Perceived expectations and young peoples' self-perceptions; exploring disadvantage in the context of a grammar school

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Abstract

Grammar schools are a stereotypical context of privilege, and the UK government has plans to expand selective education due to beliefs about its ability to improve social mobility for disadvantaged students, as deemed by their socio-economic status. This research uses an indirect interview approach as part of the wider MaCE (Marginalisation and Co-Created Education) project, to access young peoples' lived experiences of disadvantage, here in the context of a grammar school. An analysis of the emergent themes across the interviews suggests that the perceived expectations from teachers and the school context, shaped the young peoples' view of success. Evaluating their capabilities and interests against this view of success, helped the young people form their self-perception. As self-perception has numerous consequences for the attainment and mental health of young people, it is suggested that misalignments of perceived expectations against self-perceptions constitutes a wider definition of disadvantage both in education and into adulthood. As such, there are a number of recommendations made for both school practitioners and policy makers.

Keywords

Expectations, self-perception, disadvantage, privilege, grammar school, success, special educational needs, mental health.

Introduction and Context

When thinking of disadvantage in the context of young people, you may automatically think of those categorised as NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training), ESL (Early School Leaver) or students from an impoverished socio-economic background. Indeed, in schools, disadvantaged students are defined as "pupils eligible for free school meals at any point within the last six years, those looked after by the local authority, adopted children, care leavers and children of service families" (DfE, 2015, p.49) and additional funding has been provided to secondary schools since 2011, with the aim of closing the notable attainment gap between this group of students and their peers.

Disadvantage in education can arguably only be defined if there is an understanding of what it means to be privileged within the education system. While there is no working definition for privilege, it makes sense to again consider socio-economic factors and highlight families who can afford to live or move into good catchment areas and potentially pay for tutoring to pass a selective entrance exam as privileged (Morris and Perry, 2017). This, along with the statistics that show a reduced proportion of special educational needs and disadvantaged students in grammar schools, compared to UK schools nationally (Gorard and Siddiqui, 2018), leads to the stereotype that grammar schools are a privileged educational context.

Currently around 5% of secondary school students in the UK are educated in a grammar school. There have been no new grammars established since the School Standards and Frameworks Act in 1998, due to the political party at the time believing they segregate the different abilities of students, putting the children who didn't achieve admission at a disadvantage and hindering social mobility (Bolton, 2017).

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The current government proposes to allow grammar schools to expand (DfE, 2018), with the viewpoint that comprehensive schools can't cater for the most able young people (Gorard and Siddiqui, 2018). Their expansion is permitted with encouragement that they admit "a proportion of students from a lower income household" (DfE, 2016, p.25) claiming that grammar schools are "good for the pupils that attend them" (DfE, 2016, p.21). The general public would appear to be currently in favour of such a change, with less than one in five people believing that grammar schools are bad for social mobility (YouGov, 2016).

Is attending a grammar school then, a stereotypical context of privilege, part of the solution to the problem of disadvantage in education? As a teacher in a UK selective school for the last six years, I found myself questioning firstly, whether the politically constructed definitions and ideologies surrounding disadvantaged and privileged young people correlated with disadvantages that presented in my classroom, and secondly, whether the statistical measures of the success of pupils, namely measures of exam attainment and entrance to top universities, were always the best indicators of a life free from disadvantage beyond the education system.

With the political controversy surrounding disadvantaged students and a selective education, it became important to me as a practitioner to explore how 'disadvantage' could present within a selective school system and the nature of what constitutes 'success' in education.

Methodology

As I am a teacher in a UK Grammar School I adopted an action research paradigm to try to understand how disadvantage can present in my school context. The research was undertaken as a part of the MaCE project (Marginalisation and Co-Created Education), a wider body of research encompassing universities in the UK, Norway and Denmark, with an overarching aim of understanding disadvantage from the perspective of the young people themselves, in order to effect positive change.

The method used was an indirect approach, an interview style developed by Norwegian researchers Moshuus and Eide (2016). The aim is to initiate a relaxed conversation with the young person to explore the lived experiences that are important to them, with little guidance from the interviewer so that "we may actually get answers to questions that we did not ask" (Moshuus and Eide, 2016, p.7). This allows the researcher to obtain key insights into a young person's context, which they name 'happenstances'. Other research looking into young peoples' experiences in education have used systematic structured interviews instead (Tanggaard, 2013) but Moshuus and Eide (2016) argue that an indirect approach can still form part of a systematic methodology by the conscious planning for an interview which facilitates happenstances, such as allowing the young person to take on the role of a storyteller. They note however that it takes "a good measure of trust and confidence" to engage with the private lives of young people (Moshuus and Eide, 2016, p.7).

Not only did I find this method entirely suited to the purpose of this action research, and believe I have 'happenstances' which no structured question would have yielded, but that being known to the young people in some capacity as a member of staff at their school, enabled me to efficiently gain rapport, and the young people seemed comfortable telling me their experiences in education. Jonker (2006) however stresses the importance of recognising that people will tell different stories to different people, and so their prior knowledge of me as a member of staff may well have influenced the stories they told. Still, with the political controversy surrounding disadvantaged young people, perhaps it is only possible to truly disseminate disadvantages in education from accessing the lived experiences of the young people themselves.

I conducted four interviews in this manner with young people aged 15-18 attending grammar school with the approval of the ethics committee at the University of Cumbria and with full informed consent of the head teacher of the school, the parents of the young person and the young person themselves.

The names of the young people have been changed to ensure anonymity. I recruited two students based on the government's measure of a disadvantaged student, defined in my introduction, and two students who had been persistently absent from school in order to try to gain a broader perspective of what disadvantage may look like within my school context.

The interviews were transcribed and coded using an inductive approach. This approach involves talking to participants about their experiences in education and then comparing the stories to infer broad theories and ideas (Godwill, 2015). I felt this approach placed the lived experiences of the young people in paramount importance. The main themes that emerged included special educational needs, mental health, identity, funding, relationships with others and a perceived inequality of school subjects, amongst others. As there were numerous themes emerging from the data, too much for this paper to cover the full scope, the overarching theme concerned 'perceived expectations'. It is through this backdrop that I felt the stories shared with me were best communicated through this paper and suited to providing tangible recommendations to both practitioners and policy makers. It is, however, worth recognising that the nature of the qualitative data obtained, while rich, has limited scope for generalising in isolation (Godwill, 2015); it is only through the co-created body of knowledge from the MaCE project that we can truly identify key areas for change and ways forward in education.

Literature Review

According to the current measure of success across all UK secondary schools, the "Best 8" Value Added, grammar schools outperform mainstream schools, according to a large scale analysis of the GCSE attainment of grammar school students against comparable students in non-selective schools (DfE, 2015). One study calculated the educational gain for disadvantaged grammar school students, as per the DfE definition outlined in my introduction, was twice as high as those of their non-selective counterparts (Atkinson et al., 2004). Additionally, Mansfield (2019) found the most socio-economically disadvantaged quintile was more than twice as likely to progress to Oxbridge in a selective school. For the government, high attainment at GCSE and progression to a good university are seen as the determinants for success for disadvantaged young people and, as a result of these findings, allow them to conclude that grammar schools make a strong positive contribution to social mobility.

Evans (2009) argues that contextual factors should be taken into account when making conclusions about the performance of grammar schools and suggests that better modelling involves accounting for measures of disadvantage such as local deprivation levels, in care status and special educational needs. There is a case that advantageous contexts of grammar schools, such as having only a small intake of such groups of students, can account for any differences between attainments (Coe et al., 2008). In practise however this is hard to account for. There is no current way to measure access to tuition, for example, a key advantage when attempting to gain a place in a grammar school (Sutton Trust, 2014). In summary, a wide range of academic analysis on the measures of success of grammar schools, discounts evidence that they are better for disadvantaged students or for young people in general. As such, the prevailing view in academia is that selective education is no more effective and is not conducive to addressing disadvantage or social mobility (Morris and Perry, 2017).

It is important to examine this controversy between politicians and academics as this is the context the young people in this study find themselves in. Yet both perspectives often neglect to take into account the viewpoints of the young people functioning within this system. Do the political definitions of 'success', judged by GCSE attainment and progression to a good university, correlate with how young people identify success?

Many studies have found discrepancies in what adults and young people see as 'success'. Määttä et al. (2016) found that children identify success based on positive emotion and acknowledgement. It has also been shown that young peoples' views of success in education are influenced by their

parents' and teachers' expectations of them and the feedback they receive from them (Muenks et al., 2018). It is important to recognise that the young people will perceive these expectations, whether or not they were intended in such a way. However, Howansky et al. (2018) posits that how people think they see the world is just as important as how it actually is, as this serves as input for their thought processes and subsequent decision making. It would seem young people don't necessarily identify educational success from an examination outcome, but instead how they feel in a situation and how well they meet the perceived expectations of their parents and teachers. Such findings echo my experiences as a practitioner, whereby I frequently witness students distressed by achieving a grade A, when they had even higher academic expectations.

Young peoples' experiences with success guides their perceptions about their ability and of themselves (Määttä et al., 2016). Bandura's (1997) theory of human functioning places importance on self-beliefs, which informs motivation, behaviour regulation and vulnerability to stress and depression. Numerous academics have found this resonates in education, where it has been found that "regardless of previous achievement or ability, self-efficacious students work harder, persevere in the face of adversity, have greater optimism and lower anxiety, and achieve more" (Pajares and Urdan, 2006, p.343). Pajares and Urdan claim that there is no other time more important for a positive self-perception than adolescence, when young people are faced with more responsibility and decisions. Conversely, having low self-esteem, in adolescence has been shown to be a good predictor of depression in adulthood (Steiger et al., 2014), linked to worse economic prospects and higher levels of criminal activity (Trzesniewski et al., 2006) and substance abuse in early adulthood (Oshri, 2017).

Taking all of this into account self-perception becomes crucial to a young person's mental health and success in education itself and beyond the school gates. The reverse seems to hold true as well; having a negative self-perception is damaging and is disadvantaging both in education and into adulthood. A big predictor for positive mental health in adolescence has been shown to be positive relationships with teachers (Oberle, 2018). Alternatively, those students who report negatively about their lived experiences in education are the ones most at risk of dropping out altogether (Bunting and Moshuus, 2016).

Another key part of self-perception relates to the labels we are assigned by others and ourselves (Jonker, 2006). A 'special educational need' label is assigned when a young person may need extra or different help to learn. A disadvantage is that by assigning a label it represents the acknowledgement that children will fail or make less progress, often leading them to be ignored by the teacher (Mărgăriţoiu, 2010). Jonker (2006) also notes that once a label is attached to a child, it can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. However studies have found that parents seek labels so that their child's school provides support and that practitioners found labels useful to access the right support (Broomhead, 2013).

The literature exposes the ways in which young people identify success in education and how this hinges on positive emotions and the perceived expectations of them. Their lived experiences with success have been shown to be important for their self-perception which can have far reaching consequences. This exposes some of the ways in which schools and teachers have tremendous power "to either stimulate and encourage or dishearten and exclude" (Jonker, 2006, p.137).

Analysis

Through coding the narratives of the young people in this research, a common thread emerged concerning perceived expectations of the young people and, in particular, how this shaped the young peoples' views of what success looks like. The realities of this common thread manifested in several different ways and my aim is now to tell these individuals' stories within this emerged common framework.

Firstly, there were perceived expectations from both the teachers and the educational system that everyone can achieve the same outcomes. In the following extract from Chloe's interview, she highlights how her teachers' unawareness of her special educational needs as an autistic young person led to frustration and a feeling of being punished for not being able to do the same as other pupils.

> I could never really write stories, I still can't … I can write sentences and my spelling is ok, I just can't write stories or long explanations or anything like that … it was quite frustrating and none of my teachers throughout the whole of primary school helped me with it at all … often I had to try to stay for longer times to try and finish a piece of writing and I could never finish it, erm, whilst other people got to play … I didn't finish the things anyway because it wasn't really a matter of time, it was that I couldn't really do it at all.

This exposes an underlying expectation among Chloe's teachers that a pupil who struggles with a task should complete it if given more time. The fact she could not meet this expectation led Chloe to perceive that her teachers thought she was 'lazy' and that "*even I thought I must be lazy*". As perceived expectations from teachers are important to a young person's view of success (Muenks et al., 2018), such an experience shows how the repeated inability to succeed can lead a young person to change their perception of themselves, as in findings from (Määttä et al., 2016).

A similar perceived expectation was talked about by Sarah, who was later diagnosed at secondary school as having dyslexic tendencies:

> My teachers' thought I was being really awkward … because I couldn't write as fast, so I didn't learn how to read until like year 1 … they just saw it as an inconvenience because they just wanted to have the class at a certain pace, and I wasn't keeping up to that pace, so it was really awkward the fact that there was just one child who's being slower.

When Sarah evaluated herself against the perceived expectation that she should be keeping up with the class, she felt that she was 'awkward' and an 'inconvenience', impacting negatively on her self-perception. With both Chloe and Sarah, the self-perceived labels of 'lazy' and 'awkward' arguably have the potential to cause disadvantage, perhaps leading to self-fulfilling prophecies (Jonker, 2006) or lowering self-esteem during adolescence, a known risk factor for numerous disadvantages in adult life (Steiger et al., 2014, Trzesniewski et al., 2006, Oshri, 2017) and for attainment in education (Pajares and Urdan, 2006).

In both cases, the young people contrasted their experiences at primary school to secondary school and both found that with identification and recognition of their needs in school their situations improved. Sarah recounts:

> I've got an IEP <Individual Educational Plan> which allows me to get extra time … more help from the teachers … I get printed notes … in primary school they were like 'we're gonna give you the exact same help as we would all the other children because you're just like them' … I don't think they fully clicked on that I had this like problem … that's why I really like the teachers here because they seem to understand that I have this disability.

Here she explicitly states that she believes her previous teachers expected her to be the same as others and makes a reference to the warmer relationships she has towards her teachers now, who she believes support her more. This is important because having positive relationships with adults in school is shown to be linked to positive mental health (Orberle, 2018). It is also noteworthy that she is eligible for extra time, a common adjustment for assessment for young people with special educational needs. Such a method of adjusting expectations, while most likely reducing disadvantage for Sarah by some capacity, could however reinforce the expectation that pupils should be able to complete the same work if simply given longer to do so; an expectation that manifested as a form of punishment for Chloe.

Chloe had a similarly positive lived experience once gaining a diagnosis for autism at secondary school and speculated that her quiet compliant nature allowed her difficulties to go unnoticed by her teachers.

> When I came to secondary school I got diagnosed quite quickly which was very good … that means I can get help for things that I find hard … I think maybe my primary school wasn't very good for that but I was good at a lot of other things, and I didn't really make any trouble, so they probably didn't really notice.

It is notable as a practitioner in a grammar school that difficulties do tend to stand out, potentially just from the fact that grammar schools have a lower proportion of pupils with special educational needs (Morris and Perry, 2017) which could allow for the swift diagnoses reported by the young people. It is also interesting that Chloe recounts feeling ignored by her teachers. One of the main criticisms of assigning SEN labels is that the subsequent lowering of teacher's expectations can result in them being ignored by the teachers (Mărgăriţoiu, 2010). Here, Chloe recalls not being noticed before she had her diagnosis. Perhaps the problem of teachers 'ignoring' pupils stems from the innate difficulties that young person presents in the classroom, or a lack of knowledge about how to appropriately assist learners, rather than the SEN label itself.

In both of these accounts, being assigned a special educational needs label was found to be a positive experience as it enabled the young people to get the right support, in line with findings from Broomhead (2013). Here, the assignments of the SEN labels, was a way in which the expectations of a young person could be managed. It could be argued in these cases, that such SEN labels were not nearly as potentially disadvantaging long term to self-esteem as continuing in life with perceived labels of 'lazy' or 'inconvenience'.

Another way the common thread of perceived expectations emerged from the data involved expectations surrounding being 'a grammar school student'. Daniel talked about being positioned by his teachers as an able student at primary school and their subsequent expectations of him once he passed the entrance exam.

> It's been ingrained in me since primary school, because I was one of those kids that they expected a lot of … if I don't do well then I won't have a good future … [This] just put too much on someone who was barely double digits old … I remember in year six there was a table of four of us that had gotten into grammar … it was science based things or maths based things and it never really catered to more artistic things which is something I am. It was never 'here's something you can do in music or art' and as a kid it really messed with me because I thought, this is what I want to do, am I not supposed to do this? It's affected me mentally because I can't think of myself as doing something artistic in the future because I've been told all my life, no you have to do science or maths to be successful and to have a good life.

He went on to talk about how he felt these expectations led to a damaging perceived expectation of being required to be 'perfect':

> Because it was drilled into our heads, you're in a good school, you're in the top 20%, you need to do well … I couldn't face going into school because I couldn't face making a mistake and not being the perfect student that they've been trying to kind of encourage … my thought process was 'I'm going to make a mistake and then they'll see that I'm not perfect and then I won't fit the image that they've been building' … it's like the teachers that you've been told are in charge and are higher up, they're the ones that have assemblies of 'what's successful' and 'what you should aim for' and it doesn't really cater to everyone and there's no disclaimer of 'If you don't want to go to Cambridge that's ok.

Daniel perceived that the expectations of him as a grammar school student were achieving perfection, pursuing traditional academic subjects and attending a top university and this formed his view of 'success'.

It is interesting that much of Daniel's view of success matches with the variables used to measure the 'success' of schools and also 'disadvantaged' pupils; namely, academic achievement (DfE, 2015) and attending top universities (Mansfield, 2019). As this is the measure of success for schools in general, and a fundamental argument for increasing selective education (DfE, 2016), then it is only natural that these outcomes will be promoted and encouraged in selective schools. As Daniel's story shows, this has the potential to marginalise skillsets that don't inherently fit this view of success and lead to low self-esteem, poor mental health and absence from school.

Here, we see an example of how politicians' and school systems' definitions of 'success' can be different to a young persons. Daniel was able to reflect on how this had impacted his perception of himself:

> For the longest time because I just wasn't the best in physics and chemistry, I just thought that I wasn't good enough.

Just as Chloe and Sarah had self-perceived disadvantaging labels of 'lazy' and 'inconvenience' as a result of an inherent incapability to meet the perceived expectations of them, Daniel formed a self-perception that he 'wasn't good enough' because his talents and interests did not correlate with his view of success for a grammar school student. Such experiences truly expose the raw power institutions and individuals have, as stressed by Jonker (2006), in shaping how a young person perceives themselves. We can see here a disadvantage in education which is irrespective of socio-economic background; being in a system that isn't perceived to meet your needs and interests. As Daniel put it; grammar schools "*might be best for someone, but not me*".

My fourth interview with Ellie was interesting as she was able to contrast her experiences of being a bright student in a comprehensive with her experiences in a grammar school, which she felt was more favourable. This is particularly poignant as she is eligible for free school meals and therefore fits the government's description of a 'disadvantaged' young person (DfE, 2015).

> All the abilities were put together, I didn't like that as much because I found it really frustrating, I know it sounds bad but you just, like, wait … you're just so ahead all the time that you get bored … the teachers could see that but there was nothing they could do about it … so many people there don't care about their education, they distract you, because if they obviously don't wanna be there, they really couldn't care less, then they're just gonna spend their lives just messing about and disrupting the lessons … most of the lesson time is spent trying to like discipline them, so you didn't really learn much. You're sat there wanting to learn and wanting to achieve something and no one around you is letting you do that … I think that's the big difference between here, like a grammar school, and a normal school.

This lived experience supports the political viewpoint that comprehensive schools can't always cater for the most able young people (Gorard and Siddiqui, 2018). Additionally, the main aim of the government encouraging grammar schools to increase their intake of 'disadvantaged' pupils is to increase social mobility, so it was notable that Ellie communicated this precise reason for motivation to succeed in education:

> I think I work hard because I want to make more of a decent life than my family, so I'm like personally motivated because I know that's like gonna help me do that, that's my way out of everything.

Here, we see an alignment of expectations of a grammar school and a young person, unlike with Daniel; while a grammar school context expects its pupils to succeed academically, Ellie, astutely aware of her family's economic background and wanting to change this, expects she can succeed by working hard in an environment more conducive to learning. For Ellie a move into a grammar school was perceived to be a fundamental enabler against her disadvantaged home life:

> I'm glad I didn't stay there [comprehensive school] because I think if I was there for GCSE with all the stuff that like goes on at home, I don't think I'd have done GCSEs … it would've just overwhelmed me, but this school's been good for me.

Indeed, those that report negatively about school have been shown to be those at greatest risk of dropping out (Bunting and Moshuus, 2016). But what is really interesting here, is that just as the government describes grammar schools as "good for the pupils who attend" (DfE, 2015), Ellie as a 'disadvantaged' student states, in the exact same words, that the grammar school is "good for me".

Conclusions and Recommendations

The young people in this research were influenced by the perceived expectations of their teachers and school contexts. These expectations had the power to guide the young person's view of success which could differ from the political measures of success and also, when unobtainable or causing a conflict of interest, had the potential to cause harm to the young person by negatively affecting their fundamental perception of themselves.

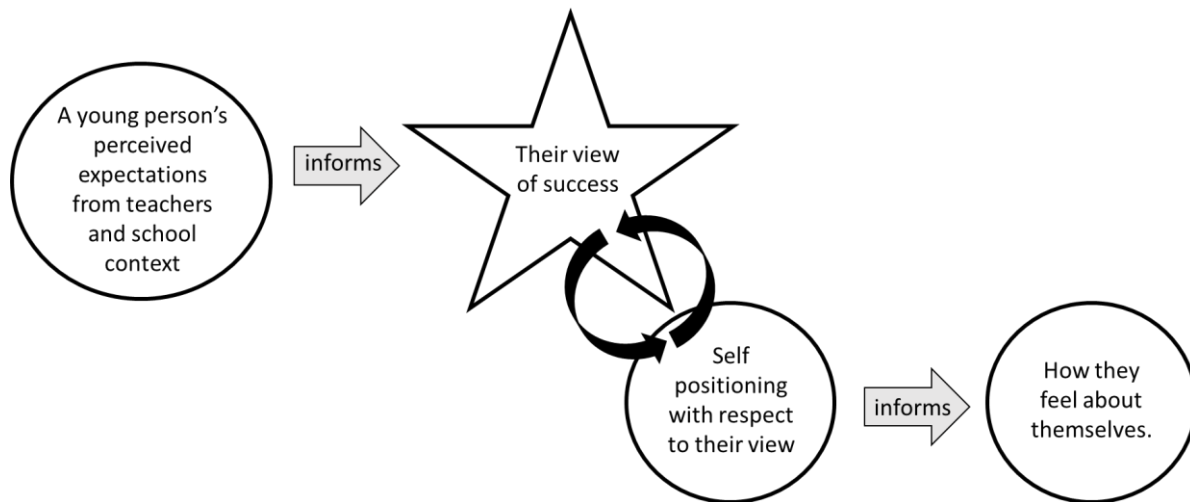This common emergent thread can be summarised in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1. A summary diagram of the common emergent thread from the interviews.

Within Figure 1, it could be argued that instances of disadvantage emerge in lived experiences when the result of this process is a negative self-perception. For Sarah and Chloe, this was during their time at primary school prior to diagnosis. For Ellie, it was during her time at a comprehensive school, unable to feel she would succeed and improve her situation at home. For Daniel, it would seem he was currently disadvantaged due to the resulting battle with his self-perception and mental health. The definition of disadvantage then, may not be as rigid as the socio-economic definition used by the DfE.

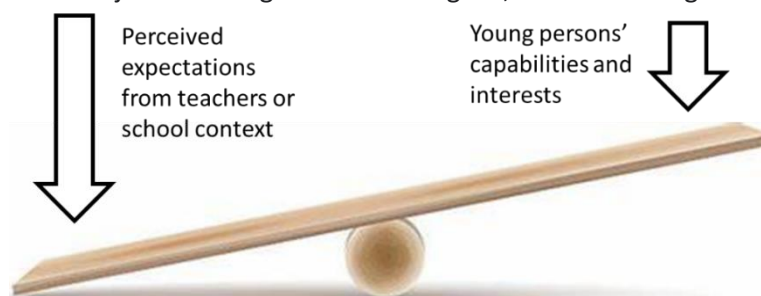The four different stories conjure the image of a balancing act, as shown in Figure 2:

Figure 2. The balance of perceived expectations against self-perception.

Again, in search of a more fluid definition of disadvantage in education, it would seem that disadvantage can be present when there is unbalance between the perceived expectations from teachers and the school context, and the interests and capabilities of the young person. For Sarah and Chloe, balance was achieved through the assigning of a label for a learning difficulty and the subsequent adjustment of expectations from teachers in line with their capabilities. Ellie found balance by moving to a grammar school from a comprehensive as this environment catered to her ability and interest in achieving academically. It appears that Daniel had not found balance as he had deep fundamental beliefs from a young age surrounding what was expected of him in a grammar school, of which he did not feel he was capable or that his interests aligned.

Of all the themes that emerged from the data, I selected the ones surrounding 'perceived expectations' for the purpose of this paper because I believe they are actionable from the positions of both practitioners and policy makers and I will now summarise my recommendations. It is important that, firstly, all parties recognise that disadvantage in education could be more than just a fixed, socio-economic concept serving political agendas and that, much more fluidly, instances of disadvantage can emerge for young people in any context and have consequences both in education and adult life. Secondly, when instances of disadvantage emerge in lived experiences, it is possible for teachers, school cultures and policy makers to have a positive impact on the lives of young people.

Specifically for practitioners and schools, it is important not to underestimate the impact they can have on young peoples' self-perception; we can't necessarily change the political measures that judge whether or not a young person had 'succeeded', but we can, through managing perceived expectations of a young person, change how they feel about themselves. With this comes a huge responsibility. As a maths teacher, I regularly promote my subject, finding links to real life and potential careers. I do this through nothing more than a love for my subject. However, for some pupils, I could be fuelling the perception that a grammar school education should result in pursuing an academic subject if they want to be successful. While it is impossible to control a young person's perspective, I recommend that teachers and schools consider their power to present expectations to young people, especially when there are inherent stereotypes attached to a particular schooling context. A school culture which explicitly promotes equality of subjects, and multiple perspectives of 'success', is arguably a first defence against damaging stereotypes in a grammar school context.

However, such stereotypes can impact young people before they come to a grammar school, through primary schools separating the pupils who passed the 11+ test and providing them with academic work which they perceive will be beneficial to them. There is evidence here to recommend greater collaboration between primary schools and grammar schools to dispel damaging myths. There is also opportunity during transition for grammar schools to formulate and emphasise an inclusive school culture to further protect young people from any damaging perceived expectations. The stories here also highlight the importance of teachers' awareness of traits of special educational needs at primary schools and knowledge of appropriate strategies to help before potentially more damaging labels manifest. As these interviews show, individuals and schools can have positive impacts on how a young person perceives themselves; impacts that aren't necessarily measured as a statistic for tackling disadvantage, but impacts that can have a positive effect on the well-being of the young people in their care.

With regards to government policy makers, I would strongly recommend further research into how disadvantage can present in the grammar school classroom from the point of view of young people rather than adults. It seems damaging for there to exist such a narrow political definition of disadvantage in socio-economic terms, as it seems to perpetuate the view that a grammar school is a context of privilege, with success defined solely in terms of academic attainment. This can create pressure for young people in the grammar school system to succeed in this way, impacting on mental health and subsequently risk causing long-term disadvantage to these individuals.

Such political definitions of 'disadvantaged' and 'success' allows for measurable outcomes and statistics that can give evidence towards political agendas surrounding socio-economic disadvantage, rather than necessarily putting the needs of the young people at the heart of education. I believe that only through engaging with young people, managing our expectations of them and achieving balance between these expectations and their capabilities and interests, can we deal with disadvantage in real life terms. Until we truly understand disadvantage in the context of a grammar school it doesn't seem to make sense to conclude whether or not a grammar school education is better for 'disadvantaged' young people.

It all brings into question what we want the purpose of the UK education system to be; about statistics, or about the individual. As Daniel put it:

> We spend a lot of our developmental years here, and I think that can shape someone a lot and shape how they see the world, and I think if you have something that fragile, treat it well, and not just 'here's something that is successful', you should teach them what it means to be a good person and what it means to find acceptance within yourself.

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