Travel Plans (primary schools in Shropshire for which data were available) achieved a significant decrease in the proportion of pupils travelling by car but this was also observed in schools without School Travel Plans in the area. Furthermore, among the secondary schools in Shropshire which were included in this analysis, those without School Travel Plans achieved a reduction in car use, whilst the schools with School Travel Plans did not. At the same time, four of the groups of schools with School Travel Plans included in the analysis, and seven of the groups of schools without School Travel Plans saw a significant increase in car use over the relevant periods.

The case studies carried out for this evaluation show that the development and implementation of a School Travel Plan can potentially lead to a school experiencing a range of wider benefits in addition to those relating to modal shift. More than 20 case studies were undertaken, and these illustrated a number of benefits reportedly experienced by schools, such as: increased independent travel for pupils with special educational needs; increased confidence in pupils with special educational needs; changes in educational attitudes; increased pupil involvement in travel planning work, and integrating this into the curriculum; health benefits of more active travel; opportunities for working with the local community; increased safety (on the roads, on school sites, on buses); engaging bus operators; improvements in pupils' behaviour; engaging schools and pupils from deprived areas; building positive relationships with the Local Authority; reducing road casualties; increasing punctuality and attendance and raising environmental awareness. In addition to these benefits, the case studies illustrate that there are successful walking or cycling initiatives in place in schools that do not have a full STP. These initiatives contribute to the wider aims of the Travelling to School Initiative, reducing car use and increasing travel by sustainable modes.

Many issues were however encountered during this initial evaluation, largely around the failings within the methodological approach. The analysis carried out during this initial evaluation was severely constrained by data quality and coverage issues, and therefore the conclusions that were drawn from this analysis were somewhat limited. Key reasons for the failings in the methodological approach were data inconsistencies with the classification of 'a school with a school travel plan'; data proving not representative at pupil, school and local authority level; questions unanswered over unused modes of travel (it was not always clear from the data whether certain modes had been asked in the survey and no pupils responded for these modes, or whether the mode had not been asked at all); uncertainty over the use of the car share option; different questions being used in different years' surveys (for example, asking 'how did you travel today?' in one year and 'how do you usually travel?' in another year); surveys being carried out at different times of the year in different years.

Suggestions to improve further evaluation have been provided in order to gain a more accurate method and results. One interesting insight was to gain more detail on the initiatives in place in each school and to provide details on how long the initiatives have been in place and when the School Travel Plan was implemented (if appropriate). If schools or initiatives are identified as being good examples of specific benefits being realised within individual schools, evidence to support this would be useful. It was also suggested that it may also be useful for the School Travel Advisor to identify what work the local authority has done with the school in developing the initiatives in question, to provide further detail and background.

3.5 Barriers to Action

As illustrated in Section 3.3, the journey to school policy framework is grounded in and shaped by a number of strategies, initiatives and schemes from a number of different policy areas. The number of national policies and strategies illustrated in Figure 5 show how many different, possibly competing, demands are made across the different policy areas. The motivations behind the government's strategies which are aimed at the journey to school seem ambiguous. Whilst the overall message is to reduce car dependent school journeys in view of the sustainability agenda and the assumed health benefits, the focus of social inclusion and choice agendas promulgated through the education department promote school choice with an inherent result being increased rates of children being driven to remote schools outside their immediate community. Increased opportunities for mothers to

return to work (with the help of Extended Schools and Every Child Matters frameworks) yet, working practices do not seem to support alternative mobility choice.

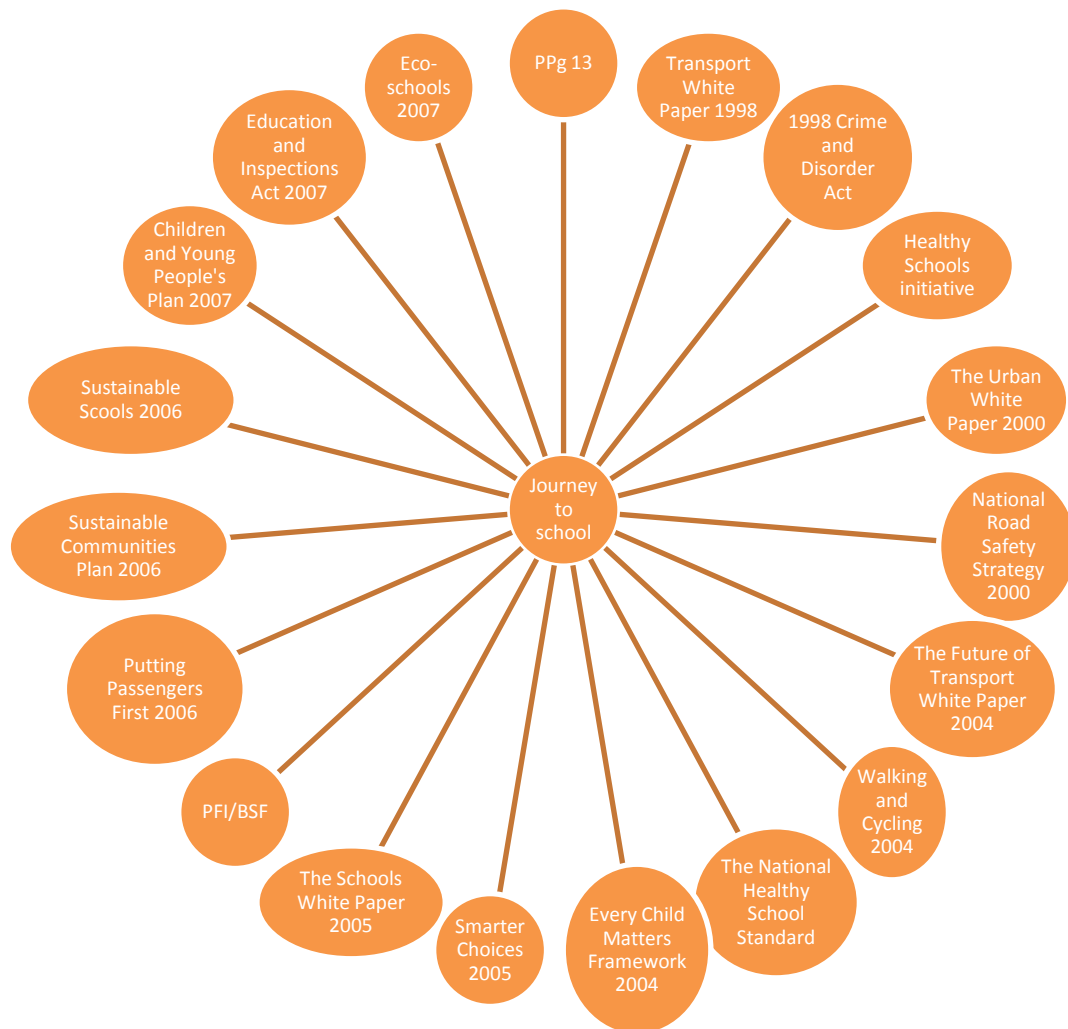


Figure 5: A multitude of strategies and policies influencing mode choice

It is fundamental to understand the complex processes that are linked to encouraging individuals to consider more sustainable consumption practices at an everyday level and to view which barriers are linked with the complexities of everyday life. Despite research showing that the public are aware of the issues of environmental sustainability (DEFRA, 2002), there seems to be a reluctance to translate this knowledge into sustainable action. So what does literature suggest that these barriers are? The following section discusses the literature suggesting the potential barriers to adopting more sustainable travel modes.

3.5.1 Individual travel behaviour and choice

Previous sections have focused upon transport issues in light of social, economic and environmental concerns and the subsequent policy responses. However, what determines why people travel and the modes of travel they choose to use?

People's travel choice and the travel experiences that result are a complex mix of a number of factors: what journey do I have to make? When do I have to make this journey? How can I make this journey and how would I like to make this journey? Borrowing Stradling *et al's* (2000) notion of obligations, opportunities and inclinations, three factors are dominant in this research.

- **Obligations – what is my journey to school?**

By 'obligations', research shows that there is a consistent pattern of journey purposes, for example, going to work, shopping, social networking, leisure and escorting children to school. People need to meet their obligations and transport choices, and patterns vary with environment characteristics or land use, for example, where people live and work.

- **Opportunities – how can I make the journey to school?**

Opportunities situate mode choice. Whilst some people are multi-mode users, some people use fewer modes of transport. This depends on personal characteristics such as age, gender and disability as well as household contexts with reference to income, transport availability and attitudes and values. For example, it is reported that children and older people spend less time on the move than do people in mid-life and women spend less time than men (Stradling and Anable, 2008). Mokhtarian and Salomon (2001) suggest that we have a desired travel time budget (a set amount of time available to make a journey), although it is recognised that this ideal maybe compromised by individual circumstances, for example, the location of a workplace. The 'opportunity' of travel choice involves the notions of affordability, availability, accessibility and acceptability – all of which constrain or facilitate travel choices with relation to school travel.

- **Inclinations – how would I like to travel to school?**

Inclinations encompass the attraction of one mode of travel over another. A number of studies have focused on understanding the attractions of the car compared to

other modes of transport. Studies highlight the symbolic meaning of the car (Maxwell, 2001a; 2001b), the importance of affective motivations and attractions in choosing a car (Abrahmse *et al*, 2004) and in influencing driving style (Stradling *et al*, 2003). The promise of autonomy and freedom is therefore linked to privileges that the car brings and is thus linked to self-image and control, promising the benefits of speed and convenience. Interestingly, in terms of travel choice to school, national statistics show that cycling is the preferred method.

The type of transport used therefore varies depending on the characteristics of the person and the environment (Stradling and Anable, 2008). An individual's values, motivations, past experiences and perceived transport patterns, as illustrated on the following diagram:

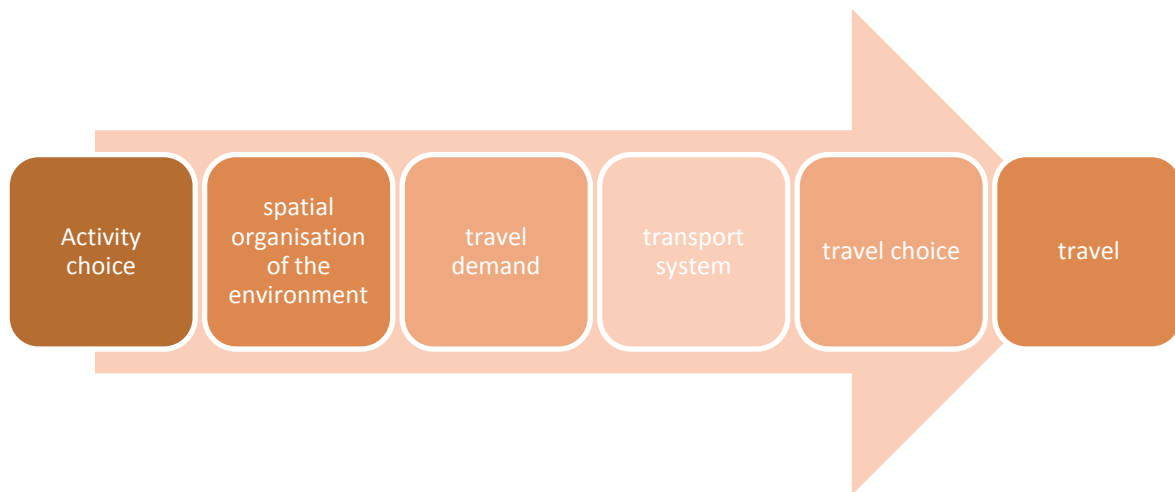


Figure 6: Factors influencing travel behaviour (Garling, 1995)

Travel behaviours and travel choices are driven by a mix of factors which contribute to a transport-intensive lifestyle. Whether and how people travel is influenced by how much the journey will personally cost and the resources available to conduct the trip. The interaction of individual's personal activity behaviours, the spatial organisation of the environment and characteristics of the transport system are set out by Garling (1995) in Figure 6, and illustrates how travel is experienced in the form of obligations, inclinations and opportunities. Garling (1995) characterises the temporal ordering of an individual's travel choices:

- Activity choice – what shall I do?
- Destination choice – where shall I do it?
- Mode choice – how will I get there?
- Departure time choice- when should I go?

Personal variables (gender, age, income, health) and interpersonal social networks, as well as physical environments, influence behaviour. The choice therefore encapsulates the characteristics of a person as well as the social identities. Literature suggests that many journeys are completed due to the fact that they have no choice (Anable, 2005), for example, due to work commitments, or the distance between the home and school.

There is a general understanding that the central currency of travel is time (Schafer, 1998). This encapsulates the notion of convenience as it assumes that using the car for a mode of travel affords a person the levels of convenience required to live such complex lives. Jain and Lyons (2008) suggest that time is a gift both to others and to oneself. Personal space in the car is therefore to be selfishly indulged in and offers a private space away from the world outside and a possible reprieve from the rigours of life, depending upon circumstance. Although this time is not always reported as being relaxed and is associated with stress (Stradling and Anable, 2008). Habitual behaviours become engrained in everyday living and change is difficult to conceive. That said our travel choices can change if there is a change in socio-political and economic frameworks. As people move through life stages habitual behaviour is weakened (Dargay and Hanly, 2003) and can change. An observation is that people change if they have to and can adapt quickly. Indeed the UK government has indicated support for a nationwide road user charging scheme when technology permits by around 2015 (Shaw *et al*, 2008a, 2008b) on the back of reported successes following the introduction of a daily charge in London (Transport for London, 2006). All of these factors show the complexities in understanding why people choose the mode of transport that they do. In short there are all different types of people with different attitudes, values, motivations and transport experiences. The 'right to mobility' for some outweighs the environmental concerns. Therefore, a major concern is that in light of the context of global warming, we are unable to sustain current levels of transport-intensive lifestyles.

How people view ideas of sustainability and how these views alter their behaviour (or indeed do not alter it) has been a subject of discussion for much research across a multitude of disciplines. Environmental psychology links environmental behaviour to complex relationships between attitudes, values, norms, intentions and individual contexts (Brandon and Lewis, 1999; Tanner, 1999). It has also been argued that certain consumption behaviours, for example, transport use, are forms of social and cultural norms with underlying reasons as convenience, profit, freedom and safety provided (Vigar, 2000). Critical social scientists have added to this by linking the affect of social issues on

sustainable consumption. For example, the resonance of being environmentally sustainable in practice as being 'morally good' has been linked to broader debates on who individuals trust, who is responsible for making policy change, and public understanding of the issue of global climate change (Macnaghten and Jacobs, 1997; Hobson, 2001). The micro-politics of the household highlight the collective nature of consumption which leads to practices being contested, negotiated and fluid, and sometimes driven by motives other than need, for example, love or duty (Bowlby *et al*, 1997), which links in with the literature previously covered in Chapter 2, highlighting the moral economy of parenting. Some literature argues that behaviours are linked to the expectations linked to the quality of life, with people 'needing' a car to take their children to school, with no consideration of the alternatives (Shove, 2003) Additionally, there is a body of literature which links the lack of uptake in sustainable mobility to the issues of scale and time:

'The issue of mobility is further compounded by timeframes associated with environmental consequence of many forms of mobility, in that they are not immediate, many are global and long-term, reducing short-term individual commitment. The composition of the household, differing transport needs and little time to exercise choice in travel implies a decreasing sense of agency with regard to tackling the environmental and social consequences of travel patterns' (Macnaghten and Urry, (1998, 232).

The argument is provided that people do not feel compelled to change everyday habits because they view the issue of global climate change as removed from their everyday lives and hence have a feeling of futility and hopelessness (Irwin *et al*, 1999) which in turn lessens their individual levels of agency. As Slocum says:

'engaging with climate change is especially difficult because global climate change is perceived as spatially and temporally distant' (2004, 413).

This perception that the problem is global and hence far-removed is not unexpected given that the wider issues of climate change are rooted in a global interpretation (Hinchcliffe, 1996). Strategies of particular campaigns, for example, those promoted by national government to encourage a change in travel behaviour, acknowledge that scale is a barrier and often attempt to root the strategies for combating climate change in local strategies that will inspire people and communities to act. Also important in this argument is for more local contexts to be considered is the need for situated local knowledge in order to ascertain what specific strategies are effective and which are not. Linked to this are the perceptions of individual and corporate responsibility (Bickerstaff *et al*, 2008) which are linked to tensions in the relationship between the state and the citizen given issues such as corporate

competence, individual moral responsibility and agency. Finally a significant theme focuses upon identity formulation and how certain identities are created and recreated within 'postmodern' society (Baudrillard, 1998) and how certain consumer goods have implicit cultural meaning, for example, cars. Physical spaces in which a child experiences their everyday lives all convey implicit cultures and meanings that are inseparable from everyday consumption and social patterns. Situated local knowledge of environmental sustainability is built up every day from direct interaction within all of the spheres discussed here (public space, household and school) and this knowledge in part will or will not shape consumption practices, depending on the complexities of, and barriers within, their individual contexts. What is important is that knowledge is fluid and ever-changing and interacts with current ideas and values and holds significance to altering or changing behaviours and experiences. Giddens' (1984) structuration theory which was discussed in Section 2.3 of Chapter 2 is of relevance here.

In line with this theory, transportation and mobility demands arise because of the complex interaction between land-use patterns, design of urban public space, housing and employment options, the organisation and delivery of private and public services (significantly in this case, education policy and practices), personal motivations, individual choices and socio-cultural identity and knowledge. Understanding the network of inter-related issues focusing upon personal choice in mobility, as experienced by the child on their journey to school, and how they impact on a child's everyday mobility experience is therefore fundamentally vital if sustainable travel policy is to be implemented successfully.

All of these literatures present complex reasoning into the links between knowledge encouraging a sustainable journey to school and actual travel behaviour change. Whilst sustainable messages on the journey to school has focused upon the individual making empowered choices (Giddens, 2005), it is clear that a number of complexities within and between the household, community, public space and school, as discussed in the previous chapter, would explain some of the barriers to adopting more sustainable transport practices.

3.5.2 Defining a 'sustainable' journey to school

The concept of sustainability has become adopted as a 'meta-narrative' (Meadowcroft, 1999) and is embedded into contemporary culture and social politics. Whilst the notions of moral imperative, social conscience and environmental integrity appear central to the notion of sustainability, given the threat of impending ecological disaster, the concept remains neither

uncontested nor ontologically-fixed (Krueger and Savage, 2007). Focusing on the complexities between the interaction between people and environment, the research field of sustainability has expanded into a multitude of directions (Clark, 2007). Critical literature ranges from the ability and capacity of local authorities to promote sustainability (Gibbs, 2002; Lake, 2000; Marvin and Guy, 1997) and on the usefulness of the actual concept itself (Krueger and Agyeman, 2005; Torgerson, 1995;). Sustainability at a local and urban scale has been well researched with policy measures aimed at "ecological cities" (Platt, 2004), "compact cities" (Beheny, 1995), "green urbanism" (Beatly, 2000) and measuring "ecological footprints" (Wackernagel and Rees, 1996). A large amount of research has been undertaken presenting local examples of sustainable lifestyles (Beatly, 2000; Calthorpe and Fulton, 2001; Portney, 2003) with the emphasis on developing a range of policy measures that can be chosen if they are deemed suitable and adaptable to local circumstances. Recent literature has begun to be more ideologically motivated in its approach with it considering sustainability as a complex social process (Portney, 2003) and asserts that the social implications of sustainable development are important. Sustainability has become to be regarded as a catalyst for social change and environmental protection, as well as a policy mechanism in local contexts. The focus over the past few years has evolved to include an exploration of social equity and environmental justice as well as a focus on environmental concerns. Emphasising the interaction between the individual and social networks, social sustainability highlights the durability of social capital within a particular society' (Pares and Sauri, 2007).

Promoting an integrated approach, Hediger (2000) asserts that economic, environmental and social components of sustainability are all equally vital. Pares and Sauri (2007) further the multidimensionality of the concept by promoting the significance of the political dimension. They assert that there is not a universal form of sustainability for all places but that each place has to define its own development model based on the needs and will of its citizens (Pares and Sauri, 2007). Therefore, the version of sustainable development leading to social change will be one that integrates environmental, economic, social and political dimensions (Pares and Sauri, 2007). These hybrid analyses, where integrated issues such as equity, power relations and hegemony, culture, economy and environment are all considered, provide one base for the concept of 'just sustainability' (Agyeman *et al*, 2003). This joined-up thinking promotes broader social concerns, especially those concerned with social justice and equity alongside the physical environmental issues.

The strategies designed to reduce localised traffic and congestion, specifically around school sites, are therefore not only about technological, practical requirements and simply aimed at measuring physical flows of resources through cities (Marvin and Guy, 1997). They have to take the related contexts into account, for example, the ability of children to socially interact. Research suggests that top-down singular policy intervention designed to police behaviour provides at best standardised notions of best practice against a pre-set definition of urban environmental sustainability, which ignores diverse physical and social contexts within urban environments, competing social behaviours and attitudes, organisational complexity and asymmetries of power (Marvin and Guy, 1997). Recognition of the importance of all of these aspirations emphasises the contemporary concept of sustainability as a multi-dimensional, balanced approach and would help in producing successful strategies (Evans and Jones, 2008), specifically aimed at school travel.

3.5.3 Stakeholder Involvement

It is suggested therefore that in view of the diversity and complexity involved in developing a policy framework for the journey to school, decision-making processes need to be dispersed as wide as possible in order to incorporate all voices of the community. Sustainable development can however be taken as a power/knowledge discourse with some organisations seeking to accumulate power over others in the name of environmental and social integrity. Luke (1995) and Drummond and Marsden (1995) both emphasise the discursive nature of sustainability in that it is used by those who prioritise the value of capital and maintain existing patterns of social relations. Krueger and Savage (2007) argue that those who focus upon social reproduction can promote sustainability as a guise and not appreciate the environmental concerns.

A multidimensional conceptual framework is one that adopts a multiple model of sustainability, recognising the '*highly contested nature of urban change*' (Marvin and Guy, 1997, 269) through understanding diverse social interests and biases (due in part to underlying power relations) and competing environmental visions of a sustainable city or community in the future. Understanding the wider range of stakeholder interest in this debate is central to providing workable solutions from transportation policy makers:

'Certainly, the identification of the principal interests and groups, and their arenas for interaction, discourses and substantive policies, goes a long way towards identifying the "boundaries" of local environmental policy making system...' (Gibbs and Kreuger, 2007, 215).

Stakeholder involvement does not only mean external agencies being involved in planning and development. Equally vital is the co-ordination of intra-government departments and the call for multi-level governance (Bulkeley and Betsill, 2005). It is also clear that differences across local authorities be recognised (Bulkeley and Rayner, 2003), in terms of macro-geographical spatialities and socio-economic and cultural environments. These differences need to be accounted for in local planning strategies. Research conducted by Burgess *et al* (1998) analysed how representatives from the public, private and voluntary sectors of two cities (Nottingham, UK and Eindhoven, The Netherlands) communicated with citizens about issues of sustainability. A key discussion in this analysis highlights the contrasting discursive constructions of the 'public' which reflect different political cultures. Those in Nottingham preferred to share knowledge and power in an attempt to widen participation whilst those in Eindhoven demanded greater authority from the state with regards to effective communication about sustainability issues.

Clearly, therefore, sustainability as a practice is in a variety of forms and at a variety of scales. As Krueger and Gibbs state:

'concepts of nature, scale, economic change, institutions, and governance must accompany sustainability analyses (2007, 6).

As Whitehead (2003) stated, the sustainable city is a social, political and economic construct. The fluidity of statutory processes, local political traditions and historical regulatory legacies in constructing discourses surrounding sustainable strategies on the journey to school are central to the wider debate. In exploring the regulatory geography of the sustainable city and its associated environmental visions and practices, he introduces 'the regulation approach to the analysis of social and economic change and development' and describes the sustainable city in terms of:

'a complex array of ideas, discourses, material practices and political struggles through which they are produced and reproduced...in a state of constant becoming' (Whitehead, 2003, 1184).

This approach has value in my framing my research, given its claim that the process of regulation is a product of material and discursive practices that are generated by social and political institutions and that these practices are continually in flux and responsive to temporal and spatial variability (Macnaghten and Urry, 1998).

3.5.4 Bridging policy and practice

Literature has discussed the gap between the discourse and implementation practices (Jarvis, 2005). There can be significant differences between the aspirations of policy makers and institutional resources to bring policy measures to fruition. It can be argued that there is a widening gap between policy and action, especially in light of the fact that after many years of encouraging modal shift through nationwide strategies, the change of behaviour has been negligible, if at all. Whilst there may be more agreement on the defining principles of sustainability, the success of sustainable development depends on the ability to attract society to this model of development (Barr, 2003). Research suggests that the highest responsibility for sustainable development issues is often placed on government and global organisations and the lowest on the individual (Lindstrom and Kuller, 2006). The public therefore feel less responsibility as an individual to effect change. Merely having a policy and a number of strategies and schemes available at a national level, does not simply mean that people alter their mobility behaviours at a local level. The increasing distance between political rhetoric and actual public behaviour, as illustrated in the negligible levels of mode change in school travel behaviour, is symptomatic of poorly designed policy which lacks understanding of the complexities of context. Policy designed to address such issues as sustainable travel and health at the school site seems to occur in isolation with little regard for the wider implications of how children are treated when in public space, for example. Children are often not accepted nor tolerated within public space which increasingly leads to them being kept indoors. Whether this is due to parental paranoia or the increasing levels of public intolerance is open to question but the fact remains that policies designed to encourage children to use outdoor space seem ambiguous to schemes designed to victimise and deter children from accessing such space. Emphasis to get mothers back into work seem at odds with lack of provision of early-years care and lack of alternative travel arrangements around fixed working hours. Similarly, local authorities are challenged with offering families school choice on the one hand yet encouraging local schools on the other. This research engages with a seemingly intractable paradox whereby education policies seek to decentralise and disperse schooling and use parent power to create competition between schools while climate change policies urge us to take a fresh look at our local community and environment, promoting the benefits of walking and cycling to local amenities. Rarely are the connections made explicit between education policy and transport behaviour; between patterns of social exclusion and processes of environmental damage. Yet this fundamentally social geographic concern is addressed when looking at the journey to school

framework. Urban segregation and housing-related disadvantage correspond with highly unequal experiences of childhood (Jarvis, 2005). For school age children, social sorting by parental occupation and neighbourhood status are compounded by the regressive effects of market competition in the state education system. Evidence that this secures the reproduction of middle class privilege reflects the neo-liberal legacy of a 'post-welfare' society: upward social mobility is promised on the back of a dominant work ethic, property ownership (debt) and competition in education and the labour market. The result is greater emphasis on 'parental responsibility' and 'consumer citizenship' with respect to school choice (often via the housing market) and the journey to school (where parents who chaperone children to school by car are implicated in acute traffic congestion and rising childhood obesity).

In the post-welfare state, housing and neighbourhood-related assets play an increasingly crucial role in determining how successfully children fare at school and in later life (Jarvis, 2005). Exploitation of private household assets (housing, transport, unpaid domestic labour, kin networks of support) adds a new dimension and scale to childhood inequality. Viewed from this integrated perspective, prospects for social mobility in later life encompass not only the 'local' state school but also the 'local' journey to school – which may serve to militate against or further define social difference and polarisation. Adding another frequently neglected layer of complexity and source of socio-spatial inequality, questions of how and where young children are chaperoned to school evolves out of socially viable and pragmatic combinations in relation to specific cultural settings as well as the linked lives of household members. Consequently there exist very different local actualities of people's daily lives. Research has shown there is a need to widen participation in the determination of successfully communicated sustainable policies which work at a local level and calls for more inclusive communication in planning and politics (Burgess *et al*, 1998) to bridge the gap between rhetoric and practice.

3.6 Conclusion

The consideration of personal mobility (Pooley *et al*, 2005a) has been well researched, highlighting the increasing levels of car ownership (DfT, 2006; Hoyle and Knowles, 1998) and the subsequent car dependency lifestyles. Such a car-centric approach to transport policy merely predicts future demand and provides road capacity to deal with it. The private car was regarded as a symbol of freedom and choice and governments asserted that increases in personal mobility paralleled economic growth, with large scale road building

programmes being agreed to accommodate the increasing traffic volumes (Shaw *et al*, 2008b). The growth of car traffic levels has however left a legacy of severe congestion, despite significant road construction schemes. Continuing to provide infrastructure to accommodate increasing levels of mobility became financially, politically and practically limiting. The obvious shortcomings of this approach led to a new way of thinking about transport and mobility which focused upon prioritising demand management and public services provision (Goodwin, 1999), which can be seen above in the development of sustainable policies.

Various types of policy have been developed and used over the past fifteen years to address environmental concerns with regards to school travel. Early policy tended to focus on the use of planning controls to deal with spatial aspects of transport policy by specific government departments and was primarily focused upon transport as a concrete measure. Recently developed policy measures seem to have shifted to a more systematic analysis of wider environmental considerations which demand more cooperation from a range of stakeholders. It is recognised at government policy level that reductions in car travel benefits children's health, develops social and life skills and, in providing less pollution, promotes greater awareness of environmental issues at both a local and global level. National and local policy is mindful that children require familiarity with public transport and provides important links with their community. It also recognises the importance of child safety. Equally significant is the recognition that encouraging a sustainable journey to school encourages children to become involved in decision making that affects them as it is used as a base within the national curriculum. As discussed in this chapter, a number of broad-brush 'one-size-fits-all' strategies have been proposed over the fifteen years and have led to a myriad of practical locally-driven solutions, from walking buses to cycle storage, and accessible public and school transport to safety zones (crossing points, traffic calming measures and low speed limits), each of which are assumed to be implemented across local schools around the country.

The key finding in this chapter is that the journey to school has been framed by a complex national policy framework, with roots in many different areas – from transport planning, urban sustainability and education to health, social inclusion and road safety. The core strategic objective of the Travelling to School Initiative is to promote a more sustainable journey to school, preferably one done by walking, cycling or using public transport, yet it is clear that many other, often competing policies, for example, those promoting school choice

and increased social accessibility send conflicting messages. How is policy aimed at encouraging sustainable journeys to school supposed to prove workable and efficient, if ambiguous and contradictory communication is received? It is not simply enough to assume that the benefits of walking or cycling to school are adequate to encourage people to alter their everyday travel behaviours. The need for a *sustainable school run* for national and local transport policy has been exemplified through the development of local traffic plans and their focus on widening travel choice by seeking to encourage the use of public transport, cycling and walking to school. This is not only of local concern and there remain a number of practical imperatives for research on the journey to school. There are critically relevant wider global and national issues which have led to the need to specifically direct policies to the school journey. The UK has widely publicised its target of reducing its 1990 national emission levels of carbon dioxide by 20% by 2010 and its aim of cutting them by 60% by 2050 (DTI, 2003). It was recently announced however that the UK will not be able to meet the 2010 targets (DEFRA, 2006), which in turn has longer term impacts on the 2050 target. As Lorenzoni *et al* note:

'there is a 'need for a radical change in values, behaviour and institutions towards a paradigm of lower consumption...the need for widespread social change' (2007, 445).

The evaluation of the Travelling to School Initiative (DfT, 2008) indicates that modal shift has been negligible, despite the plethora of nationwide policies and strategies that have been funded over the past decade specifically targeted towards the journey to school. Whilst the evaluation report questions the findings by highlighting the level of data quality, it does however list a number of benefits that the implementation of school travel plans have had. These include raising general levels of awareness of environmental issues, building positive relationships with the local authorities and increased pupil involvement in travel planning work (DfT, 2008). Whilst I would question the methodology used for generating the report and developing the findings (for example, reduced traffic casualties and improvements in pupil behaviour being cited as a result of the implementation of the travel plans), what is significant is that the recommendations to further encourage positive modal shift do not seem to take into consideration a number of barriers that could exist and have an impact on travel behaviour. Due to a web of complex negotiations that take place within childhood spaces and a child's experience being structurally determinants by a number of factors, as discussed in Chapter 2, certain barriers which may exist could outweigh the level of environmental concern that is required to alter everyday travel behaviours. These barriers may exist due to a number of interrelated factors: individual choice and behaviours, the

complexities in understanding what 'sustainable' means, the issue of stakeholder involvement and levels of responsibility and the mismatch between policy and practice. In order to understand these dynamics, centring the perspective of the child is useful as it highlights ways in which children's everyday mobilities are shaped and negotiated through private and public space. The decision of how the journey to school is undertaken largely rests however within the home space. Factors within the other two spaces of the school and public space also shape the decision however it may be that the critical factors of the household outweigh them, thus leading to very little change. This is an important contribution of this research as it seeks to understand the micro-geographies of the journey to school. Children's experiences of their journeys to school reflect the daily negotiations which take place within these key sites of childhood. Employing a methodological approach that provides meaningful data which accounts for the complexities surrounding school travel choice should be paramount in order to understand if and indeed how, engage with or contradict the journey to school policy.

Chapter 4

Methodology

4.1 Introducing the methodological framework

This chapter examines the child-centred methodological approach that I chose to use – *participatory action research (PAR)* – within a research context of children’s mobility. As an ‘orientation to inquiry’ (Reason, 2001) the research required me to develop methodological insight which proved both reactive and reflexive to the specific geographical contexts, as well as in answer to the research questions, and in agreement with Kindon, Pain and Kesby (2007), the participatory methodological process has proved just as significant as the findings. The research is anchored in the views and responses received from the children and young people who participated in the fieldwork.

The main aim of this thesis is to contribute to the understanding of children and young people’s experiences of their journeys to and from school. An attempt at understanding any aspect of the lives of children is best done by focusing upon their own views and experiences, as discussed in Chapter 2. Reflecting on James’ (1990) influential paper, which called for geographers to include children’s *own* experiences within research, the central premise is that children are knowledgeable and reliable of their own everyday experiences, social actors in their own right, shaping and controlling their own lifeworlds (Holloway and Valentine, 2000). This in-depth, intensive participatory methodological approach has evolved by directly working with four different groups of children and young people over a significant period of time. They were active agents within the process and were involved in designing the research framework, conducting the fieldwork, analysing and verifying the data and presenting the findings, and in doing so were ‘*subjects (and) architects, of research...researchers (not just) the “researched”*’ (Torre and Fine, 2006, 456).

The research has elicited complex and detailed micro-geographies and richly textured accounts (Leyshon, 2002) of their everyday lives. It was anticipated that using a range of their preferred methods would allow greater insight into children’s experiences in a way that was ‘*sensitive to the contexts of their daily lives*’ (Aitken and Wingate, 1993, 66) given that it is recognised that childhood is not a universal, static category. This research reflects the notions surrounding social constructivism (James *et al*, 1998) and regards childhood as time and space specific which acknowledges that children experience their journeys to school in different ways according to their societal backgrounds and the period of history in which

they experience. The children and young people were partners within the research process, so not only are they knowledgeable of and reliable on their own experiences but active, fully participating agents of change (Ginwright and James, 2002) involved in collaborative research focused on social transformation (McTaggart, 1997).

I begin this chapter by providing an overview of participatory action research and ask the question 'what is child participation?' in relation to the benefits and critiques of participatory research. Given the resultant ethical concerns of collaboration, responsibility, positionality and accountability (Smith, 2007) the key principles within this participatory paradigm that were adhered to are subsequently discussed in Sections 4.3 and 4.4. The following section places my research within this framework. Following these guidelines, planning the fieldwork was a significant stage of the research and the pilot project that I conducted over a three month period proved to be a turning point in developing a robust, ethical methodological approach. An in-depth story of how the pilot study unfolded is provided in Section 4.6. The context of the research fieldwork is discussed in Section 4.7. The sampling procedure is then explained in Section 4.8. I provide an overview of the fieldwork process which gives insight into the flow of sessions that were conducted at each school, which leads to an analysis of each of the methods that were chosen in Section 4.9. The benefits and difficulties of employing a participatory action approach are discussed. Section 4.10 looks at how the data was analysed and verified by the children. The penultimate section compares how each group of children engaged in the research. Lastly, in Section 4.12, an overall critical evaluation of the research is provided highlighting the importance of linking the research to strategic policy development frameworks discussed in Chapter 3.

4.2 Participatory Action Research - so what is 'child participation'?

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a methodology that is growing in its use in social science and education research (Cahill, 2007b; Cahill and Hart, 2006; Van Blerk and Barker, 2008). The methodology has roots in international liberationist, feminist, antiracist, activist social justice movements (Fals-Borda, 1979; Freire, 1997; Smith, 1999) and has for some time worked alongside and complimented research that focused upon young people's everyday lives (Bunge and Bordessa, 1975; Hart, 1979; 1992, 1997; Lynch, 1997).

As a theoretical standpoint, the collaborative methodology is designed to ensure that those who are affected by the research project have an active voice in that project. Categorised as *theory building* as opposed to *theory testing*, the research can be placed within the epistemological position of grounded theory, as a:

'robust and systematic method of designing, conducting, analysing and evaluating research, which at the same time facilitates and integrates the scientific and creative aspects of research' (Bailey *et al*, 1999, 170).

The key issue of grounded theory is that it is emergent – the theory arises from the data, the research process and the analysis, all of which are context-specific, flexible, iterative and dynamic. This research has emerged over time, in tune with continuous engagement with the children and young people. As collaborating partners, the primary focus was on working towards positive changes on issues identified by both the individual and the collective (Kindon *et al*, 2007) which required constant negotiation and re-negotiation in order to tease out the critical issues and priorities with regards to their journey to school. As Driskell advises:

'apart from involving young people in making improvements to the places where they live, one of the most effective strategies for creating better cities is through the actual process of participation: helping young people to listen to one another, to respect differences of opinion, and to find common ground: developing their capabilities for critical thinking, evaluation and reflection; supporting their processes of discovery, awareness building, and collective problem-solving; and helping them develop knowledge and skills for making a difference in their world' (2002, 17).

PAR and practice offers a *'framework for researchers who are committed to social justice and change'* (Cahill, 2007, 297). The emphasis is on it being a reiterative, reflexive process with a commitment to *giving back* to the participants. Through engaging young people it helps to:

'challenge social exclusion, democratize the research process and build the capacity of young people to analyze and transform their own lives and communities' (Cahill, 2007, 298).

A critical concern of doing collective participatory research with children and young people lies in the fact that the term *participatory* is often used indiscriminately to refer to a wide variety of practices (Cahill and Hart, 2006). Perhaps a victim of its own success, the growth in popularity of participatory research over the past 20 years (Kindon *et al*, 2007) has led to children and young people occupying a variety of different roles and exercising different degrees of decision-making (Driskell, 2002). Therefore, although the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1990) and the Children Act 1989 includes articles about children's rights to be consulted on issues that affect their lives, many different theoretical models of participation that have been used within past research show how

different interpretations of what constitutes child participation leads to different methodological practices. Various strands of participatory approaches are visualised within the participation continuums (as illustrated in Kindon *et al*, 2007) and shows the varying degrees of the practice of children's participation from misdirected, tokenistic, controlled and manipulated to child-initiated and shared decision making (Driskell, 2002; Hart, 1992; Treseder, 1997). Children's levels of participation can therefore vary, according to the project definition of '*participation*' – it can vary from them simply answering a pre-drafted questionnaire, raising their hands in answer to a pre-set question or being actively involved in defining a research agenda and becoming involved in the process from design to dissemination – in all cases, their levels of participation differ and obviously have vastly different research outcomes and ethical integrity. Such broad applications of the term '*participatory*' may mask tokenism and advance dominant powerful interests under the guise of consultation (Hart, 1997; Mohan, 2001). These issues surrounding power relations are dealt with in more detail in section 4.4.

Increasingly, children's views are being sought within policy, as well as in research (Aitken, 2001c; Barker, 2003; Cahill, 2007b). In some cases, children's participation in local planning and urban regeneration projects has reportedly proved significant to successful urban planning and design (CABE, 2004; 2007a; 2007b). The Every Child Matters consultation process discussed in Section 3.3.2 of Chapter 3 has been taken as evidence of the participatory democratic process where children and young people, alongside other key stakeholder groups, are key drivers in shaping policy, which in turn will shape their everyday lives (DfES, 2003a; 2004a; 2004b). This policy was published alongside a children's and young people's version – the first major legislative development in England and Wales to prioritise children and young people as stakeholders in their own right. The Children's Society (1999) developed action research projects with children conducting the research after being trained in research techniques. The 'Time to Talk' consultation which was launched in September 2007 by the Department for Children, Schools and Families sought nationwide feedback, specifically from young people, in order to draw up a Children's Plan covering the next decade (DCSF, 2007). The DCSF is now responsible for all of the policy on the well-being of children and young people and active participation in the consultative process seems to be encouraged. A resource pack is available which covers how to run an event in order to develop children's and young people's participation. An interesting research project that seems to have successfully achieved placing children and young people's voices as central this is between the Concerned for Working Children (CWC) development agency

and the University of Durham which highlights children's mobility and access to education, health and other facilities (Lolichen, 2007). The study concluded that children's participation in research and social planning is not an end in itself but a process that continually requires re-evaluation, alterations and the ability to evolve.

4.3 Ethical considerations within the participatory action research approach

Discussion has been generated within Geography on the importance of considering ethical issues in research conducted with children (Matthews *et al*, 1998; Sieber and Sieber, 1992). Thomas and O'Kane (1999, 336) argue that '*ethical problems in research involving direct contact with children can be overcome by using a participatory approach*'. Using a variety of methods the emphasis has been on relating ethics with participatory methodology:

'Effective methodology and ethics go hand in hand...reliability and validity and the ethical acceptability of research with children can be augmented by using an approach which gives children control over the research process and methods which are in tune with children's ways of seeing and relating to their world' (Thomas and O'Kane, 1998, 336/7).

The issue of informed consent needs to be highlighted in research conducted with children. The extent and nature of their contribution needs to be explained fully and clearly. In this research, children were made aware of the aims and objectives of the research from the outset and were often repeated for clarity during the research sessions. Children were informed of their right to opt out at any point and that they did not have to take part in specific areas of the research if they did not feel comfortable. Indeed, some children chose to *dip in and out* of the research sessions depending on which lesson they were due to miss! Informed consent was provided by the schools on behalf of all the parents. All of the children that were approached expressed interest in participating and letters were sent to parents and guardians explaining the research. Only one parent (during the pilot phase) refused her daughter to participate and the child sat in an art class whilst the research session was taking place. No reason was provided by the parent as to why she felt that the child should not participate. However the overall lack of parent engagement within the research could explain the absence of 'parental consent' or indeed any feedback from the parents themselves. How much actual 'choice' the children have when sitting in a group or class session, within the setting of the school (sometimes with teachers present), is, however, questionable and the issue of consent being negotiated by those with power over

children has been well documented (Pole *et al*, 1999). This is discussed further in Section 4.4.

The issues of confidentiality and anonymity of all the participants are to be respected. These issues were discussed with the children at the beginning of the research process, however, the urgency of maintaining both were not regarded as important by the children. They often did not see the problem of writing their names on pieces of research which would be in full view when that data was captured. Indeed they argued that they would like their names in view as they were proud of their drawing, for example. Nor did they understand that if they learnt of some specific piece of information about another child, they were not to discuss this outside the research setting. Although it seems that they understood the concept of confidentiality, they seemed to misunderstand the implications and importance of confidentiality in practice. As Leyshon (2002) notes, sometimes the maintenance of confidentiality and anonymity is incompatible with the safety of the children. Ethical dilemmas are therefore developed if certain information comes to light during the research which is deemed harming the child in question. It should be highlighted that in certain exceptional circumstances any such information would be divulged to the Head Teacher¹. In such a case, adequate support structures are available. Throughout this research care has been taken to ensure that anonymity is respected and names of individuals and places have been changed. This is complex when using the methods that have been significant in this research, for example, drawings, photographs and video.

Honesty and transparency were vital issues throughout all of the fieldwork sessions. I took care not to raise their expectations with regard to the impact of their research and what would happen when the research is complete. My role was specific and strategic as a facilitator of the research process. It was important for me to recognise when to make suggestions and offer guidance and it was also important for me to ask this of her adult facilitators present throughout the process. My primary role was to enable children with information, additional skills and opportunities to be creative.

Enabling children's participation in research does not mean letting go completely and leaving the children to cope for themselves. This is a grey area. Whilst the general research themes and participatory methodologies were in place, there was possibility for negotiation in relation to the final outcomes. The children's responsibilities sometimes increased over time and depended on individual maturity level, individual decisions, available resources and

¹ This represents the current position at common law, which allows confidentiality to be breached where there may be a risk of significant harm to the child or other people.

wider school ethics. I was the interface between other adults (for example, teachers, governors and head teachers) in decision making roles. Demystifying the research process transferred methods for the children to adapt as their own depending on their physical and social situation. Also it was my role to make sure that the children were not exposed to any harmful risks during the research.

4.4 Power relations within participatory research

Given that '*a central characteristic of adults is that they have power over children*' (Mayall, 2000, 121), the issue of researcher positionality is specifically relevant in this research. The adult-child relationship is characterised by an unequal power relationship and this is especially relevant within a school setting. As Goodman (1992) notes, the traditional power relationships within schools serve to separate and exaggerate the distance between adults and children and hence if children are regarded as incompetent, irrational and 'becomings' (Qvortrup, 1994) then their viewpoints can be regarded as lacking credibility, robustness and competence. I recall one incident when entering a room and having the door held open for me to enter first and as I gestured that the child precede she gave me a confused look. This response conveyed a salient message – that adults possess the power in schools and children need to defer to adult authority.

An emerging critique about participatory and action-orientated approaches (see Kesby *et al*, 2007), seem to be centred on participatory approaches being a form of power in themselves and hence merely impose yet another form of research on the participants. The aim is therefore to readdress the imbalance of power between the child and the adult researcher in order to enable children's active participation (Thomas and O'Kane, 1998). So although it is argued that distance between the child and the adult researcher exists, strategies can be put in place to reduce this emotional distance. Philo argues that as we have all been children a bond of recognition, sharing and mutual understanding exists (Philo, 2003).

This research process was made more child-friendly by acknowledging the existence of the power imbalance and by adopting relevant ethical and methodological procedures. It is acknowledged that access to the children in this research was gained and negotiated through different regimes of power which exercise control over children before actually coming into contact with the children themselves. Therefore, a large amount of planning took place before the children became aware of the research and given that the project was introduced from a 'top down' approach there were obvious inherent power imbalances.

Equally, there were undoubtedly implications of the levels of child participation and agency given that contact with the children was made within school hours. The school as a research setting is imbued with power relations. Context is especially important in interviewing children because the expression of the child's personality, in terms of behaviour and attitudinal preferences, is often dependent on a number of factors, such as where interviews are carried out (Scott, 2000).

Although using the schools (during school operational hours) as settings for the research was convenient, it clearly influenced their participation within the research. I was not at liberty to choose the setting as it was dictated by availability, the materials or technology required and the size of the group of children that I was working with. During the pilot study I had more freedom in providing the children with an opportunity to decide where they wanted to sit because the school had available space. Although the entire group of children initially sat in the school hall, some they decided that they wanted to use a number of different venues, namely, the library, the IT room and the empty classroom. During the fieldwork in all four schools however I was provided with a set venue and given no choice to encourage the children to choose their own space in which to work. To try and counter this issue, I did not advise the children where to sit within the room in which we were working. Children asked where they should sit but I responded that they could choose wherever. The traditional physical layout of a classroom conveys to the children their place within the school culture and I would move the desks to form a circle or small groups. I was equally careful never to sit at the teacher's desk and a few children chose to sit there and grin during the entire session.

Children are '*enmeshed in intricate webs of power*' (Simpson, 2000, 71) which dictate how they behave and how they participate within the learning process. In a school setting, adult researchers are viewed in a similar way to that of teachers and hence the children regard the rules of behaviour to be the same. Although the adoption of a 'non-authoritarian adult' role is recommended in order to facilitate interaction with children (Davis, 1998), in practice this proved difficult in my research. I tried to dress more casual than the teaching staff, although not too casual, namely, in jeans, so as to contradict the school's dress code policy. Some children were clearly uncomfortable when addressing me by my first name and preferred to call me 'Miss', even though I had introduced myself informally at the first session. I argue that by introducing myself informally it confused the children at first. Over time however their confidence in my role grew and I do think this generated more meaningful participation. They treat me as a 'friend' and told me secrets about other

children and were keen to ask personal questions, for example, if I had children of my own, if I was married and how old I was.

It was apparent that relationships established throughout my research altered depending on whether I was interacting with children, governors, parents, teachers or head teachers. Interactions differed according to whether teaching staff (and teaching and classroom assistants) were present or not. It is of no surprise that the most informal tone was established when it was just the children and I in the room without any teaching staff present. Children appear to have very little input into their own educational experiences given a rigid curriculum and set teacher-child interactional styles. Some of the teachers that were present are aware of this and adapted their styles to children's needs during the sessions. It was interesting to note how some of the teaching staff struggled to adapt to a more child-centred approach, letting the children make their own decisions regarding what activities to pursue, where to sit and who to interact with. On a number of occasions the teachers would approach me to apologise for 'leading' the children if they were asked a question. After the research ended the teaching staff in every school mentioned how they had found the structure of the session illuminating and recorded how they were proud (and surprised by some) of the children.

As discussed in Section 2.3.2 in Chapter 2, children as a social group may have similar physical spatial experiences, each is unique in character due to the differentiated factors of gender, age, ethnicity and class (Holloway and Valentine, 2000), therefore how they attach meaning to these mobilities will be culturally specific. Additionally issues surrounding gender, language, social status, culture, appearance and body language (Leyshon, 2002) between the researcher and the participant requires attention. Aitken (2001c) acknowledges that his own life experiences impact upon how he understands those of children and young people. He also asserts that the political constructions inherent in the differences between children, teenagers and adults is to be acknowledged given that none of these terms is value free. Overall, I do not view my involvement in the research as an obstruction to describing and interpreting children's experiences. Research is personal and my whole life experiences and emotions experienced during the fieldwork add to my desire to represent their voices in an ethical manner.

The age range within the research was interesting from a 'power' perspective. Certainly, in Rowlands Gill Primary the older children led the group work and took on the role of 'carer' of the younger children – some of whom were as young as four and five. The older children

told the younger children what to do – usually drawing or colouring in. In Phil and Jim Primary, where the age range was less, there didn't appear to be any differences in how children worked within groups and which roles children engaged in. Teenagers within the research groups represented a diverse group of identities, interests and experiences (Matthews *et al*, 1998; Weller, 2003) and in order to develop a more coherent approach, different conceptual and methodological reflection was required throughout this research. The majority of the participants in the age group 13-15 wanted to be addressed as a 'teenager' and not a 'child'. It was the case, as Valentine (1999, 150) suggests:

'Children – particularly teenagers – hanker after being identified as 'grown up' and respond well to being treated as adults'

The older children also used different methods, for example, video interviewing and questionnaires to share with their friends. Adhering to this complies with Valentine's (1999) argument that the way in which research is conducted is often more significant than the methods used in terms of reducing the adultist viewpoint. This issue of respect within the research was central in many discussions, as teenagers demanded greater control and power within the research process. The older participants found the term '*children's experiences*' patronising and not applicable to themselves. Labelling therefore has a direct link to power relations within the research process, showing how constructions of the self are fluid and temporal given continued changes within spatial contexts.

Establishing good rapport with the children was essential and as an 'adult' researcher there were certain personality characteristics that were definitely required. I had to show patience, act 'daft' if required (especially if they wanted to use drama as a means of conveying their experiences), be prepared to be manipulated and dominated (Fine, 1988) and willing to accept the straight forwardness of children (Holmes, 1992). I adopted a friend role and tried not to exert any 'adult' authority over the participants. This however led to some interesting situations once they realised that there was no 'adult' in the room. In three of my schools, teachers were present during all research sessions which had an obvious impact on the children's behaviour and participation. In Matthew Arnold Secondary however, there was no 'adult' present during the entire research process, resulting in me being frequently dominated and manipulated. During the initial sessions the participants did not want to do anything other than run around the classroom, talk on their mobile phones, listen to their ring tones, sit on the teacher's desk, draw on the whiteboard and eat their lunch. They were keen to ask personal questions and I responded with an answer. During the fourth visit, some of the children decided that they would like to engage with the research. So, while

some sat and watched, others began their research. During the fifth visit, most of the children participated and the two children who were still reluctant were 'told off' by the others and physically separated from them. Over the course of the next visit, these two children moved their chairs closer and closer until they felt as if they were physically participating. This session was therefore an interesting turning point in the research at this particular school.

Several researchers suggest that women view the world differently from men and therefore approach their research in a different manner. Fedigan and Fedigan (1989) assert that female researchers have an ability to respect individual differences by developing an emotional investment with their participants. I regard each child to have a distinct personality and the evolving of different methods between all of the groups has afforded me the ability to focus on each child's individuality as well as them being part of a collective. Adopting a mixed method approach appears to have diminished the power relations normally inherent in a research process. One possible explanation for this could be the fact that the children have chosen their own research methods. However, on a few occasions I was asked '*are we allowed to do this?*' with children conveying their disbelief in them having the freedom to choose. I recall receiving many quizzical looks when I said '*you can do whatever you want*'.

Van Maanen (1988) suggests that the fieldworker's emotional state, theoretical perspectives and personal characteristics be acknowledged in written text given their impact on the research process. The interpretation and analysis of data may be affected by the researchers' gender given that it is suggested that female researchers are inclined to be more holistic and integrative (Keller, 1985). In my own experiences of interpreting the data, I attempt to reflect their subjective experiences and feelings, knowledgeable of my own subjectivity within the process. Whilst I search for patterns in children's thinking and develop thematic categories, I am equally interested in a detailed explanation of their experiences. In interpretation of the data I have allowed each piece to speak for itself. The rich and robust texture of the material collected is derived from the relationships and experiences in their social world. It is impossible to remain detached completely and I acknowledge that during the research I have given empathy to certain children who were experiencing difficulty in their lives or being rejected by their peers. Whilst ethical guidelines inform researchers to remain neutral, emotive qualities developed through continued interaction have led to me having more rapport with some of the participants than others. This interaction has in no way had a negative impact on my research. Indeed without the

additional attention I feel that certain children would have chosen to leave the research completely.

A key ingredient for me throughout the fieldwork was patience, coupled with having to continue expressing positive feelings and a desire to interact with them, the failure to deliver discipline (or tell any of their teachers) and treating them with respect. It took time to establish their rules within the research. At times, this proved extremely difficult. I had to temper my need to achieve the aims of my research with the understanding of how important it was to earn the children's trust. Without going through these 'tests of the boundaries' I doubt the children would have benefitted from the research as much as they did. Their feedback at the end was testament to how much they had gained from their participation. I think they realised how hard it must have been for me too as some did show remorse for 'being so difficult'. So to borrow Rosaldo's (1989) notion of positioned subjects, there was an imbalance of power during certain points of the research with the scales tipped in their favour with them dominating me. I did not represent a real authority figure.

The experiences of male and female researchers may be viewed within the framework that individuals' experiences are influenced by cultural and ecological factors. The link between women researchers and children could affect the interrelationship given certain constructed categories, for example, mother being associated with nurturing and empathy. This was confirmed during my research. Once the children learnt I was a mother their behaviour changed. They appeared more at ease with sharing personal stories, some wanted to sit very close to me, some would ask me to button up their coats or tie their shoe laces and others wanted a hug at the end of a research session. The teenagers also became more aware that as a mother I possibly knew their '*tricks*'. Such experiences strengthened the relationship developing mutual levels of trust and security. As the sessions advanced, the children did not seem overly concerned if a teacher (or an assistant) was not present and indeed as the research continued often complained that I was much nicer than their teachers and asked if I could stay and be their teacher. At the end of the research, a few of the younger children become unsettled at the thought of me not returning. Therefore, I do believe that falling into the '*mother*' category altered their perception and behaviour towards me as a researcher and they sought out the qualities that they responded favourably to. It would however be unfair to assert that only females possess 'mother like' qualities. As Warren (1988) suggests, children draw on their own individual experiences and interact with the researcher according to his or her qualities. I tried to adopt a number of roles that

included researcher, adult, friend and mother which proved an advantage in that it extended the boundaries and contexts in which we could interrelate.

In terms of emotional investment I cared for the children whom I had the pleasure to meet and it was quite emotional for me to say goodbye at the end of the fieldwork. Emotive geographies have not been widely acknowledged in most participatory studies. I propose that this is more profound than a confession that 'I care' – it is more a reflection on how factors such as age, gender, life experiences and socio-cultural environments guide the research. Research does not, and nor should it try to, take place in a vacuum. It is only realistic to assume that feelings develop after working with a group of participants over a sustained period of time.

Reflecting Matthews *et al* (2000a) call for researchers to provide the link between children and policy makers, it is important to present participant's voices as precisely as possible. Valentine (1999) reinforces this by arguing for the use of children's own language. Although children were participating within a school culture that is officially controlled by adults, there were a number of aspects that operated outside the realms of adult control. This included interactions amongst themselves. Whenever children congregate they share a culture that exists apart from the adult world (Konner, 1991; Skelton, 1998). They manage to sustain and transmit cultural knowledge to each other and establish a degree of control. Two examples exemplify the peer culture. The first is when the children, typically whilst diagramming in groups, used 'text speak' (for example, spelling '*back to school*' as '*bk2skl*') and showed great delight in sharing the meanings with me whilst laughing loudly at the fact that I had very little understanding in how they were communicating. Secondly, a group of three boys of Matthew Arnold Secondary decided to focus on developing chants to communicate their experiences. The invented lyrics within this verbal art form reflected their shared peer culture and allowed the children to maintain some control over their behaviour.

The importance for me keeping a research diary in which my own feelings and concerns about the research were recorded showed that self-reflexivity entered all sections of the research process. Taking the point of Rose (1997) that we cannot fully articulate our own positionality and cautions against reflecting too much, the issue of my subjectivity is a significant tension central to this research process and the production of the analysis of the data. This is especially true in representing what the children mean and my role within this process. Can I speak on behalf of the children and provide meaning to their data? Pam Shurmer-Smith's (2002) work has been helpful in this regard in that for her the

interpretation and writing are not a simple representation of other people's voices but the construction of new ideas that go beyond people's words.

My own initial experiences with the children made me think very carefully about the importance of lack of communication. The initial session with Matthew Arnold Secondary seemed very disappointing at the time. Some participants were silent throughout, whilst other responses were mono-syllabic. It was easy to interpret this initially as lack of skill on my part. However, reappraising this situation critically, the apparent failure of a number of sessions was in fact very revealing. A discussion with Alistair (15) highlights this in more detail:

'So what do you think of participating in this research'? (me)

Nothing (Alistair)

Nothing at all? (me)

No (Alistair)

You are not interested in it? (me)

No, why are you asking me? (Alistair)'

The underlying message was more salient perhaps – that the young people had no experience of being active participants within research and distrusted the process at first.

Likewise, at Ryton Comprehensive, whilst discussing the strategies that the school have implemented to encourage walking, cycling or public transport, the children initially sat in silence. When asked why they felt they couldn't participate in such a discussion they advised that they felt the school had done *nothing*. This was very telling and spoke more of their lack of participation within the school's strategic planning and of a breakdown in communication within the school. The Deputy Head Teacher was involved in this particular session and was very surprised that they were unaware of specific strategies that had been implemented, for example, safer bike storage and availability of lockers for bike helmets. He made a note to advise senior management of this problem and as a result, the school introduced weekly communication bulletins on the school notice boards and website. Much was learnt out of silence.

4.5 Linking PAR methodology with my own research

This research explores an aspect of everyday social activity which has been extensively studied over the past decade and for which there is a sizeable body of theoretical literature. Reflecting the diversity of children's experiences of their journeys to school – be they either collective or individual – the theoretical perspective of grounded theory recognises that these everyday mobility experiences are dynamic, changing and contextually constructed through a constant intersection of economic, social, cultural, temporal, political and physical processes. In this respect, knowledge is relative to individual circumstance and given that an individual's world is in a constant state of change, it stands to reason that such knowledge will change and develop over time and space. The nature of social reality is that there is no 'real' world that exists independently of the relationships between researchers and their subjects (Smith, 1988). The researcher and the research participants are social beings who have been created by, and subsequently create, social processes which in turn alter over time and space. Given that there is no ultimate truth and that the world is in a constant state of change, it has been imperative to consider the wider research impacts within social, cultural and interpersonal contexts through rational, critical thinking (Bailey *et al*, 1999). Equally, the critical practice espoused from PAR of reflexive project management, providing a robust methodological audit trail of how the research is conducted, has proved insightful and is integral to this research process.

Although drawing on the sociological tradition, the research is concerned with social interaction and meaning, it is firmly linked in with the tradition of applied social research in promoting the interrelationship between policy and practice. Layder's (1993) multi-strategy approach has been helpful in this regard. Conceptualising the research in terms of four primary levels of interest: **the self**, where the focus is on the individual participants self-identity and social experiences; **the situated activity**, where the focus is on giving meaning to social interactions that take place; **the setting**, in this case, the school, the household and the spaces in between through which children experience their daily lives; and **the context**, which focuses on for example, macrostructures of national and local policy strategies (Chapter 3) and the framework of conceptions of childhood (Chapter 2). Whilst it has been suggested that the focus of research is usually towards a certain level, Layder's framework has been significant in providing understanding that all of the levels are important even if some are less prominent than others.

The qualitative methods employed in this research reflect wider methodological changes within the field of Geography as well as across the social sciences, following conceptual shifts in thinking over the past few decades. Influenced by post-structural theory, the viewpoint is that there is no single universal truth and that there are multiple standpoints from which the world is known (Foucault, 1977). Qualitative research methods have increasingly placed emphasis upon uncovering chaotic, emotional, embodied personal geographies in understanding space, place and identity (Limb and Dwyer, 2001; Pile and Thrift, 1995). This thesis builds on this qualitative epistemology as it employs a range of qualitative research methods that have proved chaotic, messy, loud, emerging and exciting given that they evolved over time due to the children themselves being positioned centrally within the research process – including framing the research questions, the design of the overall project, the choice of methods, the data analysis and verification, the presentation of findings to recognised key stakeholders and strategic forward planning in order to continue the discussion as a collaborative, educational practice.

In terms of the research looking at transport and mobilities, traditionally these research foci have been on quantitative measurement (Pooley, 2000; 2005b), yet this ignores the rich diversity in mobility experiences at a local scale. My research is significant in its emphasis on local-level in-depth qualitative research. The focus is upon meaningful and genuine participation. I took children's and young people's agency and capacity seriously and it was important for me to reflect on what domains of the research are the participants involved in (or excluded from) and why are they involved or not. Whilst the children and young people were not intimately involved in framing the initial set of research questions they were instrumental in discussing these and altering them in need. In a way the research was pre-defined yet unstructured. This lack of structure gave freedom and space to develop ideas, design a process and alter certain aspects in need. It was important to be self-reflexive and be committed to social change through this participatory research (Chawla *et al*, 2005; Porter, 2002). I found Driskell's (2002) list of participation principles very helpful in this regard, as it framed the key issues that needed continual thought and attention. A list of key principles is shown below in Table 3 below. After each principle, I have provided an explanation and then highlighted it against my own research agenda. My emphasis was to conduct research which involved *real* participation of children and young people, engaging them in the entire research process. This meant that the children and young people would develop their own research agenda within the broad heading of the research and act upon the outcomes proposed to effect change within their immediate environment.

Whilst I was mindful that the research questions and parameters of the research were largely pre-defined given funding requirements from an external sponsor, it is important to note that they have evolved and changed over time as the research has developed, being reflexive to context. This research has tried to prioritise children and young people's involvement with them designing and developing the research process, choosing the methods and tools that they felt comfortable with, and promoting them as political citizens (Barker, 2003) given that they presented the research findings as a group to key stakeholders at the end of their fieldwork. I would argue that sometimes the younger children are not given the status of full, active participants, or indeed not at a level that younger children are participating. This research covers a range of age groups (from 4 to 16 years of age) and it was very important for me to develop a participatory methodology that was open to all – not just the older ones – but to all children regardless of their age (this issue will be dealt with later in the fieldwork analysis).

| Participation Principle | Explanation | Linking to my research |
|--------------------------------|--|--|
| Local | Research focused on and tailored to the needs and issues of each group of children and young people at a local level given the micro-geographies of their journeys to school | as an outsider, my role was to facilitate and listen and provide whatever support was required, not to dictate solutions or preconceived outcomes based on my own assumptions and biases |
| Transparent | Research aims made clear to all participants | The aims were made clear to all participants and we spent several sessions discussing them and how they relate to the individual and the group. Ongoing meetings with key stakeholders, for example, government officials, also clarified accountabilities and aims. |
| Inclusive | Research accessible to all members | As the fieldwork was conducted within school time on school premises this criteria is recognised as being questionable given the child's limited choice within the setting |
| Interactive | Research is a community-wide dialogue with adults and young people working together | the sessions were developing dialogue within the group and also with members of the teaching staff, local community, local government and business |
| Responsive | Research responds to local needs and conditions | Each group was different which led to four very different research processes in terms of content, sequence and outcome. As a facilitator I was as |

| | | |
|-----------------------|--|---|
| | | flexible as I could be and provided time and space for the research process to evolve and change in need. |
| Relevant | Research builds on local knowledge and is centred on local issues that are relevant to the participants | The journey to school is a highly political item on many agendas at local and national government, community and individual level. It is linked with discourses surrounding community breakdown, childhood obesity, health and safety and sustainable cities. |
| Educational | Research is a learning process for everyone. | It proved a learning process for everyone, including the children and young people, teaching staff, policy makers, project staff and project sponsors. It also focused on variable learning styles and was adaptable to individual likes, dislikes, skills and interests. |
| Reflective | Research placing emphasis on the role of reflection as an opportunity for individual and group learning. | Raised levels of awareness, not just on the journey to school issues but on child participation and participatory methods |
| Transformative | Research which leads to transformation within the local community, between local and national and individual change too. | Offered ability to transform individual personal values as well as group perceptions. |
| Sustainable | Research makes an ongoing contribution with the change to foster commitment to action and also developing a relationship between the child or young person and the environment | Key to understanding their local role in wider societal issues at local and global scales. |
| Personal | Research to be perceptive to the needs of the participants and give space for them to being in control of their own participation | Be open-minded, perceptive, flexible to individual needs and skills. |
| Voluntary | Research to engage voluntarily as participants understand the issue impacts on their everyday lives | The journey to school is a widely debated topic and one which influences all young people and stakeholders given its centrality to everyday mobility. |

Table 3: Participation is... (adapted from (Driskell, 2002))

The importance of textual knowledge has been previously highlighted (Kelley, 2006) in relation to specific policies being discussed with children and young people which have very little relevance to their lives. In this way, it is unlikely that they would have access to the

knowledge required to make an informed input into research. In order to ensure that lack of knowledge was not a barrier to participation, it was anticipated that the research questions would need to be discussed at length so that any uncertainty by the participants could be shared and resolved. However, given the prominence of the issues surrounding health, sustainability and crime and the public discourses taking place within schools, household and the media, the participants were more than able to situate this research within their everyday lives against the backdrop of the wider political agenda. They showed a deep understanding of the issues involved given that it was integral to their own everyday lives. What was more difficult to convey was the importance of their active participation. One participant (Scott, 15) showed uncertainty in his role by asking *'why you wanting to know what I think?'* and also a level of distrust in what providing the answer would lead to, by asking *'do you tell the teachers what we say then?'* It was revealing to note the differences in how specific children and young people approached their participatory roles within the research which, as mentioned previously, was context specific (for example, depending on institutional practices conducted at the school). It is important to note that the levels of individual and group participation within this research evolved over time.

My review of current literature, discussions with various stakeholders in local government departments (specifically those charged with developing and managing school travel policy) and prior experience of completing research within schools (largely focused on the Extended Schools Framework, Workflow Management and Anti-Bullying Strategies) convinced me that the approach should be as child-centred as possible. Indeed, past experience implementing school-based research projects initiated by local education authorities had shown me how *not* to conduct research with children, given their lack of encouragement of child participation. I placed a significant amount of time and energy towards planning the fieldwork and was fully aware that having worked within schools in the past could prove to be a disadvantage. I therefore took the decision to conduct a pilot study in order to develop a more robust methodological framework.

4.6 Planning the fieldwork – the importance of the pilot study

A significant step within the research process was the three month pilot project conducted at my local primary school in Gateshead with 57 children (aged 8-9) during the period May to July 2006. The original plan had been to conduct the pilot over a few sessions, however, given the nature of how the research methods evolved, I ended up spending three months with the children comprising of ten sessions. There were three reasons for conducting a

pilot. Firstly, in the pre-drafted research overview (as a funded project the methods had been outlined in order to secure funding however there was scope to adapt them) , it stated that the participants were to complete participatory diagramming exercises, take photographs and write travel diaries. The pilot stage would therefore test how much engagement could be achieved within these pre-set methods. The second reason was more grounded within practical issues – the length of each session, the number of sessions that would be required to complete the fieldwork, how many children could I realistically deal with in each session and what would the expected outcomes be. Thirdly the importance of the pilot was grounded in ethical concerns given my positionality. As I have extensive experience of working in schools (both as a teacher and as a member of the management team) I felt that I might 'taint' the fieldwork if I approached it 'cold'. The pilot project allowed me the opportunity to develop personal strategies in order to counteract this issue. As Chair of Governors at the local school, it was practical to negotiate access to the group of children through my existing relationship with the Head Teacher. I was realistic from the outset in stating that the school was to be used predominantly as a pilot to test the pre-defined methods and to help me plan the actual fieldwork in an efficient and effective manner.

The only way I can describe my experience throughout the pilot study is by using the term '*baptism of fire*'. The setting throughout the pilot was the school hall. Two teachers and one teaching assistant were present at all times. At the beginning of the first session with the whole group of children I explained the aims of the research and the importance of their participation. I made it very clear that they had a choice in whether they wanted to participate or not. Consent forms were handed out for them to sign. This was incredibly confusing for them. They had never been asked their consent before, they did not understand the forms and they subsequently asked what would happen if they did not sign them. I had originally agreed with the teaching staff that if any children did not want to participate then they could be provided with alternative work in the classroom under supervision of the teaching assistant. The reality was therefore that they could sign the forms and stay with their friends and take part in the sessions or leave to sit in a quiet room and revise maths! When the two options became clear, there was a desperate rush to grab pens to sign the form they didn't really understand in the first place! This was an important learning point for me. It made me question the *tokenistic* nature of handing out a form to a child for them to sign their agreement to participate when the alternative (of sitting separately from the group doing work!) was bleak. It seemed a worthless exercise. Going

forward in the fieldwork, I made the decision to spend a significant amount of time discussing these issues.

Equally revealing was the process of gaining parental consent. I explained to the children that they were to take letters home to their parents advising that they have been chosen to participate within this research. Out of the 57 parental consent letters, one was returned refusing their child's participation. This proved quite difficult in practical terms. Not only had the child participated within the first session but she had indeed opted into the research herself and therefore found it confusing that she was subsequently not allowed to continue. She was accompanied by the teaching assistant and given art to complete in a separate room whilst the other children were involved in the sessions. The fact that only one child would be 'left out' had never occurred to me and on speaking to her it was apparent that she felt isolated and dejected. The issue of the parent's decision overturning her own was upsetting and seemed contradictory given the initial discussion on the importance of hearing the voices of children. The very act of requesting the parent's consent *after* gaining the child's consent was unethical and contradicted the key message of the research. This informed my fieldwork.

During the course of the next few sessions, the children were introduced to a range of diagramming techniques whilst discussing their journeys to and from school. They used large pieces of paper, pens, post-it notes and stickers to 'brainstorm' their journey to school. The original plan was to also provide cameras for the children to use on their journeys to and from school. This would gauge how many children completed the task and give some understanding to how they engaged with this method. I, however, naively bought 10 cameras and asked the group of 56 children who would like to use one in their research. Of course, all 56 children wanted one! When I explained that there were only ten they begrudgingly agreed to put all of their names into a hat and randomly choose ten names. With hindsight, their call for fairness was well founded and I did not make this mistake again during the fieldwork. I had also planned to hand out travel diaries to all of the participants. They proved to be a less favoured method. All of the children were given a diary but only 15 were returned at the end of the period. This low figure could have been down to the fact that the children were required to sustain the (writing) activity across a week, and may also have been construed as homework as it was mostly completed outside of school hours. During session five, I was faced with a group of boys (aged 9) who did not want to take part in any of the diagramming activities, they had not been chosen to be given a camera and they did not want to fill in travel diaries. They wanted to use their own method – to

write a rap song to convey their experiences of the journey to school. And they needed a piano and some drums! This proved to be a turning point within the research.

Therefore, it became clear that my restricted view on which methods should be used did not allow for and cater to children's different avenues of expression. I subsequently conducted a brainstorming exercise with the children in which I asked what methods they would like to develop, and it was at this point in the pilot study that the research took on a completely new course of action. At the end of the diagramming process the group of children gathered together and developed one new list of preferred (research) methods and used stickers to identify their favourite. Plate 1 shows the creative, novel list that hence emerged – methods that I had not previously considered ranged from poetry, power point presentations and videos to song writing and drama. The fact that travel diaries and photography were not chosen as preferred methods may be as a result of them already having experience of these beforehand or due to the many more creative methods developed through active discussion.

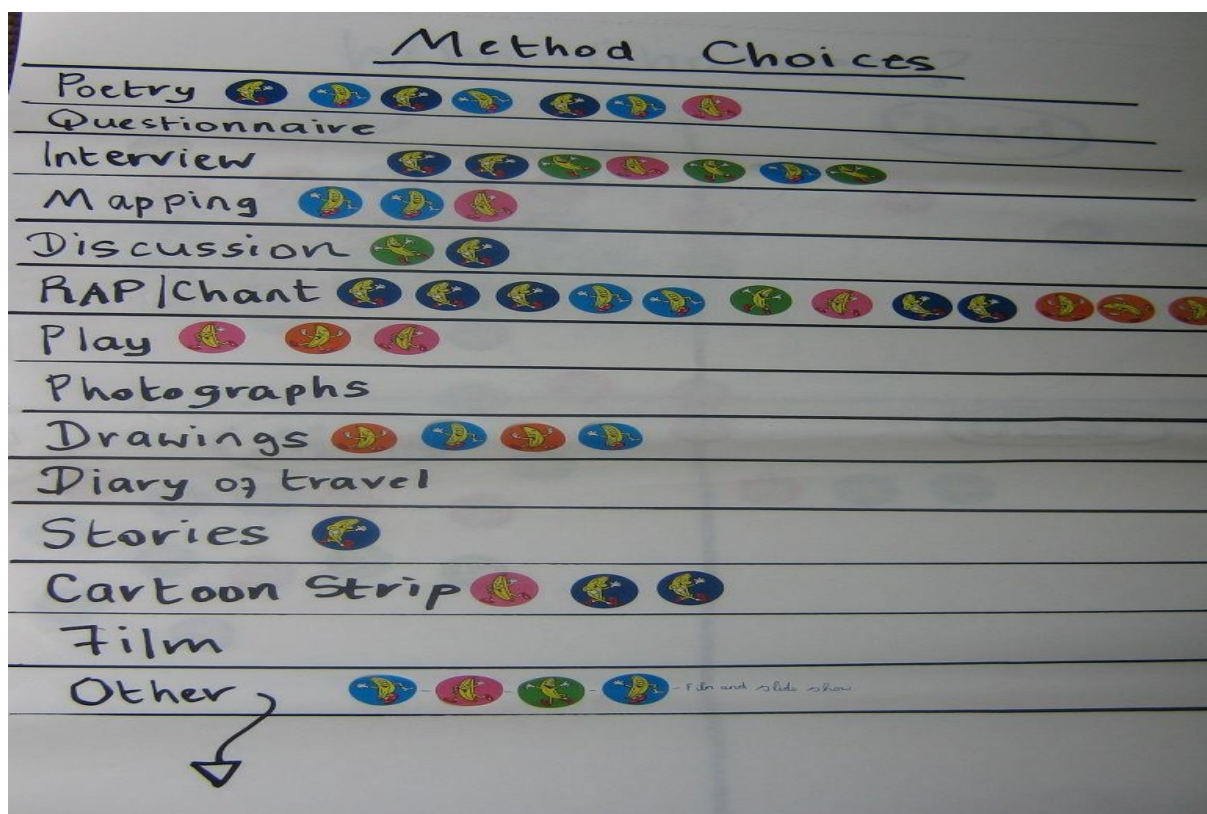


Plate 1: Preferred methods used during the pilot stage

It was at this point in the research when I realised that what I had been doing was not what I actually believed child participation to be. I had been too rigid and pre-defined in my research design and had not allowed the research to evolve and explore creative new

directions. This was a pivotal point in my fieldwork – the realisation that what I was doing was pre-defining what their participation should be and hence stifling their own abilities, needs, views and preferences. In essence the very way in which I was conducting research contradicted the participatory methodological approach that I aspired to. The range of ideas developed through subsequent discussion groups conveys their creativity and enthusiasm with regard to them developing their own new methods:

'ooooh, ideas of things to do, make a map and stories and songs and diaries and questionnaires and chatting about it and songs and music and needlework, we can paint...'
(girl, 9)

'Word searches for things about the journey to school. I don't know, oh I know, let's do a tapestry like the healthy school tapestry...I want to write, we can take turns, you can write next week, write next week...we can use a video camera...ok, so we are going to do a tapestry this week, a video camera the week after...then we are going to do a rap to explain to Mrs McMillan how we get to school, then we will do a play'' (boy, 9)

The following discussion took place between a group of children – one boy and three girls – whilst they were brainstorming what methods they preferred. They also had a large piece of paper on which they were noting their ideas:

'Let's write a good story, hello little thingy (to the tape recorder) (boy, 9)

We can make a cake (girl, 8)

We can mime (boy, 8)

We can make a cake, are you listening? (girl, 8)

Hello (boy, 9 - to the tape recorder accompanied by loud scratching sounds)

We can write a letter (boy, 9)

What else can we do? (girl, 9)

Take photos (girl, 8)

We can do a jig (boy, 9)

A dance by the way, get jiggy with it (girl, 8)

I walk to school cos I am only 5 minutes away (girl, 9)

We can take a video (boy, 9)

Is this a cassette or a voice recorder? (girl, 8)

I don't know where the sound goes...there? (boy, 9)

Harry is a naughty boy 'cos he is swearing (girl, 8 - giggling)

I am not (boy, 9)

A tea party (girl 8 - giggling)

Yeah, a tea party (girl, 9)

I've got a good idea (girl, 8)

What? (boy, 9)

A collage (girl, 8)

How do you spell collage? (girl, 9)

I will spell it (girl, 8)

No (girl, 9)

Play a board game (girl, 8)

That is mint (boy, 9)

See I am clever, aren't I (girl, 9)

No (boy, 9)

I have a good idea, draw a flower, with things that happen on the journey to school (girl, 8)

We could do a television show (boy, 9)

Yeah (all girls)

A documentary (boy, 9)

We are running out of space (girl, 9)

Is it still going round? (boy, 9)

We could take pictures (girl, 8)

Or a mime? (boy, 9)

Make a tape of joy, that's a really good idea (girl, 9)

A teddy bear, that's the best (girl, 8)

Write a poem (girl, 8)

No' (boy, 9)

Children were excitedly discussing very grand plans with regard to what methods they would like to do. Over the course of the next few sessions they were given the opportunity to pursue whatever method they wanted (and could practically manage given time and resource constraints), the result of which were some wonderfully novel methods which conveyed their views and experiences of their journey to school through a variety of different mediums. The final session comprised the children presenting their views of their

journey to school experiences through the chosen methods to the teaching staff and myself and discussing as a group the themes that had emerged over the project.

So, over all of the ten sessions that were held during the pilot stage, a number of significant findings emerged:

- The importance of fully explaining the requirements of the research to the head teacher, in terms of time, space, materials and anticipated noise levels.
- The importance of including the children in designing the research around them and their needs and preferences.
- The levels of enthusiasm and creativity that the children possessed.
- The levels of technological ability that the children possessed were extremely high and they wanted to use their skills in chosen methods.
- The need for them to be treated with fairness and to provide each child with the same opportunity throughout the research.
- The amount of time each session would take would vary depending upon activity.
- My position as a researcher within the context of a school.
- The importance of keeping the teaching staff updated and involved in all steps of the research.
- The importance of not being bound by strict method categories as the children wanted to experiment with different methods.
- That taping the discussions would prove very difficult given the noise levels sometimes and me having to resort to relying upon notes taken during the sessions.

These learning points were vital in guiding the actual fieldwork. It is hoped that the fieldwork was more ethically robust because of the significant amount of time spent re-evaluating the methodological approach tested during the pilot phase.

4.7 Geographic context of the research fieldwork

Spanning the 2006-2007 academic year, the fieldwork took place in two separate geographical areas - Oxford and Gateshead. The rationale for conducting research on school travel within these separate geographic regions lies in a number of reasons. Initially, the interest in both regions came from the project sponsor (Go-Ahead Bus Company) given their corporate interest in both of these areas and their overall understanding of public transport and the subsequent issues surrounding sustainable travel. However, the sponsor's role was somewhat sporadic. During the first year of study, I met with two senior managers within

the company and introduced the research topic. Whilst they were interested, they offered no suggestions or interest in anything specific. The project sponsor attended two presentations during the first two years of study made to fellow students and lecturers within the department. In year three, the sponsor seemed to leave the company and interest in the research disappeared. During this final year a research report was compiled, highlighting a summary of key research findings (Appendix 1) which I thought may be of interest to the company and sent to their PR department, yet I received no feedback or acknowledgement. This waning of sponsor support over time was somewhat disconcerting, yet the findings which focused on public transport travel evolved from the research in any case, especially in the two secondary schools where more children use this service, and weren't led by myself. So whilst the geographic focus of the research was determined by the sponsor, the research conducted within the schools was not structured around them.

4.7.1 Oxford

Oxfordshire's population covers 1006 square miles and has the lowest population density in the south-east region. The city of Oxford holds 22 per cent of the county's population. While the number of cars by household is just above that of the national average, it is estimated that 29 per cent of people travel to work by public transport, bike or foot. The local transport plan in Oxfordshire prioritises five areas: talking congestion, delivering accessibility, safer roads, better air quality and improving the street environment. Oxford has gained a reputation for having a progressive approach to environmental issues. This strong environmental culture in the city of Oxford, together with a mix of environmental and other interest groups, both support environmental preservation and protection and has a strong input into local policy making. It is reported that car usage on the school run within Oxfordshire county has reduced by 2 percent on average over the period 2005-2006, due in part to the active engagement of the regions' schools in exploring alternative sustainable modes of school travel. Across the borough, 198 schools have completed a travel plan and benefitted from the Travel Plan Grant Funding (OCC, 2008d) and in line with the national aim, is hoped to have all schools completing a Travel Plan by the end of 2010. Table 4 indicates the latest survey results, by pupils aged 5-16 years old:

| | Walk | Cycle | Public transport | car | Car share | other | Total |
|----------------------------------|-------------|--------------|-------------------------|------------|------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Oxfordshire Gateshead | 43%* | 8% | 19% | 24% | 6% | 1% | 100% |

- Figures have been rounded up

Table 4: Oxfordshire County – travel to school by mode (School Travel Plans: 2007 (OCC, 2008b))

4.7.2 Gateshead

One of the key battles within Gateshead is increasing levels of congestion. The levels of car ownership in Tyne and Wear (Gateshead comprising one of the five Local Authorities along with Newcastle, North Tyneside, South Tyneside and Sunderland) currently has one of the lowest levels of car ownership in the UK, but shows the fastest growth in car ownership, therefore congestion levels have the potential to increase over time (GCC, 2007). The concern is that this will be reflected within the choices made for school travel. In Oxford over the past 20 years, car ownership has doubled to 300 000 which equates to a 2 percent increase annually from 1991. It is anticipated that the capacity of road networks will outstrip demand by 2011. Both councils are also very active in encouraging sustainable school travel behaviour and key documents have been produced recently highlighting the role of school travel within both regions' overall sustainable agenda (GCC, 2007).

Gateshead borough covers an area of 55 square miles south of the River Tyne and in 2003 the population was estimated to be 191,000. Geographically, the area comprises urban areas to the centre and to the east with more rural villages towards the west. Currently 45,600 young people aged up to the age of 19 live in Gateshead. The borough consists of 69 primary schools, 1 nursery school, 10 secondary schools, 6 special schools and 4 specialist centres. There are over 15,000 children attending state primary schools and 11,800 attending state secondary schools. In line with the national target, Gateshead plans that by 2010 all schools will have completed a School Travel Plan. Currently 54 schools have authorised school travel plans (GCC, 2007). The building and refurbishment of schools within Gateshead under the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) and Building Schools for the Future (BSF) are conversant with the School Travel Plan programme. The plan contributes to a number of local and national objectives and policies including Gateshead Council's Local Agenda 21 Strategy, Tyne and Wear Local Transport Plan and the Government's Ten Year Transport Plan, as well as Community Strategy and Towards 2010. The objectives are based on the Local Agenda 21 Transport objectives which are to reduce car usage and increase the

quality of public transport; reduce the amount of travel by motorised means through promotion and provision of genuine alternatives which are less damaging to the environment; and, improve public access to amenities and services, with less need to travel (GCC, 2007).

| | Walk | Cycle | Car share | Car | Service bus | School bus | Taxi | Metro |
|------------------|-------------|--------------|------------------|------------|--------------------|-------------------|-------------|--------------|
| primary | 59%* | 1% | 2% | 34% | 2% | 0.5% | 0.5% | 0% |
| secondary | 36% | 0.5% | 1% | 18% | 31% | 13% | 0.2% | 0.2% |

- Figures have been rounded up

Table 5: Gateshead – travel to school by mode: 2006/7 in respect of schools with a STP (GCC, 2007)

A compulsory component of the STP is a section detailing travel preference and as highlighted in table 5 Gateshead’s primary school children report that they would prefer to walk (36%), cycle (35%) and use the car (22%). Only 6% report that they would prefer to use the bus. Secondary school children’s preferences comprise 34% walk, 9% cycle, 28% car and 29% the bus.

Two schools (one primary and one secondary) from each region took part in this research. The sampling procedure is discussed below.

4.8 Sampling procedure

Acquiring permission to conduct research with children in school during school hours was a time-consuming task. Schools are often reluctant to grant permission due to a number of reasons that include, past experiences with other researchers, concern about the children’s well-being and the time required to complete the research given curriculum focus, happenings at the school at that time practically restricting the research and the nature or topic of the research. In speaking to the Head Teachers of all the schools involved it is the time pressure which was most concerning given the strict requirements of the National Curriculum, which echoed the comments from the representatives in the local authority. I employed the same strategy across both local education authorities (LEAs) within Oxford and Gateshead when requesting permission to conduct research within the schools. Initially, I contacted the representatives within each LEA who manage school travel in order to arrange preliminary meetings to review the research aims and requirements. Issues such as ethical concerns were addressed as well as the practicalities that could potentially emerge.

Other meetings were also held with representatives from integrated departments, for example, Engineering and Road Safety.

The interviews were not recorded word for word and the role of the local authority was primarily to get background to the policy and to gain advice about engaging with the schools. Some common themes emerged from these interviews:

- There was a great deal of support for the research and offers of help in the research sessions
- There was interest in the findings and a request that members of the team responsible for school travel in each local authority be at the final presentation (two members of each team did attend the final presentations in each school)
- The teams responsible for school travel met up regularly with the Engineering and the Road Safety departments to discuss and/or assess any plans
- Both departments showed concern for future funding
- Both departments discussed how difficult it was to engage certain schools and knew which schools seemed uninterested in engaging with the school travel teams
- Gateshead school travel team advised that schools often showed interest yet were frustrated at the level of 'red tape' in order to secure funding

After discussing the research in depth with the two teams at each of the local authority, eight schools were shortlisted from each geographic area. Whilst this appears to be a top-down divisive approach in choosing the schools for participation, the reasoning stands within practicalities. Oxford and Gateshead LEA manage 343 and 282 educational facilities (including nursery primary, secondary and special schools) respectively. Practically, without wasting valuable research time, it was not possible to contact each school requesting their ability or interest in participating. School travel is a highly regarded issue within schools given that it is linked to many strategic objectives, for example, Every Child Matters and Healthy Schools. In Oxford, 198 schools have an authorised travel plan. In Gateshead, 54 schools have the same. This shows the extent of the importance of them within the wider policy framework. It was anticipated that if all of the schools were introduced to the research, a high proportion would be interested and the reality was that time constraints (and the methodology favouring in-depth, textured robust research spanning a few months at each school) would permit me to only practically conduct research with four schools.

It was agreed therefore that the eight schools shortlisted in each geographic region be approached to gauge their interest and practical ability. I approached them via telephone

and/or email. Six schools in Oxford, and five schools in Gateshead showed interest and replied that they were keen to participate, although a few of the schools did at this point express concern with the level of child engagement that I was requiring 'out of lesson time' given the strict requirements of the National Curriculum. A series of further conversations with each school took place during which, an in-depth review of the requirements was given. In the end, four schools were selected based on criteria discussed during on-going meetings with the representatives from the LEA. The criteria were:

- An appropriate level of information provided in each of the travel plans showing levels of child participation within their in-school research;
- A range of different strategies that the schools had used in order to encourage sustainable journeys to school.

A visit to the Head Teacher of each of the four chosen schools was then arranged and prior to each meeting, each Head Teacher was sent a detailed overview of the aim of the research, how often I may need to visit the schools, my credentials and a discussion of the ethical concerns. The latter included an agreement to protect the children and the school's privacy and certain provisions were emphasised: to not identify any child in any resulting publications or presentations and confirmation that I would not take photographs against the wishes of the children or the school.

During the meeting with the Head Teacher a number of practicalities were discussed again, namely: when the research would take place, the length of each session, who would accompany me in each session, which venues were available, the level of involvement from the children and teaching staff (more specifically if this extended to outside school hours), the requirement for materials, the 'link' with the national Curriculum and the anticipated levels of activity. In all cases a follow up meeting was conducted with a member of the teaching staff (who were subsequently charged with managing this research and who would be the primary contact within the school) to review all of these points again.

Given that the research was conducted within school, I accepted that the children were not responsible for giving their consent to participate. Rather, consent was obtained from the Head Teacher. In all cases the schools acted on behalf of the children and granted permission for them to take part. Although a letter was sent out to every parent advising of the research, the school made the final decision as to who would and who would not participate.

'I wouldn't agree to this if it wasn't in the interests of my children, if the children didn't learn from the experience...the school takes the decision as to what's best for the children and the parents will be advised' (Head Teacher, SS Phil and Jim Primary)

The letters to the parents did advise that if there were any objections to a child participating that they should contact the school. No parent contacted any of the schools. This process was regarded as more ethical as informing the parents of this research covered the consent issue as well as laying a foundation to encourage them to approach me if they had any reservations or if they were simply interested in the research. At all of the schools, a lead Governor is charged with managing school travel from a strategic objective. I organised meetings with each of them to introduce the research and to gain the views of the senior management team on issues surrounding it. Only one Governor met up with me – the one based at SS Phil and Jim Primary. Across the four schools, 122 children took part, ranging in age from 4 to 16. The number and age of children I worked with in each school varied, as shown in Table 6.

| School | Location | Number of participants | Age range |
|--------------------------------|-----------|------------------------|-----------|
| SS Phil and Jim Primary | Oxford | 47 | 9 - 11 |
| Matthew Arnold | Oxford | 25 | 13 -15 |
| Secondary | | | |
| Rowlands Gill Primary | Gateshead | 24 | 4 - 11 |
| Ryton Comprehensive | Gateshead | 26 | 12 - 16 |

Table 6: List of participating schools by location, number of participants and age ranges

The age ranges and gender of the children was not pre-decided. The composition of the separate groups in each school seemed to be down to which year groups were chosen by the Head Teacher (SS Phil and Jim Primary and Matthew Arnold Secondary) or if the Head Teacher chose the school council to take part as a wider school initiative (Rowlands Gill Primary and Ryton Comprehensive).

SS Phil and Jim Primary School

The school lies in the heart of a residential area of North Oxford. It has 375 pupils within the Early Years Unit and six year groups. As part of the schools reorganisation this school became a primary in 2003 to serve current and future housing development in the area to a

maximum of 420 pupils plus nursery. The school has a unique geographic position in that its site is deemed to have insufficient vehicular access for more than 180 pupils. The school is bordered on one side by a canal and on the other, one single lane access road across a lighting-controlled hump-backed bridge. A planned new road to the north of the school was delayed due to planning constraints within a green belt. Interestingly, due to its location within the city the school attracts a fair proportion of children who have English as a second language. There are over 20 different first languages within the school so a range of cultures present.

Matthew Arnold Secondary School

A specialist science site, the school has 982 pupils from the age of 11 to 18 and serves the western suburbs of Oxford. It is well served with local public bus routes. Geographically it is situated at the top of a steep hill, Hirst Rise Drive, which leads off a main road (A34) into Oxford. Of all the schools this school had the highest percentage of children on free school meals.

Rowlands Gill Primary School

A school of 221 children aged between 4 and 11, located to the west of Gateshead city centre in a semi-rural area. It is located 300m from a main thoroughfare into Gateshead city centre. It has recently undergone a complete rebuild under the BSF scheme and the primary and junior schools have merged into one building. Access to the new site has been made more difficult recently due to this building work, however, access is problematic in any case due to the main (only) route being through a residential area.

Ryton Comprehensive Secondary School

With 1250 students aged between 11 and 18, it is located on the western edge of the Gateshead Metropolitan Borough. A Specialist Language School, the site is well served by the local bus network and is located on a main thoroughfare through the borough. It also forms part of a larger campus, comprising the infant and junior schools, and hence localised traffic volumes are increased.

4.8 Overview of fieldwork sessions

Figure 6 shows a simplified flow diagram of the sessions that were conducted at each school. In some cases, a session lasted over a number of actual time periods depending on circumstances.

Consistency of terms and themes was maintained across the sessions. The first session was spent *'discussing and brainstorming'* the research introducing them to the overall aims and objectives. It was also during this session that I answered any questions that the children may have had. At this stage the majority of the questions were more personal in nature as it was often asked *'why would I want to come and do research with their school?'*, *'do I have children?'* and *'where do you live?'* Children's ideas of participation and what it means to the research regarding the journey to school were discussed.

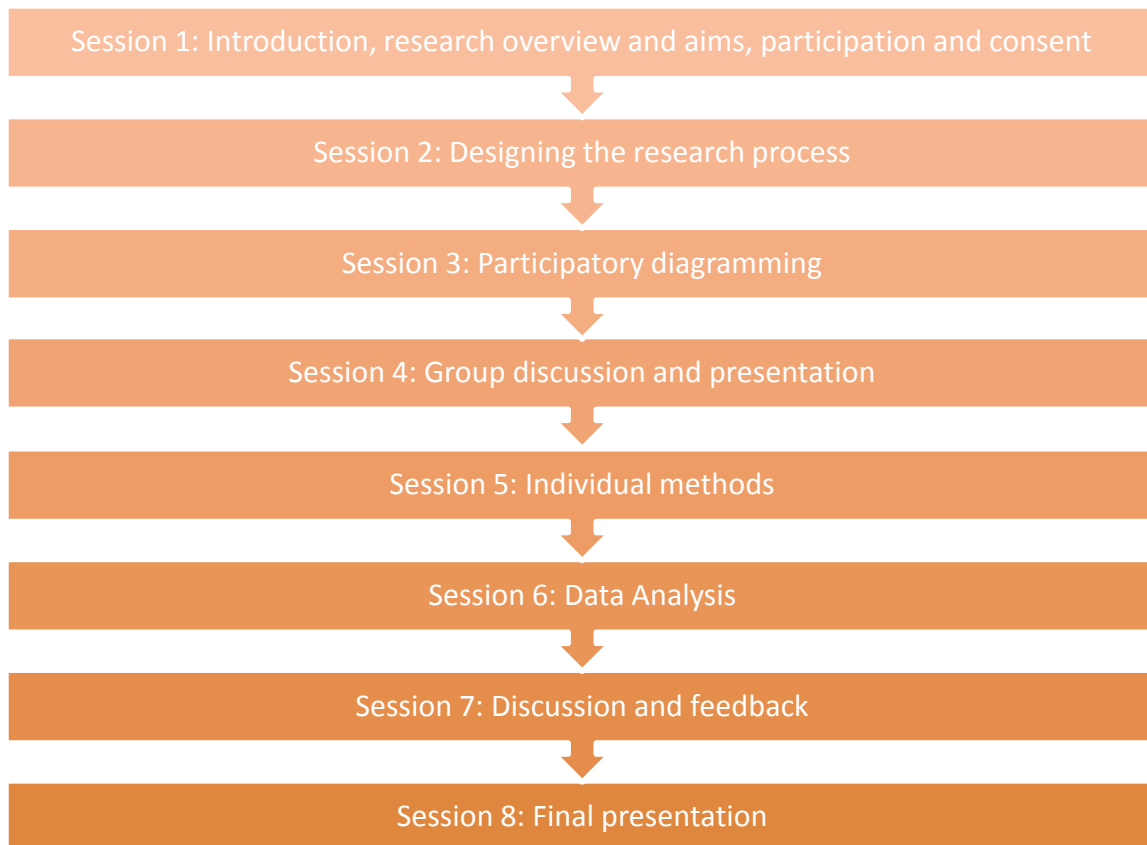


Figure 6: The flow of sessions

In small groups they engaged in diagramming exercises to explore their thoughts on the notion of participation. Reflecting van Beers (2002), in order to ensure recognition and acceptance, children's participation requires definition of the local social and cultural contexts and emphasis was placed on the different contexts experienced. Plate 2 reflects the consensus that children feel that their views should be listened to as they feel that they should play an active role in the local community. In session 2, the research design was discussed and children worked in groups or individually to decide on how the process should work, which sessions are needed and what is the final aim.

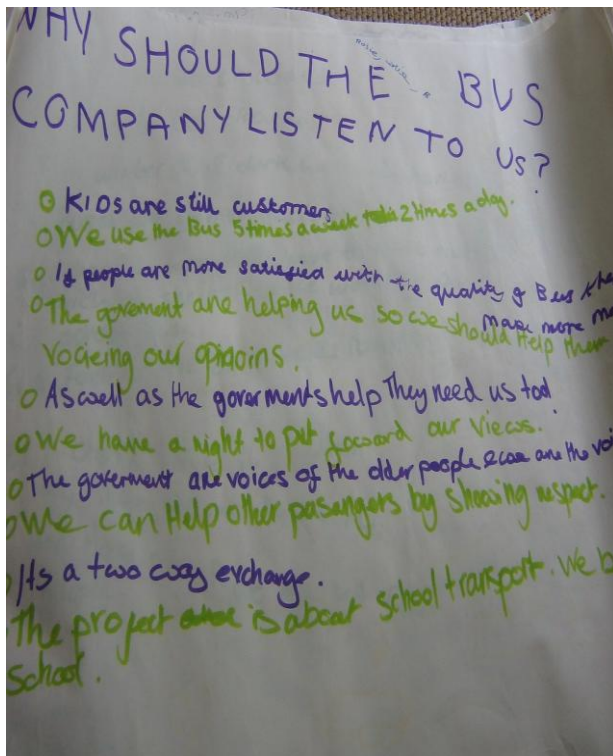


Plate 2: Diagramming the theme of 'participation' within the research (Matthew Arnold Secondary)

During session 3, diagramming techniques were used with the children, planning and designing the research process as well as discussing the integrated themes of household decision making, sustainability and issues surrounding them in their everyday lives with respect to their journeys to and from school. At the following session, the groups presented their views and a group discussion was initiated. For the following session, each group of children developed their own methods based on their experiences, preferences and practicalities. These sessions varied in length depending upon the method chosen. The timings of these sessions also varied, for example, the video interviews held at Ryton Comprehensive were held at 8am in order for the group to be present when the school buses arrived. Some participants chose to continue their research independently during lunch hours and after school. Themes that were discussed within this research also formed the basis of some of the formal lessons, for example, maths and geography as the teaching staff integrated the learning objectives. Any notes that were made by the teaching staff during these lessons were given to me during my next visit.

Discussion and feedback formed the basis of the penultimate session with a view to consolidating the data into a presentation to be conducted at the final session. All of the groups were involved in presenting their research although the composition of their

audiences differed given that the participants decided on whom to invite. In SS Phil and Jim Primary, the children chose to present their photography to a Governor and the Deputy Mayor (who lived locally). In Rowlands Gill Primary, they chose to present their findings in a poster campaign to parents and LEA representatives. In Matthew Arnold Secondary, they presented their findings to two members of the Environment and Energy Team from Oxfordshire County Council and the Deputy Head Teacher. The most ambitious of all schools proved to be Ryton Comprehensive. A diagramming exercise illustrates their thoughts of the initially-expected audience:



Plate 3: Discussing the audience for the final presentation (Ryton Comprehensive)

Sporting heroes, such as Alan Shearer, Michael Owen and Johnny Wilkinson were going to be invited, as was the Queen. A number of sessions were undertaken to discuss the feasibility of inviting certain people. After much deliberation, it was decided that they would present their findings to a group of people comprising two representatives from the School Travel Team at Gateshead City Council, the manager of School Safety at Gateshead City Council, a representative from Nexus, the Mayor of Gateshead, a representative from the university's Geography Department as well as their Deputy Head Teacher and Head Teacher. The research group planned the entire presentation session and created specific teams to manage particular aspects of the presentation. They developed three sub-teams - a data capture team (which created the presentation data on PowerPoint), a presentation team (who would present to the audience) and a hospitality team (who organised the meeting and greeting of the audience members and served tea and cakes).

4.9 Participatory Research Methods

Participatory methods emphasise shared learning, shared knowledge and shared meanings using flexible and collaborative techniques (Cahill, 2007a). They enable participants to use their own words or frames of understanding through a range of exercises. Challenging more conventional methods used within social sciences, participatory methods require the researcher to relinquish control (Sense, 2006) and take on more of a facilitator role rather than a leader. There are benefits to using a participatory approach using a wide variety of different methods, as *'greater confidence is instilled in the research findings where confirmatory support is provided independently from different sources'* (McKendrick, 1995, 6). Whilst the method choices reflected a range of preferences, skills and contextual experiences, common ground was consolidated throughout end of session discussions. Being sensitive to the power imbalance which has been commented on previously, I felt it was important not to demand answers from imposed questioning, as the target was to generate a rhythm of conversation that the children felt comfortable with. This flexible approach led to children to participate freely, allowed them a degree of control over the pace and content of the discussion and also offered them freedom to offer their views regardless of general consensus (Mayall, 2000). The discussions that were taped were done so with the children's consent. Although the children did not seem overly concerned with being recorded, they sometimes appeared more guarded when the tape recorder was switched on. When individual groups requested to use a tape recorder as part of their own discussion groups they seemed to have fun with added comments about secrets etc, whispering into the tape recorder.

There are a whole array of methods that can be employed within a participatory methodological approach, from diagramming, drama and video to photography, mapping and song (Alexander *et al*, 2007). Within this research, the participants chose their methods through using diagramming techniques to explore the range available to them and their preferences, as shown in Plate 4.

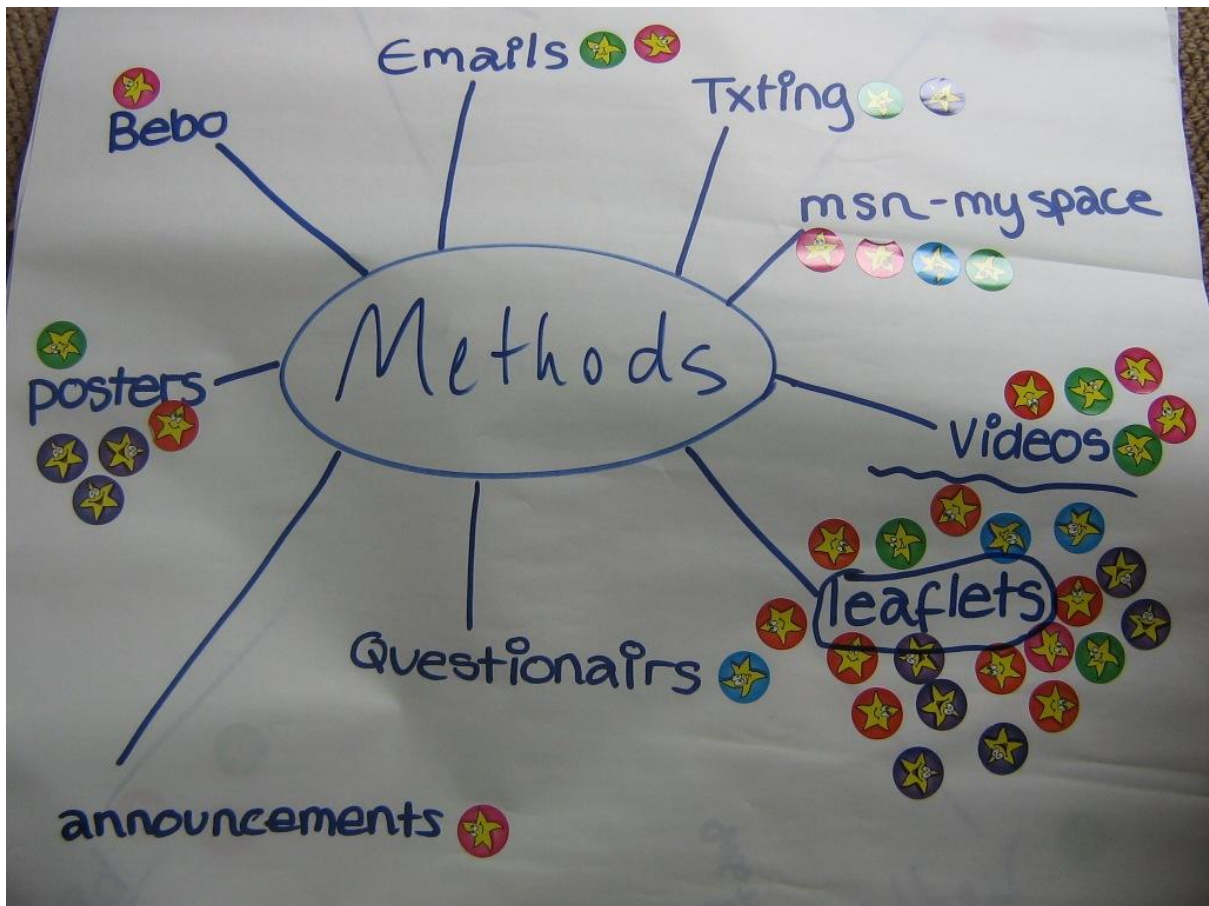


Plate 4: Diagramming to explore preferred methods (Matthew Arnold Secondary)

Therefore, as a research tool, participatory diagramming was used in a number of ways throughout the fieldwork. Firstly, it was used as a means of brainstorming wider issues surrounding child participation, the physical journey to school, household decision making, sustainability and individual feelings and experiences – discussed sometimes as a whole group, and other times in smaller groups. Children used large sheets of paper, coloured pens, 'post-it' notes, stickers and other visual materials to brainstorm their ideas. Table 7 provides an overview of the diagramming techniques used in the sessions and plates 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 provide illustration.

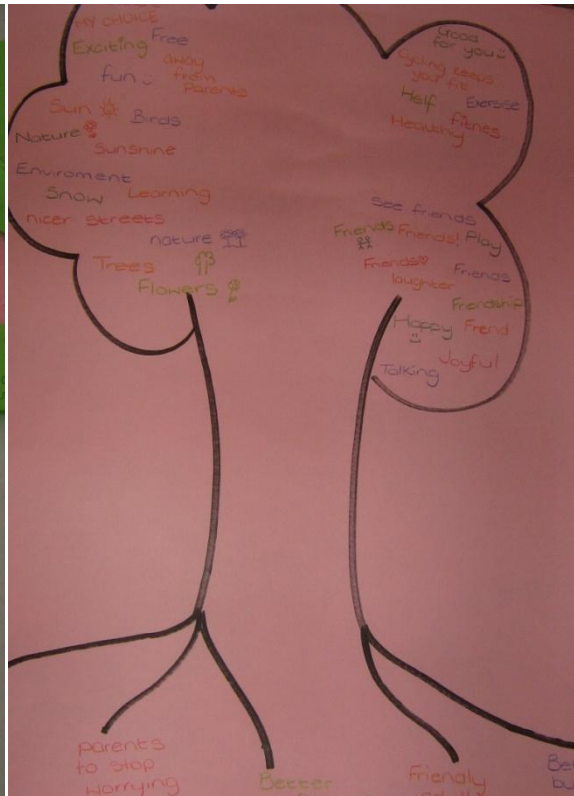


Plate 7: Feelings grid

Plate 8: Tree diagram

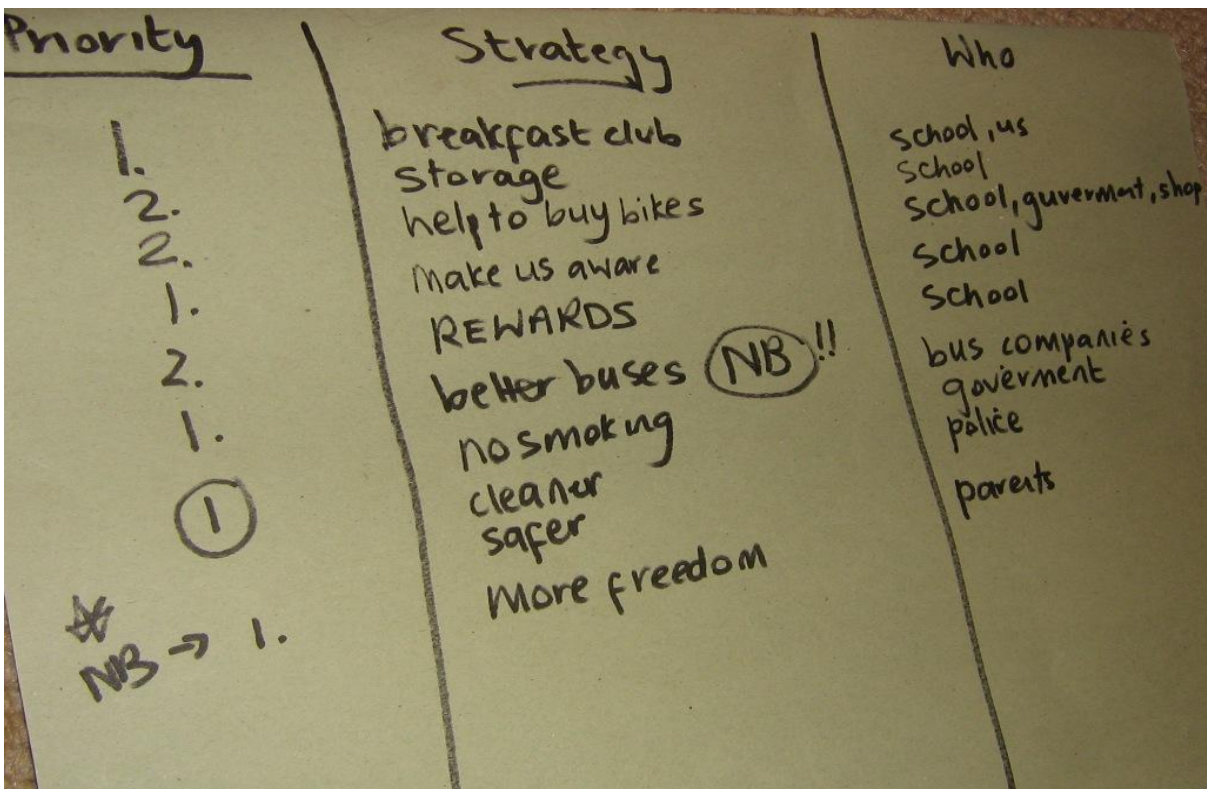
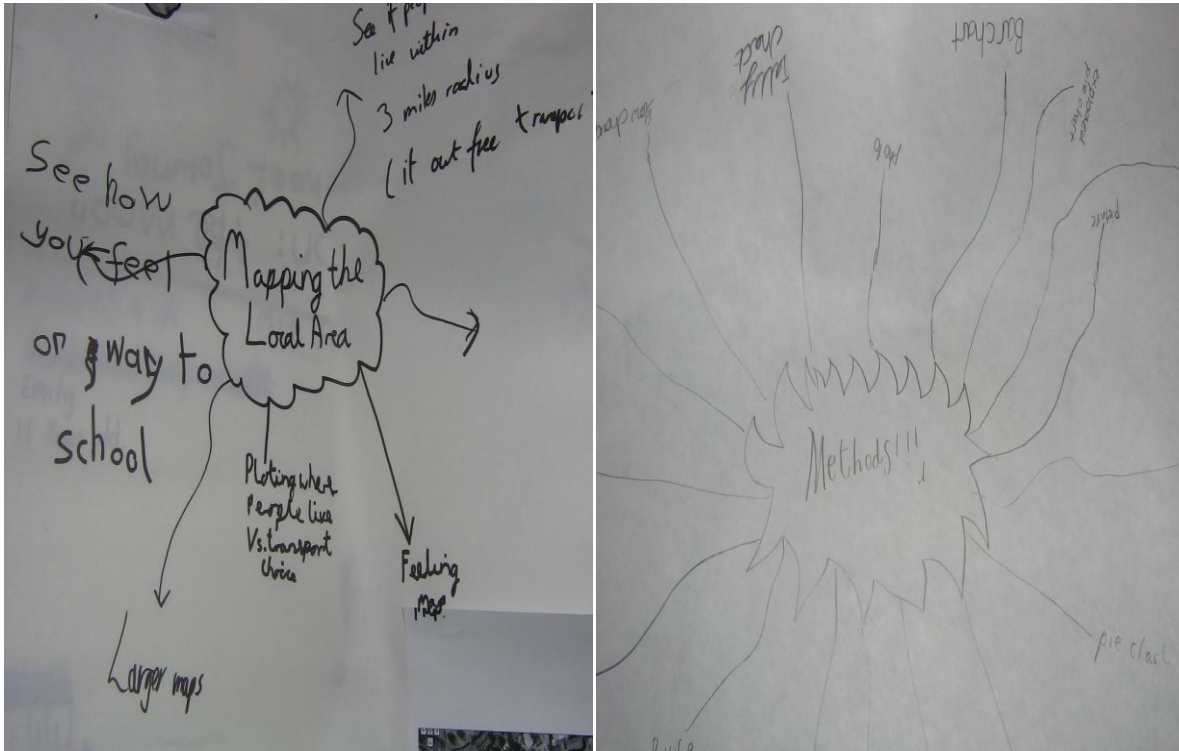


Plate 9: Evaluation matrix

Secondly, diagramming was used as a method. Plate 10 shows a spider diagram being used as part of a mapping method. Diagramming was also used to aid the participants in developing their own preferred methods, as shown in Plate 11.



Plates 10 and 11: Diagramming to decide and plan (Matthew Arnold Secondary and Ryton Comprehensive)

During these (more individual) sessions, materials and facilities that were required, for example, crayons, paints, paper, musical instruments, dress-up clothes, cameras, computers, internet, printing were made available to the children. Library facilities were also provided if required. The noise level generated during some of the sessions was unbelievable. In a few instances, a passing teacher would enter the classroom to check all was ok, and then express surprise when they saw an 'adult' present. During the initial meetings with the Head Teachers I did warn of such activity to avoid any resultant complaints. One of the drawbacks of the noise level was that I found it difficult to effectively use a tape recorder, instead on most occasions I depended on my own notes taken during and after each session. During quieter times I would try to validate the notes with the children.

There has been much written about the importance of choosing the most appropriate participatory method (Cahill, 2007a). The multitude of methods evolved from including the children in all the research phases – research design, data collection, data analyses,

verification and presentation of findings to key stakeholders. The children decided upon which particular methods they preferred and the list included discussion groups between themselves, diagramming, cartoon strips, photography, video, travel diaries, group interviewing, poetry, mapping, flow diagrams, pie charts, drawings, song and drama. As the methods were chosen by the children they were able to convey their knowledge through ways in which proved sensitive to the many different ways children used to express themselves. The pilot stage had proved to me that I was in no position to decide on what methods children engage fully in. Whilst their preferences were often beyond the realms of reality given time, space and resources constraints, the schools must be credited for their constant attempts at accommodating the creativity of the children.

It was also imperative to create an enjoyable research experience. Children responded positively and showed great enthusiasm, excitement and creativity. They were also told that they could choose where to sit whilst developing and conducting their research methods. Some children chose to move to quieter areas (for example to work in the library or an IT room), others chose to lie on the floor and others chose to remain in the classroom as a group. Whilst this degree of freedom was difficult for some children at the start of the sessions, over time they became accustomed to managing their own behaviour within certain venues

The age range of the children participating in this research across the different schools meant that one fixed set of participatory methods would have proved unsuitable. The mixed method approach allows issues to be explored in a contextual way and the differences of methods chosen between age groups highlights the differences within children's immediate life experiences. There was a distinct difference between method preferences between the younger and older children. The younger children's choices focused upon drama, drawing, song, diagrams, photography and diary writing, the older children were more interested in using technology in the form of mobile phones (especially text messaging), social network sites on the internet, video making and using website-based information to design presentations.

The methods that the children were keen to explore can be divided into a number of categories for discussion below, namely: visualisation methods, technologically-based methods, photovoice and interactive group work. Table 8 summarises the range and quantity of the data collected within each participating school.

| | Visualisation | Photovoice and video | IT | Interactive group | Parent responses |
|------------------------|---------------|----------------------|----|-------------------|------------------|
| SS Phil and Jim | 120 | 110 | 10 | 19 | 5 |
| Matthew Arnold | 84 | 0 | 17 | 6 | 6 |
| Ryton | 115 | 1 | 26 | 5 | 25 |
| Rowlands Gill | 96 | 80 | 0 | 3 | 0 |

*Visual art outputs

Table 8: Data quantity by category within each school

4.9.1 Visualisation methods – participatory diagramming, mapping and visual art

Participatory approaches commonly use visualisation methods (Coats, 2002) - diagramming, drawing, mapping, diary writing, poetry, paintings, cartoon strips, flow diagrams, charts, tallying and song writing. This creative method actively engaged the children and young people to understand the aims of the research, work through their ideas and present solutions, either collectively or as individuals, by exploring key issues, sometimes in an interactive, group way. The diagramming method also encouraged ongoing group discussion as explaining the meaning of the diagram or the drawing was of utmost importance, both to me and the participant. Discussing similar themes throughout the research process provided validity to the data, as well as aided in gaining group consensus. Educating other participants in the group (as well as key stakeholders involved in local policy decisions) through active involvement in discussion on the participatory diagramming and surrounding discussion has been central to this research. Self-education has also been inherent to the research process as participants have had time to think through and be reflexive on specific issues. Collective action has focused upon the collecting and disseminating of information gathered. Throughout this research, maximum participation was been sought, with certain barriers to participation, for example, lack of confidence in group verbal interaction, mixed ages within groups or an inability to convey messages through textual methods being eroded by exploring a range of method opportunities.

Children’s drawings offer a wonderful insight into their creative worlds. The children’s descriptions of drawings emphasises the symbolism contained within the pictures and the stories woven within each one (Coats, 2002). The drawings offered a change for a detailed narrative to be shared about their completed pictures. The younger children enjoyed this method, yet whilst initially most of the older children resisted thinking it was too ‘babyish’

over the course of the sessions a number of them chose to draw and reported that they felt creative and 'young'. Literature has shown evidence of stated intentions in children's drawings as well as the influence of peers altering the content and storyline of them (Pahl, 1999) and this was evident in this research as children sometimes shared drawing space and altered each other's drawings.

Some children chose to draw maps of their journeys to and from school. Children's maps have been used in geographical research to situate the child within the environment and used as a means to stimulate discussion about significant places (Young and Barrett, 2001a). Children of all ages chose this method – it was not confined to the younger participants. This was not used as a cognitive mapping exercise showing their competency of their mapping skills but instead was used to provide an impression of significant places for children and a guide of their local environmental knowledge with relation to their school journey. Many of the maps includes information through pictures or symbols, others included areas of writing which highlighted specific issues for the children, for example, *place where older children hang out, smoking area*. Behaviour maps were used and documented how space is used (Driskell, 2002) as they focused on key places and key issues regards to the journey to school.

Some children chose to complete travel diaries over a number of weeks. This was an option that the younger children seemed to prefer. Their competency at filling in a diary was not questioned and they were told that it was up to them to write whatever they liked about their journey to and from school. In terms of the design of the diaries, I asked the children if they wanted to design their own or want me to provide them with one. Given resource constraints at the schools it was decided that I should provide a travel diary that would cover two weeks. The majority of the diaries were returned and some were incomplete.

4.9.2 Photovoice

Children were provided with disposable cameras if they wished (the option was also to use their own cameras if they preferred) and given a number of weeks to take as many photographs as they wished. Children's competency at photography was not important. Children were free to record what they wanted and they were not advised on what the photographs must contain. Unhindered by adult intervention, there was great excitement from the children at the thought of 'owning' the cameras for a few weeks. Only one child reported back that he did not like using the disposable camera because he thought they were '*bad for the environment*'. At the end of the period I collected the cameras and had

the photographs developed. The unopened packs of photographs were then handed back to the children at a following session. I felt very strongly about not opening the packs of photographs to ensure that the children felt the pictures they had taken belonged to them, which also appeared to give them a degree of control within the research process. During a subsequent session the children viewed their photographs and chose their favourites, providing reason and comments. The photographs were then used as a base for further discussion and presentation with the entire research group. Given that the research setting was based within school, and within school hours, the photographs allowed for children to document their experiences in their everyday lives beyond the school gates. It provided the participants with a means of conveying impressions of their identity and social interactions with their local environments. The photographs offer a personal geography unique to each participant.

The use of self-directed photography is not new and falls within a growing body of research about visual methodologies (Ross, 2002). However, using photography in research is not without its problems due to the potential for biased interpretations (Markwell, 2000). Given that the photographs were used as a base for further discussion, the children contextually placed each photograph within his or her own commentary and explained the minute detail of each photograph and the reasons why the photograph was taken. Prominence to minor aspects of the photograph gave texture and meaning to the image by the child.

The power of using photovoice lies in its ability to make direct connections between local issues and national policy (Krieg and Roberts, 2007) and proved a very interactive, communal activity during the research process. The journey to school is a highly emotive topic, given its links with popular discourses in national debate surrounding health, community and children and using photovoice provided a technique to visualise the issues that were important to the children.

4.9.3 IT-based methods

The older children preferred to use the internet to source information. PowerPoint presentations, information guides and leaflets were all developed using the school's IT facilities. The use of the library was fundamental to this method and this was an issue that I had not previously thought about – access to the library for access to the computer suites. However, the children themselves negotiated use of the library (both during and after school). The internet was used in many occasions with the children enjoying looking on websites such as *you-tube* for videos concerning the journey to school. The number of

children requesting access to IT based methods show how these types of learning have become second place. Not only did children have access to these methods at school but many chose to complete some work using their own computers at home using a variety of programmes including graphics and film making software.

The group of participants from Ryton Comprehensive chose to develop a video to interview fellow students when they were coming into school. As a group, they independently organised the practical logistics with the Deputy Head Teacher (i.e. date of video shoot, who is involved, the timing and the location). One member of the team pre-scripted the interview questions. They also met with the school facilities/IT team in order to book out the required equipment and to have two brief training sessions to learn how to operate the video equipment and the editing software.

4.9.4 Interactive group work – discussion groups, informal questionnaires, role play, drama and song

Interactive group work proved extremely creative as:

'...one of the most important features of these types of method is their 'hands-on' nature, and their ability to engage people to generate information and share knowledge on their own terms using their own symbols, language and art-forms' (Kindon et al, 2007, 17).

Some children chose to hold discussion groups. These were sometimes used as a method in itself or as part of another method during which issues were explored and developed. Discussion groups sometimes took on the form of an interview with one participant interviewing another in the group about their journey to school. Role play, drama and song seemed a very popular choice with the younger participants as it provided the space for creative thought and originality. Dressing-up clothes were actively sought to use as props to their drama and song.

The entire group participating at Ryton Comprehensive chose to conduct an informal questionnaire survey of all of the Year 9 students as their overall method, whilst exploring individual methods as well. This creative approach was rooted in discussions that the group had in terms of wanting to validate their own views against their peers. This course of action took a great deal of time, planning and resource to conduct. The findings of the questionnaires were collated by the group and discussed within the group. They formed the content (along with the video interviewing) for their final presentation to local policy makers, teaching staff and project staff. The group were responsible for devising the questionnaire,

handing the questionnaire out (in personal tutorial groups), collecting it back in (two weeks later) and collating the data in order to produce the presentation. The data from the questionnaire worked hand in hand with a video that five members of the group developed (refer to previous section on photovoice and video). The questionnaire contained a small amount of feedback and responses from the parents of the children involved in the research, from those questionnaires which were taken home and discussed. The quotes from some of the parents were taken from the feedback which the children collated for their final presentation.

4.10 Analysing and verifying the research data

Children's ongoing involvement in the analysis and verification of the research is significant. Most of the analysis was done as a group discussion and/or a presentation at the end of a session or after a number of sessions. Pain and Francis (2004) in their study of victimisation, offending and fear among homeless people in Newcastle introduced a four stage approach in their verification process. First, in their preparation for verification the field researcher drew out key findings that were felt to represent the overall data collected. Secondly, an event was held to present preliminary findings to those who had taken part in the research (as well as to others who happened to be there on the day) to comment on whether they agreed with them, wanted to add anything, challenged them or prioritised them. Thirdly, the researcher modified and expanded the analysis and reports were circulated to the research participants and relevant agencies within the research field. Their responses in turn informed the policy report. The data were then subject to content analysis in light of initial research questions, themes in current academic literature and policy context. I found this staged approach useful and used it as a guide during the research process. The school premises were a continual point of contact and two of the schools decided that they would have a display of information during the course of the research so that issues could be added, discussed and challenged. At the end of every session time was set aside for a group discussion to review the session's outputs with the children leading the discussion. In fact, the children enjoyed this part of the session as they chose between themselves someone to stand and '*play teacher*'. During the penultimate session a verification process was conducted whereupon a complete review of all data collected was made against the research questions.

In terms of my own office-based analysis, all of the data were sorted and crudely organised into emerging themes. Every piece of data was photographed and logged. Textual

references to significant people, places, activities and features were made in order to build a picture of the nature and structure of children's experiences in their local areas. My motivation is to present the findings as neutral-free as possible, whilst recognising that this is an almost impossible task to do so. I do not want to make assumptions about the categories that the data falls into and I attempt to use the children's own interpretations in presenting the findings, as well as being mindful that I am interpreting the products too. Additionally, given the range of visual methods used, they are translated into textual description which in my opinion could dilute the message. The quantity of data is also significant and I attempt to provide not all of it but a sample which I have chosen which I feel reflects the particular theme. Discussion in subsequent chapters analyse the data in thematic sections and a demarcation of methods will not be conducted. Findings from all methods are combined. As in this chapter, italics are used to indicate *discussion extracts* taken from discussion with the children. Spelling mistakes from visual methods have been retained, as has the 'text speak' that was prevalent when specifically working with the older participants.

I am conscious of being explicit about the entire research process from design to presentation, mindful of employing rigour and reflexivity (Baxter and Eyles, 1997). Important issues such as participant selection (in terms of how the schools were selected as well as the children and young people), key changes in the direction of focus of the research and the explanation of data analysis procedures have proved important stages. As mentioned previously the tension between posing pre-defined research questions and allowing children to design a unique, contextual, creative research process has been managed. Bailey et al's (1999) suggestions of how to achieve reflexive management throughout the entire research process has proved extremely helpful in this regard as it showed that it is possible to '*gain balance between creativity and robustness through critical inquiry*' (Bailey, 1999, 169). At a methodological level, I was aware that I was observing children and listening to their views. They were providing me with their version of their experiences and I acknowledge that I cannot analyse these views in a generalised way. Indeed by conducting research within four different school settings, the data should reflect the diverse geographic, social, cultural and physical factors inherent in each situation. Broader historical and political relations are equally significant to factor into the overall picture. The criteria for evaluating this research arose from the research process itself. This has not been an easy task. I have attempted to provide detailed reporting of each phase and reflect on what I understand of the research process itself. I have throughout

questioned the voices of the participants – *are they telling me what I want to hear and am I hearing what I want to hear?* I tried to implement rigour throughout the fieldwork - from the early planning of the research process to the writing up stage. Looking back on my research diary which I have kept throughout it is interesting to note how external factors influenced my planning. I have tried to critically appraise each stage of the research process and recognise that each stage is cyclical in that it further informs another.

At the start of the research it was planned that parent questionnaires would form a major part of the fieldwork. The questionnaires would be sent out to gauge the response from parents on a range of issues surrounding their child's journeys to and from school. Throughout the pilot research a number of discussion groups were called inviting the parents to attend. No parent arrived at any of the sessions. This made me very aware at an early stage that the input from the parents might be somewhat limited. Questionnaires were sent out to all parents of the participating children but as Table 8 shows, the responses were somewhat limited. The only notable exception was Ryton Comprehensive. The participants discussed how important the views from parents were and made a concerted effort to engage their parents. The responses from the parental questionnaires will form part of the themed discussions in the following chapters. As an alternative, discussion groups were organised by SS Phil and Jim Primary, a discussion group was organised (via a letter sent home from the Head Teacher to each parent/guardian) to be held in conjunction with the key governor charged with managing the issues surrounding school travel. No parent arrived for the discussions.

The way in which the research evolved over time was somewhat experimental in design and there was a definite feeling of learning on my part, as well as theirs. The pilot stage of the research proved crucial in highlighting some major ethical and methodological issues that could arise when conducting research with children and young people and certainly provided in-sight into the benefits of accommodating a mixed method approach. The in-depth research was a great success in terms of it generating vast amounts of data that have proved to be both illuminating and creative. By participating in this project, the children seemed to learn at both a professional and a personal level and the process also equipped them with additional skills (information management, research design, methods analysis, interpersonal, negotiation and presentations skills). The children also faced some challenges in carrying out this research. Some gave up their free time over lunch and break periods to continue with their research and some of the methods chosen demanded time spent before or after school.

4.11 Comparing levels of research engagement

Each geographic setting for the research sessions was physically different with different agendas, priorities and interests and therefore it was found that schools engaged in this research differently. SS Phil and Jim Primary have 'school travel' so firmly placed on their agenda (it is mentioned in most school assemblies, there is a Governor who has this specific role, there are posters everywhere in the school promoting exercise and sustainable transport) whilst Matthew Arnold Secondary seemed to show very little engagement in comparison and had very little visible promotion of or relative interest in school travel, other than provide a class room and a group of children (some of whom exhibited the most challenging behaviour, especially during the initial research sessions). The group from Ryton Comprehensive undertook a higher level of research (using video interviewing and asking their friends questions) than Matthew Arnold Secondary (participants mostly used drawings). Both groups were of similar age range but the level of engagement in the research differed with those from Ryton exhibiting more competence and ability to engage in the research independently. There was much more participation from the senior management teams in SS Phil and Jim Primary and Ryton Comprehensive than from the other two schools, and this was both in terms of being physically present at the presentations as well as being interested and visible throughout the research process. The level of active support from teachers and Head Teachers did however structure some of the sessions and the end presentations. At Ryton Comprehensive, for example, the children presented to a relatively large groups of adults which consisted of members from the School Travel department at the local authority, the local mayor, the Head Teacher and interested teachers. The priority that this held with the Head Teacher was apparent, whereas in comparison relatively little support from senior managers was felt in Matthew Arnold Secondary. Similarly, in the primary schools, the attention that was focused on the presentation in SS Phil and Jim Primary far exceeded that within Rowlands Gill Primary. This could be explained by school priorities or different perceptions of the research and its findings. This may also attributed to different micro-geographical settings. In SS Phil and Jim Primary there seemed to be a 'culture' of cycling and walking, not only with the children but reportedly with the parents too. In Rowlands Gill Primary, no child reportedly discussed their parents with relation to cycling and the 'car culture' was discussed in detail within the research setting, especially within groups of boys.

The research is concerned with the impact that children's age has upon the way in which the journey to school is experienced and represented, as well as how different aged children

engaged in the research process as a whole. The groups across all four schools comprised of different age groups and this meant that groups approached the research differently. The group from Rowlands Gill Primary consisted of the youngest children (aged 4) and it was interesting to observe what roles they were 'given' by the older children in this group. They were often told to just sit and watch or to do the colouring in, after the older children had finished the drawings. In Rowlands Gill Primary, it was very clear that the older children looked after the younger children and the girls acted in a 'mothering' way, especially if the younger children chose to go outside to do some photography of their local area. It would appear that children learn about different environments in different ways and that the youngest child is able to show some level of understanding of large-scale environments away from the home. Therefore, as discussed in Section 2.3.2 in Chapter 2, age-based definitions imply a commonality of experience and this is not the case. Depending on their circumstances, their experiences are varied. What I found is that in some groups, for example, in SS Phil and Jim Primary, the children seemed to be given more affordances and opportunities to walk, cycle or scoot to school and therefore not only engaged with research more but reported a richer, more varied experience of the journey to school than some of the children in Rowlands Gill Primary. However, in the similar vein, there were older children who reported that they rarely interacted with their local environment due to being driven to and from school and therefore had very little to discuss compared to other children of the same age.

However, there was one difference due to age. The ways in which children physically represent their spatial and social experiences of their journeys to school seemed to vary with age. In general, both mapping ability and map accuracy improved as children became older. This does not mean that younger children were incapable or incompetent, but merely that the older children were able to articulate or visually represent their experience clearer. Whilst an age related progression was identified in terms of map sophistication, even the youngest children were able to represent environments in a variety of ways though which were insightful. However, in a similar vein, there were some older children who were unable to detail their local environment, however, this was largely due to them being driven to school rather than their competence at map drawing. Until more studies are undertaken using different methodologies and appropriate techniques there may well be a danger of continually underestimating the young child's true environmental potential.

As Section 4.9 discusses there were a variety of research methods chosen. The gender differences across and within groups did show that certain techniques were more favoured

than others, with girls choosing poetry and diary writing and boys preferring photography, video-making and drawings. There were no gender differences in the levels of engagement with the research, although the behaviour of boys whilst conducting the research was different in general to that of girls. As discussed in Section 2.3.2 of Chapter 2, boys dominated certain spaces in the classroom (Frosh *et al*, 2002), especially in Matthew Arnold Secondary and displayed more challenging behaviour in the initial research sessions. They would sit at the back of the classroom and try to dominate any discussion or refuse to take part at all.

It was originally hoped that parents would be engaged within the research process. However, even though letters were sent home introducing the research and inviting them in on set days when the research was being conducted, not one parent chose to do so. Of course, this may be due to the timings of the sessions (during school time) and also due to the research setting of the school site. This could also be due to the fact that parents were simply not interested and did not see this as a priority. Their non-attendance could also reflect a barrier to resistance as discussed in Chapter 3, Section 3.5, which states that amongst other things, they may not want to be preached at about a journey which they regard as an individual choice depending on their household circumstances, priorities, attitudes, values and norms. The small amount of parental input was in the form of chance meetings with them, usually after the sessions (as the majority fell at the end of the school day) or from feedback from the children who had chose to ask their parents questions in an informal manner and which were presented at the final presentations.

4.12 Conclusion

It is heartening to see that all of the research projects that were initiated in each school have continued at some level. Even more gratifying is the fact that each school has continued to use participatory methods to inform their local journey to school travel plan. As Driskell notes '*everybody learns and grows through young people's participation*' (2002, 23) and the participatory research has enabled each school to ensure visibility of the issues surrounding the children's journey to school, facilitated reflection in terms of having a deeper understanding of what strategies work and which strategies fail and implement change, no matter how small. In follow-up conversations that I have had at Ryton Comprehensive, I have been advised that some of the actions proposed, for example, cyclist breakfast and additional security at the bike sheds have been completed. Adult professionals, teachers, local decision makers and policy makers have learnt through their

participation as a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of local issues was provided. There was a greater appreciation of the significance of young people's perspectives and insights and priorities. Two of the participants wrote an article in the local community newspaper (White and Polito, 2007) stating that '*they can't wait til next year*' to discuss what progress has been made.

One of the key critiques has particular resonance, that participatory approaches legitimise local knowledge because it is developed using participatory processes (Cook, 2001). I would argue that the strength of this research process is increased due to localised knowledge and that the 'power' in such a situation was held by the children given their intimate understanding of their environments. I recognise however that knowledge, just because it is local, may not always be representative or indeed 'truthful' given varying degrees of perceptions of individuals and communities depending on localised circumstances.

It has been equally exciting to see that the research data has already informed local policy frameworks (GCC, 2008; OCC, 2008b). This is solely down to the methodological insight in involving stakeholders at the final presentation and generating a high level of immediate interest in the topic at a school, local government and national company level. Additionally it has been encouraging to hear positive feedback from both of the LEAs with respect to the levels of child participation enjoyed throughout the research. Oxfordshire County Council subsequently requested an overview document on the participatory methodology to be used as a guide for their own research. This stems from an increasing understanding that there needs to be a focus on children to participate more actively in the operations and governance of schools. Proponents of school reform and school improvement actively encourage distributed leadership calling for the promotion of citizenship education.

In light of negative assumptions often made within policy frameworks and media portrayals of young people in general, and of teenagers especially, their contribution is valuable. In this research it was interesting to note that only three of the 'teenage' participants had engaged within community issues beforehand and they advised that they felt proud and positive of their role in conducting this research. It is the role of a researcher to promote these representations which have the potential to alter power relations and representations of children and young people in academic, policy and media arenas and I hope to have achieved that through this research. Horton and Kraftl (2005) advocate the importance of banal, everyday geographies. Indeed, the participants in this research highlighted simple acts, objects, relations and social situations that are '*big*' and significant to them. It was

often the 'small' details which provided the rich texture. Children held the contextual knowledge, skills, ability and enthusiasm to actively and positively contribute to this research at a number of different levels. Dominant social and political contexts reflected and portrayed through the media had a direct impact on all of the participants, highlighting the power of public discourses of health, safety and sustainability on children's and young people's views and experiences in their everyday lives.

Meaningful participation and engagement of children and young people required significant time, resources, planning and ability. I was committed to developing an ethically robust methodological research procedure in order to gain valuable insight into the children and young people's views. I hope not to have misrepresented the children in any way. I don't wish to use their valuable output as a mere ideological poster display. I hope the research captures the chaotic, messy, non-linear process of this research, as well as the excitement and creativity of the participants who engaged within it. Children and young people are not just our future but our *now*. They have important contributions to make – not just because one day they will be adults, but because today they are children. In this research they have proved to be capable voices to inform policy stakeholders and collaboratively work towards transformative social change (Kindon *et al*, 2007; Manzo and Brightbill, 2007).

Chapter 5

The journey to school – a child's voice

5.1 Introduction

Generalisations about the journey to school hide enormous differences in the experiences of children and young people and imply a commonality of experience regardless of circumstance. This research shows that the journeys are invested with various meanings and contain great variability at a micro-geographical level, yet most academic research, policy discourse and popular media seem to focus on the increasing quantifiable trend of accompanying children to school, usually by car. Although analysing the impact of this modal choice is a rising trend which would be foolish to ignore given current concerns with global warming and climate change, relatively little attention is paid, in comparison, to the other modes of travel which many children use. It is important to recognise that children have multiple experiences on their journey to school. Past research tends to ignore the rich texture of these important, everyday childhood mobility experiences. So, although recognising its centrality to current political and social debates, especially surrounding childhood and sustainability, this chapter looks beyond the issues of the car culture to assert that a deeper understanding of children's views on their experiences of their journeys to school, regardless of mobility choice, is vital.

Firstly, I begin the chapter in Section 5.2 by introducing the geographical settings of the four schools. The aim however is to place the findings within the different geographical contexts, in order to provide an indication of the prevailing characteristics of each school's journeys and thus to gain insights into what the local influences on school journey choice are. Understanding children's individual micro-geographies is extremely valuable, given that these shape wider collective environmental and social experiences.

I then move on in Section 5.3 to identify children's views of and feelings for their present journey to school, seeking to understand what emotional feelings are attached to different transport choices. Compiled from employing various participatory methods chosen by and conducted with the children, this section gives prominence to their views and representations. The research suggests that the children and young people experience varied journeys to school depending on their mode of mobility, showing varying levels of environmental interaction, local area knowledge and risk strategies. It is helpful to discuss their experiences by situating it within four key themes that emerged during the research,

namely: the sociality of the journey to school, health, environmental knowledge and interaction with public space, and identity, autonomy and freedom. The core themes that have developed reveal differing levels of children’s agency, which relate directly to their everyday contexts. Children make visual and textual references to significant people, places, activities and features and these help to build a picture of the nature and structure of their navigation through their local, everyday spaces. The chapter concludes in Section 5.4 with discussion about the implications of the research findings on policy and the importance of a child’s voice in policy formulation.

5.2 Journey to school characteristics at each school

Table 9 summarises the characteristics of the four schools which comprise the sample of the research. Whilst this is not to provide comparison, it does place the research findings within four different geographic contexts. Each group of children experience different mobility patterns, as reflected in Table 9, which summarises each school’s dominant modal types:

| | Walk/rollerblade/ scoot | cycle | School bus | Public bus | train | car |
|--|----------------------------|-------|---------------|---------------|-------|-----------|
| Phil and Jim Primary, Oxford (*) | 42% | 34% | 7% | 1% | 0 | 16% |
| Matthew Arnold Secondary, Oxford (**) | 23% | 2% | 32% | 20% | 0 | 20% |
| Ryton Comprehensive, Gateshead | 48% | 1% | 16% | 16% | 0 | 19% (***) |
| Rowlands Gill Primary, Gateshead | 20% | 0 | 0 | 20% | 0 | 60% |

(*)All schools with a travel plan have been asked to enter this information into SIMS. From the travel plans point of view it is a little difficult as travel plans must contain pupils actual and preferred modes of travel but SIMS only collects actual data. Many schools send home some kind of document to collect this and other data at the same time. Parents are asked to record how their children travel to and from school. Once these documents are returned to the schools any changes are updated via the SIMS system. The reports on school travel are then made available to us for inclusion in travel plans. Figures are rounded up and down to nearest percentage.

(**) 2006 figures as 2007 plan in final stages of preparation

(***) 70% of car journeys are noted as ‘car share’ within the travel plan

**Table 9: Characteristics of the journey to school 2007 (by percentage use)
(Source: GCC, 2008; OCC, 2008a, 2008b; Travel Plans Development Team, 2007)**

The four schools represent diversity in local physical micro-geography, the built environment, local road design, and levels of vehicle and pedestrian accessibility, dominant housing type and social-cultural mix. The travel plans of each school are therefore focused

on specific issues because of their local physical and socio-cultural geographies and resulting dominant travel behaviours. SS Phil and Jim Primary is focused on maintaining high levels of walking, scooting and cycling journeys and have successfully managed to keep car usage to a relatively low level, due in part by the unique geographical positioning of the school and the presence of a restricted access bridge. Rowlands Gill Primary on the other hand, is intent on reducing the high levels of car journeys through active encouragement of more sustainable modes of mobility, especially as it is a brand new school building developed under the Building Schools for the Future campaign. Both Matthew Arnold Secondary and Ryton Comprehensive have high percentages of children using the scholar and public buses, but localised issues concerning traffic and congestion are of particular immediate concern as well.

5.3 Children’s views and feelings of their journey to school experiences

Initial discussions with all four groups focused upon the children’s actual physical journey to school (in terms of how they get to and from school) which provided the children the opportunity to discuss their travel behaviour with others. They began their discussions by illustrating their travel experience by using various methods to describe their journey, for example, drawings, mapping, pie charts and group tallying, as shown by the diagrams below:



Plate 12: SS Phil and Jim Primary (Abigail, 11)

Plate 13: SS Phil and Jim Primary (Sarah, 11)



Plate 14: Ryton Comprehensive (Catherine, 14)

Plate 15: Matthew Arnold Secondary (Ben, 14)

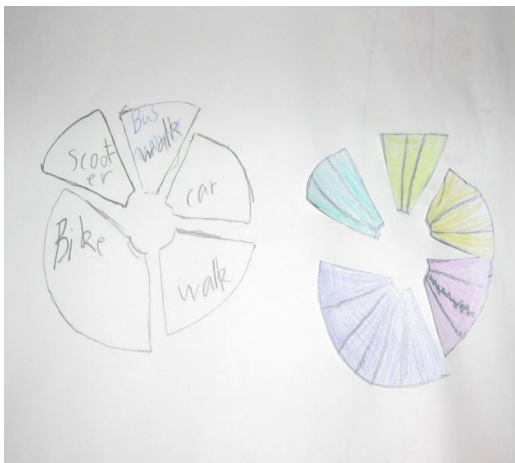


Plate 16: SS Phil and Jim Primary (Michael, 11)

Plate 17: Matthew Arnold Secondary (Simon, 14)

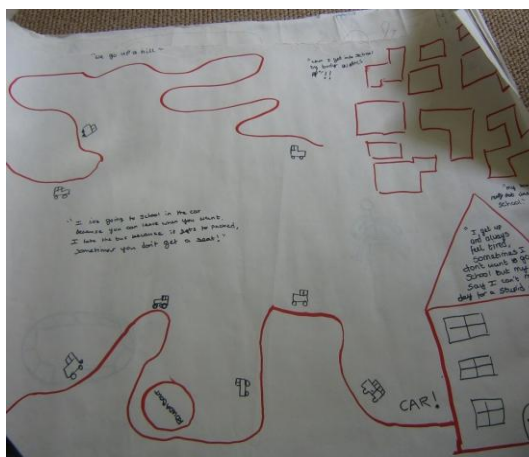


Plate 18: SS Phil and Jim Primary (Alice, 11)

Plate 19: Matthew Arnold Secondary (Alistair, 15)

The children were initially given a simple, broad title to discuss or illustrate - 'your journey to school'. This was purposeful in order to see what aspects of the journey they immediately focused upon without any advice or input from me or their teachers. Interestingly, many of the drawings done by the children explained not only how they travel to school at the moment but also how they would prefer to get to school. In all four schools, the majority of the children state that they would prefer to walk or cycle, which is in line with findings summarised in each individual school's travel plan. Of course, this may reflect what children are 'told' to prefer (especially in schools where sustainable school travel is high on their agenda) if given a choice.



Plate 20: Ryton Comprehensive (Sasha, 12) **Plate 21: SS Phil and Jim (Rebecca, 10)**

Also included in some of the initial illustrations were references to what emotions they felt on their journey to school. In order to discuss this in more depth, group diagramming exercises evolved. Different emotions were discussed relative to the mode of travel. Plates, 22 to 25 provide an idea of the feelings and emotions that the children reportedly experienced:



Plate 22: Feelings grid (SS Phil and Jim Primary)

Plate 23: Feelings on 'walking to school' (Rowlands Gill Primary)

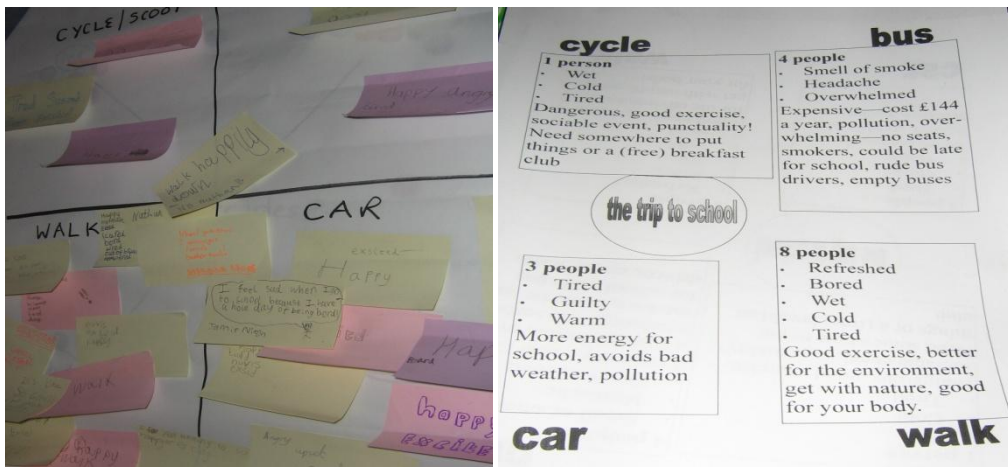


Plate 24: Feelings grid (Rowlands Gill Primary)

Plate 25: Feelings grid (Ryton Comprehensive)

Naturally different children expressed varying emotions in terms of their individual experiences of their journey to school, however, a common thread was that in all of the groups, the majority said they felt 'happy' when walking, scooting or cycling to school. Other words used to describe how they felt were 'cheerful', 'fun', 'safe' and 'excellent'. Sometimes the words 'boring', 'wet' or 'tired' were used. The word 'scared' was used a few times by younger children. In contrast, the majority of children who travelled by public or school bus felt 'overwhelmed' and 'tired', as the experience was described as 'chaotic' and 'noisy'. The commotion of using a public bus was evident by phrases such as 'pushing' and 'rushing to

find a seat'. Those who travelled by car however used words such as 'cool', 'tired', 'warm' 'alone' and 'sad'.

Another emotion expressed by those travelling by car was 'guilty'. This emotion was also expressed in commentary, discussion groups and diagramming exercises that were conducted. This emotion was sometimes felt by the individual child, but the word was also used to express an opinion of another child's journey to school by car:

'Its cos you are lazy, you should feel guilty' (Alan, 14, commentary, Ryton Comprehensive)

Leaflets that a group of children designed to explain their journey to school at Matthew Arnold Secondary also used the word 'lazy' to describe children who were driven to school, as shown in plate 26 below:



Plate 26: Expression of the word 'lazy'

It wasn't only other children that were commented upon, as teachers who drive to school were also noted as being 'naughty', as shown in the following:

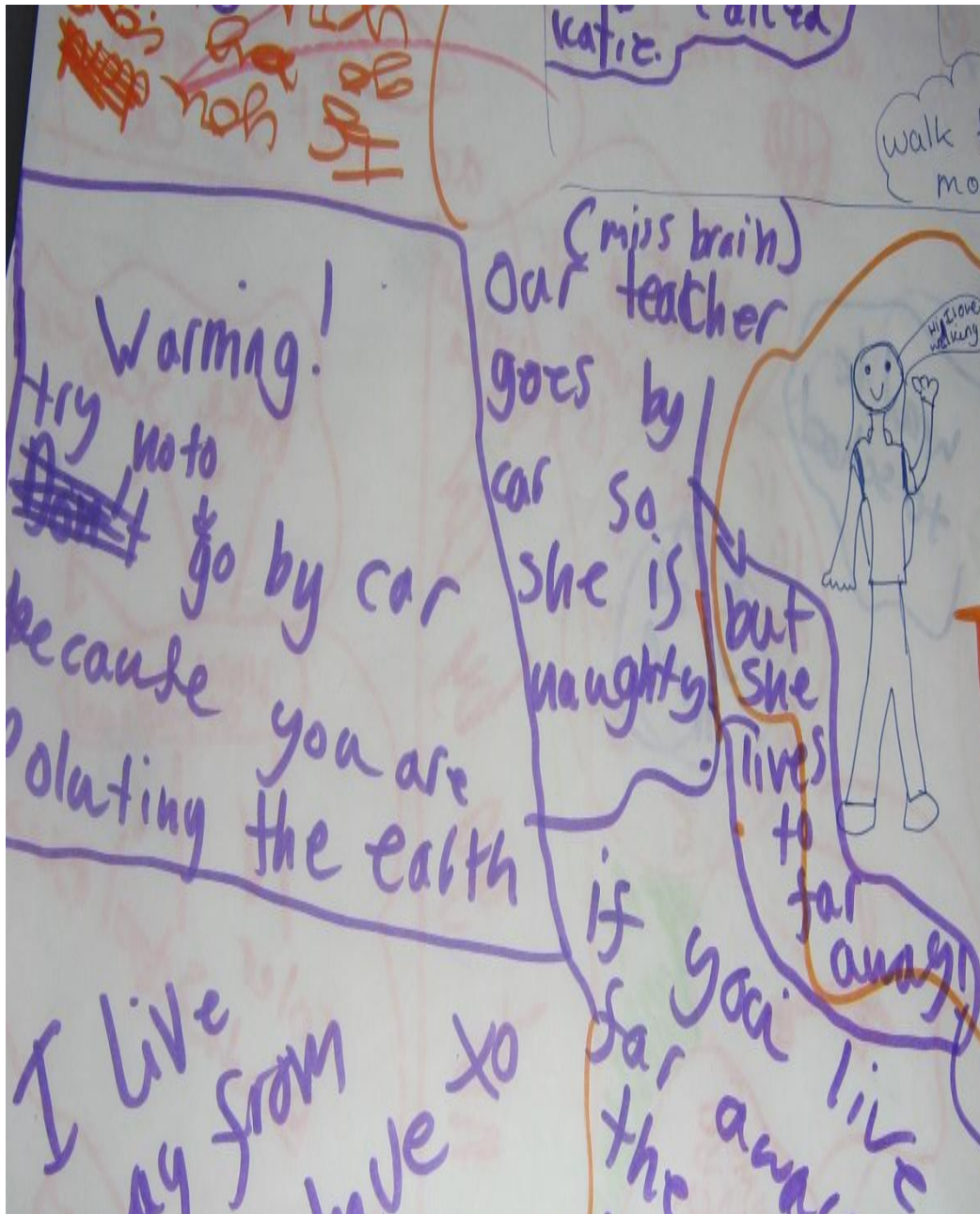


Plate 27: 'she is naughty' (Katie, 10, SS Phil and Jim Primary)

Children expressed a range of emotions, not only of themselves and how they feel during their journey to school, but also felt comfortable expressing their opinions on those who travelled by car. This was an interesting focus in many of the surrounding discussions and it was clear that using the car to get to school was regarded as a bad choice for travelling to school. Chapter 7 highlights this issue within the sustainability agenda.

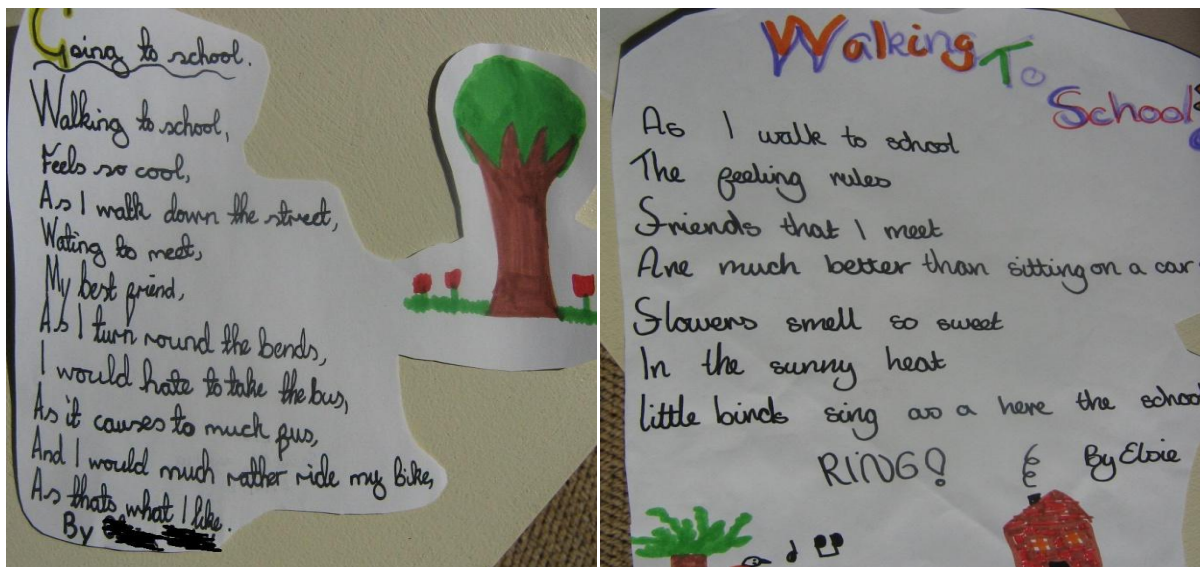
evidence of children who walk, cycle, scoot and take the bus to and from school suggests that friendship groups are the most enjoyable aspect of the journey. The most discussed and documented reason for enjoying travelling independently to school was that it provided a chance to be with friends away from adult supervision.

The importance of the journey to school for social interaction has been well documented in previous research (Ross, 2002) and it seems that frequency in contact with friendship groups and the ability to travel independently to school are inextricably linked. The significance of daily social movements and connections are revealed in the following phrases:

'I like walking 'cos it's better 'cos you get to chat, and like play with your friends on the way but make sure you are safe' (Amy, 10, discussion, Rowlands Gill Primary)

'You should have to go to your local school then everyone could walk 'cos then you make friends' (Alistair, 14, group interview, Ryton Comprehensive)

The two poems and drawing below emphasise the feelings of togetherness and belonging that children experience whilst they walk, cycle or take the bus to school with friends:



Plates 30 and 31: Poetry (Ryton Comprehensive)

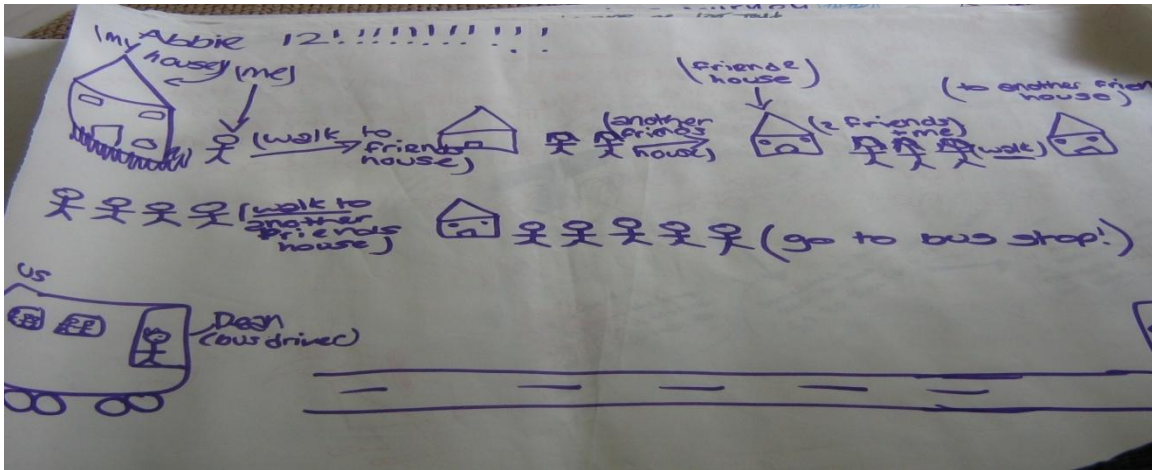


Plate 32: The collection of friends (Abbie, 13, Matthew Arnold Secondary)

Findings suggest that some of the children have a great deal of time and space for them to self-manage. They have time to walk, chat, play, cycle and scoot with friends, they have the ability to visit their friend's house and they have the time to mould friendships during their journey to school. Cycling especially is a favoured means of travel as illustrated by many drawings, one example of which is below which was drawn by Andrey (10):

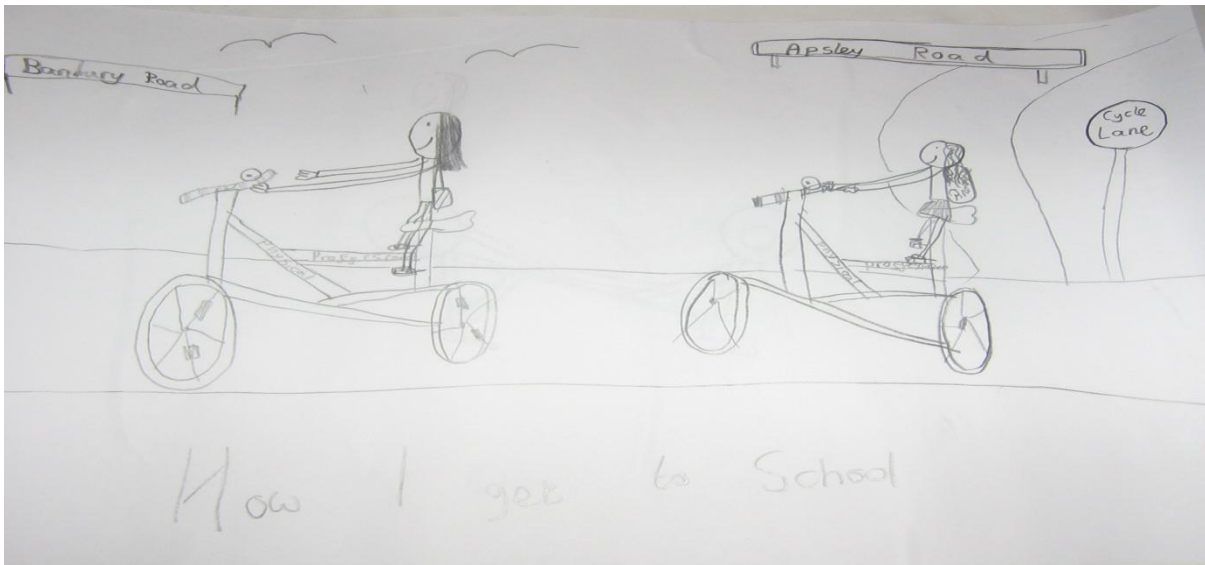


Plate 33: Cycling to school (SS Phil and Jim Primary)

At SS Phil and Jim Primary, 12% of children scoot to school. The school as a whole is very proud of the fact that they show the highest percentage of children scooting to school across the borough and the children regularly make note of this fact in discussion. The shared social practice of scooting came across clearly in travel diary extracts:

Monday: 'I scooted to school down some roads. On the way back I went halfway with a friend.

Tuesday: On the bus to school I saw 13 cars, 3 cyclists and 1 bus. My mum, brother and two friends walked and I scooted to school. On the way back from school I scooted with two other friends to a friends house instead of going home.

Thursday: In the morning I went to my friends house and then went to pick up another friend and then to school. On the way back from school I went across the bridge on my own.' (Ben, 10, Phil and Jim Primary)

Children experience scooting in a similar way as they do when walking or cycling and the same emotions expressed were clear – 'fun', 'healthy' and 'cool'- and children frequently mention friendships they enjoy on the journey. Photographs taken by the children highlighted their friends scooting and the idea that it was a shared, fun activity.



Plate 34: Scooting in a group (Simon, 11)

Plate 35: Friends scooting to school (David, 11)



Plate 36: Scooter park (Danielle, 10)

Plate 34 is accompanied with a photovoice from Simon (11) of *'these are my two friends who I scoot to school with. I love it cos its fun'*. Scooting as an activity and mode of travelling to school reveals the way in which the child's sensory experience, social relations and physical space are interconnected (Stevens, 2001). Evidence of this is in Plate 35.

Danielle's photograph of the school's scooter park (within the bike storage shed) portrayed a sense of enjoyment that they collectively use the physical facility, as highlighted in Danielle (age 10) stating: *'I took this photo cos it shows where we all put our scooters together, it's a cool place'*: This photovoice highlights a shared sense of pride and a feeling of belonging to a communal experience. In many cases, scooting could be experienced even if the child came to school accompanied by a parent in a car. A number of children remarked that they felt that they *scooted* to school even if they were driven, as their cars were forced to park some distance from the school due to the lack of access to the site. They were insistent that they scooted to school (as opposed to drive) which points to the fact that they wanted to feel as if they experienced a shared routine and practice with their friends as well as renouncing the levels of guilt many commented on feeling when they were driven to school:

'well I scoot over the bridge, that counts, doesn't it, so I scoot when my mum drops me off. I come by myself over the bridge' (Susan, 10, commentary, SS Phil and Jim)

Catching the public or school bus also provides the opportunity for social contact with friends, as illustrated in the drawing below completed by Catherine (14):

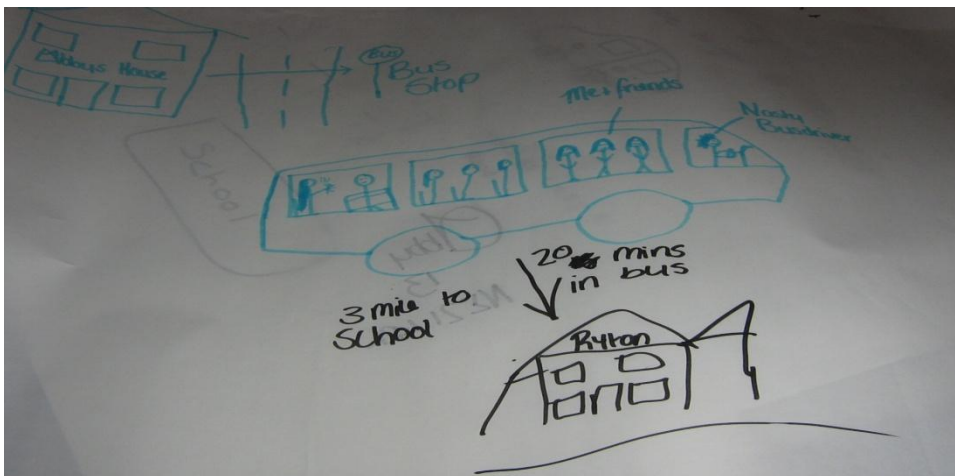


Plate 37: The journey to school by bus (Ryton Comprehensive)

Catching the bus to school however also forces children to be physically present with those who they sometimes feel different from, although many children felt comfortable within these situations *because* they were travelling with friends and were not alone. As Ellen (14) states:

'I hate the bus cos all these chavers are on it but I sit with my friends at the front so they don't bother us' (Ryton Comprehensive)

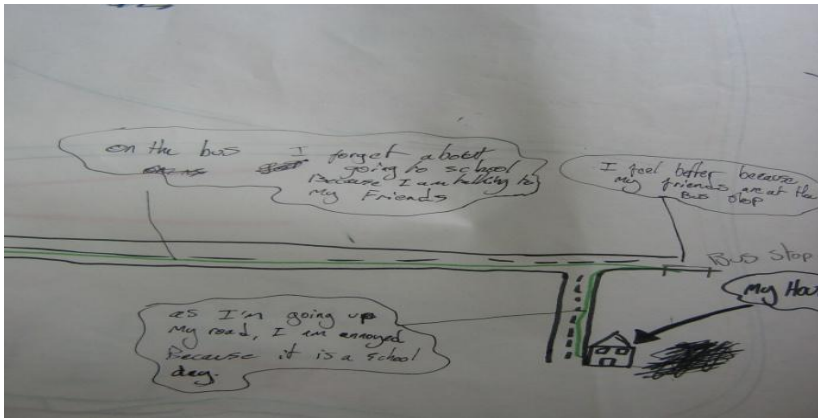


Plate 38: 'my map' (Margaret, 14, Matthew Arnold Secondary)

Plate 38 shows a map in which Margaret (14) notes: *'I feel better because my friends are at the bus stop'*, which again shows that being part of a social group relieves the stress of travelling alone on the bus.

For those children who travel independently to school, there seemed to be a tendency to travel in same-sex groups, which is not surprising given past research concluding that social networks in middle childhood comprise mainly friends of the same sex and that gender is significant in play and friendships (Danby and Baker, 1998). A few children mentioned the presence of siblings, however, not always in a good light, as Alan (14, Ryton Comprehensive) notes,

'I walk with me mates but sometimes I have to take me brother but if we run he can't catch us.'

Alice, age 11, mentions the presence of her sister and childminder when she walks to school:

'I go with my childminder and my sister to school but they are to slow so I am there before them. And I get to see my friends and you can see animals' (diagramming extract, SS Phil and Jim Primary)

Cycling to school is sometimes regarded as a shared experience with a parent, although the feeling of pride and independence in the following travel diary extract from Megan (10, SS Phil and Jim Primary) shines through when noting that she sometimes travels independent of her parents too:

Monday: Today was the second time I cycled to school with my friend Molly. Her dad takes her to my house then we go together with my mum to the traffic lights then me and Molly go on our own totally to school. We think it is fun going on our own without our parents. I also come home on my own as my dad was ment to pick me up but he went to the post office so I also went on my own home.

Tuesday: Today I also came with Molly but we didn't notice much so I don't have a lot to say.

Wednesday: Today I came with Molly again but on the way we met Tilly on her own so me and Molly cycled slowly and Tilly walked next to us. Today I took a picture of Mrs Barnard cycling along hayfield Rd in front of us!

Thursday: Today I came home with Molly and my dad. My dad put his GPS on and told us where to go but it didn't work very well because it was jogged around by the bicycle.

Friday: Today was a bit complicated because I had to take my normal bag, my violin and a bag of food to make biscuits at school plus it was cold so I made my dad go ahead with my violin and food.

Tuesday: Today it was very snowy and it was about 2 inches deep! Me and Molly walked to school with my dad and Mollys dad because it was too slippy to cycle. I changed my trousers as soon as I got to school.

Wednesday: Today we also walked cos it was still very snowy and icy.

The majority of photographs, diagramming and commentary from discussion groups show friends in a variety of physical settings on their journeys to and from school. Evidence from this research is in line with research conducted in Melbourne, Australia as part of the *Growing up in Cities Project* (Malone and Hasluck, 1998) which highlights the importance of social aspects of the environment, with most young people interpreting their neighbourhood in social rather than physical terms. Similarly, Aitken and Wingate (1993) and Buss (1995) note that children's portrayal of their urban built environments symbolised a social relationship. The need and enjoyment of friendship on the school journey is related to the concept of micro-culture (Wulff, 1995), defined as the flows of meaning which are managed by small groups that meet on an everyday basis and developed by personalities, localities and events shared. Places and people are imbued with cultural value and meanings (Chawla, 2002), affording not only a sense of identity but a sense of difference, as shown by the evidence of children commenting on the presence of groups of children that were deemed as being 'different', for example, *chavers* and *emos*. These groups of children were distinguished by their collective dress style and cultural values (Clarke and Uzzell, 2006). However, evidence suggests that those children who are driven to school in the car rarely mention social situations or friendship groups. One particular travel diary account is evidence of this:

Tuesday: I saw my friends going by bike and scooter; that's because they are quite near school. And then I started to wonder I could move closer to school so I can walk, scoot or go by bike. I live quiet far away from school so I have to go by car (Rebecca, age 10, SS Phil and Jim Primary).

The feelings of watching others and being alone is further reflected in a drawing made by Scott (6), which show the child expressing sadness at being in the car alone:



Plate 39: 'me in the car sad' - Rowlands Gill Primary

Tom (13, Matthew Arnold Secondary), who is driven to school, explains:

'how I experience the journey to school is bored cos I have no friends, I would prefer to use my bike'.

A travel diary excerpt from Charlie (11, Phil and Jim Primary) also emphasises his feeling of boredom:

Monday: I leave the house at 8.25 get in the car and drive to school. We stop in polstead road then walk the rest of the way. We never see anything except snow and fog.

Tuesday: The same

Wednesday: The same

Thursday: The same

Friday: The same – IT IS ALWAYS THE SAME!!

The insert in a diagramming exercise by Ryan, 14, also highlights a preference to cycle:

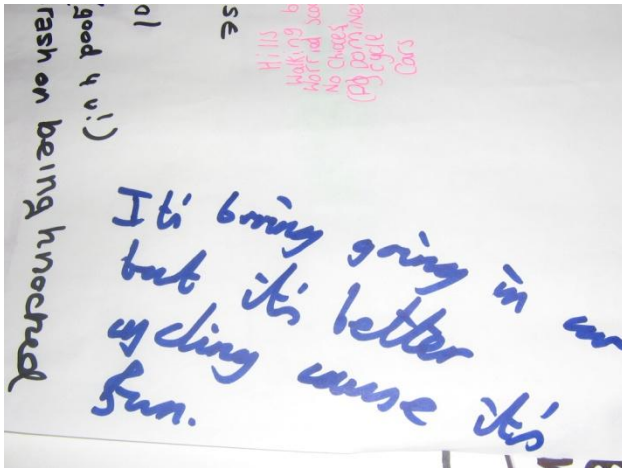


Plate 40: 'It's boring going in car but it's better cycling cause it's fun'- Matthew Arnold Secondary

There seems to be an element of children who are driven to school 'missing out' or 'feeling excluded' from social networks, when hearing their friends talking about walking, cycling, scooting or bussing to school. This was reinforced by a number of comments made by children who walk or cycle regarding those who are driven, as illustrated in a flow diagram drawn by a group of children at SS Phil and Jim Primary:

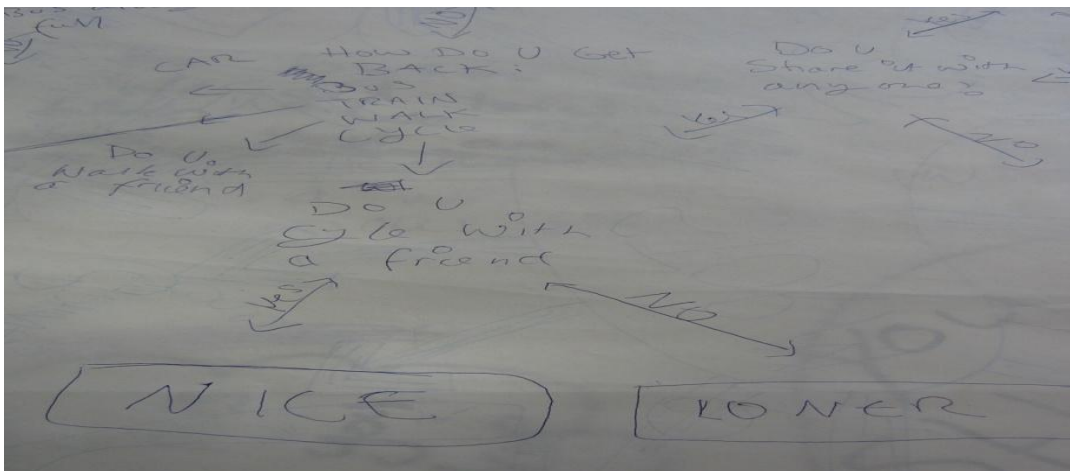
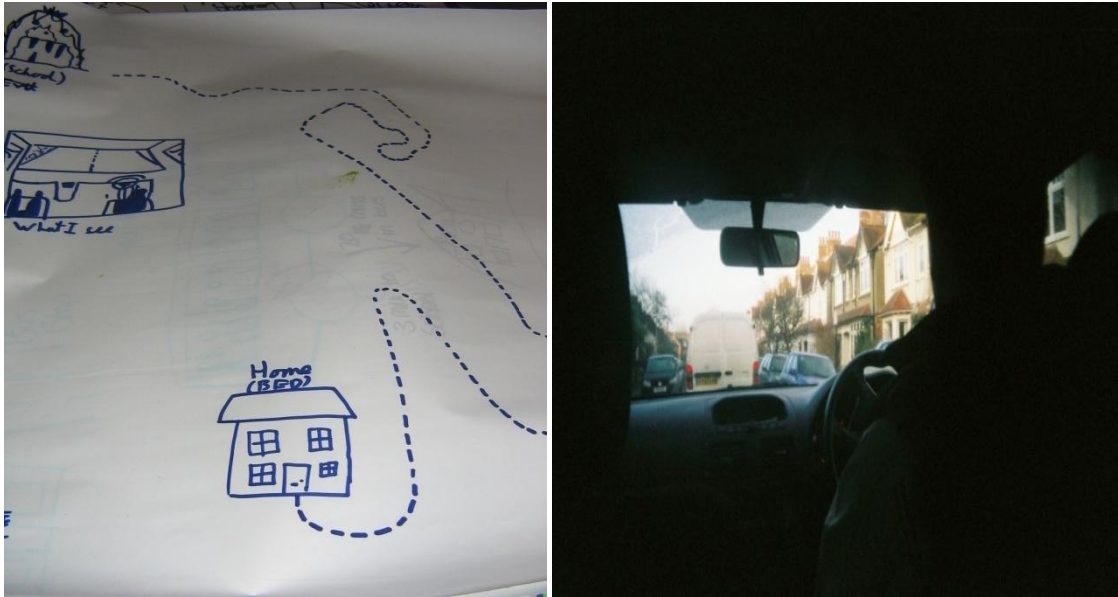


Plate 41: 'nice' versus 'loner'

If a child did not come to school with a friend they were labelled as being 'loners'. Indeed, the pictures drawn by children who were accompanied by their parents by car to school show no friends or social situations at all. Plate 42 below shows a map of how Ben (14) travels to school. The small picture entitled 'what I see' was verified by an accompanying photograph (Plate 43):



Plates 42 and 43: Matthew Arnold Secondary (Ben, 14) map of journey to school and 'what I see' (photovoice)

Some children note in discussion that they felt as if they missed out on developing friendships because they travelled alone by car:

'I would like to live closer cos then I could go home with friends' (Rebecca, 10 discussion groups, Phil and Jim Primary)

'I wish I could walk. My mam doesn't trust me so she drives me there' (Lilly, 11, commentary, Rowlands Gill Primary)

'I get a taxi to school by myself cos I have special needs but I would like to cycle' (Aiden, 10, commentary, Rowlands Gill Primary)

An extract from a diagramming exercise reads:

'I would walk to skl if I cud but I am not aloud.. If I lived nearer I wood' (Jessica, 14, Matthew Arnold Secondary)

'I wish I could come to school by my bike or even walk cos I see all of my friends but mam drives' (Ashleigh, 5, commentary, Rowlands Gill Primary)

The data suggests therefore that children's experiences of sociality in their journey to school can therefore be very different, and this seems to affect how they feel, both about themselves as well as about others. Meeting friends on the route to school seems to provide an important socio-cultural and spatial setting for many children, most notably for those who travel to school independently. Children's ability to form and nurture their social networks is partly shaped by the opportunity and ability to interact independently within their local

physical area. Children require a certain degree of freedom in terms of time and space to manage friendships and social interaction, on their own terms away from adult supervision (Aitken, 1994). For some of those who are not afforded the opportunity for independent sociality, the psychological effect is revealing. They feel as if they do not belong.

5.3.2 Health

The second thematic issue which arose from initial diagramming and subsequent discussions is health. The issue of children's health has attracted attention at many levels, from general media interest to policy and practice from health professionals (Mental Health Foundation, 2008; Mackett *et al*, 2003; Popkin *et al*, 2005). Interestingly, the issue of their own physical health was a subject discussed at length by both girls and boys. As mentioned previously, evidence suggests that when children walked, cycled or scooted to school they felt 'healthy' and 'refreshed'.

The further discussions in which children participated regarding the linking of their health to their journey to school seem to have two different foci. The first was on the individual child's personal health in relation to the choice of walking, cycling or scooting to school. Drawing from the evidence here, it is clear that children have an in-depth understanding of how daily exercise is good for them. Drawings, commentary, discussions and photovoice extracts all show that walking, cycling or scooting is regarded as 'healthy':



Plate 44: SS Phil and Jim Primary (Steven, 9) Plate 45: Rowlands Gill Primary (David, 4)

As plates 44 and 45, as well as the commentary below, show, the options of 'bike' and 'walk' are linked to them being regarded as 'healthy' as the mode of travel provides access to fresh air and the environment.

'it's fun walking to school, its healthy. I drove one day because my mam had to go to work and I thought oooh I don't like this' – (Thomas, 6, commentary, Rowlands Gill Primary)

The focus on individual health is however hardly surprising given the amount of media coverage and school policy that is targeted towards encouraging a healthy lifestyle, as discussed in Chapter 3. There is increasing evidence that provides concern about the health of children and the lack of physical activity in children is of major concern for both short and long term health issues (Wooley, 2007). The children were all aware of the '5-a-day' fruit and vegetable message in terms of promoting healthy eating and understood the importance of everyday exercise, as shown by plate 46 and the travel diary excerpt. The issue came down to whether they were in a position to choose a healthier travel option given their individual circumstances.

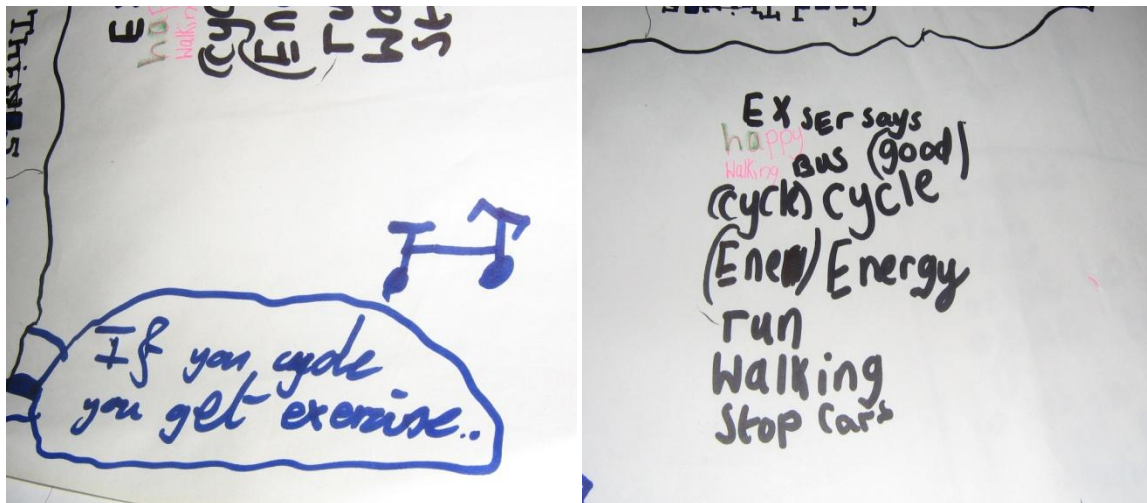


Plate 46: Matthew Arnold Secondary (Richard, Scott (13))

Wednesday: I woke up and went to school by car, then I halfway there I went by scooter so if that counts...I also saw on the way, that a fat man was eating junk food with a sigarete on his hand and in a car! I thought: 'Oh, that person isn't very healthy'. (Susan, 10, travel diary excerpt, Phil and Jim Primary)

The second foci regarding the children's individual health is the issue of them encountering specific situations on the journey to school that the children deem 'unhealthy'. This was a particular issue to the older children in this research. Second-hand smoke, especially experienced on school buses, is frequently cited as the worst aspect that they encounter. The following comments highlight this emotive issue:

'the smoking, I hate it, you get to school and you smell awful, people tell them to open windows and everything but they don't' (video interview, boy, 13, Ryton Comprehensive)

'They all sit upstairs, the driver says nothing' (Abigail, 12, discussion group, Ryton Comprehensive)

Second-hand smoke was not only associated with school buses however, as evidenced by an extract of a map drawn by Alice (14) of Ryton Comprehensive below, who advised that she tries to change her route to school in order to avoid the presence of 'other' children smoking at a particular place:

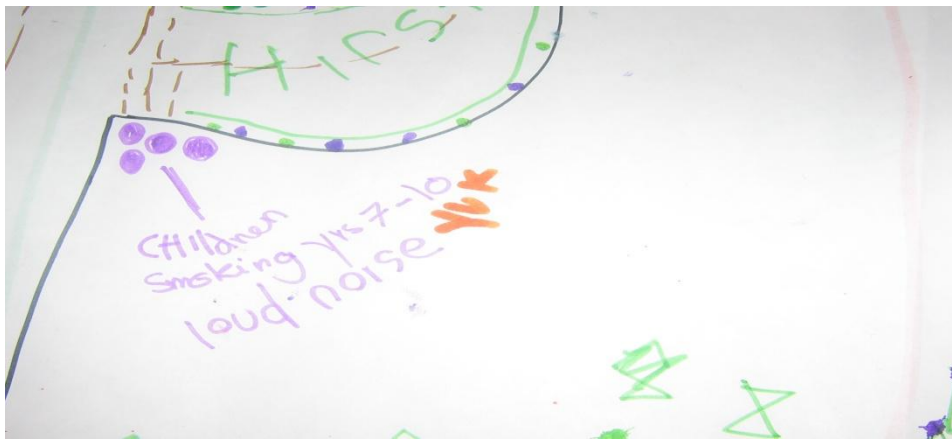


Plate 47: 'other' children smoking (Alice, 14, Ryton Comprehensive)

Further discussions revealed that a number of children develop specific routes to school in order to avoid coming into contact with 'other' children who smoke. This alteration of their micro-geographies to avoid specific situations was accepted as part of travelling independently to school. However, those that have no choice but to catch the school bus reveal how they feel it is unfair as it places them in a situation over which they have no control. The portrayal of smoking as an unhealthy, disliked practice is quite surprising given a recent research report from the Mental Health Foundation (2008) entitled 'Forever Cool: The Influence of smoking imagery on young people,' which argues that young people are exposed to the positive images of smoking and hence feel compelled to smoke. This research highlighted that not all children felt this way and in actual fact the majority of children and young people expressed concern about the fact that 'other' children or young people (especially on school buses) were not disciplined.

It is not only the social environment which alters children's choice in travel. Research suggests that the physical environment has a significant effect on diet, physical activity and

obesity (McMillan, 2007; Popkin *et al*, 2005). The children were aware of how the local physical geography acted as either an enabler or disabler to a healthy journey to school as many mentioned that given the chance, for example, less traffic, cycle routes and cycle storage at schools, many would prefer to cycle as it was a healthy option. In particular, those at Matthew Arnold Secondary highlighted the fact that the school was placed at the top of a very steep hill and this provided an obstacle to them cycling. The high level of children cycling and scooting to school at SS Phil and Jim was testament not only to the concerted effort of the school to encourage these modes of transport, but in part due to the local geography of the site in it being placed near a canal with cycle routes. In contrast, the children at Rowlands Gill Primary commented on wishing to cycle to school however as their school was located next to a main transport artery, it was deemed by parents too unsafe for them to cycle. Therefore, shaping the physical environment to support healthier mobility decisions has the potential to be a key aspect of preventing obesity and other health issues (Lake and Townshend, 2006). This is dealt with in more detail in Chapter 6.

5.3.3 Interaction with public space and community

The relationship between children and public space is shown to be complex and changing over space and time. In this research there were multiple views of places within public space as well as a varied expression of their experiences. Imbued with meaning and value, their journey through public space was viewed by some as a positive experience, whilst others talked about it in terms of 'anti-social behaviour' and threatening.

The multiple positive uses which children and young people made of public space for play, hanging out, socialising and informal sporting activities is evident, in line with Jones and Cunningham's (1999) assertion that the street is an important play space and should be recognised in urban design. As Matthews asserts:

'For a substantial residual of young people, the 'street' remains an important part of their everyday lives, a place where they retain some autonomy over space. We give emphasis to the continued significance of the 'street' for young people so that their right of presence in public places is recognised' (Matthews, 2000, 64).

The evidence shows that the journey to school provides the opportunity for play or free time in public space (Ross, 2005). The importance of the street was evident in the children's photographs, diagrams, drawings and discussions. In line with findings of Buss (1995) the children tended to capture their everyday life on the streets rather than in specialised play

areas which the children sometimes visited, more usually on their way home from school. Special places were illustrated, usually in terms of social meeting places.

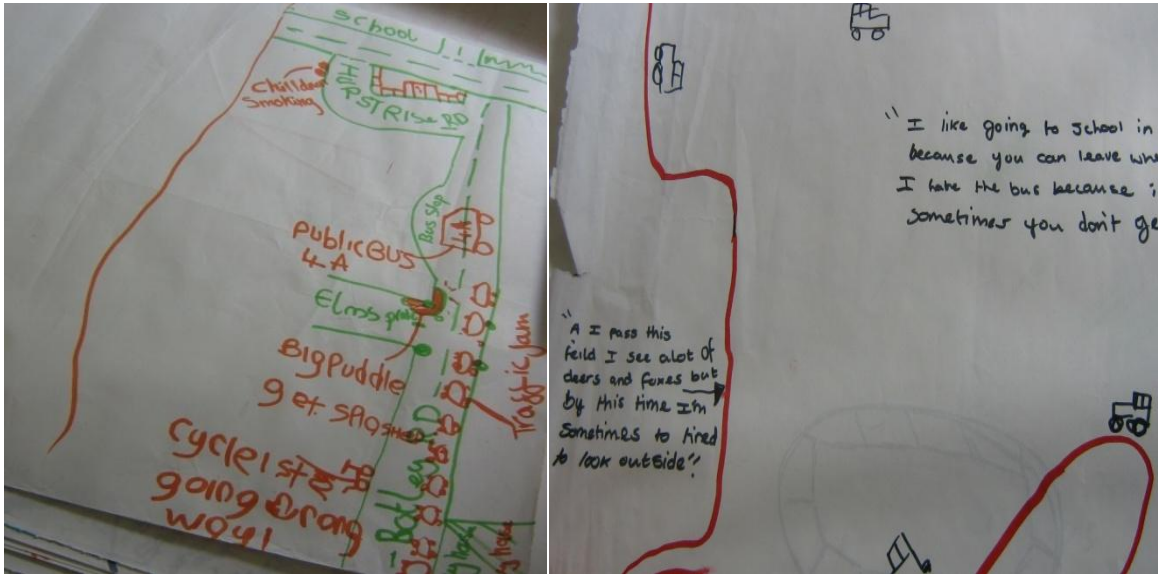


Plate 48: Matthew Arnold Secondary (Phoebe, 14)

Plate 49: Matthew Arnold Secondary (Alistair, 15)



Plate 50: Ryton Comprehensive (Dylan, 16)

Plate 51: Ryton Comprehensive (Edward, 15)

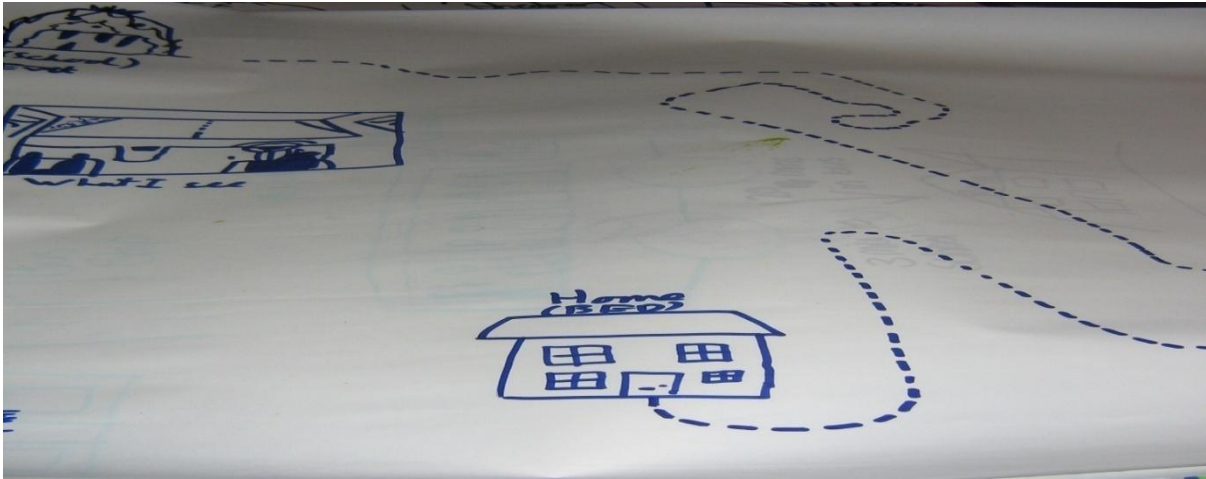


Plate 52: Matthew Arnold Secondary (Ben, 14)

The children's maps illustrate a relationship to place (Travlou *et al*, 2008). Some of them highlight roads, shops, specific housing areas and places of interest. Places were demarcated on the maps of the journeys to school as having specific uses by certain groups of people, for example, a smoking area, an area occupied by older children or certain groups of personalities. What is relatively striking about plates 49 and 52 however is that these maps were drawn by relatively older children who are driven to school. Their relative lack of information is striking. This is further evidenced by the following three travel diary excerpts written by children at Rowlands Gill Primary, which reflect a limited knowledge or perception of the 'outside' world:

Monday: I drove home from school because my sister had to bring her bike home and we live too far away to walk. I drive to school cos my mum has to go to work.

Tuesday: I drove to school cos my mum has to go to work. I walked home cos my dad wanted to get some exercise.

Wednesday: I drove cos (cos) I live too far away.

Thursday: I drove home cos we had to get home quickly.

Friday: I drove to school cos we would be late if we walked. (Jason, 6)

Monday: I drove to school cos my mum goes to work.

Tuesday: I drove to school.

Friday: I drove to school It was raining. (Jacob, 5)

Monday: I drove with my mam to school. I was really happy after school as my grandma picked me up.

Thursday: I drove to school and my mammy dropped me at entrance (Rachel, 4)

Compared to travel diary excerpts from children who walked, cycled, scooted and rode the bus, their levels of description are relatively scarce. This could be due to what Sibley refers to as having a backseat mobile view of the world (Sibley, 1995). Similarly, evidence, (plate 43) suggests that the children are missing out on the outdoor experience. Evidence shows that children who travelled by car to school seemed to 'watch' as opposed to 'do'.

The relationship that some children express with significant places within public space seems to be socially produced and is fleeting and fluid in its meaning, as Thomas (11) remarked:

'my friend and me used to go to this place, well sometimes we do, but not as much, cos others started to come too and so we had to choose another place' (SS Phil and Jim Primary, 11)

Also, Mark (10) explained his journey to school:

'sometimes we walk one way and other times another, it depends, we like to find new ways' (Mark, 10).

The minute details of their micro-geographies also became clear from a number of travel diary excerpts which shows that the journey to school offered a time and space for thought, reflection and wonder by noticing what happens within public space and community:

Tuesday: Today I walked to school and saw the old man sitting in his chair he always sits there. Every morning and every afternoon. I think how boring life would be if I were in his shoes.

Wednesday: When I go to school I turn right, right, left then I turn left and come to the bollards, and the bridge. I think that the bridge should be wider so more cars can get over, this could be in use during emergency. On the other hand I don't think cars should be allowed across during school time. I forgot to look and see if the old man was there today. I will look tomorrow. (Arthur, 11, SS Phil and Jim Primary)

Focusing on the everyday spaces of children's environments highlights 'children's often small-scale, fine-grained relationship to space' (Jones, 2000). Stephen (9) remarks: *'there is a rock where me and my mates hang out after school'* which again shows that certain places hold special, individual or group meaning for some children.

Gender differences have been documented in children's geographies asserting that girls display poorer spatial abilities, more limited environmental experiences and less environmental confidence and independent mobility (Hillman, 1990; McMillan *et al*, 2006)

The data from this research refutes this assertion as both girls and boys showed intricate knowledge of their local areas. The bigger differentiator was whether they were being driven to school or made their way independently. Children's agency was expressed in their independent movement through space on their journey to school, implying that children want to integrate and move through their local communities. The evidence shows that many children developed important coping and risk-management skills when negotiating public space on a bike, as is shown by the travel diary extract from Sophie (11, Phil and Jim) and the accompanying photographs below:

Monday: I go to school by bike today. I wear a helmet and a reflective jacket. The weather was cold and icy. So I had to be carefull not to slip and skid. I also had to be carefull because the drivers couldn't see me very well.

Tuesday: Today I walked to school because of the ice. When I got home it wasn't so slippy.

Wednesday: I went by bike. All of the green wheelie-bins were out. They can get in the way of pedestrians.

Thursday: It was icy again today. I went to school on my bike with my dad. We wore our reflective jackets and helmets. There is a big roundabout on our road and it has just been made one-way. Some people are still going the 'wrong' way round because it is quicker. The road narrows to slow down the traffic. It can be dangerous so the driver or cyclest has to slow down then stop to let the other through.

Friday: The wheely bins were out again today. I went on my bike. The bins get in the way of mums pushing babys and disabled people.



Plate 53: 'the wheelie bins to watch out for': Sophie, 11, Phil and Jim Primary

Plate 54: 'me wearing my jacket': Sophie, 11, Phil and Jim Primary

Fred's (age 14) map of his journey to school also highlights the level of detailed understanding of areas which could be 'dangerous' but also highlights the points of risk aversion, for example, the lollipop man and pelican crossing.

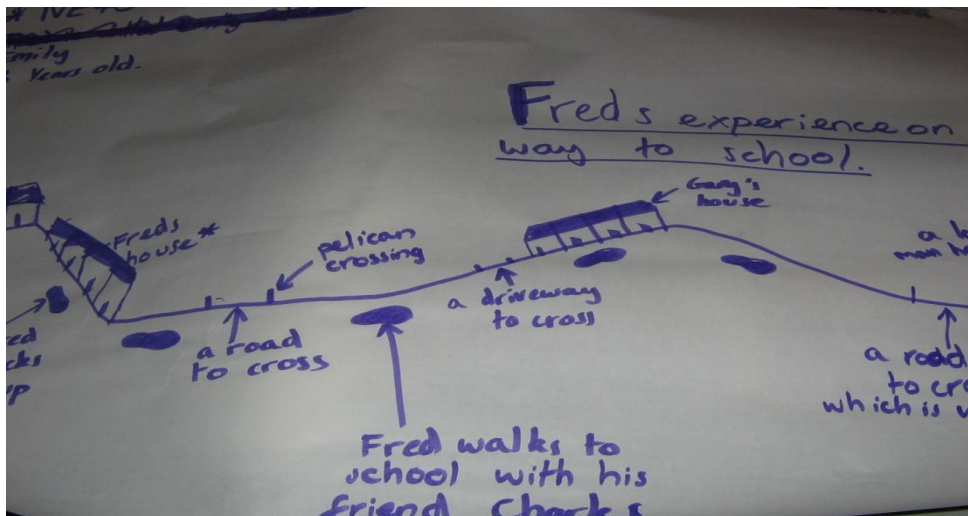


Plate 55: 'Fred's experience on way to school' (Ryton Comprehensive)

From their perspective as pedestrians, cyclists or scooter users, the most discussed issue in all of the schools was the levels of traffic and congestion around the school sites. Traffic was regarded not only as a localised issue but as part of a wider environmental problem nationally and globally (see Chapter 7 on children's views on the sustainable journey to school) and many children made their views very clear about how they felt this was a negative aspect. Rowlands Gill Primary children, in particular, were deeply aware of the consequences of traffic and congestion given that their school site was undergoing large scale redevelopment under the Building Schools for the Future campaign and long-term parking restrictions were in force due to the presence of building machinery. This has led to what is perceived by the children as dangerous levels of illegal parking around the site both before and after school. Photographs and commentary by the children emphasise their concern:

'I have to jump out of the car quick cos it is dead dangerous' (Bethanie, 7, discussion group, Rowlands Gill Primary)

'they park in bus stops so that's dangerous' (Amie, 8, discussion group, Rowlands Gill Primary)



Plate 56: 'This is what I will see when I am knocked over' (Michael, 8, photovoice, Rowlands Gill Primary)

Plate 57: 'home time' (Michael, 8, photovoice, Rowlands Gill Primary)



Plate 58: 'traffic near school' (Charlie, 11, SS Phil and Jim Primary)

The construction of public space as a *dangerous space* was sometimes mentioned, as in plate 59 below, and the reason given that it was regarded as dangerous was due to traffic. However, although it was included on some diagrams, the issue was not discussed at length by the children and it seemed as if whilst they are aware of the possibility of traffic danger, they are able to mitigate the risks effectively. Indeed, the safety rules were very well known as shown by a list provided by Joshua (6) at Rowlands Gill Primary in plate 60.

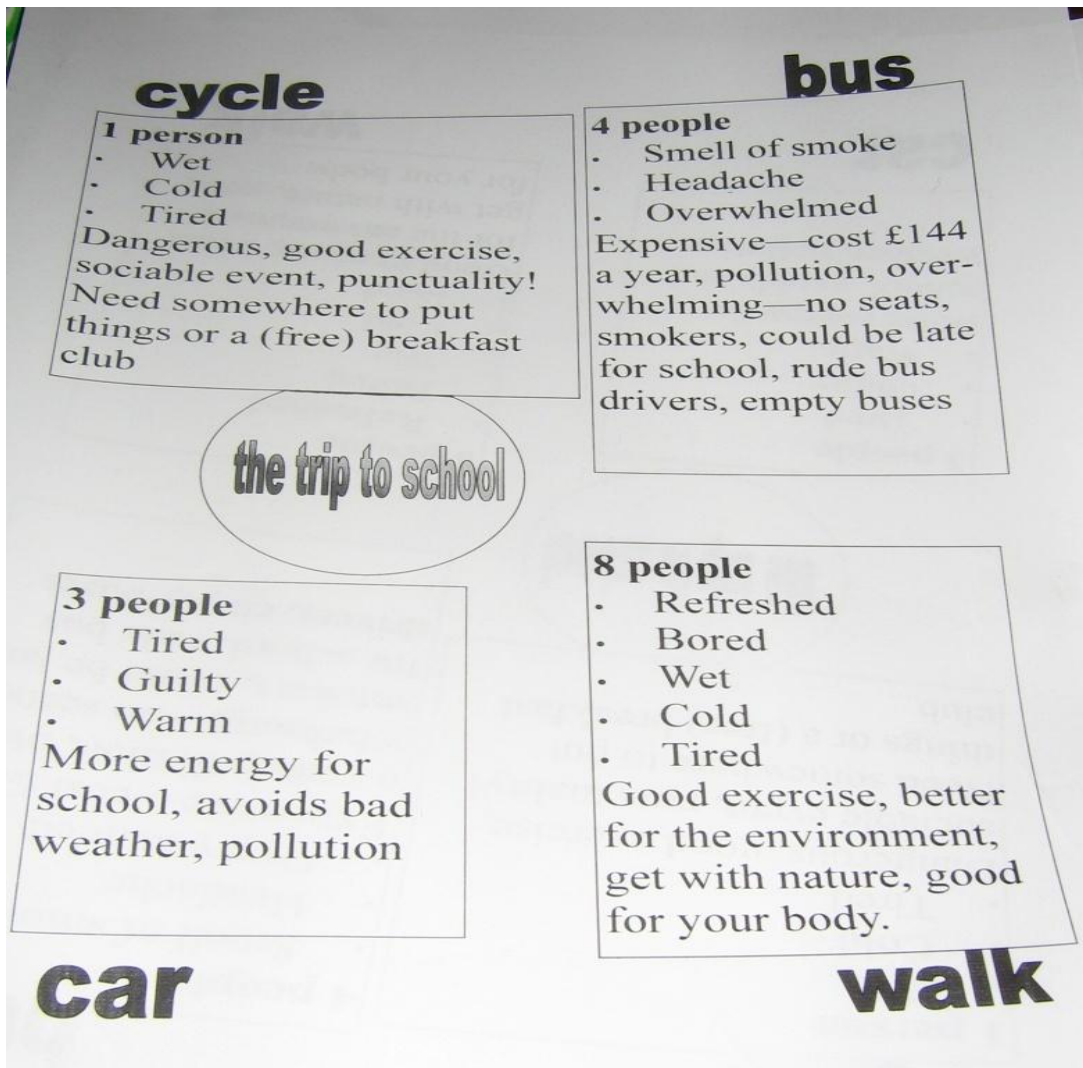


Plate 59: Feelings grid: Ryton Comprehensive

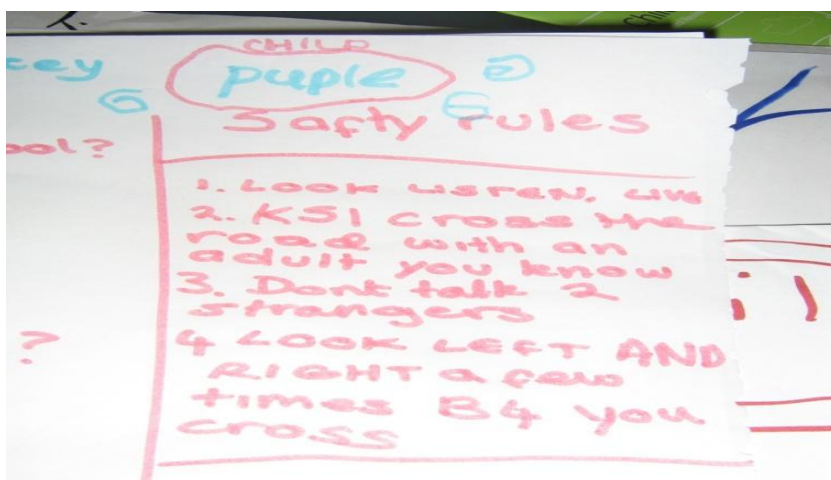


Plate 60: 'Safty rules' - Rowlands Gill

So despite the levels of traffic that they are aware of, they did not feel so much in danger as to alter their travel behaviour on the way to school. Sometimes areas of risk were established on maps, for example, traffic lights and road signs denoting 'danger' and 'traffic', however, there was little mention of public space as a whole being construed as *dangerous*. The only times when children portrayed public space as '*dangerous*' was by children who were mostly driven to school and it was used as a means of explaining why their parents would not allow them to walk, cycle or scoot, especially if the weather was wet, snowy or icy (see Chapter 6). Commercial places, for example, local shops and pubs, were included on a number of drawings by those children who walk and cycle. This may be linked to safety factors as past research has suggested that commercial places are viewed by girls as sites of safety and therefore feature in their social settings (Ross, 2002; Toon, 2000), however this link was never mentioned in any of the fieldwork sessions that the children ran. Interestingly, the issue of risk on the journey to school in terms of children's fears of stranger danger or abduction never arose. This is dealt with in more detail in Chapter 6 under negotiated and relational geographies but suffice to say here that the issue of risk in public space may be perceived as being an 'adult issue'. From the evidence of this research, such worries do not seem to form part of the child's everyday concern. If the idea was introduced in discussion groups the children noted the following:

'no, never think about it, you see it on the telly like but nah, I don't think...me(sic) mam probably does like (laughs) but...' (Dylan, 15, walks, Ryton Comprehensive)

'what? Someone pinching uz, no, I feel safe, more worried about the traffic killing uz' (Alex, 15, public bus, Ryton Comprehensive)

It is important to conceptualise public space as a complex interaction of social relations and recognise that within this complexity, individuals and social groups are constantly engaged in efforts to territorialise, to claim specific places and include or exclude others from these particular places (Massey, 1998). Evidence in this research concurs with this, as children in some cases experience the presence of other children (particularly those older than themselves) as threatening, as illustrated in Plate 47 in which the presence of 'older children' smoking caused anxiety to Alice on her way to school. They experience what Matthews, Limb and Percy-Smith (1998) refers to as '*landscapes of powerlessness*' which illustrates how their ongoing struggle for spatial identity accounts for their experience of public space is often one of social marginality and/or exclusion. Evidence illustrating the culture of the school bus highlights spaces of control and marginality:

'yeah, the older ones sit at the back, shouting and throwing stuff at us' (Matthew, 14, discussion group, Ryton Comprehensive)

'I hate getting the scholars bus cos you never get a seat and even if you do some chaver comes along and tells you to move' (Amy, 14, discussion group, Ryton Comprehensive)

The hierarchy and power relations within both the spatial and social settings on the school bus are apparent, as shown by the drawing below:

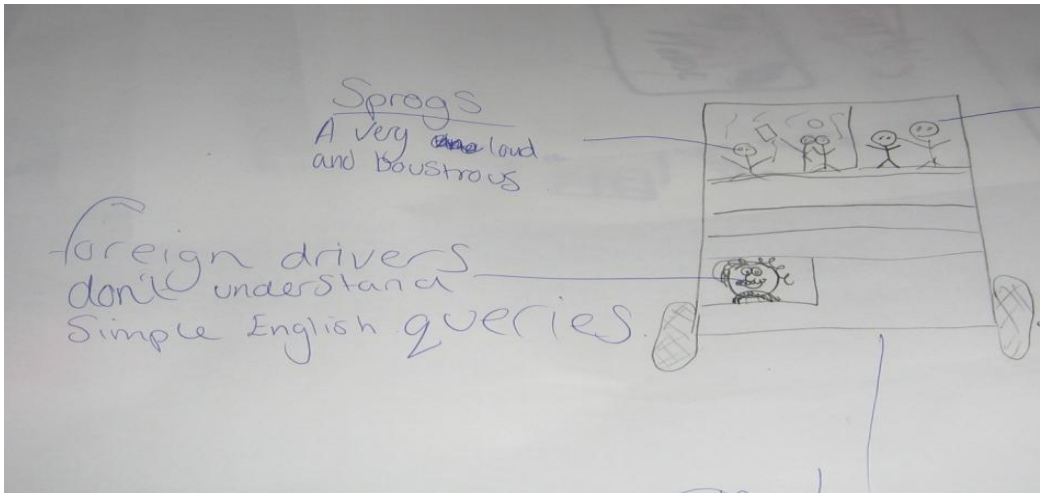


Plate 61: Matthew Arnold Secondary (Abbie, 13)

The children also appear to have an acute sense of how their visible presence and actions in public space may be perceived through *'adult eyes'* (Nayak, 2003, 12). Previous research has referred to notions of the appropriate use of public spaces and services, and the ways in which they have become regarded as appropriate for certain groups or activities. Children are regarded as a *'polluting presence'* (Matthews *et al*, 2000a, 63) whose visibility challenges the hegemony of adult ownership of public space (Furedi, 2002). Narratives from the children in this research highlight the level of adult intolerance perceived by the children.

In evidence, the adults intolerance of children occupying space on public buses, for example, equates public buses to *'adult space'* (Sibley, 1995) which further reinforces the social exclusion of children in public space. This reinforces what Church *et al* (2000) recognise as fear-based exclusion which demonstrates how children feeling anxious and concerned about how they are perceived seek alternative modes of transport. It also reinforces a stigma attached to children on public buses as the children reported as feeling *'out of place'*, *'unwanted'* and *'too loud so people get irritated'*. What became apparent in a number of cases was that the children themselves thought that the adults were justified to feel this way:

'we are too loud, they look at us funny, so we should try and be quiet and just sit there'
(Abbie, 13, discussion group, Matthew Arnold Secondary)

'we can help other passengers by showing respect' (Amy, 13, diagramming extract, Matthew Arnold Secondary)

Others are less emphatic, however:

'we pay to use the bus just like everyone else, but they don't like us on it, all the pushing and that but we pay' (Philip, 15, discussion group, Matthew Arnold Secondary)

'we use this every day because we are the main customers even though we are children'
(Terence, 14, commentary, Matthew Arnold Secondary)

The public bus can therefore be a space of potential conflict, not only between different groups of children but between adults and children. As Valentine, Skelton and Chambers (1998) note, the popular image of youth is consumption-orientated, carefree and rebellious, however, evidence here suggests that there is another image of their lives which is often largely ignored which is that children do show concern for others, respect, naivety and diversity. Some children showed genuine concern that their presence was regarded by some (mostly adults) as being 'intolerable'.

The children were aware of the *rules (adult)* of the bus and quite outspoken about the attitudes of bus drivers. They often felt aggrieved at being treated as if they were 'trouble', as James commented:

'we get told off before we even get on, he is so miserable, just shouts and everything, we haven't even done anything...' (James, 14, Matthew Arnold Secondary)

As Chapter 2, Section 2.5 discusses, a growing body of research highlights that public space is produced as adult space and children and young people need to carve out their own spaces of identity in public space, showing that *'the landscape of childhood is itself spatially demarcated'* (Nayak, 2003, 4). A number of comments in discussion or role play emerged to highlight the spatial and temporal curfews placed on children when they walk to and from school, as well as the assumption of criminality as they are walking through public space and/or using public services:

'we like to go to the shops after school, just along the road but we aren't allowed in all together, there's a sign which says we have to go in alone, well, sometimes in a two, but its cos its after school and they don't want big bunches of people' (Catherine, 14, discussion, Ryton Comprehensive)

'get out the shop you boy cos you are a thief...' (Michael, 14, role play, Matthew Arnold Secondary)

Generally, it seems to be that the older children (teenagers) focus upon the negative imagery, presenting them as 'threatening' and 'out of place', criminal, troublesome and law-breaking (Katz, 1998; Weller, 2007). This demonization of youth constructs ongoing moral panics which are subsequently reinforced by media discourse (Furedi, 2002). Key issues that older children (from the secondary schools) focused upon involved them wanting to be treated with respect and as active members of their community and society. They wanted respect for their own spaces, services that were both accessible and affordable (most notably bus services) and the physical space to carve their own identities. It is important here to link with Horton and Kraftl's (2005) research which emphasised the significance of the everyday, banal geographies. Children emphasised the importance of simple everyday objects, relations and interactions to them. For some, the ability to go to the corner shop for some sweets was a wonderful experience, for others it was the ability to play in the snow and for others it was the feeling of togetherness when walking with friends. As Buss, in his environmental research with children aged nine to eleven in Los Angeles notes:

'While my emphasis is on the spatial syntax of the city and it's role in shaping children's development, the children's emphasis is on how social relations directly and symbolically affect the character of their physical world'. (Buss, 1995, 344)

Part of this feeling of belonging was the children noting how they wanted to feel part of community. The benefits that children gain from familiarity and being known within their communities, where personal knowledge of who 'others' are enhance feelings of safety when in public space (Jacobs, 1992; Reay and Lucey, 2000), seemed indirectly present, although actual community involvement and linkages were rarely mentioned. Bus drivers were illustrated (not usually in a positive sense however) and only one travel diary extract mentioned the presence of a member of the community. This silence about community networks and familiar people within public space is very telling.

5.3.4. Autonomy and freedom

Given that public space was not overly perceived or constructed as 'dangerous' by the children participating in this research, evidence suggests that some children do possess a degree of autonomy and freedom on their journeys to and from school. Children mention in their travel diaries of the opportunities that they have to explore spaces in which to play or interact with friends. The popularity of many after-school clubs seems to provide the

opportunity to travel with friends via their houses, as shown by the extract from the travel diary below:

Monday: I dried the bikes and set off with my family. I went around Marevale square and then went down the long alley way after marevale square. Then I could see the school. After school and art club I went home the same way and met someone, I see him almost everyday called sam.

Tuesday: I walked to school and I met Sophie but then I walked and took some pictures of how I got to school. I had latin, then I went home but my sister forgot her homework so we had to go back to school in order to get the homework. On my way home I met Sam.

Wednesday: I unlocked our bikes but not mumm's. She ran to school but I beat her but my sister was late so she slowed me down. I had football club after school, it was 1 to 0 we lost, I went home alone. When I got home my sisters friend was doing Chinese with my babysitter.

Thursday: I went to school on my bike but my mum walked. This time we beat her. My sister 9sic0 caught up but then I had to wait on mum. That afternoon I had team sports it was football. When I got home my family was there.

Friday: My sister and I rid our bikes. My mom ran we met at the same time. After I rid my bike home half of the day with my friend Charlie but then my mum came home. (Albert, 11, Phil and Jim Primary)

As Albert mentioned, it was his job to clean and dry the bikes off before school and he took a photograph of the bikes as a chosen method to explain his journey:



Plate 62: 'It is my job to get the bikes out and clean the snow off them' (Albert,11, SS Phil and Jim Primary)

Many children note how they are in charge of their own time and know when to leave the house and meet friends, in order to arrive at school on time:

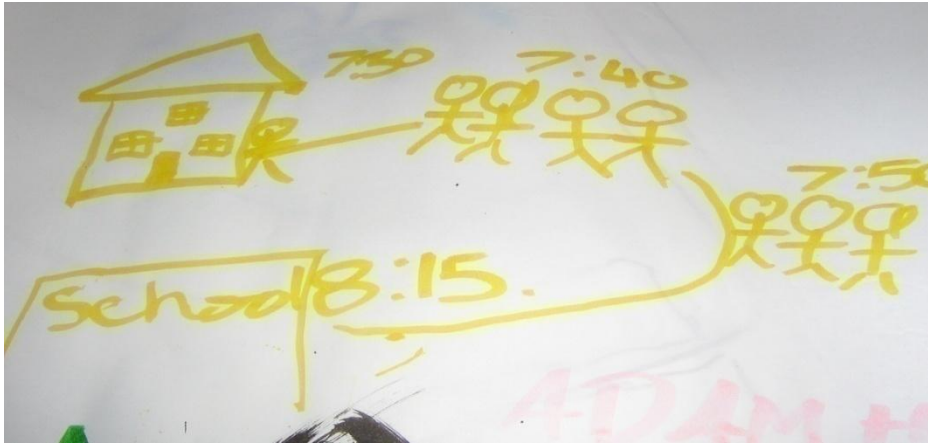


Plate 63: Jason (14) Ryton Comprehensive

There was a great deal of pride shown in many illustrations and discussions about the ability to self-manage their journey. Walking to school has been linked with developing children’s social, psychological and physical development (Hillman, 2006; Mackett *et al*, 2003) and the sense of autonomy came across clearly in a number of travel diaries that the younger children chose to write. The following travel diary extract from Arthur (11) at SS Phil and Jim Primary who walks to school (sometimes with friends) encapsulates how he manages his own time, engages in play (a snowball fight with friends), notices ‘interesting things’ and integrates with nature, hence increasing his autonomy and self-reliance:

Monday: Today I walked to school with Rory. He scooted and I walked. It was nice to talk with Rory. A lot of kids drive to school in 4x4’s which are unnecessary. Coming home I raced my sister on her scooter. I of course won.

Tuesday: Today I walked to school and saw the old man sitting in his chair he always sits there. Every morning and every afternoon. I think how boring life would be if I were in his shoes.

Wednesday: When I go to school I turn right, right, left then I turn left and come to the bollards, and the bridge. I think that the bridge should be wider so more cars can get over, this could be in use during emergency (sic). On the other hand I don’t think cars should be allowed across during school time. I forgot to look and see if the old man was there today. I will look tomorrow.

Thursday: In my school lots of children go by scooter, half the school scooter. Many people find scooters easy. People ride them from ages 4 to 12. Scooters can be dangerous and lots of people hurt themselves riding them. I think scooters should be allowed in every school no matter how old you are. Today I found that our school won a prize for having least people drive to school in a city. In our school I think that more teachers drive to school than students. Today I saw for the first time someone motorbiking to school, which I find interesting.

Friday: Today coming home from school I noticed that there are flowers in blossom, what’s more it’s the winter. I thought ‘its early for flowers to blossom’. It came to me that it must be global warming. I

really think people don't think twice when they drive to school or leave the heating on and silly things like that.

Monday: Going to school I pass 122 houses which is not a lot comparing I used to drive to school in Mozambique. Going to school the old man isn't in his chair. Today was a beautiful day. It reached 1 degree.

Tuesday: When I go to school I usually walk with my friends Rory and Matthew. At school I think they should monitor where people cross the road because bikes come around the corner really fast and could crash into you.

Friday: Today it snowed and lots of kids weren't at school even though it was open. Going to school I had a snowball fight with my friends. I even saw snowmen that were 3 meters high.

The range of sensations experienced when walking to school in all seasons and weather is also conveyed by the following travel diary extract by Abbey (10) at Phil and Jim Primary:

Tuesday: AT SCHOOL: My hands were literally frozen off when I came to school this morning. And as for my toes, well they had to warm up quick as they were freezing the rest of me.

Over the past 10 years growing attention has been paid to the notion of nature as a social and cultural construct, as well as the need to understand human relationships with it as an everyday experience (Kong *et al*, 1999). Clearly, different groups of people construct, access and experience nature in different ways. Given evidence that suggests that childhood experiences with nature shape their future association with it in adulthood, long-term behaviour patterns can be assumed (Driskell, 2002; Wells and Evans, 2003). Such opportunities to interact with nature were thought to be important by a number of children. As William (11) observed in his precise explanation of the minute details within his natural environment that he encountered, as shown by his travel diary:

Monday: This week I am going to find one natural thing every day. I saw some long catkins and photographed them. My journey was safe.

*Tuesday: Today I saw lots of red berries. I took some photos of them. They are called *Pyracantha wick* means fire thorns. It is a very thorny bush. My journey was fine.*

*Wednesday: Today I saw lots of frosted *viburnum tinus* flowers and took some photos of them. They have a nice smell so tomorrow I will smell them.*

Thursday: Today I saw three silver birch trees. They are a special type of Himalyan silver birch. They have very white bark. It peels off easily. We have 2 of them in our garden.

Friday: Today I saw some Euphorbia. They are a sort of purpley-red plant. In the summer ladybirds climb into the little hollows on the leaves. This week my journeys were all safe because we only have to cross one road. It is a cul-de-sac.

Tuesday: I crossed the road and then went round the corner, when a car came round the corner at High (sic) speed. I travelled safely to school. It's only about 100 yards to school. The school was built in 2002, but our house was built in 2000.

Wednesday: Almost the same as yesterday except a car didn't come round the corner.

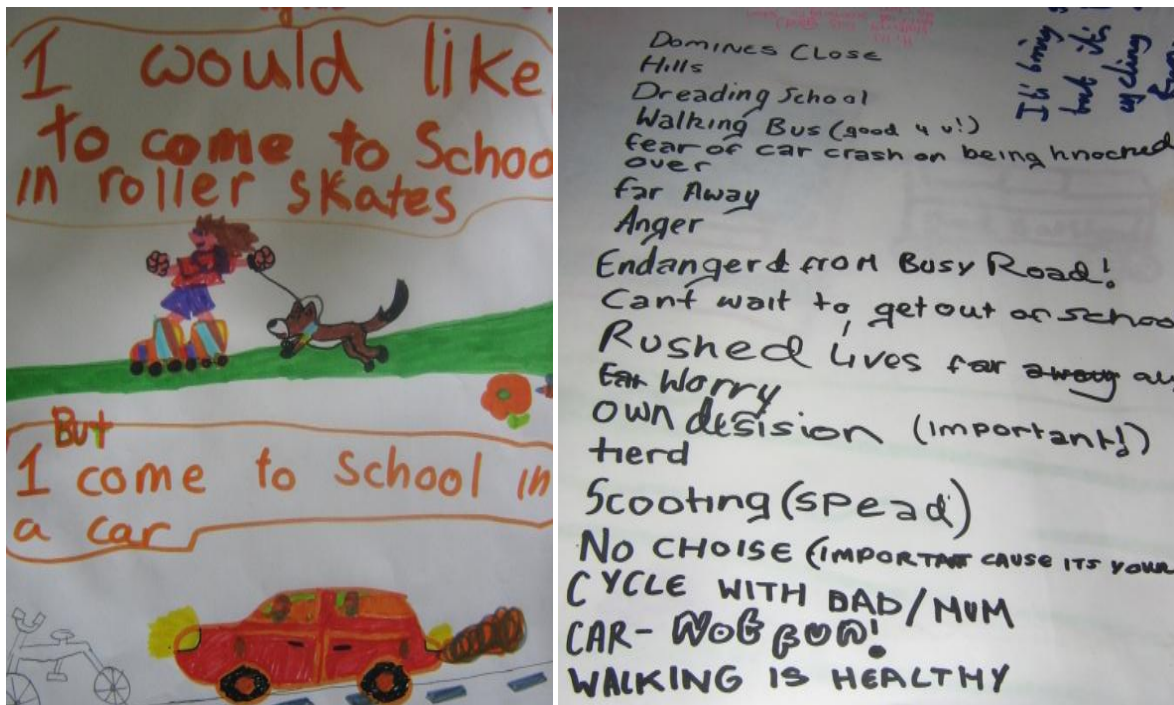
Thursday: Today I stroked the Big, white fluffy dogs, and took some pictures of them. I also saw some teachers coming on their bikes. The Big, white fluffy dogs are Samofeds wich is a rare breed from Siberia. They are chained up outside the house and they belong to our neighbours, Frank and Jean.

This travel diary excerpt was reinforced by a number of photographs that William took and provided comment for:



Plate 64: 'these are vibernus tinus flowers that I like' (photovoice)

The changing of the seasons was regarded by some children with great excitement as it gave them the opportunity to experience walking in the snow and ice on many occasions, although admittedly it was the younger children who were more excited. In some drawings the children illustrated that they chose different routes depending on the seasons and weather, as shown in plate 65 below:



Plates 66 and 67: Rowlands Gill (Lilly, 11) and group of children (Rowlands Gill primary)

This is an important point to make at this point though, as it has a bearing on how children feel about themselves. It was clear that some, like Philip (15, Ryton Comprehensive) did not like the fact that he was forced to use the bus when he would have preferred to walk, by stating *'it is shan, when you live too far, you don't have a choice, I have to get the bus cos I can't walk'*. Whilst some lamented on the fact that they felt as if they were being treated like 'babies', others noted that they felt *'grown up'* by being allowed to negotiate their own travel to school. In most of the cases where the children felt they had limited choice over their own mobility, it was justified due to the journey to school being part of a wider transportation issue, mostly due to work demands of parents. This is discussed in detail in Chapter 6 and in line with similar research (McDonald, 2008c).

The issue of feeling as if they are not treated in a respectful way was a core issue with the older children in this research. It is argued that teenage years are boundaries of exclusion (Cahill, 2000). As previously mentioned, teenagers especially feel unwelcome on public buses and in public space which demonstrate how variable, context-specific and gendered the definitions of these boundaries of exclusion are (James and Prout, 1995). Imbued with power relations, particular social groups are encouraged, tolerated, regulated and sometimes excluded depending on whether they are deemed to fit in or not (Holland *et al*, 2007). This shows that 'childhood' and 'youth' are not uni-dimensional categories. It also

shows that 'teenagers' as a group should it be regarded as a *separate grouping*, not researched in isolation, but in context given the variances in socio-cultural environments and the interrelationships that they engage in within their everyday lives. Teenagers as a group represent diverse identities, interests and experiences (Weller, 2007) and this has become apparent drawing from the evidence of this research. So, whilst 'teenage geographies' should not be regarded as a stand-alone group, they do however have specific needs and issues given their experiences which should not be discarded in socio-spatial and political inquiry. This would encourage a feeling of autonomy and belonging within the community (CABE, 2008).

The universal notion is that the child is temporally set apart from the adult world and that it is a time of innocence and freedom, free from adult responsibility (Valentine *et al*, 1998), however the evidence from this research shows that some children have well developed time and space strategies and they regard themselves as having individual and group responsibility, for example, cleaning the bikes before school, accompanying a sibling to school, meeting friends at a particular place, managing what ingredients need to be carried to school for a cookery lesson and getting to an after-school club on time by themselves or with friends. For some children (particularly those that walk, cycle, scoot or travel by bus), the period before school starts in the morning has emerged as a time of celebrated autonomy where practices and routines are made and remade. Some children actively negotiate time and space independently which is shown by remarks stating that they understand when they need to be at school and if anything happens (for example, forgetting something at home that they will need) they have the ability to manage the change. Some children related very precise movements and timings however it is also true that they have the ability to break from routine if the need arose.

5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have sought to prioritise children's meanings and views of their journey to school experiences. I argue that by drawing on children's own self-definitions, representations, narratives and categorizations of their journey to school, there is potential to shed new light on their everyday experiences. From the empirical analysis, vast differences between children's experiences of their journey to school have emerged. This research explores children's social, environmental and cultural micro-geographies and highlights the way in which they themselves physically, emotionally and socially engage (or disengage) in their everyday, local spaces and how they continually construct and

reconstruct their identity within the process. The evidence points to the journey to school as representing a number of different levels of involvement with space. Specifically, it embodies emotional space, social space, cultural space and physical space.

The journey to school as an emotional space relates the children's experiences to a range of emotions. This has implications for how children perceive themselves as well as how they relate to and negotiate with others. The data demonstrate that whilst some children have an active, emotional and creative engagement with their local environment, others do not. For some, the journey to school is an enjoyable experience in itself whilst for others it is a means to an end and construed as an experience which is boring or dangerous. This emotional attachment to the journey to school has not been identified in past research with respects to the journey to school, but has important implications for how children *feel* about their experiences.

The journey to school as a social space is of utmost importance for the children in this study in line with findings from other research (Frosh *et al*, 2002; Ross, 2002). Children drew on their experiential forms of knowledge of their activities, generated through participation in everyday practices and differing degrees of sociability. The journey to school can therefore represent a time of unstructured sociality and an opportunity to engage with their local environment as well as exercise varying degrees of autonomy and freedom. This highlights what Mackett *et al* (2003) refers to as the therapeutic value of the everyday travel experience. The research suggests that in contrast to those children who engage in social situations on their journey, those that do not, either by choice or circumstances, are very much aware of their difference in experience.

As a cultural space, the journey to school may provide opportunity for shared culture and identity-setting, obedience and conformity (Maxwell, 2001a; Nicholson *et al*, 2006; France, 2007). Some children mentioned that they form part of a particular social grouping which held common notions of culture in the form of dress or behaviours, for example. Others remarked how they did not interact with their local environment, due mostly to where they lived in relation to the school, and therefore felt more isolated and alone. Older children as well as younger children reflected on this.

The journey to school as a physical space is one which represents the ability to physically interact with public space, community, nature and the weather. Children react to changes in their everyday physical environment and incorporate this in their micro-movements. In some cases, an intimate knowledge of their physical micro-geographies is apparent. Individual

children construct topographies of their local area in which they identify different places according to pleasures, desires and anxieties (Reay and Lucey, 2000; Sibley, 1995). In other cases, a distinct disconnect with physical space is noted, regardless of age.

A significant feature of the conceptual framework of this research draws on the notions of childhood being socially constructed and regards childhood as space and time specific (Holloway and Valentine, 2000). It also acknowledges the diversity in children's lives in terms of backgrounds, circumstances and culture, upholding the maxim that childhood is not a universal category, as discussed in Chapter 2. Their experiences are varied and are not particularly dependant on age, class or gender. Their age in particular did not deter them from engaging in the research or offering fine-grain detail about their individual journeys. Previous research has suggested that girls are more likely to be driven to school (Evenson *et al*, 2003) but this did not seem to be apparent in this research. The physical and seasonal characteristics of the journey to school together with sensory experiences and social networks encountered all add to a variety of children's narratives and representations. Past research has suggested that children are severely constrained in their everyday mobility which leads them to hold very little autonomy or personal freedom (Hillman, 2006), yet evidence from this research shows there to be great variability in children's travel behaviours and needs. It is true that younger children in general are accompanied to school, but it is equally apparent that some of these younger children are afforded more opportunity for independent mobility depending on their circumstance. Some children acknowledge that their independent mobility is constrained, yet others have portrayed the ability to explore, dream and learn from their everyday, independent movement through their local environments (Chawla, 1992; Gill, 2007; Palmer, 2007a; 2007b). It is a short-sighted gain to view the journey to school in solely a negative light in terms of quantifiable statistics on traffic patterns and the number who are driven to school accompanied by parents. So whilst past research asserts that *'the ability to travel and the demand for mobility (by car) has undoubtedly increased, it can be suggested that for some people at least (especially children) certain aspects of everyday mobility may have become increasingly constrained'* (Pooley, 2005), this is only partly true. There is a high degree of variability that exists in individual children's travel behaviour. Certain children are driven to and from school and between other activities but this implies that children are a homogenous group who all experience mobility in this way. Drawing from the evidence here, there seems to be many children who exercise independent mobility in their journey to school and felt that they hold a general sense of freedom, autonomy and safety. Children mention particular risks, for

example, traffic on their cycle route to school or road works impeding their pedestrian access, yet it is inspiring to acknowledge their agency in the strategies that are employed on a daily basis to avert the inherent risks. Interestingly the only children to focus on unsafe environments to any level of real concern (and without mention of any risk-averse strategies) were the children who were driven to school. It can therefore be argued that the very children who are being protected from the outside world by being kept apart from it (be it by choice or not) are those who at most risk given the lack of understanding and integration of their local physical, social and cultural environments. Given the perceived risks and overwhelming health and safety dialogue, children still eke out a journey to school which is constructed in such a way to represent freedom, intervention with nature and provides a space for identity development.

The findings from this part of the research have important policy implications. Initially, and following from the assertions made in Chapter 4, children and young people are valuable, knowledgeable members of the community with significant everyday knowledge, skills and social and cultural responsibility. Secondly, the local environment can help or hinder young people's personal social, psychological and physical development and investing time to understand children's meanings of place not only provide positive individual development opportunities and valuable life skills (Hillman, 2006; McMillan, 2007) but also contribute to understandings about community development and environmental design. Thirdly, global and national policy initiatives require local implementation and while the national policy initiatives surrounding the journey to school (subsumed under the sustainability discourse covered in Chapter 7) can provide a backdrop of support, local initiatives can work towards the long term goal. Blanket solutions that assume that the travel behaviour of all children is the same are unlikely to be successful. Local knowledge and research will provide the building blocks to sustainable policy development as it considers context and variability. Listening to views of children of their individual and group experiences can only add to contextual policy development. Lastly, everyone learns from active participation with young people and it is a powerful vehicle for social transformation (Kindon *et al*, 2007). Drawing from the evidence of this research, children want to be consulted and treated seriously about issues that affect their everyday spatial and social mobilities. Children and young people have a specialist, place-specific knowledge of their everyday spaces. This detailed, lived cultural geography implies that they have a great deal to offer in encouraging their *meaningful* participation and consultation by policy makers. Given the findings from this chapter, the claim that children do not have the sufficient levels of knowledge and

understanding of their experiences to investigate subjects in any depth does not stand up to close scrutiny (Kellett, 2005).

The use of participatory research methodology as 'an orientation to inquiry' (Reason, 2001) encouraged creative methodological insight by the children and young people who participated in this research. The data is shown to be reactive and reflexive in understanding specific contexts through which the child negotiates and constructs their journey to school. Children gain competency through negotiating school journeys with a number of different people, places and situations as this chapter has highlighted. However, the negotiated and relational geographies of the journey to school are central within this debate and it is to this I discuss in the next chapter.

Chapter 6

Negotiated Geographies of the Journey to School

6.1 Introduction

This chapter concentrates on negotiated and relational geographies that are embedded within the journey to school, by highlighting the complex interrelationships within and between the three sites of influence within which the journey to school operates, namely: the household, public space and the school. Reflecting the theoretical framework in Chapter 2, which focused upon spaces of engagement as well as spaces of control within these three sites, this chapter is structured along the lines of assessing each site independently, as shown in Figure 7, with consideration that such a split is artificial as they are interlinked and one change on one site may cause a change in another.

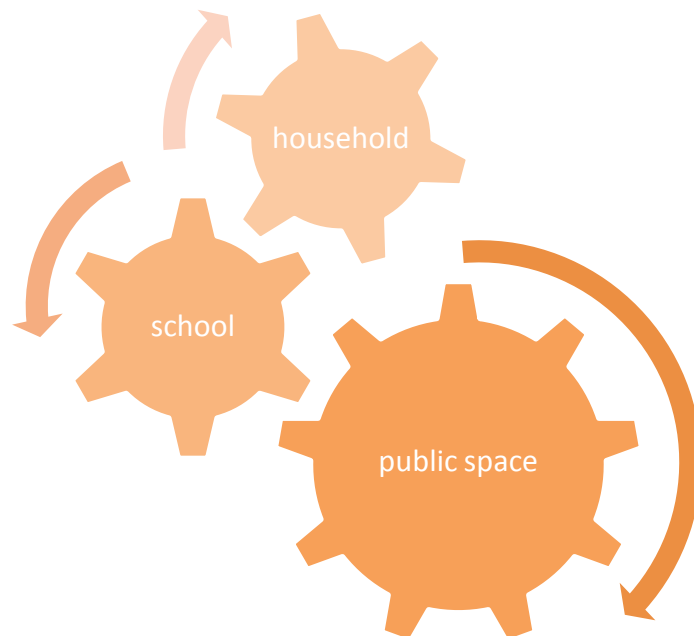


Figure 7: Negotiated geographies of the journey to school within the three childhood spaces

Research conducted on children's micro-geographies suggests that they belong to a multitude of interlinked, layered social networks based around their local area, school, home, clubs, community and parental social group (Morrow, 1999). However, it is not only social networks that influence the experience of the journey to school. Cultural, economic, physical and political networks also impact on how the child experiences their school journeys, as illustrated in Chapter 5, which in turn structures their patterns and behaviours within their wider everyday mobility.

There is an assumption underpinning this research which recognises the importance of children's varying levels of agency in their social and spatial relationships:

'Traditional socialization theory posits a finite model of agency: the child at home, in the street and at school is in all respects the same child. In our approach this same child finds multiple expressions of the self through engagement with different sets of people in different social groups... Thus it can be seen that the strategies and styles of behaviour which children adopt across and between different social environments are both the context for, and the outcome of, children's experiences of belonging' (James and Prout, 1996, 50).

Arguably, the spatial interactions between children and adults within the household, public space and the school are dominant in shaping how children experience space and the degree of flexibility, scope and rigidity enforced on their experiences. Such negotiated relationships are fluid, temporal and contextual.

Focusing initially on the household, the issue of who chooses modal travel to school is discussed through highlighting children's viewpoints of their perceptions of individual agency, as well as parental views on choice. Household structure, parenting styles and everyday travel is then discussed, examining the level at which parental concerns regulate and shape children's journeys to school. The key tension of balancing the need for protection against the levels of perceived risk in public space is discussed. It is important to situate children's perceptions of their ability to have choice in their travel behaviour to school. The previous chapter separates the interpersonal relationships of the family with the child, providing a separate conceptual space for children and their experiences. However, insisting on a conceptual autonomy for childhood does not have to deny the empirical significance of the family for children, as most children live in families and their home is central to their everyday micro-geographies. It is a very important context within their lives. Therefore, the focus here is on the children's view of their negotiated geographies within the household – their perspectives on the family and decision-making conducted within it. Parental views, issues and concerns are briefly discussed in order to provide a degree of balance and insight.

Negotiated geographies within public space take the form of two aspects: social negotiation and physical negotiation. Whilst chapter 5 highlighted the importance of friendships created and recreated on the journey to school, the issue of how parents view these social negotiations is valid. It is also significant to highlight to leverage aspect of friendship, providing an opportunity to travel unattended by adults to school. Negotiated access

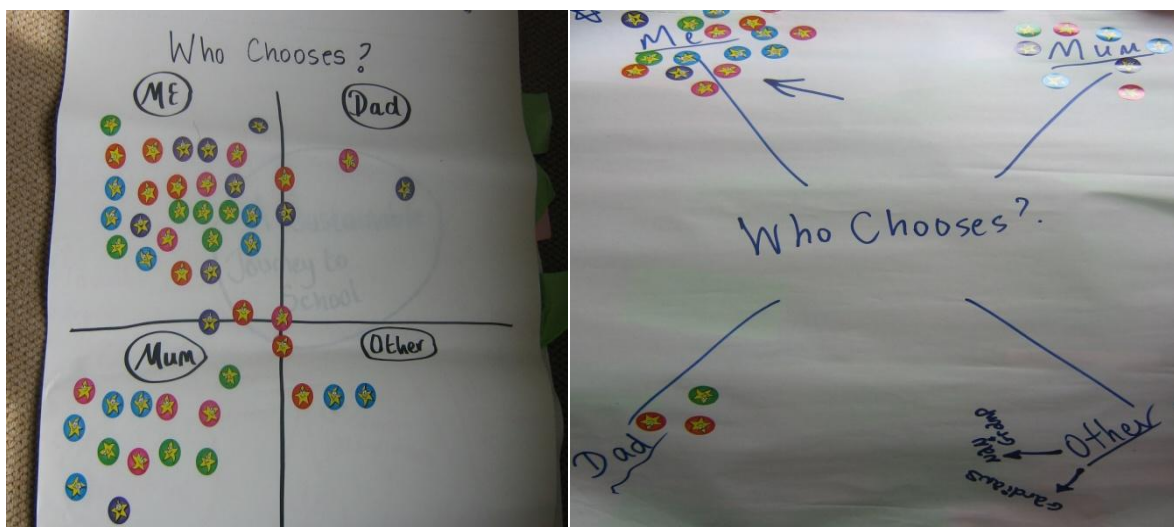
through physical public space on the way to and from school is also an important aspect which shapes the structure and nature of the journey (McMillan, 2007) and has focus given the priority based on the government's sustainable policy surrounding urban design and planning.

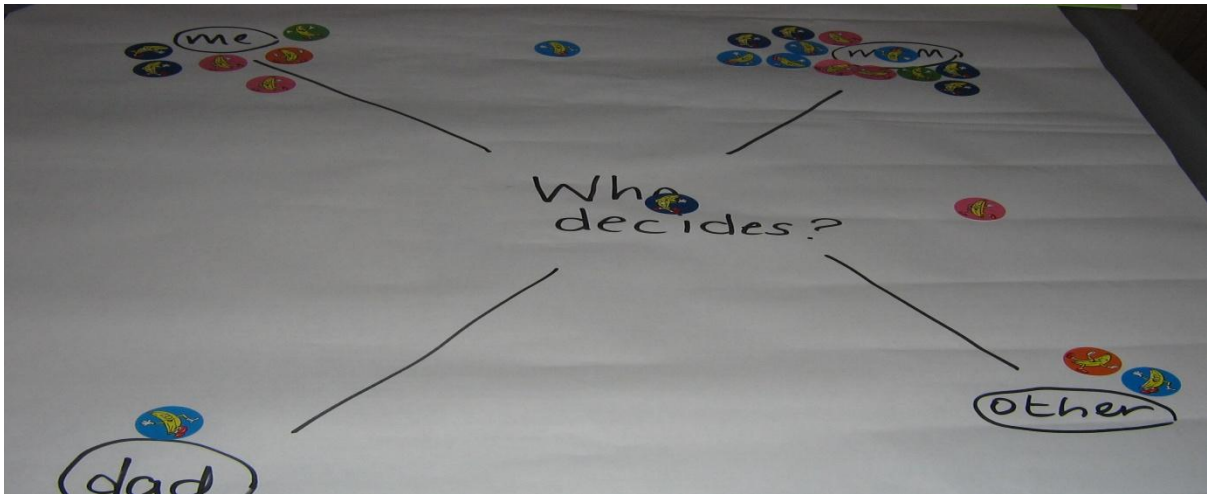
The final section discusses how the school space impacts on journey to school decisions. Children spend much of their time within school and the ethos, culture and management style that permeate this space undoubtedly inform the children's journey to school. Not only does the school physically enable or disable specific modes of transport, it also provides important messages about what is deemed socially acceptable or unacceptable, which in turn is linked to wider governance and the strategic priorities of sustainable travel policy.

6.2 Negotiated geographies within the household

6.2.1 Who chooses?

Children's journeys to school are largely dependent on a system of negotiation between members of the household. According to the younger children who participated in this research, the journey to school in most cases seems to be a distinctive space for their mothers, as well as themselves. As shown in the diagramming conducted to examine who makes the decision in the household regarding the journey's mode and route, some children chose that mothers make the decision without consulting them whereas others noted that they themselves make the decision. In discussion around the diagramming exercises it is clear that for those children who feel they make the decision, the negotiation of how the school journey is made is in negotiation, primarily with their mothers.





Plates 67-69: 'who decides?' diagramming

Fathers seem to be relatively invisible when it comes to decision-making within the household, according to the children. As Alan (8) noted:

'Me dad doesn't get up when we leave for school. It's not his job.' (Rowlands Gill Primary, discussion around diagramming exercise)

It is reported that family stability in the UK has been in continuous decline over the past four decades (CSJ, 2008). Changes in family structure in terms a rise in single parent families and co-habiting partner households (Jarvis, 2005) and an increase in the number of 'fatherless homes' (CSJ, 2008) could account for the lack of perceived or actual input from fathers in terms of household decision-making. A number of children remarked on their step-father (or step-mother) accompanying them to school, although none of them mentioned that they take part in the household decision-making process with regards to the journey.

Most of the older children in the two secondary schools' research groups were certain that they were the active decision makers, unless they lived too far away from school (and had no bus services) and were therefore forced to rely on their parents for a lift to school. In this respect, evidence shows that some of the older children feel that they do not take part in any household decision-making given their individual circumstances.

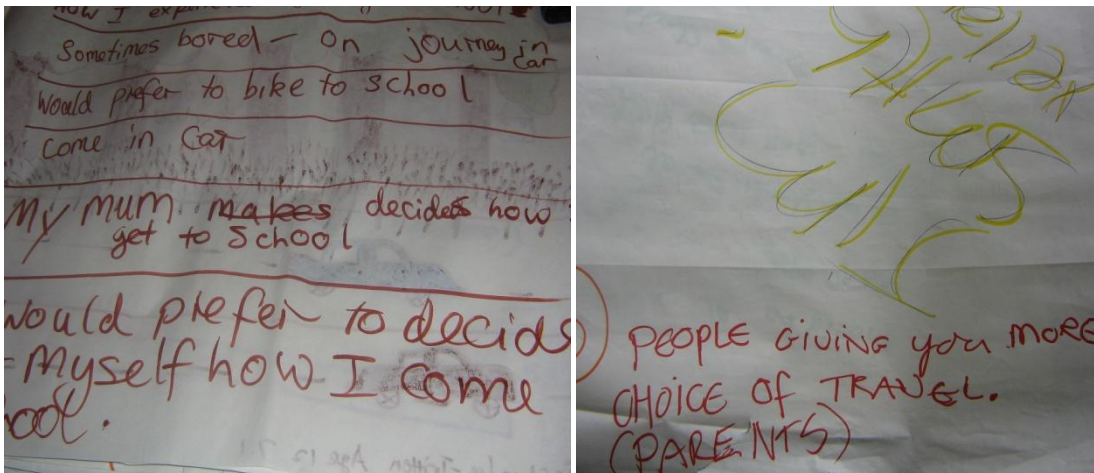
The evidence suggests therefore that whilst some children feel that they are active decision makers within the household, others feel relatively passive. These reported differences in household decision-making processes are supported by a number of parental comments:

'I don't think there is a major problem it is a joint decision around practical arrangements'
(mother, Ryton Comprehensive)

'I make the decision as I am responsible for him' (mother, Matthew Arnold Secondary)

'I suppose I make the decision actually, cos we don't have a choice' (parent, SS Phil and Jim Primary)

In further discussion, it became clear that a number of children wished that they had more of a say in the decision surrounding their journey to school, as reflected in the diagrams below:



Plates 70 and 71: The issue of choice (Matthew Arnold Secondary)

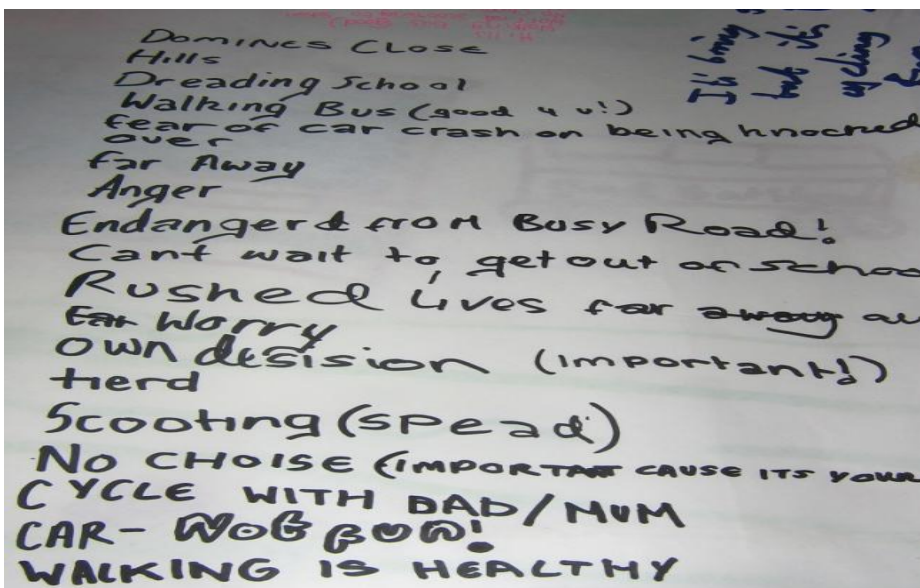


Plate 72: 'No choice' (Rowlands Gill Primary)

They reported feeling that it was unfair that they weren't given a choice considering it was them who undertook the journey to school every day of the week. This level of discontent was expressed by children of all ages. As well as a child's individual right to choice emerging strongly, parents also felt they had the right to choose how their children travel to school, as shown in a number of responses:

*'We live in a free world. I can choose how to get my children to school however I want'
(parent, Ryton Comprehensive)*

'I don't understand the need to reduce car journeys as it is a free country! It is a family decision as we are all involved. I take him by car on the way to work, it saves time and he arrives fresh too'. (parent, Ryton Comprehensive)

'I decide, it's my right as I am a responsible parent' (parent, Matthew Arnold Secondary)

Comments by the children therefore suggest that they want more active choice in decisions that affect their experience of the journey to school. The ways in which the children rationalise their perceived and experienced lack of decision-making capacity is however justified by a number of core lines of reasoning, namely: distance between home and school, employment in the household and parenting styles and practices. Each of these aspects will now be discussed.

6.2.2 The distance between home and school

The greater the distance between home and school, the more likely it is that the journey is done by car, and less chance of the child having a great ability to negotiate:

'we live too far away so I have to drive them. The school bus is useless as it comes far too soon' (parent, Matthew Arnold Secondary)

'It's ok for some children to walk or cycle if they live near but not when you live 5 miles away! It is an equal decision within the household although we don't allow him to cycle as too far and too dangerous' (parent, Ryton Comprehensive)

Children recorded that they were very much aware that this was the reason why other modes of travel were largely unsuitable for their individual circumstances, as is shown in plate 73 below, which states: *'it is ok to go by car if you live quite far away'.*

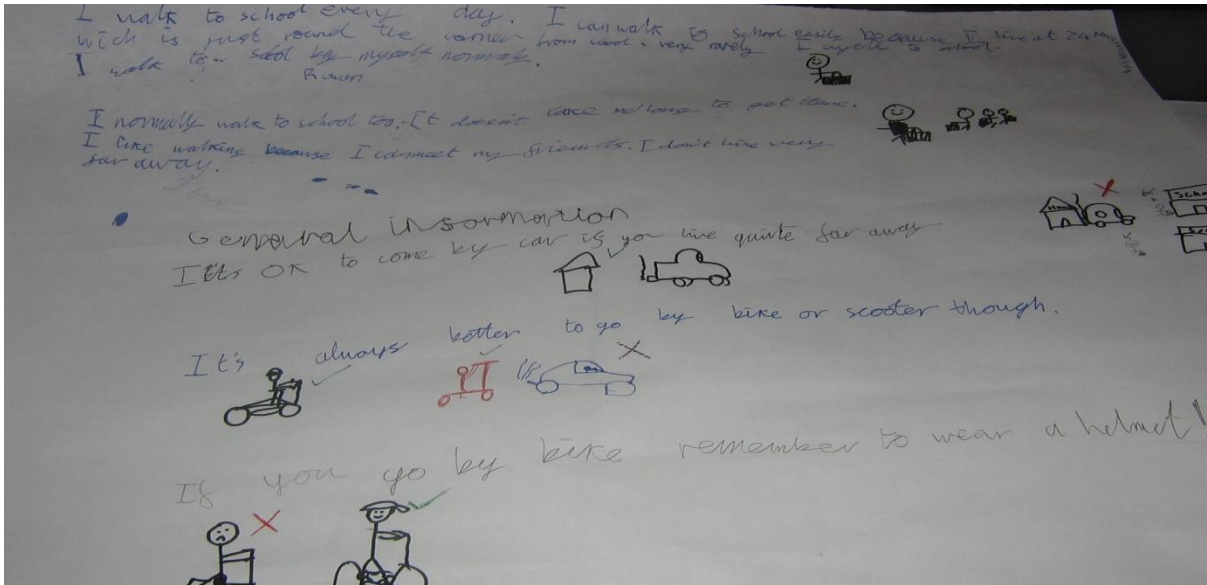


Plate 73: A child's view of the distance between home and school (SS Phil and Jim Primary)

The change in British educational policy in the 1980s which allowed parents to have a greater choice in school selection has had an unintended consequence on the nature and structure of some school journeys, in that more children are accompanied, usually by car (Hillman, 1990; Pooley *et al*, 2005a). Further research has highlighted the divisive nature of the search behaviour of parents that is employed when choosing a school (Jarvis, 2005) showing that the ability to choose a school at a distance from the home is dependent upon resources available to the household, for example, availability of a car or finances available to fund the mobility. Additionally, strategies involved in choosing residential areas and schools depends to a large degree on available and accessible social capital, for example, the ability to research the system of selection and in turn pay for complex travel behaviour in order to travel to increased journey to school. Coupled with the widespread propaganda of the importance of the school league tables, the uneven distribution of services within schools and the media and public panic regarding over-subscribed schools, the choice of schooling is a complex practice.

With the introduction of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (DfES, 2006a), free transport has to be offered to the most disadvantaged (eligible) children to attend any of three suitable secondary schools closest to their home, where these schools are more than two and less than six miles away. Alternatively children may choose any school up to 15 miles away if the choice of school is based on religion or belief. This is hoped to reduce the impact of transport availability as a barrier to parents from low income groups, however, I

would argue that this again will run counter to the policy espoused under the Sustainable Schools framework (see Chapter 3) which encourages more sustainable travel to school. The choice to send children to distant schools is usually made with the knowledge that the journey can be undertaken largely by car given the benefits of convenience, speed and control. This reflects the notion of obligations, opportunities and inclinations proposed by Stradling and Anable (2008) which asserts that the journey is regarded as an obligation as part of the overall choice of school.

The mismatch between where families live and where they choose to send their children to school (Jarvis, 2005) has other consequences. Children in this research reported that they felt very little connection with their immediate school community. This could in part be explained by the fact that some of them lead a dislocated lifestyle and travel beyond the immediate district of the school to their home. Such consequences are noted in their feelings of loneliness when they are not afforded the opportunity for sociality on their independent mobility to and from school.

The compromise can therefore be social costs to the environment which seem relatively low in priority, which echoes research done by Jarvis which showed complex integrated compromises that parents make if there is a spatial mismatch between home and school (Jarvis, 2005). In other words, it is as if the 'need' for the car outweighs alternative considerations (Shove, 2003). Given the availability of resources, it seems as if distance between the home and school is not a dominant determining factor. Generally, if a school is deemed worthy (by the parents), the issue of distance between the home and school is an aspect that is largely overcome. The notion of environmental sustainability does not appear to be a priority.

The market-led educational reforms in government policy were part of broader neo-liberal economic restructuring, but have led to an apparent contradiction between transport and education policy. Arguably there is a lack of joined up thinking, prompted by concerns over the increasing levels of localised congestion and traffic and the resultant concerns over child safety. This is dealt with in more detail in Chapter 7.

6.2.3 Linking parental employment to the journey to school

For those that travel to school by car, research suggests that it is often combined with the journey to work (Hillman *et al*, 1990; McDonald, 2008). Children and parents in this research acknowledge that the journey to school forms part of a wider, everyday household mobility,

usually linked to employment. However, the children's responses to parental employment provide some striking parallels. Children seem to realise that they have remarkably little influence over whether a parent works, where they work, how long they work (McKee *et al*, 2003) and who adopts particular economic roles within the household. Parents were often characterised by being at the sole mercy of the labour market:

'she has to be at work so I have to get the bus' (Conny, 13, discussion, Matthew Arnold Secondary)

'I have to get the bus as my parents work; we have no choice' (Matthew, 14, commentary, Ryton Comprehensive).

'it's too far and there is no bus so I have to come by car on the way to mum's work' (Stephen, 15, commentary, Matthew Arnold Secondary)

The issue is that children feel a lack of agency in participating in decisions within the household regarding the complexities of employment, and hence there is a perceived inability for parents to make the connections between their work-related mobility behaviour, changing life patterns and children's agency over their everyday experiences. It seems that the children do not demand control over these structures, and it was interesting to hear that they never expressed their feelings regarding their everyday mobility – be it boredom, loneliness, happiness, excitement or fear – to their parents. They may voice their opinion about specific aspects of the journey, but never seem to negotiate any change of their mobility patterns purely on the basis of reported feelings. Referring to Hirschman's theory of *'exit, voice and loyalty'*, Qvortrup (1985) argues that children do not have these three options – they may voice their opinions, but with little power, given that the choice of exit is not open. In most cases, they cannot leave their family. Therefore they are left with loyalty – *'children's agency is largely a matter of coping with adult's decisions'* (Jensen and McKee, 2003, 8). Although the children I spoke to were sometimes insistent that they were the ones that made the decisions surrounding how they get to school (especially the older children), evidence shows that they understand time-squeeze (Jarvis, 2005) and complex mobility choices and how these impact on decision-making within the household. They understood and accepted their lack of negotiation power in these circumstances. Children's experiences of parental work mobility, in terms of models of participation as discussed in the methodology chapter, is sometimes at best a process of limited consultation, as captured by the comments:

'it's nothing to do with me, the time they leave for work and all...I have to get the bus, I have no choice' (boy, Ryton Comprehensive)

'I tell her that I will drop her off on the way to work although she finds her own way home after school' (parent, Matthew Arnold Secondary)

'I don't have a choice, me mam brings me on her way to work' (girl, 15, discussion group, Ryton Comprehensive)

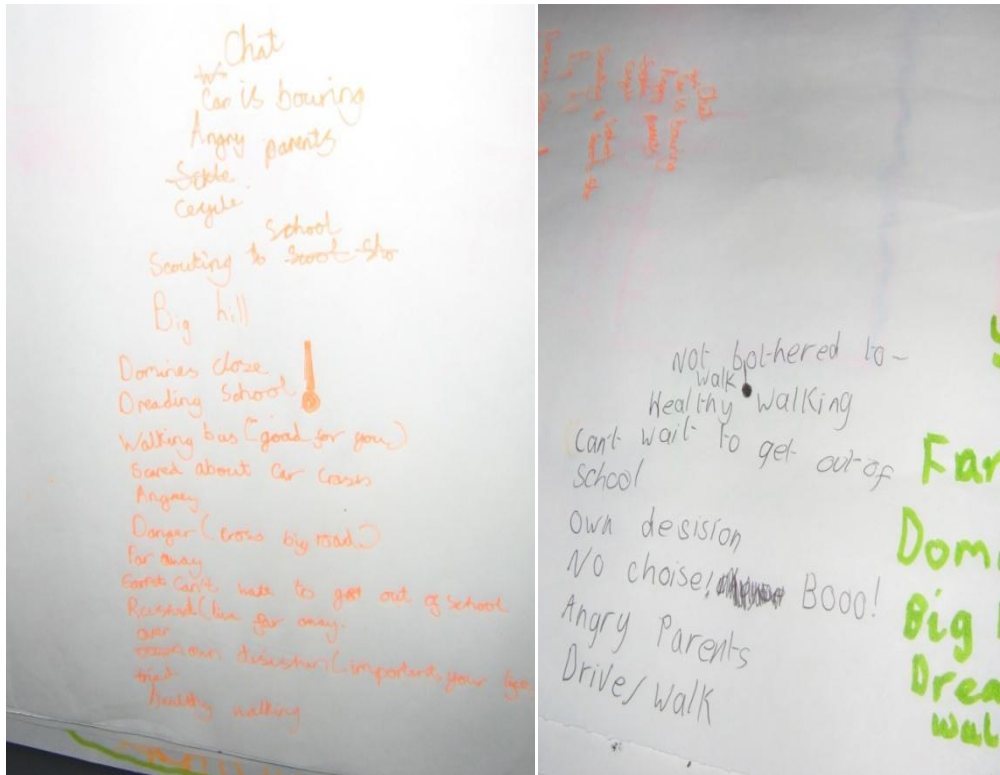
Research indicates that cars are therefore valued in some households, as they are perceived to decrease travel time and provide convenient methods of transport (Stradling *et al*, 2003). However, this may prove to be unrealistic in a number of circumstances from a child's perspective. As Alan (8) from Rowlands Gill Primary states, *'by the time the traffic has gone, we are late, it would be easier to cycle'*.

The private space of the car is also reportedly used as a space for family time, a time to be with and speak to children (Dowling, 2000). Indeed in this research the car was sometimes constructed as a time of solitude, usually away from the chaos and noise experienced on the bus.

'I like driving them as it gives us a chance to talk' (mother, Ryton Comprehensive)

Interestingly, though, no children mentioned their time in the car as a time to interact with their parents. Three children in Rowlands Gill Primary did however note in a diagramming session, as illustrated in plates 74 and 75, how *angry* their parents seemed to be. When asked why they thought their parents were angry they stated that it was due to the stress of the traffic and finding no place to park due to localised congestion problems, coupled with the stress of having to be at work at a certain time.

Arguably, the journey to school is part of a complex household mobility web, most notably prioritised around the journey to work. When the journey is done by car, it is justified by the acknowledgment of the household's daily movements, behaviours and routines (Jarvis, 2005). Simply, if the physical mismatch between the home and school is such that the car is regarded as the only option, the further issues of household employment patterns provide another layer in negotiation which may or may not take place.



Plates 74 and 75: 'angry parents' (2 children, Rowlands Gill Primary)

6.2.4 Parenting styles and practices

Recognised as a social construction (Valentine, 1996b), the style of parenting seems to influence their child's patterns of mobility. To a large extent, the opportunity to travel independently to school is dependent upon continual negotiation between the children and their parents/carers within the structures of the household. The outcome obviously depends upon the dominant parenting styles and everyday social, economic and cultural practices of the household. The parent-child relationship is seen as one of fluidity, where factors such as age and perceived maturity levels come into the household decision making process. The subtlety of the adult-child relationship is uncovered by a number of comments made by the children:

'I want to walk to school but my mam doesn't trust me, it isn't fair' (Molly, 13, Ryton Comprehensive)

'I am old enough I think, but she doesn't think so' (Alice, 9, Rowlands Gill Primary)

Evidence shows that children are aware of adult authority, yet some recognised that they had a right to assert their own responsibility in decision-making processes within the household. In this way, parents' constructions of children's agency can be seen to influence

their mobility experiences. In many cases, the ability to travel independently was regarded as a goal, when children have reached a certain age or are perceived to be mature enough and are able to deal independently with perceived risks associated with the route to school. Many parents stated that they are aware that their children need independent mobility at a certain stage in their lives. When that stage is, however, depends on a number of factors, for example, the presence of older siblings, perceived maturity of the child and the enabling and disabling aspects of their local physical and social environments. A number of parents acknowledged that the unaccompanied school journey provides further opportunities for independence, skills development, decision making and autonomy:

'I decide if they can go on the bus (i.e. appalling weather or far too much to carry because it would be me paying for it. They decide whether to walk or cycle, occasionally they choose to get the bus if they are running late or feeling lazy, that is their decision, but they have to pay themselves out of their pocket money' (parent, Matthew Arnold Secondary)

'My child decides as she is responsible' (parent, Ryton Comprehensive)

'he has to learn how to get from one place to another, if I drive him everywhere, he'll never leave home!') Ryton Comprehensive)

'They should get subsidised travel for schools. A school bus to Blaydon would be useful. He makes the decision to go by bus and it is up to him to have the bus timetable' (parent, Ryton Comprehensive)

The public bus is viewed by many of the parents as a feasible, efficient option which teaches the children how to negotiate shared public space:

'it is the only option other than me driving them as we live too far for the children to cycle or walk', 'I make the decision because I am responsible for my children, I ensured they were confident to travel on the bus alone before they were allowed to do it' (parent, Matthew Arnold Secondary)

This last quote shows the parent assuming a level of responsibility in seeing that the children are confident to travel alone. This message was clear in a number of parental responses.

Evidence also showed that some parents were mindful of the associated health benefits of walking or cycling to school. Health and exercise are often cited as being important determinants to the choice of the school journey from a parental point of view:

'Child walks – choice is healthy and easy' (parent, SS Phil and Jim Primary)

'We don't have a car. We are on a low income, so although most children in our area get the bus it is much cheaper to walk/cycle. It is also much healthier and I believe my children should get lots of exercise' (parent, Matthew Arnold Secondary)

'its good exercise for them so we cycle' (parent, SS Phil and Jim)

The issue of unaccompanied mobility encouraging a healthier, responsible, socially-able child is therefore recognised by a number of parents in this research, and reflects the children's views on why they choose and enjoy certain journeys to school, whether it is accompanied or independent travel.

However, in some cases the perception of inherent risks associated with unaccompanied travel is a deciding factor and different styles in parenting (and how risks are assessed and negotiated with their children) can lead to different travel behaviours. The balance between risk and experience is a complex negotiation in its own right. It seems that if a parent feels the risks are too high, independent travel is a non-negotiated issue. It also seems likely that if a child perceives the risks are too high, they themselves are loathe travelling independently. None of the children participating in this research reported any incident which they deemed as too risky, for example, the fear of strangers and threats of abduction. They mentioned the issue of localised traffic, but not in a way which would make them alter their decisions about walking to school. It became more of an annoyance to those who cycle as children were aware of the risks. In line with other research findings (O' Mahony *et al*, 2000), therefore, traffic and congestion were perceived by children, as shown in Chapter 5, and parents representing a significant risk:

'I don't have any major concerns about his journey to school, except the traffic and illegal parking on the paths. People using the car could park in the rugby field, or have more spaces around school should help' (parent, Ryton Comprehensive)

'We both make the decision together and of course I have concerns about the journey. An example of reducing cars is the scholar's bus' (parent, Ryton Comprehensive)

'Walking is not safe as there are too many cars so he goes by local bus or I drive him' (parent, Ryton Comprehensive)

The last quote reflects the vicious cycle that has arisen whereby many parents feel that it is too dangerous to allow their children the independent ability to walk or cycle to school and hence drive them instead, which in turn generates more traffic which ironically further contributes to the perceived levels of danger from the traffic. Those that do walk, cycle or

scoot therefore are seen by other parents and indeed the school, to be at an increased risk. Nevertheless, there is a danger of traffic around schools. The inherent dilemma is to provide the opportunity for the child to increase their independence *whilst* maintaining their safety given the levels of localised traffic and curb-side congestion. This is a difficult tension to reconcile. Children's ability to walk, cycle and scoot is to a large extent dependent upon their parents' assessments on how children can deal with this actual risk independently.

Therefore, what was clear was that whilst children were concerned with localised traffic, the factor that seemed to shape their mobility behaviour was more to do with how the parents assessed the risk. Children sometimes reported as being able to negotiate with their parents and advising them that as they are aware and that they have well-developed risk strategies. Others reported that the level of risk that traffic and congestion posed was deemed too high and that it was a non-negotiation point. Parents felt justified that the traffic was so bad that they forbid the children from walking, cycling or scooting regardless of the child's views and preferences. The parents' fears were therefore reflected in the children's mobility patterns.

'it didn't matter what I told her, she just wasn't having it, she insisted I come by car' (Abbey, 14, Ryton Comprehensive)

Of course, this ability to negotiate independent mobility depends upon household structure and parenting style, as well as the local geography of the school. The curtailing effect of traffic is especially clear in relation to children using their bikes to cycle to school. The majority of children expressed a desire to have the opportunity to cycle, yet they were aware of the issue of traffic and congestion that made it dangerous to encourage such a mode of transport, a concern echoed by many parents. As is noted in the drawings, dangerous cars and traffic were of concern to children when discussing what they don't enjoy about their journey to school and what stops them from cycling.

Interestingly however, even in light of the children's knowledge about fears of traffic, most children did not mention to a great extent any particular spatial boundaries that were incurred on them on their journey to school. There were, however, some discrepancies revealed between what the parents request in terms of the route of the journey to school and what the children actually experience:

'we go through Parkfields, but mum thinks we walk the top way' (Emily, 14, Ryton Comprehensive)

'I go over to the shop after school for sweets but she would kill me if she knew cos she would worry about the busy road' (Alice, 14, Ryton Comprehensive)

'my mum says that they are all poor and smoke a lot and just stay out all night and the parents don't care' (Abbey, 14, Ryton Comprehensive)

In terms of the first and third quotes, Park Fields (a council house estate within the village) is regarded as a no-go area by some parents according to their children. Reasons cited why the parents would be concerned at this choice of route centred on the presence of 'other', less desirable children, from a parent's viewpoint. This brings in the notion that children visible on the street can be viewed as having irresponsible parents, and are threatening to other children and adults.

In view of how parenting styles and practices influence the child's journey to school, it is therefore clear that in some cases a 'protective' discourse has emerged with children being regarded as vulnerable, in need of constant monitoring and protection, especially in light of highlighted concerns surrounding traffic and congestion. Research has also highlighted the perceived dangers of stranger abduction affecting children's experiences in public space. As discussed in Chapter 5, children's justification of parental fears of stranger danger are noted yet it did not come up as a profound issue that restricts their movement before and after school. This discussion within the household of all the risks and dangers inherent in the independent travel to school emphasise the vulnerability of children and can be regarded as a discourse of control which confines children to spaces that adults deem 'safe', such as home and school. It can therefore be argued that parents pass on their fears to children and that children in turn perceive themselves to be vulnerable and at constant risk (Pain, 1994) and this childhood socialisation about danger subsequently affects their ability to negotiate public space effectively. Evidence from this research supports the notion that children are frequently the locus upon which adult parental fears and experiences are projected upon (Valentine and McKendrick, 1997).

In a way, protecting the children from the dangerous outdoors is regarded by some as a sign of good parenting. The moral geography of mothering (Holloway, 1998) relates to the generation of sets of ideas and practices which are combined to produce standards of good parenting. The trend of parents 'chauffeur'ing their children to and from school is not only grounded in fears from increasing traffic and resultant congestion, it is also linked to the globally publicised child abductions and concerns about stranger-danger (Pain, 2006). Those that are seen to encourage children to walk or cycle independently are regarded as

'irresponsible'. As Sanger (1995) and Dowling (2000) assert, a powerful set of cultural expectations that have developed (predominantly in mothers) justify the constant transporting of children between activities. Good mothering is linked to the use of the car in everyday mobilities, regardless of length in journey, type of activity and the opportunity of an alternative means of transport.

The way that children's lives are organised and controlled by well-meaning parents is a focus of much research (Brooks, 2006). From childcare, through schooling to a myriad ways in which children's leisure is pre-planned, organised and contained, children's lives are commonly understood as closely managed within by institutional frameworks. The many mentions of regulated, after-school clubs and activities by the children are testament to the institutionalisation and commercialisation of children's activities and the reduced opportunity for unstructured, free time. Whilst some commented on it acting as a restrictive force, in other cases the availability and access to after-school clubs and organised activities was construed as an opportunity to negotiate independent travel to these activities that the children reportedly enjoyed. Travel diary excerpts illustrated in Chapter 5 bear testament to the many activities that children take part in, over weekends and after-school and there are many mentions of linking the travel to these activities with the friendship groups that they forge. The children report of their levels of negotiation that take place between their parents and themselves regarding this travel behaviour.

So children occupy a dual status in terms of risk, they are either innocent and in need of constant monitoring and protection, or they are demonised with their presence being thought of as threatening and law-breaking (Valentine, 1997). This is expressed in terms of a 'risk anxiety':

'risk anxiety is primarily expressed as fear for children – worries about their safety and well-being – but also as fear of children, of what children might do if they are not kept within the boundaries of acceptable childish conduct' (Scott, 1998, 691)

This widely (media encouraged) construction of children being viewed as either threatening or threatened is a familiar discursive dichotomy, which has had massive ramifications on the development of social policy regarding children (Gaskell, 2008). The tension between independence, freedom and experience within a risk landscape (Collins and Kearns, 2001) embodies a child's sociality and emotionality within space and time on their journey to school.

Home is a discursive space associated with values, memories and identities (Teather, 1999) and is therefore a cultural as well as a social and physical space. The home is often included in the children's maps, drawings and photographs. This is not surprising given that home is the first space that a child transforms into a place and in which constructs his or her cultural identity (Teather, 1999). Children are active cultural producers as well as reproducers and in a number of instances within this research the notion that the 'car' was a symbol of *aspiration* and *hope* was clearly recorded. Drawings by a number of boys illustrate that ownership and access to a car is a very significant aspect in their everyday lives and mobility choices.

Many active discussions were held extolling the virtues of one car over another and in all cases children reported that they couldn't wait to grow up as then they could go buy their 'dream car'. It was framed in reference to being a cultural status symbol, with children (always boys, mostly in single-sex discussion groups) listing what cars their parents owned in relation to their friend's parents.



Plate 76: 'the family cars' (Matthew Arnold Secondary)

Plate 77: 'our dream car' (SS Phil and Jim Primary)

A rap song developed by three boys (aged 14 and 15) at Matthew Arnold Secondary encapsulates the cultural value give to cars when used for the journey to school:

'The car is cool

For a way to get to school

Cos we don't have to push and shove

We have space to move

As we get home quick

So we can relax

And watch TV

And eat ham'

The symbolic meaning of the 'car' has been well researched (Maxwell, 2001a, 2001b; Stradling *et al*, 2003) and illustrates that over and above the issues of convenience and control, notions of self-identity, image and the cultural benefits of speed are significant in their own right.

This also reflects the notion that particular household goods have a social life which is important in the daily behaviour patterns and preferences. Implicit cultural and personal meanings associated with cars (Sanger, 1995; Stradling *et al*, 2003) present a strong case as to why more consumption behaviours do not change over time (see Chapter 7). Evidence from this research shows that the aspirations to own and drive certain cars are constructed from the behaviours and attitudes of the household as many children spoke proudly of their parent's choice to use the car.

In contrast, 'the car' in other instances was constructed as a symbol of environmental degradation (see chapter 7). In SS Phil and Jim Primary, the culture of cycling seemed to be more appealing to the majority of the children. To add voice to her photograph below, Sophie (11) records:

'this is a picture of my dad cycling, he will never take the car, even if it is snowing'



Plate 78: Cycling as a choice (SS Phil and Jim Primary)

It is clear that consumption aspirations intersect in a household with mobility constraints, social networks, moral choices and lifestyle politics. The notion of positive social norms (Cameron, 2008), which links an individual's behaviour to what they think is expected by society around them and what they see other people doing, reflects the complex, invisible relationship between cultural ideals of the parents and the views of the child. Learnt behaviour within a household is a sum of what is experienced due to the negotiations that take place between family member's (possibly opposing) belief systems. This again reflects the notion that particular household goods have a social life which is important in the daily behaviour patterns and preferences. Implicit cultural and personal meanings associated with cars present a strong case as to why more consumption behaviours do not change over time. Likewise, the implicit and cultural meaning of a bicycle within a household is reflected in mobility preferences and choices. Different households therefore differ in their personal politics and this is reflected in their choices on mobility and travel. The photovoice above by Sophie illustrates that the father makes virtue of using the bike, regardless of the weather, and this has in turn influenced the thinking of his daughter. The link between wider social and environmental forces and parental ideologies and practices is therefore apparent. This will be dealt with in more detail in Chapter 7.

6.3 Negotiating Public Space

The CABE Space manifesto states that public spaces are the glue that holds society together and offers a place where different people meet, share experiences and learn to trust each other (CABE, 2004). From a children's geographer's point of view, the principal focus in assessing how children negotiate within public space is to examine how children access, use and attach meaning to space. Children's experience of public space is dependent upon the nature of that space, its micro-geography, dominant use and identity. Public spaces that they engage in and move through on the journey to school are sometimes constructed as places where children can construct a form of privacy, away from familial control and surveillance of the home (Malone, 2002), yet this is not always the case, as shown in Chapter 5. The variance within and between journeys to school mirror the children's social and spatial experiences of their local everyday environments. Evidence reflects that negotiating public space was concerned with how children interact on a social level as well as on a physical level.

6.3.1 Social negotiation

Evidence from this research prioritised the children's social relationships that were apparent in boys' and girls' everyday micro-geographies. The social relations are fluid and change over time as friendship groups alter and new routines are established and re-established during their journeys to school. As Emily (14) expressed:

'I used to walk with Jasmine but then we weren't friends anymore and now I walk with Sophie' (discussion group, Matthew Arnold Secondary)

The majority of children expressed a wish for independent mobility, as highlighted in this extract of a discussion that took place in SS Phil and Jim Primary between five girls (aged 10 to 11) and one boy, aged 11, and me:

Girl 1: 'the best means by some people is by car if they live far away but if you live close you should walk'

Me: 'Where do you park, cos u can't get over the bridge?'

Boy: 'You can drop them off in the waterways'

Me: 'And does your parent come with you, walk you over the bridge or do u walk alone?'

Girl 2: 'my mum comes with me'

(A show of hands after asking if anybody walks unaccompanied across the bridge)

Me: 'Why do you like to walk alone?'

Boy, 11: 'You don't have parents to bother you'

Girl 1: ' They say hurry up'

me: 'Why else is it nice to walk alone?'

Girl 3: 'cos we can walk with friends and just be by ourselves'

In this instance the presence of parents is associated with feelings of irritation and there is clearly a need for some independent, unaccompanied time away from parental concern and regulation.

Children negotiate with each other about the time they go to school, where to meet, which route to take and how fast or slow to walk, as illustrated by the following quote:

'on Fridays I go to my dad's house and he lives up a big hill so I walk with friends. We stop and look at the wild horses. Then they stop a lot to talk and stuff and I wait for them and it's usually an hour cos they dawdle and I think why can't you walk faster, but I wait...' (Mellissa, 13, discussion, Ryton Comprehensive).

Parents' views also reflect the need for children to experience the sociality of the journey to school:

'She is accompanied with friends when she walks and I think this is safe' (Ryton Comprehensive).

'He makes the decision as he meets friends' (Ryton Comprehensive)

In the first quote the fact that the child is accompanied by friends lowers the perceived levels of risk felt by the parent and indeed might have swayed the decision for the child to walk independently. The meeting of friends and nurturing the friendship is therefore regarded as a positive aspect of the journey, not only by the children themselves but by their parents. However, what is also apparent is the understanding that the child may be at risk due to the presence of 'other' children that need to be negotiated with. The issue of bullying was never overtly mentioned by the children, yet it seems to be an emotive issue with a number of adults, who commented on their concern:

'the buses can get busy, bullies on the bus, irresponsible bus drivers I have witnessed...the length of the journey, having to catch 2 buses, the cost of the bus passes alone are approx(sic) £450 per year – I am on a low income' (parent, Matthew Arnold Secondary)

'I make the decision as I am responsible for their care! As a parent of a child who has been bullied on the school bus for years this is my main concern about using public transport. If a responsible adult was on board I think more parents would use this instead of a car as they would have peace of mind. At this moment in time all bus drivers who take my children to school wouldn't become involved in a dispute between children whether they witnessed them or not' (parent, Ryton Comprehensive)

Social differences between children were keenly observed by children and parents alike and often antagonistic in tone: 'other' children from different socio-economic backgrounds were often discussed in critical or disparaging terms. Certain identities of groups of children were noted on diagrams, as is shown below.

Concerns regarding the social aspect of the journey to school centre on the times when children have to negotiate with other children who are deemed a nuisance or 'different'.

Whilst the children's views of this issue is discussed in Chapter 5, it is clear that parents are also aware that spaces of conflict emerge during the journey to school due to presence of different groups of children. A child's identity is socially and culturally constructed (Weller, 2007) and often simultaneously represented as negative and positive. Teenage consumption patterns in particular have received much attention in past research. They embody a shared experience, identity (clothes, hairstyles, type of mobile phone) and 'micro culture', as well as showing that they experience social and spatial differences. Consumption in a consumer society (Baudrillard, 1998; Malone, 2002) is regarded as a social practice and depends on how identities are formed and reformed.

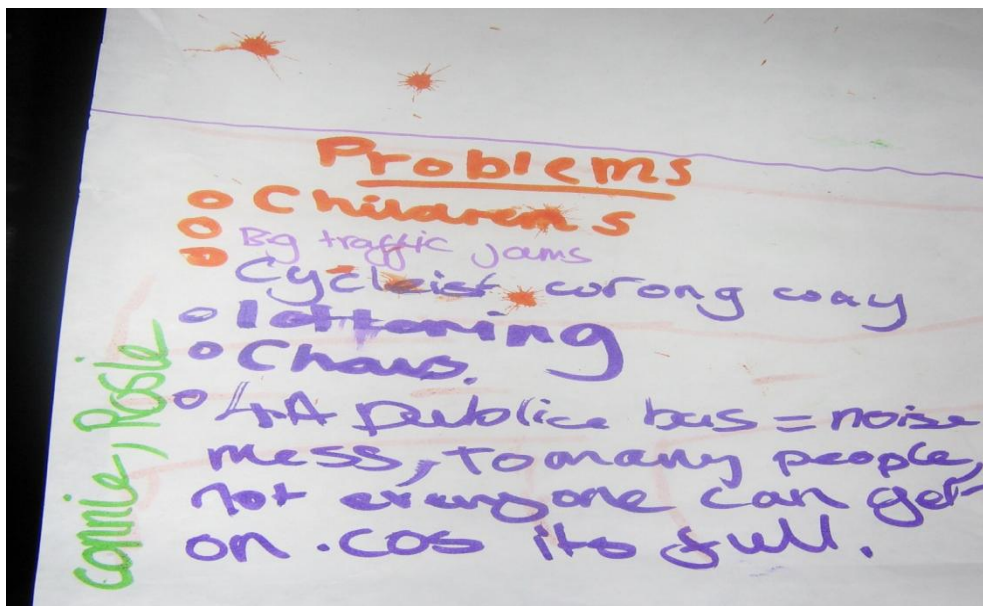


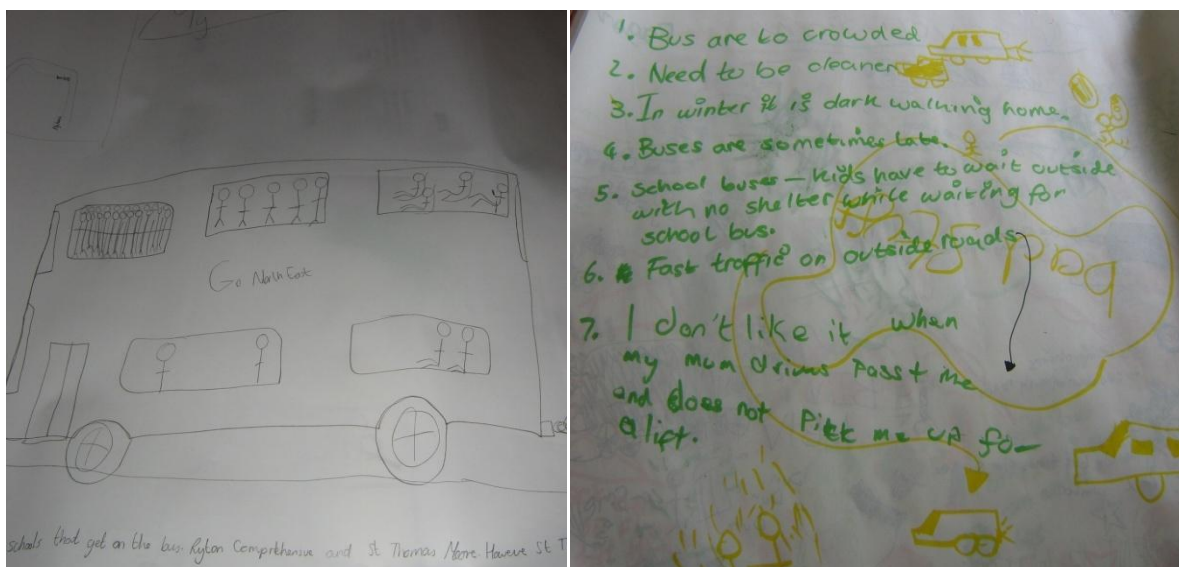
Plate 79: 'chavs' (Matthew Arnold Secondary)

This research supports the notion that consumption can then be a form of social exclusion, if particular children avoid certain places due to the presence of other children which are deemed different, due to group physical identities and cultures. Children in this research reported that they felt they had to negotiate with specific groups of children (for example, 'chavs', as illustrated in the plate above) although at times this level of negotiation was subliminal in that there is no face-to-face confrontation, just a change in travel behaviour to mitigate against sharing and conflicting within specific places within public space.

The main space of conflict seems to be experienced on the school buses in which children have to negotiate seating arrangements, areas of overcrowding and the possibility of other children smoking. As one parent comments:

'We drive him to school as it is too far to walk. We make the decision for practical reasons. Considering the law on seatbelts on coaches and buses children use for trips etc it is an absolute disgrace that they are herded onto scholar buses. It is an accident waiting to happen!' (parent, Ryton Comprehensive)

The issue of overcrowding in buses, nicely illustrated by a number of diagrams, was also a concern for children and was often noted as the reason why they, if an alternative method of travel was available, chose not to take the bus. This reflects wider research conclusions as to why the bus is not regarded as an efficient mode of transport (Stradling *et al*, 2007).



Plates 80 and 81: The school bus (Matthew Arnold Secondary, Amy (13))

Bus drivers were often commented upon as being rude to and intolerant of children, regardless of whether they were on a public or a school bus. The relationship between the drivers and the children has been raised in previous research (Ross, 2002) and it is equally apparent in the following comments:

'they are so rude and can't speak English so they are no help' (Philip, 15, Ryton Comprehensive)

'they just shout at you to shut up, never smile' (Abbie, 13, Matthew Arnold)

Engwicht (1993) characterised cities as inventions to maximise opportunities for exchange and minimize travel and regarded streets as 'a dual space or both movement and exchange' with 'plenty of opportunities for spontaneous exchanges on the walk to the public transport stop, and while riding with others'. The bus seemed to be associated with a permanent

tension between movement and exchange roles as children reported the feeling of dissatisfaction of having to endure forced proximity to others with little respect for private space, whilst their mobility is constrained by fixed routes and timetables determining frequency of the service and duration of the experience. It is therefore not always a time to engage in positive interaction (social exchange) with friends or co-present strangers.

Evidence also suggests that public places through which the children move, show little overt interaction between people of different generations, who are classed as either strangers or familiar people in the community. Social networks within their local community in actual fact receive little mention. Only one boy mentions his awareness of others when he remarks within his travel diary on him watching an old man sitting alone. However, there is no mention of social encounters with adults within the community except for an awareness of lollipop ladies, as illustrated in some drawings below:



Plate 82: Rachel, 4, Rowlands Gill Primary Plate 83: Katie, 10, SS Phil and Jim Primary

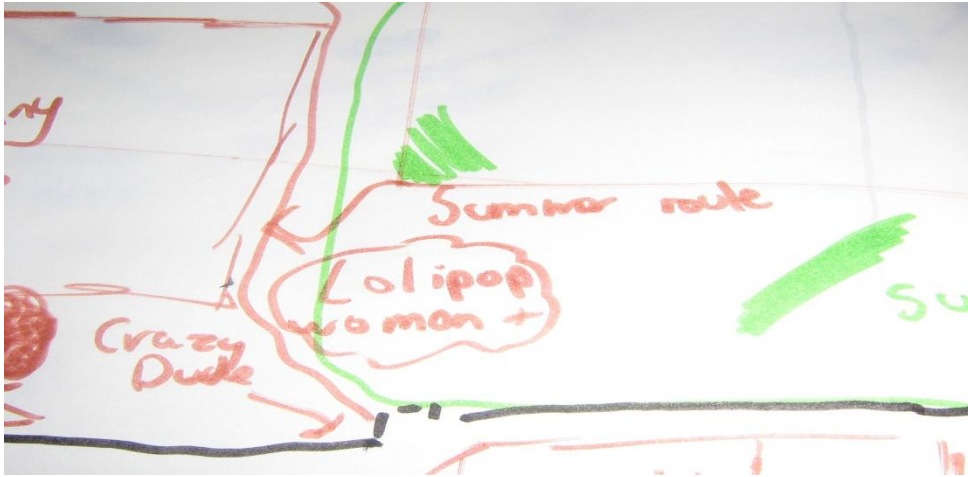


Plate 84: Fred, 14, Ryton Comprehensive

In this research there is no mention of local shop keepers, passer-byes or other community members. A number of older children mention their feelings of 'unwantedness' and 'intolerance' if they use community shopping facilities (especially if they enter the shop in a friendship group) and others mention this same feeling on the public buses. This links in with the issues previously discussed in terms of how children are becoming more invisible in public space as they are increasingly not tolerated and spatially and socially marginalised and excluded. The British ideology of a child-friendly society, advocated by governmental policy focusing on community cohesion, seems a hollow message if children do not feel welcome on public buses or on the streets. Although they have become more symbolically precious (Jensen and McKee, 2003) they have become unacceptable, invisible parts of a working community:

'they live more scripted, cloistered lives and when they do not conform to adult idealizations, they are perceived as fallen angels, or worse, as little monsters' (Gillis, 2003, 161).

This evidence is in line with findings from other research, which asserts that society seems to treat children with material indulgences yet imposes on them a kind of generational apartheid and separation and hence they are becoming visibly scarcer and more marginalised. A consistent theme in research is that young people rarely feel a sense of ownership and feel excluded from their local communities (Toon, 2000) and the evidence from this research supports this assertion, as the following excerpt from an informal discussion between two parents shows:

'people don't watch out for other peoples kids anymore, it used to be that if you saw someone's kid in trouble, you would help, now everyone looks the other way' (parent 1)

'cos everyone drives, there is no meeting on the street. I live in a small row of houses and no one talks much. (parent 2, Ryton Comprehensive)

This research suggests that some children may appreciate a degree of adult involvement, interaction and control within their everyday spaces, and this has emerged from the data here. Some children felt that there should be adult control on the buses, especially in light of the concern around 'other' children smoking, as illustrated in the drawing below which calls for 'cameras that actually work and action taken':

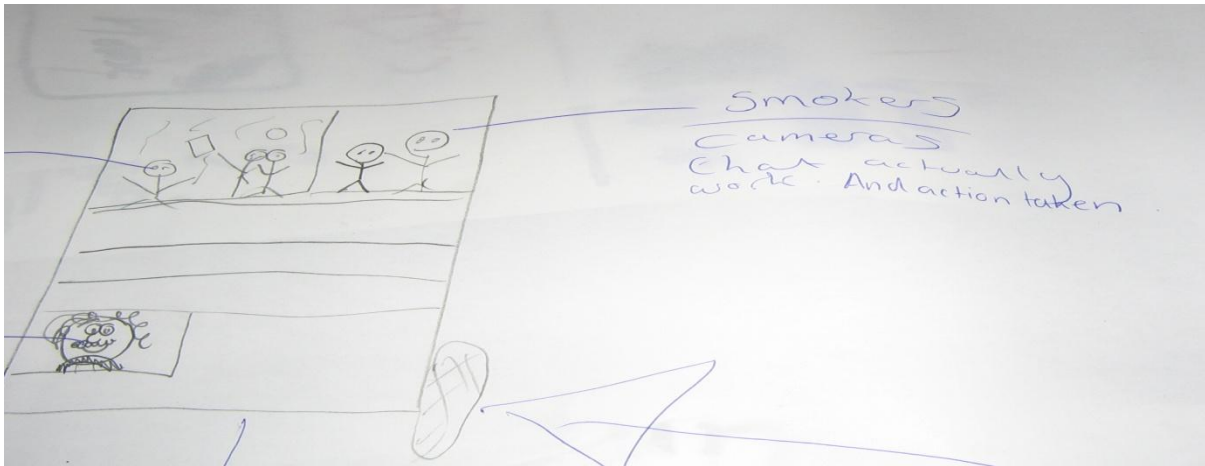


Plate 85: Smoking on the bus (Ryton Comprehensive)

There was much discussion about the futility of having cameras yet no immediate action taken if any behaviour was deemed unsuitable. The combination of the narrative and the drawings tells of a depth of understanding of their current situation. The concern that in some cases there is no adult control or management is also reflected in a number of comments made by parents:

'there is no adult on board' (mother, Matthew Arnold Secondary)

'well the kids know if something happens there is no-one there to help them, or better actually discipline the ones causing trouble' (parent, Ryton Comprehensive)

This could reflect broader anxieties about instability of the nuclear family and the decline of public morality, with a general belief that adult authority has been eroded. This is linked to changes in the conceptions of childhood in terms of children's rights, as they become more participatory and ethically-sound and illustrated by the notion of 'parental responsibility' for children replacing 'parental authority' (Franklin, 1995). Therefore in some cases the children found that the lack of an adult was woefully unacceptable and inadequate, in other cases they reported that adult management is only present at certain times. A number of children

echo the concern with buses arriving late with the result that they get into trouble at school for something that they have no negotiating power over:

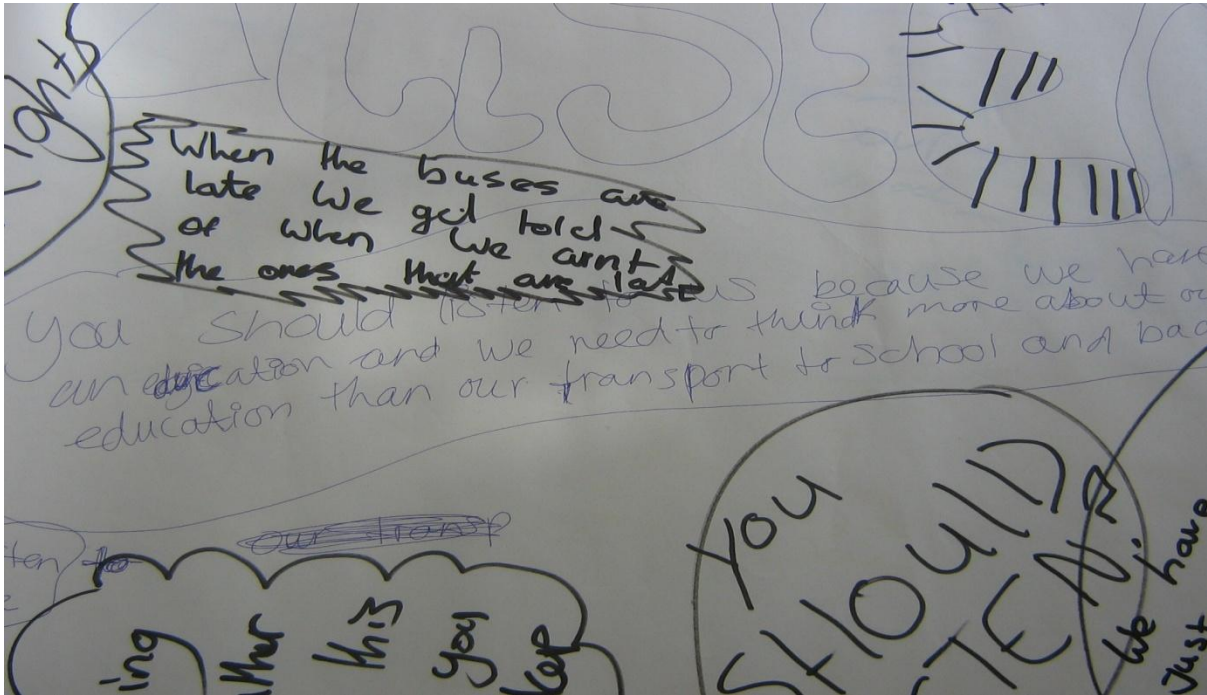


Plate 86: diagramming the issues around bus travel (Matthew Arnold Secondary)

As the insert on the plate above reads: *'when the buses are late we get told of we aren't the ones that are late'*.

This concern is reflected by a parent's concern:

'The only concern I have is when the school bus arrives late' (parent, Ryton Comprehensive)

Therefore in some cases the children feel that they require adult management and control in order to help them, whereas at other times they feel that they are in a no-win situation when they are chastised for being late when travelling on a public bus – a situation that they feel they have little negotiating power or control over.

Children in this research show an emotional response to the constant threat of control and curtailment – they themselves report on not feeling respected as individuals and feel that they are entitled to it:

'respect as a lived experience should be the tangible outcome of a politics of social justice, an outcome that children and young people are truly entitled' (Gaskell, 2008, 236).

Within the previous Labour Government's Respect Agenda, a common experience is one of being disrespected and shamed which creates an exclusionary, rather than empowering politics (Gaskell, 2008). This finding from Gaskell's research is relevant here as children reported feeling that respect is not shown to them and that they feel excluded and unacceptable, especially in public space.

6.3.2 Negotiating Physical Space

Whilst some children are driven to school in the 'protective capsule' of the car through which a dangerous, uncertain environment can be traversed (Sibley, 1995, 136), others experience a more intimate, direct interaction with physical public space. As the following plate shows, Fred (14, Ryton Comprehensive) has the ability to negotiate her route to school given the local physical geography:

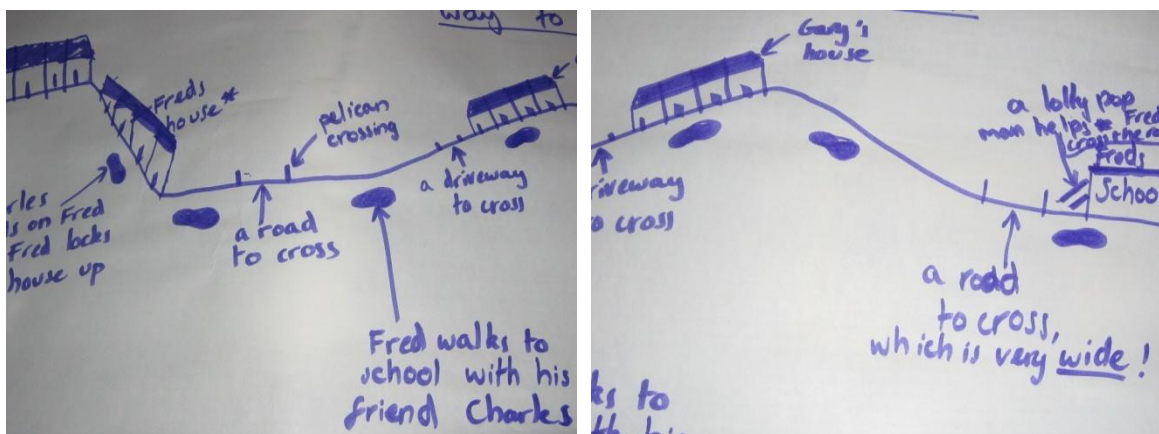


Plate 87: Fred's journey to school (Ryton Comprehensive)

Other children make note of the fact that they choose to walk over cycle due to steep hills, or they choose to cycle along a canal path due to it being flat and easy to navigate. The ways in which children use and re-use physical space occur in a number of subtle, interconnecting ways. For example, the children sometimes recorded that they like to take short-cuts and 'other' routes which disregard the established (adult) patterns of mobility, which have been illustrated in Chapter 5. The routes chosen offered the opportunity to explore (to pick apples off a tree), to experience freedom of choice (visiting a shop home after school to buy sweets) or to avoid certain physical or social situations (groups of 'other' children or areas deemed dirty or unkempt).

The ability to move through public space seems to vary depending on mode of travel as well as the perceived receptiveness of adults overseeing public spaces. For example, on public buses children reported that they felt unwanted and scrutinised whereas some mentioned

that they liked the ability to wander different routes without having to negotiate with adults in that space. They also responded that their movements depended to a large extent on how their parents sanctioned the mode of travel and established rules to adhere to when travelling through public space. As one parent noted:

'they know which route to follow cos we agreed that was the best one to school cos it's the one with least roads to cross, so if there is a problem I know where they will be' (Ryton Comprehensive)

This is not to say that children always used pre-sanctioned routes as mentioned above but the knowledge by adults that the children were provided with these broad rules limited the number of perceived risks considerably.

Evidence shows that the design and management of public space can present both opportunity and barriers to the use by some children. They note the presence of certain physical structures and comment on the state of their local physical areas:

'the street lights never work' (Amy, 13, Ryton Comprehensive)

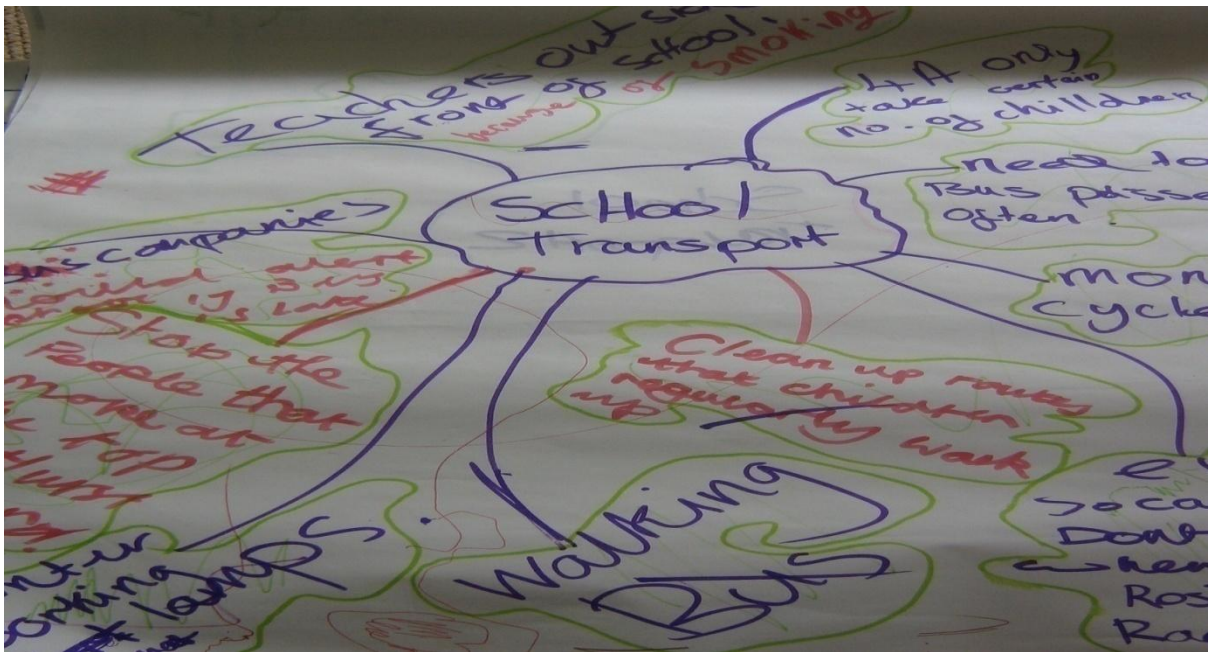
'if there were more cycle lanes I could cycle' (Matthew, 14, Matthew Arnold)

'dilly lane is awful to walk up, all the dog walkers go there and its covered in shit' (Stephen, 13, Ryton Comprehensive)

They note the need for risk-averse strategies to be deployed in specific areas, for example, busy roads and quieter areas. They also recognise that if public space was kept to acceptable standards then they would use it more and possibly change their mode of travel to school. For example, the last quote above mentions a particular short-cut across a small field, however, due to it being used by a lot of dog owners, the children feel it is a route to avoid.

Most of the strategies proposed by children in order to encourage more enjoyable (sustainable) journeys to school involved the need for maintenance of public space:

- 1) Teachers needed outside school
- 2) 4 A Takes to many children its crowded
- 3) need to check bus passes more often
- 4) Cycle paths are needed.
- 5) Roads need to be sorted to much congestion.
- 6) Clean Buses.
- 7) walking BUS.
- 8) In winter street lamps need to work
- 9) Stop the students that smoke at the top of Hirst rise road.
- 10) Bus companies need to tell school they are running late.
- 11) neo Bike shed.
- 12) shelter near Bus stops. (private)



Plates 88 and 89: Diagramming appropriate strategies (Matthew Arnold Secondary)

One parent noted the importance of local urban design as an enabler to encourage walking or cycling, as noted:

'traffic, poor cycle routes, crossings poorly designed, entrance to school, part of route quiet/secluded if they stay late for clubs' (parent, Matthew Arnold Secondary)

This ties in with research findings by Staunton et al (2005) and O'Brien et al (2000) which suggests that physical context affects experience. Children's ability to interact with public space is important for healthy physical and mental development, learning and experience (Collins and Kearns, 2001, Mackett *et al*, 2003) and it is argued that if they lose the opportunity to develop life skills and strategies by interacting physically with public space and negotiating the inherent risks, it reduces their sense of responsibility that they hold for themselves (Pain, 1994). The children's own views on the need for autonomy and responsibility create a mismatch – they recognise it is important for themselves but sometimes feel constrained in achieving the opportunity to negotiate public space due to the physical aspect of it.

6.4 Negotiated geographies of the school

The everyday practices and politics within school space can shape children's journeys to school. As Fielding (2000, 231) expresses, 'the beliefs and practices of a primary school' in which he was working, 'were a "hot bed" of moral geographies'. How children learn, behave and negotiate within school space will impact on their everyday practices and beliefs. The school is a space that for many young people represents a common space in which many people from different geographical areas come together. It is a space in which young people are seen and can see, it teaches them how to adapt to others and based upon their personal experiences, visions of negotiation are formulated. School space is largely planned and organised by adults and as such, children's behaviours and attitudes are framed within this context. They have to be at school at a certain time, they have to leave the grounds by a certain time, they might participate in certain after-school activities and they also are governed by the local physical geographical area in which the school is located. Rules and regulations also govern them in terms of their conduct on their journeys to school and home, given changes in the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (DfES, 2006a), that allows the school to maintain a degree of surveillance over the journeys to and from school. Deviations from what is considered acceptable behaviour can therefore be regulated and disciplined, from a policy point of view. Whilst this may be more targeted towards behaviour by school children on public and school buses (and in a way responding to what children have called for due to a lack of adult authority), the legislation applies to behaviour in public space as well.

The ethos and culture of the school is a dominant frame. The informal messages sent to children from school management teams and teachers about the culture of participation (as

discussed in Chapter 4) are reflected in how the children approached the research. This seems to indicate how children are involved in decision-making processes throughout the school as a whole. Although the involvement of children in school decision making seems to be established in the UK through school councils (evidenced in how three of the schools chose the children to participate in this study), the discussions in these meetings tend to focus on issues of concern:

'It is rare that such councils spend time on matters to do with local environment, the local community, learning or the curriculum, school councils tend to focus on social and behavioural concerns' (Barratt and Hacking, 2005).

The fact that the children at Matthew Arnold Secondary initially struggled with what was required of them indicates that they were not used to being asked to provide active decisions in a participatory way. This is not a critique of the school, only a reflection that different learning styles are negotiated can have an impact on how children experience their everyday life in school.

The relationship between a school and the Local Education Authority is an important political context. In both Oxfordshire and Gateshead, it is reported that there is a very good, positive relationship that has developed and this is reflected in the school travel plans produced and updated by each school. It is suggested that if this relationship is not maintained, the issue of school travel would fall from the agenda. How a child constructs the journey to school is therefore dependent on the profile that school travel gains in school space. School travel is given a high profile status within a number of subject areas, for example, Geography and Citizenship and has other links to Mathematics and Science. Given its high level of priority, the children are very much aware of the concerns surrounding travelling to school by car especially and are also aware of many of the strategies employed to encourage more sustainable travel (see Chapter 7). The priority that sustainable school travel is given depends on the school's management teams and budget. In all of the schools that participated within this research, sustainable travel was noted as being high on their agenda, although differences between how the school managed this as a priority were evident. A number of comments reflect this priority:

'on the new parent's day, everyone is advised of the travel plan...for us its part of a wider health and fitness message' (school governor, SS Phil and Jim Primary)

'our travel plan is focused on children safety and making parents see the effects that they have in driving' (teacher, Rowlands Gill Primary)

'our travel plan is owned and managed by one of the governors so they have that interest prioritised' (Deputy Head Teacher, Ryton Comprehensive)

These comments highlight the school's focus on school travel. Obviously it is contextually-driven. SS Phil and Jim Primary are very much aware of the need to continue encouraging the reduction of car use given that the local geography of the school site precludes vehicular access. However, they are mindful of the issue that whilst the level of congestion around the school site is reduced, the traffic impact is felt elsewhere. Likewise, Rowlands Gill has just opened on a new site as a combined primary and junior school and therefore mindful of the need to start promulgating a sustainable travel message. Whilst all schools were aware of what is required, the issue of budget restrictions were raised. Clearly, it is easy to be aware of the need for more cycle racks for example, however, the availability of capital to provide them is paramount

The physical provisions at schools can, therefore, shape the choice of travel for children and their parents. For example, in Ryton Comprehensive the lack of cycle storage facilities limited the amount of bikes that could be securely stored. The availability of the scooter park at SS Phil and Jim provided a facility that the children enjoyed using. Issues surrounding the physical facilities provided within the school site are also mentioned by parents, as a disabling impact on walking or cycling:

'My only concern is the amount of books and PE kit he has to take some days. More provision at school for storage would be good as long as it was secure. There are new cycle racks which are good and the school bus arrangements are good. Larry makes his own decision as he is old enough. He walks unless it is very wet.' (parent, Ryton Comprehensive)

The lack of storage facilities for books, musical instruments, cookery equipment and or sporting equipment were noted by children and parents as a deciding factor in school travel.

'I have PE on Thursdays and violin so I have to travel by car cos my bag is too heavy' (Anna, 13, Ryton Comprehensive)

'If we do cooking, my mum drives me in' (Ashley, 13, Ryton Comprehensive)

The use of the physical school grounds also impacts on how children negotiate and interact with the outdoor environment in general. Research has revealed that the way in which children can learn, especially through play in nature, is strongly influenced by the nature, design and policies informing the use of school grounds (Moore and Wong, 1997b; Titman, 1994). How a child learns to interact with outdoor space within the setting of the school can

impact on how they perceive the outdoors as whole. This was illustrated in a number of comments:

'if its raining we aren't allowed out of school to play, we have to crowd into the hall' (Alan, 8, Rowlands Gill Primary)

'it's boring in the yard at breaks so we go to the library' (Abbey, 14, Ryton Comprehensive)

'I like the yard, if it's wet we can splash in the puddles and I like the trees' (Arthur, 11, SS Phil and Jim Primary)

'we don't go out in the rain at school so if it's raining my mum drives me' (Danielle, 13, Ryton Comprehensive)

Given a learned environmental behaviour at school it is no wonder that some children show no interest in the outdoor environment at all, especially if the weather is not particularly appealing. School policies were sometimes cited as disabling children to experience the outdoor space, usually on the grounds of health and safety. A number of comments were made regarding an over-cautious approach that was taken in school about allowing children to explore the outdoors if the weather was deemed cold, wet or windy. Head teachers were concerned that parents would then phone the school and complain that their children are wet or have caught a cold.

Negotiations that take place within a school space also inherently impact on the local community. Schools can be key contributors to the socio-economic character of the local neighbourhood. In the case of SS Phil and Jim Primary, demand for local housing has increased due to the increasing numbers of children on its roll. This has stimulated new housing developments around the school. In the case of Rowlands Gill Primary, the surrounding community comprises of a mix of retirement bungalows and family homes, and the Head Teacher is mindful of the impact of increased congestion and traffic on these areas, as she states:

'We have to negotiate with the local residents, especially during the building of the new school, the traffic was a nightmare'

Schools are by en large activist in their nature, under neo-liberal governance frameworks. They are encouraged to promote their own interests, for example, hire out land or classrooms for external bodies to use for sports or IT training and provide after-school fee-paying services. In line with what Collins and Kearns (2001) state, the neo-liberal landscape of opportunity and risk consists not only of tangible urban physical settings which children

must negotiate within and through, but also of the institutional-political spaces in which schools must operate (Berg and Roche, 1997). This link with broader structures of governance has important implications for the focus of sustainable travel, which is discussed in Chapter 7. However, the point to make is that children negotiate within a school space - physically, socially and culturally - and the school (and the management team and staff) in turn is part of a wider institutional negotiated relationship with local and national government.

6.5 Conclusion

How children and young people interact with their local geographies is directly linked to the way in which contemporary society regards and treats children. It is intrinsically linked to how society constructs an image of 'good parenting' which grossly underestimates the resilience and competence of children, intensifies parental anxiety and encourages excessive interference into children's lives, portraying the child as vulnerable and useless. Although this research recognises children and young people's levels of resourcefulness and creativity which centres child competence and agency, this does not mean that an analysis of the wider social structures that shape and alter their everyday experiences is insignificant. Their experiences are continually moulded by a number of political, historical, socio-cultural and moral positions and therefore this research furthers the view that children are socially constructed; temporally, culturally and spatially. There are multiple childhood experiences of the journey to school. Whilst there may be commonalities – depending on class, gender, disability, ethnicity, culture - children's everyday experiences must be viewed as worthy and individual. Children's agency needs to be appreciated in its own right with research acknowledging that they are competent and able to make their own decisions about issues that affect their own lives and the people and environments around them. These contemporary understandings on the nature of childhood, centring children's competence as social actors, also contribute to debates about spatiality and in particular to this research, about their journey to school. Drawing on the theories surrounding the nature of childhood highlighted in Chapter 2, this research highlights the desire that children and young people have for active, meaningful participation in addressing community issues that affect them in their everyday local, micro-geographies experienced during their journey to school, with particular relevance to effective local, environmental sustainability policy in view of global climate change concerns.

The decisions surrounding the journey to school are formed at the intersection of the key childhood sites – the home, public space and the school. What this research shows however is that although they have the ability to shape and change their experiences of their journeys to school to some degree, it is often the case that they feel unable to alter it in view of sustainable consumption practices of the household. Decisions about the journey to school rest largely within the home site as it depends on the circumstances and priorities of the members of the household. So whilst it is framed in the public space and school space, the primary decision site seems to be the home. This has implications in how (or how not) effective communication should be delivered into the home site with regards to altering people's perceptions about travel behaviour. As the journey to school policy structure is largely focused on the school site, it seems that there needs to be a shift in focus.

The journey to and from school is a power-laden geography, and its structure and nature may be seen as a form of disciplining and controlling children (mostly by adults) through time and space. As Aitken asserts:

'much can be learnt from investigating how young people learn to negotiate and/or break an abstract space conceived by adults' (2001a, 123).

The everyday spaces in and through which children's lives are made and remade are examined here in relation to the inter-related spheres of the home, public space and the school. The different contexts of children's lives deeply affect the levels and spaces of their patterns of negotiation. There is a complex web of connections binding children's mobilities to parenting styles, social norms, household structures and relationships with institutional governance.

This chapter has made connection with recent theoretical concerns with the social constructions of childhood; how childhood is regarded as the 'other' by adult constructions and which are shaped by the levels of negotiation and encounters that are experienced within the spheres of the household, public space and the school. It also focuses upon the binary tension between children being regarded as either threatened or threatening, and highlights that whilst some feel that they are accepted in public space (be it in local shops or on public transport), others feel unwelcome and at risk. Evidence from this research highlights children's experiences of 'socio-spatial marginalisation' (Holt, 2004) in a number of ways. Within the household whilst some children feel that they are consulted about their everyday mobility, others remark on their inability to make decisions for themselves. This acceptance of their passive decision-making capacity is usually linked to household

structures and behaviour patterns which are moulded by different parental styles and framings of social norms. Modern childhood is often portrayed in terms of enhanced democratic decision-making between family members and the child with the assumption that the child's power of negotiation has increased over time. There is a suggestion that modern families permit individual choice with children negotiating about issues of their everyday mobility. This may not always be the case. The children I worked with certainly seemed to regard themselves as active family members with certain individual rights and obligations to that collective. The research also showed how some children transformed the relative concept of age and negotiated affordances and opportunities. However, they also understand the limiting factors of aspects of the household which are out of their control - they understand that the working life of the parents temporally structures their everyday lives (McDonald, 2008c), as well as where their parents choose to live and how parents morally view the idea of negotiation within a household.

Negotiation within public space embraced how children interact with both the physical and social environments. Often due to concerns about the levels of traffic and congestion a number of spontaneous activities and experiences by children are often hidden from the parents. They advised how they changed their routing without parental knowledge and also visited shops or crossed roads that were deemed dangerous. This opportunistic exploration of space (Jones, 2000) was highlighted as a most favourite part of their social mobility. Perceived risks associated with negotiating 'others' within public space were also evidenced in terms of parental concerns of bullying (especially on school buses). The issue of 'stranger danger' was never overtly mentioned. Despite the journey to school being moulded within environments of 'risk', the data suggest that many of the children and young people have managed to continue to experience relative freedom and autonomy on their journey. Evidence proves that the child's experience is far from a barren account of constant paranoia over health and safety, as they report space to learn and experience and just 'be'. Of course, this does not seem true for all children, especially those that are driven to school, in which case, it is compelling to argue that their experiences are sometimes in stark contrast to their peers. They report that they have very little independent control and autonomy over their everyday mobility through public space, and even less say in whether to seek more sustainable methods of mobility.

In terms of the levels of negotiation that take place within the school space, the management style and ethos of the school is a core impact. If the children feel that they have an active part to play in decision-making at school regarding their everyday

experiences and the space for negotiation is offered, meaningful participation is valued. On the other hand if they feel that the school space does not offer them this opportunity, they feel ignored and restricted in their everyday choices. The political context of the school is equally significant given that it frames the priorities and behaviours of a school's management team. Children negotiate in their school space, socially and physically, and how they learn this behaviour is reflected in how they apply this learning to wider everyday situations.

Tensions therefore exist in various guises when assessing the negotiation that takes place within the journey to school: between a child's predilection for interaction with public space and the natural environment and an adult's fear of the potential dangers to children; between an adult's desire to encourage engagement with community and the outside world and the child's preference for other types of mobility due to cultural aspiration or physical need; between a child's desire to engage in more 'healthy' journey to school choices and the adult's inability to respond to that desire due to household circumstances; between the lack of enabling physical aspects in public space (O'Brien *et al*, 2000) to encourage alternative methods of travel and the educational policy advocating more active involvement within local community.

Psychology literatures outline the confounding relationships between attitudes, cultural norms, values, intentions, behaviour and individual contexts (Tanner, 1999). Conspicuous consumption behaviours, one of which is transport use for the journey to school, are argued to be forms of social and cultural norms which have underlying goals that counter environmental concerns, for example, convenience, profit, freedom and safety (Maxwell, 2001b; Shove, 2003; Vigar, 2000). Therefore, the attitudes of a parent will have an impact on that of the child (Mitchell *et al*, 2007). It stands to reason that how an adult views environmental behaviour and actions will frame the way a child acts now as well as in the future (Brandon and Lewis, 1999). A parent may not want to alter his or her travel behaviour, depending on household circumstances and priorities, as well as moral values, independent choice and attitudes about individual responsibility, the role of the government and environmental issues. This chapter has framed the journey to school within the engaged and contested spaces of the household, public space and the school and supports the notion that the choice of travelling to school is neither linear nor rational as it is a constant negotiation between circumstance and priority. Situating the journey to school within the wider discourse of *sustainability* (in Chapter 7) will further frame the experience.

Chapter 7

The 'sustainable' journey to school?

7.1 Introduction

Agenda 21, the blueprint for sustainable development, argues that the practices and material goals of high-income countries are responsible for the majority of global environmental stresses (UNCED, 1992) and calls for all social actors to adopt more sustainable everyday behaviours and practices. In this guidance, it is suggested that the individual's role is to adopt a sustainable lifestyle in which personal consumption patterns consider the impact on the environment and become an everyday habitual behaviour. The largest policy challenge is however to translate this broad global aim into workable strategies which will encourage people to change their everyday behaviours to support the broader notion of sustainability. The way in which the journey to school is sometimes taken by car, when alternative modes of travel are available, is one such targeted mobility behaviour.

Prompted by concerns about levels of congestion and traffic and the associated increased risks to pedestrian safety, local authorities aid schools in drawing up school travel plans (STPs) with the intention to persuade parents to abandon their car and use more 'soft modes' of transport, cycling and walking. This is done by communicating the virtues of these mobilities on the grounds of health benefits of regular exercise or by restricting and controlling vehicular access around certain school sites in order to make travelling by car seem less appealing. For the most part, the UK government has channelled information through schools under the National Framework for Sustainable Schools (DfES, 2006b), which introduces eight 'doorways' through which schools may choose to initiate or extend their sustainable school activity (see Chapter 3). It focuses on ways in which sustainable development can be embedded into whole-school management practices and provides practical guidance to help schools operate in a more sustainable way. As well as educating the public via the school space, large scale public service information campaigns through popular media are also used to tackle the wider issues of sustainable travel and energy efficiency, especially targeted towards the household consumption patterns. The concept is to fill in the gaps of information about the impact of unsustainable journey to school practices on the environment (Owens, 2000) with the logic being that, if people are aware of the impact, they will naturally alter their everyday travel behaviours accordingly. However, despite occupying a central place in the sustainable development paradigm, policy

measures encouraging the adoption of patterns of sustainable travel have failed to gain ground. Indeed, modal shift in school travel has been limited. Oxford has reportedly been minimal and there has been a reported negative modal shift in Gateshead (DfT, 2008).

This chapter presents a critical perspective of institutional governance- driven pro-environmental campaigns targeted at encouraging individuals, households and communities to use more sustainable modes of transport for the journey to school. Section 7.2 illustrates what the children and young people who participated within the research define as 'sustainability' and shows how these definitions depend on everyday contexts. Section 7.3 analyses what the children regard as being a 'sustainable journey to school'. Each individual school is then discussed separately with regards to the strategies that are employed at a school level, in Section 7.4. The children's perceptions of these strategies and proposed solutions are covered. Section 7.5 examines three significant barriers to engagement of sustainable travel which have emerged from the empirical research - the effect of scale, levels of responsibility and societal moral values and motivations. The chapter concludes in Section 7.6 by highlighting the impact of the evidence of this research on local sustainable travel policies.

7.2 Children's understandings of the concept of 'sustainability'

Evidence from this research shows that the children hold a shared understanding of what the concept of 'sustainability' means to them. The majority knew the basic details surrounding the concerns about global warming and climate change as illustrated in the figures below. The message on the leaflets illustrated in Plate 89 written by a group of children states: *'cars cause harmful smoke and gases which go up in the air and will thicken the atmosphere and cause extreme global warming and make the earth much warmer'*.

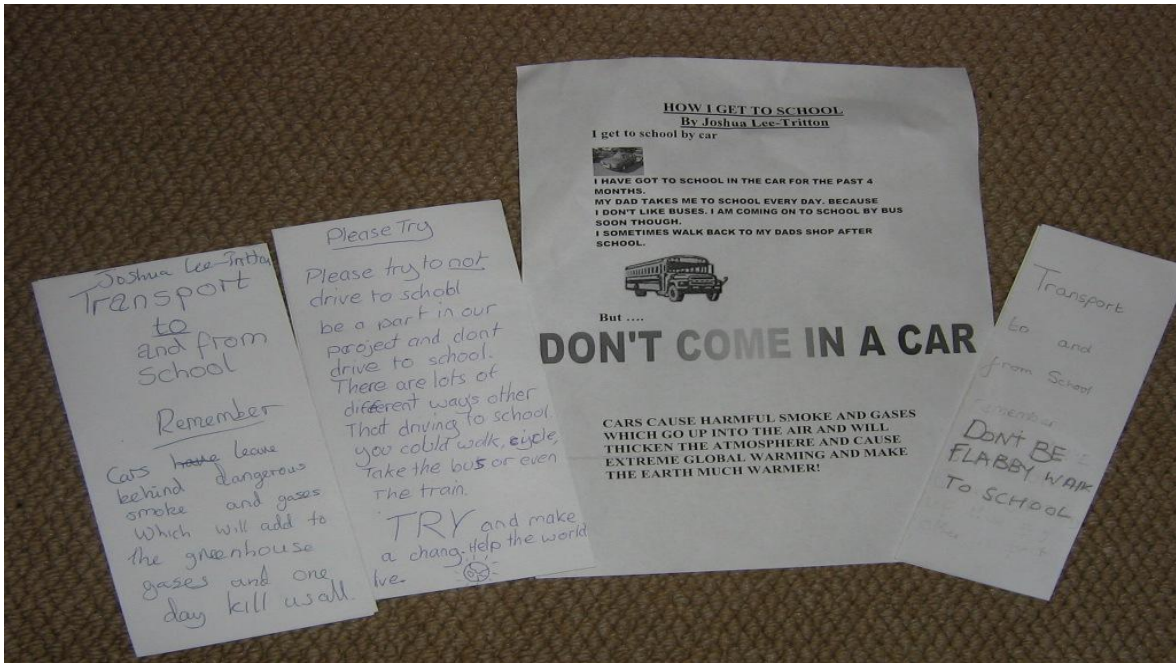


Plate 89: Leaflets: Matthew Arnold Secondary

Plate 90 is a drawing which illustrates the child's knowledge of the scientific facts of global warming, highlighting the 'carbon monoxide' from 'exhaust' fumes and the 'hole' caused by 'CO', whilst Plate 91 gives the message: 'try not to go by car because you are polluting the earth'



Plate 90: SS Phil and Jim Primary

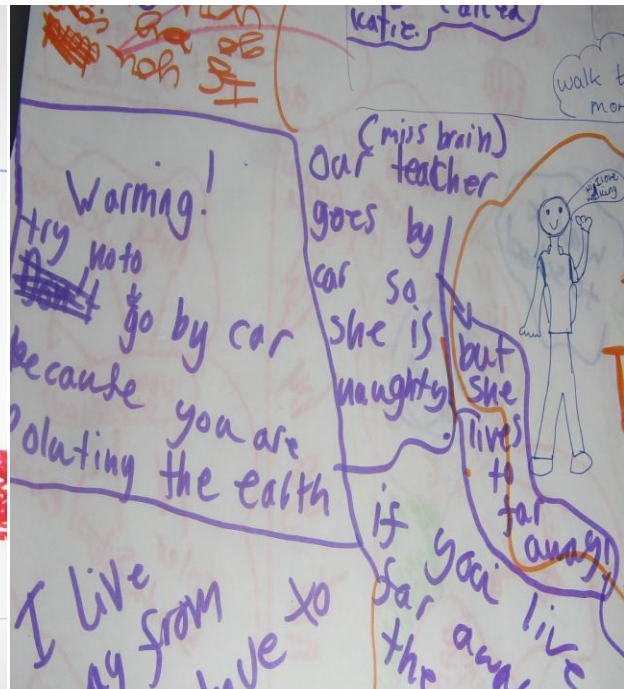


Plate 91: SS Phil and Jim Primary

One of the most discussed aspects of defining 'sustainability' was how the concerns about climate change and global warming is linked to the threat on animals and nature. In Plate 92, polar bears and penguins were highlighted as being most under threat: '*animals are dieing*', '*polla bears*' and '*pengwins*' with the message to '*look after the environment*'. This was a view held by the majority of the children.

In discussions, children often linked polar bears to the discourses about climate change and global warming, which shows that the image of the polar bear being at risk has made the large-scale issue of global climate change locally visible to children. This may be due to the many public messages communicated across various types of media about global warming with the polar bear being used as a recognised iconic symbol. As Slocum asserts:

'Polar bears are boundary objects that serve as a bridge because of their universal appeal to Western culture as distinctly Northern charismatic megafauna' (2004, 428)

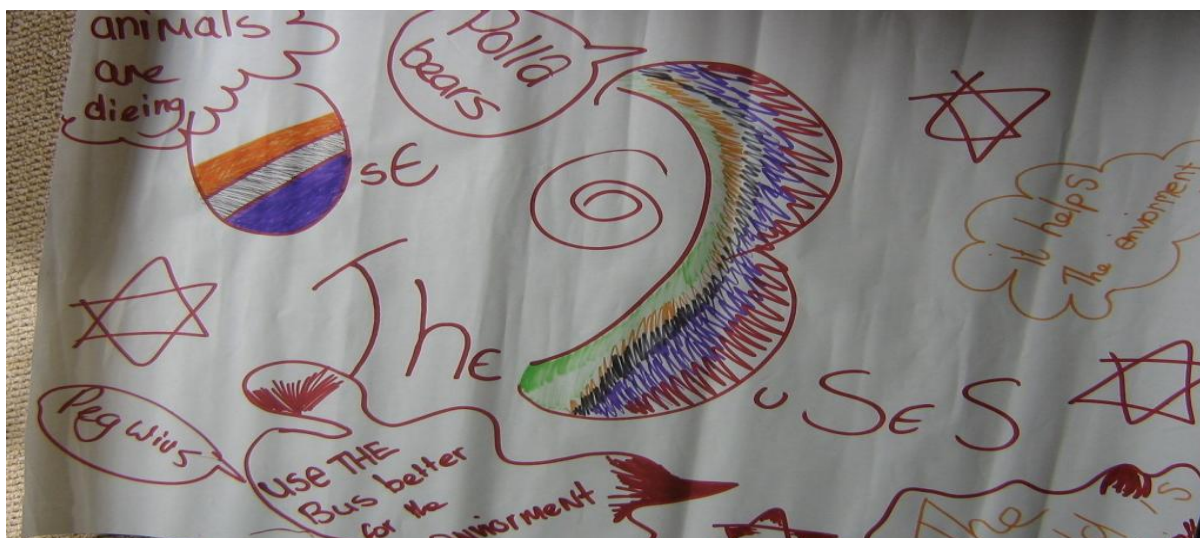


Plate 92: What is 'sustainability'?(Matthew Arnold Secondary)

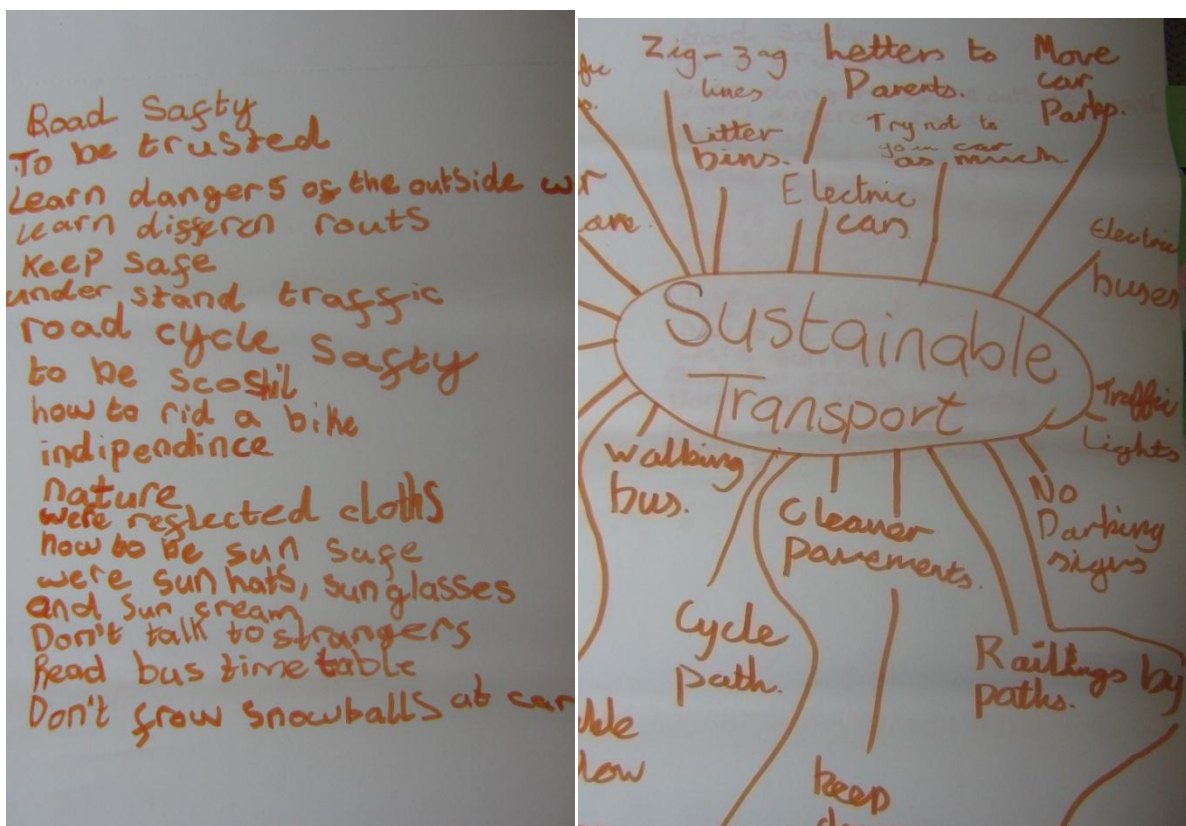
How climate change is visibly brought locally into the home was therefore clear, due to the long discussions about polar bears and the bottom-line efficiency of energy conservation (Slocum, 2004). Issues like increased oil process, increased electricity and gas prices and increasing petrol prices were all discussed at great length. The strength of these particular objects within discussion reflects the notion that societies are part of a global community

(van der Sluijs, 1998). It is a question of how these globally constructed images alter an individual's everyday local consumption behaviour which is significant.

Children understand the global impacts, especially on nature and animals, and are able to acknowledge their role in encouraging and participating in sustainable behaviour at a local level. Most initial conversation on sustainability focused upon the environment. In general then, children were showed to have a shared understanding of the concept of 'sustainability', and defined it by using visible objects in the environment that they could relate to, but what about defining the 'sustainable journey to school'?

7.3 What is a 'sustainable' journey to school?

Whilst children all felt they were aware and understood the global issues of climate change and the need for local environmental sustainable policies, when it came down to actually defining what a 'sustainable journey to school' was, they was more variation in what the priorities should be and how local strategies could help. Children discussed a number of aspects of what they thought defined a 'sustainable' journey to school, as illustrated by the diagramming in plate 93 and 94 below:



Plates 93 and 94: Diagramming 'sustainable transport' (Ryton Comprehensive)

As can be seen, a number of issues fell under the remit of 'sustainable transport', from physical aspects of the environment, for example, cleaner pavements and cycle paths to social aspects, for example, independence, sociality and behaviour. Interestingly, health and safety aspects were also highlighted in them asserting that a sustainable journey required the wearing of reflected clothing, sun hats, sunglasses and sun cream. This understanding reflects the notion that 'sustainability' has a social element (Hediger, 2000; Portney, 2003), as well as an environmental focus.

In general there was a strong agreement that the number of cars used for the journey to school is of major concern, not only for their own individual safety due to localised traffic and congestion but for the environmental impact. Whilst in some cases the use of cars were justified given individual household contexts, as discussed in Chapter 6, the children were largely in agreement that the choice to use cars for journeys which could be made using alternative mode of transport was wholly unjustified. A number of illustrations highlight a very strong 'anti-car' message:

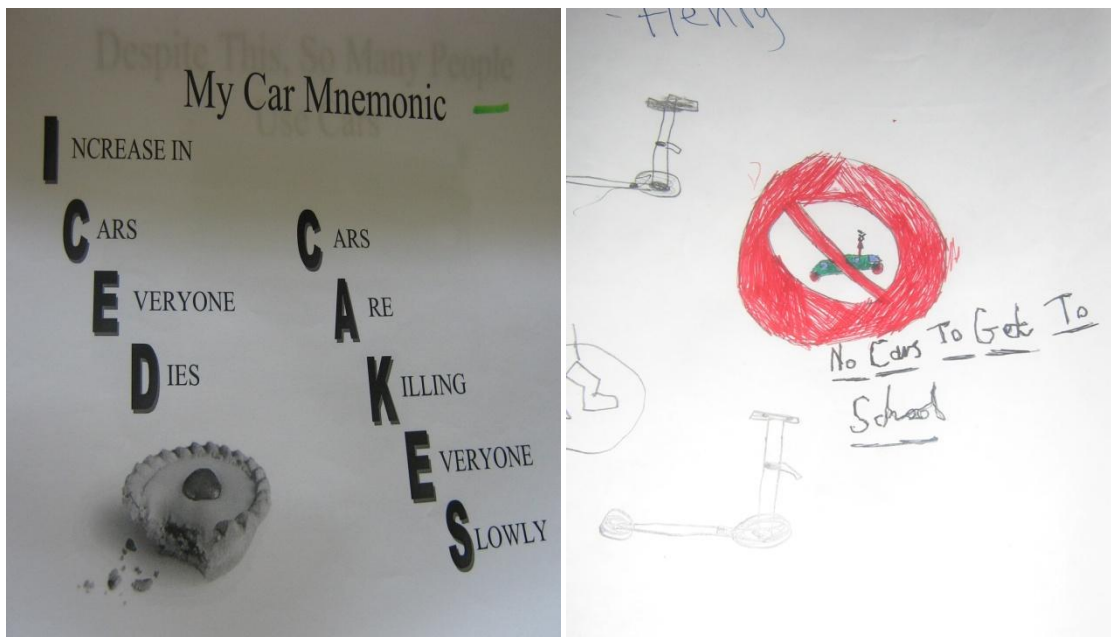


Plate 95: 'my car mnemonic' (Matthew Arnold Secondary)

Plate 96: 'No cars to get to school' (SS Phil and Jim Primary)

Large cars, especially 4x4s, were construed as being the worst offenders. One travel diary from Thomas, 11 (SS Phil and Jim Primary), who walks to school, reflects many other children's thoughts in this regard:

Monday: On my journey to school today I walked. It was quite cold so I wore a big jumper. It seemed to be quite cloudy. I saw a huge landrover and it didn't seem to have any use at all for its huge polluting energy. I also saw Rowan on the way.

Tuesday: Today again I walked to school and took the camera with me. I was very surprised to see 4 land rovers I took photos of 3 of the land rovers. I also took a picture of a mini to show they use less petrol and are cheaper. Minis also have four seats so people should use them. On the way back I went to Rowans house with benga and henry.

Wednesday: Today I walked to school as always but the weather was sunny and much hotter than it should have been, I think global warming is taking its toll. Henry came round to my house and on the way another land rover polluting I think they should ban 4x4 from citys. I think it would be very good.

Thursday: Today again it was much hotter than usual. I saw another land rover. I think it is the one of the main reasons of global warming. I also went back with Rowan because his brother my buddie at school was having a birthday and he wanted me to come, and also help him with his game-boy game.

Friday: Today I walked with Rowan and benga again and again it was very hot as summer. I saw another land rover they annoy me so much. On the way back home from school I went into my house for some money and bought some needle and thread and made a penguin. After that I went to Cosmos house.

Thomas remarks on the 'huge polluting energy' from a Landover in his Monday excerpt, and every day remarks on his annoyance of seeing this type of car on the road.

A number of drawings also reflected the concerns about 4x4s:

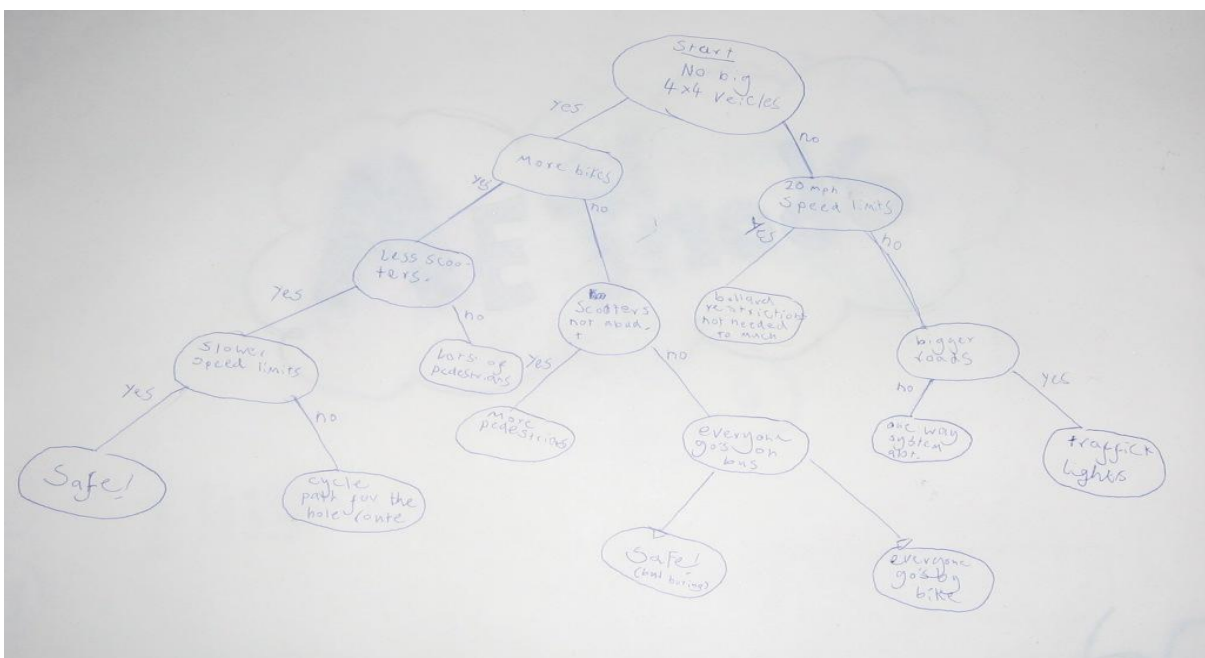


Plate 97: Flow diagram (SS Phil and Jim Primary)

The car, when contrasted to the options of walking, scooting or cycling, was also constructed as an environmentally unfriendly mode of transport, with children describing it as 'bad':

'some mams and dads park in the bus stop which is bad' (Jacob, 5, discussion group, Rowlands Gill Primary)

'it takes longer to drive cos you can never park which is bad' (Michael, 8, discussion group, Rowlands Gill Primary)

'if someone parks in a strange place, no-one can get passed and that's bad cos its dangerous to us' (Lilly, 11, discussion group, Rowlands Gill Primary)

The above quotes suggest that the children feel that using the car is 'bad' due to the issues that are faced when driving, parking or simply dropping off and picking up the children. For those which have alternative modes of travel available, the use of cars was spoke of in disgust and reflects the feelings of some children who reported feeling 'guilty' at being driven to school when other choices were possibly available, according to them. As evidence in Chapters 5 and 6 showed, another reason why some children described the car as an unfavoured mode of travel to and from school is that they felt that they could not join in with social and physical interaction in the local community, which was regarded as a vital component of a sustainable journey to school. Likewise, for some a sustainable journey to school was one which offered a healthy option. Numerous discussions, therefore, centred on the need for social sustainability (Portney, 2003) as an important aspect of the journey to school:

'we need to interact more with the community, get people to talk to us then the whole area is sustainability cos its nicer and friendlier and good for us' (Stephen, 13, Ryton Comprehensive)

'if parents would let go a bit we could be a bit more in the environment which would make us feel better and more healthier and this would be a more sustainable journey I think' (Matthew, 14, Ryton Comprehensive)

This has significant ramifications for social and environmental policy. Environmental sustainable strategies cannot only focus on the issue of reducing cars. They cannot purely offer practical solution to reducing localised congestion based on road management and design. Although these concerns are important and need to be addressed, policies encouraging sustainable travel to school need to take into consideration the wider contexts. Children do not only view a sustainable journey as a physical one - one which is done by

walking, cycling or using the bus. They also attribute the definition of a sustainable journey to one which affords them the opportunity to enjoy safe, social interpersonal relationships. They also state that they are part of a wider community and that they need to feel happy and safe in a physical setting. They feel that they have a right to enjoy a sustainable journey to school and that at present they are at a disadvantage within their own communities (Farrington, 2007; Foley, 2004; Hine and Mitchell, 2001).

The children acknowledge that the daily lived experiences of their journeys to school are rooted in specific local places, whilst being linked to large-scale global processes (Krueger and Gibbs, 2007). The strategies of campaigns directed to encourage a more sustainable journey to school assume that climate change is relevant to local people and communities and that people are inspired to change their behaviours and moral practices for the good of society as a whole. However, if this was the case, why do policies often fall short of accomplishing this goal? An understanding of context is applicable here.

7.4 Contextual Strategies for a Sustainable Journey to School

In order to understand the effectiveness of some sustainable journey to school strategies, as well as appreciating why some fail, it is necessary to address them within context. Each school is discussed separately below.

7.4.1 SS Phil and Jim Primary

At SS Phil and Jim Primary, the physical geography of the school site is a core factor as to why there is no major *visible* on-site traffic and curb-side congestion. The children and the parents remark on how the controlled access bridge restricts cars from driving close to school which leads them to opt for other easier, more convenient methods of travel. The significance of the bollards as determinants on travel behaviour was illustrated in a number of children's drawings:

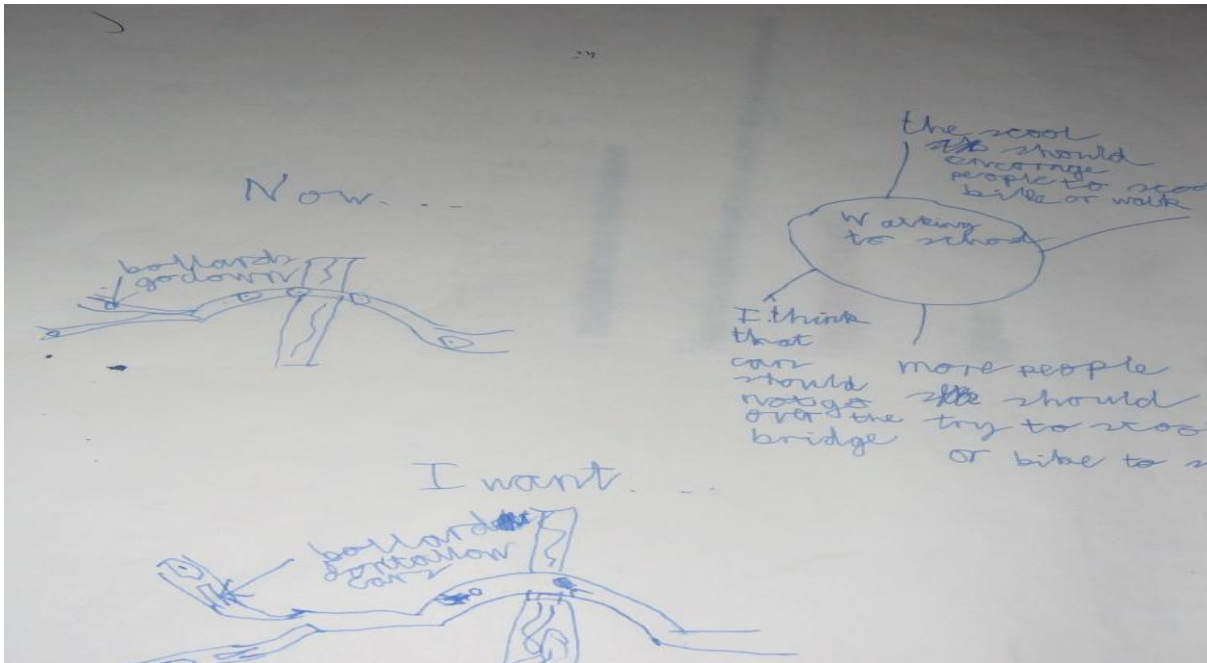


Plate 98: SS Phil and Jim Primary

The children were in agreement that the bollards and the restricted access-bridge on Aristotle Lane were a good measure to encourage more sustainable travel. The parents also agreed:

'the bollards before the bridge are determinant' and 'by opposing the construction of the road coming from the north' fewer cars come near the site'

'it stops you taking the easy way so you think a bit more'

In fact the message that the children proposed is that all schools should restrict parking and access in order to reduce car usage. They argued that if the decision to drive was made on the ideas of convenience and accessibility then these reasons should be taken away so that alternative methods needed to be sought. As Alex, 11, noted:

'if you stop all cars coming up near schools then it makes it hard and parents will choose another way'

Long term use of cycling, walking, scooting and using the bus is encouraged and is a shared message throughout the school:

'we have a new parents day and they are all advised of the travel plan, it's a well-informed area and its more focused on the health and safety message' (Governor, SS Phil and Jim Primary)

The message is an ongoing, constant dialogue, given the acknowledgement that the traffic and congestion, whilst not directly around the school site, is experienced at the opposite side of the bridge. Residential concerns about this are treated with utmost importance by the school. The fact that they have a high percentage of children walking, scooting and cycling does not lead to complacency, as sustainable travel is an ingrained cultural 'whole school' message. Although some mentioned that the traffic was increasing over the bridge and congestion was becoming more of a problem the children stated that they had an important role to play in continuing to encourage parents to choose more sustainable transport. Part of this was the level of negotiation which takes place within the household as discussed in Chapter 6, which reportedly centres on the children highlighting the aspects of health, safety and risk management to their parents. The children also showed a shared sense of pride due to the fact that the school was recognised as being a leader in the region for encouraging sustainable travel and commented on the fact that the teachers, head teachers and governors were always promoting this message. Travel-related activities (emphasizing health, safety and the community) are also brought into the curriculum and the school day in various ways, for example, projects and presentations. School assemblies are used to discuss travel arrangements with all children, and let them understand how much they can contribute individually. Governors, teachers and the Head Teacher were also very visible, often standing on the bridge before and after school in order to add credence to the message of sustainable travel. Their involvement was noted by the children. They reportedly felt proud of being seen to be doing something positive and this made them feel proud and able to continue using sustainable modes of transport.

Successful local campaigns included cycle fun days and 'Active Travel Weeks'. On one cycle fun day, 49% of pupils arrived by bike. The school day revolved around cycle safety with a 'helmet assembly', cycle art and DT projects and a visit from a cycle workshop for the older children. During 'Active Travel Week' the children learnt about how their bodies benefit from being active with activities including recording heart rate before and after exercise. An assembly was taken by Oxford United's outreach squad promoting the benefits of a healthy lifestyle. All pupils were given a take home sheet of facts about the relationship of exercise to health. The initiative was extended to include parents. Oxfordshire County Council supplied pedometers to record how far they had all walked on their journeys to and from school for the week. These campaigns are in addition to a Footsteps program to educate younger children about sustainable travel, as well as the annual Walk to School Week, which is also used by most classes as a hook on which to hang special project work. The success

of many of the campaigns is also due to long term travel plans for the school being integrating into the Labour government's extended day initiative to ensure that all users of the school premises are fully aware of the need for safe travel to and from the school.

The school also insists on a contract between school, parents, and pupils. The school wants parents, carers and children to be aware of the Travel Plan, and to make the daily journey to and from Phil and Jim a safe and pleasant experience. It promotes that the school will:

- promote healthy and safe methods of travel
- offer regular safety-awareness sessions with children
- provide storage for cycles and scooters
- organize cycle training in collaboration with the county service
- coordinate walking buses when groups of parents ask for assistance
- liaise with county services to provide buses to school where possible

The school asks that parents and carers will:

- take responsibility for getting their children to school safely
- try to minimize car usage in our restricted urban environment
- behave sensitively towards local residents, e.g. with regard to parking
- encourage good road safety behaviour in children

Lastly, it asks that the pupils will:

- be attentive to school teaching about healthy and safe methods of travel
- act responsibly and considerately when coming to and from school

There is continual promotion of cycling as an 'Oxford institution' and a healthy and fast way to travel over several years, in conjunction with regular Cycle Training Courses for the older pupils and good, safe cycle access from the local area to the school is reflected in this number.

Active regular communication with partner schools in the Comenius project on how children get to school in different countries also help children understand the aspects of sustainable

travel and local contexts. This also leads to an understanding that sustainable travel can be encouraged regardless of the weather. A recent campaign called the 'polar bear' day focused on wet/cold weather wear and the *fun* of sustainable travel in all weathers. The school actively encouraged children to design clothing to wear if the weather was deemed cold or wet.

The success of encouraging sustainable travel also depends on the level of networking that takes place between the school and partners. This can be structured in a number of forms: between the children and the school, between the school and the local authority; between the school and the local residents; between the school and local environmental activist groups, for example, the Canalside Environment Group; between the school and local community services, for example, to negotiate discounts at local cycle shops for SS Phil and Jim Primary pupils and parents.

Interestingly, a number of strategies were reported as being unsuccessful. The walking bus and cycle bus were proving to be unpopular. It was suggested by the Head Teacher that the walking bus relied on a number of volunteer parents and that people did not want to take on this level of responsibility for other people's children. She stated that children came from a wide geographical area so each parent preferred to manage their journey to school with their children independently. Equally unpopular was the 'drop and walk' strategy employed at a designated point which had one parent collect the group of children and walks them to school.

'I think its cos of the lack of community, and parents liking to be responsible for their own children, guarding them into school, not entrusting another person to do it' (Governor, SS Phil and Jim Primary)

For those parents who chose to accompany their children, they seemed to feel responsible to see that they arrived at school safely. The concept of trusting others within the community to do this job seemed unnerving to some. Of course, this can be attributed to a number of reasons previously discussed in Chapters 2 and 3: parenting styles, risk assessments of the local area, moral practices within the household or a community and differing levels of community engagement.

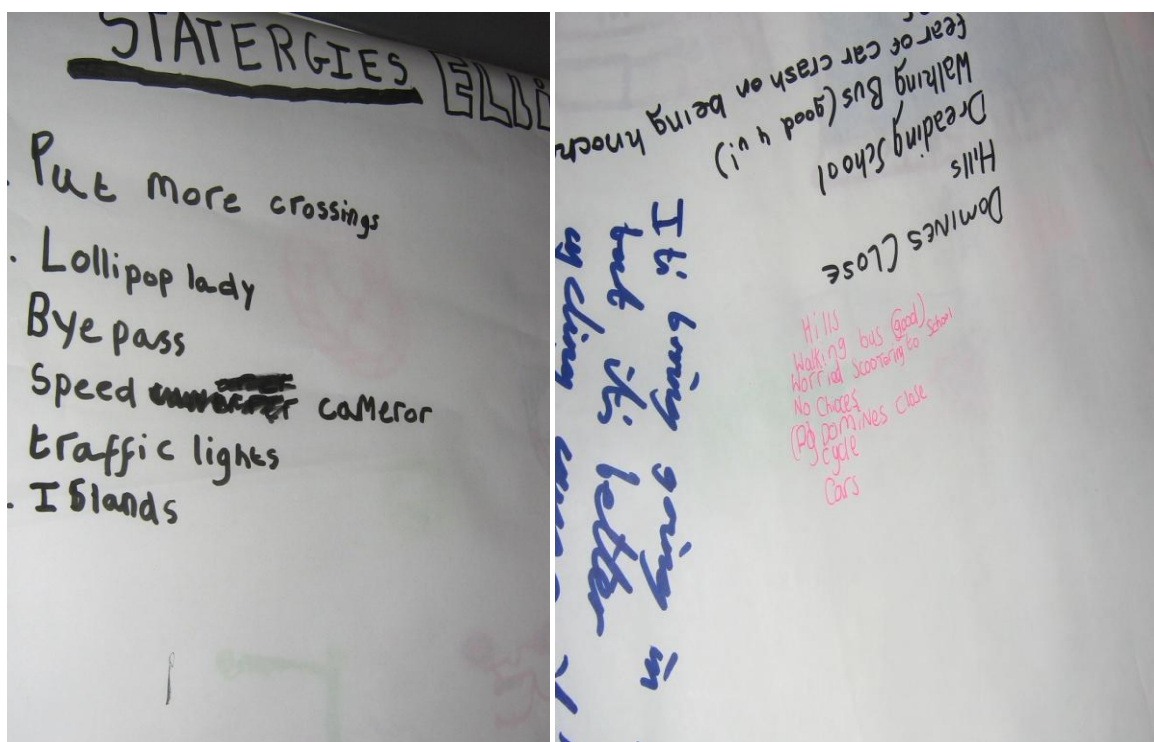
7.4.2 Rowlands Gill Primary

From a child's perspective the majority reported that they thought that the walking bus was a good idea. Whilst believed to '*put out an insidious message for the children, inculcating*

fear in their impressionable minds that if they step out of line or away from the 'safe' route, they will be injured or their lives put at risk from strangers intent on abducting them' (Hillman, 2006, 64) from a child's point of view it was a well-liked strategy as it would encourage walking 'independent' of parents, as shown in the following commentary:

'I like the walking bus here in school its fun and nice to chat' (Emily, 8, Rowlands Gill Primary)

However, although many children liked the idea, very few took part in the walking bus, mainly due to the local geography of the area. The school is situated on a side road off a main artery through the village. Whilst some children could walk, the majority lived some distance from the school and hence no safe route was perceived to be available. The main concern at the school was the level of curb-side congestion, as shown in the majority of photographs, diagramming exercises and drawings:



Plates 99 and 100: Diagramming extracts (Rowlands Gill Primary)

A number of campaigns have been implemented in recent years in order to encourage sustainable travel. A staff car-sharing initiative was established with reserved parking. Community links with NEXUS involves Year 6 parents at their parent's consultation evening in order to promote bus transport, including a welcome pack containing information about

road safety and bus travel. Curriculum links with sustainable travel are used, especially with PSHE and Science, especially given the Healthy School Award and the Every Child Matters Framework. Negotiations with local bike shops are undertaken to secure discounts in addition to providing safety equipment for the school. The school also has close links with the Cycling Officer at the local council to identify safer routes and safe, storage facilities have been built on the new school site.

However, despite the number of combined approaches used to address the issues of irresponsible, illegal parking on Dominies Close, parking in designated bus stops and restriction of emergency services vehicular access, a change in modal shift has been negligible (Rowlands Gill, 2007). Children requested that unsafe parking and congestion be tackled by strong measures, such as fines, speed cameras and police presence. The children also stated that the parent's names should be published in order to shame them into changing their behaviour. They also said that they would like to see proper road safety measures, for example, pelican crossings, zebra crossings, traffic islands, cycle paths, ramps and lollipop ladies so that they can negotiate the area safer. A particular area of concern is Dominies Close as this is the area most parents illegally drive and park outside the school gates. Others mentioned that a proper car park be built to cater for the cars, but the message should be that:

'they only drive to school if they live far away' (Cameron, 8, discussion group)

A number of children also stated that a by-pass should be built around the village so that traffic is not as congested along the main route, thus making it safer to cycle, walk or scoot. The children also requested that more campaigns be done at school, for example, more walking buses, and that vouchers be given out if this behaviour is sustained over a long period of time. No strategies were mentioned regarding bus travel, possibly due to the fact that very few children catch the bus to school.

7.4.3 Matthew Arnold Secondary

The predominant focus of sustainable transport strategies proposed by the research group at Matthew Arnold Secondary was on the scholar and public bus services. As a number of illustrations show, the majority of suggested changes focused on a more efficient and affordable bus service. A reduction of fares was stated as being a priority, as was the more effective timetabling of the buses to help children arrive at school on time. The majority of the children who travelled by bus reported that they did not enjoy the journey due to issues of overcrowding and fellow student behaviour. The fact that a single-decker bus was used to

cater for a large number of students at the end of the school day was of major concern, especially in light of the fact that a double-decker bus passed the school just after the school day ends yet remains half empty due to the fact that the children cannot make it in time.

Children requested that flexible timetables be implemented in different seasons to take into consideration changing weather patterns. They were also concerned with driver behaviour and felt that the bus companies should monitor speed and behaviour of their drivers. The 4A bus was of particular concern as it was regarded as too crowded and very unsafe. All of the children noted that if these suggestions were implemented not only would they enjoy the journey better, but more children would be encouraged to use the bus for their journey to school. As noted in Chapter 6, there is concern about the efficiency and management of the bus services and it was noted that if these issues were resolved parents would feel that they could agree to their children using the bus services.

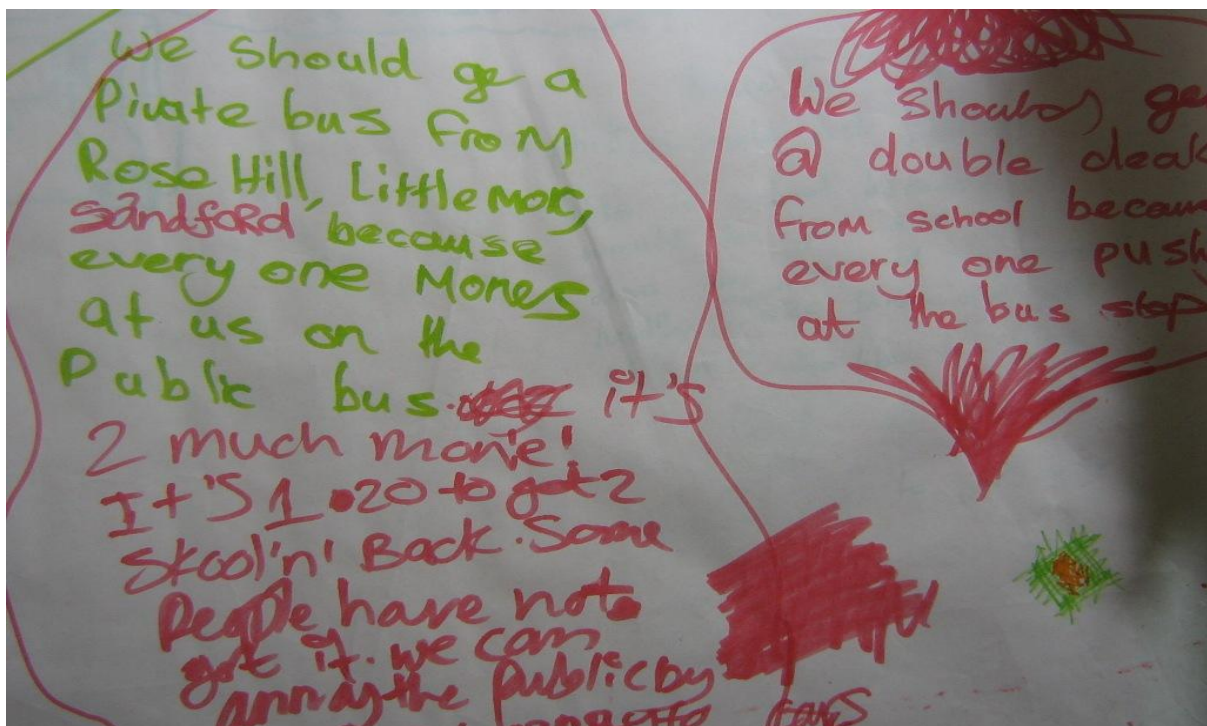


Plate 101: Discussions about buses

These findings are in alignment with research which highlights that children are disadvantaged due to current transport patterns and structures (DETR, 2000c; Hine and Mitchell, 2001). Concerns about increasing cost, poor levels of safety, crowdedness and discomfort are regarded as the reasons why people do not use public transport (Stradling *et al*, 2007) and these issues are highlighted by this group of children. In terms of social justice

The steepness of Hirst Rise Drive was also regarded as being a major barrier to walking and there was a general agreement that more buses should be used to help in this regard.

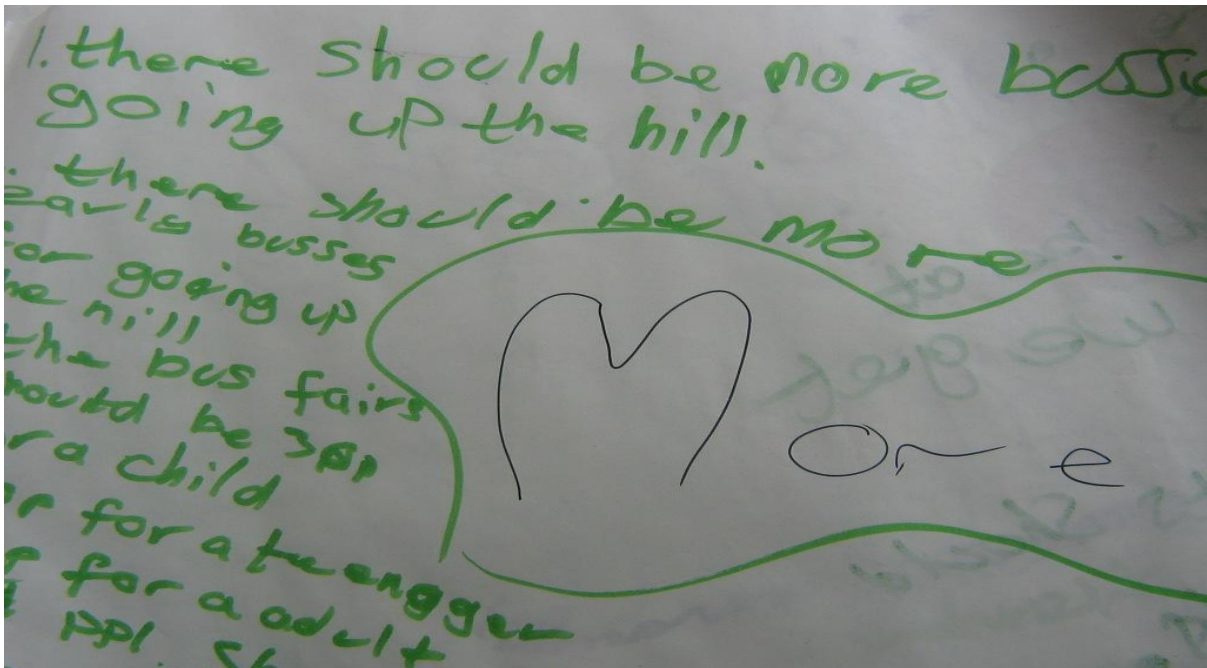


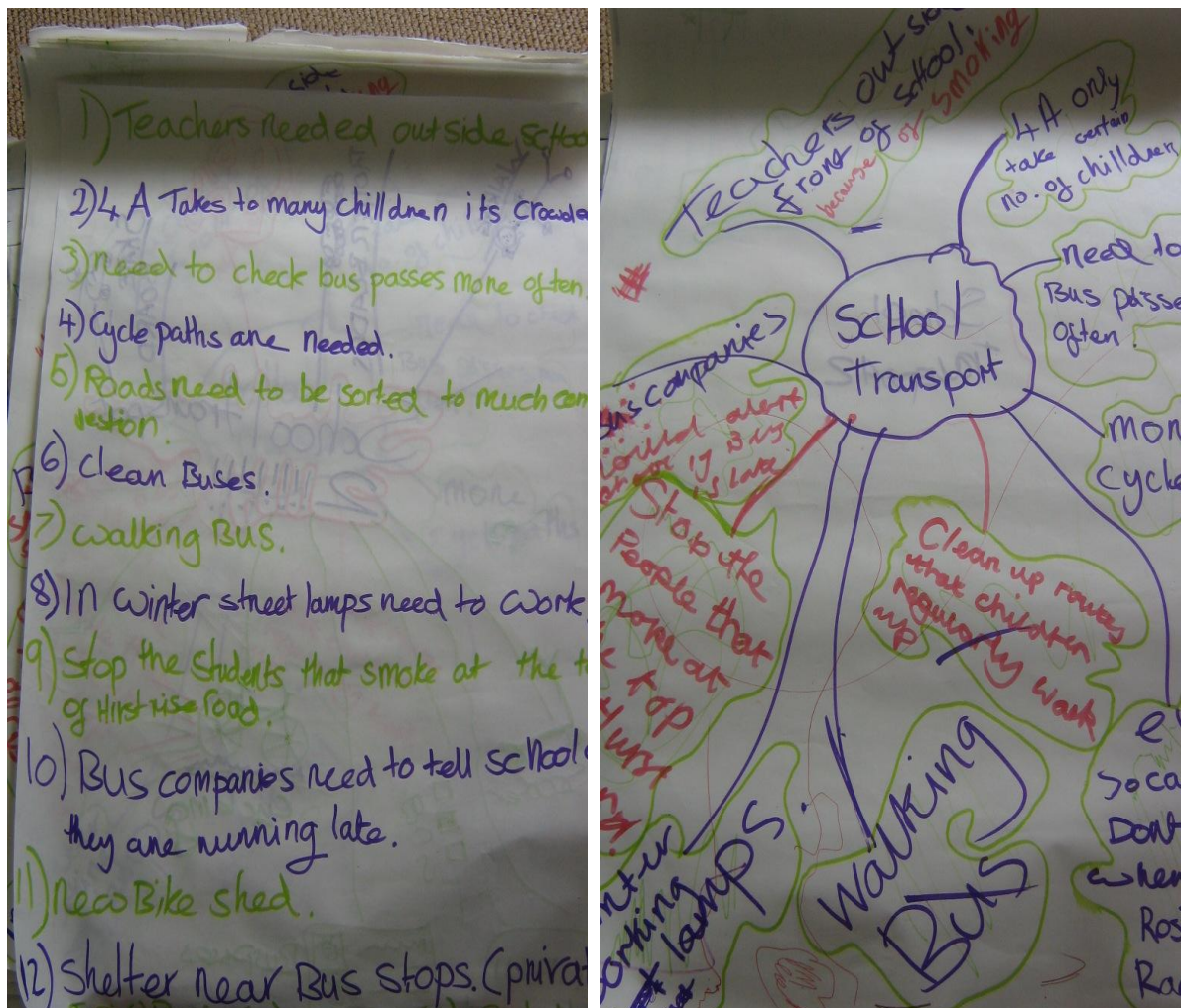
Plate 106: Strategy for bus travel

Less prioritised strategies also included the provision of more cycle storage facilities at the school. The school shows a very small percentage of children cycling to school, although in their latest travel survey it is reported that 40% of the children live within cycling distance from school. The children felt that the new bike shed would encourage cycling, although the lack of storage facilities for helmets and clothing (which, according to the travel plan were considered unnecessary) were seen as being a barrier to cycling, especially in the winter months. The school has increased the security of the bike shed by having CCTV coverage in this area.

Another interesting aspect that emerged for encouraging sustainable travel refers to the management of public space. This was framed in two ways by the children. The first recognised the need to make streets safer by adding cycle paths and maintaining public space by making it safer (seeing that street lamps work) and cleaner. Although the school travel plan advises that a pedestrian crossing cannot be developed due to local planning restrictions, the children felt this was a much needed physical aspect of a sustainable journey as it would increase personal levels of safety. The second involved the management of 'other' children's behaviour around the school so that those who walked did not feel uncomfortable. The suggestion that '*teachers need to be outside school*', as shown on plate

94 below, reflects the tension experienced by different groups of children occupying specific spaces. In discussion it became clear that children requested more control, especially around the local bus stops, after school.

The children suggested that a walking bus could be considered. This was an interesting request given that the children in this school were 13 and 14 years of age, and the idea of the walking bus has always been regarded as a strategy aimed at younger children. Although the school travel plan asserts that there was limited interest in a 'walking buddy' scheme, the evidence here shows that with the right planning and management, it may prove an efficient strategy. The school does take part in the Walk to School Week, which is reportedly popular.



Plates 107 and 108: Bus travel strategies

The school has been awarded 'Healthy School' status, as well as being classed as an Eco-School. The school has an ongoing dialogue with the school and local community, and, in line with the other schools, sustainable travel forms part of lessons and assemblies. The Governing body tables an agenda item covering school travel and ongoing negotiation between the parish council is considered vital.

7.4.4 Ryton Comprehensive

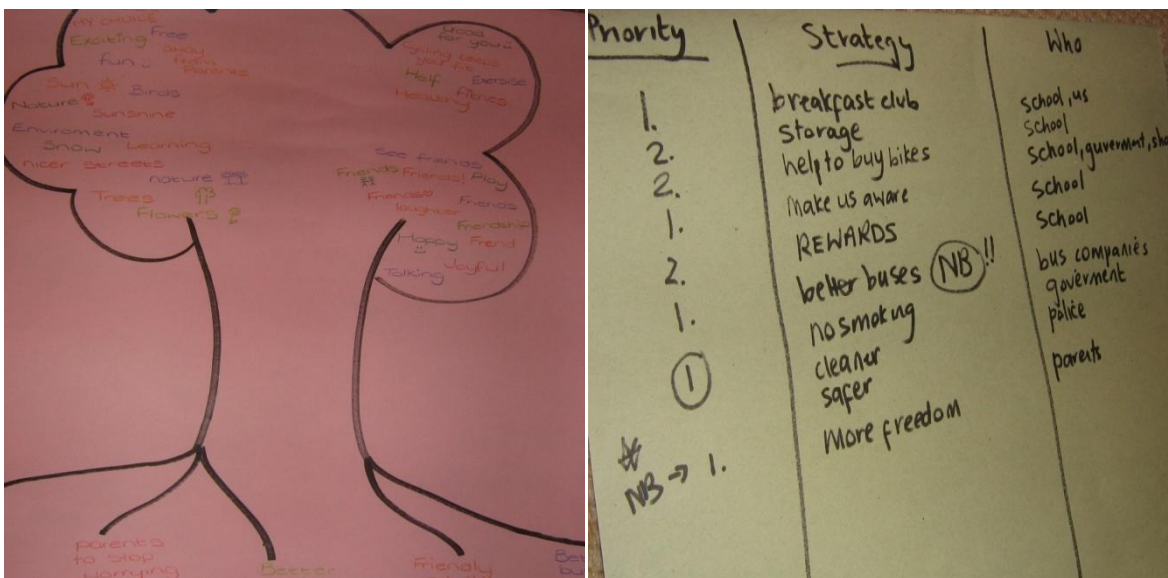
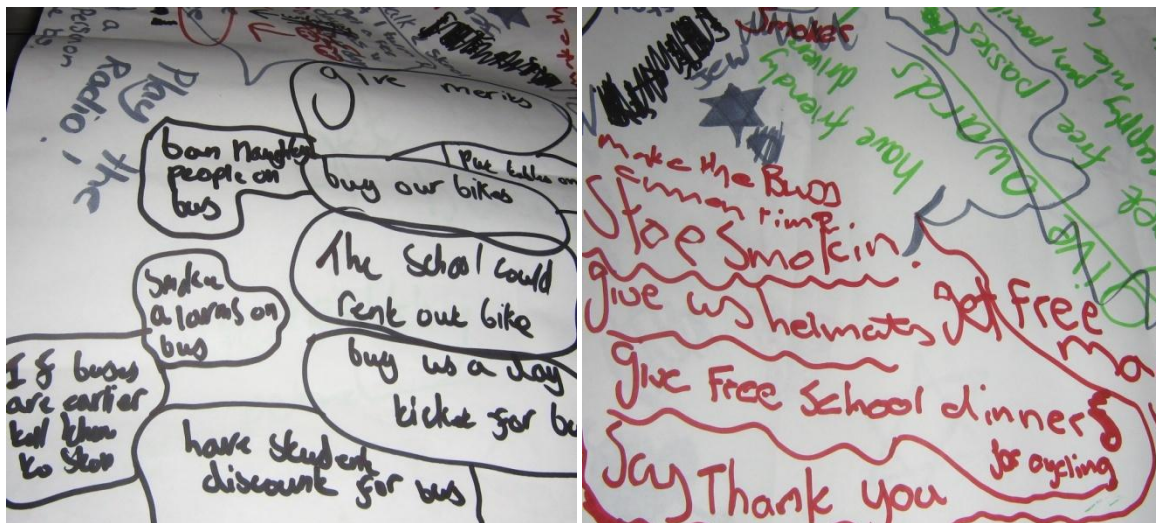
An interesting point was made by the children when the discussions about sustainable travel were held. Initially when asked what the school implements as part of its strategy to encourage sustainable travel, the children responded that they did 'nothing'. However, with research, they soon found out that a number of initiatives had been implemented:

- A relationship established with Bicycle Repair Man cycle shop, Low Prudhoe for discounts on safety equipment.
- A successful Bike Week encouraged 24 cyclists.
- Review of Tutorial system allowed two sessions on transport/environmental issues, to include repeat of annual survey.
- Barriers installed to bus turning circle to improve safe management of bus boarding, funded by Highways Department of Council.
- Some improvement to managing behaviour on buses.
- The school gates at both of the entrances are closed after school to prevent parents from parking in a dangerous position on the site and to prevent staff cars from exiting the site.
- The promotion of an Under 16 Travelcard to enable more pupils to travel by bus at reduced rates.
- Ongoing encouragement to parents to use the transport hub to park for parent's consultation evenings and other events to reduce the danger around the immediate site.
- School operational times were changed (with school starting at 08h30 and finishing at 15h00), partly to reduce the levels of congestion on the campus as a whole.

Given the acceptance that these strategies were in place, the research team at Ryton Comprehensive further proposed a three tiered approach to reducing car usage for the school journey.

Firstly, in order to encourage cycling a number of school strategies were proposed:

- A Breakfast Club – cyclists can get a free breakfast in the school canteen
- Better storage facilities at school for helmets and clothing, especially during the winter months
- Help with purchasing cycles and facilities to look after bikes, for example, good safe storage and a pumping station to blow up tyres
- Specific campaigns to encourage long-term bike use. Subsequent to the research, a campaign entitled Tour d’Afrique has been implemented which monitors the mileage covered in cycling with the aim of arriving (mileage wise) at the tip of Africa.



Plates 109-112: Sustainable travel strategy diagramming

Secondly, a merit system was proposed whereby those who walk, cycle or take the bus get specific points which can be converted into awards after a period of time. The children suggested that gift vouchers could be used as a positive reward.

Thirdly, in terms of bus travel, it was suggested that the physical and social environment of the bus be improved by a number of strategies. These involved the playing of music, having a TV on board, fitting smoke alarms, cleaning seats and floors and providing management on the bus to reduce the levels of smoking and other behaviours deemed unacceptable by the children. It was also suggested that fares could be cheaper for students to encourage bus use. Generally the children advocated a nicer physical and social environment, one in which was fun, relaxed, ordered and managed. These needs reflect the findings from many surveys on bus travel in order to understand why people do not use these services (DETR, 2000c; Hine and Mitchell, 2001). If the concerns about cleanliness, discomfort, safety and control were addressed, the children report that this would make for a more enjoyable journey to school.

An interesting aspect which emerged strongly from this school is the child's demand for respect and the inclusion of the statement 'say thank you' echoed many of their concerns about feeling disconnected from community. They stated that they would like to feel like responsible, active community members who, if given the chance, could promote and take part in more sustainable mobilities. The general message to parents was 'let go and allow us to take responsibility' as illustrated in their final presentation.

Given the evidence that the children in all four schools have a keen understanding of the notion of sustainability and the need to encourage more sustainable mobility behaviours in everyday life, the fact is that many individuals, households and communities fail to change their travel patterns. A recent evaluation report has reported that there has been a negligible shift in people's school travel behaviours (DfT, 2008) in some areas of the country and indeed a negative shift in some others. Despite the great deal of financial backing and resource from local and national authorities, and a range of combined strategies employed within schools, as illustrated above, a discussion of the barriers to effective engagement of sustainable practices is required.

7.5 Barriers to Effective Engagement

The question of how to best engage the public in efforts to confront global climate change poses a significant challenge to academics, policy makers and activist organisations (Jasanoff and Wynne, 1998). Three significant barriers to adopting wide-spread sustainable travel behaviour are discussed relevant to this research: namely, scale, levels of responsibility and societal moral values and motivations.

7.5.1 Scale

Climate change has been framed as a global threat. Engaging the public in altering their everyday travel behaviours at a local level is proving difficult because climate change and global warming is perceived as being spatially and temporally distant. Appeals focused on the global risks seem to make it non-meaningful to a number of different publics (Demeritt, 1998) and they fail to see how this is locally solvable problem. It is argued that people tend to act when an environmental problem comes close to home and if 'climate change is not so close' (Slocum, 2004) then there is little impetus to alter behaviours. Literature suggests that there is a need to widen participation in the determination of Local Agenda 21 policies and to provide more inclusive forms of communication (Burgess *et al*, 1998) in order to encourage a change of attitude to sustainable issues.

The simultaneity of local and global scales (Krueger and Gibbs, 2007; Swygendouw, 1997;) has been visibly illustrated in a number of political strategies regarding the journey to school under the broad message of 'think global, act local'. However, despite the 'local' being centred within policy on the journey to school through the encouragement of developing individual school travel plans and providing regional institutional governance as travel advisory services, the overall policy is globally construed, which assumes a perception of 'distance' and 'lack of ownership' to the problem.

As Hinchliffe notes:

'perhaps it is only by transcending notions of the home and the global, and the resultant appropriate scales of action, that the environmental movement, as a cultural movement, can reclaim its 'raison d'être' (1996, 62).

Local life is lived at all scales (Massey, 2002) and can be understood by children in this way. The evidence from this research shows that children and their parents think about themselves in relation to both spatial scales, namely, local and global. A view that the children have is that global warming is both global and local (Demeritt, 1998) and they

showed they hold the knowledge that climate change is a global concern. They also showed their ability to take this globally constructed message and apply it at a local scale. The strategies that they proposed all took context into consideration, given their daily knowledge of their local environments. For those who walked to school they showed a fine-grained knowledge of intricate environmental factors: how the weather impacted on their choice of route, how their social negotiations through spaces they occupied moulded their friendships; how their journey was impacted on by the physical design of their environment. For those who cycled, safety issues were of paramount concern with their ability to negotiate specific obstacles like traffic being highlighted. The children using buses reported local concerns ranging from safety aspects to social considerations. For the children who were driven to school, they too acknowledged the sustainability issues associated with their journey to school made by car.

The significance of this intricate local knowledge is reflected in the proposed strategies. What emerged from the evidence of this research is that each group of children at the four individual schools suggested very unique, locally situated strategies that could be used at a school-level to encourage more sustainable travel. The broad message that is often communicated through national campaigns to encourage a reduction of car journeys seems to be too simplified and large in scale. A nationwide, single approach does not take into consideration the contexts of the schools – culturally, socially and physically. It neither takes into consideration the contexts in which the individuals live, move through and experience. The broad brush approach to sustainable travel ignores the rich diversity of individuals, households and communities. Broad strategies theoretically cater to the call for environmentally sustainable communities enshrined in the Urban White Paper, however practical everyday strategies that can be used over the long-term are required. Claiming too much in common erases important geographical differences. There is a need to localise the sustainable journey to school and adopt the communication methods accordingly. The evidence in this research shows that the negotiated geographies of the journey to school place value in the social and cultural networks which shape the specific experiences of the journeys, so whilst the children are aware that local strategies are needed, their concern is that as children their voices remain largely unheard.

7.5.2 Who is responsible?

Critical social scientists have added a further dimension by asserting that social contingencies affect sustainable consumption and environmental policy agendas (Hobson, 2001; 2003). It is linked to a broader debate about who the public trust and who is

responsible for climate change and global warming. There are many different actors, all holding differing degrees of assumed responsibility – individuals, households, communities, businesses, institutional governance, media (both global and local) and environmental groups. They all profess to hold knowledge and create facts for the public to listen to and act accordingly (Jasanoff and Wynne, 1998). Whilst environmental political strategies focus on the *individual* as a consumer who is able to make empowering choices, evidence from this research shows that lifestyles have multiple complex interrelated demands. This highlights the collective nature of consumption practices, which makes sustainability a contested negotiated construct that is often driven by motives other than the need of an individual. The journey to school forms part of a web of inter-related, changeable mobilities and employing a more sustainable mode of travel may not be a priority for specific actors given competing and negotiated behaviours of the other players.

Public and policy discourse is focused upon urging people to accept energy conservation as a household objective, not only for money saving reasons, but also for personal health and moral objectives. The general message is for people to live more sustainable lives. The 'thinking global and acting local' has been widely cited in many public messaging campaigns, with the emphasis being placed on the individual and not the community. This raises the question of 'who is responsible for a sustainable journey to school?' The dangers that people hear about in the media seem far away and irrelevant to current, modern life, as one parent highlighted:

'what difference can we make? Its only gonna happen in about a hundred years or so anyway...what's the point in worrying now, I'll be dead anyway', its not my problem, its someone elses' (Ryton Comprehensive)

This notion of environmental sustainability being '*someone elses*' responsibility is a barrier to engagement. Therefore, where the individual sits, or where individuals perceive themselves to be sitting, within the framing of environmental sustainability policy is significant in this regard. An individual's environmental concerns are often outweighed by other conflicting attitudes, as shown by Martin, 13, stating:

'yeah I know I should walk cos the environment and all that but I am too lazy' (Ryton Comprehensive)

It is often assumed that public inertia is caused by ignorance and I agree with Hobson (2003) who asserts that practices do not change through exposure to scientific knowledge but through individuals connecting and relating to that knowledge in their everyday local

behaviour. The fact that individuals do not feel responsible because of the issues of temporal and spatial scale lead to an apparent irrelevance of sustainable travel behaviours in their everyday complex lives. The choice of alternative travel is not a high priority issue. Interestingly, the children showed a level of commitment to sustainable behaviour with a keen understanding that if strategies were implemented now, the long term prospects were better. As Amy, 13, stated:

'we seem to know more and care more than our parents, they are too busy and stuff' (Ryton Comprehensive)

The perception that an individual's actions would lack efficacy is reflected in the comment made by one mother:

'why should I worry about the environment when others don't, what difference would I make'

Constructed as a collective problem in policy, there doesn't seem to be a common perception of it being a shared activity and individuals report feeling aggrieved at doing something environmentally aware when they see others that 'don't care' and acting irresponsibly. As one mother explained:

'it's sad actually, I come out of my back door, we live in a row of terraced houses in the village, only half a mile or so to here (school) and I watch everyone of my neighbours get into their cars, one or tow kids in each car, no one mentions car-sharing or anything, they all reverse out the lane together then drive back home after dropping the kids off and go indoors'.

There is an argument that a lack of community spirit is a barrier to engagement. It is what Furedi (2002) calls a breakdown in 'adult solidarity' which causes people to develop everyday travel behaviours in solitude. The lack of community responsibility was highlighted by one of the teachers at Rowlands Gill Primary:

'it's laughable, there was one mother reversing her 4x4 up over the path dropping her child off with no thought about all the kids she was nearly running over in the bus stop area, she had this sign in the back window 'caution, child on board...what about the ones she was running over? They just don't think of anyone but themselves.'

In the face of other's apathy, parents mentioned that they felt they could do nothing:

'what's the point, everyone else drives' (parent, Ryton Comprehensive)

People's perceptions of institutions and responsibility is a well entrenched social dilemma (Blake, 1999) where people do not see it their responsibility for helping to solve

environmental concerns as they assume that they are acting on their own which is deemed unfair and a wasted effort. A number of comments reflect a lack of trust in the institutions that affect positive sustainable action:

'all this information they churn out, telling you what to do and not to drive and what to eat and what to wear and its like we are idiots...I don't read it' (mother, Ryton Comprehensive)

The fact that information to encourage sustainable travel to school is largely channelled through the institutional space of school is therefore a constraining factor if this is the perception people hold. In terms of the table illustrated in plate 112 of the priorities of sustainable travel evaluated by the children at Ryton Comprehensive, there is a clear understanding as to whose role it is to make things happen. Interestingly, parental responsibility is evaluated as low, except for allowing children more freedom, and the majority of strategies were thought to be the responsibility of the school and the government. They also mentioned the need for the bus companies to take more responsibility in providing more efficient services. The children were aware of the need for a web of responsibility in order to affect change.

7.5.3 Societal moral values and motivations

Environmental values are socially and culturally constructed. They are fluid and ever changing due to specific contexts and advancing knowledges about the notions of environmental sustainability. Different studies (Blake, 1999) have shown how the attitude-behaviour relationship is moderated by two primary sets of variables: namely, the structure of personally held attitudes and external or situational constraints. Based on this research with children, it is clear that knowledge is mobilised when individuals experience and rethink their individual practices. Their individual behaviours of everyday consumption depend to a large extent on their attitudes towards environmentalism. This of course is shaped by the negotiations held within households, communities and other institutional spaces, for example, schools, religious groups and cultural centres. It depends on situational realities. This is illustrated by the children acknowledging that they understand the need to alter their behaviour given their knowledge of sustainability, but feel disempowered given the structural contexts in which they live, for example, the distance they live from the school or the household's environmental beliefs. As shown in Chapter 6, the household's belief in cycling regardless of the weather is reflected in Sophie's choice to travel to school by bike.

Reflecting on Giddens' structuration theory (1991), the emphasis needs to be on known local information, as well as discursive processes, in addressing consumption behaviours and

practices. Social structures are works in progress. They are daily habits and practices that constantly create and recreate social ordering. Hidden knowledge is that which is practical, embodied and experienced on an everyday basis, without having to constantly make and remake decisions. Discursive consciousness is the body of knowledge that is an ongoing creation of ideas anchored in knowledge, values and experience. In her article Hobson (2003) suggests that these two forms of knowledge mirror the differences between those consumption behaviour practices that are changed and those that remain unchanged.

Children's responses in the research reflect this:

'I don't think about it, I don't know why...' (Matthew Arnold Secondary)

'I am now more aware of sustainable travel...' (Dean, 14, Ryton Comprehensive)

The last quote shows that the research has led to the child to reconsidering his behaviour, however, the context in which he lives does not allow her to change it as he adds:

'but what can I do, I have to come in car cos there is no other way, we live too far and my mam won't let me walk. I might be able to see if I can get the bus next year when I am older' (Dean, 14, Ryton Comprehensive)

This quote is in keeping with Giddens' suggestion that the boundary between practical and discursive conscientiousness is moveable through time and experience. In this way the child linked age with maturity levels and level of experience. Other quotes uncovered their examination of their logic:

'I don't know why I can't walk, suppose I am lazy...' (boy, 14, Matthew Arnold Secondary)

Whether the messages of the journey to school done through a school setting work in encouraging children to alter their behaviour is questionable and obviously depends on the interrelationship of the school space with those of the household and public spaces. In a way, the school is providing additional knowledge that may or may not become everyday consciousness, however, suffice to say that a long-term communication of the message has a hope of infiltrating knowledge and hence altering behaviours accordingly over time.

Knowledge that speaks to children's discursive consciousness and experiences enable connections to be made with individual everyday practices and environmental impacts (Bickerstaff and Walker, 2001). It is not the extent of this scientific knowledge that is important but the ability of a person to connect, relate and link their everyday behaviour to the knowledge which willing turn alter consumption patterns. Therefore old patterns of

consumption will be regarded as not making sense. Policy makers for sustainable development would therefore be best served to consider who and what is represented in framing the information on sustainable travel. Likewise, the questions of who has vested interests in the strategies proposed and are there any uncertainties or ambiguities within the information also need to be addressed.

It is important to note here that local knowledge about environmental sustainability is fluid and inseparable from socio- cultural practices (Irwin *et al*, 1999) within the household and therefore how a household views and prioritises sustainability as a household practice is dependent upon that household's context. There is considerable evidence which suggests that children's travel behaviour mimics that of their parents (Scottish Executive, 2003). In Gateshead in particular, children reported on the thoughts and attitudes of their parents in terms of using the car for their journey to school and given their cultural setting it may be more unlikely that these children are motivated towards developing active travel behaviours as part of their everyday mobility. As Freeman and Quigg (2009) state, children are described as *transport canaries* in that they are more vulnerable to adverse environmental impacts e.g. air pollution, and are warnings of heightened and prolonged unsustainable travel behaviour in the future (Centre for Sustainable Transportation, 2003, 1). A 2006 study by O' Brien however shows that few parents are aware of the impacts of cars on their children's wellbeing but are concerned when they learn about these and may motivate them to make changes to their travel behaviours.

This relationship between knowledge and context would explain why some households act in certain sustainable ways over others. The concept of environmental sustainability is equally informed by micro and macro societal structures that shape the current high profile public and private discourses on what constitutes a *sustainable* journey to school. There needs to be an engagement with theoretical debates around the 'public's constructions of responsibility, agency and choice' (Bickerstaff *et al*, 2008) in relation to the journey to school, in order to understand why modal shift has not been experienced in light of national and local large-scale policy. How children view their 'place' and 'responsibility' within these debates surrounding environmental sustainability is of critical value in this regard.

7.6 Conclusion

This research shows that in some ways the constant effective communication of 'sustainability' may encourage some individuals to make pro-environmental behaviour changes. However, the ability to alter behaviour regarding the journey to school in such a

way is dependent upon so many negotiations that take place at the intersections of the household, public space and the school. However, what became clear is that if the message is purely proposed through the school site, there is a fear that take-up would be limited, and interventions are required at the other two key sites too, particularly within the home site. Understanding the links between the home and school, between the home and public space and between public space and the school would allow for more effective environmental messages which would have more impact and lead to actual change. Sustainable consumption should not be viewed as a neutral tool of environmental policy (Hobson, 2001) given the fact that it is a concept that is socially and culturally constructed.

Children of all ages are knowledgeable to different extents about the global message of 'sustainability', yet I would argue that purely physical interventions aimed at altering the built environment are not totally adequate. Attention needs to be paid to the social and cultural aspects of the journey to school and spatial policy needs to adapt in order for children to feel welcome in public space. From a social perspective, the journey to school may become a sustainable asset as long as it contributes to greater social cohesion in communities through which children move, hence increasing the levels of social capital and social justice. A sustainable journey to school would not be one which encourages spaces of exclusion, fear or social segregation (Gaskell, 2008). Many of the children in this research agreed with this, advising that promoting other ways to travel to school have to be holistic.

The research shows that some schools may respond more effectively to some strategies, for example, the walking bus or cycling, than others, however this depends on a number of interrelated factors, for example, local physical environment and school location, parental moral choice, bus travel availability and individual school schemes. Ryton Comprehensive reports that their breakfast club is proving important, whereas a better experience on the bus was a priority for children in Matthew Arnold Secondary. It was clear that providing alternative drop off points in which parents may park did not seem to work well across the board. Children at Ryton Comprehensive reportedly said that their parents did not like the idea of dropping their children off at a distance to the school as this distance was perceived as too great. In reality the site was approximately 100m. Take-up of this strategy has therefore been slow. The overall lack of popularity of public transport is an area that has been reflected in the Gateshead Council Sustainable Travel Policy (GCC, 2008) and has instigated a closer working relationship with Nexus and private bus companies and children report that simple measures to ensure cleaner, more efficient bus services would make way

for a more sustainable journey to school, not just from a physical perspective but also as a social experience.

Whilst national frameworks provide an overall strategic objective, the success of altering people's travel behaviour to adopt more sustainable means at a local level, may also depend on the priority of sustainable travel within the school. Children at SS Phil and Jim Primary are well aware of the high priority fixed on sustainability and this is reflected in their individual and collective choices regarding their journeys to school. SS Phil and Jim Primary had a very effective communication strategy which involved posters and displays, regular newsletters and annual reports. At parental meetings, sustainable travel was a point of discussion. In Ryton Comprehensive and Matthew Arnold Secondary the promotion of the health benefits of walking or cycling is regarded by the children as sporadic, for example during the Walk to School Week or Cycling Proficiency Week. Children advised that a more concerted effort across the entire year might work better and ensure continual engagement with the issues surrounding school travel.

Research needs to weave the different influences on mobility choice together to reduce the disjuncture between policy discourse and everyday practices. In terms of the push for more sustainable journeys to school, for example, childcare policies, after school clubs, extended schools, school admissions policies and working hour directives prove incongruous to the sustainability agenda. With respect to school admission policies, the availability of school choice (irrespective of home address) seems to counter the argument for promoting walking and cycling to school given increasing distances that need to be covered. Assuming that the choice of how a child travels to school may fall to the parent (or carer), especially amongst younger children, the child seems to have little platform from which to negotiate.

Requirements of employment generally result in work hours differing from school hours which inevitably provide fewer choices available to households with respect to mobility. Fixed-route public transport may not provide an efficient alternative to the car in some cases. There may be a need (or choice) to transport children to distant schools in areas where housing is unaffordable or to take children to schools which, according to the league tables are offering a 'better' quality of education. Schools do not have the facility to deal with sick children and hence the parent or carer has to have the ability to return home when needed, therefore limiting the practicalities of car sharing or utilisation of public transport. The unavailability or prohibitive expense of daily childcare further compounds the issue.

There seems to be an impasse between the current conceptual understanding of childhood mobilities and practical interventions. There is a need for policy **and** the ability to deliver it. Policy measures such as implementing happiness lessons are aimed at teaching decision-making, self confidence and risk management to children and young people. However this once again is executed within a regulated environment in which set targets are aimed for, and a set curriculum is adhered to. The actual practice of these aims by children is however difficult given their restriction in public space. The irony is that if children were afforded more space in the outdoors without constant monitoring and management, these skills would be taught in a much more favourable way – a way in which the children have experienced for themselves and put in practice something that becomes a habit or a way of living.

It is argued that only sustained, well supported and inclusive policy efforts will secure marked changes in consumption practices (Burgess *et al*, 1998). The call for a sustainable journey to school has been a constant message for the past decade channelled through schools especially, and augmented by larger scale sustainable transport policy initiatives advertised on mass media. The strategies used mostly through schools and public messages to encourage a reduction of car use often seek to modify children's behaviour. Conventional approaches to road safety, for example, pedestrian education programmes that the schools participate in, seek to modify the child's behaviour and to re-educate the child as to how to act appropriately in public space (Roberts and Coggan, 1994). The priority should surely be to alter the environment rather than the child, as highlighted in CAFE's recent report on *Civilised Streets* (2008) which argues that streets which are designed to give all users more freedom of movement, and not only cars, are ultimately slower, safer and more social places. While it is necessary to educate children and parents about road safety, the primary goal of policy makers should be to make the environment safer. One way is to provide opportunities for children to participate in identifying and responding to these dangers and act accordingly with changes suggested in their environments. This of course requires policy makers to appreciate the decision-making capabilities of children and young people and to provide opportunities for their meaningful participation in the process by acknowledging their experience is vital in shaping decisions that affect them every day. Their participation needs to extend way beyond tokenism and offer meaningful participation. Children need to see that action is taken from their advice. It would also acknowledge that children have a right to be visible and present in public space without the threat of being labelled as anti-social.

This also has significant implications for community development. The delinking of the individual and household from their local communities has led to an individual-focused mentality and therefore sustainability issues are not approached as a collective 'good'. Contemporary society seems to be driven by individualism, selfish consumerism, and rigid nanny state regulations and rights legislation (Furedi, 2002). The notion of partnerships within a community was a common thread in discussions about the journey to school. This may be a partnership between local homeowners and the school in working together to create an environment which encourages children to engage with public space, both socially and spatially. It may also be the partnership between local companies and the school in offering advice and services to encourage cycling, for example, as was the case in Ryton Comprehensive.

It is easy for powerful groups to exert power over groups perceived to hold less power and children are perceived to be the least powerful members of contemporary society. When adults deny children the right to be active agents in their own right – whether it is in school, public space or the home –due to fear, risk aversion and intolerance - I assert that they threaten not only their long-term physical and psychological health, but the health of society as a whole. Clearly there is a need to take into account spatial, social, cultural and family contexts in which children find themselves which accounts for vast differences in the experiences of children on their journey to school as:

'No child can escape the impact of economic and spatial forces, nor ideologies about children and their families' (Qvortrup, 2000, 79).

The need to develop more differentiated policies focused on localised sustainability practices is paramount. In agreement with Blake (1999), an emphasis must be placed on the constant negotiation between partners and stakeholders that are sensitive to local environments and will involve a more equitable distribution of responsibility between different stakeholders in developing relevant environmental sustainable policy and practices. The research has shown that there are a great number of complex negotiations that take place in the search for encouraging local sustainable behaviours. Networks between local shop keepers and the schools and between the local authorities and the public all need to be sustained over the long-term if the message of sustainable travel is to be created effectively. In speaking to the local authorities a number of issues will need to be resolved in order to up-scale the work focused on sustainable travel, namely, the securing of constant, long-term funding; the ongoing use of the planning system which coordinates the approaches within education, transport and urban development and the continued integrated networking between the

schools and LEA and travel advisors. The final point is significant. To date the relationship between the schools and the travel advisory services seem to be effective however for long-term focus, it is reported that the implementation and effectiveness of schemes and strategies need to be measured and these results shared as a base for best-practice. This would also ensure a long-term strategy to sustainable travel, not just for the journey to school, but for wider, complex mobilities.

In conclusion, policy is more than purely raising environmental awareness. It needs to promote pro-environmental behaviour, which possibly involves lifestyle changes and this needs policy makers to understand the complexities inherent in people's everyday mobilities. Drawing on broader social and institutional theory, this evidence suggests that policy must be sensitive to these everyday complexities in which individual's experience, which are framed and constrained by socio-economic, cultural, physical and political institutional contexts. This research suggests that greater emphasis be placed on the negotiation of partnerships (and these partnerships must include children) that are sensitive to and understanding of these variations and will involve a more equitable distribution of levels of responsibility between all stakeholders in 'just' environmental sustainability (Agyeman *et al*, 2003).

Chapter 8

Conclusions

8.1 Introduction

In this final chapter I draw together the conclusions of this research and locate them within wider practical, policy related implications. Section 8.2 outlines the main conclusions against the key research questions and set them within the broader theoretical and methodological debates. Section 8.3 deals with the practical implications of the conclusions and provides meaning to them by placing them within a practical policy-driven framework. The third section provides a review of how the research has effectively contributed to theoretical, methodological and policy discourses as well as highlighting the challenges faced. The final section provides a focus for future research.

8.2 Main Conclusions

8.2.1 How are the journeys to school experienced by the children and what meanings are attached to these journeys?

A key aim of this research is to understand how children experience their journeys to school. This thesis has added to research on children's environmental mobility experiences from a geographical perspective (Mackett, 2004; McDonald, 2008; McMillan, 2007; Pooley *et al*, 2005a). The children's experiences of their journey to school have been revealed through their individual and collective perceptions, negotiations and meanings which they have attached to their journeys and provide insight into their levels of individual agency as well as into the structures which shape these experiences. The research highlights the importance of this everyday experience to the children, as a microcosm of wider mobility experiences. In centring the importance of the child's voice (Cahill, 2007b), from both a theoretical and methodological standpoint, their explanations of their independent and collective experiences of their journeys to school focuses on how different modes of mobility can alter children's feelings and everyday physical, social and cultural experiences.

Each child's experience of their journeys to school is different due to their own individual circumstances. The majority of the younger children were accompanied, yet some showed different levels of negotiation, for example, asking to walk, cycle or scoot a small distance alone or with friends. Yet, in the same light, many of the older children were driven to school and felt that they had little choice over their mobility. The evidence suggests that

children and young people experience varied and unequal journeys to school, showing varying levels of environmental interaction, local area knowledge and risk strategies. The journeys can vary depending upon what mode of transport is used, whether the journey is done independently or accompanied and the nature and structure of the local built environment through which the journey is made.

When the experiences are constructed as positive, the foci are primarily upon their processes of engagement - friendship groups, their enjoyment of autonomous independent social engagement with their local community, their connection with their natural environment and their individual responsibility for their physical health. Children of all ages reported that they felt it was important to experience independent mobility in order to cultivate friendships and enjoy social interaction within a space relatively free of direct parental control. They showed agency in managing their own time and their own micro-geographies in that they could change the route to school if required. This social interaction was regarded as the most important reason why children who were driven to school felt that they 'missed out' or were excluded. Children reported how exciting it was to experience their journey to school in winter months, if it snowed or was icy, and they demonstrated risk strategy awareness in altering their behaviour in need, for example, wearing different clothes of their choice and becoming more aware of their local environment if they were walking or cycling. They enjoyed the ability to choose to go to friends houses after school if they so wanted and the fact that they felt independent to have this choice. Their understanding of how walking, cycling and scooting contributes to their physical health was often discussed at length (Mackett *et al.*, 2003) and they reportedly enjoyed the fact that they felt it was their autonomous decision to see that they were healthy.

The key issues that reportedly negatively affect their journeys are increasing levels of localised traffic congestion (Pooley *et al.*, 2005a), poor experiences on public and school buses, an increasing lack of acceptance within public space and the lack of opportunity for meaningful participation in environmental decision-making. They mentioned how physical urban form impacted on their journey to school decision, with particular reference to areas which were perceived to be unsafe (largely due to traffic) or dirty and unkempt (CABE, 2004; McMillan, 2007).

The findings of the research are in line with similar research involving teenagers (Brooks, 2006; Malone, 2002; Stevens, 2001) which shows that they embody a youth culture and regard public space as important as a place to meet and socialise. This shared culture

(France, 2007) allowed certain groups to appropriate space and make it their own, which was commented on in both a positive light (if the child belonged to the group) and in a negative light (if the child was younger or did not belong to this group).

Children are extremely aware of the concept of sustainability and many showed dismay at the fact that those who lived close enough to walk and cycle to school still chose, or had no choice, to be driven to school. They were adamant that stricter controls needed to be put in place to prohibit such behaviour, such as increased policing at school sites, exclusion zones and restricted parking areas. They also offered valuable advice in terms of positive encouragement in the form of offering rewards to those who chose more sustainable modes of transport. The majority of children, whilst enjoying the ability to share space with their friends, reported that their experiences of bus travel were largely negative. This stemmed from them feeling unwanted and rejected, particularly on public buses, both by the drivers and the general public. Whilst some acknowledged that they were often loud and boisterous, they remarked that the lack of respect they gained led to a feeling of embarrassment and isolation. The physical space on the buses is reported to be dirty, expensive, crowded and unmanaged, especially on school buses where the issue of smoking was the most discussed issue with regards to their negative experiences. They called for more management of this situation and felt that the monitoring of such behaviour by security cameras is a waste of time as there is never any punishment given out. This reflected a general acceptance that their presence within public space as a whole was deemed unworthy and unacceptable, in that they were not allowed into specific shops after school due to the general public perception that they were causing trouble. Their lack of interaction with community space and other people within it, mostly adults, is cause for concern as they repeatedly stated that they felt isolated, ignored and hence at increased risk if they needed any help from anyone. A number of children reported that if any incident happened on their journey to school they felt that the general public would ignore their pleas for help. They stated that this does not form the base of a 'sustainable' society. This over-riding message of intolerance and exclusion (Furedi, 2002) is echoed in the call from the children for more meaningful inclusion in local policy related matters. Whilst they stated that the perception remains that children have a voice, it is often muted or changed or indeed not allowed to be heard at all. There is a mixture of puzzlement, detachment and yearning to be more involved or accepted into community as whole, but especially in decision-making that affects their everyday lives.

This research has offered a unique view on how children *feel* on their journey to school. It is clear that the journey to school, as an everyday physical mobility, represents an emotional space as well as a social, economic and cultural space. The journey is invested with meaning. For some it represents a time of freedom, fun and creativity, when they can engage in public space and with friends, for others it represents a time of chaos and noise, and yet for others it represents a time of loneliness, control, rejection and sadness. Whilst it would be foolish to generalise, it is apparent in listening to the children that generally those who walk, cycle and scoot to school report on feeling glad of their journey to school choice. Whilst those who travel by bus like the element of autonomy and independence, their personal experiences of crowdedness and anti-social behaviour for others overshadow the positive feelings. In most cases those who travelled by car complained at the lack of interaction they had with other children and seemed to wish for some independent time alone so as to experience those things readily talked about by others. Of all the children who took part in this research it was those who travelled by car which showed the greatest levels of sadness and hope for change.

8.2.2 What are the structural determinants of the journey to school?

The spatial aspects of the journey to school mirror the ever-changing complexities of contemporary everyday life for both children and adults (McDonald, 2008). The changing nature and structure of the journey to school over the past decade increasingly reflects the continued want and/or need for independent personal mobility. People may choose to live greater distances from their workplace, children may live some distance away from their chosen school, and families' social networks are no longer constrained by distance if there is access to transport. Whilst these spatial and social patterns of mobility may offer convenience and choice (Vigar, 2000), they are seen as contributing to fewer people using cycles, walking or taking public transport.

A household's everyday mobilities are highly complex, time-driven, fluid and spatially disjointed (Jarvis, 2005; McDonald, 2008) due to a range of interrelated factors, for example, age, gender, cultural background, race and ethnicity, the built environment, economic circumstance and level of accessibility (Lucas, 2004; McMillan *et al*, 2006) and hence decisions and negotiations regarding the journey to school lie at the intersections of the key childhood spaces of the home, public space and the school. Decisions made in one space impact on behaviours embodied in another. This research illustrated that the decision as to how to make the journey to school is not a clear, rational, linear choice. Analysing the

influencing factors that are present within the three key childhood spaces of the home, public space and the school, highlighted the complexity of the decision making process.

The journey to school is a power-laden mobility. Understanding the journey to school at the intersection between the social, cultural, political and physical spaces of the home, the school and public space has been useful in my research. These three interrelated spheres of influence on the structure and nature of the child's experience of their journey to school have a significant impact on children's everyday mobilities and determine whether their mobility is regarded as being 'sustainable', in view of global conceptions of environmental sustainability. Traditionally children's geographies have neglected a thorough understanding of all interlinked spheres of influence on the journey to school and hence the child's varying experiences of it. Much research has focused on one of two of these spaces of childhood, however, by including the school site, an important space has been added to the debate.

Their positive and negative experiences are framed by various interrelated factors negotiated within the spheres of the home, public space and the school. Negotiations that take place within the home revolve primarily around perceived levels of safety in the local environment, where ironically if the area around the school is regarded as being too 'unsafe' largely due to localised traffic congestion, the child more often than not is driven to school thereby reinforcing the perception that the localised traffic is an issue. Some children reported that their negotiation tactics were such that if they proved worthy of making decisions and being able to demonstrate risk strategies, then their parents would allow them to walk, cycle or scoot to school independently. This is in line with Solberg's (1997) research which showed that children transformed age as a relative concept through negotiating alternatives. Some children reported that they had to reach a specific age, usually when entering secondary school, until they were given the opportunity for independent mobility and choice. More often than not, however, the negotiation did not take place and children accepted that the perceived risk was too great. Some children and parents however acknowledge the need for healthy behaviours and often mentioned that this overrode the decisions to drive to school. Other parents also accepted that children need to learn how to deal with real-life situations, otherwise they turn into ineffectual adults, and that their children were required to be more independent in order to learn these life-skills.

Negotiations in the home depend upon the priority that was placed upon sustainable behaviour (Hinchcliffe 1996, Sullivan 2006). In Oxford especially, children mentioned the fact that their parents believed that cycling and walking were sustainable behaviours that should be encouraged to children and that this led to modal choice for the school journey.

Similarly, the car culture (Maxwell, 2001), especially mentioned by young boys, seemed to be a learnt perception, with many commenting upon the fact that their family regarded the car as a definite need in today's society and hence would not consider alternative transport means. This has implications for the need for prolonged, effective communication at a local scale if sustainable travel behaviour is to be adopted over time as car dependent children become car-dependent adults (Mitchell et al, 2007).

Negotiation in public space often came in the form of accepting the fact that certain areas were restricted, for example in local shops (which wouldn't allow children inside) or on local buses (where their behaviour was deemed inappropriate). Children also stated that negotiations within public space had to be done every day due to the physical built environment of their local communities as well as the physical presence of specific social groupings which formed within specific public spaces (Wooley, 2007). The children's reflections of their movements and experiences through public space reflected their abilities in managing risk and time. Changing circumstances, for example, in the built environment or the weather created the opportunity for negotiations to take place. Often these negotiations came in the form of interactions within social groupings.

As discussed in Chapter 2, physical, conceptual and moral boundaries may circumscribe the extent of children's independent mobility patterns. From the closed arenas of the home space to the infinite horizons of cyberspace, socio-spatial boundaries may forestall and structure children's movements. As James and James (2001) note, the controlling aspect of such constrained mobility through public space is promulgated through parental notions of care and protection. This further separates 'children' from the 'adult world', excluding them from discussion about the impact on transportation and mobility policy, and on the choice reflected in their journey to school. Conventional approaches to improving levels of safety for children as they move through public space conceptualise children as victims, educating them by fear of the risks, regarding them as unreliable presences within urban areas in need of education. As Rose notes:

'Childhood is the most intensively governed sector of personal existence. In different ways, at different times, and by many different routes vying from one section of society to another, the health, welfare, and rearing of children have been linked in thought and practice to the destiny of the nation and the responsibilities of the state. The modern child has become the focus of innumerable projects that purport to safeguard it from physical, sexual and moral danger to ensure its 'normal' development, to actively promote certain capacities of attributes such as intelligence, educability and emotional stability' (Rose, 1989, 121).

School negotiation was noted as being largely culturally-driven, in that certain behaviours were regarded as acceptable, for example, cycling to school, whereas others were largely deemed unacceptable, parking at the school gate to drop children off. The over-riding message of sustainability was drilled through many channels within certain schools (most notable SS Phil and Jim Primary), via particular school policy measures, curriculum focus and a general understanding of what is regarded as best-practice and culturally appropriate given their local geographies. Children from SS Phil and Jim Primary noted that they were proud of their school's stance on sustainable travel and felt that this message was conveyed in a whole school approach so that it became an accepted encouraged behaviour, both in and out of school. Negotiation at a school site also depended upon the provision of certain facilities and services, for example, bike sheds and storage, as well as the school's link with the local community. A significant negotiation (noted at Ryton Comprehensive) which was actively encouraged through the school site was between local community services and the school, for example, cycling shops, local police and bus companies, however the extent to which this is actually happening in practice seems limited. More research on the extent of this linked discourse is required.

Structured by a political framework, the journey to school has evolved over the past decade due to a wide range of interrelated policies, strategies and schemes developed in transport, education, social inclusion, health and urban design. Sustainable development is a cross-cutting theme across many of the current strategies aimed at promoting more sustainable modes of travel for shorter journeys. The Travelling to School Initiative (DfES, 2003b) as a framework promotes sustainable travel however when placed within the myriad of other policies and strategies it is clear that there are often competing demands. For example, the promotion of choice in school conflicts with the framework as families who have this choice exercise it in such a way when they drive their children to a distant school. The children themselves mentioned that walking and cycling are encouraged on one hand, yet, strategies aimed at increasing safety and accessibility of public space are found wanting, Children are sometimes not accepted in certain shops on their journey home from school, nor are they tolerated on public buses (Church *et al*, 2000).

Over the recent decade there has been a growing public and policy concern for children, a massive anxiety about their capacities, safety and status in contemporary western society (Aitken, 2001b; Brooks, 2006; Griffiths, 2008; Louv, 2006). Childhood is composed of a number of elements: particularly significant are the adult constructions of childhood itself,

the growing blurriness of the boundaries between childhood and adulthood and concerns about the lived experiences of children today. Increased knowledges, the commodification of childhood, and the spatial and temporal marginalisation of children by perceived adultist fears all contribute to policy and public debate surrounding the issue of childhood. Growing instances of increased mental health problems amongst children (Mental Health Foundation, 1999) provides compelling concern around the future state of childhood in contemporary western society. It is reported that 1 in 10 children have mental health problems (DCSF, 2007). It is the conjunction of normality and children's protection from the outside world that is unnerving. There has been a mass retreat from adults upholding public standards in public spaces for fear of false accusations or sudden, unpredictable violence that allows people to ignore what happens around them. The kind of communal confidence has largely disappeared from society, due to a fear of consequences (Brooks, 2006). As a Geographer I am interested in the shrinking spaces of childhood that seem to have resulted from living in an increasingly risk-averse, surveillance-based society (Furedi, 2002). Although the previous Labour Government's Every Child Matters framework and The Children's Plan has theoretically put the well-being of children to the forefront of policy debate, in practice it seems that their 'safety first' message has driven out opportunities for children to experience, develop and learn in their own childhood spaces. This seems to have led to an over-simplified, myopic viewpoint that creativity and personal growth can occur in a sanitised, risk-free, adult-controlled 'safe' world. Adult nostalgia is conflated with images that childhood should embody beauty, purity, wildness and innocence, yet the picture that seems to have emerged is one where the culture of risk aversion has encroached into and over-structured childhood spaces. Decisions made in some households show that the journey to school sometimes embodies a risk-averse strategy with parents choosing to transport their children by car to school so they do not have to interact with the dangerous outside, public world. This spatial and social restriction is commented upon by many of the children participating in this research.

There seems to be a visible tension between how children are ideologically viewed and how they are physically treated by contemporary society. On the one hand they are over-protected and kept constrained within a sanitised, indoor world where it is constructed to be safe (largely by parents). They are encouraged to stay behind closed doors, so that they do not engage in public space and community. They are enticed to stay indoors due to the fears of their parents, teachers and any other adult which views their presence as at risk. They are encouraged to become invisible. On the other hand they are victimised and

publicly admonished when they are visible in spaces through which they naturally need to move and experience. They are constantly watched, assumed guilty of breaking the law and not tolerated in public space. They learn that people ignore them, and that people begrudgingly tolerate them. They report that if they need help, very little is available due in part to the public's reluctance to offer aid. This damning account of children's 'visibility' in public space makes for a very hostile, unsustainable society and one which is reflected in the findings of this research. Children therefore grow up in a vacuum of perceived indifference, where they learn to ignore those around them as they are ignored by those around them. This theme of adult indifference came through in this research. The children reported that they get no help from adults if they feel threatened and nor are they stopped if they are threatening others. Some reported that they feel both powerful and neglected in public places due to the apparent fear of instilling civilised behaviour. Such shrinking of childhood spaces within contemporary society has significant influence on the quest for a sustainable journey to school and highlights the barriers that are in place, both socially and spatially, restricting the growth of sustainable societies.

8.2.3 Linking the global sustainability debate to the local journey to school.

This thesis provides a unique view of how children view the concept of sustainability and how they use this understanding in providing strategies for a 'sustainable journey to school'. With the deliberate centring of children's voices to this debate, their understanding and detailed nuances of localised contexts is significant in addressing the current gaps in knowledge surrounding the journey to school. This research follows the assertion that children and young people are significant social actors and solution-based researchers who consider local contextual sustainability strategies, in view of regional and national environmental policy frameworks. They show concerns about, and aspirations for, their future urban environment.

The concept of '*sustainability*' was understood by the children from both a global and local scale. The children proposed strategies and schemes relevant to their own individual localised contexts. However, what was highlighted was the fact that just because the global message of 'sustainability' is visible within global media and promulgated through a variety of national policies, it does not translate into immediate action to alter travel behaviour. There are a number of interlinked, complex factors present which may cause barriers to such change. The plethora of strategies, schemes and policies that have been advanced over the past decade to promote the sustainability agenda seem convoluted and complex in

their own right and seem to provide mixed messages, especially when focusing upon those influencing the journey to school. At one level they propose sustainable mobility but actively encouraging the use of public transport, community cohesion and sustainable spatial development, whilst on the other they espouse the notion of individual choice in schools and social services in order to increase levels of accessibility and social justice. Changes in mobility behaviour with regards to the journey to school therefore need to take account of the complexities within choice, how people make decisions and what the key drivers are behind the decisions in order to understand the influences on people's behaviours at a micro-scale.

Children are often treated as if they have less knowledge about their local area and less experience within it, however, given the time that some of them spend in their immediate environments areas the evidence here shows they have a very well developed sense of local knowledge given their complex experiences (Skelton and Valentine, 1998). They are highly complex due to the landscape of childhood being socially and spatially demarcated. Children dwelled on the significance of friendship, the ability to experience free time to explore public space and placed value on nature and their environment. Their agency is foregrounded in these spaces of engagement. They understood that sustainability is not just a physical construct which requires changes in actual travel behaviour but also the importance of more social sustainable travel for the impact on mental health. The understanding of the need for social sustainability showed their ability to link the physical elements of sustainability to their social health. Studies have shown that the loss of independent mobility poses a threat to children's physical and social health (Davis and Jones, 1996). Motivated in large part by parents concerns of the dangers, this has been linked to increased sedentary lifestyles, declining fitness and obesity problems in children. Likewise, the loss of the opportunity to explore and interact with a stimulating environment and independently negotiate the social and physical aspects of it leads to children who feel unable to cope with a variety of experiences within public contexts and could lead to mental health issues later on in life.

The journey to school falls within high-profile public and policy discourses centred within the agenda of sustainability. It has been used as a tool in promoting the ideals of sustainable travel and is linked to government initiatives aimed at changing household behaviours. As a discourse, sustainable development seeks to offer the notion of combining economic, social and environmental development in a holistic manner. As Gibbs (2007) states, sustainable development is about the integration of environment, economy and society.

Sustainable development has become a significant discourse at all spatial scales. Not only is policy applied to local environmental guardianship, it has become a linchpin in seeking to address the global urban problems in contemporary cities. Issues such as social justice and accessibility have become equally as important as environmental stewardship and economic well being. A number of social, economic, cultural, political and environmental transformations have triggered a change in the structure and nature of the journey to school over the past decade. In this respect, global and local spheres coincide with the journey to school

Using the insights of 'just sustainability' (Agyeman *et al*, 2003), the first integration must be that of scale. In terms of policy formulation it is necessary to understand their economic, social, cultural and physical geographical contexts present at different scales. A sustainable journey to school cannot assume a fixed singular public area but rather must take into consideration where this space is located and also the broader framework of societal change occurring across a wider region. This research emphasises the importance of the human-environment interaction at a local scale. As this research shows, the journey to school as a policy tool through which to encourage more sustainable travel behaviours and patterns is regarded as not only a physical mobility but as a social and emotional space. In order for people to change their behaviours at a local level it seems that the structures need to be in place to provide a socially sustainable environment, which accepts the presence of children. The political dimension of sustainability deals with how to achieve the goals of policy. Because contemporary society is complex and diverse, decision making processes have to be dispersed widely to cater for all voices in a community. The journey to school may act as a catalyst for change through active participation and involvement between children, their local communities and policy makers. Past research has discussed how sustainable development issues were perceived as more important on a global scale than on a local scale (Lindstrom and Kuller, 2006). If the responsibility of sustainability was placed on government and global organisations but not as much at a family level, then expecting a change in travel behaviour is somewhat unrealistic. For any change to take place, sustainable travel needs to be an important issue at a family level as it is the space of the home which is where the decisions are primarily made.

Secondly, '*sustainability integration must be approached transversally*' (Pares *et al*, 2007, 168). This means that all of the different dimensions must be taken into consideration – political, social, environmental, economic and cultural arenas that intersect with the discourse surrounding the journey to school. It is impossible to analyse the journey to

school solely from an economic point of view or from an environmental point of view for example. If a society is to become sustainable it must do in its entirety, accommodating all of its dimensions. This integrative approach would lead to a more holistic, practical strategy formulation.

Thirdly, as individuals we can appreciate the logic behind 'everyone doing their bit' as it recognises a collective responsibility but the problem arises when people do not believe others are doing 'their bit' and therefore fear that their 'own bit' will prove futile. This is compounded by habitual behaviour. The journey to school is a habitual behaviour, a routine in everyday life governed by utility maximisation as well as familiarity and accepted behaviour (Hinchcliffe, 1996). Our travel choices are not made in a vacuum but in the context of choices in our lifestyle. However, times change and our lifestyle choices and resultant travel behaviours that shape them can *if* the socio political and economic framework exists.

Planners increasingly seek to create sustainable places, cities and regions in which development is supporting the social, economic, cultural and environmental resources for the long term benefit of individuals, communities and societies. There has been an enormous increase in government publications on environment-society relations and sustainability along with urgent concerns over environmental degradation, global warming and climate change (IPCC, 2007; UNEP, 2007). Critical questions such as 'what environment is in danger?', 'who is at threat?' 'do certain communities benefit over others?' and 'how is the concept measured over time?' are all key concerns and address Torgerson's (1995) concerns that sustainability is so ambiguous that it allows a whole range of actors from different backgrounds to proceed without agreeing on a single action or end-point. Defining sustainability has therefore proved cumbersome, yet there seems to have been a move in recognising the multidimensional aspects of it – economic, social, political and cultural. Sustainable development policy in the UK has aimed to consider all of these dimensions, yet when policies aimed at the journey to school have reported to have had little impact on reducing car travel, the question remains as to how much is understood in terms of individual choice and resultant travel behaviours? The continued dependency upon the car underlies the complexities of discussions around place, spatial distribution and scale.

The journey to school is linked to these wider debates surrounding transport and mobility. This thesis asserts that the school journey is not only constructed as a form of travel, but also as an indicator of children's independent mobility. It is intrinsically linked to wider

discourses on sustainable development at both global and local scales. Transport has an important role to play in promoting accessibility, addressing social exclusion and enhancing social justice (Agyeman *et al*, 2003) whilst at the same time offer solutions to the global concerns of climate change.

There is a broad recognition in children and young people's policy and services that the environment is a key determinant of well-being alongside more established social and economic factors. A higher priority needs to be placed on efforts to improve children's everyday environments - their homes, streets, schools, communities - acknowledging their right to a safe, healthy, enjoyable and rewarding present, and a sustainable future (CABE, 2008). Problems like congestion, litter, loss of green space and continuing carbon emissions compromise all of these things. Improving quality of life without damaging the environment and adversely affecting future generations is a necessary part of building a society that cares for its children and young people. This is an issue of intergenerational equity impacting on children and young people's rights to a safe, healthy and sustainable future.

Using the evidence in this research to inform policy designed to mitigate climate change and the energy resource security threats caused by the transport sector indicates that travel behaviour is best galvanised by the introduction and communication of localised soft measures in policy directed at individuals travel behaviours. The decisions as to how to travel to school are largely made within the home and family at a local level so an increased concentration on locally based participatory projects is suggested, in line with previous research (Lindstrom and Kuller, 2006). These locally-focused strategies may partly address the congestion problems at the school gate. There are a full range of instrumental, affective, symbolic and moral reasons why people choose to drive their children to school rather than allow them to walk, cycle or take the bus. Demand management strategies can focus upon regulation, pricing and policy, land use management policies and a range of bespoke travel policies to encourage the public to make smarter choices in their travel. Nevertheless coupling these with hard measures such as pedestrianisation, bus lanes, cycle lanes and parking charges might be the way forward as this will target differing beliefs, attitudes and values and be most effective in sustaining long term change to mobility patterns.

Given that their research findings and its methodological insight have already informed local sustainable travel policy in both Oxford and Gateshead local education authorities, children's views are significant in contributing to environmental decision-making and policy development surrounding sustainability, community cohesion and urban design. Effective

sustainable development policy requires the informed participation of children and young people. The data provides rich contextual strategies developed by the children and young people for more effective sustainable mobilities, especially in light of failing policy attempts by national government to encourage more sustainable travel behaviour at a national and local level. Softer issues of transport psychology, for example, cultural values, need to be considered in order to influence smarter transport choices leading to a more sustainable future. Attitudes, values, motivations, experiences and transport patterns vary across all segments of the travelling public and the challenge is to seek to understand the localised knowledges and differences. Children are a great voice in this regard as their nuanced understanding of such issues is immense and immediate.

8.3 Reflections on the successes and challenges of the research

The research has been successful from a number of perspectives. The methodological contribution has proved notable. Certainly, the levels of enthusiasm, creativity and commitment with which the children participated throughout the various stages of the fieldwork were impressive. The merits of employing a participatory methodology are clear through the presentation of the findings. They are rich and detailed and provide a wonderful glimpse into the geographical experiences of the children at an everyday level. Using this approach, children were active partners in making decisions about the research direction and process rather than being objects in it (Coats, 2002; Driskell, 2002). The research design was emergent, through a process of negotiation and discussion with the children at each stage of the process. The children devised and conducted a wide array of preferred methods, lead active discussions, set their own agendas within the research framework and presented the findings after analysis and verification to key stakeholders whom they chose were critical to dissemination. The research emerged out of the grounded experience of the children and out of collaboration between them, teachers, families, local policy makers, key stakeholders and me. Children are recognised as being central to the research process, knowledgeable about their own experiences and a participatory methodology was used to allow for a multitude of methods to be employed which has added to the richness and texture of the data.

The fact that the research was set across two geographical settings provided some elements of contrast in policy focus and cultural diversity. The age range of the children (from 4 to 16 years of age) provided a more in-depth view of how a range of children felt about their journeys to school. Past research has seemed to focus on smaller age ranges, yet given that the children were the key drivers of the research process, the large age range demonstrated

the flexibility of the methodological approach as well as the ability of very young children to engage at some level in meaningful participatory research.

This research has a strong design addressing both analytical and empirical issues. It contributes to academic and policy needs for information on children and young people and their everyday mobilities. Policy makers need to commit to a legislative and social structure designed to meaningfully engage with children and develop a paradigm which allows for mutual dependence and trust.

The inclusion of children's accounts of their spatial and social experiences on their journey to school into this wider geographical debate not only enriches our understanding of childhood, but also contributes and provides texture to knowledge of issues that children contend with everyday in their everyday spaces – spatial cognition and environmental competencies, social negotiation, place identity and meaning, risk management and decision-making. Implicit in incorporating children's understandings and experiences of their everyday experiences, stakeholders can move to a more holistic, integrative approach in policy development, planning, crime prevention and community generation.

This research has highlighted the tension between agency and structure in a child's everyday life. It is the conflict between the notion of 'visible' children (being accepted within theoretical debate and methodological approaches) and 'invisible' practices. The gap between rhetoric and practice seems to be widening. The fact that children may be increasingly invisible in public space is a reflection of socio-economic, political and cultural changes in contemporary British society. On the one hand, it is recognised that children are autonomous and able to make creative life choices and they are encouraged to fully engage in discussions about their life worlds, in the form of a technology and opportunity. On the other hand, however, they are physically and emotionally constrained within the spaces of control that they experience in their everyday lives (Brooks, 2006; Furedi, 2002). These boundaries of control can emanate from a number of areas. They can emanate from the household through parenting styles which can either restrict or encourage children's independent experience of their local environments. Controls can also be experienced through differing levels of accessibility and inclusion within public space. This has largely developed due to the criminalisation of outdoor social 'play', in that children seen outside are regarded as committing a crime and are dangerous and in need of constant monitoring and control, often in the form of anti-social behaviour orders, curfews and dispersal orders.

The school space can exert a level of control over children's ability to engage in creative behaviour and specific learning needs.

This study is interested in the varying types of experiences of the journey to school. In exploring the micro geographies of children's social, cultural and physical environments, this research goes beyond the quantification of the journey to school and introduced a different methodological paradigm to inform sustainable policy. So much research in the past focuses upon the number of children who no longer walk or cycle to school and lament over the loss of individual, unaccompanied mobility. However, this generality loses the spatial complexities of the journey to school experiences. This research has shown that some children do possess the ability to independently negotiate time and space. It illustrates how some children can imaginatively and creatively engage within different geographical contexts on their journey to school. They employ daily routine practices and have the ability to alter these patterns if the situation arises. Of course, it also shows how some children display a lack of ability in individual mobility and the feelings they share when provided with little alternative choice. Differing levels of children's agency is also highlighted within their boundaries of control that they experience in their everyday lives, which emanate from the home, public space and the school. Whilst it is important to understand the effects of such controls on children's everyday lives, it is equally significant to recognise that not all children are locked away behind closed doors, unable to experience unmonitored mobility. Such a perception often portrayed by statistical analysis ignores the diversity of children's experiences.

A further success of the research is that a number of new initiatives have been more actively communicated, partly due to the participatory methodological framework and the active involvement of stakeholders in the research. For example, a complimentary bus induction programme is currently being piloted across the region of Gateshead. Year 6 classes are visited by a District Bus Manager who provides information, advice and reassurance about bus travel in view of their imminent move to secondary school. A bus journey is undertaken for children to experience the route (albeit in a controlled way) and the issues such as appropriate behaviour and safety are explored. Another example is the implementation of the Bike-It strategy at Ryton Comprehensive which was developed after this research and has led the way for Gateshead to increase cycle use. Pedometers were also provided to children by the Gateshead local education authority after the presentation to key stakeholders.

The research was not without its challenges. From a methodological viewpoint, managing participatory research across four sites was a complicated, time consuming task. It is argued that children and young people can make important, timely contributions to understanding local transport and sustainability issues that affect them in their everyday lives (Barker, 2003), but ongoing strong alliances between relevant practitioners, academics, policy makers and the children themselves are required. The logistics of such an alliance could possibly not be granted a level of importance given many other 'higher' priorities that schools and communities face. The time and labour inputs are substantial for genuine, meaningful research to take place and unless there is a real commitment to social transformation through participatory research, such efforts shall be wasted. The need to get *'political and technical stakeholders on board is critical to the process of change'* (Porter and Abane, 2008) yet it is accepted that this commitment is not without its challenges. This has linked consequences for the discipline of Geography as a whole, in view of the call for increased interaction between academic and the general public, the perceived inability to engage with and influence the world and public(s) 'out there' (Castree and Harvey, 2007); and the increasing calls for academics to play more prominent public roles.

Conducting research in schools, no matter how participatory its ideological pursuit, still provides a power imbalance, purely due to the fact that the children are contained within the school space. Whilst options were available for children to opt out of this research, the options given to the children were, in hindsight, not particularly favourable and well planned. In doing further research I would seek further means to provide alternative activities. Whilst it is noble to state that children were provided with the freedom to express themselves, it is noted that this freedom was controlled within the school space at a pre-determined time. Approaching the journey to school from a child's perspective still requires a fair degree of input from adults – be it teachers or the researcher. The obvious shortcoming is that this is still my viewpoint being represented which may seem to run counter to the very idea of child agency. With more time, it would have proved beneficial to show the children the output of their research once it was compiled together, for them to verify and challenge.

The research did not engage with parents at the level which I had originally hoped, and their views are limited, sporadic and by en large by chance. Indeed, the small amount of parental input at Ryton Comprehensive was purely due to the children who participated in the research and their decision to take the information into the home space and consult their parents and partly due to informal conversation that I had with people I knew. The

limited results are somewhat skewed towards the small number of parental comments and views of one school. More input from other schools' parents would have greatly benefited this research. Other approaches could have been deployed in order to engage parental views, for example, through home visits. However their lack of response may illustrate a key issue in developing effective sustainable travel strategies which engage in the family decision making process. There may be resistance to change due to a feeling of limited responsibility at an individual level and an element of not wanting to be told what to do with respect to their own household mobility behaviours. The decisions surrounding the nature and shape of the journey to school are largely placed within the home space and depend on individual households' circumstances and priorities. From the limited number of responses by parents it is noted that they regard their child's travel mode as their personal choice, regardless of government strategies and communication to adopt a more sustainable travel mode if possible. This in some way legitimises the concerns about sustainable development as discussed in Section 7.5. Parents may have felt they weren't responsible for adopting a change to their mobility. As Hobson (2003) notes, individuals may not connect to this message, which is delivered at a nationwide scale, possibly due to their complex everyday lives. Adopting different travel behaviours is therefore not a priority and any change in the future may then depend on moral obligations and values within the home. As O'Brien's (2006) research showed if parents are more knowledgeable about the affects of not adopting more sustainable methods of travel, they may be more willing to change their behaviour.

8.4 Looking forward – avenues for further research

The evidence from this research has a number of implications for further policy formulation and related research.

Firstly, children's involvement in policy formulation for local planning issues is important. The provision of facilities for young people and their 'place' within planning processes have received much research interest (Barker, 2003). Further research has observed that their needs and views are largely ignored in urban planning which reinforces their feelings of social and political marginality (Davis and Jones, 1996; Hine and Mitchell, 2001). Children and young people are often constructed in ways in which they are assumed meaningless in active participation in shaping the design and management of their urban space. They are constructed as a number of different things: as future adults and hence unknowing of their own best interests given their young age; as vulnerable innocents in need of constant adult

protection and monitoring; as threatening and crime-focused and hence not acceptable in being visible and active in planning processes. This situation continues despite research advancing that children and young people are active users of public space and are more than capable of being meaningfully involved in the design and care of urban spaces (CABE, 2004). Evidence from this research on children's views on the concept of sustainability and their ideas for strategies to encourage more sustainable, everyday practices shows their ability to meaningfully participate and engage. They have an acute understanding of fine-grain, daily spaces which are occupied by the journey to school and they fully understand the link between local strategies and global concerns. Although they perceive themselves to be knowledgeable subjects in their own right, the opportunities to participate meaningfully are not available in some situations. Their individual contexts shape their opportunities therefore in some cases their voices remain unheard. Childhood needs to be re-imagined. As Brooks states:

'as adults we need to understand why we continue to idealise childhood innocence...we need to break the prevailing ideology of childhood, which constructs young people as needy and incapable at the same time as excluding those who fail to meet strict parameters' (2006, 333).

She further mentions the notion of common citizenship. I further this call for more research focusing upon the work of the community on children's development so that more progressive policy may be forwarded.

Secondly, the recognition of varied, localised knowledges is significant. The notion of situated knowledge (Slocum, 2004) argues that if practiced it could produce more sustainable travel behaviours, as it takes into account the contexts of different geographic areas and different lives of people.

'situated knowledge recognises one's place in history of how humans and nonhumans have been differently constructed, It is useful as a basis for making choices "for some worlds but not others"' (Haraway, 1997, 37)

This reflects the view of poststructural theory which asserts that different knowledges are based in multiple identified subjects and their constructed positions (Tuana, 2003). Knowledge is spatially, temporally and culturally constructed. This has been evidenced in this research by assessing each area as unique and highlighting specific strategies suit one area, whilst other strategies suit another. So although responsibility falls to the national government to design and manage sustainable urban space, the individual's understanding

of their role to alter their behaviour within their local spaces is of paramount importance. There is thus a need to consider context of the consumption practices within all spheres of influence.

In discussing sustainable journeys to school there needs to be far greater engagement with issues such as materiality, power relations and adult hegemony, institutional governance and the multiple constructions of sustainability. Without understanding the impact of these different political economic conditions, the policies aimed at reducing car travel and encouraging more sustainable modes of transport are reduced to something less than they should be.

One further theme for future research exploration will be to look at the ways in which sustainability is defined in different places amongst children and what type of place imaginations they reflect and reproduce. As different needs and aspirations change over time and space, it is important to recognise who the essential actors are and what their agendas are, in view of associated power imbalances. Within the context of enhanced globalisation it is likely that discourse around spatial policy and sustainability will alter over time and the need for future research to highlight the key stakeholders in this ongoing debate is vital. Mobilising the stakeholders is a significant step in developing a reiterative research agenda which will then enable the development of more effective communication which reaches those who actually make decisions around sustainable travel. In this way, parental decision-making and thought patterns can be more understood.

Exploring the *sustainability* of sustainable travel is bound to represent a very important part of future research. There needs to be increased involvement in measuring the effectiveness of policies, strategies and schemes that are produced at a nationwide level in order to reiterate the importance of the local. Children offer fine-grained understanding of local spaces and situations that arise within them. In this research, the children were very aware of the localised issues arising from increased traffic and congestion. There were equally keen to advance local solutions to deal with these issues that were affecting them directly. Exploring what *sustainability* actually means to them at a local scale in light of global media impact and institutionalised policies, will develop a more targeted approach to providing more effective strategies and schemes aimed at developing a meaningful and adaptable sustainable mobility framework. This research provides grounding for the development of a more progressive, inclusive framework regarding sustainable travel.

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Appendix 1: Go Ahead Report Summary

Children's experiences of the journey to school

Julia Stevens

Introduction: This participatory research looks at how children experience their journey to school. It draws on educational, geographical and environmental perspectives to form a theoretical framework which critically frames the journey to school within three interconnected conceptual spheres of influence, namely: the home, public space and the school. The research highlights the desire that children and young people have for meaningful participation in addressing community issues that affect them in their everyday micro geographies and mobilities, with particular relevance to urban sustainability policy.

The three key aims are:

- To gain insight into the daily experiences of children's journeys to school
- To understand what shapes the nature of that experience
- To understand which strategies have proved successful in encouraging a more sustainable journey to school by focusing on localised solutions

Theoretical Framework: Understanding the journey to school at the intersection between the social and physical spaces of the home, the school and public space situates the debates surrounding the journey to school. These interrelated spheres of influence have an impact on the structure and nature of the child's experience of their journey to school and determine whether their mobility is viewed as being 'sustainable' by the children themselves in view of global concerns about environmental sustainability.

Methodology: Using an ethical participatory methodological approach, children were active partners in making decisions about the research direction and process rather than being objects in it. The research design was emergent, through a process of negotiation and discussion with the children. The children devised and conducted a wide array of methods, lead discussions, set their own agendas within the research framework and presented the findings after analysis and verification. The research emerged out of the grounded experience of the children and out of collaboration between them, teachers, families, local policy makers, key stakeholders and me. The setting was four schools – two in Gateshead and two in Oxford. The ages of the sample of children ranged from 4 to 16. The four geographical areas were varied in terms of economic, political, socio-spatial and cultural environments. The methodology chosen highlights the importance of the approach of centring the child within the analysis which in turn required the development of evolving methods that the children themselves chose to undertake.

Key findings:

The child's voice: By thematically analysing their data and findings, the evidence suggests that children and young people experience varied journeys to school depending on their mode of mobility, showing varying levels of environmental interaction, local area knowledge and risk strategies. The thesis centres independent school and feelings and this everyday the importance of the child's voice in their and collective experiences of their journeys to looks at different modes of mobility and children's experiences of them. It highlights the importance of experience to the children and young people, as a



microcosm of wider mobility experiences.

Positive and negatives: Children's positive perspectives of their journey to school focus primarily on their friendship groups, their enjoyment of autonomous, independent interaction with their local environment and their health. The key issues which negatively affect their journey are traffic and congestion, behaviour on buses, increasingly restricted 'tolerated' access to public space and services and the lack of opportunity for meaningful participation in environmental decision-making.

Negotiated geographies of the journey to school: Their positive and negative experiences are framed by various interrelated factors negotiated within the spheres of the home, public space and the school. Their experience is largely guided by their circumstance and context and it is within these areas that specific negotiations about the journey to school may take place.

Sustainability and the journey to school: Children and young people are significant social actors and solution-based researchers who consider local contextual sustainability strategies, in view of regional and national environmental policy frameworks. They show concerns about, and aspirations for, their future urban environment. Effective sustainable development policy requires the informed participation of children and young people. The data provides rich contextual strategies developed by the children and young people for more effective sustainable mobilities, especially in light of failing policy attempts by national government to encourage more sustainable travel behaviour at a national and local level.

Suggested strategies to develop a 'sustainable' journey to school:

It was recognised that a 'sustainable' journey to school did not only encompass the physical element of sustainability but also the social element. Six key context-driven strategies were forwarded:

- Public space design to enable more walking and cycling – this includes integrated cycling routes, lighting, road management, no-car zones and restricted access sites.
- Better on-site cycling facilities, including storage and the availability of incentives and rewards for continued cycle use
- Networks within the community – local retailers (bike shops), companies (Nexus), environmental groups, councils
- The experience of bus travel can be enjoyed if issues surrounding cleanliness, discomfort, bus driver training, safety and control were addressed
- A constant messaging throughout all spheres of influence promoting the message of a sustainable journey to school
- Parents to 'let go' and provide the space for children to learn, experience and take risks.

Impacts of the research: The research has had three key impacts:

- It reinforced the knowledge that children are knowledgeable, solution-driven researchers whose voice needs to be heard in relation to issues that affect them in their everyday life.
- It provided localised solutions in view of sustainable policy and recognised the need for policy to be focused on social, cultural, economic and environmental objectives.
- It informed local knowledge on the journey to school by involving key stakeholders in discussion.

