Negotiating learner identities and success: a linguistic ethnography with late-arrival multilingual learners in a secondary school

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Dedication

This thesis acknowledges the courage of young people who move and start again.

Acknowledgements

Abstract

This thesis offers rich insights into the under-researched experiences of late arrival multilingual learners in English secondary schools. It examines how they co-construct and resist learner identities through interactions with peers and staff, and how these identities are positioned within majoritarian stories of success.

It focuses on four recently-arrived young people in a secondary school in the West Midlands of England with data gathered through conducting a linguistic ethnography between 2019 and 2022. Analysis is based on observational fieldnotes including interactions recorded in mainstream and intervention lessons, ethnographic and more formal interviews with the four learners and teaching staff, and a learner focus group. The analysis centres on accessing a deep understanding of the experiences of each young person, using the tools of ethnography and Conversation Analysis to analyse data, including through the detailed study of their interactions.

Identity is explored by employing the lens of Positioning Theory (Davies and Harré 1990), where it is constructed at micro, meso and macro levels through the co-positioning of participants in talk in (dis)alignment with storylines about success, multilingualism and learning which circulate at these three scales. Local understandings of success are uncovered through the concepts of Model Minorities (Gillborn 2008) and Imagined Communities (Norton 2001), ideal learners (Archer and Francis 2007) and educational triage (Gillborn and Youdell 2000).

The thesis makes three main arguments which reinterpret and extend these established concepts of success to consider the multilingual and transnational dimensions of new arrivals' learner identities. Firstly, I argue that while multilingual new arrivals negotiate classroom positions, teaching staff hold significant power to make these (un)available, resulting in greater or fewer opportunities for learning content and English language. Secondly, over time, these momentary interactional positions sediment into meso-level identities which align more or less closely with a construct I propose of the *ideal EAL learner*. These alignments enable schools to triage newly-arrived learners according to their perceived potential value for formal measures of success, realised through national exams at the age of sixteen.

Thirdly, this identity work takes place within macro-level storylines about multilingualism, success and the 'good immigrant', which coalesce in a racialised and meritocracy-driven construct I call the *EAL Model Minority*. While these majoritarian constructs drive institutional and national notions of success for multilingual learners, the learners additionally envision success in richer, more humanitarian terms through the Imagined Communities to which they (seek to) belong. I argue that recognising learners' identities as members of Imagined Communities creates a more holistic understanding of success, providing a counter-story to the majoritarian view and a more inclusive understanding of multilingual learners in mainstream classrooms.

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List of abbreviations

BICS	Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills
BTEC	Business and Technology Education Council
CA	Conversation Analysis
CALP	Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency
CCM	Critical Communicative Methodology
COVID-19	Coronavirus 2019
CRT	Critical Race Theory
DES	Department for Education and Science (now DfE)
DfE	Department for Education
DT	Design and Technology
EAL	English as an Additional Language (see also Appendix 1)
EHO	Environmental Health Officer
EU	European Union
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
IC	Imagined Community
IRE	Initiation-Response-Evaluation
KS1/2/3/4	Key Stage 1/2/3/4
L1	Language 1/'first' or home language
L2	Language 2/a second or subsequent language
LE	Linguistic Ethnography
MBE	Multicultural British English
MM	Model Minority

NALDIC   National Association for Language Development in the Curriculum

OFSTED   Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills

ONS   Office for National Statistics

PT   Positioning Theory

RE   Religious Education

SLA   Second Language Acquisition

UK   United Kingdom

UNESCO   United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

USA   United States

WMS   West Midlands School

1. Introduction

1.1 Overview

This study is a linguistic ethnography which focuses on four *late arrival newcomer multilingual learners*[1] in a secondary school in England. It investigates how they construct their learner identities through interactions with staff and peers, and how this might relate to their success as learners.

This overview chapter first outlines the educational context of the study and identifies the central issues for investigation. The discussion is followed by the research questions which narrow the focus to identity and success for late-arrival learners of English as an Additional Language (*EAL*), and an articulation of how this linguistic ethnography contributes to knowledge and understanding of newly-arrived multilingual learners and notions of success in secondary school learning.

The research site and the key participants are also introduced in this chapter. Without them there would be no thesis and, in line with ethnographic practice, their presence, experiences and voices are centred throughout. Following this, the structure of the thesis is outlined.

1.2 Context and central issue

Education today sits within a globalised capitalist economy. Educational outcomes are compared worldwide, governments borrow educational policies from one another, and the academisation and free schools programmes have brought quasi-private sponsorship to a majority of secondary schools in England (Ball 2021).

At the same time, the United Kingdom (UK) school population is increasingly ethnically and linguistically diverse, with a growing number of EAL learners, in England currently around

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[1] The thesis uses terminology frequently found in literature about English language learners in England. Although common, it has a sometimes-imprecise and sometimes-contested nature. Appendix 1 is a list of definitions as used in this study.

20% (Department for Education, DfE, 2023a, 2024c), who have historical or current transnational connections. Many EAL speakers are second- or third-generation immigrants to Britain who speak English alongside (an)other language(s) at home (Evans et al. 2020). The years following Britain's decision to leave the European Union (EU) have seen a decrease in immigrants from the EU, while the number from outside the EU has increased (Office for National Statistics, ONS, 2023). The war in Ukraine along with more longstanding conflicts such as those in Afghanistan and Tigray have contributed to increasing numbers of applications for asylum and resettlement in the UK (UK Parliament 2023). Overall, the numbers of people arriving for work, study and humanitarian reasons to the UK is at an historic high (ONS 2023), and many families have children who arrive during the course of their schooling career, after the start of formal education. This is the most common definition of 'late arrival' (see Appendix 1). These children are expected to adapt to English-language education and the national system of schooling, curriculum, and assessment.

Research and scholarship take an interest in EAL learners, primarily from the perspectives of pedagogy and attainment. Attainment data is the most frequently-researched dimension (e.g. Demie 2018; Strand, Malmberg and Hall 2015; see also Gillborn 2010) and shows a mixed picture: while overall, EAL learners do very well in national assessments in secondary schools, this hides considerable differences between sub-groups of multilingual learners, some of whom struggle to achieve benchmark targets (Choudry 2018; Strand, Malmberg and Hall 2015). While there is a thriving community of EAL practitioners and specialists in the National Association for EAL (NALDIC 2024) and many guidelines to good practice (e.g. The Bell Foundation 2023), effective intervention strategies remain under-researched (Murphy and Unthiah 2015). Whereas there are EAL studies from across England, there is an over-representation in the literature of London (e.g. Demie 2018; Sharples 2017) and the East of England (e.g. Evans and Liu 2018; Hryniewicz and Dewaele 2017), leaving a vacuum in other areas of the country.

National policies and funding which support EAL learners have become ever-scarcer in response to changing national educational priorities, while local provision has become correspondingly inconsistent (Costley 2014; Evans et al. 2016; Hutchinson 2018). There is a lack of research attention on *mainstreaming* (Welply 2023), the policy of educating multilingual learners as part of the mainstream classroom alongside their monolingual

peers. Within identity research and EAL, attention has been focused on socialisation and ethnolinguistic identities (e.g. Hryniewicz and Dewaele 2017; Wallace 2011) while wider second-language identity research focuses on learner identities in relation specifically to their language acquisition (e.g. Norton 2010). This leaves several questions about multilingual learners unanswered, particularly about their identities *as learners* within a school mainstream environment, rather than in relation to wider sociological categories or as learners of English language, and about how mainstreaming may impact identity in terms of assimilation or, conversely, the Othering of EAL learners.

1.3 Research questions

The research questions of this project are:

1. How is the learner identity of late arrival multilingual learners in secondary schools co-constructed through the learners' interactions with staff and peers?

2. How might this relate to constructions of success at school?

1.4 Nature of this study

This study is a response to questions about how newly-arrived multilingual secondary school learners, who are placed into mainstream school contexts, negotiate their learner identities, and how that may impact on their success at school, in a context where EAL learners comprise around one in five learners in English secondary schools, but are increasingly 'invisibilised' (Richardson 2023:3) by policy, funding, and the wider educational system and where success is largely envisioned in terms of exam attainment. To seek answers to those questions, I undertook a linguistic ethnography (LE) over three years in a secondary school in the West Midlands of England. The West Midlands has the highest number of EAL learners after London (DfE 2020b) but limited research has been carried out within its schools. Focusing on learners and their interactions with peers and staff is a response to invisibilisation, as I make visible and audible the voices of young people who might not

otherwise be heard, voices which are not prominent enough in literature about them (Evans and Liu 2018; Sharples 2017).

My researcher positioning undoubtably influenced my desire to investigate these research questions. I was a languages teacher for twenty years including a decade in secondary school and have taught countless EAL learners (see also Vignette 1 in Section 3.2). I am multilingual; my first language is English but Spanish is one of our home languages and I additionally speak French. While a British citizen by birth, I moved to England at the age of 11 and have some empathy with the bewilderment that such upheavals can induce (see also Vignette 7 in Section 3.6.3). These circumstances gave me a keen professional interest in newly-arrived multilingual learners and a desire to better understand their lived experiences. Researcher positioning is further discussed in Chapter 3, particularly in the vignettes and Section 3.6.

In addressing the first research question, a post-structuralist conceptualisation of identity is operationalised, following Bucholtz and Hall (2005). Identity is understood to be socially co-constructed through the socio-cultural linguistic process of interaction between learners, their peers, and teaching staff. This conceptualisation is elaborated in Section 2.4.1. The analysis of these interactions and wider ethnographic data is framed by Positioning Theory (PT) (Davies and Harré 1990) as a way to understand the rights and obligations to speak which are allocated by the learner identities negotiated by young people. Both PT and Conversation Analysis (CA), which is used as a tool of analysis, focus on the participant point of view; they are ways to access what interactants understand to be happening in an interaction. In this way, their use is a response to the invisibilisation of EAL voices.

PT has not previously been used to examine the lives of multilingual learners in mainstream settings in England, and this study contributes its interactional perspective to literature about EAL learners. The study draws on Anderson's (2009) tripartite model to examine the micro, meso and macro scales of positioning work; in particular, I develop Wood's (2013) micro-identities to provide a more extensive conceptual framework to identify and analyse moment-to-moment identity work in the classroom.

At all levels of the tripartite model, the notion of the *ideal learner* (Archer and Francis 2007; Youdell 2006) is operationalised to suggest that young people and their teachers align or

disalign themselves and each other with storylines about the *ideal EAL learner*, storylines which reflect and reconstruct expectations and assumptions about perceived abilities, behaviours and attributes. It is suggested that the model of the *ideal EAL learner* incorporates the dimension of perceived proficiency, a linguistic dimension not present in current literature about the *ideal learner*. I demonstrate that these (dis)alignments and the identity positions that they create impact the opportunities that young people have to learn both English language and curriculum content. At the micro scale, moment-to-moment interactions shape the distribution of speaking rights within the classroom, expanding or closing down opportunities for learner participation, while over time, these micro-identities coalesce into meso-level learner *kinds* (Anderson 2009) which attract, or fail to attract, additional support for the learners from teaching staff. I also argue that being newly-arrived in an English school, from an educational context with perhaps quite different ideas about idealness, creates interactional spaces where multilingual learners can challenge the Whiteness of the dominant *ideal learner* model.

With regard to the second research question, the concepts of Model Minorities (MM) in the English education system (Gillborn 2008) and Imagined Communities (IC) (Norton 2001) are used to investigate the young people's positioning in relation to successful identities. Both represent abstract groups which exist only in the ways people are discursively co-constructed. MM are majoritarian stories about meritocracy and race (Mitchell 2013) which seek to place the responsibility for success or failure on minoritised individuals, families, and communities. While MM are usually envisioned as a particular ethnic group, this study proposes an adaptation, the *EAL Model Minority*, which works in the same way to homogenise EAL learners and allocate responsibility away from schools and governments and onto the learners themselves for their success or failure. Imagined Communities in this study act as a *counter-story* (Delgado and Stefancic 2023) to the majoritarian one, a way in which the young people can envision their future success as multilingual transnational citizens.

1.5 Summary of contributions to knowledge

In summary, the study makes the following important original contributions to knowledge:

- It adds to the representation of newly-arrived EAL learners in literature, specifically those in mainstream secondary classrooms. As a linguistic ethnography, it illuminates the precise detail of learners' talk to reveal how they represent themselves in interactions, and it contextualises those interactions through the wider analytical lens of ethnography, in a multi-scalar way (Rampton 2006).

- It uses the tools of Conversation Analysis, more usually employed in second language classrooms, to examine mainstream classroom interactions with EAL learners. I highlight the pivotal role of the third turn in teacher-learner talk sequences in co-positioning learners in alignment with more or less powerful learner identities.

- The theoretical framework of the thesis innovatively brings together Positioning Theory with the concepts of Model Minorities, ideal learners, educational triage and meritocracy. I present evidence to suggest that newly-arrived learners co-construct and challenge identities through their interactions which reproduce and resist gendered and racialised storylines about multilingual learners and their perceived value in a neoliberal education system.

- The study synthesises and expands the range of classroom positions previously identified in Positioning Theory literature about Mathematics classrooms (Smith 2022; Wood 2013) by examining interactions across mainstream and EAL intervention lessons. The resulting conceptual framework of positions (*subject learner, explainer, manual worker, spokesperson,* and *teacher*) enables a rich and detailed understanding of micro- and meso-level identity work.

- I propose an original model, the *ideal EAL learner*. This expands upon the established concept of the ideal learner (Archer and Francis 2007; Youdell 2006). I argue that the existing understanding of ideal learners does not account for their multilingualism. Based on the findings of this study, my proposed model throws fresh light on the

concept, incorporating learners' willingness to linguistically assimilate, expressed through their perceived English proficiency.

- It adds to a small but growing body of literature about Model Minorities in British education (Bradbury 2013; Flynn 2013; Gillborn 2008; Wong 2015). My data suggests that EAL learners may be viewed as a Model Minority, a powerful set of storylines which serve to hide individual experiences of late-arrival learners, including experiences of racism.

- The study provides new evidence and insights into multilingual learners' own conceptualisations of success as (future) members of multilingual, transnational professional Imagined Communities. As an alternative to the dominant ways of thinking about mainstream inclusion for EAL learners, this provides a holistic and emic understanding of success which contributes to wider discussions around multilingualism and the 'value' of migrants to education and society.

1.6 Representation and truth

Linguistic ethnographies focus on the emic account of social reality while acknowledging the etic perspective of the researcher, and must negotiate the fluidity between the two (Conteh 2018; Martin-Jones, Andrews and Martin 2017). This study consequently understands truth not as an objective reality but as a social one, co-constructed through interactional interpretivism (Busch 2017). It emerges not only from the data itself, but in the processes of data collection and its analysis, the flow of interactions between participants and between participants and researcher, and in the back-and-forth interactions between data, analysis and theory (Blommaert and Jie 2010).

Ethnographers therefore have a responsibility to consider how we represent our participants, their accounts, and the interactions in the research process, mindful of our own positionality (Section 1.4) and the imbalance of power between researcher and participants. A reflexive approach was taken to representation in this study, with ongoing

decision-making. This process is detailed throughout the thesis (Sections 3.2, 3.4.1, 3.7.2, 9.4.1, 9.6 and 9.7.1; see also Vignettes 2, 6 and 7).

1.7 Introduction to the study setting and participants

The ethnography was carried out in West Midlands School (WMS),[2] a smaller-than-average state-funded urban secondary school in England. I spent three years in WMS, punctuated by an extended period (fifteen months) where, due to COVID-19 restrictions, the school did not allow external visitors. The school is situated in an area of high social and economic deprivation and more than half of learners are eligible for Pupil Premium, government funds allocated to improve outcomes for disadvantaged learners (DfE 2023d). Around three-quarters are known to be multilingual learners, but the majority of those have high English proficiency and do not receive support from the EAL department.

WMS is unusual in that it has local expertise in the form of its EAL department — most schools do not and are increasingly isolated (Sharples 2021). Nevertheless, it illustrates the wider decline: staff numbers have been progressively cut over the years, and further dwindled during the period of data collection. The EAL department has its own physical space, comprising a single classroom with an attached office set apart from the main school building. This is a bright and welcoming space, filled with multilingual books and games amongst other teaching resources. Displays on the walls celebrate cultural and linguistic diversity, with most displays made by the learners themselves.

A full list of study participants is in Appendix 2. This includes staff whose lessons were observed, or who were interviewed. The learner participants deserve their own introduction, as their experiences and interactions form the core of the ethnography. The two EAL staff are also introduced here, because their backgrounds and professional ethos provide context to departmental practices and the school experiences of the learners they support.

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[2] The names given for the school and all participants are pseudonyms.

1.7.1 Staff

Magda

Magda was the head of the EAL department throughout the time of the study. She is multilingual and has worked in EAL provision for two decades, most of that within WMS. She is highly qualified and regularly seconded to other schools and teacher education programmes to share her expertise and experience. She is a passionate advocate for EAL learners and has set up robust systems at WMS to induct and assess young people, engage them in mainstream learning, provide interventions for emerging multilinguals, liaise with families, and deliver ongoing training for colleagues. Magda was a highly supportive contact who facilitated access to other staff and learner participants.

Ana

Ana taught small-group withdrawal sessions in the EAL department. She is multilingual and trained as an inclusion specialist. While qualified as a teacher in her country of origin, in WMS she was paid as a teaching assistant. Like Magda, she was highly committed to the learners and spent considerable time talking with families and facilitating learners' day-to-day problem-solving both inside and outside school. Ana left WMS in late 2019. She was not replaced; instead, a mainstream teacher was allocated part-time hours to support the department, and, later, two unqualified learning mentors were timetabled for a few hours each week to run withdrawal sessions.

1.7.2 Learners

LeBron

When he joined the study, LeBron was eleven years old and in Year 7, the first year of secondary school. He had moved from France two months earlier and is of Central African heritage. His English proficiency level was assessed as Level A, New to English (Section 2.2.1). An outgoing personality, LeBron was keen to participate as a means to improve his English. He shared his plans with me: to be a basketball player and live and work transnationally.

LeBron gradually received fewer intervention sessions and, by Year 8, had a completely mainstream timetable. He expressed some ambivalence about continuing to participate in this study as he became more embedded in his peer group and the school basketball team. However, he later regained interest and continued his involvement into Year 10. He concluded participation by saying how helpful he had found the opportunities to speak about himself for a reason other than the usual school or social purposes, and that he would be framing his debrief letter as a souvenir of the study.

Jamal

Jamal joined the study much later, shortly after arrival to England, at the end of Year 9 when he was fourteen years old. He was born and raised in Cameroon, and his home language is French. He had attended an English-medium school prior to arrival in England, and his English proficiency level was assessed as Level B, Early Acquisition. He was put into the same year and form group as LeBron, partly because of their shared home language, and as part of data collection I facilitated a focus group with them.

Joining late in his school career, Jamal was very focused from the beginning on academic success, although he was also invested in social integration. He agreed to be part of the study because he liked the idea of participating in an academic community, one he aspired to in his own life. Quiet and very polite, Jamal enjoyed popularity amongst staff and peers

alike and, whenever I arrived to observe one of his lessons, he would ensure that I had a seat and was comfortable.

Daniella

Daniella and Jamal joined the study at the same time, immediately after COVID-19 restrictions were relaxed. The amount of data collected with them was correspondingly less than that collected with LeBron or Gabriela. Daniella was assessed as Level B in English proficiency, and had previously studied in Italy, where she was born. In addition to Italian, she spoke Spanish and Panjabi, the languages of her parents, but was most confident in Italian.

Daniella appeared a little harder to get to know. She seemed to ignore me around school, while continuing to assert her willingness to participate in the study. However, over time, she became more forthcoming and, in her debrief meeting, said how much she had appreciated the opportunity to speak openly about how she felt at school.

Gabriela

Gabriela was recruited to the study at the start of Year 7. She had studied in an English primary school the previous year, where she had been bullied, but reported feeling safe and happy at WMS. As with LeBron, data collection with Gabriela was interrupted by the COVID-19 restrictions and, after these were relaxed, she did not immediately return to school, having apparently moved back to her country of origin, Romania. Just as I was preparing to recruit a replacement, Gabriela reappeared in school and was happy to continue with the study.

She was initially assessed as Level A English proficiency, and while there was some attempt to move her at the beginning of Year 9 to a fully mainstreamed timetable, after a few months she was re-integrated to part-time EAL intervention support. Gabriela formed a close friendship with a Romanian-speaking girl at WMS and spoke frequently about her family life, which appeared to be warm and supportive. In particular, she loved to help care

for her brother's baby, an experience which inspired her to consider midwifery as a career, rather than teaching as she had previously planned.

Each of the four young people has a chapter of analysis dedicated to their experience, as the outline of thesis structure will explain.

1.8 Structure of the thesis

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 outlines the theoretical framework of the study, and reviews scholarship about late-arrival EAL learners, their learner identity, and success. Linguistic ethnographies frequently blend theory and context in literature reviews (e.g. Rampton 2006), and this enacts the methodological principle that data collection and analysis are inseparable and situated (Blommaert and Jie 2010).

The chapter foregrounds first success, then identity, although they intersect in profound ways. The chapter opens with an overview of EAL learners and critical examination of current policy in England, particularly that of mainstreaming for late arrivals. It then outlines exam attainment data as a measure of EAL success, particularly that of late arrival learners. This dominant view of success is problematised using the *ideal learner* (Archer and Francis 2007; Youdell 2006) and *Model Minority* (MM) (Gillborn 2008) frameworks, and *Imagined Communities* (IC) (Norton 2001) is examined as an alternative view of success. All these frame EAL education and success in terms of identity, which is the focus of the remainder of Chapter 2, specifically the primary theoretical framework for this study, *Positioning Theory* (PT) (Davies and Harré 1990). The final section of Chapter 2 addresses the relationship between identity, learning, the right to speak, and success, drawing together the different elements of the research questions and the literature.

Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology, research design, data collection and analysis. It begins with an exploration of linguistic ethnography, in particular the balance between the micro and meso scales of data collection and analysis (Rampton 2006). The chapter sets out how this study enacted a commitment to polyphonicity (Clifford 1990) and ethical and

multilingual research practice. Finally, it details how data was analysed using thematic analysis, discourse analysis, and the tools of Conversation Analysis (CA).

Chapters 4 to 7 take, in turn, each of the young people introduced above and present a rich and individual analysis. The four chapters take the reader into the everyday lives of the learners through detailed exploration of their interactional and wider ethnographic data. This individual approach is not irreconcilable with drawing out the patterns and 'rich points' (Agar 2006:4) across chapters as a broader picture emerges.

Chapter 8 is a discussion of the themes and concepts which cross-cut the four analyses. The first part of Chapter 8 explores how these themes suggest a proposed triple-faceted model of the *ideal EAL learner* which encompasses constructions of proficiency, learner attributes and behaviours, and 'ability'. Meritocracy and MM as majoritarian stories are particularly useful as a way of interpreting the construction of the *ideal EAL learner*. The chapter then returns to IC as an alternative, emic view of EAL learner success arising from the data.

Chapter 9 summarises findings and draws out contributions to knowledge with regard to learner identity and success, before detailing further contributions in terms of representation, concepts, and methodology. Implications and opportunities for practitioners, schools, policy-makers and researchers are considered. Finally, there are reflections on the ethnographic process of this study.

2. Literature review

2.1 Overview

The previous chapter introduced and contextualised this study and set out two research questions about EAL learner identity and success. This chapter turns to the context of contemporary EAL in England, and the theoretical framework for the study, to establish the gap in literature which these questions address.

Section 2.2 examines the socio-political and educational context of late-arrival EAL learners in England,[3] paying particular attention to the policy of *mainstreaming*. EAL success is investigated in Section 2.3; exam outcomes as a measure of success are problematised as products of a neoliberal education system and a more humanistic perspective, *Imagined Communities* (IC) (Norton 2001) is outlined as an alternative.

Section 2.4 outlines learner identity through the key theoretical framework of this study, *Positioning Theory* (PT) (Davies and Harré 1990). This is drawn together with the socio-political context in Section 2.5 to establish the gap in research which this study addresses, namely the examination of learner identity amongst late-arrival EAL learners and how this may impact notions of success.

2.2 The EAL landscape

2.2.1 EAL learners

In England, 'EAL' is an ambiguous and imprecise term (see Appendix 1), homogenising a highly heterogeneous group, who may differ in first language, levels of proficiency and literacy in any of their language(s), length of residence in England, socioeconomic status, immigration status, and future mobility plans. The 'EAL' label, then, is limited, for the collection and interpretation of data, and design and implementation of policies (Evans et al.

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[3] Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have different arrangements for EAL learners; although there are commonalities, the chapter refers to England throughout.

2020; Leung 2016). In 2023/24 EAL learners comprised 18.6% of the secondary school population and 20.8% of the overall school population in England (DfE 2024c); however, not all EAL learners need language support and those that do may need different forms of support.

Language data is captured three times a year in the school census, but this does not include information about proficiency, although the collection of such data has been advocated since as far back as the Bullock Report (Department for Education and Science, DES, 1975). From 2016, schools were required by the government to assess the English proficiency level of EAL learners using an A–E scale, A denoting 'New to English' and E 'Fluent' (DfE 2016). This policy, along with a requirement to collect information about nationality and country of birth, was abandoned in 2018 amid concerns about the data being used to identify and pursue families without legal status in the UK (Evans et al. 2020; Liberty 2018; Smith 2018). However, the systematic collection of proficiency data had been welcomed (Demie 2018; Hutchinson 2018) and its abandonment disappointed practitioners and advocates (NALDIC 2018). Many schools already viewed ongoing proficiency assessment as good practice for the identification of language needs and planning of support and have continued to do so using the A–E scale or equivalent.

In 2015, fifty-six percent of EAL learners whose first language is not English were born outside the UK (Strand, Malmberg and Hall 2015) but this percentage has fallen since then: now, just 6% of children in the UK were born abroad (The Migration Observatory 2022). An approximation of data on international arrival and length of residence in the UK is collected through school rolls and attainment scores at the end of Key Stages 1 (aged 7, optional tests) and 2 (aged 11, statutory tests) (KS1, KS2). Of these learners, 46% enter the UK after schooling begins at age five, and 21.5% enter secondary school between the ages of 11 and 14, during Key Stage 3 (KS3) (Strand, Malmberg and Hall 2015). Entering the English school system later is associated with lower attainment at the age of sixteen (DfE 2019; DfE 2020b; see also Section 2.3.1). Late arrival learners, then, represent a specific group of EAL learners who have particular needs in terms of proficiency and curriculum knowledge. They, along with secondary EAL learners more widely and newly-arrived learners are all under-represented in current EAL research (Evans and Liu 2018; Sharples 2017). This matters

because, with limited time until they face high-stakes testing, understanding their experiences and needs is crucial to offering them the right support.

2.2.2 The policy of mainstreaming

'Mainstreaming' EAL pupils has become standard practice in England. In the 1960s and 1970s, EAL pupils were commonly taught in specialist units or classrooms, using methodology taken from English as a Foreign Language traditions, with the aim of raising their proficiency levels enough to join mainstream classrooms after about a year (Costley 2014; Leung 2016). In the 1980s, amid concerns about racial inequalities and social divisions, policy moved to placing learners into mainstream classes 'as quickly as possible' (DfE 2012:1), with additional support provided either in those classes or in withdrawal sessions. The change was underpinned by theoretical support from acquisition models of learning which, when translated into policy, often conflated understandings of first language acquisition and second language learning (Costley 2014; Leung 2016),[4] and by government reports such as the Swann Report (1985), which urged an end to segregationist policies; in other words, it was a decision which prioritised the social integration of EAL learners over their language needs (Leung 2018). In mainstream classrooms EAL learners are expected to engage with the same National Curriculum as all other pupils.

The Department for Education sets out a particular view of equality when they state that all learners have a right of access to the National Curriculum, including those newly-arrived, and that they make best progress when they learn alongside their peers and 'feel secure and valued' (DfE 2012:2). This understanding of equality and the manner of its implementation, however, have raised questions about visibility, difference, and assimilation. In the 1970s, there were concerns that policy was designed to make young people's language and culture invisible (Derrick 1977) and there were calls for greater visibility of both by the Bullock Report (DES 1975). The move to mainstreaming, which the Bullock Report advocated, has not addressed invisibility. It is a 'contestable and contested

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[4] 'Acquisition' usually refers to the natural ways that children learn (particularly their first) language while 'learning' refers to formal processes, often in a classroom (Cook 2016). In the case of EAL learners, either or both terms may be applicable, depending on the learner's exposure to English and the language interventions they receive.

set of curriculum choices and pedagogic practices' (Leung 2018:2) which must be problematised (Welply 2023). It is based on a perspective of equality which erases difference, including language difference, in favour of assimilation to a dominant form of language and schooling (Costley 2014; Cummins 2000). The mainstreaming project has dovetailed with the focus on 'fundamental British values' in education since 2014 which has its roots in ideologies of identity assimilation and moral panics about religious extremism (Richardson 2015; Tomlinson 2015). Specifically in terms of language, the conflation of first language acquisition and second language learning into a general concern about 'literacy' has led to the erasure of the distinct needs of EAL learners, which have been steadily 'invisibilised' (Richardson 2023:3) in policy: to illustrate, Flynn and Curdt-Christiansen (2018) note the incidence of the terms *EAL* and *English as an Additional Language* fell from 147 to 35 in policy documents post-2010.

Ending educational segregation was intended to sit alongside targeted language support from mainstream teachers and EAL specialists (Leung 2016). Since 2011, however, funding has been drastically cut, alongside specialist knowledge held within local education authorities, leading to highly inconsistent provision (Evans et al. 2016). Eighty percent of secondary schools are now academies or free schools (DfE 2023c). These are not subject to local government EAL policy which might support provision (Flynn and Curdt-Christiansen 2018), compounding the inconsistency. Funding is available only for the first three years after a learner's arrival in England, which disproportionately impacts young people in secondary school, as they have the least time available to gain proficiency and knowledge of the curriculum before taking end-of-school exams (Hutchinson 2018). Hutchinson therefore advocates for intensive funding and support for late-arrival learners. In any case, funding is not ring-fenced and therefore may not be spent on direct support for EAL learners (Costley 2014; Evans et al. 2016; Hutchinson 2018).

The lack of funding and expertise is compounded by a lack of training. EAL is not a specialist subject in the way that, for example, Geography or Music is. Instead, all teachers, regardless of subject specialism, are expected to 'have a clear understanding of the needs of all pupils, including…those with English as an additional language…and be able to use and evaluate distinctive teaching approaches to engage and support them' (DfE 2021:12) and training providers are expected by the government's Office for Standards in Education, Children's

Services and Skills (OFSTED) to ensure that trainees meet minimum standards on this, as other, expectations (OFSTED 2023a). Nevertheless, only around a third of newly-qualified teachers feel they have been well-prepared to teach EAL learners (Foley et al. 2018; National College for Teaching and Learning 2017) and the statutory Early Career Framework for the ongoing training of practising teachers does not mention EAL at all (DfE 2024a). While teachers may be keen to support EAL learners and committed to the principle of providing for them within their mainstream classrooms, they often lack the tools to do so: training on teaching strategies and on core values around inclusion, available expertise from EAL specialists, and ongoing funding (Evans et al. 2016).

A further set of concerns revolve around the unsuitability for EAL learners of the National Curriculum and, indeed, the school system itself, in their present form. The specific understanding of inclusion which underpins the mainstreaming project has at its heart a dominant discourse of 'Standard' English monolingualism and monoculturalism, rooted in Britain's colonial history, which values white, middle-class cultural capital above all others (Cushing and Snell 2023; Welply 2023). The tendency of researchers, practitioners and policy-makers to focus on EAL pedagogy and attainment leaves largely invisible the structural Othering of EAL learners through the system itself (Welply 2023). Likewise, the National Curriculum promotes Anglocentric monoculturalism, creating space only for a white British model of citizenship (Szymczyk, Popan and Arun 2022) which is particularly problematic for those learners who are new to the culture it promotes. EAL content specification is not given any dedicated space in the National Curriculum, not even within the section on Languages (DfE 2014), underscoring its 'non-subject' status (Costley 2014:289). The 105 pages of the National Curriculum (DfE 2014) mention provision for EAL learners just twice.

OFSTED, the schools inspection authority, removed the post of Lead Inspector for EAL in 2021 (Chalmers 2021) and the language of its inspection framework reflects a contrast between the language of 'we' who share culture, and 'other pupils' (Ranson 2023), while containing no substantive reference to EAL, a decision which runs contrary to the government's obligations, as a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, towards the promotion of children's rights and the inclusion of multilingual learners' voices (NALDIC 2023). The results of a commission into racial and ethnic

disparities, the Sewell Report (HM Government 2021), likewise makes no reference to newly-arrived learners or their language needs (Tikly 2022). Exclusions such as these lead Szymczyk, Popan and Arun (2022) to argue that the homogenising EAL label serves little practical purpose but to Other multilingual learners.

England is sometimes claimed to be in an age of super-diversity (Vertovec 2007), going beyond ethnicity to include unprecedented transnational connectivity, space and place, stratification of legal status, gendered channels of migration, and other factors, all of which reflect and impact on the lives of multilingual learners. Recalling that EAL learners account for around a fifth of the school population, any discussion of educational inclusion begs a question: inclusion into what? Levitas (2005:188) problematises the concepts of exclusion and inclusion, arguing that any talk of a minority who must be included, discursively and *a priori* excludes that minoritised group relative to the 'included' majority, and pathologises their 'unwanted characteristics'. The monolingual, monocultural 80% are thus reified through education policy as the norm to which it is assumed that the multilingual, multicultural 20% aspire. This assumption, in a super-diverse EAL population, may be partially or entirely incorrect (Welply 2023), as frameworks of integration and inclusion tend to ignore 'the complexities and fluidities of the multilingual migrant experience' (Evans and Liu 2018:152), while the state of English language learning is itself pathologised. In sum, EAL policy revolves around a model of inclusion to a norm which discursively locates a fifth of the school population outside its boundaries, while paradoxically making it practically difficult to be included, thanks to dwindling EAL expertise, funding, and visibility.

EAL policy necessarily impacts the success of EAL learners, and it is to the question of success that this chapter now turns. The next section examines how success for EAL learners is measured and ideologically framed, and how late arrival multilingual learners may encounter these measures and framings.

2.3 EAL success

2.3.1 Exam outcomes in secondary school

The success of all secondary school learners, including EAL learners, is primarily assessed through national exam outcomes at the age of sixteen. Those who arrive to England during primary education experience a significant 'gap' in academic achievement when compared with their monolingual peers (Demie 2013; Strand, Malmberg and Hall 2015). However, by the end of KS4 (at the age of sixteen), the 'gap' is reversed.

At that point, learners sit GCSE and equivalent exams which are graded from 1 (lowest) to 9. The UK government, and therefore schools, measure success in state-funded schools through Attainment 8, whereby the grade achieved in a GCSE exam is awarded a score; the best eight are added together, with English and Maths given double weighting, and averaged to give the Attainment 8 score. A second measure is the percentage of learners who achieve a grade 5 or above in English and Maths (DfE 2023e). Selected years of these two measures are shown in Table 2.1 to compare the performance of EAL learners (108,000 learners in 2023) with that of the general pupil population (607,000 learners) (DfE 2023e).

Table 2.1: A comparison of GCSE results for EAL learners with all learners (DfE 2018; DfE 2020a; DfE 2022; DfE 2023e)

	Attainment 8 (all)	Attainment 8 (EAL)	Difference	English & Maths grade 5+ (all)	English & Maths grade 5+ (EAL)	Difference
2017	46.3	46.8	+0.5	42.7%	42.8%	+0.1
2019	46.7	47.6	+0.9	43.2%	43.8%	+0.6
2022	48.8	50.6	+1.8	49.8%	53.3%	+3.5
2023	46.3	48.5	+2.2	45.3%	48.9%	+3.6

The DfE (2023e) urges caution in interpreting recent figures because of changes to examination procedures during and since the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, as

illustrated in Table 2.1, there is a pattern over the last six years whereby EAL learners increasingly out-attain monolingual peers. These headline figures have been greeted with some dismay by the tabloid press, who interpret them as evidence of discrimination against white British learners (Choudry 2018; Evans et al. 2020), and with caution by EAL practitioners and researchers (Choudry 2018; Demie 2018; Hutchinson 2018; Strand, Malmberg and Hall 2015), who point to the heterogeneity of the EAL learner group; headlines about strong attainment fail to highlight wide variations between different EAL sub-groups.

Of particular interest is the attainment of multilingual young people who arrive in England after the age of eleven. In 2016, children who arrived aged eleven attained an average of grade 5 in each GCSE subject, those who arrived aged twelve to fourteen attained an average of grade 4, and those who arrived aged fifteen attained an average of grade 3 (Hutchinson 2018). In 2018, children who arrived in Year 8 gained an average Attainment 8 score of 41.9 in total (or grade 5 in each subject), those who arrived in Year 9 gained an average of 38.5, those who arrived in Year 10 gained an average of 35.6, and those who arrived in Year 11 an average of 23.7 (DfE 2019). In summary, for EAL pupils, the later they arrive in England after the age of eleven, the lower their attainment compared to their peers.

A second, related, key difference amongst EAL learners is their proficiency in English. Analysing data from the brief 18-month window when its collection was mandatory (Section 2.2.1), Hessel and Strand (2023) found proficiency to be a significantly better predictor of GCSE exam attainment than the EAL label alone or in combination with social characteristics such as gender, ethnicity or economic deprivation. Figure 2.1 from Hessel and Strand (2023) shows the correlation of Attainment 8 scores with English proficiency level, a result which supports earlier studies (Demie 2013; Demie 2018; Demie, McDonald and Hau 2016; Demie and Strand 2006; Strand, Malmberg and Hall 2015).

Figure 2.1: KS4 Attainment 8 correlated with English proficiency (Hessel and Strand 2023:774)
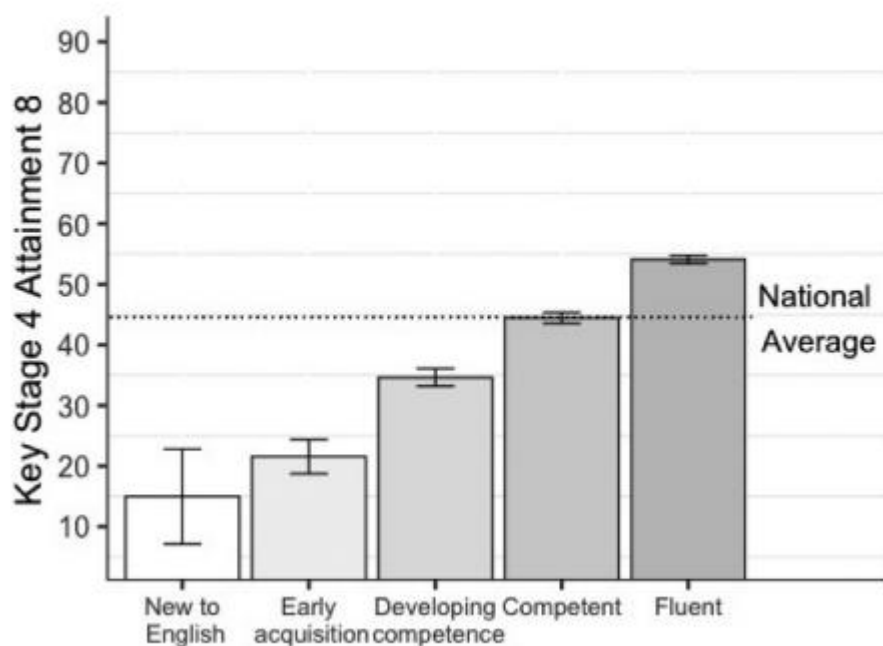
It takes a new arrival school learner in an English-dominant country around six years to acquire the academic (as well as social) language to achieve the highest level of proficiency (Cummins 1981; Demie 2013). Such proficiency levels are necessary for the attainment patterns seen in the 'fluent' data shown in Figure 2.1. Exposure to other languages, socioeconomic status, regional variations, school mobility, and many other factors intersect with EAL status, painting a complex picture (Hessel and Strand 2023; Strand, Malmberg and Hall 2015). Nevertheless, proficiency and age of arrival emerge as particularly impactful in the attainment of multilingual learners (DfE 2020b).

While schools and young people can do little to influence age of arrival, research and practitioner attention focuses on how schools can support EAL learners and influence the rate of English acquisition (e.g. Gibbons 2015; Murphy and Unthiah 2015), to enable greater engagement with the curriculum and, as the studies discussed above indicate, higher rates of exam success. Late arrivals have not only to engage with academic English language but

also a curriculum which may not reflect their experience, culture or prior education, raising questions about the legitimacy of current measures of success, questions which the next section addresses.

2.3.2 Problematising 'success'

In England, GCSEs must be taken in English (other than specific language subjects). Inclusion in the dominant measures of success, Attainment 8 and grade 5+, depends on assimilating to the language of instruction and assessment, English. It also involves assimilating to the cultural models taught in the English National Curriculum, such as the requirement to study Shakespeare (DfE 2014). These are models and language which late arrival multilingual learners disproportionately lack and which the universalist approaches of mainstream will not teach them in the limited time available (Evans et al. 2020; Welply 2023). Tikly (2022:477–478) calls the requirement to assimilate, alongside the dismantling of EAL provision, 'an example of systemic racism in that it fails to meet the needs of a disadvantaged group of learners because of their ethnicity.' Individual schools' acknowledgements of multilingualism and cultural diversity, argues Bonnin (2013), only serve to reinforce linguistic discrimination by glossing over the wider systemic inequalities.

Hutchinson (2018) points to the higher-than-average attainment of the most fluent EAL learners and questions the appropriacy of the national average benchmark. Given the evidently high academic potential of EAL learners, she says, measuring their success in line with national averages is limiting, giving no real indication of what good or excellent outcomes for multilingual learners might look like. This is not limited to secondary learners: Bradbury (2020) questions the Baseline Assessment for five-year-old multilingual children because it does not consider what learners can do in languages other than English. The measures establish limited and limiting expectations of multilingual learners, where their potential to thrive academically is underexplored and they are always instead chasing the moving target of their first-language-English peers (Cummins 2021). Hutchinson (2018) calls for specific EAL benchmarks, rather than a simple alignment to the national mean, to ensure that the potential of multilingual learners can be understood. Exam success at sixteen is

therefore racialised by the monolingual and monocultural expectations of the GCSE system through an Anglo-centric curriculum, English-only assessment (Tikly 2022; Welply 2023) and the way it lowers expectations of the highest-achieving to a normatively average benchmark (Hutchinson 2018). This places disproportionate pressures on one particular group, those who arrive after the age of 11 and have least time remaining in school to meet the benchmark measures.

This present study takes place at a time of 'moral panic' (Evans et al. 2020:25) over immigration, when multilingual learners are portrayed in the media, on social media, and in political discourse as a drain on the limited resources available for education and a threat to politicised views of national identity. Schools are expected to play a key role in bringing about social integration, with English proficiency seen as a proxy for successful integration (Evans et al. 2020) and a symbol of national and social stability (Costley 2014). Simultaneously, within a neoliberal capitalist economy, EAL learners represent latent human capital who, if successful at school, have potential to add value to their new society (Devine 2013). Failure to reach benchmark results leads to a loss of human capital in the employment market, as well as loss of life chances (Cummins 2008; Roessingh & Douglas 2012; Strand, Malmberg and Hall 2015). Aggressive neoliberal policies position recipients of funding, including EAL funding, as an underclass (Cullen 2017; Levitas 2005) and such funding is tied to job-market outcomes, the realisation of investment in human capital; social inclusion, in such a model, means adding value to the job market (Levitas 2005).

For Devine (2013), the future capital value of multilingual young people conflicts with the present value they hold as citizens of their schools; a conflict which may be characterised as human capital versus human rights (Bian 2017) or human capability (Saito 2003). Viewing language learning as a human right or capability means seeing learners' linguistic capital as 'a valuable personal asset' (Bian 2017:476). Conversely, Bian (2017) continues, language can be viewed in human capital terms, a skill to be offered in the employment market, a means to an end. From this perspective, languages are valued relative to their usefulness in gaining and retaining employment via the attainment of benchmark GCSE results. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (2015) calls for a rejection of the strictly utilitarian approach to education, appealing for educators and policy-makers to go beyond a theory of human capital and embrace a humanistic goal, so

that education develops 'the capabilities for people to lead meaningful and dignified lives' (UNESCO 2015:37). This encompasses a vision of success and human capability wider than that exemplified in an exam-focused curriculum. Section 2.3.6 will examine one such vision, Imagined Communities (Norton 2001). First, the dominant understanding of success as measured in exams will be contextualised using research around educational *triage* and *meritocracy*.

2.3.3 Triage and meritocracy

GCSE results do not only measure success for individual learners, but also for schools (Ball 2021; Cotterill 2018). In an education landscape of competition and free markets established over successive UK governments since the mid-1980s, the proportion of sixteen-year-olds who reach the benchmarks is used as market information to rank schools in league tables so that parents and carers, as consumers, can choose between 'good' and 'bad' schools (Ball 2021). Poor exam performance can trigger a school inspection (OFSTED 2023b) potentially leading to a lower rating or forced academisation. This has consequences for recruitment and funding and is therefore of prime importance for school leaders.

The free-market landscape has led to the 'rationing' of education (Gillborn and Youdell 2000:1). School staff must decide on which learners to focus their limited resources in order to maintain or improve their position in league tables and ratings, and thus they operate a system of *triage* (Gillborn and Youdell 2000; Reay 2020). In this system, learners' potential to achieve the benchmark GCSE results, and thereby be perceived to add value to the school, is assessed. Specifically in relation to newly-arrived multilingual learners, it might be supposed that rationing happens in response to the significantly decreased resources available for EAL support. The results of triage have consequences for the educational opportunities that learners are offered, such as access to higher sets, higher-tier exam papers, and additional classes (Allen 2018) and, for EAL learners, English language support. This is not new: in 1988 Pye stated that, 'the credential hunt, though it makes teachers sniff out success, also makes them accept failure' (1988:60). However, Gillborn and Youdell's (2000) study demonstrates that triage is not a neutral undertaking but has strongly

racialised and classed dimensions through the labelling of poorer and minoritised students as less academically able. Specifically with regard to migrant learners, Devine (2013) reveals an implicit valuation difference of young people according to their affiliation to cultural norms, and questions the value that is assigned to migrant learners in the rationing and triage processes.

Triage and rationing are compatible with a neoliberal view of education which positions it as a meritocratic system, where talent and hard work are rewarded. This view sees schools as places which offer opportunity to all learners and are thus inclusive of all (Littler 2018); learners take up these opportunities in line with their talent and hard work and so responsibility for success is placed with the individual learner. However, meritocracy is 'the educational equivalent of the emperor with no clothes, all ideological bluff with no substance' (Reay 2017:123). Inequalities such as those revealed within EAL attainment data (Section 2.3.1) are not problematised, rather characterised as a result of market forces, the demand and supply of talent and hard work, both in schools and society more widely (Mijs and Savage 2020).

Talent is viewed as innate: 'character' is essentialised (Devine 2013; Littler 2018) alongside intelligence which is seen as fixed and measurable (Ball 2021). Indeed, Gillborn and Youdell (2000:15) label this the 'new IQism', a hereditarian view of intelligence, encoded in discourses about 'ability' which permeate the education system and accept inequity of outcomes as inevitable. They locate the new IQism within historical racism, an ideology of white racial superiority whereby ethnically minoritised people were 'scientifically proven' to be less intelligent, a history also invoked by Wright, Maylor and Pickup (2021) in their overview of discourses around Black boys' educational success.

According to meritocratic thinking, any failure is attributable solely to the learner, their family, and their community, with 'assumed deficits in their character/motivation and/or individual capacities' (Devine 2013:286). This allows schools and politicians to deny responsibility for those members of minoritised groups who fail to thrive (Archer and Francis 2007): indeed, it 'endorses and legitimates' a system of triage and educational segregation (Reay 2020:407).

Mitchell (2013) characterises the imposition of meritocratic ideology on multilingual learners as a majoritarian story. Majoritarian stories are descriptions of events or society which are told by dominant groups, and which reflect the values and interests of those groups (Love 2004). As a concept, it is used in Critical Race Theory (CRT) to explain how ideologies which disadvantage racially minoritised groups come to dominate the way that issues are framed and to privilege the experiences of majority groups (Delgado and Stefancic 2023). Mitchell (2013) characterises meritocracy in this way because representing school as a site of fair and equal opportunities takes no account of the additional linguistic demands on EAL learners in accessing content and taking exams. Clearly, she says, those demands present barriers which the meritocratic model does not engage with; hard work and ability count, but ignoring the existence of those obstacles is to deny the experiences and needs of minoritised EAL learners and thus serve the interests of the dominant white English-speaking majority. Majoritarian stories serve to make the privileged position of dominant groups seem 'normal, natural and ordinary' (Love 2004:229). The ideology of meritocracy, that success is the result of innate intelligence, talent, and a commitment to hard work, carries out this function within schools; to the range of abilities for EAL learners is added English language proficiency, and the obstacles that the system creates for minoritised learners are rendered invisible (Mitchell 2013). This key function of majoritarian stories, the making invisible of barriers which minoritised learners face (Love 2004), is what Littler (2018:155) calls 'the racialisation of merit'. Application of a meritocratic model intersects with the long history of racialising intelligence (Gillborn and Youdell 2000; Wright, Maylor and Pickup 2021) and this in turn intersects with language proficiency in that EAL learners' lower English proficiency is sometimes associated with lower intelligence (Evans et al. 2016), adding to the racialisation of EAL learners.

Over the past seventy years structural inequality has deepened in the UK while belief in meritocratic education and employment systems has risen to become a majority view, including and perhaps especially amongst those most disadvantaged by it (Littler 2018; Mijs and Savage 2020; Reay 2020). Increased belief, suggest Mijs and Savage (2020), is a reaction to increasing inequality. It represents a turn from a desire for government intervention as a solution towards individual agency: the belief that one's own hard work will result in better life outcomes, 'meritocratic hope' (Littler 2018:11). Disadvantaged learners may share this

internalisation of meritocratic belief, attributing to themselves responsibility both for learning and for failure to achieve measurable success (Reay 2020). Studies have not yet explored internalisation of meritocratic thinking by multilingual learners, but it is reasonable to suggest that EAL learners may share the values and beliefs of the ideology, even as it serves to hide the inequalities of the school system in which they study.

Being triaged into an education system driven by an ideology of meritocracy suggests an explanation for the under-attainment of late-arrival multilingual learners beyond reductive proficiency data. To situate this within EAL learner identity, the following sections outline two concepts: *Model Minorities* and the *ideal learner*. Myths about *Model Minorities* illuminate the racialising effects of meritocratic ideology on EAL learners while the concept of an *ideal learner* provides a framework to understand the dynamic between macro-level ideology and everyday classroom life.

2.3.4 Model minorities

The origin of the concept of a *Model Minority (MM)* is usually sourced to a 1966 article about the social, economic and educational success of Japanese Americans (Petersen 1966). It attributes their success to hard work, willingness to assimilate to a majority American culture, and perceived characteristics such as respect for authority and strong family values, and contrasts their success with 'problem minorities' (Petersen 1966:180–181) who are described as apathetic or self-hating. The implication of the article, and others published contemporaneously and since, is that if 'Asian Americans' can overcome barriers, the failure of other racially minoritised groups to do the same is their own fault. For this reason, claims about MMs have been denounced by anti-racist academics and activists as stereotyping myths which enact harm to minoritised groups (Wu 2014).

Little has been written about MMs in the UK, although there is a small body of literature critically examining the concept as it occurs in education specifically in relation to learners of Chinese (Archer and Francis 2007; Wong 2015), Indian (Wong 2015) and Polish (Flynn 2013) heritage, as well as particular Muslim groups (Bradbury 2013). Within an educational triage system, belonging to a group perceived as an MM, Gillborn (2008:150) argues, 'pay[s]

dividends in terms of students' likelihood of being selected for the highest ranked teaching groups and receiving all the other benefits that accrue to those who embody (literally) the school's hopes of academic success'. This reflects wider government concerns about migration, particularly deciding which migrants should be eligible for British citizenship: the highly-skilled, the assimilated, those who take little from social services but contribute much to the economy (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government 2016; Yuval-Davis, Anthias and Kofman 2005).

The MM functions as a response to pressing and current socio-political questions, and as such, it is subject to change, and malleable by actors in politics and the media (Wu 2014). For example, Bradbury (2013) demonstrates that smaller groups of Muslim learners, such as Afghan and Kosovan refugees, are constructed as MMs because it is politically and socially expedient to counter accusations of Islamophobia in society and education. EAL learners' out-performance of non-EAL learners in the last years has been greeted in some media with dismay, as evidence of discrimination against white learners (Section 2.3.2). However, UK government communications consistently highlight it as evidence of success (DfE 2022, 2023e) and other media articles have explicitly linked EAL performance to perceived attributes such as 'bright…ambitious…keen' (White 2020), highlighting the work done to overcome 'speaking barely a word of English' (BBC 2018), and linking exam performance to future contributions to British society.

Myths about MMs are harmful in the British education system because they potentially 'demonize and scapegoat' (Gillborn 2008:152) other minority ethnic groups.[5] Success for MMs is said to be meritocratic and located within a nebulous and politicised interpretation of 'culture' (Alexander 2016; Mac an Ghaill 1988) which is perceived as innate to the individual, the family or community (Archer and Francis 2007; Maylor 2015). Learners from minoritised groups who do not achieve success are condemned as unmotivated, unintelligent, or not backed by ambitious-enough families and communities. MM myths in education serve a majority group purpose, namely to 'provide evidence of a supposed meritocratic system in which any student can achieve' (Bradbury 2013:553). They provide a

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[5] It is important to note that many so-called ethnic 'minorities' are not minorities globally or even locally and, in the case of late-arrival learners, may have recently lived somewhere that they are in an ethnic majority: a point which matters here and when considering the default Whiteness of ideal learners (Section 2.3.5).

rationale for the triage and rationing of education for ethnic minoritised learners, a moral justification, by setting up a Hierarchy-within-the-Other (Youdell 2003). For example, the success of Afghan and Kosovan learners creates a hierarchy whereby Bangladeshi and Pakistani learners' lower attainment rates can be blamed on the individual, family or community (Bradbury 2013).

A second harm of MM ideology is the failure to acknowledge the discrimination and racism, including linguistic discrimination, that minoritised learners encounter, and the 'serious but unseen sacrifice' (Wing 2007:465) required to attain success. Some media and politicians use MM myths to deny the existence of racism (e.g. Ehsan 2022); by pointing to the success of certain groups, it is argued that success is available to all who are motivated and intelligent enough. The Sewell Report, published by the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities (HM Government 2021), mobilised several MM myths. For instance, Indian learners' high rates of exam success were used to imply that it is a failure to properly assimilate, rather than Islamophobia,[6] which is responsible for Pakistani learners' relative under-attainment (Tikly 2022). Instead of acknowledging and countering racism, there are requirements for ethnic minority learners to demonstrate respect for authority and willingness to assimilate as 'good' immigrants: to be grateful (Okwonga 2021) and quiet (Kam 2021), not to get angry about inequality or injustice (York Loh 2021), and to accept a position of perpetual probation within the majority community (Bradbury 2013; Kam 2021).

MMs have often been associated with a specific ethnic group. However, this is not always the case: Wing's (2007) study of an American high school highlights the different ethnic backgrounds captured by the MM umbrella term 'Asian Americans', while Bradbury's (2013) study focuses on groups of Muslim learners in a UK primary school, with religion a proxy for race. In the context of current UK government and media-stoked 'culture wars' about immigration, specifically that of asylum-seekers (Morini and Hudson 2022), it may be fruitful to explore how constituting EAL learners as a MM might serve a purpose for socially and politically dominant groups by 'demonstrating' that families who are willing to linguistically

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[6] Islamophobia in the UK is sometimes referred to as a 'non-colour-coded' form of racism, where race is enacted through markers such as clothing and facial hair rather than 'colour' (Cole 2015).

and culturally assimilate, 'good' immigrants (Kam 2021), can attain educational and social success.

The linguistic discrimination built into the English school system (Section 2.3.2) acts as a proxy for race and, like other forms of systemic racism, renders EAL-related racism invisible, subsumed within mainstreaming ideology and the attention given to attainment and pedagogy (Welply 2023). Many EAL learners are white; nevertheless, they are often seen as 'not white enough' (Burrell and Schweyher 2019), an attitude reflected in the language of the school census: 'White Other' (DfE 2023b). Late-arrival learners are folded into the EAL label at a policy level without disaggregation of their needs, experiences and outcomes. While this study does not explicitly draw on CRT, MM is a race-focused framework with which to investigate the interplay between the micro, meso and macro levels of EAL learners' educational reality.

The MM framework also offers a way to understand less successful EAL learner identities. There is often a failure to recognise and support MM learners whose attainment is not as high, although within any MM group, there are always many such learners (Wing 2007; Wong 2015). Their different experiences go unrecognised amongst the stereotypes and 'amiable statistics' (Wong 2015:742) of national attainment levels, and there is an expectation that any under-attainment is temporary. With EAL learners, this expectation may be linked to projected improvements in English language proficiency and adaptation to the practices of English classrooms and thus it is bound up with their ethnolinguistic identity. Considering EAL learners as a MM may therefore have explanatory value for the increasing invisibilisation of EAL learners in policy since the 1980s (Section 2.2.2): as a homogenised group which is expected to exceed national benchmark standards, the failure to provide support is 'justified'.

2.3.5 Ideal learners

An *ideal learner* is constructed in the intersection of school discourses about behaviour and learning, including constructs of intelligence or 'ability' (Youdell 2006). The *ideal learner* displays qualities such as compliance, restraint, helpfulness, curiosity, and eagerness to

learn (Archer and Francis 2007; Youdell 2006). Against this idealised construct occur valuations: 'formal, informal, explicit, implicit and tacit assessments of who approximates this ideal' (Youdell 2006:97); these assessments occur in the day-to-day micro-interactions of school life and are not simply descriptions of learners, but are an ongoing process of identity construction, a creation of the ideal through interactional alignment with dominant narratives (*storylines,* see Section 2.4.4). Importantly, storylines about ideal learners are mediated by the social constructs of race, social class and gender such that the ideal is white, middle class, and male (Gillborn 2008), as illustrated in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2: The ideal learner
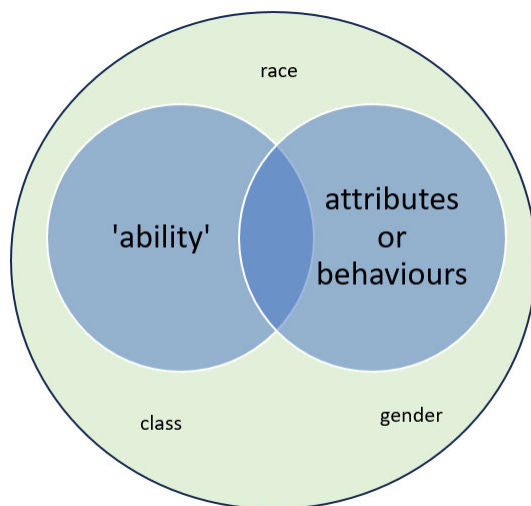
The abstract *ideal learner* is a yardstick against which real learners are valued and with which they align to a greater or lesser extent. Disalignment contributes to the construction of either the 'Other/pathologised' or the 'demonised' learner identity (Archer and Francis 2007:66). Young people may even be constructed as 'unintelligible' or 'impossible' learners (Bradbury 2013; Youdell 2006), where their interactants fail to recognise them within the prevailing storylines, particularly where those storylines intersect in ways which fail to make sense to teachers and institutions. Archer and Francis (2007) and Bradbury (2013) assert that racially minoritised learners cannot be securely construed as ideal; where they are, the position is always precarious and temporary. Similarly, girls and working-class learners are unintelligible, and their academic success is attributed to additional factors, or seen as inauthentic, achieved in 'the wrong way' (Bradbury 2013:548).

Sharples's definition of an idealised EAL learner engages with an EAL perspective by focusing on the linguistic storylines surrounding the ideal (male) learner. The idealised EAL learner is a 'bilingual student whose command of an unproblematised "English" effectively allows other elements of his linguistic and cultural repertoires to be erased; and who is able to engage with the curriculum on the same terms as his non-migrant peers' (Sharples 2017:169). Introducing multilingualism to the construct of the ideal learner adds complexity. Many EAL learners are white, middle-class, and male and can therefore theoretically be intelligible as ideal learners if they also display the behaviours and possess the perceived 'ability' associated with the ideal.

However, their linguistic capital (Bourdieu 1991) intersects with these and with race in fluid and complex ways, not yet examined in the literature. The prior schooling of many multilingual learners takes place in locations that the current concept of the *ideal learner*, developed in majority white, English-speaking contexts, does not speak to: in their prior schools, they may have operated within entirely different storylines about what an ideal learner is and does, based on different ideologies about, particularly, 'race' and language. Newly-arrived in English schools, their linguistic and cultural capital may move from aligning with an ideal to a 'troublesome' or 'unintelligible' position. In their prior locations they may have been considered as ideal learners, or at least have been educated within a set of storylines which allows them the potential to be intelligible as such. In the English education system, where almost a fifth of learners are now multilingual, a learner model which accounts for multilingualism constitutes a significant gap in knowledge.

Considering MM and the ideal learner concepts together, Bradbury (2013) asserts that a member of a MM cannot be an ideal learner; ethnic minority status renders learners unintelligible as ideal because of its racialised nature. However, she also recognises the infantilising nature of MM myths: they portray learners as lacking in agency, dependent on families and communities for their success in life. An *ideal EAL learner* model may offer a lens for interpreting learners' interactions with possibilities for agency, wherein learners accept, propose and challenge identities which align or disalign with *ideal EAL learner* storylines.

2.3.6 Imagined Communities: an alternative model

While EAL learners' success is usually conceptualised in terms of exam success at the age of sixteen, young people have additional ways of envisioning their future selves and this impacts on their day-to-day engagement with learning. They belong to what is sometimes referred to as the 1.5 generation of immigrants (Evans et al. 2020; Waite and Cook 2011), arriving usually as part of immigrating families in their early to mid-adolescence, with strong memories of and connections to their prior homeland. The school is situated in an area where around half of the population were born outside the UK. The neighbourhood is ethnically heterogeneous; nine in ten residents belong to an ethnic minority group with South Asians the most strongly represented in data but with significant Black African, Black Caribbean, and Eastern European populations. Over a third describe their 'main' language as not English (Birmingham City Council 2024). Local businesses and services, as in similar neighbourhoods (van de Vijver et al. 2015) reflect this diversity; local people are able to dine out, shop, and access services pertinent to their cultural and linguistic identities.

Peutrell and Cooke (2019:229) coined the phrase 'diasporic locals' to describe residents such as these, who bring 'linguistic, cultural, social, affective and other resources' to the locality and the interactions in which they participate on their journeys to integration in the host society. These multicultural and multilingual resources enable them to commit both to an ethnic identity, be that associated with a 'homeland' or with a global or local diaspora, and to the diverse local communities in which they participate (Waite and Cook 2011). These commitments involve ongoing (re)negotiations between the local and diasporic identities which extend beyond a simple binary (van de Vijver et al. 2015), coalescing in the 'diasporic local' identity.

For multilingual learners their diasporic local identity impacts how they conceptualise success. They align themselves with the *Imagined Communities* (IC) they aspire to join: an alternative view of success for multilingual learners which has well-established links with the co-construction of classroom identity (Norton 2001). ICs, originally used by Anderson (1991) to describe an abstract feeling of nationhood, are not the everyday communities within which learners participate — these are communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991) such as learners' friendship groups, EAL intervention groups, or classroom communities,

within which they may participate as diasporic locals, utilising their diverse cultural, linguistic and social resources. ICs represent the imagined ties which extend 'beyond the four walls of the classroom' (Norton 2010:165) both spatially and temporally, including professional groups, transnational communities, and diasporic national groups (Kanno and Norton 2003): any community in which a person seeks membership (Pavlenko 2003). Learners who align with particular ICs are invested in the storylines and practices of those communities and this can have a powerful effect on their engagement with learning. Crucially, ICs encompass not only the past and present, but also the future, and connect the concept of diaspora identity to its role in (language) learning at the micro-level of lessons and the meso-level of the school.

The concept of ICs has been used to analyse the engagement and disengagement of multilingual learners in their language lessons (e.g. Ahn 2022; Norton 2001). Success, to the aspirant member, is about becoming and being recognised as a participant in the community, and being given the right to speak as such (Norton 2001; see also Section 2.5). For transnational young people, such as those in this study, their time in school represents a time on the trajectory of their migration, 'in which people, places and experiences that are far away in time and space can be centrally relevant' (Sharples 2017:170). Young people in this situation may not envision a future which aligns with the normative notions of success embodied in GCSE outcomes, the model of white British cultural and linguistic citizenship to which it is assumed that they aspire (Cunningham and Little 2022; Welply 2023); they are used to using their full range of linguistic, cultural and social resources, and English forms 'just one thread in the webs of knowledge and experience' (Rampton et al. 2023:222) that they possess. 'Britishness' is not conceptualised in the way commonly articulated by government and media, which is 'refracted primarily through "whiteness"' (Waite and Cook 2011) and positioned within a belonging/not belonging binary but, rather, is entirely compatible with a diasporic identity. They may have a 'hopeful imagination' (Simon 1992, in Kanno and Norton 2003:244) which places them in other countries, pursuing other qualifications or careers, connecting globally through technology, and doing so in other languages: a more rounded vision of success, better aligned to the UNESCO (2015) rallying call (Section 2.3.2).

Success within this model shares features with the measures enacted by school practices or national policy: for example, a learner who aspires to be a midwife aims to gain the GCSE qualifications to study midwifery, even if they plan to live between two or more countries. ICs, therefore, represent abstract membership communities which encompass both the local and the diasporic nature of multilingual learners' identities and experiences. Norton (2001) suggests that where teachers and institutions recognise learners' right to speak as a member of an IC, it can act positively to build learners' investment in their studies. For instance, Pavlenko's (2003) study demonstrates the powerful effect of reframing failed attempts at 'native-speaker'-like English acquisition in a community of practice, as membership of a global IC of successful multilingual speakers. Conversely, where membership is not recognised or valued, it can result in disengagement, and narrow the opportunities for success.

ICs, then, offer an alternative to the majoritarian story of MM in envisioning success for multilingual young people. In contrast to the meritocratic story of exam results, aspiring or actual memberships of an IC foreground the experiences and hopes of the learners. Known as a counter-story in CRT (Delgado and Stefancic 2023), the construct of ICs functions as a set of *storylines* (Section 2.4.4) which may challenge racist narratives, allowing learners to foreground their own visions of success. Whereas MM ideology homogenises learners and invisibilises their individual experiences and needs, ICs can make the complexities of young multilingual learners' identities visible and relevant, complexities which are the subject of Section 2.4.

2.4. Learner identity

The chapter so far has examined the context of the EAL landscape in England and how success for EAL learners is understood in current policy, practice and research. It has considered the barriers these constructions of success create for young multilingual late-arrivals, who must linguistically and culturally assimilate in order to reach national benchmark measures by the age of sixteen.

While the theoretical concepts of MM, the *ideal learner*, and IC provide frameworks for understanding EAL success and its links to identity at meso and macro levels, this chapter now turns more explicitly to learner identity. The remainder of the chapter outlines key concepts in identity and, specifically, *Positioning Theory* (PT), which forms the main analytical framework for the study (Sections 2.4.2–2.4.6). Section 2.4.7 considers the contribution of PT to knowledge about the role of peers in adolescent identity co-construction. Sections 2.3 and 2.4 are brought together in a discussion about EAL learner identity, learning, the right to speak, and their relationship to success in Section 2.5.

2.4.1 Identity as a sociocultural linguistic phenomenon

The model of meritocracy (Section 2.3.3) relies on psychological explanations of identity as existing primarily within the individual in terms of personality, motivation, and aptitude. However, such explanations are inevitably partial. This study adopts a sociocultural linguistic understanding of identity, whereby identity is interactionally emergent and intersubjectively produced (Bucholtz and Hall 2005). Sociocultural linguistic accounts such as Positioning Theory (PT) do not deny the influence of internal understandings of self, nor the importance of sociological identity categories. PT, originally conceptualised through a psychological lens, has become a trans-disciplinary model which explores, through *storylines* (Section 2.4.4), the problem of scale — the relationship between moment-to-moment participant positioning moves and macro-scale sociopolitical positionings of those participants (Section 2.4.6).

Discussion of 'learner identity' admits the possibility of other identities, and sociocultural linguistic literature tends either towards discussion of 'constellations of identities' (Youdell 2003, 2006) or a single, multifaceted 'identity'. This study adopts the singular 'learner identity' but recognises that this is not unifaceted and that other aspects of a young person's identity, such as culture, language, family, transnationalism, religion, and friendship groups intersect with and co-constitute the learner identity. Indeed, previous studies around EAL and identity have tended to focus on these as a way of accessing learner identity (e.g. Blackledge and Creese 2009; Evans and Liu 2018; Wallace 2011). This study, however, draws on ethnographic (Duff 2002; Sharples 2017; Wickens, Cohen and Theriault

2019) and PT (Anderson 2009; Smith 2022; Wood 2013) studies which understand *learner identity* primarily as *negotiated intersubjectivity as learners of a mainstream curriculum*, where learning is interpreted as a sociocultural activity taking place within communities of practice (Section 2.5). It focuses on the *positioning* (Section 2.4.5) of learners in relation to *storylines* (Section 2.4.4) about what a learner is and does, and with reference to emerging meso-identities, or *kinds* (Section 2.4.6) of learners. These are necessarily co-emergent with *positions* and *kinds* which intersect with people's cultures, families, genders, linguistic capital, and any other elements of self which matter to participants in a particular interaction.

2.4.2 Positioning theory

Positioning theory (PT) holds that '[a]n individual emerges through the processes of social interaction, not as a relatively fixed end product but as one who is constituted and reconstituted through the various discursive practices in which they participate' (Davies and Harré 1990:46). Discursive practices make positions available for different interactants to take up, based on the rights, duties and obligations arising within those practices (van Langenhove and Harré 1999). Once a position is assigned or taken up, however ephemerally, it makes a person's actions and identity *intelligible* (van Langenhove and Harré 1999) to co-interactants within that conversation. PT is complementary to the sociocultural linguistic understanding of identity proposed by Bucholtz and Hall (2005), with its principles of emergence, positionality, indexicality, relationality and partialness (Block 2022). Therefore, PT does not view identity in a fixed or categorical way. As Davies and Harré (1999:39) state, positions are 'not part of a linear non-contradictory autobiography…but rather, the cumulative fragments of a lived autobiography'.

PT identifies three key elements in identity processes: *positions*, speech acts or, more broadly, *communication acts* (Herbel-Eisenmann et al. 2015), and *storylines*, sometimes represented as a triangle, as in Figure 2.3.

Figure 2.3: The positioning triangle (adapted from van Langenhove and Harré 1999)
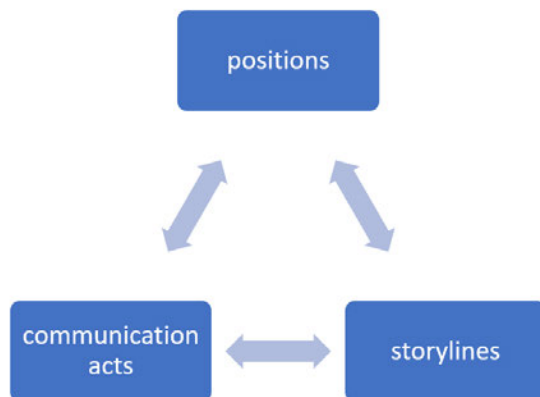
The three elements mutually determine in any interaction, in ways which distribute the obligations, duties and rights to speak of the participants, collectively known as the local moral order (Harré and Van Langenhove 1999). *Communication acts* (Section 2.4.3) are meaning-making acts such as words, gestures and gaze which interactants use to accomplish this identity work. Particular positions can limit or expand the communication act resources available. *Storylines* (Section 2.4.4) are the frames of understanding about any interaction which form its context. Different storylines make available a range of *positions* (Section 2.4.5), or temporary micro-identities, which interactants can assign, claim, accept and reject, and which serve to reinforce or challenge the storylines by making available different rights, duties and obligations. Each of the three elements of the local moral order is explored in turn in the following three sections to achieve an understanding of the model's usefulness in interpreting learners' identity work within a multi-scalar perspective.

2.4.3 Communication acts

PT proposes that meaning is constructed by interactants in a dialogic, negotiable dynamic (Davies and Harré 1990). This study uses *communication acts* (Herbel-Eisenmann et al. 2015) rather than Davies and Harré's *speech acts* and *actions*. This broader term captures the importance of non-verbal communication strategies. It is particularly appropriate to multilingual research study contexts as gestures, facial expressions, silence, and other non-verbal semiotic resources form significant communication resources (Kayı-Aydar 2019).

It is through communication acts that positions are assigned, rejected, accepted, or claimed (Kayı-Aydar 2019). More directly, 'all actions constitutive of communication are simultaneously "acts of identity", that is, they are about a person's attempt to self-position in such a way that ensures acceptance and authentication by members of a group' (Block 2022:84–85). Reciprocally, occupation of any position brings a share of the rights and obligations in the interaction, and these expand or contract the range of communication acts available to an interactant.

At the same time, every conversation contains 'a braided development of several storylines' (Davies and Harré 1999:39) which play out in the talk turn-by-turn; symbiotically, storylines function to tell interactants what kind of meaning-making process they are involved in, and therefore what communication acts are most appropriate or useful. Participants often find themselves in situations of contradiction or choice (Depperman 2015) as they interpret the talk in line with previous experiences and conversations, perhaps differently from their interactants. These choices and contradictions create space for agency as participants choose, reject, and propose new positions, and select communication acts which reflect these choices (Davies and Harré 1990, 1999).

2.4.4 Storylines and scales

Storylines are socially constructed frames of understanding which comprise the context for interactions: shared values and beliefs about the social world, communicative habits, expectations and norms. They enable interactants, turn by turn within the interaction, to interpret social events and interlocutor positionings (van Langenhove and Harré 1999). Davies and Harré (1990, 1999) conceptualise them as the historical and current discursive production of knowledge which positioning enables and within which positioning takes place (Section 2.4.5). This is a reciprocal relationship: mutually negotiated positioning moves lead to the ongoing micro-level joint construction of storylines.

The concept has been criticised as conceptually inexact and a somewhat neglected second fiddle to the foregrounding of positions within PT (Herbel-Eisenmann et al. 2015; Kayı-Aydar 2019; Kayı-Aydar and Miller 2018). Studies tend to start from one of the two extremes of

scale: here-and-now narratives which unfold in the interaction, or shared cultural understandings which are drawn from wider social frameworks, whereas a more multi-scale approach is needed (Herbel-Eisenmann et al. 2015). Examined at a micro level, storylines consist of local repertoires and narratives which may be constituted within a single interaction. For instance, Arrieta and Rosado's (2020:239) examination of identities on a teacher education programme in Colombia contains storylines such as 'So, what are you doing here?', which emerge from individual interactive episodes in the data.

Macro-storylines, on the other hand, reminiscent of Foucault's conceptualisation of discourse, demonstrate how wider understandings, such as those around multilingual learners, immigration, and race, are played out at an interactional level. One example is a study of media representations of minoritised maths learners in the United States (USA), which identified storylines such as 'Students from minoritised groups underachieve' (Andersson et al. 2022). In fact, macro-storylines are identified as discourses in some PT literature (Depperman 2015; Kayı-Aydar 2019), leaving storylines as a term used exclusively to refer to the micro level. The danger with a conflation with discourses, including as used in Foucauldian thinking, is a lapse into the determinism which PT, as an immanentist[7] perspective on identity, seeks to escape (Deppermann 2015).

The point of storylines is or should be to connect the micro and macro levels of social process, enabling a fuller understanding of both, and an exploration of how each constitutes and reconstitutes the other (Herbel-Eisenmann et al. 2015; Ingram and Elliot 2020). The more precise use of the language of scale can create much-needed clarity as to how this has been accomplished (Herbel-Eisenmann et al. 2015), along with a recognition that micro and macro levels are not easily separated. Anderson (2009:292) offers an escape from dualistic, micro versus macro, conceptualisations of storylines in her use of the additional term *meso* to sharpen and clarify a sense of 'social processes at different scales — local/immediate, institutional/intermediate, and structural/distal'.

This present study draws on Anderson's (2009) tripartite model. Storylines arise from interactive data at the micro scale. Their identification is made transparent through the

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[7] 'Immanentist' identity is used in line with Davies and Harré (1990:60) who described it as 'reproduced moment by moment in conversational action'.

highlighting of recursive positioning acts and explicit statements by participants (Smith 2022) as well as unique events in the data (Kayı-Aydar 2019) to demonstrate that storylines are identifiable in individual interactions.

Ethnographic approaches bring attention to the meso scale (Bucholtz and Hall 2005) through close and longitudinal observation and conversation, showing the recursivity of storylines over time and space at the level of classroom and school (space), lesson, school year and Key Stage (time) — the meso scale. Ethnography also enables a suggested interpreted placement of observed events, and recognition of instances of wider social processes, the macro scale, played out day-to-day. Depperman (2015) suggests that, combined with the findings and strategies of Conversation Analysis (CA), ethnography has a powerful potential to explore storylines, because it combines the perspectives of different scales. Storylines in this linguistic ethnography therefore contribute to the ongoing call within PT for multiscalar analysis and precise explication of storylines.

A second criticism of the concept of storylines is that it depends on shared and socially constructed understandings of the world, but these can be multiple. Past experiences, the bedrock of shared understandings of the world, are 'autobiographical fragments' (Deppermann 2015:372) which are as diverse and varied as the interactants in talk because they are living different narratives (Davies and Harré 1999). In a school, for instance, learners might imagine school as a place where they are judged on ability, whereas others might orient to a storyline around bullying, and this leads them to very different interpretations of a classroom interaction (Wood 2013). With multiple storylines in play, Herbel-Eisenmann et al. (2015) challenge researchers to know which storyline is the most pertinent at any time. Kayı-Aydar (2019) further highlights the need to reflect on how different storylines may intersect and relate to each other.

Furthermore, there is the possibility that storylines are not understood by interactants (Davies and Harré 1990, 1999): shared and socially constructed understandings may not be recognised in the moment of interaction. Storylines which are established and circulated by school communities may be unrecognisable to newly-arrived multilingual learners with entirely different prior experiences of education. Even within the school community, youth sub-cultures may have storylines about learning and being a learner which are unrecognisable to non-members of those sub-cultures. Block (2022) suggests incorporating

stance as a means of understanding how interactants construct and come to share understandings of storylines. This study refers to *alignment* and *disalignment* rather than stance (which, following Block, is what stance essentially is), to examine how young people and their interlocutors interact with practices and attitudes through their talk. This allows a more nuanced exploration of concurrent, recognised and unrecognised, or even contradictory storylines.

Wood (2013) returns to the observer in trying to resolve the visibility of storylines, insisting that storylines in play can be identified by careful examination of interactants' communication acts. Likewise, Kayı-Aydar and Miller's (2018) exhortation for researchers to show the links guides the present study, which makes transparent the process of storyline identification (see Section 3.7.1).

2.4.5 Positions

Positions come into being through the discursive process of positioning, that is, the way in which we present ourselves or cause others to be presented. They are commonly represented as a 'cluster' (Ingram and Elliot 2020; Kayı-Aydar 2019) of interactional and social and moral rights and obligations, an ephemeral rather than fixed phenomenon. Positions matter because they determine access to those rights and obligations within an interaction, which can augment an interactant's power or their vulnerability (Kayı-Aydar 2019). Conversely, a person's power and vulnerability influence their positioning choices within the interaction, an important consideration with newly-arrived EAL learners, who may have lost considerable social and personal power in their movement into the English schooling system. At the same time, PT urges analysts not to assume that all learners have equal access to power or speakers' rights simply because they share a characteristic such as multilingualism (Kayı-Aydar 2019).

Interactants position themselves and others in alignment and disalignment with storylines. New-arrival multilingual learners are allocated or offered certain learner positions in relation to storylines around their multilingualism and newly-arrived status, and those might include storylines around schooling in other countries, immigration, language, race and

ethnicity. Positions are made available to claim, reject, offer or counter, by these and the many other storylines around, for instance, peer social status, gender, and socioeconomic situation, which make up a newly-arrived young person's socially-shared understanding of the world, and which affect the range of identity possibilities available (Davies and Harré 1990; Kayı-Aydar 2019).

Positions have an immanentist nature and there is an emphasis on the role of speaker agency. Who the participants are in the interaction, the storylines suggested, and the creation, acceptance and rejection of positions for self and others, create a state of constant flux, (re-)negotiation and (re-)creation of intersubjectivity or mutual understanding, which extends beyond the more fixed concept of roles in social interactionist theory (Davies and Harré 1990). Observing positioning work allows researchers to interpret the flow of power between interactants. By accepting a position, for example, learners accept access to the rights and obligations of that position, while by challenging a position which has been assigned, learners assert a redistribution of rights and obligations, and therefore a redistribution of power and vulnerability (Kayı-Aydar 2019). Within a schooling system which homogenises their ethnolinguistic identity (Costley 2014), and where they must confront and resolve internal and interactional conflicts around their learner identity (Sharples 2017), PT throws into relief the agential nature of identity work, including space for contestation and resistance, that young people undertake as they (re-)negotiate their learner identities.

Van Langenhove and Harré (1999) identify several ways in which positioning takes place and upon which the current study draws:

- Reflexive (or self-) positioning is that carried out by a subject in an interaction, the way that we present ourselves to others in a communicative move.
- Interactive positioning is the way in which people position each other, and accept or reject the way that this is done to them.

Positioning can be intentional or unintentional. For example, a learner might deliberately self-position as a proficient English speaker through an explicit statement to this effect, or they might unintentionally do so in the way they answer a teacher's question. Positioning is always a matter of relationality (Block 2022; Kayı-Aydar 2019); we position ourselves and

other people in relation to others and ourselves within the storyline. Every position which is assigned, claimed, accepted or rejected creates new possibilities for self and others in the interaction, in a constantly evolving situation (Kayı-Aydar 2019).

Positioning can be:

- first order: the way that an interactant positions themselves or others
- second order: the acceptance or rejection of the first-order position, and counter-moves
- third order: that which emerges in narratives about incidents after or during the event (Van Langenhove and Harré 1999)

Some forms of positioning may be easier to see than others depending on the methodological approach of a research study. For instance, narrative approaches may foreground third order positioning moves. Kayı-Aydar (2019) calls for greater exploration around the relationship between first/second order positioning and third order. Different data types allow for different forms of interactant positioning to be observed and analysed, and this affords opportunities for the data contextualisation championed by Deppermann (2015) as well as opportunities to explore the relationship between different orders of participant positioning.

Storylines and positions are mutually constituted and recreated. Available positions are enabled or constrained by storylines as well as speaker agency in accepting, rejecting, and creating or claiming new positions. From any position, a person then has a particular vantage point on the world (Davies and Harré 1999) and this strengthens or challenges the meaning that the world holds for that person. This mutual constitution avoids determinism because as an interaction progresses positions are co-constructed and interpreted, storylines are made relevant or irrelevant, interactants' prior positionings and the storylines available all act to constrain or expand the available positions.

In summary, PT offers a specifically interactive development of the sociocultural linguistic approach to identity, with an ontology which is primarily social constructionist in nature. It demonstrates how, through individual and multiple interactive episodes, the meaning of communication acts is negotiated between participants, and meaning is negotiated between participants and the world around them. PT has been used to explore identity and

learning, particularly in second language contexts (e.g. Arrieta and Rosado 2020; Kayı-Aydar 2014), and Maths classrooms (e.g. Anderson 2009; Enyedy et al. 2008; Herbel-Eisenmann et al. 2015; Wood 2013), a few of which examine positioning of and by multilingual learners in mainstream classrooms (e.g. Davies and Hunt 1994; Martin-Beltrán 2010; Smith 2022). None of this prior work has examined the learner identity positioning of EAL learners in UK secondary schools.

While positioning work provides a micro, moment-to-moment perspective on identities, PT also considers scale, and the relationship between the different levels of social life. The following section examines this in greater detail.

2.4.6 Immanent and sedimented position identities

The emphasis in PT has been on the immanentist nature of identity, and how this sits alongside an acknowledgement of a more stable identity has been problematised (Anderson 2009; Kayı-Aydar 2019; Kayı-Aydar and Miller 2018; Wood 2013). PT research has tended to focus on the ephemeral, moment-to-moment identities articulated by positions. In classroom studies this enables exploration of 'moments of learning' (Wood 2013:780), allowing detailed investigation of how identity may impact on learning, but the troubled relationship between ephemerality and stability mirrors the discussion more widely in social interactionist understandings of identity. Specifically, PT has struggled with how to understand the relative importance at any one time of momentary, local, and broader social identities (Bucholtz and Hall 2005).

Positions have been expanded from the initial and quite limiting concept (Anderson 2009) to suggest a tripartite system, similar to that of storylines: the moment-to-moment position, sometimes known as *micro-positions* (Wood 2013), the sociological level of categories, sometimes known as *macro-positions* (Wood 2013) or *identities* (Kayı-Aydar and Miller 2018), and the meso level.

The meso level concerns the 'sedimentation' (Pennycook 2010:46) of linguistic and social practices through repetition to create an 'accumulation of positions' (Kayı-Aydar 2014:688) which Kayı-Aydar calls positional identities. In the classroom context, this means that 'the

person becomes, in a sense, a compound noun (e.g. *silent student*) or a label (e.g. *troublemaker*) that he or she may internalise to act or not act on in the future' (Kayı-Aydar 2014:688, emphasis original). Anderson (2009) refers to these identities which span interactions as *kinds*: acts of positioning combine with access to cultural and interactional resources, and all of this 'sticks' (Anderson 2009:291) to learners over time so that they are known as particular *kinds* of learners. Just as individual positioning processes have the potential to redistribute power through the re-allocation of rights and duties within an interaction, it may be that power also 'sticks' over time to a person; how this happens is underexplored in classroom-based PT (Herbel-Eisenmann et al. 2015) although there is acknowledgement that power shifts at all scales are constant (Kayı-Aydar 2019). A note of caution is important here: Wood (2013) notes the non-linear nature of identity construction which PT brings into focus; trajectories towards a *kind* of student can look entirely different in different contexts, as access to resources is limited or enhanced, and acts of positioning combine with these in different ways. In line with wider social interactionist conceptions of identity (Bucholtz and Hall 2005), the meso level is fruitfully explored ethnographically (Deppermann 2015).

This study uses the term *position* to refer to micro learner identities in moment-to-moment interactions. It adopts and later expands upon Wood's (2013) terminology for certain learner positions: *explainer, menial worker,* and *(Maths) learner* along with Smith's (2022) *spokesperson* and *responsible speaker*. This study uses Anderson's (2009) *kinds* to refer to meso-level learner identities which are observed across time or space. *Identity* is often used to refer to macro-level categories, those which might correspond to the ideological, socio-political level of storylines. *Identity*, in this study, also refers more generally to identity work or reflects its use in prior research. This tripartite distinction sits alongside a recognition that to separate learner identity into three levels is a false tidying up of a 'constant and harmonious interaction' (Kayı-Aydar 2019:19) between different levels of identity work, where each is constitutive of the other, mediated by the continual interplay of myriad storylines, some of which may originate outside the classroom and school.

Block (2022:63) has recently proposed an expanded model of PT incorporating the 'structuring spheres' of life, which impact on and mould individual agency and identity through the ways that they suffuse social life with complex relationships of power. It

redresses what Block (2022:91) sees as imbalance in PT, whereby identity is conceived of as 'willed into existence by individuals' without enough consideration of the influence of structure. As he says, '[w]e are not pawns to the discourses in circulation that undergird communicative acts and events, but we are certainly to a great extent shaped by these discourses'. This allows room for PT to work with macro-level concepts and tools, such as that of MMs, and to critically examine the influence of dominant storylines about success, EAL learners, multilingualism, and the 'good immigrant' (Shukla 2021) on everyday interactions. PT is therefore a complex model of a multi-scalar, multi-agency social life which enables the close examination of day-to-day interactions to be contextualised within wider socio-political understandings, with storylines providing much of the connective tissue while themselves being constituted by both the everyday and the broader structures of social life.

The role of peers in adolescents' identity co-construction has received special attention in research, and it is to this that the chapter now turns attention before drawing together identity, success, learning, and the right to speak in Section 2.5.

2.4.7 Adolescence

During adolescence interactions increasingly take place with peers rather than family, and these friendships play an important role, unique amongst young people's relationships (Scharf and Mayseless 2007). Peer interactions are key sites of identity negotiation as young people try out different ways of being (Grbić and Maksić 2020), where peer appraisal of these identity moves becomes a central concern (Scharf and Mayseless 2007). For newcomer EAL learners, an added layer of complexity is that they are often forming new friendships in a language, culture and school system with which they are unfamiliar. Identity work is, for such young people, a 'shifting, complex and multifaceted process' as they seek to reconcile times and spaces within their identities (Wickens, Cohen and Theriault 2019:666).

Much of this identity work takes place in schools, where newcomers encounter potential friends. Previous work suggests that schools have the power to define adolescents through opportunities for interactions with peers, staff, and wider structures such as curriculum and

access to services (Eckert 2000; Grbić and Maksić 2020). For example, Pinson, Arnot and Candappa (2010) argue that schools redefine children from migrants to learners, and that this process is partially facilitated by the development of peer friendships. Verhoeven, Zijlstra and Volman (2021) found that where peer norms and expectations conflict with those of the school, the negotiation of these conflicts feeds into the development of learner identity and that where discontinuities cannot be resolved within learner identity, they can affect engagement.

Friendship success demands a measure of 'fitting in', including English language development (Pinson, Arnot and Candappa 2010) although Chen (2009) and Evans et al. (2016) observe the importance of a shared first language other than English in the formation of some reciprocal peer bonds. Martin-Beltrán (2010) notes the power of peer interaction in first (L1) and additional languages (L2), in terms of learner identity and success in the classroom. Her study demonstrates that emergent multilingual learners' language proficiency is not an objective phenomenon, but co-created through interactions where peers make judgements and modify their behaviour based on the learner's perceived proficiency. The EAL learner's identity emerges from this interactive process as one of greater or lesser communicative competence, with attached rights and obligations to speak.

Interactions take place within a peer social order, the development of which is a key process during adolescence (Eckert 2000). Within such a social order, learners may have greater or lesser social and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986), impacting their access to social power. It might be expected that newly-arrived EAL learners enter the social order with low status: the forms of capital which they possess (social, cultural, linguistic) may hold little value in the social marketplace of the school. Becoming 'local' (Talmy 2010) is a matter of participating in local social and linguistic practices which define the boundary between old-timer and newcomer in 'hierarchies of belonging' (Phoenix 2011:313). Newly-arrived young multilinguals negotiate their identity within this hierarchy through interactions with peers and staff, interactions which offer opportunities to participate in such practices. *Newly-arrived* is poorly defined in literature (Evans et al. 2020) and, in schools where young people join frequently throughout the school year, those who arrive new to England and the school may move from newcomers to relative old-timers (Talmy 2010) in the communities of practice of friendship groups and classrooms fairly rapidly. This widens their social

possibilities and, indeed, is a main priority particularly in the first year after joining a school (Evans et al. 2016).

2.5. Identity, the right to speak, learning and success

This final part of the chapter draws together concepts around learner identity, EAL learners, and success, to demonstrate where this study fits into current literature and where it proposes to contribute.

This study understands learning to be a sociocultural activity. Learning takes place in *communities of practice* (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998), where newcomers learn the ways of being a learner through participation on the peripheries of the group, gradually working their way inwards as they become old-timers. This is a non-linear process in which identity work involves negotiating the meaning of experience within the community as journeyfolk (Wenger 1998): relative positions of not-yet-old-timers, no-longer-newcomers. For Gibbons (2006), this socioculturalist paradigm provides a resolution to the dichotomy between the cultural transmission model of learning, which has strongly influenced education policy in recent times (e.g. Gove 2011), and the individual, progressive outlook, both of which separate the social from the individual, and language from learning. Gibbons (2006:24, emphasis original) argues that learning is 'an interactive and communicative activity occurring *between* individuals, not simply *within* a single individual'. The theory and research gap between language and learning is closed, she argues, by focusing on the interactions which happen between multilingual learners, their peers, and their teachers.

Moreover, learning depends on opportunities for both comprehensible input and comprehensible output, both as language learners (Krashen 1981; Swain 1985, 1995) and specifically within mainstream environments (Cameron, Moon and Bygate 1996). Comprehensible input is language and content which is challenging but accessible for the learner (Krashen 1981), while output is their opportunity to speak and write at levels which go beyond minimal participation, opportunities which are considered central to language development in multilingual learners (Swain 1985, 1995). Together, these provide the scaffolded but cognitively-challenging conditions which are needed in mainstream

classrooms for EAL learners to make effective language and content progress (Gibbons 2015). Opportunities to interact in input- and output-rich environments enable EAL learners to negotiate meaning with their interlocutors, an essential part of language acquisition (Gass 2003; Long 1996).

Success, within a communities of practice model, is attained through the negotiation of identities which make accessible new forms of participation within the community. Necessarily, this means identities which are intelligible as learner identities to the community and are associated with rights to speak which are ratified by the community. PT studies suggest that that such identities and rights create opportunities for academic and language-learning success (Kayı-Aydar and Miller 2018; Pinnow and Chval 2015; Yoon 2008). The relationship between English proficiency and the attainment of benchmark national measures of success at the age of sixteen is then not a simple one. Instead, it is co-constructed every day as learners and their interactants negotiate positions and rights to speak which empower learners to access both the English proficiency and the curriculum content necessary to successfully navigate those exams.

Work around IC (Section 2.3.6) demonstrates the powerful force exerted by young people's membership of, or aspirations to membership of, imagined, abstract groups: transnational, ethnolinguistic, an imagined professional future (Kanno and Norton 2003; Norton 2001; Pavlenko and Norton 2007). ICs provide perspective on the trajectories of young people's journeys, incorporating the past and future in the present negotiations of identity. Wenger (1998:155) emphasises the trajectory in learning, providing 'a context in which to determine what, among all the things that are potentially significant, actually becomes significant learning'. Amongst transnational, diverse learner populations, the importance of trajectory to identity, and therefore learning, is all the more important (Sharples 2017). Just as positions in local communities can enable or block access to learning, so can the way in which young people position themselves as part of ICs. When there is alignment with the practices of the classroom, learners can claim a wider and more powerful range of rights to speak (Norton 2001) and invest in language and curriculum learning more effectively (Kanno and Norton 2003).

The right to speak is not automatic for multilingual learners. Newcomer identity (Talmy 2010), undervalued linguistic capital (Bourdieu 1991) within wider raciolinguistic ideological

norms (Cushing and Snell 2023), and linguistic inequality and discrimination (Bonnin 2013) serve to 'silence' EAL learners (Safford and Costley 2008) and label their speech as incompetent (Martin-Beltrán 2010), and the wider social context encourages newcomers to be quiet and well-behaved (Kam 2021). Negotiating positions from which they may speak with authority, as competent and intelligible members of the community, is a trajectory strewn, therefore, with obstacles which their first-language-English peers do not encounter. The identity work which is done is hence a matter of raciolinguistic justice by and for multilingual new arrival learners as they move, or fail to move, from peripheries of participation towards the heart of mainstream learning.

2.6. Summary

This chapter has outlined the socio-political context and theoretical framework of this study. It identified that there are few studies which give space to the voices of newly-arrived secondary school learners in England, and those which exist tend to focus on learners' sociological or linguistic identities, not on the learner identity *per se*. There is also a dominant concern in secondary school studies with success in national exams, and a gap in literature regarding alternative conceptualisations of success, to which this study can contribute through its research questions (Section 1.3) around learner identity and success as constructed through interactions.

It has also outlined Positioning Theory (PT) as a framework for understanding the co-construction of learner identity and its impact on success. PT has been used in very few studies with multilingual learners, and none in the British secondary context but offers a way to interpret scale: how moment-to-moment interactions reflect and reproduce institutional (meso-level) and socio-political (macro-level) storylines about EAL learners.

The next chapter turns to how the research questions were investigated through linguistic ethnography. It outlines the study methods, considers researcher positioning, and explains how the theoretical models were operationalised in the study to analyse and interpret the interactions of the participants as well as wider ethnographic data.

3. Methodology

3.1 Overview

This chapter details the methodology of the study and shows how methodological decision-making addressed the research questions (Section 3.2) and was linked to the socio-political and theoretical contexts detailed in Chapter 2. Linguistic ethnography (LE) is the initial focus (Section 3.2), to establish the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of the study, followed by critical reflection on the research design (Sections 3.3–3.6) and data analysis methods (Section 3.7). Ethical considerations are woven through the chapter to align with each stage of project planning and implementation, particularly in Section 3.5.

Vignettes are included in this chapter and Chapter 9, as a form of ethnographic writing (Copland and Creese 2015; Martin-Jones, Andrews and Martin 2017) which consists of narrative blended with extracts from fieldnotes, to reflect the deeply personal commitment (Atkinson 2015; Bhatti 2012) that ethnography entails. The vignettes were all created post-analysis, during the thesis write-up; they do not pre-empt data presentation and analysis but can be read as stand-alone accounts of the research journey.

3.2 This study as a linguistic ethnography

Vignette 1: Starting points

Part of my researcher positionality is my former role as a languages teacher. I spent twenty years teaching multilingual learners, and rarely had a chance for in-depth conversation; classrooms were always busy and individual communication often rushed. I wanted the chance to slow down, listen carefully, watch attentively. I studied social anthropology at undergraduate level and have always thought that ethnography is a particularly insightful research choice: it's the opportunity to enter someone else's world for a while.

Linguistic ethnography (LE) is 'slow science' (Van der Aa and Blommaert 2017:260), traditionally carried out over months of full immersion in a research site. Despite a greater range of 'ethnographic time modes' (Jeffrey and Troman 2004:538) which are used in contemporary academic contexts, the principle remains that an ethnographer commits to sustained and intense periods of fieldwork in the community under study (Atkinson 2015). This 'slow science' approach allows the study of social, linguistic, and interactional processes (Jeffrey and Troman 2004), enabling researchers to notice the situatedness of the processes that are observed, and their change over time and place (Copland and Creese 2015; Van der Aa and Blommaert 2017).

The research questions of this study centred on understanding identity and learning amongst newly-arrived and emergent multilingual young people in a secondary school:

1. How is the learner identity of late arrival multilingual learners in secondary schools co-constructed through the learners' interactions with staff and peers?

2. How might this relate to constructions of success at school?

To observe and record processes of identity work through interaction and gain an insider understanding of ideas about success required a methodology which afforded extensive time in the field, sufficient to build relationships and be allowed to see identity processes at work in their context of success at school.

LE developed out of the ethnography of communication of Hymes, the interactional sociolinguistics of Gumpertz, the dramaturgy of Goffman and the micro-ethnography of Erikson (Copland and Creese 2015). Building on these interdisciplinary foundations, it benefits from 'a disciplinary eclecticism' (Copland and Creese 2018:262). Interdisciplinarity is seen as a powerful principle for research in a globalised society, with less certainty about our own and others' identity (Van der Aa and Blommaert 2017). It is, therefore, particularly well-suited to investigating the questions about identity that this study addresses along with the complexity of the notion of success in contemporary, 'superdiverse' (Vertovec 2007) British society.

From linguistics, and post-structuralism more widely, comes a belief in the centrality of language in social life, along with the precision of tools such as discourse analysis, which this study harnesses to examine the interactions of young people with staff and peers. One of the assumptions of this study is that identity is co-constructed in an ongoing and interactive manner by people positioning themselves and each other through communication acts (Davies and Harré 1990; see also Sections 2.4.1–2.4.2). This acts as a sensitising concept (Lefstein and Snell 2020; Rampton 2006), suggesting directions in which to look while collecting data. Sensitising concepts are a significant feature of ethnographies: they guide the observer, putting boundaries around the vastness of the observable social action so that the ethnographer has starting points, but without prescribing *a priori* the objects of observation. There is an assumption in this study, therefore, that observing interactions carefully is a useful way to understand how young people co-construct their identity through the negotiation of rights and obligations.

While the precision of the tools of linguistics ties down ethnography, which is traditionally an open-ended enterprise, ethnography expands the constraints of linguistics and enables a consideration of scale (Rampton 2006). Ethnography assumes that reality is socially constructed and that giving meaning to reality is a social project, carried out interactionally through negotiation over time and space (Martin-Jones, Andrews and Martin 2017). For that reason, language can only be understood in its social context: situatedness is everything, and, correspondingly, the linguistic/non-linguistic divide is a false one (Blommaert and Jie 2010; Lefstein and Snell 2020; Martin-Jones, Andrews and Martin 2017; Rampton 2006). Situatedness is a second assumption in this study, therefore; it is not enough to observe people interact, but fieldwork encompassing a range of data collection tools can uncover the contexts in which people construct their identities and illuminate the meaning which they give to this identity work. The framework of Positioning Theory (PT), which guides the analysis of data in this study, enables a sense of scale. In particular, the tripartite scale of identity proposed by Anderson (2009) and the concept of storylines (van Langenhove and Harré 1999) allow the micro-detail of linguistics to be analysed in local, institutional, and wider social contexts with a sense of coherence (Section 2.4.6). Few studies explicitly link LE and PT, perhaps because LE developed largely in a European research context whereas most classroom positioning studies are from the USA — Martin-Beltrán's (2010) study of language

proficiency positioning, however, uses an ethnographic approach, as does Duff's (2002) study of insider/outsider positioning in a mainstream classroom. This study contributes to expanding this approach to investigating multilingual classrooms.

A third assumption, or rather assertion, of this study is that the voices of young multilingual newcomers, whose experiences are under-studied, are not heard enough in research (Anderson et al. 2016; Sharples 2018). Specifically, their voices are not heard with regard to the 'code talk' (Arnot and Reay 2007:319) of learners, that which focuses on expressions of 'the pedagogic democratic rights…that shape learning in classrooms'. Ethnography views knowledge as something which research participants have, and share with the researcher, a process which leads to the co-creation of new knowledge (Martin-Jones, Andrews and Martin 2017). The epistemic process is one by which everybody cooperates to make new information understandable (Blommaert and Jie 2010); this process itself forms part of the knowledge (Copland and Creese 2015). 'Polyphonic' ethnography (Clifford 1990:57) seeks to distribute authority for the ethnographic account, an authority which is steeped in relations of power, between researcher and participants, and thus it is appropriate in increasing the audibility of young multilingual people.

Polyphonicity extends from the extensive inclusion of quotations in the final text, to withdrawing the authorial voice altogether (Blackledge and Creese 2023). This study aims for a middle ground: retaining the researcher voice as the cohering force, while centring the voices of the young people in various ways. To achieve this the analysis (Chapters 4–7) is arranged around interaction events where their voices are heard, and their interpretations of experiences are foregrounded through informal and formal interviews. The tools of Conversation Analysis (CA) are used (Section 3.7.3); this is significant in that CA prioritises the emic account, the perspectives of those taking place in the interaction, rather than the etic account, that of the observer or analyst (Seedhouse 2004). Equitable conversations (Gómez, Puigvert and Flecha 2011) were also incorporated to the study design (Section 3.6.3), where national attainment data was discussed with the young people and their views sought.

Vignette 2 exemplifies the blurring of the binary etic/emic line (Martin-Jones, Andrews and Martin 2017); three voices combine to construct knowledge around a pattern of observed

interactions, with Gabriela's voice given authority by affording her time and space to tell her story rather than relying on events reported by staff.

Vignette 2: Sharing epistemic authority

In January 2022, I noticed a significant shift in Gabriela's visible engagement with lessons and English talk compared with before Christmas. The head of EAL, Magda, also commented on it and suggested some possible explanations but said she was scared to ask what had changed in case she jinxed it! — so I asked if I could take Gabriela out for a chat on my next visit. From my fieldnotes:

I watched a bit of the lesson until Magda had done the introduction and got everyone on task, at which point she said I could take Gabriela out. We chatted in the office for 15 minutes or so… I had prepared some pictures to help the discussion along. However, in the event she understood immediately what I was asking her, and just as immediately launched into an explanation. What really came across to me was how hard this event had affected her, how it marked, in her head, a paradigm shift in her view of the relationship between herself and English language. (January 2022)

This is a messy and contradictory process — my observations, Magda's interpretations, Gabriela's story — and Clifford (1990) warns of the temptation for ethnographers to sacrifice complexity for a single narrative. The point of ethnography is to welcome contradiction and intricacy and to render it intelligible to others (Geertz 1973). LE is well-equipped to 'bring to the surface those voices that are otherwise obscured' (Van der Aa and Blommaert 2017:270), and so the situation of contradiction and complexity where '*chaos is the normal state of things*' (Blommaert and Jie 2010:25, emphasis original) must be embraced. My hope is that the chapters of analysis (Chapters 4–7) and discussion (Chapters 8–9) preserve some of this contradiction and complexity.

While this approach seeks to share power more equitably, unless authorial voice is withdrawn entirely it is the ethnographer who retains power in the written account of the ethnography. For example, the words used to describe participants in this study, such as

'EAL', 'multilingual' and 'newcomer' or 'old-timer', are all etic terms, not used by the learners themselves (Duff 2002). Conversely, the experiences narrated by the learners are irreducible; while their sharing empowered me to tell their story, there are limits to what can be expressed in the ethnography (Rampton 2006). Researchers choose how to represent participants and the ethnographic context through the selection of data to include, interpretation and analysis of that data, and the words chosen to write about it. There are therefore limitations to power-sharing in this account, and these are acknowledged.

LE claims a predisposition towards an ethical approach, partly because of the considerable commitment to the research field and participants (Atkinson 2015; Bhatti 2012). Ethnography is, says Hymes (1980:105), the research paradigm 'least likely to produce a world in which experts control knowledge at the expense of those who are studied'. Two further cornerstones of ethnography are researcher reflexivity, and relationships which empower participants (Conteh 2018), and these are considered throughout the remainder of this chapter. Personal commitment, empowerment, and reflexivity do not guarantee ethical procedures, and in fact situated research approaches bring particular ethical challenges. These can be compounded in multilingual research (Cormier 2018), or with participants who may be from asylum-seeking or refugee backgrounds (Block et al. 2012; Kubanyiova 2008). The ethical challenges of this study were considered at every stage through a focus on the importance of developing virtue ethics (Kubanyiova 2008) and polyphonicity (Clifford 1990).

3.3 The research site and site visits

There were three criteria for selecting a school for this study. One was the presence of newly-arrived multilingual learners, another that there was at least one member of staff specifically responsible for their inclusion. With the decrease in funding and local EAL expertise (Evans et al. 2016; Hutchinson 2018; see also Section 2.2.2), this second criterion could not be assumed, and was essential to gaining access to learner participants and obtaining informed consent from them.

The third criterion was a matter of convenience; working in one city and living in another, it needed to be easily accessible to facilitate the juggling of research, home, and work. In 2018, half-a-dozen secondary schools were approached in both cities. West Midlands School (WMS) immediately referred the enquiry to the Head of EAL, whereas with other schools, communication was subject to significant delays. WMS becoming the research site was therefore a combination of applying research-question-relevant criteria, and convenience. Formal permission was granted by the head teacher, in line with the conditions of the ethics agreement with the University of Derby for this study (Appendix 3).

In Spring[8] 2019, initial school visits were carried out to build relationships, gain insights and identify a potential participant for a pilot study. Initial visits used a recurrent time mode (Jeffrey and Troman 2004) in that they were infrequent and happened at predetermined times, for a full day each time. The EAL staff, Magda and Ana, quickly agreed to become participants and data from informal conversations and their EAL practices and routines was collected as background.

The pilot study with LeBron (Chapter 4) employed a compressed time mode (Jeffrey and Troman 2004); nine days and half-days of intense data collection. This was because of different time available for research in the Summer term.

In Autumn 2019 and Spring 2020, visits reverted to the recurrent mode for recruitment of main study participants and data collection. This recurrent mode laid 'a critical foundation' (Block et al. 2012:76) because it allowed for the slow formation of relationships with young people who were going through a considerable period of change and learning to navigate school life in a language in which they were not yet highly proficient. This less rushed approach was important for informed consent: it allowed time between visits for young people and their families to reflect, process information, seek clarifications, and decide whether or not to participate (Block et al. 2012). It also allowed time for translated versions of consent forms and information sheets to be created, distributed, and discussed (Section 3.4.1).

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[8] Most English schools follow an academic year consisting of three terms: Autumn (September – December), Spring (January – April), Summer (April – July).

COVID-19 brought an extended hiatus to data collection, as external visitors were not allowed into WMS from the start of the national lockdown in March 2020 until July 2021. In July 2021, there were four days/half-days in compressed mode to start rebuilding relationships, assess the post-pandemic site and possible data collection constraints (see Vignette 3 in Section 3.5), and identify potential participants. Thereafter, a recurrent mode of visits was maintained until the end of May 2022. Figure 3.1 shows a summary of visits, time modes, and hours.

Figure 3.1: Timeline of data collection for pilot (green) and main study (blue)

| Feb-April 2019: recurrent (30 hours) | June-July 2019: compressed (29 hours) | Sept 19-March 20: recurrent (32 hours) | March 20-July 21: Covid-19 restrictions | July 21: compressed (17.5 hours) | Sept 21-May 22: recurrent (76 hours) |

3.4 Participants

Participants comprised newly-arrived multilingual learners at WMS, and the staff who teach them in mainstream curriculum lessons and EAL intervention sessions. The learners are often referred to as *young people*. As a participant observer (Atkinson 2015), I could also be considered a participant in the research; an example of my participation is shared in Vignette 5 (Section 3.6.1).

3.4.1 Multilingual learners

Many new starters at WMS spend a substantial part of their school week in the EAL department having small-group intervention classes and join mainstream classes for a limited range of lessons. Several days were spent with the intervention classes, to get to know the learners and identify possible participants. For recruitment, the inclusion criteria were learners who had arrived in England in the previous twelve months, were receiving support from the EAL department, and were in Key Stage 3 (school Years 7–9) at the time of recruitment.

After the pilot study, and again after pandemic restrictions were lifted, this process was repeated to recruit further participants and replace those who had left the school during the pandemic (Figure 3.2). At these points, EAL staff provided input. They knew the young people and suggested names and facilitated opportunities to work with them. This was time to get to know them, explain the project, and ask if they would like to participate. A description of the process for each young person is included in Chapters 4–7, including where relevant the events indicated for Gabriela and LeBron in Figure 3.2 which extended the period of data non-collection in 2020–21. No additional characteristics were included or excluded in the sampling process: first language, gender, ethnicity, nationality, proficiency in English, family background, immigration status, socioeconomic status, or current academic attainment were all discarded as criteria. This was because the focus of the research questions is not restricted to any of these characteristics, and because EAL learners in WMS, in line with national trends (Evans et al. 2020), are a very heterogeneous group and often have little in common other than their EAL label.

Figure 3.2: Participation timeline for young people
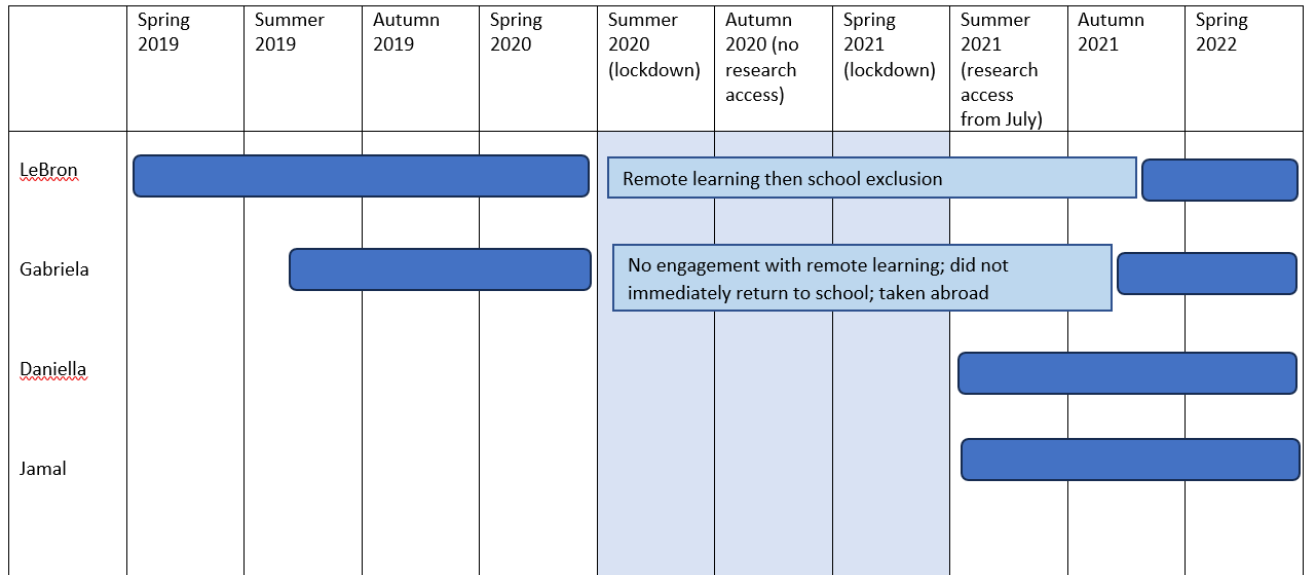
Recruitment happened over contiguous activities and visits. For three out of the four young people, shared languages (French and Spanish) were used to explain the project and answer questions. Information sheets and consent forms for young people and their families were provided at the following visit in French or Spanish, and potential participants encouraged to discuss it with their families. The translations of these documents had been checked with

highly proficient speakers. This gave young people time to ask questions and seek the views and consent of their parents. In the case of one participant (Gabriela), Ana was paid to provide an explanation of the project in Romanian to participant and family and translate the information/consent documents.[9]

One learner's family did not give consent which, after investment in professional translation and interpretation, was disappointing. However, the refusal of consent was an indication of the robustness of the consent procedure (Wegorowski 2022). While using EAL staff and normal school channels of communication (a letter home) was efficient and harnessed already-established relationships of trust, there was the risk that parents or learners might agree in order to preserve good standing with the school (Smette 2019), to please staff or researcher (Copland and Creese 2015; Kubanyiova 2008) or feel obliged to participate given the unequal balance of power between the institutions (school and university) and learners/families (British Association for Applied Linguistics 2021). This family's refusal could be seen, upon reflection, as positive.

Research is a 'game', set up and run according to the researcher's 'rules' (Bourdieu 1996:19), and this brings an asymmetry of power which is compounded by the dominance of English in this study, the youth of the participants, and their possibly insecure immigration status (Block et al. 2012). Using shared linguistic resources with a range of speech community members, from the beginning of the project, allowed a multilingual and more democratic dynamic (Cormier 2018; Costley and Reilly 2021). Researching multilingually necessitates researcher reflection not only on the research design, processes, and analysis, but also on the researcher's own stance towards multilingualism (Cormier 2018; Holmes, Reynolds and Ganassin 2022). Frustration with the limitations of an intractably monolingual English schooling system (Section 2.2.2), but also recognition of a

---

[9] There were an additional three learners who expressed interest in the study and, for them, documents were professionally translated into Tigrinya and Panjabi, and staff and older students provided interpretation, to ensure that consent was as fully informed as possible. Two of them joined the study in early 2020; however, the COVID-19 lockdown immediately afterwards meant that no substantial data was gathered, and they had left WMS by the time data collection was resumed.

welcoming attitude towards multilingualism in the EAL department, which mirrored my own stance, influenced the linguistic decision-making throughout this study.

The participants do not represent their language, culture, attitudes towards learning, or EAL learners as a group: they are not 'linguistic catalogues' (Blommaert and Jie 2010:3), rather individuals. On the other hand, they are not represented in their entirety. Participants represent their own voices in relation to those aspects of themselves which they revealed within the study (Hryniewicz & Dewaele 2017; Sharples 2017). In this way, the participants are entirely representative of the research population; they exemplify complexity and instability in their learner identities.

The four young people were key informants (Alvesson 2011; Gillham 2008), in the sense that not only were they participants, but they sometimes suggested other learners and teaching staff for participation, in addition to providing background information, and opportunities for observation outside timetabled lessons. For example, LeBron suggested observing his after-school basketball practice and Jamal suggested a particular Maths teacher to interview. Motivations for particular suggestions are considered in the analysis, where useful.

3.4.2 Staff

The EAL specialist staff, Magda and Ana, also became key informants in the study, and Magda acted as gatekeeper for observations of mainstream lessons (*pupil trails*), as indeed she 'sponsored' (Gillham 2008:52) the whole study in the school. For example, she briefed her colleagues about the study in a staff meeting, and before each day of pupil trails she emailed participating teachers as a reminder. Staff were given time to read study information and ask questions, and returned consent forms to me either via email or at the start of interviews or lessons. Some staff chose not to participate, and this again provided reassurance of the robustness of the process. In total eighteen staff members became participants. They are listed in Appendix 2, along with their subject specialisms and a figure showing onset and termination dates of their participation.

Teaching staff were therefore selected through purposive sampling based on learners' mainstream lesson timetables. There was also an element of convenience, because some teaching staff did not have time for interviews and eliminated themselves from the sample on the basis of access. Bhatti (2012) notes that in ethnography, access to a site and participants can be problematic, and the COVID-19 pandemic did nothing to ease this. Access became more difficult as staff absence and workload increased considerably, agency staff who did not know the participants replaced salaried teachers, and free time which had previously been shared for interviews was used to cover for absent colleagues. This accounts for the uneven number of staff interviews for each young person. At the start of each chapter of analysis there is a list of staff who appear in data in that chapter.

3.5 Vulnerability and micro-ethics

> Vignette 3: Recognising vulnerability
>
> Throughout Autumn 2021 and Spring 2022 I kept losing staff participants. One interview was done online because the teacher had needed to start shielding due to a health change; she had switched to teaching the class via video link with a teaching assistant in the room to supervise learners. This is one of several fieldnotes from that time.
>
> *This is what it's like, doing field work in a school in a pandemic. I went in to trail Gabriela all day. Periods 1&3 she has the same teacher, but the teacher is off sick, as she has been since early December. I've observed one of those classes with a cover teacher before and it was valuable, but I wasn't keen to do it again, as it's added stress for staff who are already under strain. So period 1 I offered my services to Magda, who was teaching a Science vocabulary lesson to new starters, and she jumped at the opportunity. I sat with one table and supported a particular learner. At break we went to the toilet and on the way back I bumped into the teacher of the lesson I had been planning to observe next. She told me that her lesson was now going to be taught by a trainee teacher — so again, not fair for me to be there.*   (January 2022)

Vignette 3 exemplifies participant vulnerability and researcher responsibility at 'ethically important moments' (Guillemin and Gillam 2004:261). Virtue ethics moves the emphasis from following formal ethics agreements — which are important, but only a starting point — to developing the reflexivity of the researcher, the willingness and ability to notice moments of ethical importance and to take action to preserve respect for the participants, avoid doing harm, and increase possibilities for beneficence of the research (Kubanyiova 2008). The development of value-driven rather than procedure-driven ethnography, argues Atkinson (2015), is key to negotiating ethics in the field.

Vulnerability during the formal or macro-ethics stage of research had focused on young people, their multilingualism, possible asylum-seeker status, and age. However, at the micro-ethical level, it was the vulnerability of teaching staff that sometimes came to the forefront. Vulnerability is not just the recognition of categories such as age, which encode significant power inequalities and hence significant responsibility to avoid doing harm. It is more fully considered as 'a condition or circumstance to which people can become susceptible at any given time' as circumstances and needs change (Aldridge 2016:12). Responding to vulnerability requires micro-ethical decision-making. At the time of the fieldnote above, Magda had not taken a lunchbreak during any day observed in the previous six months and was quite unwell with exhaustion, and the trainee teacher had reportedly been struggling on placement. Decisions not to observe certain classes with vulnerable staff members may have impacted data collection but felt important out of respect for staff and to avoid harm.

With young people, a similarly reflexive and ongoing approach to consent and participation was taken, with mindful consideration of moving in and out of vulnerability.

Vignette 4: Noticing consent changes

LeBron consented enthusiastically to the study; however, as time progressed, I started to feel uneasy because he was told off frequently in class and I was unsure if my presence might be making things worse by providing an audience. After the compressed days of pupil trails (Summer 2019), I asked him in French if he'd like to continue after the holiday and he said that he supposed his mother would make him. Ana also picked up a sense that, as he

embedded himself further into friendship groups, he didn't want to stand out. I backed off completely in Autumn 2019 and Spring 2020. On returning to the school in Summer 2021, I noted this:

I saw LeBron today on my way to the EAL department. He was surrounded by friends. He looked pleased to see me and greeted me in French. I was surprised because the impression I had was that he has become quite distant to the department. I told Magda and she said she'd seen him the day before, told him I was back in school and, meaning to tease him, told him that I was back to follow him around again! To her surprise he'd actually seemed very pleased, and keen to work with me! An unexpected and very welcome surprise both to see him and to get such a positive and warm response. Perhaps I will set up a focus group with Jamal — it may draw LeBron back in, affording him a way to continue being involved and feeling 'special' in a manner which doesn't threaten his social status. (July 2021)

Vignette 4 covers just over two years, which is a long time in an adolescent's life, particularly when going through the changes of migration, social integration, lockdown learning, and development of English proficiency. Staying alert to changes in willingness to participate felt important, seeing consent as 'a series of iterative conversations' (Creese 2015:65). In the formal consent process LeBron agreed to participate in the entire study but there were subsequent changes which I needed to be willing to acknowledge. It would have been unethical to ignore LeBron's growing disaffection with study participation; equally importantly, this disaffect did not last either and, as noted by Smette (2019), refusal of consent can sometimes change to willingness, as young people's relationships to school or the study evolve.

3.6 Data collection

Data was collected primarily through fieldnotes, which were made during and following each site visit. Mainstream classes were observed (Maths, Science, English Literature, Religious Education [RE], Citizenship, Catering, Design and Technology [DT]) as well as EAL intervention classes, some of which were audio recorded. Formal interviews were audio

recorded. Finally, captured in the fieldnotes are ethnographic or informal interviews. The following sections give detail on each of these data collection methods. Researcher positionality is considered within each section, along with ethical considerations and the trustworthiness of the data as appropriate.

3.6.1 Fieldnotes and researcher positioning

Fieldnotes are the backbone of ethnography. Both language and identity are processes rather than products, anchored in day-to-day activity, and therefore no insight can be truthfully gained into either without extensive observation to gain an ethnographic understanding (Blommaert and Jie 2010) through contextual clues to the situatedness of participants' daily school lives and their interactions with peers and staff.

Fieldnotes are not a single genre, comprising aide-memoirs written while observing, transcriptions of participant accounts, and more consciously authored reflexive and analytical texts (Clifford 1990). Fieldnotes in this study are a combination of aide-memoirs written during observations of school life and notes written after the event, where note-taking during an event was impossible. They include ethnographic interviews - informal conversations with participants (Section 3.6.3). These fieldnotes total 60,000 words. Vignette 5 illustrates how fieldnotes were drawn from many vantage points: mainstream and EAL intervention lessons, playground duty and in the uniform room, in corridors and offices and the library, canteen, and reception area, walking amongst learners from school at the end of the day. Non-participants were described simply by category (student, staff) in line with university ethics guidance.

Vignette 5: Moving in and out of participation

I was challenged by a colleague to explain how this is an ethnography and not a case study. After thinking, I said, 'Last week I spent two hours teaching French because the teacher was ill and there was nobody to take the lesson.' My fieldnotes are peppered with events where I was treated as an insider by the school — given keys and a staff pass, left in charge of classes, asked to contribute to departmental processes, involved in discussions about the

progress of particular learners — and by learners; for example, after spending a number of mornings helping Ana in the uniform room before school (any learner who arrived at school without an item of uniform was sent to this room to borrow a replacement), learners I did not know started spontaneously removing non-uniform items such as hats and jewellery when they saw me!

I had envisaged the researcher role as more strictly observational. However, EAL staff drew me into working one-to-one with learners during intervention sessions and, while I could have refused, it created opportunities for informal conversations with learners and built relationships which enabled me to start disappearing into the woodwork (Blommaert and Jie 2010). As a former languages teacher I was a useful pair of hands and glad to help (Section 3.6.2). However, it threw in new challenges, as this except shows:

As I approached the doors, LeBron exploded out with such force that it propelled him about 15 feet into the playground. He was laughing hugely. Where was he coming from and what had happened? We'd left Maths together so he'd clearly gone walkabout and had some fun in between. He said hello to me, still laughing. (June 2019)

I brought habits with me to the project from my years as a teacher, and it was initially hard to ignore behaviour like this, but important in building a researcher relationship, showing learners that I would observe without judgement. Likewise, some teachers asked me for feedback on their lessons and I learned suitable ways of turning them down as I worked to avoid forming judgements about teaching and learning (Conteh 2018).

The insider position afforded to me brought enormous advantages in terms of relationships and information, smoothed the way into lessons and interviews, and built opportunities for collaborative data checking. However, at times it impacted data collection and I had to make decisions about when to agree to things, and when to stand back. I also had to be careful about consent and reflecting on the requests I made as I did not want participants agreeing to things out of a feeling of obligation, particularly Magda with whom I developed a friendship.

Ethnographic observation can seem like the same thing every day. Becoming a part of the scene meant that the strange quickly became familiar: sitting in the same Maths classroom, meeting the same learners in the playground. However, it is this apparent sameness which is significant (Blommaert and Jie 2010): patterns matter as much as singularities (Rampton 2006). Instead of looking for difference, Pennycook (2010:37) suggests that we take difference as the norm, and instead ask sameness to account for itself: 'repetition that is something else…sameness that is difference, as a way of understanding how it is we do things as humans'. Blackledge and Creese's (2009) study of 'carnival lives' in the language classroom embraces both in observing the continual re/co-construction of learners' identity, and this principle guided my writing of fieldnotes.

Initially, fieldnotes were unfocused, because there was no familiarity and everything was potentially of interest, but as the fieldwork progressed, they testify to a shift in gaze (Blommaert and Jie 2010). Fieldnotes often focus on '*rich points*…the fuel that drives ethnographic research' (Agar 2006:4, emphasis original); where understanding of what is going on takes a small jump forward (Sharples 2018). As opportunities to '*chase* the rich point[s]' (Agar 2006:5, emphasis original) multiplied there was a progressive focusing on the patterns of peer/staff interactions and departures from those patterns. Not yet a 'thick description' (Geertz 1973:6), fieldnotes nonetheless reflected my growing and changing interests and attentions in relation to the research questions (Copland and Creese 2015): interactions with peers and staff, references to learners' other linguistic resources, the extent to which they were observably engaged with classroom tasks, and so forth.

Fieldnotes also captured initial reflections on some events as they happened, a first step in analysis. In other words, they were inscriptions rather than descriptions (Clifford 1990; Copland and Creese 2015). At the end of each day, they were typed up and, at that stage, more thoughts were added, moving them from 'raw' to 'partly-cooked' data (Clifford 1990:52). Re-readings over the course of the project led to more notes being added in the margins, often in the light of subsequent interviews or observations. Data collection and analysis, therefore, was a constantly iterative process.

3.6.2 Observations: moving in and out of participation

As often happens in education ethnographies (Copland 2015), classroom observations were recorded as part of fieldnotes; it was sometimes difficult to say where observing school life in the corridors ended and classroom observation began; for instance, I observed learners lining up outside classrooms or socialising as they came into lessons. Participants belonged to different teaching groups for each subject and moved classroom each lesson; this made setting up classrooms in advance with microphones or cameras unworkable. Nevertheless, there were discrete lessons and these afforded opportunities for observing interactions more carefully and in specific learning contexts.

Some EAL intervention lessons were audio-recorded; however, the EAL classroom was free-flowing - learners came and went, lessons with different members of staff happened simultaneously in the same space - and this created difficulties for recording, so many were captured solely in fieldnotes (see Table 3.1). The lack of recorded interaction was initially disappointing. The analysis of data in the following chapters includes data from interactions which were not audio-recorded. This meant that they could not be listened to again, which impacts the accuracy of language captured in interactions. However, in linguistic ethnography the amount of interactional data is not what makes a case, but its analysis (Blommaert and Jie 2010; Copland and Creese 2015) and, together with interviews and focus group, and interactional data recorded in fieldnotes, the few hours audio recorded provided a rich seam of linguistic data for analysis (Section 3.7.3).

Table 3.1 summarises the breakdown of data collection for each participant. It shows how many hours of lessons were observed and audio-recorded. It also has the total hours of observation, in and out of lessons, which were collected in fieldnotes for each participant over the course of visits to the school. Tables in this chapter are organised chronologically, in order of participant recruitment.

Table 3.1: Lesson observations, audio recordings and fieldnotes, in hours

	Mainstream lesson hours observed	EAL intervention lesson hours observed	Total lesson hours observed	EAL intervention lesson hours audio-recorded	Fieldnotes (hours)
LeBron	9	15	24	2	53
Gabriela	11.5	18	29.5	4.5	51.5
Daniella	9	1.5	10.5	0	23
Jamal	11.5	3	14.5	0	25

Generally, in mainstream classrooms observation was done from an unobtrusive or non-reactive position (Angrosino 2012) and in EAL interventions from a more participatory position, as requests were made to work with learners. Although the insider/outsider positions available in ethnography have been visualised as a continuum (e.g. Johnson 2017) rather than in-or-out, even this is 'virtually useless for practical purposes' (Atkinson 2015:39). For example, even in ostensibly unobtrusive mode, teachers would approach me in quiet moments for informal conversations used as ethnographic interviews (Section 3.7.1), and so the observer role proved to be as porous as the researcher role more widely. The insider view was not the same as adopting the role of a teacher, it was about making a personal as well as intellectual commitment to the research (Atkinson 2015), without relinquishing the overview of events and interactions of an outsider.

3.6.3 Interviews and trustworthiness

There are two types of interview data in this study: ethnographic and formal. The latter were arranged in advance and audio-recorded, the former captured in fieldnotes as they arose. The different collection methods and their opportunities are considered in the following sections, with reflections on data trustworthiness.

On each site visit, conversations arose in a naturalistic and opportunistic way (Gillham 2008): during or after classroom observations, in corridors and playgrounds, over lunch, in the EAL office. These felt the closest method of data collection to Geertz's (1973:13) characterisation of ethnography as 'conversing' with people because they enabled side-by-side emic voice, access to participants' realities. They took place spontaneously, in circumstances where the researcher role was often blended with that of colleague, support worker, friend, and they provided valuable polyphony. Learners would bring up incidents from lessons, staff would mention changes in learners' circumstances, Magda would outline a shift in EAL provision, staff would chat in ways which revealed their attitudes to school and national policies and demonstrated how they made sense of their world (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007).

Vignette 6: Striving for polyphonicity

I wanted to involve participants, to check their interpretations and compare them with my own, but sharing transcripts or fieldnotes was difficult; staff were time-poor and exhausted and I could not keep taking learners out of class, particularly when so much time had been lost to COVID-19 (all four), exclusion (LeBron), and international travel (Gabriela). I also wanted polyphonic input on where to look, lots of voices sensitising my direction of gaze. Little conversations here and there became a goldmine in both regards. These fieldnotes are examples of captured conversations.

The first prompted an informal discussion with Gabriela around changes:

Final part of the [RE] lesson, we go out to the garden to find things which remind us of God. On the way I talk with the teacher. She says that Gabriela has become much more outgoing recently, participating a lot more. She says it's lovely to see. What's changed, I wonder?

(January 2022)

The second supported and challenged my interpretations of teachers' support for EAL learners:

> *I asked how she [Daniella] was in (mainstream) lessons and she said that nowadays she feels more able to ask teachers for help 'every time' than before, but not all the teachers — there are those she feels able to ask all the time, and those she never asks. Like the other young people, she divides teachers into helpful/not helpful, or can be asked/can't be asked.*
>
> (May 2022)

Polyphonicity is a solution to the danger that ethnography can become researcher-centred, even 'scholarly artifice' (Geertz 1973:16). Starting from and regularly returning to participants' voices as illustrated in Vignette 6 provides reassurance to the ethnographer and, later, to readers, that interpretations and conclusions are not entirely subjective but made in partnership (Gillham 2008; Jeffrey and Troman 2005). In this study, these checking conversations added to the analysis, demonstrating the iterative cycle of data collection, reflexivity and analysis (Conteh 2018; Copland 2015).

Most ethnographic interviews took place in lessons, where the frequent switch between participant and uninvolved observer roles meant that notes were often made in quiet moments later in the lesson. Such interviews raised an ethical question over whether participants understood that what they were saying constituted data, and whether they were less guarded because they did not realise that their words would be captured (Copland and Creese 2015). This may have been compounded by the fact that, due to the spontaneous nature of the interviews, notes were sometimes taken later. To mitigate this, making my note-taking visible, whether at the time or later in a lesson, reminded participants that words and actions were of research interest. Most out-of-lesson conversations took place with EAL staff and, particularly in the case of Magda, with whom conversation was at times less guarded, noting conversation content was often made explicit with phrases such as 'I'm just going to write that down,' or, from Magda, phrases like 'I'm telling you this as a friend,' in which case I would not write it down either then or later. These served as ongoing negotiations of consent.

As noted in Vignette 3 (Section 3.5), staff became increasingly difficult to access as the study progressed, due to illness, self-isolation, turnover, and workloads; similarly to the audio-recorded lessons, access constraints were frustrating and sub-optimal (Alvesson 2011). Nevertheless, interviews formed an invaluable data source. Ethnographic research depends for its credibility on trustworthiness (Mishler 1990). Articulating the research process transparently is a vital part of building the trustworthiness of a study and thereby its academic credibility. When knowledge is seen as process-based and emergent (Blommaert and Jie 2010; Copland and Creese 2015), this is perhaps particularly significant. Multiplicity of perspectives is a second facet of trustworthiness, reducing over-reliance on my interpretations and, to this end, data triangulation through staff and learner interviews was important.

Formal interviews are sometimes characterised as 'the worst possible way' to find things out (Blommaert and Jie 2010:3). There is an expectation 'that people have their self-knowledge arranged in such a way that they can be easily interrogated about it' (Gillham 2008:3), but most people do not have easy access to coherent accounts of themselves or their situations, and their accounts are highly subjective (Gillham 2008). This is a key argument for the central role of participant observation (Atkinson 2015; Hymes 1981). At the same time, the research questions in this study demand an account of the learners by themselves, and interviews provided valuable opportunities for learners and staff to voice their own self- and other-views. It is the subjectivity which is valuable.

Table 3.2 shows the number of interviews which were conducted for each learner participant: how many staff were interviewed, those undertaken with the learners themselves, and the focus group carried out with two learners.

Table 3.2: Audio-recorded interviews and focus group

	Staff interviews	Learner interviews	Focus group
LeBron	7	2	1
Gabriela	3	3	0
Daniella	5	1	0
Jamal	2	1	1

Interviews were structured conversations (Conteh 2018), to enable speakers to talk on topics which they felt were important, and guided with prompts when necessary — reflexive interviewing (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007) towards the interests of the research questions. This approach allowed the development of anecdotes, the 'raw diamonds' (Blommaert and Jie 2010:52) of interviews. Staff and students told stories about classroom interactions and these lent depth and reflection to the talk, revealing attitudes, experiences and knowledge.

Asking participants with emerging English proficiency to discuss complex ideas in their non-dominant language risks 'perpetrating "symbolic violence" through tokenistic consultation' (Block et al. 2012:82). Interviews with learners were therefore semiotically heterogeneous; co-participants drew on different resources and were explicitly reminded that they could do so.

For the first interview with Gabriela, there was little shared language (Romanian or English) so Ana offered to interpret. This was a distinctive sociocultural event to which the presence of an interpreter was key; the interview is more than its content (Cormier 2018), embodying existing and new relationships, assumptions, cultural knowledge, empathy, and rapport, which must be accounted for in analysis (e.g. Section 7.7). Ana's collaboration exemplified the fluidity of authority in the project as she navigated between and illuminated our different experiences and cultural standpoints. Nevertheless, there were elements of translanguaging (in its interactional rather than pedagogical sense) used by all three interlocutors; this felt significant in positioning the interview away from the 'all or nothing', bounded languages model of interpreting in multilingual research (Rock 2017). In later interviews, Ana had left the school and Gabriela's English proficiency had developed, so we

used English, Romanian, an iPad for translation of occasional words and image searches, drawings, gesture, intonation, volume, and facial expression, much of which was added to the transcripts (Section 3.7.2).

Jamal, LeBron and Daniella elected to use mainly English, and some Spanish and French; interpretation was not necessary. Nevertheless, when transcribing the interviews, French translations were checked with a highly proficient speaker. Transcription of Gabriela's occasional use of Romanian was likewise checked, and the transcript of the translated Romanian sections of the initial interview (interpreted during the interview by Ana) was later provided by a highly proficient speaker. Translators and transcribers were given a confidentiality agreement beforehand and paid for their work.

However, they were more than machines (Bucholtz 2000); they were interested and offered comments on what they had translated. This provided insight from new voices, which deepened the analysis as they brought their experience and interpretation to bear on the data. These discussions mitigated the risk of erasing non-equivalent cultural or linguistic concepts (Cormier 2018) in translation; for example, there was a discussion around the interpretation of a Romanian phrase meaning to *find one's place* or *belong* which helped to illuminate part of Gabriela's first interview. In this way, multilingualism within the study became an opportunity for collaboration rather than a set of challenges to be overcome (Costley and Reilly 2021). Vignette 7 relates a different aspect of multilingual collaboration which emerged as relationships developed.

Vignette 7: Sharing linguistic effort

In addition to habits, I brought assumptions and beliefs to the project, particularly frustration about the limited opportunities that multilingual newcomers have to thrive in secondary education, within current English government policy. I am multilingual and was a new arrival at the age of 11 which gave me empathy with my participants, but I was aware that, as Cormier (2018) says, we cannot assume sameness because of superficial similarities. English is my home language and I am a white British passport holder, so my experiences of being a newcomer will have been very different from those of the young people in this study, particularly in terms of the value given to our different cultural and linguistic capital.

Nevertheless, translanguaging, reaching for an iPad or pencil to draw, gestures; I realised that these were indications that the four young people trusted me. It levelled the playing field; they searched for words in English and I searched in French, or we translated Romanian or occasional Italian words through my knowledge of Spanish. They appreciated my efforts, as I appreciated theirs. I remember getting the final debrief translated into Romanian as an audio file for Gabriela, and her grin when I played it to her, or LeBron's serious corrections of the written French debrief as he said that he could not possibly show it to his mother with all my orthographical errors! I was not a linguistic insider with any of them, not really, but using what we had at our disposal, and working hard, was something that we shared.

The focus group was set up with LeBron and Jamal, to gather their reflections on published data on exam success; they were in Year 10 (aged 14/15) at that time, preparing for GCSE exams. Drawing on the methodology of Block et al. (2012) and the concept of equitable conversations (Gómez, Puigvert and Flecha 2011), the focus group took a collegiate approach, sharing academic knowledge to empower and build the autonomy of the two young men. Information about GCSE attainment levels and age of arrival was prepared in a visual format, and they were invited to give their views. Focus groups allow the researcher to speak less, listen more (Mears 2012) and, in line with the research questions of this study, observe the peers' interaction. It enabled Jamal and LeBron to prompt each other's recollections and views, and position each other in new, previously-unobserved ways, which complexified and strengthened analysis (e.g. Section 5.6).

3.7 Analysis

Ongoing reflexive analysis was inevitable over such a long period of data collection; however, starting more formal analysis early was instrumental in dealing with the large amounts of data which an ethnographic study generates. Moving from piles of fieldnotes to a coherent thesis is part of the ethnographic journey, changing the complex and unintelligible into the complex and intelligible (Geertz 1973).

Analysis was drawn together in stages, which are detailed in the following sections. Fieldnotes and ethnographic interviews, along with transcripts from recorded interviews and lessons, were coded and storylines identified. Next, extracts of interactive data were identified for close investigation using CA. The data for each young person was initially analysed separately to avoid transferring assumptions, although sometimes this involved re-analysing the same data sources (fieldnotes from a particular day, for example). Cross-storylines were the final step, taking all four learner participants' data into account (see particularly Chapter 8).

3.7.1 Fieldnotes and ethnographic interviews

Transcripts of interactions in fieldnotes were initially content-based (Section 3.7.2), so as to enable thematic analysis. Texts were manually categorised in their entirety, to avoid the traps of selectivity or anecdotalism (Kuckartz 2014). Category construction was inductive; it arose from the data by starting with the research questions — identity and success — which offered directions in which to look for answers (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2018). However, it did not take place in an 'epistemological vacuum' (Braun and Clarke 2006:84). It was informed by researcher experience, prior knowledge, and assumptions: for instance, the use of L1 was noted because of my prior knowledge regarding the relationship between identity and learner attitude towards L1. Initially, then, analysis consisted of typing up and re-reading fieldnotes, and making notes on anything which might relate to identity or success. This list of possible data categories was an ongoing tool which was revised as the data was collected, typed up or transcribed, and more data collected, and the codes attached to each note were edited as each new set of fieldnotes was appraised. A photograph which illustrates an early part of this categories and codes process is shown in Appendix 6a.

During earlier and wider reading about post-structuralist identity theory, the relevance of Positioning Theory to and use within applied linguistics had become clear (Kayı-Aydar 2019; Kayı-Aydar and Miller 2018) as well as its use within classroom studies more widely (e.g. Anderson 2009; Davies and Hunt 1994). At this stage of analysis it offered a framework to gain access to the processes of identity-construction, to see *how* identities were negotiated.

For this, it was necessary to identify the storylines operating within interactions, lessons, and the school more widely. PT research has been criticised for not making sufficiently explicit the source of claims about storylines (Section 2.4.4) and this careful categorising process robustly addresses that criticism.

The categories for thematic analysis were of different types: factual, thematic, evaluative, and theoretical (Kuckartz 2014) but these are inexact distinctions. For example, the category label *PPhum* (peer-to-peer humour) is primarily descriptive in nature, and often co-occurs with the more evaluative label *PR* (peer relationships), which reflects my interpretation that the participant used humour to consolidate peer relationships.

This was not a linear process. Often, the same line of data was categorised in different ways; Appendix 6b shows an example from an interview transcript. No attempt was made to write summaries of data or collate it, to maintain its complexity and the immediate contexts of interactions. This systematic and reflective approach (Kuckartz 2014) brought coherence and order to the data without simplifying it or (crucially) losing the individual voices.

As data was categorised and tagged with codes, *storylines* (van Langenhove and Harré 1999) began to emerge: these are the temporal-spatial micro-macro connectors of Positioning Theory (PT) (Davies and Harré 1990; see also Section 2.4.4). The beliefs, norms, communication habits, social practices, and expectations shared within classrooms, friendship groups, and the school, became clearer in the patterns of individual coded events, and these formed the storylines which contextualised learners' interactions. Storylines were colour-coded in the data (see Appendix 6b) and, as each participant's data was analysed, they were adjusted to reflect similarities and differences — for example, tentative storylines in LeBron's pilot data around *strength and weakness* were later amalgamated into a broader storyline of *success*. It is acknowledged that the extraction of storylines and identification of rich points was interpretive and subjective, and a different researcher might have seen other storylines or interpreted events differently. Such interpretations would be just as trustworthy if done with sufficient rigour (Conteh 2018). Table 3.3 shows the storyline groups which emerged from each learner participant's data.

Table 3.3: Storylines in the data, by participant

Storylines about	(In)visibility	Success	Agency	Safety
LeBron	🟩	🟩	🟩	
Gabriela	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩
Daniella	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩
Jamal	🟩	🟩	🟩	

In this way, sets of storylines were identified which would enable a coherent examination of participants' identity work. With successive readings of the fieldnotes, patterns began to emerge, particularly once the content-focused transcripts (Section 3.7.2) had been processed in the same way, and notes of analysis were added, suggesting connections and noting possible positioning alignments of the participants with regard to the storylines, as seen previously in Appendix 6b. The data initially revealed storylines at meso level (Anderson 2009) through this identification of patterns across time, spaces, and data sources, but further readings started to indicate the links in storylines between the meso- and macro-levels, such as that between learner positioning for *success* and staff talk about national measures of success. This provided reassurance that, as a conceptual tool for analysis, storylines (and PT more widely) had the potential to bring intelligibility and illuminate the 'layered and multi-scalar systems' within the data of everyday school life (Rampton and Charalambous 2016:5).

3.7.2 Transcripts

This study acknowledges the non-neutral character of transcription and the need to make transcription choices transparent. There are two processes: interpretive (choosing what to write) and representative (choices in committing voice to text) (Bucholtz 2000). For the content-focused transcriptions (Appendix 4), there were choices around the transcription of different communicative resources, such as LeBron's tchip (Section 4.3), 'non-standard'

English, and Romanian or French content. The choices that transcribers make are infused with power to ascribe social identities to participants which might impact reader and researcher alignment with the participant (Vakser 2017). For example, the tchip is often associated with negative speaker attitude (Figueroa and Patrick 2001; Hill 2022) and simply including it in LeBron's transcripts might imply such an attitude. For this reason, I refer to it as a tchip, and not as sucking or kissing teeth, which may have more negative associations in English.

Multilingual transcripts, where relevant, were created in collaboration with different listeners (Section 3.6.3). Representational decisions included how to show the range of linguistic resources in a way which did not hide interactants' languages (Cormier 2018), artificially separate them for analysis or neatness, or (inadvertently) give some more prominent status through font choices (Vakser 2017). A second set of decisions concerned some participants' 'non-standard' English. While standardising the transcripts risks misrepresenting the speakers, a more preservationist approach risks perpetuating stereotypes or undermining the authority of the participant voice (Bucholtz 2000; Copland and Creese 2015; Cormier 2018). Decisions were made with the intention to preserve both the ideas and the dignity of the speakers.

Content-focused transcripts, once prepared, were categorised and coded in the same way as the fieldnotes (Section 3.7.1), and notes of initial analysis similarly added in the margins as storylines emerged from the data, as seen previously in Appendix 6b. Similarly to the fieldnotes, this was an ongoing process because, in a data collection period of such longitude and with large volumes of data generated, it was important to manage the analysis to prevent it becoming overwhelming. As with the fieldnotes, this iterative dimension to data collection and analysis provided opportunities for more focused data-gathering; for example, if something of interest emerged in an interview, it could inform future observations, and vice versa. Appendix 6c illustrates this back-and-forth: it is a photo of fieldnotes from a lesson which includes a captured exchange with a staff member and is annotated with possible questions for an interview with the learner and initial reflections on my observations.

3.7.3 Interactional rich points and Conversation Analysis

Following the content analysis of fieldnotes and transcripts and, using PT, the identification of storylines, more detailed analysis was undertaken of selected interactions. These interactions represent 'rich points' (Agar 2006:4) in the data, either by exemplifying a pattern more widely observed or an exception to a pattern. PT, while invaluable in this study for the interpretation of ethnographic data, does not provide specific theorised tools for the micro level of analysis and is usually used, therefore, in conjunction with other approaches.

The tools of Conversation Analysis (CA) were employed for this more detailed analysis, after careful reading, and attendance at seminars, workshops and data-sharing sessions during the ongoing data collection period. Elements of CA are often used in PT studies (Kayı-Aydar 2019) because CA enables the examination of interactional organisation, which illuminates 'who positions who and in what ways' (Kayı-Aydar 2019:31). Using CA analyses in conjunction with the storylines identified in the content analysis of data from this study meant that analysis could proceed to focus not only on *who* and *how*, but also on *why* positioning moves were undertaken; the alignment and disalignment with storylines, turn by turn, in talk. By combining CA tools with exogenous-to-CA Positioning Theory (PT), this study is CA-informed, rather than CA-inspired (Sert and Seedhouse 2011). It shares with LE an interest in small-scale, slow science (Van der Aa and Blommaert 2017) and likewise starts with the discipline of sustained observation (Rampton 2006).

Where CA is used in multilingual studies, it is sometimes viewed in purely methodological terms (Li Wei 2002). Nevertheless, the alignment of its theoretical underpinnings with LE and PT are significant. Importantly for this study, LE, PT and CA share the foregrounding of an emic perspective, a focus on intersubjectivity, and an interest in the situated world. There is a common concern with scales (Sidnell 2010), the relationship between the micro-context of turn-by-turn talk and the macro aspects of the social world. CA examines the processes by which interactants co-construct shared understandings of the interaction and its contexts, and the analysis may only invoke particular assumptions or world-views if it can be demonstrated that participants themselves orient to these (Depperman 2015; Peräkylä 2004). This gives direction to the storylines of PT. CA, therefore, was selected as a congruent

and insightful tool for analysis, one which involved a back-and-forth between the wider ethnographic data and the CA-analysed interactional data, in order to situate talk in its temporal-spatial contexts and robustly establish the relevance of storylines in the different sets of data.

Selected interactions from fieldnotes, recorded lessons, and the focus group were re-transcribed, using transcription conventions adapted from Jefferson (2004) and, for embodied actions, Mondada (2022) (Appendix 5). The transcripts do not note every feature, as to do so might obscure the focus of analysis (Jefferson 2004). Using CA for non-recorded materials is unusual but was seen as valid because in linguistic ethnography it is often necessary to capture conversations as part of unrecorded fieldnotes. Whether the data is audio-recorded or not is indicated in the extract labels in Chapters 4–7.

Sequences of talk were examined in terms of turn-taking and turn construction, repair, preference, and other insightful ways of understanding how interactions unfold. As this study was CA-informed, the examination did not begin with 'unmotivated looking' (Seedhouse 2004:38), but with an interest in how, through these turn-by-turn choices, speakers chose, ascribed, accepted, or rejected positions (Section 2.4.5) which gave them rights and duties to speak, and which (dis)aligned with circulating storylines. These micro-analysed interactions form the centrepieces of the analysis for each learner, foregrounding their voices.

3.7.4 Multiscalarity: the micro, meso and macro

During the CA analysis of selected interactions, analytic attention repeatedly returned to the wider data set, working outwards and upwards (Rampton and Charalambous 2016) to situate not only the micro-analysed extracts within the framework of PT, but the experience of each participant within the context of the wider data sets. This enabled a multi-scalar analysis, allowing the links between the immediate positioning work of the participants and their wider temporal and spatial contexts to be explored.

The analysis of storylines, communication acts and positions following PT richly illuminated how participants co-constructed their learner identities and it suggested differing

conceptualisations of success arising from the data. However, I felt that PT (and CA) fell short of a full explanatory value for the interplay between the different scales of experience: interactions, the meso-level of classroom and school, and wider socio-educational structures. Emerging storylines pointed towards racial and ethnolinguistic factors, the twin ideas of the 'good' EAL learner and the 'good' immigrant. This led to further reading and engagement in discussions around three final but crucial theoretical inputs: Model Minorities (Section 2.3.4), the ideal learner (Section 2.3.5), and Imagined Communities (Section 2.3.6). These three concepts were operationalised, in conjunction with prior work on meritocracy and educational triage (Section 2.3.3), to allow the data to be viewed in a more multiscalar way, by incorporating the external voices of the socio-political inputs to EAL learners' lives, the macro-scale or 'structuring spheres' (Block 2022:63), and the young people's agency in negotiating their own responses to those spheres. As attention was repeatedly moved between the individual interactions and the wider ethnographic data, these concepts became a cohering force in understanding the reflection of storylines in data, and their reproduction through interaction.

3.8 Summary

This chapter has detailed how the research questions were addressed through undertaking a linguistic ethnography in WMS with four multilingual newly-arrived learners and the staff who taught them from 2019 to 2022. It has described how the ethical and adaptive methods of LE led to rich sources of data: fieldnotes, lesson observations, formal and ethnographic interviews, and how these were subsequently analysed using thematic analysis and CA to lead to insights about identity construction and success. It has explained how LE enables problems of scale in PT to be addressed through examining storylines in the moment-to-moment data of classroom interactions and the meso-data of the fieldnotes which give a wider perspective on the learners' school lives.

The following four chapters present the analysis of this data following the approach described here, with each chapter providing rich detail of the experiences of one young person: LeBron, Jamal, Daniella and then Gabriela. These chapters are drawn together in a

discussion of storylines which cross-cut the four participants' data (Chapter 8), enabling the lens of analysis to be widened and balanced.

4. LeBron

4.1 Overview

LeBron was eleven years old when he became a participant and had been in England for three months. He arrived part-way through the Autumn term of Year 7, and was assessed as Level A, New to English. LeBron's parents are from the Democratic Republic of Congo but he arrived from France, where he had been born. He spoke French as a first language.

LeBron was the first participant and, as the longest-participating, analysis of his data is the most expansive. EAL staff were concerned about how he was settling into WMS and it was suggested that participating might provide him with opportunities to connect (Fieldnotes February 2019). LeBron became an active participant, suggesting places for me to observe him and taking an interest in findings. Observational data as fieldnotes was collected in 2019, including nine hours of mainstream and fifteen hours of EAL intervention lessons, along with audio recordings of two EAL intervention lessons, an extended interview, and four interviews with staff. Post-pandemic lockdowns in 2021/22, LeBron was temporarily excluded from school on behavioural grounds but on his return into Year 10, some limited further observational data was collected, a second interview, three staff interviews, and a focus group was conducted with Jamal.

This chapter explores storylines around *agency*, which emerged as prominent in initial coding. In lessons, LeBron frequently and proactively positions himself as competent and knowledgeable (Section 4.2), and resists classroom practices which invisibilise (Ranson 2023) his language needs (Section 4.3). Storylines around agency, in LeBron's data, are inextricably linked with those around *success* and, particularly, *visibility* (Section 4.4). He walks a fine line between visible engagement in learning and peer group clowning, which he characterises as an active, aware mode of learner identity, rejecting teachers' assessments of his behaviour as problematic (Section 4.5). I argue that this agential and resistant self-positioning is seen as the *wrong sort of visibility* by teaching staff but leads to greater participation rights within his peer group (Section 4.6).

Conversation analysis (CA), situated in ethnographic context, demonstrates that LeBron's interactions with staff and peers create conflicting positions for him. His attempts to self-

position as a 'good' student are rejected by staff in these interactions; he has, increasingly, to choose whether to align with dominant storylines about *ideal EAL learners* to be accepted as a good *kind* of learner (Anderson 2009) or consolidate old-timer status (Lave and Wenger 1991) within his peer group (Section 4.7). Positions he seeks, as competent *explainer* and *(Science) learner* (Wood 2013), on the other hand, are rejected in interaction, pushing him repeatedly towards positions which eventually sediment into a meso-identity of a troublesome *kind* of learner (Section 4.8).

Table 4.1 lists the staff who appear in this chapter, in addition to Magda and Ana.

Table 4.1: Staff who appear in data in order of appearance

Charlotte	English Literature and Language teacher, Year 10
Charlie	Maths teacher, Year 7
Sandra	Science teacher, Years 7 and 10
Natalie	RE teacher, Year 7
Julia	Maths teacher, Year 10

4.2 A capable and successful learner

In early 2019, LeBron attends EAL interventions for 50% of his timetable, with the remainder spent in mainstream lessons. Small group numbers mean that each learner is visible to the teacher, Ana; she works with them individually by turn, and they are all expected to contribute regularly.

In Extract 4.1, LeBron sits at the main teaching table with Ana and three other learners. Learners have a worksheet with pictures of items of clothing, and they are labelling them in English.

For transcription methods and key, see Section 3.7.2 and Appendices 4 and 5.

Extract 4.1   Fieldnotes February 2019, EAL Intervention lesson

48	LeBron:	I know these all.
49	Ana:	Can you write them?
50	LeBron:	Oh WRITE, yes I write them. Can you give me a paper? I don't want you
51		think I cheat
52	Ana:	No it's okay, I know you don't cheat.
53		((He works for about a minute. LeBron is very absorbed, talking out loud,
54		saying the words as he writes))
55	LeBron:	Miss, these ((pointing at two pictures)) the same.
56	Ana:	No, they're different.
57	LeBron:	This, jeans, and these trousers /tʁu:zerz/
58	Ana:	Yes, trousers.
59	LeBron:	Miss, this is short. And this shirt ((laughs)) (1.0) shi::rt.

In the adjacency pairs in Extract 4.1, LeBron self-nominates for the first pair part, and he adds a post-expansion to the final adjacency pair (line 59). Although this disrupts normal classroom conventions where teachers have exclusive turn-allocation rights (Gardner 2013), particularly in activities like this one which focus on language form (Seedhouse 2004), it aligns with the observed practices of the EAL department. Nevertheless, by opening four adjacency pairs in this way, LeBron pushes self-allocation of turns further than other students (Fieldnotes February–June 2019), claiming the right to speak five times (lines 48, 50, 55, 57, 59). The actions he proposes in each adjacency pair are significant too. In lines 48, 57 and 59 he claims epistemic rights, positioning himself as capable, by demonstrating his ability to differentiate similar lexical items (line 57) and vowel phonemes (line 59) as well as communicating prior knowledge (line 48). Such a learner position is typified by Wood (2013) as an *explainer*, one which carries significant rights and indeed obligations to speak, and LeBron's claiming of such a position marks his sense of agency, an intention to be part of the construction of his learner identity.

In line 49, Ana acknowledges his claim to know the lexical items and challenges it by asking if his knowledge extends to the written form. LeBron's responsive *oh* (line 50) acknowledges

Ana's talk as a correction to his understanding, reconfirming his prior and current state of knowledge (Heritage 1984). However, by adding the noticeably-louder *write*, he signals that the source of trouble is his failure to understand, or her failure to explain, the task instruction, rather than a gap in his lexical knowledge. He therefore aligns himself with Ana's correction while simultaneously resisting the challenge to his position as a knowledgeable learner.

Underscoring this, he requests paper with the comment *I don't want you think I cheat* (lines 50–51). Other students are working in their exercise books, but LeBron wants Ana to know that he is not planning to copy the words from his book, but do the exercise from memory. His communication act here self-positions not only as capable, but also as a learner with integrity, whose knowledge is not faked. This self-positioning move is ratified by Ana in line 52 with *No it's okay, I know you don't cheat*.

Much later, in 2021, LeBron's English teacher, Charlotte, also recognises his agency, specifically as a language learner. She describes how he 'shows his working sometimes when he's speaking' (Interview Charlotte November 2021, line 30), narrating and drawing peers and teacher into his word searches, identifying paraphrases so that he can communicate his knowledge and skills. She contrasts his approach with other EAL learners who, she says, tend to give up their conversational turn when they cannot find the word they need. While features of learners' English, such as disfluencies during word searches, often serve key interactional functions, they tend to be viewed as dysfunctional, incompetent communication (Gardner 2013). However, LeBron's narration is recognised by Charlotte as functional, enabling him to claim and maintain speaking turns, participating as a member of the class community by voicing his knowledge.

By this point, in late 2021, LeBron's proficiency is assessed at Level C, or Developing Competence, and he no longer receives support from the EAL department; while strategies to support Level C learners are embedded in staff training, the learners tend to blend into the general class population (Interview Magda February 2022). Level C learners form a well-described group who tend to have a high level of Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills

(BICS),[10] may have lost much of their L1 accent, and deal fluently with everyday classroom and social business, as LeBron does. This group are often lacking in Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) (Cummins 1984, 2008), the more complex vocabulary and grammatical structures needed for effective academic performance, but this lack can be invisible to teachers whose statutory training skims lightly, if at all, over EAL (Foley et al. 2018). LeBron, according to Charlotte, continues to make visible his language needs, positioning himself as an emergent multilingual, but this contrasts with the institutional position he is assigned (Martin-Beltrán 2010), as a linguistically assimilated learner. His teacher recognises his self-positioning and validates it, positioning his speech, and him, as agential, creative, and 'so interesting' (Interview Charlotte November 2021, line 29).

The range of positions available to LeBron is also wide in Maths classes. The teacher, Charlie, interactively positions LeBron as a Maths *explainer*, a successful basketball player, and a skilled multilingual communicator, and LeBron engages positively to co-construct these positions, which afford him varied and active ways to engage in the lessons both socially and academically (Fieldnotes June, July 2019). Extract 4.2 illustrates how this identity work enables LeBron to extend his Maths and English language skills. In this lesson, learners are working independently. LeBron has already spent a few minutes helping a peer.

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[10] BICS and CALP are often poorly-understood by policy-makers and practitioners as simply different types of language (Cummins, Brown and Sayers 2007). They are deeply embedded in the contexts of interactions as well as cognitive demands and inextricably linked to each other.

Extract 4.2   Fieldnotes June 2019, Maths lesson

77		((LeBron goes over to help Student A again, rips out an old page, gets
78		a pencil.))
79	LeBron:	So, so ((Charlie says something to the whole class)) you do
80		like this.
81		((Demonstrates and asks questions to elicit the steps from Student A)):
82	LeBron:	What's two times eight? ((shushes a girl who jumps in with the
83		answer)) So, put sixteen here.
84		So, what's two times three?
85		Plus them. ((he pronounces it /plu:s/ but this doesn't affect the
86		interaction)) This is the answer.
87		((He returns to his table but Student A asks him to help again.))
88		((Another student calls out: What's four times four?))
89	LeBron:	six /si:s/…one six

In Extract 4.2, Student A repeatedly requests help from LeBron, thereby positioning him as an *explainer*, a competent mathematical communicator. Wood (2013) calls *explainer* a classroom micro-identity, in this study a *position*. *Explainers* are learners who are positioned in ways which afford them the right to speak with epistemic authority, as they are obliged to explain concepts or ways of working things out to peers or the teacher.

LeBron accepts the position and expands it to a further micro-identity, which I suggest is that of *teacher*: he organises paper and pencil and asks arithmetic questions to which he already knows the answers, controlling the content of each question-and-answer adjacency pair as teachers do (Gardner 2013; Woods 2006). He gives instructions (*put sixteen here, plus them* lines 83, 85). He controls turn-taking and the right to speak, even shushing a peer (line 82), again a role usually exclusively that of teachers (McHoul 1978).

Language is no barrier to this positioning; his Francophone pronunciation of *plus* (line 85) is understood and passes without comment. In line 88 another learner further ratifies his epistemically powerful position by asking what four times four is, and LeBron responds (*si:s*), pauses, and self-initiates a self-repair, saying the two digits of the number separately. Again

this passes without comment from his peer, who appears to decode the repair successfully. Opportunities for negotiation of meaning are key to both language and curricular learning (Gibbons 2006; Long 1996; Wenger 1998) and, here, LeBron has access to the interactions which provide such opportunities.

LeBron co-constructs powerful positions in this classroom, which create him as capable, knowledgeable, advantageously multilingual, skilled; and through these micro-identities, he responds to opportunities to develop curricular and linguistic knowledge and skills. He assumes the rights and duties that the *explainer* and *teacher* positions afford him, as he and Student A talk into being a zone of proximal development (Seedhouse 2004, 2009; Vygotsky 1978).

In addition to negotiating meaning, he identifies opportunities for comprehensible output (Cameron, Moon and Bygate 1996; Swain 1985) which enable him to test language hypotheses (Swain 1995) such as the use of *one six* (line 89) as a workable substitute for the more difficult *sixteen*. His hypothesis-testing is frequently observable (Fieldnotes February, June, October 2019) and he describes it in a mainstream lesson:

> *So when she say a word I don't understand I can hear this word, erm *tchip**
> *plusieurs fois (*several times*) so after I try to do a sentence and after I say I say it and*
> *she say yeah it's good* (Interview June 2019, lines 293–295)

What is noticeable is LeBron's active search for opportunities: he is aware of new language and its recurrence, independently formulates and produces a test sentence, and notes the teacher's evaluation. However, this process can only happen in lessons where he can secure positions which give him rights to speak: he describes some subject areas simply as 'impossible' (Fieldnotes February 2019, line 109) and later (Focus group December 2021) he recalls feeling that some teachers regarded him as 'stupid' because of his emerging proficiency (line 164), an attitude which he describes as 'getting into my head' (line 165) and which may have limited the positions which those teachers made available to him.

4.3 Resistance to invisibilisation

While in Extracts 4.1 and 4.2 LeBron successfully negotiates positions as *explainer* and *teacher,* as successful and capable with considerable rights to speak, this is not the case across his timetable. Extract 4.3 is from a Physics lesson. LeBron expresses frustration with Science lessons; he is familiar with content from prior schooling in France but feels unable to communicate his knowledge (Fieldnotes June 2019). In Extract 4.3, the teacher, Sandra, has set the class an exercise about forces and is checking answers using Initiation-Response-Evaluation (IRE), a very common talk sequence in classrooms whereby the teacher poses a question, a learner responds, and the teacher evaluates that response (Mehan 1979).

Extract 4.3   Fieldnotes June 2019, Science lesson

250	Feedback: Q&A about forces. Sandra wants to elicit the word 'unbalanced' and I
251	can physically and clearly see when the penny drops for LeBron — he grabs the
252	iPad, translates the word, calls it out. Sandra says 'well done' and then asks if he
253	used the iPad. He justifies himself: 'I just use it to translate'.

Through the IRE sequence in Extract 4.3, Sandra and LeBron co-position him as a successful and knowledgeable Science learner: he answers a question correctly and receives encouraging feedback (*well done*). However, Sandra adds a post-expansion to the sequence, questioning whether he used an iPad to obtain the answer, which encodes a presupposition that using the iPad is wrong. LeBron's use of the word *just* (line 253) in his response suggests that he hears a threat to the position he has negotiated, perhaps a repositioning to incapable or dishonest. He refutes the repositioning and signals his language needs as an EAL learner, seeking to negotiate with Sandra and have his Science capabilities acknowledged within an identity position which encompasses emergent multilingualism. Indeed, the iPad is lent by the EAL department precisely so that he can use it in mainstream lessons to check vocabulary in this way.

Extract 4.4 suggests that this is an ongoing negotiation. Taken from earlier in the same Physics lesson, Sandra is calling out items of Science vocabulary and learners are drawing them.

Extract 4.4   Fieldnotes June 2019, Science lesson

236	First word is 'springs'. LeBron uses the iPad to look it up, then draws it. Second
237	word, he asks Sandra if he can translate it using iPad. Sandra says he just needs to
238	draw it.
239	LeBron: If I don't understand, how can I draw?
240	Sandra says that they've 'done' this word several times in class, so no, he can't
241	look it up.

In Extract 4.4, LeBron initiates a sequence by requesting to use the iPad, and receives a dispreferred response from Sandra, who denies the request (lines 237–238). Similarly to the EAL lesson (Extract 4.1), LeBron then locates the source of trouble away from his subject knowledge; this time, he locates it as a language proficiency issue (line 239) and indicates the connection between language support and his ability to be an active Science learner. Wood (2013) differentiates between positions as active *subject learners* and *menial workers*, who can only participate through copying or similarly cognitively-unchallenging tasks. LeBron attempts to avoid a *menial worker* position by soliciting language support, and self-positions as a capable and engaged *Science learner*.

LeBron's language needs, which he repeatedly makes visible to Sandra, intersect with storylines around the *ideal learner* which emphasise compliance and obedience alongside curiosity and eagerness to learn (Archer and Francis 2007) in ways which at times contradict each other (Youdell 2006) (Section 2.3.5). Standard English language proficiency, which intersects with race, ethnicity and social class, and the perceived lack of which is pathologised (Cushing and Snell 2023) is, for LeBron, an additional and powerful operator in the construction of the *ideal learner*. LeBron insists on making his language needs visible to Sandra, which he feels demonstrates his keenness to learn (Interview July 2019). However, far from signalling eagerness or curiosity to Sandra, his insistence instead invokes disobedience and ungovernability, and he cannot be understood by Sandra in the position he proposes. Sandra asserts that they have *done* this word in class (line 240). Rejecting his self-positioning as an engaged Science learner with an unmet language need, instead she second-order positions LeBron as an assimilated learner, merging his identity with the rest

of the group. He is one of a group of learners who have *done* a word and are therefore expected to reproduce it without assistance. Teachers' attitudes to EAL learners and their own role in supporting them can expand or restrict participation opportunities for learners (Yoon 2008). Sandra displays what Yoon (2008) terms an assimilation-oriented attitude: she positions LeBron as undifferentiated from the rest of the class, without specific need of language support. Unable to fully understand the lesson, the position leaves only a limited range of positions available to him, with restricted rights to speak.

Sandra's invisibilisation of LeBron's language needs aligns with macro-storylines in EAL policy. Successive policy changes since the 1980s have sought to assimilate learners into mainstream education, all but removing EAL from curricular, training, funding, and inspection frameworks (e.g. Evans et al. 2020; Ranson 2023; see also Section 2.2.2). At a meso level, however, two clashing storylines emerge in fieldwork and interview data. At the time of this lesson WMS has a dedicated EAL department with two specialist members of staff. Detailed data on EAL learners is used to track progress, and there is ongoing liaison with mainstream staff about learners' needs, along with consistent training. EAL is institutionally visible and staff are expected to adapt practices to support learners.

However, the EAL department has been downsized considerably and its erosion continues over the course of the study, with staff redeployed and replaced with unqualified, inexperienced, low-paid assistants (Fieldnotes 2019–2022). While the fieldnotes suggest that some staff provide careful EAL support, Ana and Magda express concern that others do not regard it as a mainstream teaching responsibility, an attitude which may impact the positions available to learners (Yoon 2008). Regarding many teachers, Ana says:

> *honestly? I think they just push them in the back of their classrooms and, like, I don't have time for you* (Interview June 2019, line 194).

Regarding LeBron, Magda says:

> *he will specifically tell you which teachers he likes and which ones he doesn't, and it's purely down to the fact who's going, who's allowing him to use an iPad and he can actually show the teacher he's able to do the work* (Interview July 2019, line 149).

LeBron confirms the inconsistency of teacher attitudes and practices both at the time and much later in the study (Fieldnotes 2019; Interviews July 2019, November 2021). Regarding the incident recounted in Extract 4.4, I repeat back to him his words, *If I don't understand how can I draw?* and he responds vehemently:

> *yeah, YES *tchip** (Interview July 2019, line 303)

Throughout this interview, LeBron uses the non-lexical marker which, in the limited literature which exists specifically about its use by Francophone speakers, is called *le tchip* (Hill 2021). It is often associated with negative affect (Hill 2021). LeBron's tchips are always short and are used to accomplish a range of functions in this interview, primarily evaluative or to express frustration. Here, he responds to hearing his own words repeated back to him with *yeah* and immediately adds a more formal, louder *YES*, signalling recognition of the incident and frustration as memories of the incident are evoked. He adds a tchip both as an evaluative marker — its primary use (Figueroa and Patrick 2001) — confirming my narrative as accurate, and as an affect marker, underlining his frustration, and perhaps relief that someone he perceives as an independent witness has verified his travails with this particular teacher.

4.4 Moments of silliness, or a troublesome *kind* of learner?

Magda and Ana recognise LeBron's frustration regarding in-class support as an explanation for the behaviours he sometimes displays (Interviews June, July 2019). Sandra, however, characterises him as someone who 'decides' to 'mess around' (Fieldnotes June 2019, line 225). LeBron's Religious Education (RE) class (Fieldnotes June 2019) reveals similar data: decontextualised and inaccessible work, alongside LeBron's attempts to make his needs visible. His RE teacher, Natalie, describes him as 'really silly…distracted…playing up' (Interview June 2019, line 64). LeBron's self-positioning as capable but in need of language support is rejected by these teachers, who counter-position him as disruptive. Equally, their first-order positioning of him as an assimilated mainstream learner is resisted by LeBron, who demands attention. His assertiveness and eagerness to take the initiative (for instance, using an iPad to translate) are characteristics, according to Archer and Francis (2007), of the

ideal learner. However, his emerging English proficiency means that he is not 'intelligible' (Bradbury 2013; Youdell 2003) as an ideal learner; in such circumstances, his assertiveness is read and interpreted differently by these teachers: he is understood as defiant and ungovernable, and, in this way, any success he does attain is an exception (Archer and Francis 2007; Bradbury 2013).

The role of interpretation is clear in how the Maths teacher, Charlie, observes the same behaviours but explains them quite differently in Extract 4.5.

Extract 4.5   Audio-recorded interview Charlie, July 2019

74	if he gets something a little bit wrong, he'll wind
75	himself up a little bit and it I think it's nice to see that he can see (.)
76	he seems quite bothered about learning. He does have his
77	moments of silliness but he's an eleven-
78	year-old boy so he's going to which is very fair
	((lines omitted))
84	he'll he'll just sort of he has a little frustration to himself but he
85	never out of order or anything he's ah ((uses gestures to show LeBron's
86	movements)) winds himself
	((lines omitted))
95	yeah he's very easy to read in that sense, when he gets excited
96	he stands himself up and does a little dance, I don't know if
97	you've seen that in his other lessons

 '[F]air…moments of silliness…does a little dance' are more positive evaluations of LeBron's behaviours. They are seen as recognisable, normal and expected. This contrasts with the essentialist stance of the other teachers who use words not to describe LeBron's actions, but LeBron himself as 'very silly'. Charlie's description links the actions to emotions and events: not doing as well as expected, or doing particularly well. Similarly to Magda and Ana, Charlie recognises frustration as an explanation for behaviour; here is a learner who wants to do well, and when he encounters barriers, he makes this frustration visible to his teachers. He positions LeBron as a keen learner who responds kinaesthetically to the

context, and this positioning creates spaces where LeBron can ask for help in Maths lessons, something which happens frequently (Fieldnotes June, July 2019). The position affords LeBron the right to speak, and his dances, gestures, and distraction from tasks are seen as communication acts (Herbel-Eisenmann et al. 2015) which make his language and content needs visible to the teacher.

Sandra's and Natalie's interpretations of LeBron's actions align with macro-storylines around African Caribbean boys, whose behaviours are more likely to be interpreted as a challenge to teachers' authority than those of other learners (Gillborn 1990; Maylor 2015) and whose interactions with staff are significantly more likely to be disciplinary than pedagogic in nature (Tennant 2004). Black[11] learners, particularly boys, often face lower academic expectations and more punitive disciplinary measures for behaviour infractions than their non-Black counterparts (Gillborn 1990; Maylor 2015; Wright, Maylor and Pickup 2021; Youdell 2003).

Not all Black boys behave in the same way; where their behaviour does not align with these racialised assumptions, it is often explained as exceptional, linked to family characteristics such as socio-economic status (Bradbury 2013; Youdell 2003). For instance, LeBron's politeness towards teachers is noted by Natalie (Interview June 2019) as unusual compared to other EAL learners: Natalie says that she does not know where he has learnt his manners from. This matters because, for a learner to be *ideal*, the characteristics which define them, which include politeness (Archer and Francis 2007), are viewed as innate: LeBron's politeness, by contrast, is reported as learnt.

LeBron was born in France of Central African parents, so is not clearly labelled by either the *African* or *African Caribbean* identity categories used in the English education context but there is the possibility that staff assimilate his identity to the African Caribbean, as has happened with other not-easily-labelled Black learners (Gillborn 2008). His Blackness means that he cannot be intelligible to staff as an ideal *kind* of learner (Archer and Francis 2007; Bradbury 2013), and his English proficiency level reinforces this ideological non-congruence. However, understanding him as *African* or *African Caribbean* intersects with the racialised

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[11] I capitalise Black following Crenshaw (1991), to show "Black" as denoting a specific cultural group and therefore treated as a proper noun.

learner identity in distinct ways which can promote or further close down the possibility of alignment to the storylines of the *ideal learner*. A learner with an ascribed African, rather than African Caribbean, identity, is located higher in the Hierarchy-within-the-Other (Youdell 2003), a placement which may be related to the higher attainment in national exams of Black African learners as a disaggregated group: indeed, Black African learners account for the fourth most highly-attaining ethnic minority group at the age of sixteen (Demie 2021). Conversely, African Caribbean learners, particularly boys, are often 'demonised' (Archer and Francis 2007:66) as more likely to be destined for prison than higher education, time spent on their education therefore a waste (Wright, Maylor and Pickup 2021). Within these distinct sets of storylines about success amongst Black learners, the way that staff label LeBron matters. As *African* his behaviours can be meaningful to staff as expressions of frustration; as *African Caribbean* they align with storylines about ungovernability and disruption.

4.5 Affiliation and resistance to EAL intervention

LeBron vigorously resists being positioned as troublesome, an exercising of his agency which itself risks being interpreted as disruptive. Extract 4.6 illustrates this resistance and introduces a further site of struggle for LeBron: EAL intervention. In Extract 4.6, four learners are working with Ana in the EAL classroom. LeBron is seated next to Student B, who he says he finds annoying (Interview June 2019). At the start of the extract, he is speaking quietly to Student B, and this prompts Ana to separate the two learners.

Extract 4.6   Audio-recorded EAL lesson, June 2019

1	Ana:	[where is everything (1.5) shhh
2	Students C and D:	[((quiet talking in background))
3	LeBron:	() (1.0) °like [this°
4	Ana:	[okay (1.0) {LeBron}, you move here now ((indicates seat
5		next to her)) (.) <u>you</u> <u>had</u> <u>your</u> <u>chance</u> of (.) <u>not</u> talking and [<u>being nice</u>
6	LeBron:	[°she's

7		talking to me miss°
8	Ana:	that's life (.) move here please <u>now</u> (2.5) {LeBron}? (2.5) ↓move here
9		(3.5) thank ↑you
10	Student C:	((to Student D)) what are you <u>do</u>ing
11	Ana:	oh she's just (.) covering the words in Slovakian
12	Student C:	Oh
13	Ana:	(1.0) good
14		((conversation between Students C and D continues in the
15		background))
16	Ana:	{Le↑Bron} I want to give you positives (.) not negatives (.) come on
17	LeBron:	can I stay here=
18	Ana:	=no I want you next to me
19	LeBron:	Why
20	Ana:	let's try (.) I think you're going to be better and she's not gonna (.)
21		she's not gonna:: ↓annoy you (2.0) and you can ↓focus
22	LeBron:	°I can focus here°
23	Ana:	no cause you talk to her
24	LeBron:	<u>she</u> talk to °me°
25	Ana:	{LeBron} I am the teacher you need to ↓listen to me (.) okay because
26		when you ask me the questions I listen to you and I talk to you and I
27		tell you things (.) now it's <u>your</u> turn to listen to me when I tell you
28		you need to move <u>here</u> (.) end of story (3.0) let's try (.) if ne- if you're
29		gonna be good (.) then you can si:t where you want next time (1.0)
30		one time
31		((sound of pen put down and chair scraping as {LeBron} moves))
		((lines omitted))
56	Ana:	((to Student B)) you shouldn't write on your hand (.) it means you're
57		<u>chea</u>ting
58	Student B:	<u>no</u> <u>miss</u>
59	Ana:	°yes°=
60	LeBron:	=she [did it (.) she do it always

61	Student B:	[(I did know)
62	Ana:	°ok[ay
63	Student B:	[shush man
64	LeBron:	(stupid)
65	Student B:	()
66	Ana:	[you two (1.0) {Student B} beHAVE okay behave (.) okay?
67	Student B:	[I'm not talk to him
68	Ana:	ignore him and stop behaving like that (.) and ((to {LeBron})) you
69		stop laughing and making her angry (.)

In lines 4–5 of Extract 4.6, Ana directs LeBron to move seats and describes the behaviour which she finds unacceptable, a direct reproach. Direct reproaches carry explicitly negative moral evaluations of learner conduct, hold the learner culpable, and provide justifications for the teacher's actions. They are non-preferred forms of reproach, with teachers usually preferring to use indirect reproaches as a first step (Margutti 2011). Nevertheless, Ana uses it here in spite of Extract 4.6 taking place near the start of the lesson and this being the first reproach, and it therefore positions LeBron as a troublesome learner. The directive to move seats simultaneously positions Student B as blameless, with all the culpability for the whispering assigned to LeBron.

Moving seats would signal acceptance of the position, but LeBron resists it and engages in second-order positioning through his response (in lines 6–7), *she's talking to me miss*. He overlaps the start of his turn with Ana's talk, which has not reached a transition-relevant point; rather, with the use of *and* (line 5), her talk projects a continuation. LeBron's overlapping talk is therefore an incursion (Jefferson 1983) into Ana's turn, a strongly disaffiliative move, particularly in the classroom context where teachers hold the rights to assign turns. Further, there is a preference for silence in the learner turn of reproaches (Macbeth 1990), and so LeBron's talk (line 6–7) is in itself a dispreferred response and might be perceived as a challenge to the classroom's moral order, specifically Ana's authority.

At the same time, however, his speech is quiet, and he further mitigates his response using the respectful address term *miss* (line 7). His words are a counter-reproach to Ana and his use of *miss* at the end of his turn acts to draw Ana's attention to the perceived injustice of

her directive and propose a change in the frame of interpretation (Lehtimaja 2011). It is less an attempt to undermine Ana's authority than an appeal to keep his rights to speak and to renegotiate the relationship of authority (Lehtimaja 2011) by keeping his seat, and the claims to knowledge in circulation, by not being blamed. It is an attempt to hold her accountable in an asymmetric institutional context of power where it is teachers who hold learners accountable, not the other way around (Macbeth 1990).

Ana's response to this, *that's life* (line 8), is typical of teacher responses to learner reproaches (Lehtimaja 2011): a semi-humorous attempt to end the sequence. She immediately follows it by upgrading the directive to an imperative, *move here please now* and there are several further extensions to her turn before LeBron finally moves seat (line 31). Her response is a rejection of his proposed positionings as innocent, a holder of sufficient authority to reproach her, and a source of knowledge regarding the true culprit.

Space precludes a detailed CA analysis of its entirety but over the course of Extract 4.6 LeBron continues to claim positions with greater rights, not only to speak but to make seating arrangements and sanction Student B's behaviour. He rejects the position of troublesome learner and claims those of knower, negotiator, innocent, using a range of tactics: request (line 17), request for explanation (line 19), justification (line 22), redistribution of blame (line 24), and accusation (lines 60), all without success. Finally, he appears to accept the position he has been assigned, as disruptive learner, and proceeds to insult and laugh at Student B (line 68–69).

The dominant storyline throughout the talk is that a good learner is obedient, acquiescent to adult authority, and helpful (Youdell 2006). LeBron's struggles stem from his orientation to this storyline, seeking to position himself in alignment with it while simultaneously claiming justice. Ana's orientation is equally complex. At times she claims a position of teacher authority, invoking the natural moral order of the classroom (Macbeth 1990; Margutti and Piirainen-Marsh 2011), by issuing directives and imperatives, reproaching, and using LeBron's name, sometimes followed by a pause — the turn which should be filled with a change in learner action (Macbeth 1991) but which LeBron declines to orientate to. She oscillates between authority, and a position as bargain-maker. She offers school behaviour points (line 16), persuades (line 20), explains (lines 20–21, 23), promises (lines 28–29), seeks agreement (line 25), and invokes prior experiences of co-operative talk (lines 26–28).

Neither authority nor bargaining effect the result she wishes for; LeBron declines to acquiesce.

It is noticeable that, throughout Extract 4.6, Students B and C talk quietly in the background of the recording (lines 2, 14–15). Equally noticeably, the extract begins with LeBron apparently showing Student B (line 3) how to carry out the task they have been set. The events in Extract 4.6 may exemplify the racialised experiences of discipline that Black boys face (Section 4.4). It appears that LeBron is disciplined for behaving in exactly the same way as the other learners, and during a time when he is showing the kind of helpful behaviour which he demonstrates in the Maths lesson (Extract 4.2) and which, on that occasion, opens up opportunities for engagement and learning. At the very least, in his own mind, it is an unfair application of expectations, and one which he resists.

His stubborn rejection of the troublesome learner position, coupled with his refusal to acquiesce to authority, may relate to his ambivalent relationship with EAL provision. As Extract 4.6 suggests, Ana sees herself as more than a language instructor, building connections with learners and coaching their peer and staff relationships as well as the interactional norms of English classrooms which are sometimes very opaque (Woods 2006). Fieldnotes of observations and informal conversations demonstrate that she and Magda get to know the learners' lives beyond the classroom, and support them with day-to-day matters such as lost possessions and medical and dental worries (Fieldnotes 2019–2022).

Magda is a passionate advocate for 'her' learners within WMS, liaising with staff to secure the best outcomes for them, and as a senior member of staff she is able to make changes to LeBron's timetable in response to his feedback, provide him with an iPad to take to mainstream lessons, and act as a mediator with his teachers when conflicts arise (Fieldnotes February, June 2019). LeBron speaks of them with gratitude and warmth, recognising the progress in English he makes in Ana's intervention classes and saying that she and the Maths teacher Charlie are the only teachers who understand him (Interview June 2019). This positivity endures: three academic years later he characterises Ana as 'an amazing teacher' and Magda as 'the one who was motivating me' (Interview November 2021, lines 253 and 256). His attitude mirrors findings elsewhere which indicate that new arrivals value language support, recognising increased proficiency as a route into friendships and academic progress (Anderson et al. 2016; Evans et al. 2016; Hryniewicz & Dewaele 2018).

At the same time, he struggles with receiving EAL intervention outside mainstream lessons. He complains that the content of Ana's lessons is childish (Fieldnotes June 2019) and that he has covered the content previously in France (Interview June 2019). He does not appear to make friends in the EAL class; taller than many in Year 7 and with a deep, strong voice, he appears older, which may compound his sense of being treated as a baby. When studying with learners from higher year groups, because he is in Year 7, he is treated by them as a child (Fieldnotes February, June 2019). Ana's self-positioning as confidante irritates him as much as he appreciates it: he describes her as *chiante* (informally translates as 'a pain in the arse') in the same interview (June 2019, line 479) that he says she is the only teacher who understands him.

LeBron says that in France he was the strongest in his English lessons. He states that he has family in the USA, and each day he and his family set aside time when they practise speaking English. He speaks of a rivalry between him and his cousin over English fluency (Interview June 2019). He thus self-positions as a successful English communicator and finds it hard to reconcile this with his classroom comprehension struggles. Additionally, he is convinced that he has been held back an academic year on arrival to England, an issue which he raises with me several times, because he recognises lesson content, particularly in Maths and Science. He arrived in WMS mid-year and was placed into Year 7 with substantial time in EAL intervention classes; Magda and Ana relate that he reacted strongly to this, constantly arguing to be moved to Year 8 and a full-time mainstream timetable (Fieldnotes February 2019; Interview Ana June 2019). Newly-arrived learners are assessed by Magda and Ana in terms of English proficiency, Maths, and Science, with the intention of placing them into as many mainstream lessons as possible, in the most appropriate academic sets for their current levels of curriculum knowledge (Fieldnotes February 2019, July 2021). However, data, in fact from all four learner participants, indicates a tendency among staff to talk about 'gaps' in learners' prior skills and knowledge and although staff sometimes make tentative guesses about prior learning, they appear to have limited information (Interviews October, November 2021, January, February 2022).

Albeit with limited information on prior learning, institutional judgements about EAL learners' timetables are based on careful decision-making by experienced staff. Nevertheless, the school's decisions about his timetable reject LeBron's self-positioning as a

strong English speaker and capable mainstream learner who possesses considerable cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986) in the form of family, education, and language, and replace it with a deficit identity which characterises his prior academic efforts and family circumstances as inadequate: his cultural capital is undervalued. Although he resists this, his ability to choose is limited and his agency frustrated by school policy, staff decision-making, and the limited ways open to him for communicating prior academic and linguistic knowledge. Three years later, he reflects on this time and says that when he arrived in England his confidence really suffered (Interview November 2021). He felt the need to 'calm down' (line 159) and accept that his English was not good enough at that time for him to do everything that he wanted to; his confidence returned and grew, he says, as his English improved.

LeBron's experiences exemplify concerns about the positioning of EAL learners as Other (Devine 2013; Szymczyk, Popan and Arun 2022; Welply 2023) within an education system which normalises English monolingualism and an Anglo-centric, white middle-class curriculum (Section 2.2.2). At WMS the EAL department is in a separate portable building which, while it provides a specialised safe space for learners, is also a physical manifestation of being Other. Intervention classes, while invaluable in building learners' confidence and English skills, are provided instead of certain mainstream lessons. Limits on EAL resources and a commitment to mainstreaming policy mean that learners' timetables are frequently revised to include more mainstream subjects; nevertheless, their school time is spent differently from that of their peers. LeBron's ambiguous reactions to EAL provision, therefore, mirror the ambiguity of the provision itself: it aims to promote inclusion but, to do so, removes and excludes learners in time and space from the mainstream, at least in the short term. In identifying 'gaps' in newly-arrived learners' knowledge and English skills, it seeks to understand where learners need support, but inadvertently risks characterising their prior knowledge and multilingualism only in deficit terms (Sharples 2017; Welply 2023).

4.6 Negotiating the peer community

As with many new arrivals (Evans et al. 2016), LeBron's concerns in his early months at WMS lie with social integration. Withdrawal for EAL intervention not only threatens his self-positioning as communicatively competent, it interferes with peer group integration. Magda notes this when she later says:

> {LeBron} wanted to be disattached er very quickly he found that we dragging him down ((laughs)) and we making him look bad in the eyes of other students you know he didn't want to feel isolated anyhow so he just wanted to fit in (Interview February 2022, lines 175–178)

LeBron says how much he valued the friendship and help offered by boys in his class when he arrived (Interview June 2019). The peer group to which he is affiliated consists of Black boys who appear engaged in learning but behave in ways which are sometimes characterised as problematic by staff: talking, not visibly paying attention to the lesson, turning around in seats, playing with pens or water bottles, 'slouching' (Fieldnotes June, July 2019).

What constitutes problematic behaviour depends on the norms and values of schools and classrooms, which provide interpretive mechanisms for the evaluation of behaviour (Margutti and Piirainen-Marsh 2011). Dominant storylines about the behaviours of ideal *kinds* of learner in WMS are made explicit through the online behaviour management system (Fieldnotes June 2019) and include gratitude, attentiveness, compassion, and curiosity. Common behaviours within LeBron's peer community do not demonstrably align with these dominant storylines.

This may not be clear to LeBron, whose understanding of how to act as a student is necessarily informed by his prior experience of schooling (Sharples 2017). LeBron describes a poor relationship with teachers in his previous school in France, where he would refuse to talk to them, slam doors, and leave classrooms at will (Fieldnotes May 2019, Interview June 2019). He describes his move to WMS as a fresh start, an opportunity to develop a new learner identity, and he appreciates that, in WMS, he appears to have achieved this: people are 'nice' and 'don't look at you like if er like if er you are naughty' (Interview June 2019,

lines 168–169). In his later interview (November 2021, lines 282 and 284) he goes further, describing his move to England as 'a whole different vision of life' and a realisation that 'I have to grow up I have to mature up'. So, eleven-year-old LeBron recognises an opportunity to reconstruct his learner identity; this further illuminates his strenuous exercise of agency in lessons to claim positions of capability and willingness, and the resistance he shows to being positioned as an inattentive or misbehaving learner.

In Extracts 4.7 and 4.8, LeBron explains the balance he pursues between sharing the practices of his peer community and aligning with staff expectations.

Extract 4.7   Audio-recorded interview LeBron, June 2019

220	LeBron:	and in same time the people distract me I just
221		don't work so I talk and after I I can work in same time but I
222		more talk er and I more talk er je travaille moins et je parle plus
		I work less and I talk more
223	Hannah:	yeah okay so you get like fifty-fifty, then sixty-forty
224	LeBron:	yeah
225	Hannah:	and so on ((LeBron nods)) yeah I saw that as well ((LeBron smiles))
226		and it's your friends
227	LeBron:	mm
228	Hannah:	who distract you your friends
229	LeBron:	sometimes only sometimes sometime if I tell them us them yes
230		now I need to work *tchip* they will let me and after they will
231		work if the teacher say no we will will work we will work

Extract 4.8   Audio-recorded interview LeBron, June 2019

319	LeBron:	I'm always laughing and all of them they like me but some teacher
320		don't like me
321	Hannah:	really?
322	LeBron:	yes I can be annoying with them
323	Hannah:	ah you can be annoying, why

324	LeBron:	huh
325	Hannah:	why
326	LeBron:	sometime I can be annoying but je fais pas l'extrême
		I don't go to extremes

Extracts 4.7 and 4.8 demonstrate LeBron's self-perceived sense of agency: he self-positions as somebody who chooses how to balance his time between talking to peers and working (Extract 4.7), and the extent to which he laughs and clowns around in class: he is willing to annoy some teachers in order to entertain peers, but not to disrupt beyond a perceived line of 'extremes' (Extract 4.8, line 326).

His sense of agency extends to his peer group identity. In Extract 4.7, he resists the suggestion that his friends distract him, instead positioning himself as a group leader who tells peers when to focus on work: *and after they will work* (lines 230–231). He positions himself as an integral part of that group through repeated use of the pronoun *we* (line 231). A later interview with his Year 10 Maths teacher, Julia, supports this. LeBron has been moved into her bottom set class, where he has access to more limited Maths knowledge and skills, because of his disruptive behaviour. Julia characterises the class as one which struggles to maintain focus, and of LeBron, she says

> *he got a very big influence on the whole class so…actually if I keep him working I can say mostly whole class will work* (Interview Julia January 2022, line 186)

Julia characterises their relationship as very good, and LeBron as compassionate, having a 'good heart' (line 236). She describes occasions where she is unwell in class and when LeBron takes on behaviour management of the class, shushing his peers, urging them to work, drawing attention to Julia's ill-health. LeBron positions himself in the very powerful *teacher* position (see also Extract 4.2), leading other learners and assuming rights to control the right to speak of others and, as described by Julia, his peers ratify this leadership position by complying.

He self-positions as a clown, suggesting in Extract 4.8 that teachers as well as peers appreciate his humour: *all of them they like me* (line 319). Later in the interview he self-describes as

a good student and er er silly. What I mean is not stupid, funny like someone who

makes a jokes always, not for stupid (lines 330–331)

He is anxious to clarify his use of the word 'silly', which can be translated from French, as in English, as either as *comical* or *stupid*. He reiterates his position as both comical and clever, a balancing act which has the potential for greater social capital, or the resources available through his membership of his peer group (Bourdieu 1986), as well as aligning with the storylines he identifies as associated with a good *kind* of learner.

Initially isolated at WMS (Interviews LeBron and Magda June 2019), the boys in his peer group befriended him, showed interest in his French language and nationality, and helped him to navigate the school (Interview LeBron June 2019). LeBron employs different strategies as he seeks to negotiate and consolidate an insider identity within this peer group by joining in with the practices of the community (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998) such as verbal and physical clowning (Fieldnotes June, July 2019).

One strategy is mirroring: LeBron repeats phrases which have just been said by peers and joins in laughter in a mark of group affiliation (Glenn 2003), even when he may not have understood the context (Fieldnotes June, July 2019). Mirroring is a means of facilitating interactions and increasing social acceptance (Chartrand and Bargh 1999); additionally, in the case of multilingual learners, it may enable social participation in otherwise difficult-to-access interactions by strategic appropriation of ready-formed social and linguistic tools. In this way, LeBron can move beyond his newcomer identity (Wenger 1998) and make himself visible to his peers. Extract 4.9 illustrates how this enables him to negotiate more powerful speaking positions within the peer group. In the extract, LeBron is sitting with a group of peers including Student E, talking quietly about personal matters as they do their Art work.

Extract 4.9   Fieldnotes June 2019, Art lesson

271	at the other end of the classroom a student is suddenly audible, accusing a girl
272	of using the n-word. She denies it but he keeps repeating the
273	accusation and a couple of other students pick it up, including
274	Student E, who says, 'we can't have that' largely and loudly. Girl is
275	crying, denying it. LeBron asks Student E what happened and I

| 276 | can see Student E explain. LeBron then also looks over at the girl, saying |
| 277 | 'we can't have that'. |

In Extract 4.9, after checking to understand what is happening (line 275), LeBron precisely mirrors the words of Student E, a dominant member of the peer group, and thereby aligns himself with the peer group, positioning himself as an old-timer (Lave and Wenger 1991) who has a right and duty to speak on issues which the group feel to be important. Following Extract 4.9, their direction of gaze indicates that the peers continue to discuss the incident, indicating the ratification of LeBron's self-positioning move by Student E and the wider group. The position affords him, as well as rights to speak, obligations to align himself with peer group values, in this case an anti-racist stance. This awareness of racism is one which increases as Black boys become older and drives an affiliation to Black identity, partly in resistance to a white British assimilation and partly as self-protection (Mac an Ghaill 1988). LeBron reiterates the group anti-racist stance in interview (June 2019) where he discusses a teacher he characterises as racist and refers to his peers as holding similar views about that teacher.

The dilemma for LeBron is that the storylines around what constitutes a good learner and those around peer group membership 'coalesce, intersect and contradict in ways which open up and close down the possibilities available' (Youdell 2006:96), making it difficult for him to position himself within the learner identity that he wishes to construct, that of the academically *and* socially successful 'cool' young Black man. His different interactants require distinct interactional choices and, to meet clashing requirements, he must constantly renegotiate his position with both peers and staff (Verhoeven, Zijlstra and Volman 2021). As a young Black man who leads and entertains his peers he occupies a privileged position within the school and Black masculine subculture but this is attached to peer values including some irreverence to school norms, embodied through acts such as slouching and laughing, which may sit alongside a value for learning itself (Youdell 2003): the 'legitimate strategies for survival' (Mac an Ghaill 1988:4) of young Black men in schools which are necessitated by a wider context of socially structured racism. LeBron is therefore caught in a complex constellation of identity positions, and the moral orders attached to those positions with the rights and obligations they bring (Davies and Harré 1990), a

complexity he successfully negotiates with his sick Maths teacher Julia, but which is not always so easily reconciled. As an adolescent, peer appraisal of his identity moves is of greater importance to him than that of his teachers (Scharf and Mayseless 2007) and, where there is tension between conflicting identity work which cannot be reconciled, he may, over time, increasingly choose to negotiate positions which augment his social success, which Verhoeven, Zijlstra and Volman (2021) found can lead to disengagement from learning.

4.7 We didn't grow up here

During COVID-19 remote learning, LeBron participated little in formal learning (Interview Julia February 2022). However, LeBron speaks positively of his learning at this time and describes negotiating with his mother to join online lessons for 'a little bit' each day (Interview November 2021, line 57) and spending the remaining time watching films and listening to music with the specific aim of improving his spoken English. He returns to onsite schooling with only a trace of his French accent, having replaced it almost entirely with a Multicultural British English (MBE) accent (Drummond 2021). What matters to him at that point is the reaction of peers, which he describes in Extract 4.10.

Extract 4.10   Audio-recorded interview LeBron November 2021

59	it's like cause straight away Year 9
60	my friends were like wow {LeBron} your accent changed blah blah blah
61	like they were telling me I sounded different

In Extract 4.10, LeBron engages in hypothetical directly reported discourse (Holt 2007) or voicing (Penry Williams 2019) to describe an example of peer reaction. It is hypothetical rather than actual reported speech, a form of reporting closer to acting than informing, used to draw the hearer in as audience to a story using representative peer characters. He uses the innovative quotative *were like* (line 60) to introduce his constructed dialogue, as is common in British adolescent speech (Macaulay 2001), and there are noticeable prosodic changes in intonation to convey the shock and admiration of his peers.

LeBron describes himself as French, has family in France, travels there routinely for holidays and orthodontic appointments, and speaks French to me and Francophone peers throughout the study (Fieldnotes 2019, 2021; Focus group 2021). Notwithstanding his continued identification with French linguistic and national identity, he seems to want to sound more like his peers. MBE as a linguistic style was originally associated with Black ways of speaking, but although its racialisation is still prominent in the media, young MBE speakers report it as more widely linked to young, urban speech (Drummond 2017). It offers the opportunity to identify more closely with peers (Drummond 2021), a choice LeBron appears to make consciously.

Young multilinguals commonly claim identity positions which reflect their languages, national identities, and cultures in complex and shifting ways (Evans and Liu 2018; Hryniewicz and Dewaele 2017; Sharples 2017; Wickens, Cohen and Theriault 2019). The enactment in school of this complex and constant (re)negotiation reflects their wider social positioning as diasporic locals, marking solidarity both with their local communities and with their ethnolinguistic communities (Section 2.3.6). They make active choices using their linguistic and cultural knowledge to align their identities moment-to-moment advantageously, such as the hypothetical interaction which LeBron relates above. LeBron's plans for an international basketball career make English important for him (Interview June 2019) and he plans to divide his time between the USA and France, a plan which remains constant throughout the study (Fieldnotes May 2022). Positioning himself as a fluent speaker of both English and French reflects his alignment not only with a richly-resourced local diaspora, but with an Imagined Community (IC) (Norton 2001; Pavlenko and Norton 2007) of transnational and multilingual young people, a community which extends temporally and spatially through LeBron's familial connections and plans.

All the young people in this study view themselves, to some extent at least, as members of a transnational IC (Section 2.3.6). A dominant macro-storyline around EAL learners is of inclusion through becoming British as much as becoming English-speaking (Phoenix 2011), although building a life in England is by no means a given for multilingual learners in a super-diverse, globally-connected society (Cunningham and Little 2022; Welply 2023). At a local level, although planning for the future is encouraged in the school (Interview Charlie June

2019), no mention is made by mainstream staff of LeBron's transnationalism and his membership of this IC appears unrecognised.

The silence regarding transnationalism is, in itself, a positioning move, one which positions him in the process of becoming a particular version of 'British', as he prepares for exams which are entirely geared to a British, English-speaking future (Cunningham and Little 2022). This hegemonic conceptualisation of 'Britishness' may not align with LeBron's understanding of it, as young immigrants tend to understand Britishness in ways which recognise their transnational, multicultural and multilingual capital (Waite and Cook 2011). In fact, transnationalism is positioned as problematic; his father, who works in France, is viewed as absent (Interview Ana June 2019) and unsupportive of his learning, and 'nobody cares' (Interview Julia February 2022, line 146). The agential, successful, multilingual, global IC to which LeBron claims membership does not appear to exist within the imaginations of staff. This stands in contrast to LeBron's discussion of his family, where he tells of his older sister returning to France to obtain better qualifications, the English-speaking games they play at home, his family in the USA, and his mother's unwavering work ethic and encouragement (Interviews June 2019, November 2021; Fieldnotes February, July 2019; Focus group December 2021).

Transnationalism is, however, claimed and negotiated in EAL intervention lessons, where overseas trips to visit family or for medical appointments are routinely discussed and where staff are also members of diasporic communities (Fieldnotes June 2019, July 2021). Extract 4.11 takes place when learners have just completed a listening exercise and are checking answers together.

Extract 4.11   Fieldnotes June 2019, EAL intervention lesson

13	They all get one answer wrong, 'swing'. LeBron says
14	'swinet' and objects when Ana gives the correct answer, 'but he say
15	swinet!' Ana asks another student if he has a swing in his garden and he says
16	'not here'. She asks LeBron and he also says 'not here'.
	((lines omitted))

| 19 | The other student asks LeBron, 'do you have in Spain?' and Ana says, 'he |
| 20 | only lived in France.' LeBron says, 'you don't know where I live.' |

In Extract 4.11, Ana's question (line 15) launches a pedagogical action, to contextualise the word *swing*. The student's reply furthers her action in that he demonstrates comprehension of the word, and he launches his own action: to position himself as a person who has two (or more) homes, one here and one *not here* (line 16). He displays another life away from this city, with pleasant things such as garden toys, challenging the stereotype of newly-arrived migrants with depleted socio-economic resources (Charsley and Bolognani 2016). Transnationalism, here, is a source of cultural and economic capital, 'home' an unbounded and plurilocal possibility (Waite and Cook 2011).

LeBron mirrors his answer, *not here* (line 16) and replicates the self-positioning move, affiliating to the developing group position (Chartrand and Bargh 1999). His peer then asks him if he has this swing in Spain. LeBron is from urban France; the swing might not exist at all. He may view his peer's question as a challenge to his claim of transnational cultural capital or to his French identity, but it is Ana who self-nominates (line 19), taking the turn for which he was nominated and explaining where he previously lived, perhaps in an attempt to foster harmonious classroom relations. This enables LeBron to side-step the challenge to his self-positioning by telling both Ana and his peer that they do not know where he lived (line 20). He thereby disaffiliates from the classroom community, while simultaneously rejecting the second-order positioning moves of both his interlocutors and retaining his alignment with a culturally rich transnational identity.

With his friends, transnational and multilingual identities take on a different dimension. In Extract 4.12, LeBron is sitting with peers in an Art lesson, and they chat while working.

Extract 4.12   Fieldnotes June 2019, Art lesson

282	LeBron asks for a rubber and Student E asks him which one he wants
283	using an 'African' English accent. LeBron clarifies and there is laughter
284	between all of them on the table. He seems to be positioned
285	as a 'freshie' in the group but seems unthreatened by it.

While I acknowledge its derogatory connotations, I used the term 'freshie' in my notes at that moment because it is common in the speech of young people at WMS to refer to recently-arrived peers, reflecting its wider use (Charsley and Bolognani 2016) as a way to stereotype recent arrivals by more settled migrants. It reveals dynamics of social and symbolic power in transnational contexts. Student E is a second-generation migrant, whereas LeBron is first generation. A 'funny accent' is an element of symbolic capital which marks a 'freshie' (Charsley and Bolognani 2016:46) and so LeBron's French accent is enough for Student E to position LeBron as newly-arrived. While the boys in the group share Black African as an ethnicity marker, they are a multicultural peer group whose parents or grandparents may have migrated from very different geographic, socio-political and socio-economic contexts. In spite of those differences, their Black African ethnicities form part of the peer group diasporic-but-local identity, something which unites them (Waite and Cook 2011): Student E knows that his use of this accent will be recognised by the group and its use as a marker of newness validated.

At the same time, the performed accent and its implication of 'freshie' status is a form of intra-ethnic discrimination (Charsley and Bolognani 2016), other-positioning LeBron as a newcomer multilingual (Talmy 2010). 'Belonging is always…defined by non-belonging' (Waite and Cook 2011:245) and so the boys position LeBron, perhaps not as 'non-belonging' but certainly lower in the hierarchy of belonging (Phoenix 2011) than his peers in a reinforcement of the boundaries of who does and does not 'belong'. It is a simultaneous positioning of LeBron as part of the peer group, and Other. It gives him duties to accept mockery, indeed to join in with laughing at his own accent as he does here, in a demonstration of group affiliation (Glenn and Holt 2013). This is a position of relatively low social power but LeBron accepts it here and in similar incidents where his name and speech are mocked (Fieldnotes June 2019). Accent acquisition is not simply a matter of age or length of residence, but intricately woven with social dynamics (Levis and Moyer 2014). LeBron accepts the other-positioning by his peers, but it may explain why he works so hard during remote schooling to rid himself of this marker of low symbolic capital and acquire an MBE accent. It holds the value of normalcy within the group and allows him to move further from the newcomer position.

The hierarchy of belonging has an academic dimension, as LeBron notes in the focus group with Jamal in Extract 4.13. I asked them how schools could support multilingual learners as they approach GCSE exams.

Extract 4.13   Audio-recorded focus group December 2021

98	I think well support yeah, well what you, what {Miss
99	Nowak}[12] does, yeah I think there should be more places like that for
100	students like us that let's say came here for English, because people
101	who grew up here, it's not like, they had their whole life basically, us
102	lot yeah, we came here a part of our life but we didn't grow up here

Prior to Extract 4.13, LeBron said that he no longer struggled with language and that classes were 'normal', claiming a position of linguistic invisibility which places him high in the hierarchy of belonging (Phoenix 2011). This aligns with the old-timer position gained through his peer group identity work. When the question is framed more generally, it does not threaten his old-timer position in the way that a direct admission of needing support might have done, and his answer in Extract 4.13 suggests an acute awareness of being at a disadvantage as a relative newcomer to the school system as he switches to the inclusive pronoun *we* (line 102) to act in *spokesperson* position for himself and Jamal, positioning himself as part of this group in need of support. He describes multilingual newcomers as *students like us…us lot* (lines 100–102) and contrasts this group with *people who grew up here…they* (lines 100–101), creating a binary identity position of us and them, the linguistic newcomers and the old-timers, as described by Talmy (2010). LeBron's self-positioning, which reflexively draws in Jamal, indicates his understanding of the paucity of time and support available for late-arrival multilingual learners to accumulate the linguistic and cultural capital necessary for exam success (Section 2.3.1).

LeBron's positioning moves in Extract 4.13 thus represent a complex relationship between being a newcomer and an old-timer, at once occupying different spaces in the hierarchy of belonging. He simultaneously affiliates to an IC of transnational multilinguals and negotiates current membership of a concrete community of local peers. He claims positions of

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[12] Miss Nowak is a pseudonym for Magda's 'classroom name'.

language proficiency, concurrently drawing attention to his language needs. The storylines available to explain him as a learner, in their focus on assimilation, fail to recognise the complexity and impermanence of these shifting identity positions. This leaves him a reduced range of choices in moment-to-moment interactions and, in his habitation of such a complex and contradictory space he fails to align with dominant storylines around the good, assimilating, *kind* (Anderson 2009) of EAL learner, leaving him vulnerable to classification instead as a troublesome *kind* of learner.

4.8 A troublesome *kind* of learner

Relationships with staff matter greatly to LeBron. In interviews (June 2019, November 2021), fieldnotes (February, May, June, October 2019), informal conversations (February 2019) and the focus group with Jamal (December 2021) he refers not only to teachers who help or not, but those who care or do not care, going as far as to say that he will only take help from teachers who care about young people (Focus group December 2021). He displays self-awareness of the impact of his behaviour on teachers (Extract 4.8) and his leadership in shaping a purposeful class environment (Extract 4.7; Interview Julia February 2022). With teachers such as Ana, who he believes care about him, he goes to considerable interactional lengths to resist potentially disaffiliative positionings (Extract 4.6), and he voices distress when adults with whom he has a good relationship leave the school (e.g. Extract 7.2 in Section 7.2).

At the same time, his positioning moves frequently challenge the normative classroom moral order, demanding a greater share of power than storylines about English classrooms and the invisibilisation of EAL learners allow. He makes himself audible and visible in lessons as a learner who wants language support and, where teachers do not meet this need, he challenges it (Section 4.3), making himself *visible in the wrong way*. He balances his class time between entertainment and learning in a way that he believes purposeful (Section 4.6) but which some teachers find problematic (Section 4.4). He questions school decisions about his timetable, ability set, and year group (Section 4.5), and resists school uniform norms (Fieldnotes July 2021). This fractious relationship with school processes leads to a

complex relationship with institutional power; while many teachers voice their ambitions for him and hope that he will focus more on studies (Interviews Ana June 2019, Charlotte November 2021, Julia February 2022; Charlie in fieldnotes February 2020), he is increasingly excluded from classrooms and subjected to a formal school exclusion lasting several weeks in 2021.

LeBron is a highly agential learner who wants greater control over moment-to-moment interactions so that he can be recognised as a certain *kind* of learner, with greater rights to speak and ask for language support to enable better curriculum access. He attempts to balance this with the identity work he does as he journeys from the periphery to the centre of his peer group, becoming an old-timer within a hierarchy of belonging to the school community (Sections 4.5–4.6). Where his language needs are acknowledged by teachers and his insistent visibility recognised as a struggle to learn, he thrives, using a creative range of strategies to communicate and interact with lesson content (Section 4.2).

However, more often, his positioning moves are perceived as challenges to teacher authority within both the norms of the school and the storylines which circulate about young Black men, whose behaviour is more likely to be interpreted as aggressive or a threat to institutional authority (Gillborn and Youdell 2000; Maylor 2015; Youdell 2003). This, along with his lack of 'Standard' English proficiency, makes him unintelligible as an ideal *kind* of learner, and instead the moment-to-moment interactions and positions which he negotiates or is assigned come to sediment into a pathologised Other (Archer and Francis 2007) meso-level identity of a troublesome *kind* of learner. His English proficiency is interpreted as a pathologised characteristic (Cushing and Snell 2023) and his reactions to the frustrations of not understanding lesson content are essentialised as personality traits.

In the interview data set, the word 'intelligence' does not occur at all, but his 'ability' is referred to 25 times. This supports Gillborn and Youdell's (2000) assertion that the new IQism, through which learners are triaged, their potential value to the school judged and educational resources allocated, is encoded through the word 'ability'. Over the course of the study he is moved to lower sets in a judgement of his 'ability' (Interviews LeBron November 2021, Julia February 2022), although teachers refer also to his attitudes and behaviours when making such decisions. Like his behaviour, his intelligence is pathologised, making it impossible for him to be co-positioned in alignment with storylines about *ideal*

learners (Archer and Francis 2007). This pathologised Otherness is located not only in himself but in his family, who are characterised as unsupportive of learning and absent.

While positioning himself as a highly ambitious transnational young person with a globally mobile and multilingual family allows him to align with similarly-situated young people in school (Section 4.7), it does not align with dominant storylines around new arrival learners, who are expected to 'change to fit in' (Phoenix 2011:320) as part of assimilationist discourses around migration, to become British in habits and thinking as they linguistically assimilate to the mainstream curriculum and classroom practices.

At the same time as his learner identity work is frustrated by the failure to be recognised in the positions he claims, his peer group identity work is highly successful, aligning him with storylines around an urban cool, culturally prestigious Blackness (Phoenix 2011) and bringing social and cultural capital: leadership, admiration, popularity. This success creates tensions between pro-school attitudes and behaviour, and the entertainer or clown position he occupies for the amusement of his friends. While he initially feels that he can negotiate the two successfully, it appears that as his attempts to negotiate *ideal learner* identity are largely rejected, and the relationships that he values with staff members are threatened, he turns more towards peer-focused positions. These in turn continue to reward him, including inside the classroom as he demonstrates his power in influencing the behaviour of his friends.

In Extract 4.6 LeBron uses considerable creativity to attempt to negotiate positions which align with an ideal *kind* of learner; as these are rejected he appears to give up and accept his assigned 'troublesomeness'. Over the course of fieldwork a similar process occurs on a meso scale; while continuing to position himself in line with storylines of success, towards the end of the study these are defined less in terms of academic success and more about his imagined future as a professional sportsperson, his work ethic and his personality (Interview November 2021; Focus group December 2021; Fieldnotes May 2022), as he appears to accept that the success he has in life may need to be built upon foundations other than academic outcomes. This disaligns him with institutional priorities of benchmark exam success, further sedimenting his meso-identity as a troublesome *kind* of learner.

4.9 Summary

This first chapter of analysis has examined the experiences of LeBron, whose learner identity work takes place within storylines about visibility, agency and success for EAL learners. He seeks to be recognised as a competent and communicatively capable learner, and a member of an Imagined Community of transnational and multilingual, successful young people. He claims positions as an *explainer* and a *learner* of curriculum subjects (Wood 2013), even on occasion a *teacher*, rich in cultural and educational capital, and simultaneously as a learner who needs ongoing language support. Struggling to be recognised as such, he resists alternative positionings as a *menial worker* (Wood 2013), an assimilated learner or as disruptive, and this results in conflict with some teachers. At the same time, he values strong and caring relationships with teachers and, where these break down, his resistance is compounded as he is positioned as pathologically ungovernable and his identity as an *ideal learner*, already precarious because of his Blackness (Archer and Francis 2007; Bradbury 2013; Youdell 2003) is rendered impossible.

He also struggles to reconcile the English intervention help he wants, as he journeys from the periphery of his peer community to its centre to become an old-timer (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998). His accent and need for help mark him within the hierarchy of belonging, placing him lower in the order of his new community. At the same time, his self- and interactive positioning as a peer leader and clown place moral demands on his speech and actions which further problematise his efforts to establish an identity as a successful learner.

The next chapter will explore the diversity of new arrivals' experiences, as LeBron's identity work journey is contrasted with that of Jamal. Examining the experiences of Jamal will enable more detailed exploration of the storylines around EAL learners. How storylines are constructed and renewed, and how their immediate deployment in classroom interactions relates to meso- and macro-level processes, particularly those encoded in stereotypes about Model Minorities, becomes more visible as Jamal's positioning work is scrutinised.

5. Jamal

5.1 Overview

Jamal was 14 when he joined the study in 2021. He had moved to England from Cameroon, where he attended an English-medium school, and his home language was French. I met him on his second day in WMS, shortly before the end of the academic year. Three study participants had left WMS during COVID-19 and I hoped to recruit new participants. I was immediately interested in including Jamal; he was arriving late in his school career and would be entering Key Stage 4 after the summer holidays, working towards GCSE and BTEC qualifications. There was an early connection, as we discovered that I had lived close to his former home in Cameroon.

Jamal was in the same year group and form as LeBron, and this afforded possibilities for a focus group and comparison of their learner identity trajectories. His English proficiency was assessed as level B (Early Acquisition) and, together with my knowledge of French, it was easy to communicate.

Jamal's data was gathered over a single academic year. Because, after initial testing, he was put straight into mainstream classes, there were no opportunities to audio record lesson interactions (Section 3.6.2). Data is therefore drawn from fieldnotes including 14.5 hours of lesson observations, two staff interviews, and an interview with Jamal, and the focus group with LeBron provides audio-recorded interactional data.

This chapter explores storylines around *success* as Jamal self-positions as an academically successful student, and teaching staff largely ratify this position through moment-to-moment choices in classroom sequences (Sections 5.2 and 5.3). The chapter also explores storylines around *visibility*. I argue that Jamal's bids for greater visibility are accepted by his teachers because the classroom storylines to which he affiliates align closely with dominant institutional storylines, and so he can be recognised by most staff in the positions he claims (Wood 2013). In contrast to LeBron's challenges to invisibilisation, Jamal bids for visibility *in the right way*, which does not challenge the moral order (Herbel-Eisenmann et al. 2015) embedded in dominant classroom storylines (Section 5.3). Continuing with visibility, Section 5.5 examines the positioning of Jamal by his peers as newly-arrived within the hierarchy of

belonging (Phoenix 2011; Talmy 2010), and how he contests the position in ways which reiterate the storyline of academic success with which he aligns. Instead, he claims membership of an Imagined Community of transnational, multilingual, successful young people (Pavlenko and Norton 2007) (Section 5.6).

Jamal's identity work creates possibilities for learning and his moment-to-moment positions sediment into a meso-identity as a successful *kind* of learner (Section 5.7). Within the educational triage system (Gillborn and Youdell 2000), he is identified as a 'worthy' investment. His co-constructed identity, through the dual dimensions of behaviour/attributes and 'ability', aligns closely with that of the ideal learner (Archer and Francis 2007; Gillborn 1990; Youdell 2006), and it further encompasses his language proficiency; he is positioned as an *ideal EAL learner* (Section 5.7). This challenges existing understandings of the ideal learner as always white, and I suggest that newly-arrived EAL learners may encounter space in their interactions to position themselves as *ideal*. Nevertheless, the essentialising storylines about his idealness and the failure to recognise the barriers of Otherness that he navigates suggests the operation of Model Minority stereotyping: a racializing myth which, I argue, can be applied to EAL learners (Section 5.8).

Table 5.1 lists the staff who appear in this chapter, in addition to Magda.

Table 5.1: Staff who appear in data in order of appearance

Anwar	Maths teacher
Jacqui	Religious Education (RE) teacher
Eloisa	English Literature and Language teacher
Shazia	Catering teacher

5.2 An ideal learner

Moment-to-moment in classes, Jamal self-positions, and is reflexively positioned, as a capable and engaged learner with knowledge and skills which are valued. He participates in classes in ways which enable him to co-construct an identity as a successful, visible-in-the-right way learner. Extract 5.1 illustrates this through close examination of his interaction with his Maths teacher, Anwar. Jamal sits on the back row of the class, next to Student A,

who is also an emerging multilingual. Anwar is a trainee teacher who teaches the class twice a week and supports the main class teacher in the remaining lessons. This is a lesson about statistical concepts: mean, median and mode.

Extract 5.1   Fieldnotes October 2021, Maths lesson

40	Anwar gives out calculators to work out the mean, but Jamal and Student A have
41	their own. Jamal has already worked out the mean as others are working on it.
42	Calls Anwar over but although he acknowledges the request he doesn't respond,
43	giving out calculators. He makes a non-committal comment and moves on. Jamal
44	calls him over again a moment later. Anwar confirms the answer, and Jamal ticks it
45	in purple. He has now also calculated the median and shows this to Anwar who
46	says that he doesn't know yet if that's correct. When checking answers with the
47	class a few minutes later, he nominates Jamal to explain how he got the answer.
	((lines omitted))
50	Anwar comes around again while learners work out the final part to the question
51	and asks Jamal what he's got. It's wrong, so Anwar shows him where he's gone
52	wrong and corrects the error in his working-out. Jamal is looking, nodding, saying
53	yeah, yeah, and smiling — he can see where he went wrong and how it's affected
54	working out the answer.

At the start of Extract 5.1, when Anwar gives out calculators, Jamal already has his own to hand, a communication act by which he self-positions as prepared to learn. He immediately starts answering the first question and calls Anwar over to check the answer, while Anwar is still giving out calculators (line 42). His quick Maths work is a self-positioning as an engaged learner, in relation to a wider storyline where visible engagement with pedagogical tasks is valued (Anderson 2009; Davies and Hunt 1994; Enyedy et al. 2008), and it contrasts with his peers, many of whom have not yet started.

Jamal's first attempt to call his teacher's attention appears to fail, as Anwar continues with his task of handing out calculators. Calling out (line 42) opens up a range of possible responses for Anwar, one of which is to classify this as a disruptive behavioural event. Doing this would challenge Jamal's self-positioning and second-order position him as disruptive. It

is therefore significant that, although Anwar does not come over, he acknowledges Jamal's request for attention. This communication act validates Jamal's self-positioning move, a validation reinforced by the positive response to a subsequent call for attention a moment later (lines 43–44).

This incident contrasts with LeBron's bids for teacher attention, which are often classified as disruptive by his teachers and result in repeated rejections of LeBron's proposed self-position as a good student and successful learner (Sections 4.3–4.4). Key to Jamal's success is his acquiescence to Anwar's rejection of his first bid for attention. Where LeBron might respond either with an immediate and more urgent request, or a refocusing of his attention on his peers, Jamal returns to his calculations and waits for another opportunity, showing idealised learner characteristics of patience, acquiescence, and diligence (Archer and Francis 2007; Youdell 2006). In other words, it is the pause in interaction (line 43) which enables Jamal's interactive positioning as a successful learner to be maintained. His quietness exhibits the restraint and obedience of the 'good' learner; his continued Maths working additionally demonstrates eagerness to learn and be on task.

A storyline in this lesson appears to be that good learners are visible *in the right way*: they contribute but do not demand attention or challenge the teacher's authority, including the norms of interactional talk and their power dynamics. The storyline (re-)creates position possibilities, just as the positions taken up by interactants (re-)create the storyline (Davies and Harré 1990). Jamal aligns with the storyline, visibly engaged with work and contributing to lessons, without insisting on attention or claiming rights to speak when the teacher does not want to respond, and thus they co-create and maintain a position of *visible-in-the-right-way*. Further observation data, and comparison with that of LeBron, suggests that the storyline operates at the institutional level. Extract 5.1 illustrates a moment-to-moment display of that wider storyline, and illustrates how the storyline and the positions claimed by interactants are mutually reinforcing. Learners who challenge the moral order of the classroom, such as LeBron, occupy the marked position in the 'good'/'bad' learner binary (Davies and Hunt 1994), relegated to positions of classroom marginality, and this enables the unmarked position to be intelligible in learners such as Jamal.

In line 46, Anwar admits that Jamal has reached the next part of the answer before he has worked it out himself, and despite not checking the answer with Jamal, when doing whole-

class feedback a few minutes later, Anwar invites him not only to give the correct answer, but to explain to the class how he reached it. In doing so, Anwar makes available a new position for Jamal, that of mathematical *explainer* (Wood 2013). This carries with it greater obligation as he must now explain his mathematical thinking, and greater rights to speak, specifically to the whole class. Anwar has also therefore also offered Jamal the position of *responsible speaker* (Smith 2022), and by proceeding with his explanation, Jamal accepts both positions.

Responsible speaker is a positioning of Jamal's English proficiency. Jamal's assessment as Level B (Early Acquisition) suggests that proficiency is a normative construct which can be objectively measured. However, using the concept of *perceived proficiency* (Martin-Beltrán 2010), the invitation by Anwar to explain his thinking to the class, which involves an extended answer, is a positioning act which not only asserts Jamal as a person with communicative proficiency in English, but marks his contributions as successful, serving as a model to his peers in the class (Smith 2022). In this way, Jamal's proficiency is negotiated through interactional positioning (Martin-Beltrán 2010) rather than fixed or affixed to the Early Acquisition label. Although not fluent in English, he is positioned as communicatively competent.

His teachers describe Jamal as constantly improving in English proficiency (Interview Anwar October 2021; Magda in fieldnotes February 2022). However, this progress must be in terms which make sense to teaching staff. If proficiency is a perception by learners and those who surround them, then the learners must interact in such ways as enable staff to perceive of them as proficient. Jamal demonstrates just such positioning in Extract 5.1, through the 'correct' balancing of assertiveness and acquiescence.

Perceived proficiency or linguistic assimilation may thus be important to the *ideal EAL learner* model, alongside established dimensions of 'ability' and behaviours/attributes. Jamal is said to be 'clever' (Jacqui in fieldnotes November 2021) and 'intelligent' (Interview Anwar October 2021, line 236). Anwar attributes his success in Maths to his confidence and prior learning; he appears convinced that Jamal has a great deal more mathematical knowledge and skills which are not yet apparent because of his English proficiency. He proposes changing the seating plan so that Jamal can work with the highest-achieving learner in the class, so that he has greater opportunities to express this hidden knowledge

(Interview Anwar October 2021). In sum, he values the cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986) of Jamal's prior learning, in a way that LeBron's teachers generally do not. This opens up opportunities: being moved to work alongside a high-achieving peer from his current seat (allocated so that limited-proficiency EAL students sit together), invitation to an extracurricular Maths course (Fieldnotes October 2021), additional help from the Maths teacher at break times and guided additional work out of class, access via email to additional help from his Business Studies teacher, and additional support from his English Literature teacher (Interview Jamal November 2021). It seems that finding routes to be *visible-in-the-right-way* contributes to Jamal's alignment with an *ideal EAL learner* model, which in turn unlocks opportunities for his further learning.

5.3 Visible in 'the right way'

Jamal is keen to be seen within most of his classes. I observed him offering to give out books at the start of lessons, confidently offering answers to teachers' questions and taking part in small-group discussions without hesitation, including speaking for his group in a self- or teacher-nominated *spokesperson* position. He also finds ways to push the boundaries of visibility, but in ways which are acceptable to his teachers and not incompatible with the *ideal EAL learner*, as is shown in Extract 5.2. The English Literature lesson started with a task which learners completed individually. They now correct the answers with the teacher, Eloisa, using a straightforward Initiation-Response-Evaluation (IRE) (Mehan 1979) sequence.

Extract 5.2   Fieldnotes October 2021, English Literature lesson

68	In correcting, Eloisa calls on Jamal and others by name, nominating them. While
69	waiting for Eloisa to choose someone to answer he says a couple of answers
70	quietly, and she picks up on this, confirming the answers.

In Extract 5.2, Eloisa begins each IRE sequence by asking a question and nominating speakers for the response turn. Jamal sometimes self-nominates, which within a classroom

moral order where teachers have almost exclusive authority to allocate turns (Gardner 2013) could be interpreted as disruptive behaviour. Yet his self-nominations are not sanctioned or ignored, but treated by Eloisa as valid turns. She confirms his offered answers, accepting his self-positioning as a knowledgeable and engaged English Literature *learner.* This is an interactional strategy which Jamal uses in many lessons, to similar effect (Fieldnotes October, November 2021).

One reason perhaps that this is acceptable interactional behaviour is that Jamal offers his turns quietly. It is *sotto voce* learner self-talk, where learners rehearse English utterances in a non-public way, and is considered as a display of understanding (Gardner 2013), hypothesis-testing and internalisation of learning (Ohta 2000). In fact, Jamal is not bidding to take the floor in the interaction, but uses the *sotto voce* utterances to display not only his understanding but his engagement in learning. The low, non-disruptive voice means that teachers do not feel their authority challenged and are able to absorb his self-nominated turns without repositioning him as a disruptive learner. For Jamal's part, the strategy affords him 'avenues of participation' (Ohta 2000:53) with a comfortable level of visibility whereby he can continue to position himself as knowledgeable and engaged, and have that position affirmed by his teachers, without drawing attention from the whole class.

Not all his contributions are successful, however. Sometimes his answers are incorrect, and at other times there is a breakdown in communication. In Extract 5.3, Jamal attempts to negotiate meaning (Gass 2003; Long 1996) with his RE teacher, Jacqui. The lesson is nearly over and Jamal has contributed extensively to group work and whole-class discussion. As in the Maths lesson, he sits next to Student A. The lesson concludes with a game of hangman using key vocabulary. The game has just started and only one letter (<A>) has been guessed so far. Learners put their hands up to offer guesses as to which letters are missing.

Extract 5.3   Fieldnotes October 2021, RE lesson

296	Jacqui:	{Jamal}? ((he has his hand up))
297	Jamal:	/ei/
298	Jacqui:	We've already had A
299	Jamal:	No, /ei::/
300	Jacqui:	B? Okay, no.

301		((Jamal looks at Jacqui, looks at Student A, looks back at Jacqui,
302		shrugs his shoulders. Jacqui has moved onto another student by the
303		second time Jamal looks at her.))

At the start of Extract 5.3, Jacqui nominates Jamal to respond, and he offers a candidate answer, which he intends to be the letter <E>. Pronunciation of vowel letters in English can be challenging for language learners as there is no easy correlation between a letter and the range of phonemes it represents. Jamal pronounces <E> using the phoneme /ei/, which sounds like the English letter <A>. However, <A> has already been given as an answer and so in the third turn, Jacqui rejects Jamal's answer and, specifying the reason for rejection, she suggests the source of trouble as Jamal's inattention to what has gone before in the talk. Although she does not invite Jamal to repair, neither does she nominate another speaker at the end of her turn (line 298), leaving an opportunity for Jamal to self-nominate and self-repair in the next talk turn.

Jamal recognises the trouble, but locates the source as his own pronunciation. He attempts the self-repair by repeating the same phoneme but elongating the second part of the diphthong (line 299). In doing this, he rejects the position of inattentiveness which has been assigned to him by Jacqui and engages in a second-order positioning move, highlighting his pronunciation trouble and proposing an alternative position for himself, as a non-fluent English speaker, not incompatible with an attentive learner position. His anxiety to demonstrate that his answer is correct, if badly-pronounced, reflects the public display and social sharing of understanding which is implicated in answering a question in class (Gardner 2013); to get it wrong in front of his peers might additionally risk his social standing.

Jamal's attempt at self-repair is unsuccessful. Jacqui interprets his utterance as the letter <B>, which is incorrect. Whereas in the third turn of the IRE sequence (line 298), her error correction avoids the unmitigated 'no' (Seedhouse 2004), in this extension of the IRE sequence, her evaluation is a balder *Okay, no* (line 300). In pedagogic situations of procedure or content, this unmitigated response is quite acceptable (Seedhouse 2004) and therefore Jacqui may feel that, as the trouble itself is seen as 'non-problematic and non-face-threatening' (Seedhouse 2004:175), the response is similarly non-threatening.

Jamal, however, has evaluated the trouble as linguistic in origin, which is more serious as it affects intersubjectivity (Gardner 2013) rather than pedagogic flow and thus he treats this sequence as one of repair and not correction (Gardner 2013). He signals the continued presence of trouble through the communication act of gaze (line 301). He may be using gaze to appeal for help in repairing this trouble, as he appears to have no further recast ideas. However, Student A does not offer a repair in response, and, by the time Jamal looks back at Jacqui, she has nominated another student (line 302), effectively closing the sequence with Jamal. He shrugs his shoulders, apparently in resignation.

This sequence is typical of Jamal's troubles-in-talk: he tries to self-repair and, if unsuccessful, looks for a sympathetic interactant for other-repair, and where this is not forthcoming, retreats from the talk in apparent resignation (Fieldnotes October, November 2021). This resignation does not mean acceptance and he discusses his frustration with pronunciation troubles in the focus group (December 2021), saying that he would like more support. LeBron, present in the focus group, agrees that pronunciation is a difficulty. Both young men appear to find it frustrating because it interferes with their ability to give correct answers in class and participate in ways which are recognisable by their teachers.

However, analysis of the interactional sequences suggests that they address the frustration in different ways. While Jamal shrugs and retreats, LeBron takes further turns in the sequence, trying to self-correct and verbally appealing to teachers and peers for help (Section 4.2). This disrupts the flow of the teaching sequence more than Jamal's mute appeals, and draws in other speakers in a context where he does not have turn-allocation rights; this is one of the asymmetries of classroom institutional talk (Seedhouse 2004) and it is sometimes evaluated as disruptive behaviour.

This storyline of *visible-in-the-right-way* circulates across lessons and over time in the data of both young men, at the meso level (Anderson 2009) of the institution. Jamal consistently aligns himself with it in his positioning moves, enabling him to inhabit the meso-level identity of a good *kind* of learner. Meanwhile, through repeated challenges to the storyline, pushing the boundaries of what constitutes *visible-in-the-right-way*, LeBron comes to be associated with a less positive meso-identity, that of a troublesome *kind* of learner (Section 4.8). The additional learning opportunities afforded to Jamal indicate his identification by teachers as a learner who is deserving of their effort, in a way that LeBron is not; with

limited resources, the teachers focus on the learner who is most likely to reward their efforts. This suggests that, as with other ethnic minority learners, EAL learners are subject to a system of educational triage (Gillborn and Youdell 2000) (See further discussion in Section 5.7).

5.4 A contrasting deficit identity

In his Catering lessons, the construction of Jamal's identity happens differently from all the other observed lessons, as Extract 5.4 illustrates. In Extract 5.4, the teacher, Shazia, has explained the structure of the qualification they are working towards and it is displayed on the board; learners are instructed to copy.

Extract 5.4   Fieldnotes October 2021, Catering lesson

113	When they start working, Jamal looks at a peer's book, sees that they're copying
114	from the board, starts to write in his own book. Shazia gives information about
115	each point, uses Q&A to elicit key vocabulary and check comprehension of it.
116	Learners call out answers or put hands up — all self-selected — but Jamal does not
117	participate. Shazia says to me, 'All in this class, they're either SEN or ((nods
118	sideways, as if gesturing, slight pause)) the other. They were supposed to give me
119	someone but they didn't.' ((she means support staff))
120	She checks books, going round the bench ((students sitting roughly in a horseshoe
121	shape)), to see if everything has been correctly copied and set out as required.
122	Jamal's book: all fine. Some learners ask questions about the course and she
123	answers. Jamal is sometimes distracted, looking at the displays or outside the
124	window, where KS3 are having lunch break and in the playground.

The interaction continues as indicated in Extract 5.4 for the full lesson, and Jamal makes no verbal contributions at all. With continuous questioning from Shazia while simultaneously copying information, the linguistic load is high, and Jamal gives no sign that he engages with the questions. On the contrary, his attention is sometimes elsewhere (line 123) and, when he needs clarification, he looks at a peer's book rather than ask the teacher (line 113).

Copying from the board positions all the learners as *menial workers* (Wood 2013), as it requires very little cognitive effort. For those who can engage with the question-and-answer interaction, more demanding learner positions are offered with associated rights to speak and obligations as *explainers*, but for Jamal these are not available. Indeed, no effort is made to include him and, as line 118 indicates, he is characterised as *the other*, positioned as difficult or impossible to teach, particularly without (promised) support staff. In another aside to me, Shazia points out Jamal and another new arrival to the school as the learners who have missed prior learning. With these remarks, Shazia engages in third-order positioning of Jamal as a learner with deficit cultural capital. At the meso level, Jamal's identity is one which aligns with the ideal learner *kind*: behaviour, aptitude and expanding proficiency intersect in ways which allow his teachers to see him in positive ways. By contrast, the storyline circulating here is that newly-arrived multilingual students are academically and linguistically troublesome, and teachers cannot be expected to teach them without support. This sits within a meso-storyline about EAL deficit evident in WMS whereby newly-arrived multilinguals are medicalised in remarks by senior staff about EAL 'diagnosis' (Fieldnotes July 2019) and often segregated within mainstream lessons both physically through the seating plan and in the curricular access they are given (Fieldnotes July 2019, October 2021, February 2022).

Jamal, in other classes, makes his engagement with each lesson visible to peers and teachers. Here, however, he seems content to be invisible, possibly because he regards Catering as a less important subject, or perhaps because is resigned to his position. In interview he reaffirms the assigned position of *menial worker* which I observed, saying that 'we are there to cook' and that he does not have opportunities to speak (Interview November 2021, line 98). In this situation, his opportunities to demonstrate engagement and position himself as capable and communicatively competent are very limited.

In the next lesson (Fieldnotes October 2021), they go through a completed test paper. Correct answers are praised and Shazia repeatedly asks learners to specify how many marks they earnt. Each iteration of the focus on correctness and marks highlights and recreates a storyline, that a 'good' learner is one with correct answers and high grades. Jamal self-selects several times to find out what he should have written to get full marks. He reflexively positions as engaged and curious, aligning with notions of a good learner (Archer and Francis 2007; Youdell 2006). His teacher, however, does not accept the positioning move; on

one occasion she tells him that he should have written 'more' and on another simply that his answer is 'wrong', an unmitigated correction (Seedhouse 2004) which is usually avoided in classroom interactions just as in everyday conversation. It is a strong rejection of Jamal's proposed position as an engaged and curious learner. This may be because the dominant storyline within the lesson is one of correctness and grades, of product rather than process of learning, and in seeking further detail, Jamal fails to recognise or align himself with this.

Jamal's distraction from learning, then, does not happen in a vacuum but within a micro-storyline of deficit and invisibility which is reconstructed despite his continued efforts to challenge it. It illustrates the instability of learner positioning and identities, and their interactional nature; Jamal alone cannot construct himself as a good *kind* of learner. Within these lessons, he is distracted by games of football outside the window, and peer interactions within the classroom. There is a great deal of building the masculine peer community in this lesson: teasing, academic rivalry, discussion of the football games outside, clowning around (Fieldnotes November 2021). Jamal orients to this, joining in with laughter and using gaze to indicate his attention to the peer community. While his attention to peers is evident through gaze, conversation and laughter in other lessons (Fieldnotes October, November 2021), in these Catering lessons it is much more prominent and, to some extent, supplants the attention to learning. He repositions himself as an engaged member of the peer social world, in response to the lack of available learner positions with rights to speak which are afforded to him. This suggests that, where learners fail to be recognised within the positions they propose, and continue to resist assigned positions, they seek alternatives, which may or may not afford them learning opportunities.

5.5 Communicative competence

Jamal is variously positioned as communicatively competent and incompetent, and these moves further draw him into or marginalise him from the learning community (Davies and Hunt 1994). Extract 5.5 from a Catering lesson on Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) illustrates how his English proficiency is co-constructed: in this case, as incompetent.

Extract 5.5   Fieldnotes November 2021, Catering lesson

192	Shazia: What else does an EHO do?
193	Jamal: ((hand up, nominated)) Test /teist/ food
194	Students: ((some quiet laughter, presumably at his pronunciation))
195	Shazia: No, the EHO does not taste the food, it's not what they do, they check the
196	safety and hygiene

In line 193 of Extract 5.5, Jamal offers an answer in the response turn, and receives an unmitigated negative evaluation from Shazia, somewhat of a pattern in Catering lessons (Fieldnotes November 2021; Section 5.4). However, this turn is additionally evaluated as a laughable (Glenn 2003); that is, something which other interactants can laugh at. In the original fieldnotes (line 194) I felt this was due to his mispronunciation of 'test'; it may also be that it was heard as the lexical item 'taste' by peers as it was by Shazia.

Glenn (2003) distinguishes between laughing with and laughing at, and proposes four keys to discern which of the two is happening in a sequence of turns. One key is the initiation of laughter. Jamal's peers initiate quiet laughing (line 194). This is in the third position of an IRE sequence, where the preferred response would be a teacher evaluation of Jamal's candidate answer. The laughter is therefore already a dispreferred response, starting as it does before Shazia's evaluation. Further, while the intended recipient of Jamal's turn is the teacher, it is the students who interject with laughter, thus disaligning with the sequence, the structural level of interactional co-operation (Clift 2016). Jamal does not join in with the laughter, suggesting that it has a disaffiliative effect, positioning Jamal as communicatively incompetent, lower in the hierarchy of belonging (Phoenix 2011) than his more proficient English-speaking peers. However, it is not solely disaffiliative: a single episode of laughter can be both affiliative and disaffiliative (Clift 2016; Glenn and Holt 2013). Here, the peers unite in their laughter, reinforcing the boundaries of the old-timer group (Talmy 2010), excluding Jamal through his perceived error. Shazia's use of no fewer than three negative constructions in consecutive turn construction units in line 195 (*no…does not taste…it's not what they do*) underscores the position of incompetence and marginality that Jamal has been ascribed.

Jamal's Maths teacher, Anwar, mentions peer laughter as a response to Jamal's talk:

> *yeah erm so I ask everyone questions in the class but I try and not with the worded*
> *ones I try and not to go too much to them two because {teacher mentor} observed*
> *one of my lessons and she said to erm just control that because at times when he was*
> *talking the people would laugh* (Interview Anwar October 2021, lines 173–176)

Anwar is coached to avoid asking Jamal (and the other emergent multilingual learner) more complex mathematical word problems, as a suggested strategy for dealing with peer laughter. While well-intentioned, this positions Jamal as lacking in communicative competence and narrows the range of available identity positions for him, excluding that of Maths *explainer*. However, Anwar's report here contrasts with his actual teaching practice which includes invitations for Jamal to explain his work, a linguistically challenging task involving an extended turn (Extract 5.1). His report also contrasts with a later assertion in the same interview that, despite his attempted sensitivity, Jamal is quite confident to speak in class.

> *he's happy to contribute himself anyway he he doesn't mind*
>
> (Interview Anwar October 2021, line 182)

Throughout Maths, English, and RE lesson observations, Jamal regularly self-selects to speak, and on no occasion is peer laughter observed (Fieldnotes October, November 2021). However, the observed Catering lessons demonstrate one key difference, and that is the repeated construction of Jamal as deficit, both in the teacher's remarks about him (Extract 5.4) and in the moment-to-moment interactive positioning moves. Taking their lead from the teacher (Smith 2022), peers become complicit in the positioning of Jamal as incompetent (Davies and Hunt 1994; Martin-Beltrán 2010). It is noticeable that throughout Catering lessons, his contributions are fewer than in other classes (zero in one observed class) and usually happen by calling Shazia over to ask her questions (Fieldnotes November 2021). This limits his opportunities for interaction and possibilities for positioning as a knower or *explainer* of learning. It suggests that he has aligned himself, at least within this lesson, to the deficit-focused storyline and the limited positions that it affords, and he looks for less public and therefore less socially risky strategies for interacting.

This episode of interactional difficulty due to pronunciation resembles that of Extract 5.3, the game of hangman in the RE lesson, but with key differences. The mitigated teacher response avoiding the word 'no' in Extract 5.3 contrasts with Shazia's triple negative here; the opportunity to self-select and attempt repair in Extract 5.3 contrasts with the laughter and immediate teacher evaluation here. While both episodes position Jamal as 'wrong', in this second episode the laughter additionally positions him as vulnerable to ridicule (Clift 2016) and he has no opportunity to recast his speech or negotiate meaning with his interactant, processes which are vital to language learning (Gass 2003; Long 1996).

The ridicule is different from the teasing experienced by LeBron regarding his newcomer status. LeBron joins in the laughter, marking it as 'laughing with' rather than 'laughing at' (Glenn 2003), an affiliative act which serves to position LeBron as peer group insider with a specific 'freshie' identity (Extract 4.12 in Section 4.7). Jamal, like LeBron, self-describes as confident but more quietly so; as a calm person who prefers listening to talking (Interview Jamal, November 2021).

The actions of Jamal's peers in Extract 5.5 serve to reinforce an insider/outsider hierarchy which, paradoxically, many of them will have resisted as new arrivals (Talmy 2010). In WMS where most learners are multilingual, being an emergent multilingual is not enough to mark Jamal as an outsider, but the majority of his peers have been in England for long enough to acquire a UK English accent of some kind. Jamal is therefore marked as different by his Cameroonian French accent and occasional word searches. He is liked and accepted as a peer, but he is not yet positioned as an old-timer (Lave and Wenger 1991); the storyline which circulates at a meso level across time and space in WMS is that accent marks a difference between newcomers and old timers, as it does more widely in society (Charsley and Bolognani 2016; Section 4.7). In a school community where the majority are first- or second-generation immigrants, there is a boundary between 'local' EAL learners and the newly-arrived, a hierarchy of belonging (Phoenix 2011) which is marked linguistically (Talmy 2010). Mockery events delineate the boundaries of the local community and define and recreate insider status, through defining and creating the outsider. The Catering teacher is complicit in the construction of Jamal as less communicatively competent; the imposition of the derogatory label creates and maintains a boundary of belonging and non-belonging (Waite and Cook 2011). By reinforcing the hierarchy of belonging (Phoenix 2011), they

collectively reproduce and recreate the wider more generalised storyline (Talmy 2010), positioning Jamal as lower in the hierarchy.

While being laughed at in the Catering lesson other-positions him as a peer group outsider, wider ethnographic data shows no such parallel self-positioning by Jamal. That he has friends is clear from fieldnotes and interviews; he reports good relationships beyond his immediate peers, including with class 'clowns' and more dominant peers, as he explains in Extract 5.6.

Extract 5.6   Interview Jamal November 2021

140	I don't make discriminations so if I have something to talk with him, si j'ai quelque
	If I have some-
141	chose a parler avec lui et si j'ai des problèmes ils sont très ouverts …ils ont des
	-thing to talk about with them and if I have problems they're very open they have
142	cœurs et parle avec moi et demande comment ma journée était donc je suis ami
	hearts and speak with me and ask how my day was so I'm friends
143	avec eux aussi, donc, oui
	with them too, so yeah

In Extract 5.7, as LeBron and Jamal discuss teachers' attitudes towards helping learners, they co-construct a contrasting identity for Jamal, that of someone with a high level of communicative competence.

Extract 5.7 Audio-recorded focus group December 2021

337	LeBron:	when you think about it they don't want to help you be↓cause (1)
338	Jamal:	they care about [°you
339	LeBron:	[yeah they just want to help you so that (.) like they'll
340		leave it because (.) teachers like (.) let's say (0.5) *tchip* ↓how to
341		explain it
342	Jamal:	okay I'll help you [like
343	LeBron:	[mm
344	Jamal:	[it's their work to help you pass

345	LeBron:	yeah
346	Jamal:	they only care about some pupils so=
347	LeBron:	=<u>there</u> you go <u>there</u> you <u>go</u> there you go
348	Jamal:	some pupils

The sequence in Extract 5.7 constitutes a co-telling where they take turns in the role of storyteller and story consociate (Lerner 1992) and work together to tell me about their teachers; throughout, Jamal reflexively positions as an effective communicator, a position which LeBron ratifies.

In line 338, Jamal self-nominates for a turn; although LeBron's turn is noticeably incomplete, he pauses and Jamal takes up the story, completing LeBron's turn for him. One reason why a co-teller may enter the story is to resolve a word search (Lerner 1992), which Jamal proceeds to do, offering his own reason for teachers' motivation. LeBron agrees (line 339) and recommences the storytelling, but soon runs into trouble in the delivery (Lerner 1992), creating an entry for his consociate. This is signalled with pauses, false starts, *like*, and a tchip, which perhaps signals frustration. These attempts at self-repair fail to advance the story and so LeBron self-initiates an other-repair (*how to explain it*, line 340). LeBron's search for language is typical of EAL learners at more advanced stages of proficiency who are developing CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency) (Cummins 2008); LeBron sounds 'British' but, in the moment, may lack more complex vocabulary and sentence structures to describe, particularly, abstract concepts, such as teachers' motivations and attitudes.

As the adult with authority in a school situation and the most proficient English speaker there, I might reasonably be expected to provide the other-repair. However, it is Jamal who takes the next turn. His *okay* (line 342) is a reply to LeBron's appeal for language help and he expands by explicitly stating his offer to help, a strongly affiliative move as he assumes he knows what LeBron wants to say. As this turn construction unit comes to an end, LeBron overlaps with *mm* (line 343), a third part in the sequence which shows his assent to Jamal taking over the storytelling. However, Jamal continues straight into his telling (*like it's their work to help you pass*) without waiting for this assent. He self-positions as a competent

communicator and, by assenting, LeBron ratifies his position. LeBron continues to monitor Jamal's story (Sidnell 2010), producing the consociate continuer (Lerner 1992) *yeah* (line 345) and the stronger, emphasised, thrice-repeated *there you go* (line 347). In his affiliative responses, LeBron repositions Jamal from competent to responsible, as he acts as *spokesperson* (Smith 2022) for the two of them. He has succeeded in explaining what LeBron could not alone; they have collaboratively pooled their language resources to tell me something that mattered to them, and co-positioned Jamal as a competent user of English.

5.6 Co-constructing the Imagined Community

Jamal plans to become a doctor in England and eventually return to Cameroon to practise medicine and build a home (Interview November 2021). Like many first-generation immigrants his sense of diasporic identity is linked to Cameroon as well as more lateral diasporic ties such as those which LeBron negotiates with his peers through a Pan-African identity (Section 4.7). He recognises gaining good qualifications as key steps to future success and makes no secret of his academic focus. While keen to improve his English, he readily uses French in interviews, conversation with me and others, and the focus group, signalling his multilingualism rather than an intended English monolingualism. He refers to people and healthcare in Cameroon in his plans. Jamal's imagined future is as part of an Imagined Community (IC) (Norton 2001; Pavlenko and Norton 2007) with similarities to that of LeBron (Section 4.7): multilingual, professionally and educationally successful, spending his life in more than one country, firmly rooted in transnational social, linguistic and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986, 1991).

In Extracts 5.8 and 5.9, Jamal's membership of this IC is recognised and given value by LeBron. In Extract 5.8, we discuss Cameroon.

Extract 5.8   Audio-recorded focus group, December 2021

221	Hannah:	did you know (.) {Jamal} and I lived quite close to each other in
222		Cameroon
223	LeBron:	¿yeah
224	Jamal:	yeah
225	Hannah:	yeah he knew my area we were chatting about Yaoundé the first day
226		we [were
227	LeBron:	[oh you you ch- tu habitais là ↑bas
		did you live there
228	Jamal:	oui j'habitais là bas oui
		yes I lived there yes
229	LeBron:	yeah that's a nice place yeah I never been there but I seen like (.)
230		videos

LeBron grew up in a large French city and is likely to have encountered substantial continuities between the Western European Black male youth subcultures (Youdell 2003, 2006) of his old and current school. Specifically, his peer group at the time of this focus group constitutes a status which Youdell (2003:12) characterises as the 'pinnacle' of the Hierarchy-within-the-Other: high-status heterosexed Black masculinity. Within that group, he possesses cultural, linguistic and social capital (Bourdieu 1986, 1991) of high value, such as his clothing, MBE use, closest friends, and free time interests (Sections 4.6–4.7). Jamal, by contrast, grew up in a Central African city and, while no doubt familiar with elements of globalised Black culture (Alexander 2016), he possesses forms of capital which are afforded lower value in the marketplace of the school youth subculture. Jamal and LeBron speak frequently to each other (Interview November 2021) but this extract reveals that Jamal has never told LeBron where he is from. Indeed, it is possible that Jamal has chosen not to reveal this, perhaps allowing peers to assume that he is from France, given the higher cultural capital that this may carry within the peer subculture.

When I inform him of Jamal's prior home (line 221), LeBron responds positively, showing interest in his rising intonation and through the change-of-state token *yeah* in response to

the question-elicited informing (Heritage 1984). This retrospectively confirms LeBron's state of knowledge as previously ignorant of Jamal's previous home and his current recipient status as informed (Heritage 1984) as well as my own as the informer. However, this *yeah* is not directed at me but rather at Jamal in a request for confirmation (line 223); Jamal, as the recipient, responds. Although LeBron's *yeah* treats my telling as incomplete (Heritage 1984), when I self-nominate and offer further information (line 225), LeBron's response is again directed to Jamal. He interrupts me (line 227) and switches into French, their shared home language. His turn appears designed to position me outside the conversation and create a private interactional space with Jamal. His nomination of Jamal to take the next turn is affiliative, just as it is disaffiliative towards me. He seeks reconfirmation of the information I shared from Jamal in French, and Jamal replies using almost the same words (line 228), again an affiliative move. 'We do not simply "become" close or distant; it happens turn by turn, moment by moment' (Stivers 2022:21). In this sequence, LeBron offers Jamal the position of peer equal, and Jamal accepts. The moment is one of intimacy creation through affiliative use of language resources.

Having accomplished these actions, LeBron offers an assessment not only of the prior turn but of Cameroon more broadly, as a *nice place* which is interesting enough to him that he has *seen videos* of it (lines 229-230). The turn aligns and affiliates (Stivers 2022), and by both positively evaluating Jamal's home country and switching back into English, LeBron makes it affiliative towards both Jamal and me; the intimate interactional space created in line 227 is closed. He positions Jamal's cultural capital (the place he comes from) as of high value, and by extension, Jamal himself is positioned as of high social value, as LeBron signals a close to the topic.

Extract 5.9 occurs later in the same focus group, as the conversation turns to post-GCSE plans. Jamal has just reiterated his ambitions to go to medical school.

Extract 5.9   Audio-recorded focus group December 2021

388	Hannah:	so maybe looking at sixth forms to do Sciences
389	Jamal:	°the (fun Science)
390	LeBron:	(hhh) he's good at it
391	Hannah:	are you ((looking at Jamal who smiles))
392	LeBron:	yeah yeah

LeBron's quiet laughter (line 390) is probably in response to Jamal's assertion that Science is fun, which he marks as a laughable (Glenn 2003). They are in the same Science class but, whereas Jamal enjoys it and achieves good grades, LeBron clashes with the Science teacher and his progress is slower than the school expects (Fieldnotes February 2022). Nevertheless, the laughter is very quiet, and he immediately adds that Jamal is good at Science. When I respond (line 391) with a request for verification from Jamal, it is LeBron who, claiming a *spokesperson* position, provides a verbal response (*yeah yeah*), underlining his positioning of Jamal as a good *Science learner*. Jamal uses the non-verbal communication act of a smile to show that he accepts this position, which aligns with his self-positioning in interview (Interview November 2021).

These two extracts show how Jamal is interactively positioned as a member of a transnational, successful, IC. LeBron positions him as academically successful in the Science studies he needs for a medical career, and as a transnational citizen, his connections to Cameroon are designated as of high social value. This contrasts with the static and Anglo-centric identity suggested by teachers which fails to acknowledge his richer, more complex identity as a diasporic local (Peutrell and Cooke 2019; Rampton et al. 2023) or the plurilocal and multilingual possibilities for his future within his IC. While his Maths teacher alludes positively to his prior learning (Interview Anwar October 2021), neither his RE, Catering, or English teachers acknowledge any learner identity outside the immediate time and space of WMS. Both young men self-position as members of their IC: as successful citizens of a transnational, professional, multilingual learning and future-focused space. However, there is no parallel recognition at an institutional level, either in day-to-day interactions or in meso level policy and storylines around what EAL learner ambitions might be. Wider

storylines around migration and belonging likewise fail to incorporate transnationalism (Yuval-Davis, Anthias and Kofman 2005); the macro-storyline is one of assimilation into Britishness through abandonment of more complex (inter)national identities.

Jamal works hard to achieve academic success within the majoritarian terms set by the education system, as is explored in the following section. He aligns himself with storylines about meritocracy, having 'ability' and working hard. In parallel with this, however, he positions himself as part of an IC. It appears that his notions of success extend beyond the narrow confines of exam results set by school and wider policy. This is not a simple binary: to become a doctor, Jamal will need those exams. Recognising his membership of the IC, his wider terms of success, could provide Jamal with valuable points of affiliation with and investment in the practices of the school, and provide a frame of reference for its exam-focused demands (Norton 2001; Pavlenko 2003). Conversely, failure to recognise his positioning and rights to speak as member of an IC could be demotivating (Norton 2001; Pavlenko 2003) as his multilingualism and transnational ambition are afforded little value by the school. Recognition of these rights and position, and making explicit links to the IC, might enable a more holistic, rights-focused approach to understanding and achieving success (Bian 2017; Saito 2003; UNESCO 2015).

5.7 The ideal EAL learner and educational triage

Black learners cannot be securely or permanently ideal in the current understanding of *ideal learners* (Archer and Francis 2007; Bradbury 2013; Gillborn 1990; Youdell 2006); however, in Jamal's prior schooling context in Cameroon this model may have limited application and it may be that, with his acquiescence to authority, politeness, engagement and hard work (Sections 5.1–5.2) as well as perceived 'ability', Jamal is used to being positioned as in possession of the attributes of exactly such an ideal. For learners in Jamal's situation, being new to English schools may bring a new set of positionings — as linguistically deficit, for example (Section 5.4) — which threaten previously-held learner identities. Recent arrival might provide space for resistance to and negotiation with local storylines, whereby multilingual learners can assert, in their minute-to-minute interactions, idealness.

Jamal, like LeBron, is keen to achieve academic success, with plans for professional success. He is similarly French-speaking, with a continuous history of prior schooling, of Black African heritage, good at making friends, positively-disposed towards teaching staff. However, in what I argue is an illustration of educational *triage* (Gillborn and Youdell 2000), while LeBron comes to acquire a meso-identity as a troublesome *kind* of learner, Jamal's meso-identity is more aligned to the ideal *kind* of EAL learner.

Jamal has some frustrations with communicating ideas, but contributes frequently and confidently in most lessons and, importantly, in what is assessed as *the right way* (Section 5.3). Jamal demonstrates highly pro-school behaviour in lessons (Fieldnotes October, November 2021). He speaks in pro-school terms, praising the school for its facilities and attention to themes such as Anti-Bullying Week and opportunities to pray (Interview Jamal November 2021).

Furthermore, he defines his success in ways which align with the dominant exam-focused storyline, as he reveals in Extract 5.10 when I ask him how his first few months in school have been.

Extract 5.10   Audio-recorded interview Jamal November 2021

5	Mm, c'était très bien, ça s'est bien passé parce que j'ai fait des nouveaux amis
	It was really good, it's gone well because I've made new friends
6	et ils sont très gentils, et sont accueillants parce que je suis nouveau à l'école. Ça
	they're really nice and welcoming because I'm new in the school. It's
7	s'est bien passé et j'ai eu de bons résultats. Je vais doubler d'efforts pour avoir des
	gone well and I've had good results. I'm going to make twice as much effort to get
8	bons results.
	good results.

Verhoeven, Zijlstra and Volman (2021) highlight the importance of learners understanding what a 'good' learner is, and whether they consider it important to be one, in the development of learner identity. By referencing results, Jamal displays an understanding which is highly congruent with dominant institutional storylines; my observations reveal references to exams in every single lesson and every teacher interview. This aligns with the

macro-storyline too, as government assessments of learners' success, including that of multilingual learners, are expressed in terms of exam attainment (e.g. DfE 2023e).

However, social integration is also important to Jamal. In class, he works well independently, but also with peers in small-group work and pairwork (Fieldnotes October 2021). Although focused on the work in most lessons, most of the time, he orients to the wider social life of the classroom, indicated by gaze and body positioning (Fieldnotes in Catering, Maths and RE classes), and by offering infrequent socially-oriented utterances (Fieldnotes in RE and English classes, all October 2021). As suggested by Extracts 5.6 and 5.7, he gets on well with peers from outside his immediate circle. This extends beyond school, as Jamal reports meeting friends from different social groups in the park (Interview November 2021). This mix of first and second-order positioning by Jamal and his peers suggests somebody who is socially integrated, albeit continuing to negotiate between newcomer and old-timer identities.

There is a set of storylines at play, around success and visibility, which emanate from the male peer subculture. Within the dominant peer groups in each lesson, while much importance is attributed to learning, there is a certain resistance to the routines and power hierarchies of the school. They demonstrate a storyline of anti-school, pro-learning (Youdell 2003) in which the (predominantly Black) boys resist alignment with dominant institutional storylines in order to secure 'collective protection and survival' (Mac an Ghaill 1988:102). Jamal self-positions to these storylines of resistance peripherally through gaze, body turning and smiles (Fieldnotes October, November 2021). LeBron's more active participation in the shared practices of the peer group has enabled him to move from the periphery to the centre (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998) (Section 4.6) but while Jamal engages indirectly with resistant behaviours, he positions himself in a way that has greater continuity with the more dominant meso- and macro-level storylines about good learner behaviours which are shared with school staff.

His ecumenical approach to friendship is significant in aligning himself to storylines about good *kinds* of learner. Verhoeven, Zijlstra and Volman (2021) found that, where learners have both pro-school and anti-school peers, it sets up continuities and discontinuities in terms of alignment to notions of how important it is to be a good learner. In other words, the storylines which are dominant may differ between peer groups, as well as between the

youth subculture as a whole and school staff. Jamal aligns closely in most lessons to institutional storylines around exam results and the importance of studying hard (Section 5.2).

Jamal does not appear to see a conflict between his social and learner positionings, as was the case with LeBron. However, perhaps crucially, Jamal's teachers do not appear to see a conflict either. His participation in anti-school or resistance storylines is peripheral enough that it does not draw attention; he is not positioned by staff as *troublesome*. This matters because the data supports previous claims (Kayı-Aydar and Miller 2018; Norton 2001; Wood 2013; Yoon 2008) that learner identity is closely allied to the opportunities for language acquisition and subject learning that young people are afforded within classrooms. Moment-to-moment, Jamal negotiates rights to speak through positions of *explainer*, and *spokesperson*, in lessons, and these bring increased quantity and quality of pedagogical and social interactions, opportunities for rich input and output (Swain 1985, 1995) so crucial to learning.

Analysis demonstrates that these immanentist positions sediment, or 'stick to' (Anderson 2009:291) Jamal in the form of a meso-identity as a successful, capable, communicatively competent *kind* of student. Neither deterministic nor unmediated (Anderson 2009), neither linear nor simple, the meso level of identity is informed by and in turn informs the storylines which circulate about Jamal and other EAL learners at the level of classroom and institution. Identified as approximating an ideal *kind* of learner, Jamal is offered additional time and other resources (Fieldnotes October, November 2021).

Jamal and LeBron are therefore 'sorted' through the system of educational triage (Gillborn and Youdell 2000) which operates in WMS, according to who is more likely to achieve benchmark grades at the age of sixteen. Jamal is judged as possessing this potential, is put into higher ability sets and offered additional support, whereas LeBron is thought not likely to contribute to the targeted GCSE outcomes and so receives less academic support and effort. Learners, in other words, are judged in terms of their human capital, their potential to add value to schools' league table positions (Allen 2018; Devine 2013). Indeed, Magda acknowledges the positive contribution that learners such as Jamal make to 'pulling up' the school's outcomes (Interview February 2022, lines 44–45). Judgements are based not only

on past formal assessments but on the everyday interactional constructions of the learner by teachers (Gillborn and Youdell 2000), as Jamal and LeBron's experiences demonstrate.

Although an emerging multilingual, Jamal's proficiency is positioned interactionally as communicatively competent, his contributions valued. As an ideal *kind* of EAL learner, his linguistic and cultural repertoires are successfully invisibilised and, as he does not directly ask for language support, he is assumed to engage with curriculum content on the same terms as his peers (Sharples 2017). Not only does this result in additional resources and teacher time, he is also offered additional academic support moment-to-moment in the positions of *explainer* and *spokesperson* which afford him enhanced learning opportunities. His acquiescence to dominant practices and values, including linguistic practices, reflects and reproduces wider storylines about 'good' immigrants, particularly that of the Model Minority (Section 5.8).

The current concept of the *ideal learner* (Archer and Francis 2007, Youdell 2006) establishes that learners are constituted through the twin facets of attributes and behaviours, within gendered, classed and raced contexts (Section 2.3.5). However, Jamal's data suggests, to clarify the co-construction of EAL learners, the need for a third set of storylines: linguistic assimilation, expressed as *perceived English proficiency*. This argument will be developed in Section 8.2. Jamal's data indicates that, while the current understanding is that racialised learners cannot be intelligible as ideal, his new arrival to England provides him with interactional spaces in which to negotiate an *ideal EAL learner* identity. In this process, his willingness to invisibilise language needs and be linguistically *visible-in-the-right-way* are key components of his intelligibility as *ideal*. The negotiation of idealness, a more dynamic application of the ideal learner model, allows a framing of multilingual new arrivals as agential, active participants in their own construction.

5.8 An EAL Model Minority

The concept of an *ideal EAL learner* enables examination of the process by which learners' individual interactions and positioning moves sediment into *kinds* (Anderson 2009) of meso-level identities as positions 'stick' to learners over time, but it does not address the

relationship between EAL learners and storylines circulating in wider society about quietness and 'good' immigrants (Shukla 2021). The concept of a MM, drawn from broader social observation (Section 2.3.4), provides this wider perspective which may further illuminate Jamal's experiences.

EAL learners consistently out-perform non-EAL in national exams at the age of sixteen (Section 2.3.1) and those successes are characterised in terms of the kinds of characteristics which index 'good' immigrants (Shukla 2021): resilience, determination, success. As with other MM groups, this is not an uncomplicated position: media reports also view EAL success as a threat to 'white working class' learners (Evans et al. 2020), and it feeds into national conversations around immigration in political and media discourse currently: a division of immigrants into 'good' and 'bad', acceptable and unacceptable (Bradbury 2013). Assignment of the MM identity sits alongside a deficit storyline about EAL learners in the same way that the learners in Bradbury's (2013) study occupy a Muslim MM identity while simultaneously navigating the effects of Islamophobia. It addresses the 'moral panic' around immigration by identifying the disaggregated EAL group as providing human capital value to schools now, and holding potential value as socially and economically assimilated citizens in wider society (Devine 2013).

Myths about MMs function as majoritarian stories by decentralising storylines about race in understanding learners' experiences (Archer and Francis 2007; Bradbury 2013; Flynn 2013; Gillborn 2008; Wong 2015). Jamal's experiences, as LeBron's, are deeply racialised. Jamal, constructed as Black African, and LeBron as Black French, are disciplined differently, their similar behaviours, such as quiet talking, interpreted in line with, respectively, the *engaged* and the *ungovernable* learner positions (Sections 5.3 and 4.3). They align themselves with different social groups to enable Jamal to assimilate, and LeBron to resist, in ways that Mac an Ghaill (1988) argues are for survival in a racist schooling system. Both are interactively positioned by some teachers as Other (Sections 4.8 and 5.4), their linguistic resources judged as communicatively incompetent (Sections 4.3 and 5.5).

Nevertheless, as members of what I suggest can be thought of as an *EAL MM*, racism, along with other barriers which Jamal faces, is made invisible (Gillborn 2008) amongst storylines about 'ability', being *visible-in-the-right-way*, and hard work. Not only this, but the sacrifices

which Jamal makes to attain success are 'unseen' (Wing 2007). In Extract 5.11, Jamal talks about exams.

Extract 5.11   Audio-recorded focus group November 2021

80	Si un élève arrive (.) et il parle pas bien anglais et il sait (.)
	If a student arrives (.)and he doesn't speak English well and he knows (.)
81	il aura un test ça beaucoup met de pression et n'aura pas le
	he will have a test and that puts pressure on and he won't have
82	temps d'étudier normalement, sa tête (.) il aurait la pression et
	time to study in a normal way, his head (.)that puts pressure on and
83	frustration.
	frustration.

Twice during the focus group, Jamal mentions that exams are referenced in every lesson, and he and LeBron agree that they would like more support (Extract 4.13 in Section 4.7). Taken together with the hypothetical student described in Extract 5.11, Jamal's anxiety about the exams becomes clear, an anxiety often found amongst MM learners because of the expectation that they will attain highly (Wing 2007; Wong 2015). Jamal's grades are expected to improve as his English proficiency grows (Interviews Anwar October 2021, Magda February 2022) and he is given very little support for his language needs; as with other MM learners, it is assumed that he will assimilate and attain well. This absolves institutions, government and school staff from responsibility, his education trajectory located within a meritocratic storyline about the right sorts of visibility, participation, and assertiveness.

Considering EAL learners as a MM is therefore helpful in illuminating the mutual constitution and invigoration of macro-level storylines and those apparent in Jamal's and LeBron's daily negotiations of learner identity. Further discussion of an *EAL MM* is found in Section 6.6 and drawn together across the four learners' data in Section 8.3.

5.9 Summary

The use of Positioning Theory (PT) to analyse Jamal's interactions demonstrates the truth of Youdell's (2006) observation that terms such as 'ideal learner' are not simply descriptive of a young person, they construct the identity of that learner. Teachers' and peers' interactions with Jamal are shaped by the *kind* of learner they believe him to be, just as the positions he occupies sediment over time into that meso-identity. It is a reciprocal and ongoing process of identity work.

PT acknowledges the 'messiness' of identity and the non-linearity of the development of more sedimented meso-identities (Wood 2013). It enables the complexity and subjectivity of proficiency labels, and their interactively-negotiated nature, to be revealed (Martin-Beltrán 2010). Over the course of the data set, Jamal is variously positioned as insider and outsider, good learner and incompetent learner, *explainer* and *menial worker*, proficient communicator and incompetent English speaker. Nevertheless, over time, the meso-level identity which develops is one of a successful *kind* of learner, one with close alignment to an idealised concept, and his linguistic assimilation, in the form of a constructed *perceived proficiency,* appears key in this process.

Chapter 6 explores the trajectory of Daniella who, like Jamal, is co-positioned in close alignment to the *ideal EAL learner*, although the patterns in her classroom interactions have little in common with Jamal. The analysis examines how she succeeds in being self- and other-positioned as successful and capable, despite an almost inaudible classroom presence, and how this is interpreted by those around her, at least in part, in gendered ways.

6. Daniella

6.1 Overview

Daniella, like Jamal, joined the research study after WMS re-opened to external visitors post-COVID-19 in the final weeks of the Summer term 2021. She had started at WMS a fortnight earlier, at the end of Year 7, from Italy, and in addition to Italian (her main language) she spoke Spanish and Panjabi (the home languages of her parents). Her English proficiency was assessed as Level B (Early Acquisition) by the EAL department. Her participation was suggested by EAL staff because they felt that she might benefit from having extra attention, because she appeared to be almost silent in and out of classes. Daniella and I shared Spanish, which enabled easy conversations about study recruitment and more generally.

I was keen to work with Daniella because she was given a mainly mainstream timetable immediately, and the plan was for the few EAL intervention sessions on her timetable to end with the summer break, meaning that she would be fully mainstreamed after just four weeks in an English school. Two years previously, LeBron, with a similar level of English, had attended EAL intervention as part of his timetable for seven months but, Magda revealed, their capacity to support learners had been significantly impacted by lack of staffing and leadership support and they were having to take tough decisions about who could 'swim' and who might 'sink' (Fieldnotes July 2021). I was interested to see how the reduced level of support might affect Daniella's development of learner identity and impact her success.

Because she was mainstreamed so early, there was no opportunity to gather audio-recorded classroom data. There was also no opportunity to conduct a focus group as I had done with Jamal and LeBron; I felt it would be unfair to invite a reportedly shy learner to that focus group with significantly older boys, and although it might have worked well to set up a group with the fourth learner participant, Gabriela, Gabriela's unreliable school attendance rendered the venture beyond reach. This analysis is therefore based on observational fieldnotes including 10.5 hours of observed lessons, an interview with Daniella four months after her arrival, ethnographic interviews, and interviews with four mainstream teachers and Magda. As with Jamal, this data was gathered over a single academic year.

Similarly to Gabriela (Chapter 7), Daniella is heard very little in mainstream classes and she interacts with just two friends, relying on 'the silent act' (Gundarina 2020) as a survival strategy (Safford and Costley 2008). However, she is highly visible to most of her teachers, and, as Jamal, is (mainly) constructed as an ideal *kind* of learner. This chapter explores storylines around visibility as an alternative to audibility (Section 6.3), and particularly the negotiation between Daniella, her teachers and peers, over the obligations to speak (Davies and Harré 1990) which attend the positions she interactively constructs within her lessons (Section 6.2). It also investigates her various co-positionings within storylines about silence as an innate attribute, a natural stage in language acquisition, and a fear of getting English 'wrong' (Section 6.4).

Storylines about overcoming barriers through hard work, hunger for success, and 'ability' are key in Daniella's data. Her success is interactively and discursively located within storylines about meritocracy (Littler 2018; Mitchell 2013; Reay 2020), whereby it is attributed to individual and essentialised qualities (Section 6.5) characterising a Model Minority (MM). The MM myth (Bradbury 2013; Gillborn 2008) activates storylines about success and quietness around Daniella and EAL learners more broadly (Section 6.6). It places the responsibility for success or failure within the remit of the learner and their family (Archer and Francis 2007; Welply 2023). I will argue that these multi-level positionings and storylines align with the broader EAL policy project of mainstreaming which foregrounds neoliberal principles of self-reliance (Leung 2016) and assimilation at the cost of genuine inclusion and provides moral 'justification' for continued national and local cuts to EAL policy, expertise and other resources.

Table 6.1 lists the staff who appear in this chapter, in addition to Magda.

Table 6.1: Staff who appear in data in order of appearance

Naheed	Science teacher
Julia	Maths teacher
Santiago	Spanish teacher
Angelina	Design and Technology (DT) teacher
Charlotte	English Literature and Language teacher

6.2 Scaffolded rights and obligations

Daniella speaks quite rarely in lessons, but there is a pattern of interaction between her Science and Maths teachers and her, which is illustrated in Extract 6.1. In this Science lesson taught by Naheed, the learners have just finished a task about sources of energy, during which they visited stations around the classroom, read information sheets, and used what they read to complete an information grid in their books.

Extract 6.1   Fieldnotes November 2021, Science lesson

224	Feedback time: Naheed nominates learners, goes around the class, states several
225	times that she wants everyone to have a go/contribute. Comes to Daniella.
226	Can you give us any detail about geothermal energy?
227	Daniella: Pollution.
228	Which one is that? Advantage or disadvantage?
229	Daniella: Advantage.
230	Yes, exactly, no pollution isn't it. Give me another one.
231	Daniella: Low cost.
232	Yes, good, it's cheap, that's very good, well done, that's all you have to say.
233	Daniella gets her name on the board for a positive (behaviour point).

In Extract 6.1, Naheed is the exclusive giver of rights to speak, as learners cannot self-nominate to share the information they have found but wait to be nominated for speaking turns. Naheed thus positions all of them as Science *learners* (Wood 2013), young people who are expected to actively contribute to the lesson; in fact, they not only have rights to speak, but obligations to do so (Davies and Harré 1990). The talk takes an Initiation-Response-Evaluation (IRE) (Mehan 1979) structure and Naheed's initiation is open (line 226), suggesting that there is no particular fact that Daniella is expected to contribute. Daniella's response is a one-word answer (line 227) and in her next turn, Naheed withholds the evaluation, teachers having primacy of decision-making over the sufficiency of learner responses (McHoul 1978). Instead she initiates a post-expansion by asking Daniella to provide more detail (line 228). Having asked her question (*Which one is that?)* there is a

transition relevance point but Naheed continues with a second question (*Advantage or disadvantage?*). This scaffolds Daniella's reply by clarifying that the explanation she is seeking consists of just one word, and by modelling the form of the words.

After Daniella's response (line 229), the evaluation is given (line 230) but again, Naheed expands her turn. She recasts Daniella's answer (*no pollution*) because Daniella's two contributions (*Pollution — Advantage*) could be construed by other learners as suggestive that pollution is a positive outcome of geothermal energy. By doing this, Naheed demonstrates that she has understood the meaning of Daniella's answer and explanation, although it was ambiguous in its form. She then initiates a second IRE sequence with an open request for further information (*Give me another one*), Daniella responds (line 231), and her answer is evaluated positively (line 232).

The evaluation appears effusive (*Yes, good, it's cheap, that's very good, well done, that's all you have to say*), containing confirmation that the answer is correct, layered with three words or phrases of praise. Naheed's final words (*that's all you have to say*) appear to be a reassurance to Daniella that she has spoken enough and, indeed, Naheed's next action is to add Daniella's name to a list of learners who will receive a positive mark through the school's behaviour management system. Naheed explained at interview that she must 'encourage' Daniella to speak because she is a very reluctant speaker (Interview October 2021, line 137), but that she responds to this incentive, positive marks, because she wants to be 'in the good book all the time' (line 101).

At one level, therefore, Naheed rewards Daniella based on the quantity of talk produced, a simple behaviourist tactic to recompense Daniella for meeting her obligations as an active participant in the lesson, as other learners are similarly recognised. At interview, Naheed third-order positions Daniella, through telling stories about her work and participation, as not only a good learner but as a learner who wants to be seen as good, who actively manages her behaviour and participation so as to be identified as 'good' by the teacher (Interview October 2021). Naheed tells stories about lesson tasks where she explicitly tells learners what they need to do to get a positive behaviour point, and that Daniella immediately responds to these and communicates them to Naheed to ensure that her compliance and work is seen and rewarded.

Extract 6.1 also illustrates how Naheed positions Daniella at that moment as a Science *explainer* (Wood 2013), a learner who is not only learning but can express thinking and make connections. As part of her evaluation (line 323), Naheed recasts Daniella's answer using a synonym of *low cost* (*it's cheap*). Revoicing learner contributions can have several functions including, as here, revoicing to position (Enyedy et al. 2008). Naheed's recast gives Daniella's answer (*low cost*), and by extension Daniella herself, legitimacy as a contributor to knowledge. Being positioned as such brings greater rights to speak, but also obligations: to explain, expand, justify. Naheed does not evaluate Daniella's first response (line 227) but asks for clarification and then expansion before bringing the sequence to a close. Daniella responds each time, but minimally (lines 227, 229, 231), offering responses which provide the second part to each of the adjacency pairs in the shortest turn verbally possible. This suggests that she accepts with reluctance, or only partially accepts, the position of *explainer* as offered by Naheed, and perhaps prefers the position of Science *learner*, which carries simpler language obligations.

Similar sequences of questions and answers between Daniella and her teacher occur in Maths lessons, where the teacher, Julia, expands the IRE sequence to scaffold longer contributions from Daniella. However, Julia uses the third-part turn more creatively to pursue pedagogical actions (Gardner 2013; Walsh 2013): she asks for clarification, recasts Daniella's answers, indicates with rising intonation the incompleteness of an answer, indicates mistakes and invites corrections (Fieldnotes October 2021). Most of these turns open post-expansions to the IRE sequence, which give Daniella extended opportunities to speak beyond her initial responses but also make 'hearable and visible the focus of the teaching point' (Gardner 2013:598), which in turn enables Julia to hear Daniella's state of understanding in relation to the lesson topic.

Julia was explicit about using this as a strategy with Daniella, saying that Daniella can explain Maths well, but that 'we have to do it in slower steps yes not everything at once' (Interview October 2021, lines 106–107). Julia's more varied use of the third-part turn affords Daniella a broader range of talk options as she responds to Julia's turn, rather than simply answering further questions as in the Science lessons. Julia's expansion of the IRE sequence each time signals that she positions Daniella as a Maths *explainer*, whose initial answers are starting points for Maths talk rather than complete answers in themselves. These varied third-part

turns are more linguistically demanding, requiring more than simply answering questions; the obligations for Daniella to speak are varied and challenging.

At the same time, Julia's third-part turns provide linguistic scaffolding for Daniella's responses. Daniella is thus both cognitively challenged and teacher-supported in her language production. Such high challenge/high support situations are ideal for multilingual learners, ones in which they can engage and thrive (Gibbons 2015). Daniella gives longer answers both in the second-part turn and in response to the third-part expansions by Julia, and sometimes self-nominates for the second-part response by putting her hand up in the lesson.

In both Maths and Science lessons, Daniella accepts the obligations to speak which accompany the *explainer* position, and she negotiates this interactively with the Science and Maths teachers in response to the opportunities she is given through the teachers' uses of the third part of the IRE sequence. Where she is offered further questions by Naheed, she responds with minimal answers but where she is given a range of scaffolded options through more creative use of the third-turn part by Julia, she is more likely to seek opportunities to talk and to expand her answers. Unlike Jamal and LeBron, Daniella pushes very little for audible participation in lessons; however, these teachers' responses evidence their awareness that she is engaged, and they work hard to encourage further participation. Ethnographic data explored in the next section suggests why and how they do this.

6.3 Not heard but seen

Daniella makes very few spoken contributions, and those few are almost always through teacher nomination, not self-nomination. She speaks extremely quietly on those occasions and with her peers and a recurring adjective used to describe her is 'quiet' (Interviews October, November 2021). And yet Daniella is highly visible to her teachers. They discuss her subject knowledge and progress in some detail (Interviews October 2021) as was the case with most of Jamal's teachers (Section 5.2), whereas LeBron's is characterised more often in terms of gaps in knowledge (Section 4.5) — even though, at the time of the interviews, Daniella had been in WMS for just four months.

One source of visibility is Daniella's written work, which is characterised as better than that of her non-EAL peers (Interview Charlotte October 2021) and an example to 'showcase' (Interview Naheed October 2021, line 125) to peers in other classes. Most teachers are keen to show me her written work. Her homework is similarly singled out as 'outstanding' (Interview Naheed, line 125). Daniella uses written work to position herself as a highly capable learner, to communicate this to her teachers in a way that she may feel unable to do orally in lessons (Interview Daniella December 2021), and this self-positioning is ratified by the teachers in their use of her books as exemplars for other learners, their keenness to show me the work, and the good behaviour points awarded for written classwork (Fieldnotes October 2021).

Daniella's written work is produced individually and therefore aligns with the local moral order as evidence of 'competent membership' (Davies and Hunt 1994:389) of the classroom community. The emphasis on individual work in storylines about successful learners is perhaps a washback effect from preparing for national exams. In interview, Daniella reveals that she often asks her older sister for help with homework and so, arguably, her homework is a collective effort — but teachers do not appear to be aware of this or, at any rate, they credit only Daniella for its production. Her Spanish teacher, Santiago, goes as far as to say that, as far as assessments are concerned, 'communication skills are not that important when it comes to speaking' because 'everything is written' (Interview Santiago December 2021, lines 153–154). In a school context where attainment is measured primarily in terms of progress against projected GCSE grades, Daniella's written visibility is enough to content teaching staff.

Daniella also positions herself as academically competent by mouthing correct answers along with nominated learners (Fieldnotes October 2021). While this has some commonality with Jamal's habit of quiet language rehearsal and class participation (Section 5.3), Daniella does it infrequently and completely inaudibly, and it is not visibly attended to by her teachers, in the way that Jamal's quietly-voiced displays of understanding (Ohta 2000) are. Nevertheless, it is noticed, as demonstrated in Extract 6.2 from an interview with her Maths teacher, Julia.

Extract 6.2   Audio-recorded interview Julia, October 2021

110	yes I always look on the face expressions yes so you can see when she's engaging
111	she is on it she is straight away taking a pen doing something even when I
112	explaining yes and sometimes when I do something yes she's sitting like that
113	((mimes sitting without writing)) I think ah that is something wrong so I going
114	around and try to give her a extra explanation

In Extract 6.2, Julia explicates the non-verbal cues which enable her to see Daniella's state of understanding: facial expressions, task participation, and the speed with which she engages with tasks. Similarly, Santiago gauges Daniella's comprehension and engagement from her body language (Field notes December 2021) and the Design and Technology (DT) teacher, Angelina, notices whether and how much she is writing (Interview November 2021) as a measure of understanding and engagement. Her teachers all notice her and, in interviews, they third-order position her as an engaged and competent comprehender of English-medium curriculum content.

Moreover, the ongoing teacher monitoring of these non-verbal displays are themselves positioning acts, within a wider storyline which values visible engagement (Anderson 2009; Davies and Hunt 1994; Enyedy et al. 2008). When teachers attend to these communication acts, they position Daniella as a learner worthy of academic attention, and when they respond to her non-verbal expressions of incomprehension, as Julia describes in line 113, they position her as worthy of support, in ways which, as will be seen, simply do not occur in the data collected with Gabriela (Chapter 7).

Granger (2004:7) suggests that silence in second language learners is not merely the absence of words, but also the loss of a sense of identity — a 'silenced self'. Positioning theory (PT), however, recognises the importance of gesture, facial expressions, and other forms of non-verbal communication (Kayı-Aydar 2019), and indeed this study uses the broader term of 'communication acts' (Herbel-Eisenmann et al. 2015) to encompass these; nevertheless, in PT studies these non-verbal communication acts tend to occur within sequences of spoken talk. Daniella, on the other hand, uses non-verbal acts largely *instead* of talk in class. In multilingual learners, multimodality is recognised as an important

interactional resource though which intersubjectivity is constructed (Matsumoto and Canagarajah 2020). Daniella's multimodal communication acts are seen by her teachers as such, and her identity work is recognised despite its non-verbal nature. Thus, Daniella's self-positioning as a competent and engaged learner is recognised through the ways in which she ensures that she is seen, as well as through her limited verbal interactions. Indeed, her silence in itself may be a communication act and accomplish positioning work, as the next section explores.

6.4 Silent, but not shy

Daniella's reluctance to speak is characterised by Magda as 'classic Silent Period' (Fieldnotes July 2021, line 96). Initially developed in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theory to explore why many young children withdraw from verbal interaction in the early stages of exposure to L2 (Ellis 2012; Saville-Troike 1988), the Silent Period is now a widely-recognised phenomenon (e.g. Bifield 2019; NALDIC 2008), understood largely as a time for receptive, comprehension-based learning (Krashen 1981). Daniella, however, is a productive learner, producing written English for all her lessons, so, in her case, this 'Silent Period' is not accurately characterised as a pre-production stage (Ellis 2012; Granger 2004).

Amongst Daniella's mainstream teachers, her silence is perceived less as a linguistic phenomenon and more as a personality trait (Crozier 2001). Across four teacher interviews, the word 'quiet' is used to describe her twelve times, 'shy' six times, 'closed' and 'introvert' three times each, suggesting that her position has been sedimented in the minds of these teachers: Daniella is a shy *kind* of learner. Daniella herself, however, says that when speaking in Italian with peers and siblings, she is very talkative and highly competitive in arguments, and plans to enter the legal profession when she's older (Interview December 2021). She explains that in English 'sometimes I know the answer but uhm I'm shy if like I say I say wrong' (lines 228–229). Daniella positions herself here as knowledgeable but fearful of making mistakes, one of the reasons for learner silence suggested by Cameron, Moon and Bygate (1996). This suggests that her reluctance to speak may be to avoid being

positioned as a less competent speaker: she would perhaps rather be positioned as a 'non-speaker' than a 'wrong-speaker'.

Lack of English proficiency is sometimes perceived, or feared to be perceived, as lack of intelligence (Evans et al. 2016; Safford and Costley 2008) by peers or teachers. LeBron voices his experience of this very directly (Section 4.2); it seems that Daniella's solution to the fear of being thought of as deficit in language or intelligence is to stay silent, and this may be more accurately thought of as reticence rather than intrinsic shyness (Crozier 2001). While it may be therefore that Daniella's quietness is part of her acquisition through comprehensible English language input (Krashen 1981), it is also partly 'a survival reaction to an indifferent or even hostile atmosphere' (Safford and Costley 2008:140) where she does not feel safe to contribute with possible language errors. The characterisation of reticence as a personal quality positions Daniella in alignment with notions of the ideal EAL learner, situated within a wider set of storylines around ideal immigrants, where '[b]eing quiet is considered a really good quality' (Kam 2021:92), and with established classroom storylines around the right sort of visibility (Section 5.3), the learner who does not disturb.

It is however a nuanced alignment. There is some evidence in Daniella's data that her quietness is equated with essentialised passivity (Section 6.5), often associated with femininity and Asian Minority learners, who are unintelligible as ideal learners (Archer and Francis 2007). Daniella, who is South Asian-Latinx, thus inhabits a somewhat precarious position (Archer and Francis 2007) and there is a risk of second-order repositioning by staff as Other (Archer and Francis 2007), according to whether they recognise and align her quietness with storylines about idealness or about Asian Minority femininity, and how those storylines interact. Her visible and multimodal engagement with learning (Section 6.3) appears to enable her quietness to be interpreted more within storylines of *ideal learner* acquiescence to authority, restraint and obedience (Youdell 2006), and her self-positioning as a 'good' learner is recognised and validated, but the position is perhaps an insecure one.

Positioning her as timid, some teachers are reticent to push Daniella to contribute orally, leaving her in a learning zone of low cognitive challenge (Gibbons 2015). The DT teacher, Angelina, is content to monitor engagement through 'seeing that she's on task' and accepts that she makes 'no contributions' (Interview November 2021, lines 77 and 90). Similarly, in Extract 6.3, Daniella's English teacher, Charlotte, describes her technique of cold-calling,

where she nominates students to answer questions and will not allow them to put their hands up.

Extract 6.3   Audio-recorded interview Charlotte, November 2021

37	when I am cold-calling there's some students who I might feel like ooh no I won't
38	go to them and I feel like a bit of a block, and I have to sort of talk myself out of it
	((lines omitted))
41	she's definitely one of those students that I think oh I don't know maybe I won't go
42	to {Daniella} because erm I'm worried that I'd be putting her on the spot making
43	her feel uncomfortable

Daniella's Maths, Spanish, and Science teachers similarly refer to strategies they use to avoid discomforting her. They select questions which they are confident she will be able to answer, give her non-verbal ways to participate, create peer-talk opportunities, and ask her questions quietly in one-to-one opportunities instead of in front of the class (Fieldnotes October 2021), and each of them describes concern for her comfort or to avoid embarrassing her (Interviews October, November 2021), citing her perceived shyness as a reason. This active search for ways to include Daniella without discomforting her reflects caring and nurturing teacher attitudes, but it also creates a very static identity position for Daniella, whereby she is repeatedly positioned as a shy *kind* of student, with little possibility for change.

Pinson, Arnot and Candappa (2010) challenge teachers' well-intentioned responses to silence; while there is a need to respect it, this goes along with a need to provide platforms and opportunities for it to be broken when the learner is ready, so that silence does not become a meso-identity for the learner, and leaving them in silence a classroom habit for the teacher. Extract 6.4 illustrates how Daniella takes on this challenge herself in her moment-to-moment identity work. In Extract 6.4, Charlotte is reading a Sherlock Holmes story and learners are following on their photocopies. She stops frequently to ask questions of comprehension and inference.

Extract 6.4   Fieldnotes November 2021, English Literature lesson

147	Charlotte:	what's Spaulding's real name Daniella?
148		((pause)) ((repeats the question while Daniella looks at the
149		photocopy))
150	Daniella:	erm…John
151	Charlotte:	Good yes his name is John and what's
152	Daniella:	((overlaps)) Clay
153	Charlotte:	his surname?
154	Daniella:	Clay
155	Charlotte:	good yes Clay

Superficially, Extract 6.4 appears to contain a similar sequence to those observed in Maths and Science classes, where the third turn of the IRE sequence is expanded in order to scaffold a more extended answer from Daniella. However, in line 152, Daniella interrupts Charlotte's second question and gives the answer, *Clay*. The point at which Daniella interjects is not a transition-relevant point, Charlotte having barely begun her question (line 151) and her turn is therefore most likely to be a recognitional overlap (Jefferson 1983), wherein she recognises the direction of Charlotte's question, predicts its ending, and begins her response.

Jefferson (1983) suggests that a recognition overlap evidences careful attention by the recipient to the talk. Indeed, Daniella's answer (line 152) is 'deeply turn incursive' (Jefferson 1983:19) in that it starts up long before Charlotte has reached the semantic key to the question (*surname*, line 153). It is not clear from the surrounding talk how she recognises the direction of the question, as Charlotte has been using a variety of question types with other learners, so she could plausibly be planning to ask about character motivation, relationships to others, or any number of other things. Nevertheless, Daniella is certain enough of the direction of talk to interject. It may be that she recognises her original answer (*John*) as partial and wishes to complete it, regardless of Charlotte's projected turn. However, the original question (line 147) is very easy, requiring no literary interpretation, and, taken together with Charlotte's remarks about her own hesitancy in nominating

Daniella to speak, I suggest that Daniella is accustomed to being asked only the most basic questions in this class and is therefore able to accurately predict that, of all the possible follow-up questions, the one she is being asked will be another basic comprehension.

Charlotte says (Interview November 2021) that Daniella can write competently about complex topics such as the dual nature of Sherlock Holmes and that her skills in literature analysis are well-developed, and Daniella says (Interview November 2021) that English Literature is an easy lesson for her. This provides further context to Daniella's interjection, a disruption to the sequence which violates the normal classroom order where the possibilities for overlap are minimised because it is the teacher who controls turn-taking (McHoul 1978; Woods 2006).

While the feedback that she gets on her written work positions Daniella as high-achieving, the types of questions she is asked in class do not. Nominating her so infrequently (this is the only time that she is nominated in this lesson) and for such basic questions other-positions Daniella as a *menial worker* (Wood 2013) who can be relied on only for easy, cognitively-undemanding speech work. Daniella's early incursion into her teacher's question marks a challenge to that position, and proposes a more powerful position in alignment with that recognised by her teachers in terms of her written work, as a learner who pays careful attention to the talk in the classroom and can comprehend and respond swiftly: a competent learner and communicator. It suggests a level of frustration in Daniella at the identity of shy *kind* of learner which, through her own reticence to speak, coupled with her teachers' solicitude for her comfort, has sedimented around her. Through this, she challenges the gendered and racialised storyline of passivity and unassertiveness (Archer and Francis 2007), and proposes a repositioning as active and enquiring, a rejection of the Other position.

Daniella expresses the complexity and frustration of this situation in interview when she tells me that she often knows the answer in class but fears for the accuracy of her spoken English and therefore prefers not to speak. She goes on in Extract 6.5 to describe a Religious Education (RE) lesson the previous week, where she had been obliged not only to speak but to give a presentation to the class.

Extract 6.5   Audio-recorded interview, November 2021

210	Daniella:	mm but the last week I had to talk in front of the class
211	Hannah:	you had to
212	Daniella:	mm hmm
213	Hannah:	how did that make you feel
214	Daniella:	erm good I guess because ahm sometimes I want to talk but I'm too shy
215		and like when I talk and after I feel good

The RE teacher positions Daniella as an *explainer* (Wood 2013), as do her Science and Maths teachers, but moreover he positions her as a proficient communicator (Martin-Beltrán 2010), capable of public and extended speaking, and in giving the presentation, Daniella accepts these positions along with the related obligation to speak in front of the class. Daniella later describes the Maths and RE teachers as her favourites, because they challenge her to speak in lessons (Interview December 2021). Indeed, Maths lessons are the only classes where I observed Daniella self-nominating by putting her hand up, albeit infrequently, showing her resistance to the meso level shy *kind* of learner construction and, rather, her self-positioning as active and independent.

It is known that EAL learners thrive where there is an appropriate level of cognitive demand in the classroom and where support is provided through suitable levels of context-embedding (Cummins 2000; Gibbons 2015). Context embedding is not just the provision of, for example, visual resources, although this is considered good pedagogic practice with multilingual learners. It is also the opportunity to negotiate meaning interactively (Gass 2003; Long 1996). Where her teachers provide such a context-rich environment, such as the scaffolding questions that her Maths teacher uses, Daniella can vocalise and explain her learning more, and she feels 'good' (line 215).

Being characterised as a shy *kind* of learner is a meso level of identity which builds up around Daniella through her positioning as reticent. It allows alignment with a local, institutional and wider storyline about good learners being non-disruptive and acquiescent, a storyline which intersects with Daniella's gender and South Asian-Latinx heritage (Archer and Francis 2007) as well as macro-storylines about quietness and 'good' immigrants (Kam

2021). The gendered nature of this shy, passive learner *kind* and the concern for her comfort and nurture intersect with these storylines to construct a sedimented identity which not only describes Daniella as shy, but informs teachers' decisions about the opportunities she is given to participate in the classroom. It therefore actually produces the learner positions she is offered from moment to moment in lessons, and limits Daniella's rights and obligations to speak. It is an identity which allows Daniella to feel safe as her English skills develop, but it is also one which she challenges, proposing an active, ideal learner identity for herself which aligns more cohesively with the ways that she is self- and other-positioned through her written work. Peer positioning contributes to the overall coherence of her *ideal EAL learner* identity, as is explored in the following section.

6.5 Individual success: meritocracy and the ideal EAL learner

Daniella has two friends that she tells me about, with one of whom she shares Italian and the other only English (Interview December 2021) and she refers to a wider group of friends. The Italian-speaker friendship appears to have started through linguistic convenience, arranged by the EAL department as a peer buddy when she arrived at the school. However, rather than offering academic or linguistic support as happens with other learner participants in this study, being seated next to or near this friend by teachers is a way of ensuring that she is 'comfortable' (Interview Charlotte, November 2021, line 54), in line with the more nurturing ethos afforded to Daniella than to other participants. The friendship is also interactively constructed in a quite different way. In Extract 6.6, taken from a DT lesson, the teacher Angelina uses an extended question-and-answer session of about 45 minutes to elicit ideas and discussion about a series of letters in an acronym. Daniella sits behind her friend (Student A), next to a peer who she does not speak to all lesson, and she does not self-nominate, nor is she nominated, to contribute to the discussion.

Extract 6.6   Fieldnotes October 2021, DT lesson

56	The fourth letter is E. Angelina asks for ideas as to what it might stand for. Daniella
57	taps the student sitting in front of her, Student A. She turns around and Daniella
58	points to a word she's found in her booklet. Student A smiles, turns to the front,

59	puts her hand up, confident smile. Offers the answer (ergonomics) and Angelina
60	says that it's not the word.
61	Angelina: I know that's a word in your books, but it's not the word.
62	Student A turns round to Daniella and says 'I hate you' (in a friendly way).

In Extract 6.6, sure that she has a suitable candidate answer, but reluctant to speak for fear of making mistakes with her English (Interview Daniella, December 2021), Daniella finds another way to contribute, through 'indirect participation' (Pye 1988:48). By offering the candidate answer to Student A, Daniella does not self-position as knowledgeable or capable to the teacher, but to her peer, and by taking the answer and offering it to the class discussion, Student A ratifies this positioning move. Simultaneously, it allows Student A to self-position as knowledgeable in her interaction with the teacher — a move which is rejected by the teacher, and an alternative explanation is put forward (line 61) as she suggests that Student A, rather than knowledgeable, has simply found a word which begins with the correct letter in her workbook. Later in the lesson, it emerges that this is a misprint, and the correct answer should have been found in the place where Daniella found the word 'ergonomic', so her answer is logically constructed; however, for now, it leads to Student A in turn blaming Daniella for her failed contribution. Crucially, her rebuke (*I hate you*, line 61) does not remove the prior ratification as a knowledgeable learner. Instead, it playfully addresses their friendship and the potential embarrassment that Student A feels.

Daniella tells me that this friend says she is 'smart' and 'clever' (Interview December 2021, lines 146 and 148), and she explains that, while the friend helps her with the translation of occasional words, she helps her friend with the content of the lessons when they sit together. I observed this (Fieldnotes October, November 2021) and noticed that the friend asks Daniella for help rather than Daniella offering it. In this way, the friend positions Daniella as academically successful, the more knowledgeable of the two. This is powerful positioning, as peer interactions are key sites of identity negotiation (Eckert 2000; Grbić and Maksić 2020) and peer positioning along with peer acceptance of a self-proposed identity are of increasing importance in comparison to identity work done with staff (Scharf and Mayseless 2007). This friend is important in Daniella's co-construction as academically competent.

Teachers, too, describe her as 'bright', as a learner who 'stands out', who is achieving 'higher than target' and 'exceeding' academic expectations. Her written work is good, and this is attributed to her intelligence (Interviews November, December 2021). Moreover, Daniella is repeatedly characterised in interviews as hard-working, a learner who makes a lot of effort. Like Jamal (Section 5.2), an identity as an ideal *kind* of learner brings additional resources: individual teacher time at break and lunch, guided access to learning software, extra homework tasks (Interviews November, December 2021), with the associated opportunities to strengthen her curriculum content knowledge and understanding.

Daniella takes up some of these opportunities, specifically for Maths and Science; however, she expresses a strong preference for independent study at home, relying on her sister, finding videos online, and her own further study to clarify things which she has not understood well in class (Interview December 2021). This reliance on self-study can reflect classroom environments which are 'constrained academic spaces' (Safford and Costley 2008:138), where learners' linguistic tools are devalued and they are silenced. It is perhaps significant that the two subjects where Daniella and her teachers report out-of-lesson additional engagement, Maths and Science, are the two subjects where I observe teachers scaffolding her vocal contributions, enabling her to extend answers and take up more powerful positions as *explainer*. Specifically in Maths, where most frequent and extended opportunities for scaffolded interaction between Daniella and her teacher occurred, I observe her habitually using gaze, gesture or words to ask for help. In response, Julia prioritises her for additional help, in a demonstration of educational triage at work in interaction.

Extracts 6.7 and 6.8, from interview data, exemplify how her teachers attribute her hard work to a desire for success.

Extract 6.7   Audio-recorded interview Charlotte, November 2021

93	Charlotte:	but then I think that's because she's also really keen to do well as as
94		well she's
95	Hannah:	mm-hmm
96	Charlotte:	or that's the impression I get from her is that she's she's hardworking
97	Hannah:	mm
98	Charlotte:	and she's and to being successful is important to her

Extract 6.8   Audio-recorded interview Naheed, November 2021

330	Naheed:	but I can see her being obviously very successful in future
331	Hannah:	mm
332	Naheed:	because she knows what she wants

What is not clear is how this judgement about her ambition is made, beyond an *impression* (line 96), a word also used by Angelina, although Naheed cites her keenness to amass good behaviour points as evidence. Nevertheless, Daniella is judged as determined and success-oriented.

Ambition, like hard work and 'ability', are storylines within a model of meritocracy which dominates the policy-making landscape in England and takes a view of schools as 'inclusive, offering competitive opportunity to all' (Littler 2018:101). Modern British meritocracy as a political ideology acknowledges inequalities in schools but offers a focus on competition as a solution (May 2016), a view of competition which idealises individual hard work and intelligence. It thus locates the source of success — and failure — firmly within the individual (Archer and Francis 2007) through qualities which are essentialised and said to be innate (Littler 2018). Like Jamal, Daniella takes responsibility for her learning through the vast amount she does outside school, perhaps believing that it is her responsibility to adjust and meet expectations rather than that of the school to adjust to her needs (Safford and Costley 2008), and that this is within her control. Unlike LeBron, she does not seek to assign responsibility to the teachers, a tactic which disaligns with dominant storylines around class norms and gets LeBron the meso-identity of a troublesome *kind* of learner. Instead, she

says, 'I don't like get help because I prefer understand the work by myself' (Interview December 2021, lines 97–98), demonstrating a self-reliance, determination and quietness which align with wider storylines around meritocracy, an EAL MM, and 'good immigrants' (Kam 2021).

In this way, Daniella aligns with the storyline which dominates across school and is illustrated through teacher interviews, that her successes are within her control. Julia explains that she has filled the 'gaps' (Interview October 2021, line 61) in her learning though taking the initiative to come after class and ask for additional work, and Naheed praises the 'independent research' (Interview October 2021, line 13) that she does at home. Santiago locates her success in her ability to apply prior knowledge of Italian and Spanish (Interview December 2021), which additionally recognises her linguistic capital (Bourdieu 1991) as valuable within the school. Charlotte speaks of her 'breaking out of the limitations' (Interview November 2021, line 174) of her EAL status, a metaphor of embodied linguistic deficit, a prison from which she escapes through effort. This demonstrates how the ideal EAL learner is constituted not only through the perspectives of 'ability' and attributes or behaviours as previously proposed (Archer and Francis 2007; Bradbury 2013; Youdell 2006) but through an additional set of storylines around language, where, while initially placed in a position of perceived linguistic deficiency, the learner demonstrates their ambition to become predominantly English-speaking. Daniella's perceived determination to 'break out' from her EAL-ness aligns with this storyline, and by explicitly positioning her in line with it, her teachers contribute to its ongoing reconstruction, sedimenting it at the institutional level.

An ideal learner does not exist; learners approximate more or less the ideal model (Youdell 2006). Thus, Daniella is not entirely positively constructed. Here too, her failures are attributed to her own responsibility, a key process in the way that meritocracy legitimises social exclusion (Archer and Francis 2007; Reay 2017). For example, in response to my question about what she knows about Daniella's prior DT learning in Italy, Angelina says:

> *erm I'm not sure whether she's done it before or not erm I think again because she didn't engage with the lesson* (Interview November 2021, lines 42–43)

This language recurs when I ask about other aspects of Daniella's learning including her academic progress and her English language skills: 'not necessarily engaging', 'she wouldn't contribute', 'again no contributions'. It is later in the interview that some quarter is given, as the teacher says that 'I didn't even ask her' and 'I didn't get to know her' (lines 46 and 67). DT lessons, in Daniella's year of school, are limited to one hour a week, which means that it is harder for the teacher to get to know learners than in core curriculum subjects such as Maths, where teachers see them four times a week. Nevertheless, it is striking that the responsibility is placed with Daniella so many times for being seen and acknowledged, rather than with the teacher (Pye 1988); she is third-order positioned throughout the interview as having her learning within her control. This strongly echoes meritocratic thinking, here evidenced at a micro-interactional level: Daniella is positioned by Angelina as failing to take responsibility for her own audibility, her own rights to speak.

Other teachers allocate responsibility similarly. Santiago says, 'the problem with {Daniella} is she's very very shy so she doesn't really participate that much' and even 'the way she looks' is 'closed' (Interview December 2021, lines 32, 102, 107). In this way, Daniella's responsibility for success is physically embodied within her facial expressions, her gestures, as much as in her words (Youdell 2003). However, while her Spanish and DT teachers find them problematic, they do not interfere with their interpretation of her as an effective learner, who meets or exceeds academic expectations.

Her Maths teacher, Julia, puts it more subtly in interview:

> *I can see issue only about the low self-esteem but I hope so it will finish er once she acquire more language yes and she will be feel more er independent and and er you know share her point of view yes if she can argue about her point of view*

> (Interview Julia October 2021, lines 83–87)

The implication is that it is up to Daniella to change (Pye 1988; Safford and Costley 2008), to gain higher self-esteem, acquire more language, be more independent, and, just as with her other teachers, this culminates in the responsibility for being audible as a Maths explainer. Extract 6.1 (in Section 6.2) shows how this can happen interactively. The Science teacher asks Daniella a series of questions and as a final evaluation says (line 232), 'yes, good, it's cheap, that's very good, well done, that's all you have to say'. The final words, *that's all you*

have to say, locate responsibility for participation and for the success that this has enabled firmly under Daniella's control, and position Daniella therefore as responsible for her own success or failure.

That's all you have to say implies that Daniella's efforts will be enough to level the playing field, to attain success. However, the school system does not work for multilingual learners in an equal way, because it is set up as monolingual, for first-language English learners (Mitchell 2013). The language of instruction is English, the high-stakes assessments are in English, and this means that, no matter the skills, hard work and ambition they bring, the playing-field is never levelled (Mitchell 2013) and no matter what progress is made, multilingual learners are always chasing a moving target (Cummins 2021). Implying that effort is enough to overcome barriers is the pretence of meritocracy, an ideologically-driven storyline which ignores the inequalities hard-baked into the education system.

Daniella appears to have internalised the storylines about meritocracy which circulate not only at WMS but more widely (Littler 2018; Mijs and Savage 2020). Meritocracy has appeal, in that it appears to put agency into her hands, in a situation where, as a newly-arrived learner, she may feel disempowered. Daniella says that, at her previous school in Italy, she was a successful and hardworking student (interview December 2021) and taking her own steps to reconstruct this identity in her new learning environment is perhaps a way of exercising agency in a situation where she has had little power to choose outcomes.

Teachers collaborate to place agency in her hands. At a micro level, teachers other-position Daniella as responsible for whether she 'sinks' or 'swims' (Magda in fieldnotes July 2021), and at a meso level, the sedimented third-order position emerges in teacher interviews as well as in conversation with Daniella herself. Like Jamal, she is triaged and found to be worthy of investment, a human capital model of education which positions EAL learners as of potential added value to schools and wider society (Bian 2017; Devine 2013). Conversely, meritocracy as an ideology in education enables governments to abdicate meaningful responsibility for EAL learners (Welply 2023), and a key part of this is the internalisation of the ideology by the minoritised, the disadvantaged (Mijs and Savage 2020; Reay 2020). Daniella positions herself within a meritocratic system as somebody whose duty it is to maximise the opportunities available to her (Archer and Francis 2007). By aligning herself with this dominant value, she claims her identity as an ideal EAL learner: one whose

successes can be added to the school's measures of accountability, but whose failures can be blamed on the individual.

6.6 The EAL Model Minority and authenticity

Daniella is a member of the *EAL Model Minority* which exists in the minds of teachers, institutions, and the wider policies which contextualise the education of racialised learners (Sections 2.3.4 and 8.3). It references wider social storylines around the 'good immigrant' (Shukla 2021): gratitude, assimilation, quietness, being *visible-in-the-right-way*, which recur in Daniella's interactions — interactions which reproduce and reinvigorate the storylines as Daniella (dis)aligns herself with them. Storylines about MMs have long been used to locate the successes and failures of immigrants within themselves, referencing so-called innate traits along with stereotyped characteristics of ethnic minority families and communities (Wu 2014). Daniella's hard work, drive and intelligence are compared to those of her siblings (Interview Santiago December 2021) with the suggestion that her success stems from familial traits, and her linguistic and cultural capital in the form of prior learning and languages is affirmed as valuable, thus locating her success within her family, and her community. Bradbury (2013) suggests that this acts as challenge to the authenticity of MM learners' success; rather than being achieved in a genuine way, it is accredited to families, communities and nebulous ideas of 'culture' (Mac an Ghaill 1988). Daniella is repeatedly positioned as 'able', determined and successful by her teachers and peer, but this exists alongside at least a partial attribution to her background, a pattern of disauthentication of success which Bradbury (2013) claims is typical for MM learners.

Just as with other MMs, the EAL MM stereotype serves to hide the racism and discrimination which EAL learners encounter. The data in this study suggests that, just as the triaging process is racialised (Gillborn and Youdell 2000), so the judgements about EAL learners are racialised, as well as gendered, as will be further discussed in Section 8.3. Two of Daniella's languages (Italian and Spanish) are valued, while her Panjabi is never mentioned. Meanwhile, as will be described in Chapter 7, Gabriela's languages are a source of suspicion and, through them, she is repeatedly positioned as a member of a stigmatised group.

The EAL MM, therefore, is constructed through a complex and intersecting set of storylines about linguistic ambition, meritocracy, innate characteristics, assimilation, and race, and functions to hide the different experiences of group members (Gillborn 2008), a key component, I argue, of the ongoing invisibilisation of EAL learners in mainstream education. The barriers Daniella faces, such as the decision by many staff members that she is 'shy' and which ignores her language-learning needs (Section 6.4), are absorbed and hidden, along with the effort and sacrifices she makes to overcome these (Section 6.5). MM discourse has been used for decades to 'disprove' the presence of racism in education systems (Gillborn 2008; for an example, see Ehsan 2022) and obscure the barriers faced by minoritised learners. Similarly, the EAL MM provides the means by which staff, institutions and policy-makers can avoid engaging with the complexity of the learning trajectories of newly-arrived multilinguals: if the MM exhibits such success and progress, then, runs the logic, success is available to everyone. All it takes is ambition, hard work, and natural talent.

6.7 Summary

Daniella's experiences take place within a set of storylines emanating from the EAL MM: that EAL learners are successful, well-assimilated members of the school community. Within these storylines, her individual struggles to overcome barriers, the gendered interpretation of her quietness and the racialised nature of her linguistic capital are all hidden. Like Jamal, she succeeds in co-constructing a learner identity largely in line with that of the ideal EAL *kind* of learner; however, the interactional journey of identity work is very different from that of Jamal. She sees herself and is seen by her teachers as manifesting many of the characteristics of an ideal learner: intelligence, drive, eagerness to learn, confidence in her written work. At the same time, she is largely silent in most lessons, a behaviour which risks her position as an ideal EAL learner, within a dominant storyline that ideal EAL learners make visible and audible their ambition to become proficient English speakers, to assimilate into the host society. However, Daniella engages in several positioning moves with her teachers and a close friend, often using multimodal resources, which enable her to co-construct positions where she negotiates visibility, if not audibility, in most lessons. Like Jamal, she appears able to co-construct an idealness within the space afforded by being a

newly-arrived multilingual learner, an idealness from which her race and gender do not exclude her, although they add precarity to her negotiations.

Because of this, most of Daniella's teachers, rather than triaging her as a less valuable investment because of her disalignment with the obligations to speak, position her instead as shy, and seek to alleviate her perceived discomfort through a variety of pedagogical strategies. The identity of a shy *kind* of learner 'sticks' (Anderson 2009:291) over time and allows the incongruity of Daniella's silence to be absorbed into a meso-identity of *ideal EAL learner*. In the next chapter, the trajectory of a similarly silent learner, Gabriela, will be analysed and it will be seen that, over time, Gabriela comes to be seen as an impossible *kind* of learner (Bradbury 2013; Youdell 2006), in part because of the ethnicity which is ascribed to her.

7. Gabriela

7.1 Overview

Gabriela joined the study in Autumn 2019. The pilot project with LeBron had concluded, and while he continued as a participant, I wanted to recruit more young people. Of those I recruited, Gabriela is the only one who remained in WMS beyond the COVID-19 hiatus in data collection. She did not participate in online learning during lockdowns and, after on-site learning resumed, she did not immediately return due to international travel. There was a further prolonged absence in Autumn 2021, again due to travel. Gabriela's data, similarly to LeBron's, was therefore collected in discrete time periods: October 2019–March 2020, July 2021, and November 2021–May 2022.

At the time of recruitment, Gabriela was in Year 7 and, uniquely amongst the participants, she had previously been enrolled in an English primary school for a limited time. Despite her prior English schooling, Gabriela had been assessed as Level A (New to English) by WMS EAL staff. This made her of interest; I was curious to explore why her proficiency appeared to have developed so little, and the role of learner identity in this. It was suggested by Ana and Magda that Gabriela was socially isolated and academically restricted by her low proficiency and that participation in the project might create additional interaction opportunities. LeBron also brought her to my attention in conversation; in this respect LeBron acted as a key informant (Alvesson 2011; Gillham 2008), aiding me to notice a potentially interesting participant.

In addition to Romanian, Gabriela may speak a Romani language (Section 7.7). Although the shared cognates of Romanian, French and Spanish, along with Gabriela's English, provided us with a multilingual and multimodal set of resources, Ana supported with interpretation for Gabriela's first audio-recorded interview in November 2019. Transcription of the Romanian, translated into English, was later provided by a different highly-proficient Romanian speaker (Section 3.6.3). Alongside three audio-recorded interviews with Gabriela and three staff interviews, audio recordings were made of 4.5 hours of EAL intervention classes. Data was also gathered through fieldnotes, including observations of 29.5 hours of classes.

Similarly to Daniella, Gabriela is largely silent in mainstream lessons. However, teacher interviews and fieldnotes suggest that her silence is interpreted by staff as a deliberate lack of participation rather than shyness. She puts into place limited strategies to increase her visibility but these are generally unsuccessful and, quickly, a sedimented meso-level identity as an *impossible* learner (Youdell 2006) 'sticks' to her (Anderson 2009:291): she is unintelligible to staff as a young person who can attain academic success (Section 7.6). This chapter investigates storylines in the data around silence, visibility and the *ideal EAL learner* to analyse how this *impossible* identity comes to sediment around her.

This chapter also examines how, more obviously than any of the other three young people, Gabriela appears racialised by school staff (Section 7.7). Storylines around success intersect with storylines around gender and ethnicity, specifically Roma ethnicity, in ways which restrict the micro-identities available to her in classroom interactions to those which carry only limited rights to speak, predominantly that of *menial worker* (Wood 2013). Her perceived family and community characteristics are invoked as explanation for her academic failure, demonstrating the power of meritocratic thinking to blame multilingual learners as responsible for their own lack of success.

Peer interactions are prominent in the audio recorded data as well as fieldnotes and interviews. These interactions enrich the analysis, providing complex alternative perspectives on Gabriela's identity work. They illustrate storylines around safety and communicative competence, as Gabriela alternately positions herself to seek invisibility, and to move from the social periphery to the centre of the communities of practice (Wenger 1998) to which she wants to belong (Sections 7.3–7.4). They, alongside her interview data, demonstrate her determination not only to survive the school system and into adult life, but to thrive (Safford and Costly 2008) (Section 7.5), and how, when she is able to negotiate more powerful positions, she does thrive (Section 7.8). The issue remains, however, whether she can realise her full potential as a multilingual learner (Hutchinson 2018) when her alignment to dominant storylines about EAL success is so fractional.

Table 7.1 lists the staff who appear in this chapter, in addition to Magda and Ana.

Table 7.1: Staff who appear in data in order of appearance

Louise	Art teacher (Year 7)
Deborah	Citizenship teacher (Year 7)
Charlie	Maths teacher (Year 7)
Kavisha	Maths teacher (Year 9)
Karolina	Learning mentor, EAL (Year 9)
Sandra	Science teacher (Year 9)

7.2 Invisible and inaudible

Gabriela frequently positions herself and is positioned in ways which make her invisible and inaudible in lessons. Extract 7.1 is from an Art lesson. She sits next to a Romanian-speaking friend, and the extract is taken from close to the beginning of the lesson where students have to look at and respond to the feedback the teacher, Louise, has written on their work.

Extract 7.1   Fieldnotes February 2020, Art lesson

52	{Gabriela} sits down with Student A. As usual there is silent reading to begin the
53	lesson. {Gabriela} is holding the book but looking around.
	((lines omitted))
56	In books, there is a yellow feedback sticker on a previous piece of work. Students
57	need to respond with what they will do today as a result of the feedback.
58	{Gabriela} is chewing. Student A translates the feedback to her and they talk;
59	{Gabriela} writes something in her book in response. She appears to be copying
60	this from Student A's book. Student A helps by explaining as they write.

Gabriela employs several strategies in Extract 7.1 to make it look as though she is engaging with lesson tasks. She holds up a book as if reading it, as she does at the start of other lessons (Fieldnotes February, March 2020). WMS policy is that lessons begin with ten minutes of silent reading, but Gabriela is still working on phonics in EAL intervention lessons. Later the same day I asked Gabriela about the book, and she admitted that she could not read it. Those she

reads in intervention lessons would afford her valuable decoding practice, but might draw unwanted attention to herself from peers or teachers as the books are written for young children and therefore are visibly different. There are no Romanian books available in the school library so, although Gabriela is literate in Romanian, this is not an option. Gabriela undertakes the physical act of holding up a book to make herself invisible to Louise, enacting the task requirement without academic engagement. She, and her learning needs, are hidden in plain sight. While she self-positions as a compliant, studious learner through her physical movements, the activity has no learning value and may impact negatively on her self-confidence.

Similarly, she listens to her friend's translation of the feedback (line 58) rather than reading it and copies her friend's response rather than formulating her own. To do otherwise would '"embarrass" or obstruct the planned flow of classroom instruction' (Mackay 1993:32) and risk calling unwanted attention to herself from the teacher or peers, breaking her cover of invisibility. Instead, she chooses what Mackay (1993:32) terms 'hygiene resources': strategies which cover up embarrassment or obstruction and enable the lesson to flow according to teachers' plans. Mackay notes that, although convenient to the flow of the lesson, hygiene resources reduce cognitive engagement with learning and so it is with Gabriela; she fails to engage with either the English language or curriculum content.

Perfunctory glances at her or her book reveal a learner who appears to be reading, appears to be engaging with feedback, appears to be writing a response, in ways which comply with the moral order in classrooms (Anderson 2009; Davies and Hunt 1994; Enyedy et al. 2008). She completes tasks through copying or other manual strategies, without learning any of the content: the epitome of the micro-identity of *menial worker* (Wood 2013). While Jamal's data also reveals a positioning as *menial worker* (Section 5.4), it is just in Catering lessons. With Gabriela, it is widespread: she uses the same strategies in almost all lessons to self-position as a *menial worker*, a position which affords her minimal rights or obligations to speak and renders her almost entirely invisible and inaudible to teaching staff and peers other than Student A. It also extends over time. Fieldnotes taken in 2020, 2021 and early 2022 record her using the same strategies to appear busy and fill her book with answers, enacting a learner identity but only at a superficial level.

The *menial worker* position is ratified by mainstream teaching staff. They rarely look at her work or nominate her to speak; on one day, for example, it was the final lesson of the day before she spoke with a member of staff at all, or to any peer other than Student A (Fieldnotes February 2020). Where there is interaction, it often additionally positions Gabriela as communicatively incompetent. In Year 7, she is always seated next to her Romanian-speaking friend and when teachers wish to check on Gabriela, they speak to this friend. No time is allocated in these interactions for interpretation; rather, teachers speak exclusively to Student A, who replies, and only afterwards speaks with Gabriela in Romanian, presumably to explain and interpret. Several times in fieldnotes (February 2020, December 2021), I note that teachers do not even look at Gabriela during these interactions, positioning her as invisible as well as communicatively incompetent.

This is different from the quietness of Daniella, whose silence is attributed to shyness and a natural language-learning trajectory, the Silent Period (Section 6.4). No such remarks are made about Gabriela. Indeed, her Citizenship teacher implies that she is lazy, saying 'that young lady… can do more than she lets on' (Fieldnotes February 2020, lines 218–219). Even in EAL intervention classes, where she and her work are more visible, more proficient learners sometimes tell Ana or Magda if they think Gabriela is lost, or making mistakes, and this often develops into short conversations about her (Fieldnotes October 2019, January 2020). These incidents, both mainstream and intervention, position Gabriela as unhearing, uncomprehending, not part of decision-making about herself: an entirely powerless position.

Gabriela's invisibilisation (Ranson 2023; Richardson 2023) is further highlighted in a Citizenship lesson. Throughout the lesson, the teacher, Deborah, who also teaches Drama during the week, uses learners' names to nominate for answers; however, on the one occasion that she responds to Gabriela (Extract 7.4 in Section 7.3), she calls her 'sweetheart' and, in remarks to me after the lesson, refers to her as 'that young lady' (Fieldnotes February 2020). Deborah has been teaching her for six months in two curriculum areas and yet, it appears, does not know her name. Youdell (2006:100) names as 'impossible' learners who fail to align with storylines around learning and behaviour in a way which is intelligible to teachers, and Gabriela, invisible and inaudible, appears to be such a learner.

7.3 Challenges to and complicity with invisibilisation

What is not clear from observations is whether Gabriela's self-positioning as a *menial worker* is because she feels that there are no other positioning possibilities for her, or because she prefers the lack of visibility. Certainly, it affords her immediate personal advantages: unmonitored by teachers, she chews gum, eats sweets from her pockets, and enjoys surreptitious drinks (Fieldnotes 2020, 2021, 2022).

In her first interview (November 2019), Gabriela says that she was bullied at her English primary school; she had nightmares and was unable to sleep, she felt sad, afraid, and lonely, because of verbal and physical intimidation by a group of girls. The bullying appeared invisible to school staff until a friend interpreted for her while she explained to a teacher. Gabriela said that she had learnt little English in her English primary school and depended on others for everything, saying, 'I had to ask the girls to take me to the toilet if I needed to go. I didn't learn, I didn't know any' (Interview November 2019, line 104). Her own voice appears to have been silenced through her lack of English, even the most fundamental needs of hygiene and safety hidden from staff. By contrast, when asked about WMS, she says that she feels happy and that she belongs; alongside the words, she smiles and her voice rises several tones. Asked to explain her answer, Gabriela first mentions the absence of the primary school bullies, saying that nobody 'is bothering' her and that she is 'free' (Interview November 2019, line 337). In WMS she has her Romanian companion who she describes as her 'best friend' in this interview, later as a 'sister' (Fieldnotes July 2021, line 29) and that they only have each other at school.

It may be that Gabriela, traumatised by her earlier experiences of school bullies, chooses invisibility, or to be complicit in teachers' invisibilisation of her, in order to feel safe, unseen by class peers as much as by staff. The self-contained bubble of friendship with her Romanian-speaking friend offers social as well as academic safety: the friend mediates not only English language but curricular content, interactions with those around her, and classroom routines. As with Daniella and Jamal, Gabriela's L1 peer interactions are a key site of identity negotiation, the peer dynamic being one of particular power in the identity work of adolescents (Eckert 2000; Grbić and Maksić 2020). However, while Daniella's Italian-speaking friend positions her as knowledgeable and competent, and LeBron does the same

for Jamal, Gabriela's friend self-positions as 'mother hen' (Fieldnotes February 2020, line 112). This matters because positioning is always a relational activity (Block 2022; Kayı-Aydar 2019); by positioning herself as explainer and protector, she creates positions of relative powerlessness, which Gabriela accepts. Gabriela, the teaching staff, and her friend therefore discursively and continually co-construct her invisibility and inaudibility.

Gabriela occasionally challenges her invisibility and attempts to position herself in ways which afford her better opportunities to learn, with more rights to speak. Extract 7.2 captures a conversation between LeBron and Ana, which takes place in the EAL classroom in the presence of Gabriela. Ana has just told LeBron that she is leaving WMS, and he is listing reasons why Ana should stay. At this point, Gabriela has been at WMS for two months, spends most of her timetable in EAL intervention, and speaks almost exclusively through Ana.

Extract 7.2   Fieldnotes October 2019, EAL intervention lesson

11	He then indicated {Gabriela} and asked what would happen to her as she can't
12	speak English and relies on {Ana} for translation. {Ana} said, ah, that's sweet of
13	you, you care about others and he immediately scowled and said no, I just… I felt
14	he was hoping to find reasons why she has to stay. {Gabriela} jumped in at this
15	point — it transpires that she is understanding a great deal more of what is spoken
16	around her these days — and said that she is going to be learning English quickly
17	and won't need {Ana}, that she can't be asking for help forever anyway.

Gabriela's response in Extract 7.2 is as interpreted by Ana, as she spoke in Romanian: Ana often interpreted for Ana so that she could participate more socially. However, by claiming a conversation turn Gabriela demonstrates that she understands the topic of conversation, and even if she is not yet able or willing to respond in English, she can use other linguistic resources to participate. She voices ambition and a future plan for communicative independence. It is a second-order positioning move, challenging the speechless position of communicative incompetence that she has been assigned by LeBron. Where peers perceive language learners to be in need of accommodations and support, they position those learners in line with their judgements, just as LeBron does here (Martin-Beltrán 2010), in a

process which demonstrates that proficiency is not an objective measure, it is socially constructed with staff and peers in moment-to-moment interactions. LeBron's assessment concords with the institutional positioning of Gabriela as Level A (New to English); yet she seeks to renegotiate it.

Likewise, in our first interview (November 2019) Ana interprets, not only the spoken words, but also concepts and cultural knowledge helpful to the interview (Cormier 2018; see also Section 3.6.3). Nevertheless, Gabriela sometimes jumps in and answers in English before Ana interprets or explains, showing us both that she understands and can formulate short answers to simple questions unaided. By choosing to do the interview through an interpreter, Gabriela might feel co-positioned as unproficient in English, and her interruptions may be a set of proposed negotiations to this position, again self-positioning as a learner with agency to communicate and willingness to try.

Later interviews (November 2021, February 2022) and fieldnotes of our informal conversations (July 2021) contain significant episodes of storytelling when Gabriela extends and develops her turns, to get across quite complex ideas and events, using gesture, Romanian lexical items, iPad translation, laughter and facial expressions. This suggests that, far from communicatively incompetent, Gabriela has a strong desire to speak, to have her version of herself heard. She is quite happy, when I ask, for me to share these versions with EAL staff, as if she wants her stories to have wider circulation as counter-narratives to the dominant storylines (see also Section 9.6). While she can get her meanings across, she lacks confidence and needs both time and an accommodating listener which I, in my role as researcher, am able to provide.

In mainstream lessons, only one teacher positions Gabriela in ways which enhance her obligations and opportunities to speak; perhaps not coincidentally, this is the same Maths teacher, Charlie, who co-constructs powerful positions for LeBron (Section 4.2). In Extract 7.3, Charlie is leading whole-class as they do a series of worked algebra examples on the board.

Extract 7.3   Fieldnotes February 2020, Maths lesson

259		Next class worked example, {Gabriela} joins in with answering simple
260		questions.
261	Charlie:	((to class)) how many have we got?
262	Gabriela:	((as part of chorus answer)) six A.
263	Charlie:	Have we got six {Gabriela}?
264	Gabriela:	((nods and smiles))

In Extract 7.3, Charlie engages in an Initiation-Response-Evaluation (IRE) sequence to guide the class through the worked example. In line 261 he initiates, and most students respond with a candidate answer, *six A*. Gabriela forms part of the group who answer and, by doing so, she self-positions not as a *menial worker* but as a *Maths learner* (Wood 2013), a position which enables her to produce discourse about Maths at the level of which she is currently capable in terms of her English proficiency and Maths knowledge. Wood (2013) suggests that teachers can create the conditions for positions which enable learning, such as the *Maths learner* position. Charlie has already engaged in positioning Gabriela through his seating plans; he strategically moves Gabriela and her Romanian-speaking friend to sit variously alone and in pairs through the course of the lesson (Fieldnotes February 2020) and thereby he first-order positions Gabriela as a *Maths learner* who can complete some tasks independently as well as an English language learner who, at times, requires language support. In this extract, she maintains the position of *Maths learner* by providing a response (line 262). Charlie then disrupts the IRE sequence and, rather than providing feedback to the class on their answer, pursues an alternative pedagogical action in the third turn (Gardner 2013): he directs a yes/no question to Gabriela, asking her to confirm the candidate answer. Her response is non-verbal, a smile and a nod, which nonetheless confirms her agreement and (apparent) understanding.

Gabriela's response here, and in other places during this lesson, is minimal. Cameron, Moon and Bygate (1996) suggest that EAL learners offer minimal responses in mainstream lessons for several reasons such as fear, lack of prior subject knowledge, and task design. It is true that the questions Charlie asks are designed to elicit minimal responses. However, what

stands out here is the opportunity for Gabriela to participate meaningfully at all; her general invisibility in lessons is such that this is the first time in several days of mainstream lessons that I observed any such opportunity. Although she simply choruses a two-syllable response with her peers, and her second response is non-verbal, this marks a continued claiming of the *Maths learner* position. Furthermore, by nominating Gabriela for a turn in this way, Charlie breaks from the rigid IRE sequence and creates space for the negotiation of meaning (Waring 2009), signalling a position for her of a learner who is capable of English language comprehension and interaction. These positions empower Gabriela to engage in subsequent interactions with the content of the lesson through individual work, independently of her friend, as well as further English language interactions with Charlie (Fieldnotes February 2020).

These interactions make Gabriela considerably more visible within the class than in her other mainstream lessons, and release her from the cocoon of exclusive interaction she shares with her friend, a bond which is both protective and restrictive. Her non-verbal communication suggests that she feels safe as she participates in the lesson: she frequently smiles, apparently with happiness, whether she gets an answer right or wrong. However, this is balanced with body language more suggestive of hiding. She always covers her mouth when speaking to Charlie, leaning her chin and mouth on her hand. She tips her head forward while working in her book, which hides her face behind her long hair. Whenever she answers a question, she immediately laughs and hides her face in her hands. These non-verbal semiotic devices suggest anxiety, particularly about speaking (Gregersen 2005), or a learnt defensiveness based on past bullying (Wainwright and Thompson 2010). There is therefore ambivalence in Gabriela's participatory positioning: she laughs and smiles more in these Maths lessons than any other in the sequence of observations over several days (February–March 2020), while physically positioning in ways which suggest a continuing wish for some level of invisibility.

In this lesson, Charlie offers positions to Gabriela within which she can engage with both curriculum content and English language interaction. However, Gabriela sometimes initiates the hunt for such positions herself. Extract 7.4 is from a Citizenship lesson about police powers. The teacher, Deborah, asked learners to read out their prepared answers to questions, and each answer then prompted further class discussion, led by Deborah.

Immediately before the extract begins, the class has been discussing police cautions, and Gabriela has not appeared to engage with this at all, but has instead been writing an answer in her book through quiet discussion with her friend.

Extract 7.4   Fieldnotes February 2020, Citizenship lesson

172		{Gabriela} puts her hand up and Student A asks {Deborah} if {Gabriela} can read it
173		out
		((lines omitted))
181	AT:	You want to read it out do you sweetheart?
182	Gabriela:	Yeah miss.
183	AT:	Okay read it out for us.

Gabriela then reads the answer out, blushing furiously, with her friend prompting her in places where her decoding skills limit her fluency. She smiles continually.

In Extract 7.4, Gabriela initiates interaction with the teacher and contributes to the lesson. She does not engage with the class discussion, but instead locates a task for herself, writing an answer which is likely to be shortly required in the class, through dictation from her friend. Dictation is again a form of *menial work* (Wood 2013) but, in comparison with the alternative on offer, sitting and doing nothing, Gabriela uses the work to prepare for her positioning move, and this is therefore not simply menial work but identity work. She next rehearses it with her friend, *sotto voce*. All of this is preparation for her positioning move, which she then proposes by raising her hand.

The act of raising her hand is a rejection of the invisible position she has so far been offered in the lesson, and a claim to a micro-identity position of *Citizenship learner*. When noticed by Deborah she turns her gaze towards her friend, apparently appealing to her to explain the intended contribution, and so the push-and-pull dynamics of independence, visibility, and safety become evident: 'Can I read?' would be entirely within her English proficiency but perhaps a lack of confidence, or fear, pull her into silence.

Deborah's response, *you want to read it out do you sweetheart?* (line 181) is an invitation, addressed to Gabriela, to confirm the substance of the friend's utterance, and advance the

talk. Often, such newsmarks (Jefferson 1981) are prefaced with 'oh', and Heritage (1984) suggests that when, as here, the newsmark is freestanding, it forms a weaker commitment for the recipient (Gabriela) to further talk. It may be that Deborah, treating Student A's utterance as news (Heritage 1984), is not confident that Gabriela will, in fact, read her work out loud. After the lesson, Deborah remarked to me that this was the first time that Gabriela had contributed in such a way to the lesson, which suggests either surprise or a genuine uncertainty about what Gabriela wanted.

Gabriela's confirmation (line 182) of the intention to speak leads to Deborah granting permission (line 183) for her to speak. It has taken several turns for Gabriela's projected action, asking for permission to read aloud, to be completed, but she has finally received validation of her self-position as *Citizenship learner*, and she proceeds to undertake the duty (Davies and Harré 1990) which this position brings.

Deborah maintains Gabriela's self-position a few minutes later by asking her a simple yes/no question, which she correctly answers, and follows up by asking her to explain her answer, which she does not have the English proficiency to do. When Gabriela does not answer, Deborah instead asks her if she knows the meaning of a piece of vocabulary and tells her to look it up and write it down. There are no resources for her to look the word up independently, so she asks Student A, who dictates the definition to her (Fieldnotes 2020). This sequence of events reassigns Gabriela from a cognitively and interactively challenging class discussion to a menial task for which she is dependent on her friend; her position as a *Citizenship learner* is challenged and she is re-positioned as a communicatively inadequate *menial worker* with an unchallenging task. Nevertheless, however briefly, she has sought to move out of this position and engage more cognitively with lesson content and English language interaction.

7.4 Flirting as communicative competence

While she interacts exclusively with her Romanian-speaking friend in mainstream classes, and is often silent-but-talked-about in EAL intervention, I observed one peer interaction which afforded Gabriela new positions and wider rights to speak. Extract 7.5 is taken from

the EAL classroom on a busy afternoon: some students are engaged in a taught lesson with Magda, Year 11 learners are working independently on desktop computers, and Gabriela is tasked with reading a book. Magda suggests that she read out loud to a one of these peers, Student B. Gabriela moves across the classroom to sit near this much older boy, who continues with his own work while listening to her read.

Extract 7.5   Fieldnotes February 2020, EAL intervention

209	Gabriela:	((reading)) he cans
210	Student B:	wait, what, how is that 'cans'? Look.
211	Gabriela:	Cans (.)cans
212	Student B:	no, how is that 'cans'? go to Miss and tell her what is that.
213	Gabriela:	((shouts across the classroom to {Magda})) Miss, what is that?

Extract 7.5 comprises a tease sequence consisting of teasable-tease-receipt (Drew 1987), where the teasable is Gabriela's erroneous decoding of a word. Classrooms have a greater range of teasable possibilities than everyday conversations (Looney 2021), and in classrooms teases are often ways of playfully resisting and simultaneously embracing classroom roles and affiliation, and of building intimacy between interactants (Looney 2021), as this sequence reveals. Extract 7.5 is one of a number of observed tease sequences between Gabriela and Student B in this lesson and although here, Student B identifies the teasable and responds with a tease, in other sequences Gabriela takes this more powerful position, locating Student B's words as teasables (Fieldnotes February 2020).

Student B's tease (line 210) is in the form of an open-class repair initiator (Sidnell 2010) common amongst teenagers, *wait what?,* and he then clarifies the source of trouble (the word *cans*). The interrogative form and lexical choice (*how is that 'cans'?)* suggests incredulity that somebody could decode this word as Gabriela has done. In classrooms the democracy of natural conversation is disrupted (Waring 2009) and the authority figure has extended rights to nominate speakers, curtail turns, and, as here, waive the preference for self-repair and for weak versions of other-initiated repair (Sidnell 2010). Student B's other-initiated repair indicates that he claims this position of authority, but the mocking tone and lexical choice of *how is that cans?* marks a duality in his proposed position, both authority

figure and a peer who is teasing Gabriela, exaggeration being a common element of teases (Drew 1987). It also positions Gabriela as foolish or incapable, a less proficient reader who is making a silly mistake. Positioning the speaker thus is a common component of teases (Drew 1987) but here it also serves to remind Gabriela of her junior position to Student B in terms of language proficiency and age.

The mockery in his tone and Gabriela's giggling which accompanies the tease and receipt are indicative of mutual affiliation. Teasing, for adolescent girls, is one of the most common indicators of opposite-sex flirtation, along with giggling, smiling and hair-tossing (Moore 1995), all of which Gabriela exhibits throughout Extract 7.5 and much of the remaining lesson while she works with Student B (Fieldnotes February 2020). Working with an older male peer offers new positioning possibilities to Gabriela; while Magda has other-positioned her as a junior reader and Student B's assumption of authority has solidified the position, Gabriela, through these teasing sequences, second-order self-positions as a more socially powerful peer, foregrounding social intimacy and the more adult world of male-female interactions. By participating in the teases, Student B accepts her self-position, one which gives her a wider range (in terms of quality and quantity) of opportunities for interaction and spoken output.

These opportunities are much bolder, less safe, than her usual interaction patterns. In line 211, as a receipt for the tease, Gabriela attempts to repair her error, but still fails to decode the word. Rather than simply modelling correctly, Student B invokes Magda: *go to Miss and tell her what is that* (line 212). Gabriela's response is to raise both her tone and volume and call directly to Magda, an act of voluntary visibility seemingly at odds with her demeanour in mainstream and most intervention lessons. This indicates the greater power to speak that she feels; the combined positions which she claims at this point give her the duty to correct her reading error but the right to be heard and seen in a louder, more visible way than in any other context I observed.

The teasing sequences carry out further actions in terms of Gabriela's positioning. Student B has a lot of social capital within EAL intervention classes, and his interactions with Gabriela are not exclusive:

Although everyone is on task, there is an ongoing thread of banter and light-hearted teasing which runs through the class, and he contributes to and reacts to this continuously. Once G begins working with him, he draws her into this. (Fieldnotes February 2020).

By initiating and participating in tease sequences such as Extract 7.5, he positions Gabriela as a peer in the community of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991) of the intervention classroom, as somebody who has social capital. Perhaps this is also why Gabriela feels emboldened to call out to Magda across the room (line 213); she is an insider of the community of practice while she works with him, rather than in the peripheral position (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998) she generally inhabits. As such, possibilities open up for Gabriela in terms of who she can interact with, and the type of interactions she can have.

A final position is one of communicative competence, as exemplified in Extract 7.6. Gabriela is still reading from the iPad to Student B, and she has skipped a portion, whether accidentally or deliberately, while he was talking with Magda.

Extract 7.6   Fieldnotes February 2020, EAL intervention

236	Student B:	you have to start here, you missed all of this.
237	Gabriela:	she is reading, you ((points to {Magda})) talking to Miss.
		((lines missing))
240	Student B:	no, I can hear you.

The omitted fieldnote lines are my grammaticised interpretation at the time, 'I was reading and you were talking to Miss, so how do you know what I read and what I missed?' (Fieldnotes February 2020). However, Student B's response indicates that he has understood Gabriela's meaning perfectly: it is another tease, another disalignment with the instructional project (Looney 2021), and Student B receipts the tease with a rejection of the premise without any reference to the grammatical errors. In so doing, he offers Gabriela the position of communicatively competent interactant. Although they have been interacting continually, her short utterances have been quite accurate, and this is the first one which strains the listener and forces the need for accommodation. Nevertheless, without pause,

he responds to the content of Gabriela's turn in line with the tease sequence. Already occupying a peer position of greater power to speak in this lesson, she has gone beyond her usual one-or-two-word utterances, something which she does not attempt in mainstream lessons at all, and rarely in intervention lessons. Student B's next turn in the sequence is entirely in line with the expected order of a tease sequence. This lesson partnership, therefore, offers Gabriela several positioning possibilities that she does not usually encounter, more powerful social and learning micro-identities which enable her to interact more fully and access opportunities for comprehensible output.

7.5 A multilingual professional: an Imagined Community

Gabriela, on the rare occasions that she negotiates positions where she can engage with language, content, and social life, claims the right to speak and to learn as a member of the community of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998). This suggests that her invisibility and inaudibility may be an identity she proposes to inhabit only temporarily, as the content of her exchange with LeBron also evidences (Extract 7.2 in Section 7.3). This extends to another of her strategies, copying. Extract 7.7 is from her first interview with me, which was interpreted by Ana and where Ana has added her own follow-up question (line 386). Extract 7.7 is transcribed in English from the Romanian audio recording.

Extract 7.7   Audio-recorded interview Gabriela, November 2019

383	Ana:	What do you think stops you from learning in these lessons? What
384		doesn't help you learn? What makes it more difficult for you to learn?
385	Gabriela:	to copy
386	Ana:	Do you think if you'll copy you won't learn?
387	Gabriela:	Yes Miss, because if you don't use your brain to do it you don't focus
388		on it.

In all mainstream lessons but one (Maths), Gabriela relies heavily on copying to fill her book to pass as a good student and avoid negative feedback (Section 7.2). Only in Maths and EAL

interventions is she consistently positioned as a *learner* rather than a *menial worker*, and Extract 7.7 suggests that she recognises that copying is unhelpful for learning. She continues to say Maths is the lesson where she learns best, her favourite lesson, and that she feels happiest there (Interview November 2019). From Gabriela's point of view, a good lesson is one where she is cognitively engaged and participates. Her attempts in other lessons to negotiate positions where she is given things other than menial work are attempts to create learning opportunities for herself (e.g. Extract 7.4 in Section 7.3). Copying, like a reliance on Romanian speakers for interpretation and translation, is a strategy she is eager to leave behind. The safe environment she has created with her friend, with concomitant linguistic and academic invisibility, is not foreseen as an academic long-term plan, but as a social safe space, free from bullies, in which she can learn English and catch up academically.

Gabriela is aware that she is very behind academically, but she has future plans which include academic success: at this point she wants to be a primary school teacher in an English school (Interview November 2019), later a midwife who can support Romanian-speaking mothers (Interview November 2021) and these plans are supported by her parents, who are reported to envision a successful career in mainstream British society for her (Interview November 2021). Gabriela imagines herself as a member of a future Imagined Community (IC) (Norton 2001; see also Section 2.3.6) which requires academic qualifications, uses both English and Romanian language skills, and she appears determined to achieve her place in this community. For Gabriela, then, school is more than a place of safety. While many of her teachers appear content to enable her survival skills in lessons, Gabriela, like other multilingual learners, has ambitions beyond mere survival (Safford and Costley 2008): she wants to thrive, to learn the knowledge and skills needed to be recognised as a member of her IC.

7.6 The impossible learner

In contrast to the other learner participants, Gabriela, to most staff, appears to be *an impossible learner* (Youdell 2003), one whose social and biographical identities, behaviours, and perceived English proficiency not only fail to align with dominant storylines about ideal

EAL learners but fail to make sense at all to staff. Her behaviour infractions (drinking, eating, chewing, failing to pay attention, copying work) are all ignored by staff; the behaviours, as Gabriela herself, are triaged (Gillborn and Youdell 2000) as seemingly unworthy of attention. Her schoolbooks are full of copied writing and that is enough to satisfy staff; some staff appear not to know her name, and there were full days of observations that I did not see her speak to another peer or be spoken to by a staff member in any meaningful way. With LeBron, 'troublesome' though he is, staff speak of expected grades, ambitions for an academic and social turnaround, and there is frustration at his behaviour infractions, choices of friends, and exclusions from school (Section 4.8). With Gabriela, teachers speak instead in vague terms of her personality, characterising her as *a lovely girl* (Interview Kavisha February 2022, line 139) or a *sweetheart* (see Extract 7.4 in Section 7.3), someone that they *love* (Fieldnotes December 2021, line 18), but not someone for whom they hold expectations of academic success. The lexical choices (*love, lovely, sweetheart*), like Daniella's reported 'shyness', reflect a gendered, feminising assessment of her learner attributes, a storyline of smallness and childishness which infantilises her (Archer and Francis 2007) and, through intersection with her wider invisibility, further diminishes her learner identity. Using the lens of educational triage (Gillborn and Youdell 2000), Gabriela has been triaged and found to be not a useful investment of teacher time and resources, as it is felt that she is unlikely to attain benchmark academic success at GCSE. In contrast, it is suggested that she may have special educational needs (Interview Kavita February 2022). While adding value (Devine 2013) to the school community as a 'lovely' person, she does not have the right sort of human capital value to be worth much academic attention.

7.7 Roma? Racialisation and the impossible learner

From the beginning of data collection with Gabriela, there is some uncertainty about whether she is of Roma ethnicity. Ana communicates with Gabriela in Romanian but cites several factors which make her think that Gabriela is Roma: her family's appearance, her own physical appearance, her low academic base gained in Romania, where Roma children often have access to only poor standards of education or are segregated (Lazar and Baciu 2014; Roth and Moisa 2011). She feels sure that Gabriela speaks Romani (Interview

November 2019). Staff voice concerns about Roma learners in the school such as disinterest in learning, early entry to labour markets, early marriage for girls, absence rates, and lack of parental engagement (Fieldnotes 2019). An interview with Gabriela's Year 9 Maths teacher, Kavita, reveals that she felt Gabriela's parents are unsupportive of homework as well as English language learning (Interview February 2022). Staff are alarmed by her lack of engagement with remote learning during COVID-19 lockdowns, her absence from school more generally (Interviews and fieldnotes July 2021, January 2022, February 2022) and with the perceived low effort that she puts into learning (January and February 2020). Concerns are raised about early marriage (November 2021), and some of these concerns are explicitly couched in the context of a racialisation of Gabriela as Roma and the prevalent storylines about this group within the UK.

Gabriela positions herself, however, as non-Roma, as exemplified in Extract 7.8. In this extract, Gabriela tells the story of being bullied in primary school the previous year. Ana, a non-Roma Romanian, is present as interpreter. Italicised font indicates the transcript of the translation from Romanian audio to English, provided later by a different highly-proficient Romanian speaker (Section 3.7.2).

Extract 7.8   Audio-recorded interview Gabriela, November 2019

242	Gabriela (to Ana):	*Yes miss and there was other three or four Romanian girls and they*
243		*were Gypsy[13] and they spoke Gypsy. So, not having anyone else to*
244		*talk to, I talked to them.*
245	Ana:	*Did you speak Gypsy to them?*
246	Gabriela:	*No miss, Romanian. I befriended them, they were speaking Gypsy, I*
247		*didn't understand but we played together.*
248	Ana (to Hannah):	Okay. So I asked her quite a long time ago if she speaks Gypsy.
249	Hannah:	mm

[13] The term "Gypsy" in English is usually considered a racial slur when used with reference to Roma people (European Roma Rights Centre 2023). Both Ana as interpreter and the Romanian speaker who later translated and transcribed the interview use "Gypsy" in their translations and interpretations, presumably without realising its problematic status in English.

250	Ana:	She says that she doesn't but I think she might be able to understand
		((lines omitted))
263	Hannah:	but she can understand
264	Ana:	She's not telling me that
265	Hannah:	oh okay
266	Ana:	They er they feel like it's er shameful to say. I just find that a lot of
267		Gypsy kids are not saying that they speak Gypsy just because they
268		feel ashamed and parents
269	Hannah:	hmm
270	Ana:	even if they look
271	Gabriela:	*yes miss and those girls were always making me sad making me cry*
272	Ana:	*who? The girls who spoke Gypsy?*
273	Gabriela:	*yes miss*
274	Ana:	*why?*
275	Gabriela:	*Miss when they stopped being my friends they would leave me alone*
276		*and I would just stay alone, play alone, speak with the ladies, and*
277		*they would always come to bother me and I didn't like that. They*
278		*would start coming at me asking why I didn't speak to them Gypsy.*
279		*But how should I if I don't know Gypsy?*

In Extract 7.8, Gabriela gives an account of attempting to deal with her social isolation at primary school by befriending other Romanian girls. Her strategy in the story involves a risk, making herself visible by approaching the girls, and it does not pay off. She quickly finds herself isolated again but worse off than before as she cannot go back to her invisible self; having become visible to these girls she is continually verbally harassed, and she is left with only staff for company (line 276). The source of this harassment appears to be her inability or unwillingness to speak Romani. It is not clear in which language(s) their initial game-playing occurs: perhaps in Romanian, which the girls would presumably also speak, although Gabriela characterises them specifically as *speaking Gypsy* (line 243). At any rate, her own lack of Romani is perceived as a problem and leads to bullying which later includes physical abuse (Interview November 2019).

Ana's response to the story is to open an adjacency pair with a question to clarify the language Gabriela used with her peers (line 245). She foregrounds this element of the story, implicitly positioning Gabriela as Roma. Gabriela rejects this three times: *no…they were speaking…I didn't understand* (lines 246–247) and reiterates in line 279: *I don't speak Gypsy*. She maintains the position she has proposed in previous interactions with Ana, as a non-Roma Romanian (line 248–250). In the third turn position, Ana does not provide an evaluation of Gabriela's answer, or even a change-of-state marker such as 'oh', which would signal to Gabriela the receipt of information (Heritage 1984). Her failure to provide this post-expansion is a non-preferred response. Compounding the disaffiliative move, Ana switches into English and begins a talk sequence with me, ending her talk sequence with Gabriela. Taken together, these talk choices suggest a rejection of Gabriela's answer, Ana perhaps doubting its veracity, based on the assumptions she has already made from other sources.

Ana touches on why Gabriela, if she is Roma, might reject being positioned as such. In addition to teaching English, Ana's role in the school is to liaise with Romanian families and she knows the other Romanian learners in the school, as well as many of their families. She states that a rejection of Roma identity label is common as it is *shameful…they feel ashamed* (line 266–268). OFSTED (2014) found in interviews with Roma parents that non-acknowledgement of Roma ethnicity is widespread, because of a fear of discrimination. This is different from shame; Matras, Howley and Jones (2020) found that Romanian Roma parents and learners were unembarrassed by their ethnicity, although wary of speaking Romani at school. Roma people have historically been subject to, and continue to endure, racial discrimination and hatred (European Parliament 2022; Penfold 2016), leading to social and institutional marginalisation and a mutual lack of trust. This includes education, where Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT)[14] learners are frequently victims of bullying (Anti-Bullying Alliance 2020). Penfold (2016) cites a deep-seated and historically-located mistrust of what governments may do with ethnicity data.

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[14] The UK government uses the acronym GRT to refer to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller learners, sometimes with awareness (Race Disparity Unit 2022) of the differences between the groups subsumed under this label. I use it here only when referring to published data which itself uses the acronym.

Ana, in her unfinished utterance *and parents* (line 268) might therefore be implying that Gabriela may have been instructed to deny her ethnicity by parents, cautious of discrimination and racism (Greason 2016). She then refers to appearance (*even if they look,* line 270), perhaps a reference to the stereotypical physical appearance of Roma people. It is at this point that Gabriela interrupts to continue her account, and it is not clear to what extent she might have understood the English exchange and wish not only to proceed with her story but also to curtail talk about her ethnicity which connects her to a possible Roma identity.

The storylines of safety and danger, along with that of (in)visibility, are entwined throughout the interview. Gabriela tells a story of her English primary school, where she felt unsafe. By not speaking Romani, she opened herself up to bullying, and visibility of a traumatic nature. In this interview, Gabriela undertakes repeated interactional actions to be audible: she is a young person who wants her account of herself and her experiences to be heard. Both Ana and the Romani-speaking girls in the story ascribe to Gabriela a language and identity that she rejects, and her continued efforts to challenge this racialised other-positioning are powerful.

Whether or not she is Roma, Gabriela is positioned as such by staff, and this may illuminate the moment-to-moment interactional positioning work carried out with her. In 2023, Gypsy and Roma learners in England were the lowest-achieving group at GCSE (DfE 2023e). Gypsies, Roma and Travellers are the most likely to be temporarily or permanently excluded from school (The Traveller Movement 2020) and have the highest absence rates (DfE 2024b). Statistics like these, coupled with well-intentioned schools training sessions, contribute to an institutional essentialising storyline which positions Roma learners as 'inherently prone to learning disadvantages' (Matras, Howley and Jones 2020:362). In turn, this impacts on teacher attitudes and behaviours, and can create lower aspirations in the minds of teachers for Roma learners (Matras, Howley and Jones 2020). Gabriela's teachers appear to align her with such storylines, as they are cautious in their aspirations for her life after leaving school (Interviews February 2020) and, as explored in Sections 7.2 and 7.3, often limit the range of positions available to her in lessons.

Although overt segregation does not exist in English schools, Roma learners report frequent discrimination from teachers including 'being negatively labelled, judged and having

presumptions made about them being trouble-makers or not willing to learn' (Anti-Bullying Alliance 2020:6). Reported bullying of GRT learners is often perpetrated by teachers (Halfon 2022), even more than by peers (Anti-Bullying Alliance 2020). Gabriela's reluctance to be positioned as Roma in her interactions with Ana may not stem only from fears about bullying, but that being labelled as Roma might negatively impact her chances of academic success.

Her challenges to the positioning by Ana in the interview can be seen, therefore, as a series of rejections of a racialised position, which is incompatible with that of the ideal *kind* of EAL learner (Archer and Francis 2007; Youdell 2006). Gabriela's inconsistent school attendance, non-participation in remote learning, and lack of homework are pathologised and racialised as deficiencies located in her community and family, although Gabriela characterises her family as highly supportive of her wellbeing and future career plans (Interviews November 2019, November 2021; Fieldnotes July 2021, May 2022). Her invisibility in class is likewise interpreted and pathologised from an early stage as a lack of interest in learning (Fieldnotes February 2020; Interview Kavisha February 2022) or perhaps an unidentified special educational need (Interview Kavisha February 2022). The third facet of the ideal *kind* of EAL learner, English language assimilation, is characterised primarily as one of choice: staff say, or imply, that Gabriela chooses not to learn English (Fieldnotes February 2020; Interviews Gabriela and Kavisha February 2022). In contrast, my analysis shows that Gabriela uses invisibility as a safety mechanism, and sees it as a temporary tool for survival, while her longer-term plans are for academic and professional success using all her linguistic resources.

Alone amongst the participants, Gabriela is an *impossible learner*, one who lacks educability (Youdell 2006). This suggests that Gabriela is ascribed a subordinate position in the Hierarchy-within-the-Other (Youdell 2003) of the school. In schools like WMS, there are few, if any, learners who fit the classic profile of the ideal learner as white, middle-class, male (Archer and Francis 2007; Gillborn 1990; Youdell 2006), and, as I suggest is key for EAL learners, linguistically assimilated or on a trajectory to become so. This creates a space for learners such as Jamal and Daniella to co-create identities as ideal *kinds* of EAL learners, although they are not white, through alignment with storylines about meritocracy, while LeBron, who is Black French and identifies closely with a Black youth subculture, cannot be

intelligible as *ideal*, and Gabriela, ascribed a Roma identity, aligned with dominant storylines about Roma educational and social failure, is *impossible* (see further discussion in Section 8.2).

Gabriela's plans to be recognised as a member of an IC of transnational, multilingual future professionals indicate huge ambition for the kinds of social and professional success which are lauded by the Model Minority (MM) ideology, to no less a degree than her fellow-participants. Like the other learners, she experiences the storylines of MM as they manifest in interactions: Gabriela's non-disruptive classroom presence typifies the quiet, 'good' immigrant.

Gabriela is a low academic achiever at the time of this study but there is a failure to recognise the barriers which she faces because, as has previously been noted by Wong (2015:742), amongst MM learners the 'amiable statistics' of EAL success homogenise the EAL group and render irrelevant their different experiences and backgrounds. In particular, Gabriela faces barriers of low confidence, borne of prior exposure to bullying, and racialisation, which intersects with that history of being bullied. In Section 8.3 the storylines of EAL MM are explored taking all four participants' data into consideration, but it seems that the invisibilisation of EAL learners is one of its key functions. Through storylines about 'inclusion' and expected success, the experiences and challenges which learners face, including those of racism, are hidden.

7.8 A moment of crisis and change

In January 2022, there is a dramatic change in Gabriela's interactional data, exemplified in Extract 7.9. This audio-recorded EAL intervention lesson is taught by a learning mentor, Karolina. Learners have been working with a clip from the film *Frozen*. There are four learners and they have collaboratively written a summary of the clip. They are about to start a clip from the film *Beauty and the Beast*.

Extract 7.9   Audio-recorded EAL lesson, January 2022

6	Gabriela:	miss can I have the glue glue for er ()
7	Karolina:	glue yeah one second so this one do you like Beauty and the Beast
8	Gabriela:	no mm
9	Karolina:	this one ((displays screenshot of clip on the board))
10	Gabriela:	ah this one yes er no Elsa
11	Karolina:	no Elsa okay you need glue
12	Gabriela:	Er
13	Karolina:	so who's that
14	Gabriela:	best er bestia bestia
15	Karolina:	beast yeah bestia that's in Polish as well
16	Gabriela:	yes Romanian same miss
17	Karolina:	so this is er Beauty and the Beast

In a series of sequences in Extract 7.9, Gabriela interacts with Karolina to accomplish a number of pedagogic and social actions: she asks for glue, gives her opinion of the film, and negotiates the meaning of the word *beast* with Karolina. In line 6 she initiates interaction with Karolina, and in line 10 she self-repairs the error of understanding in line 8. In both she uses short and syntactically incomplete sentences, and in line 14 she responds to a question using a Romanian word, *bestia* ('beast'). Karolina's response in the following turn in each case (lines 7, 11 and 15) does not flag trouble but affirms the content of Gabriela's answers. Karolina repeatedly positions Gabriela, therefore, as a communicatively competent English speaker. Further, she positions her as a multilingual speaker; Karolina treats the use of Romanian as a point of interest, affiliating as a multilingual by comparing it to Polish, which is Karolina's home language.

Karolina later tells me that Gabriela's English is good: 'the way she conveys her ideas, like you understand what she means and everything' (Interview February 2022, line 74). Karolina regards her use of Romanian as a strength, in that it both strengthens Gabriela's connection with English language and builds the teacher-learner relationship, as they can compare their language resources: 'it's how we bond' (Interview February 2022, line 126).

Karolina relates their translanguaging practices to a comparison between their life trajectories; as a young person she also came to England and felt lost at school, but was academically successful and is now studying at university. She feels that this provides a role model to Gabriela: 'I could really see myself in her' (Interview February 2022, line 100). Karolina therefore explicitly positions Gabriela as relatable and normal, rather than *impossible*.

Gabriela, positioned as a competent conveyor of meaning in these different ways, has considerably greater rights and obligations to speak in these lessons. This is evident also in her peer interactions. Extract 7.10 is later in the same lesson. The class have watched a short clip from *Beauty and the Beast* and written a collaborative summary. Student C is reading it out loud.

Extract 7.10   Audio-recorded EAL lesson, January 2022

240	Student C:	he is light
241	Karolina:	mm-hmm
242	Student C:	[and (.)
243	Gabriela:	[and dark
244	Student C:	da[rk (.) brown
245	Gabriela:	[brown
246	Karolina:	dark brown
247	Gabriela:	the [°Beast
248	Student C:	[the Beast
249	Gabriela:	is on the
250	Student C:	is on the (.) [red
251	Gabriela:	[red
252	Student C:	st- steps
253	Karolina:	steps yeah

Extract 7.10 shows Gabriela claiming more powerful learner positions than I had previously seen. In line 247 she reads along *sotto voce*, her voice dropping to barely audible on *beast*, in a manner suggestive of rehearsal, trying out the pronunciation and decoding for herself in

a way which does not disturb the class but signals engagement and understanding, much as Jamal does (Section 5.3). In the previous minute of the transcript there are four more examples of this quiet reading. Similarly to Jamal, it suggests that Gabriela claims an active and engaged *learner* position and, again similarly, Karolina does not contest her right to do so, recognising it as a *right way* of being visible in the class.

Gabriela overlaps Student C's reading three times (lines 243, 245 and 251) with her own reading, in a slightly louder tone. Each time, the overlap follows a slight hesitation from Student C, indicating that Gabriela claims for herself an *explainer* or perhaps even *teacher* position, self-positioning as a more fluent reader than Student C, decoding more rapidly. Any act of positioning creates new positions for others in the interaction (Kayı-Aydar 2019), and Gabriela's turns other-position Student C as less competent as she is left to repeat Gabriela's modelling. If she wishes to contest this position it is not clear that she does so; rather, her repetitions seem to ratify Gabriela's positioning move, as does Karolina's lack of interference. Fieldnotes indicate that Gabriela smiles at Student C and holds out her hands and arms towards her in an apparent show of support and solidarity each time she overlaps. Like the *sotto voce* voicing, this signals an intention not to disturb the lesson or Student C's reading but to participate collaboratively, suggesting an *explainer* rather than *teacher* self-position. Yet it is undoubtably a claim to a more powerful speaking position, one which mirrors the support which Karolina gives Student C in decoding.

Gabriela is more vocal and interactive in mainstream lessons too. In Maths, she is again seated next to Student C and they work together and talk throughout the lesson in English, the only language they share (Fieldnotes February 2022). In RE, she sits with her Romanian-speaking friend but also with another girl, with whom she speaks only English. Gabriela participates in group work, reads out loud, contributes to discussions and teases another learner in the group (Fieldnotes February 2022). In a Food Technology class, she sits with a group of English-speaking girls who show her what to do and explain work to her. In the playground, she appears to have expanded her friendship group to include an English-speaking girl, and in interview (February 2022) Gabriela confirms this, and says that they speak mainly in English.

Mainstream and EAL staff reported increased engagement with both lesson content and with peers, and Extract 7.11 is from an interview with Gabriela undertaken in response to

these changes. I was curious as to what had caused such a sudden change. I prepared several visual prompts for the interview but Gabriela, as ever when given space and time to tell a story, was willing and able to give her account and the prompts were not needed.

Extract 7.11   Audio-recorded interview Gabriela, February 2022

90	Hannah:	but before in Year seven Year eight [Year nine
91	Gabriela:	[yeah m she I don't know she say
92		she er take the bo- the the teacher she said come and put it the chair
93		in here and me put it the chair £for the chil- for the children hh (hhh)
94	Hannah:	(hh) which teacher
95	Gabriela:	˙hhh miss er this miss (.) the Science
96	Hannah:	yeah=
97	Gabriela:	=miss er she said miss come in here (0.5) er no {Miss Matthews Miss
98		Matthews Miss Matthews} is the Science (.) she says she take the
99		chair and putting it to take the board because you no understand and
100		come here for the board
101	Hannah:	yeah
102	Gabriela:	and me put the chair hh over there hh in the face of the childre(h)n
103	Hannah:	oh ↑n[o:: and what happened
104	Gabriela:	[hahh hahh ˙hhh (hh) and laughing every=
105	Hannah:	=you were laughing
106	Gabriela:	no the people it's er huhh huhh hehh (hhh) ˙hhh
107	Hannah:	and the teacher?
108	Gabriela:	and the teacher she say oh oh put ((points))
109	Hannah:	and how did you feel
110	Gabriela:	↓miss I'm feel now I'm not feel good because the the children is
111		laughing at (.) get ↓sad hh hh ˙hhh

Gabriela's Extract 7.11 is set in a Science lesson, just before Christmas. The teacher, Sandra, with whom LeBron had difficulties (Section 4.3), says that, because she does not understand, she must move her chair closer to the board. Gabriela misunderstands and sits

down at the front of the class, facing the learners, and they all laugh. The teacher redirects Gabriela.

The reported interaction begins with an other-positioning by Sandra as uncomprehending: Gabriela is told to move because *you no understand* (line 99). As reported by Gabriela this is a very direct, public, negative assessment, and one which Gabriela does not contest — the position confers few rights to speak. Indeed, the unproficient identity has muteness built in by definition. She moves her chair, but subsequent events compound the positioning and it is ratified by the other learners, through their laughter, and by the teacher, who redirects her. The incident has the effect of making Gabriela highly visible to her peers, in contrast to her usual hiddenness, and in a very negative way. The laughter is unmistakeably 'laughing at' her (Glenn 2003), a disaffiliative move by her peers. Gabriela has been ascribed the position of fool, and her reaction is one of sadness and humiliation.

As she tells me the story, Gabriela uses a 'smile voice' (Jefferson 1984) and laughs (lines 93, 102, 104, 106). A teller of troubles commonly laughs, to exhibit 'troubles-resistance' (Jefferson 1984:351), a message that the troubles are not getting the better of them. In troubles-talk the job of the recipient is not to affiliate with the teller's attitude towards the troubles by joining in with the laughter, but to show a serious attitude towards the troubles by talking instead to the trouble (Jefferson 1984). In lines 91–93 Gabriela tells me the story, with some laughter, but I do not really understand her account: this is indicated by my laugh in line 94, not yet recognising her story as one of trouble. As I elicit the story more fully, the trouble becomes visible and I decline to join in with Gabriela's laughter, instead addressing the trouble itself in each turn. As Gabriela's story tells of more challenge, the frequency, length and intensity of her laughter builds, to peak in lines 104 and 106, the moment where her peers all laugh at her. If laughter in troubles indicates resistance, this might indicate the moments where Gabriela most needed a resilient attitude towards the unfolding events, moments echoed in her retelling of those events. Her sharply falling tone (line 110), complete with a sudden absence of laughter, marks a change in attitude as she reflects on how the incident made her feel. Her turn, as an answer to my question, could end after *good* (line 110) but she continues, to reiterate the source of her feelings (being laughed at). Again it could end after *laughing at* (line 111) and indeed she pauses, but extends to clarify her feelings, using a subdued tone conveyed through a pitch fall.

Gabriela tells me that this incident and the feelings it provoked made her decide to learn English (Interview February 2022). Other variables also change: Student C joins the school and is placed in many of her mainstream as well as EAL intervention classes, Karolina joins the EAL department as a part-time learning mentor and they build a strong relationship, and (as reported by Gabriela in the same interview) her Romanian friend, on hearing about the incident in Science, tells her that she needs to learn more English. Additionally, she is frequently not in lessons with that friend any more, due to set changes and GCSE subject choices.

Nevertheless, Gabriela's own account centres the socially-disastrous incident of unsafety and high visibility. She has spent all her school time in a very small, very safe social bubble with her friend, generally invisible in classes (Sections 7.2–7.3). She grew largely reliant on this friend who not only interprets the world of school for her but interprets her to her teachers (Fieldnotes February 2020). While her initial talk suggested an assumption that her dependence and invisibility were temporary (Section 7.5), the safe bubble has become somewhat of a social and academic cage, limiting both her English and content learning. This incident in the Science class shows her that her social bubble does not protect her any more, as she is exposed to ridicule.

The last part of Gabriela's experience in this study is therefore one of readjustment of her notions of what safety is in school, and a new alignment to a more visible, participative learner identity as she comes to recognise that her initial strategies are no longer working. Key to this process is her own agency: the racialised low expectations of her academic potential continue (Interview Kavisha February 2022; Fieldnotes February 2022) and, in line with the internalisation which pervades even those most oppressed by meritocratic thinking (Mijs and Savage 2020; Reay 2020), Gabriela feels that the key to her success lies chiefly with her own effort and ability (Interview January 2022). Nevertheless, she is not alone in this venture. Magda recognises that she is struggling in classes and gives her a new timetable which returns her to daily EAL intervention sessions (Interview Magda February 2022). Crucially, these are with Karolina, who continually positions her in powerful ways (Extracts 7.9 and 7.10) and where Gabriela's self-positioning as a member of a multilingual, ambitious IC is finally recognised and she is able to access positions with richer rights and obligations to speak (Fieldnotes January, February 2022). Her new friendships also offer

possibilities of new positions and being a different *kind* of learner. Without these adjustments to the support that she is given, it is possible that her renewed efforts to learn English would not be any more successful than in previous years. She is still largely seen as *impossible* in mainstream lessons, triaged as unworthy of scarce resources and frequently ignored altogether (Fieldnotes January, February 2022).

Our final conversation was five months later. Planned as a debrief, Gabriela spent time talking about her family and friends, and I noted that for the first time 'she attacked the conversation in the expectation that I would understand her' (Fieldnotes May 2022). Hesitations, particularly for wordsearching, unfinished utterances, and insertions of non-words were all fewer. She appeared more confident than before and this extended to my observation of her in the playground that day, when I saw her, 'surrounded by a small group of friends' (Fieldnotes May 2022), which of course included her Romanian friend. In the struggle between racialised low expectations and Gabriela's self-positioning as a member of a successful multilingual IC, it is to be hoped that she, like the other participants in this study, can swim, rather than sink, in the English school.

7.9 Summary

Gabriela's data reveals a Hierarchy-within-the Other (Youdell 2003) operating within models of the *ideal EAL learner*. Her silence is interpreted differently from that of Daniella, as non-participation and communicative incompetence. She is invisibilised in most of her classes, low expectations of her academic potential rendering her of little value in the human capital framework of GCSE exams and league tables (Devine 2013) and resulting in very low levels of teacher attention. She is the *impossible* learner, one whose perceived characteristics, disalignment with dominant classroom community behaviours, and failure to assimilate to linguistic and cultural norms makes her unintelligible as a learner to her mainstream teachers. Storylines about a Model EAL Minority inform the ways that she is positioned as carrying the blame for her own lack of academic, linguistic and social progress, locating the source of her failure in herself, her family, and her ascribed ethnic community.

A humiliating incident retold in interview is cast as providing the catalyst to change, and Gabriela makes strenuous efforts towards language learning. She renews her efforts to position herself as a successful and participative learner, at least in those classes where she is enabled to do so. Nevertheless, the impossible *kind* of learner identity has 'stuck' (Anderson 2009) to her, and staff continue to hold very low expectations of her academic potential. However, it is possible that, with the more participative positions she is offered in peer groups and intervention lessons, she will find more powerful ways to resist the *menial worker* position in mainstream lessons and co-construct a new learner *kind* of identity.

8. Discussion

8.1 Overview

The four previous chapters analysed the experiences of LeBron, Jamal, Daniella, and Gabriela over time in WMS, by examining how they self-position in interactions with staff and peers, and how they are positioned, in micro-level identity work. While primarily focused on the participants as individuals, the analysis compared their experiences, particularly in relation to the *storylines* (Herbel-Eisenmann et al. 2015; Ingram and Elliot 2020) identified in the data.

This chapter cross-cuts the four individual trajectories to pull together those discussions and explore two proposals to theory which arise from them, and which respond to the research questions of this study. Section 8.2 focuses on my proposed construct of the *ideal EAL learner* as a significant component of EAL learner identity. In Section 8.3, I argue that the *ideal EAL learner* is constructed within a view of EAL learner success driven by the myth of meritocracy, and I propose that EAL learners may be constituted as a Model Minority (Gillborn 2008) within British education. I contrast these majoritarian stories in Section 8.4 with the framework of Imagined Communities (Norton 2001), a counter-story which emerges from learners' talk. Together, these discussions set the scene for the final chapter to follow, which will consider the conclusions, contributions, and implications of the research.

8.2 The ideal EAL learner

Analysis in Chapters 4–7 was conducted primarily using Positioning Theory (PT) (Davies and Harré 1990). A key tool was the adoption of Wood's (2013) micro-identity terms (*explainer, learner, menial worker*) to describe moment-to-moment identity positions in lessons. Fieldnotes and interviews enabled connections to be made to the meso-level and macro-level contexts (Anderson 2009) of social life, specifically Anderson's use of *kinds of learner* to describe the meso-level identities which 'stick' to learners over time. When describing the *ideal kind of EAL learner*, this is used interchangeably with *ideal EAL learner*, to index

both Anderson's terminology and the wider construct of the *ideal learner* (Archer and Francis 2007; Gillborn 1990; Youdell 2006).

The *ideal EAL learner* is my proposed adaptation of the established model of the *ideal learner*, a construct which exists at the intersection of discourses around 'ability', attributes and behaviours, informed by storylines around race, gender and social class (Section 2.3.5). The following three sections explore the three facets of the *ideal EAL learner* as illustrated in Figure 8.1.

Figure 8.1: The *ideal EAL learner*
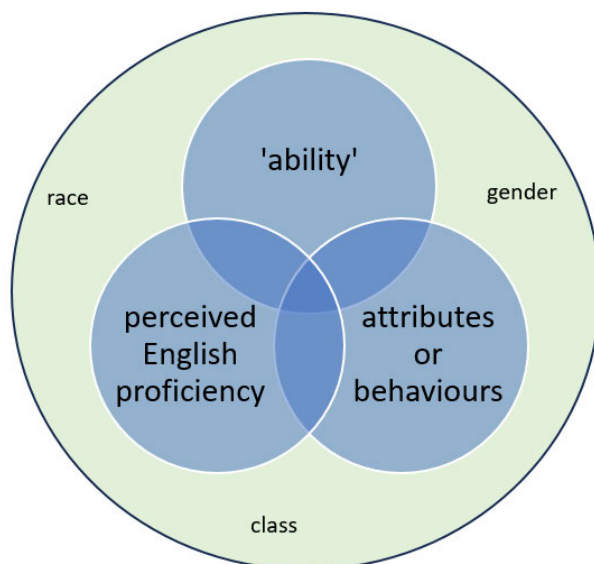
Two of these sets of storylines ('ability' and attributes/behaviours) are considered in Sections 8.2.1 and 8.2.2, expanding upon discussions already explored in literature (Archer and Francis 2007; Bradbury 2013; Gillborn 1990; Youdell 2006). They illuminate the analysis of classroom interactions, enabling the positioning moves of LeBron, Jamal, Daniella and Gabriela to be understood as a process of identity work whereby they position themselves, or are positioned, in (dis)alignment with storylines around their perceived intelligence, agency, classroom visibility and audibility, and success.

However, their experiences as located in the data suggest that for EAL learners a third set of storylines is helpful, to consider the role of linguistic assimilation in the construction of

'ideal', expressed through their perceived English proficiency. This third perspective and its contribution to establish a model of the *ideal EAL learner* is the focus of Section 8.2.3.

8.2.1 'Ability'

LeBron expresses concern that his lack of fluency is interpreted as a lack of intelligence and Daniella fears speaking with errors (Sections 4.2 and 6.4), concerns which have been noted in other studies with emergent multilinguals (Evans et al. 2016; Safford and Costley 2008) and examinations of school practices, most strikingly that of placing EAL learners in Special Educational Needs provision (Arnot et al. 2014; Cummins 2000; Foley, Sangster and Anderson 2013; Gillborn and Youdell 2000; Institute of Education 2009). The association between ('Standard') English proficiency and perceived intelligence has a deeply racialised dimension, historically and currently, including through the practices of OFSTED (Cushing and Snell 2023; Welply 2023). While WMS EAL staff take pains to assess newly-arrived learners and place them accurately in sets according to their abilities in Maths and Science, the data also shows a deficit-orientation in the language used by some non-EAL specialist staff about emergent multilinguals, such as talk about learners being 'diagnosed' with or 'breaking free' of EAL (Sections 5.4 and 6.5). This characterisation of highly-proficient Standardised English, associated with 'ability' and a socially-dominant white middle class, as the only legitimate way for an 'able' learner to speak, is a language-oriented racialisation of multilingual learners (Mitchell 2013; Welply 2023) which sits uneasily alongside the efforts of the EAL department.

Despite her concerns, Daniella is consistently positioned as having innate 'ability', both in moment-to-moment interactions and through third-order positioning in the way that staff speak about her (Section 6.5). Jamal is likewise positioned (Section 5.2), and this affords them both regular opportunities to be recognised as *learners* and *explainers* (Wood 2013) of subject content. LeBron and Gabriela find more limited opportunities available, restricted to lessons with specific staff members (Sections 4.2 and 7.8) where they can negotiate such powerful learning positions. More usually, particularly Gabriela, they are positioned as *menial workers* (Wood 2013) on the periphery of learning, with restricted rights to speak and less cognitively-demanding tasks (Sections 7.2–7.3). They are, conversely to Daniella

and Jamal, often third-order positioned as lacking in 'ability' in the way that staff speak about them and through institutional positioning such as their placement in lower-ability sets (Section 4.8) and, in the case of Gabriela, comments about possible Special Educational Needs (Section 7.6). Their failure to thrive within the exam-focused system is attributed to lack of perceived innate characteristics including intelligence, and this failure is located within themselves, their families and communities (Sections 4.8 and 7.7), rather than within the education system.

WMS, like all schools, needs to prioritise resources. This study witnesses such decision-making in terms of how much support newly-arrived learners receive, and which learners are left to 'sink or swim' (Section 6.1) in a reflection of the findings of Gillborn and Youdell (2000) about educational triage. Jamal and Daniella, who are believed likely to reach national benchmarks in exams, are offered additional support (Sections 5.2 and 6.5). In moment-to-moment interactions, they are drawn into positions with more powerful rights to speak, by interactive teacher positioning moves. They are aligned with storylines around success, ascribed value (Devine 2013) in terms of their potential contribution to school measures of success and future contributions to society. Their positionings are mutually constitutive with storylines: as they co-construct identities in alignment with *ideal learner* storylines, those storylines are reinforced and revitalised.

Meanwhile, LeBron and Gabriela fail to be recognised as valuable human capital in the marketplace of the school system because their attempts to position themselves do not align with dominant storylines around 'ability' and success. Neither are offered the additional support which Daniella and Jamal enjoy. Indeed, they are excluded from mainstream learning in line with their 'needs': Gabriela is reassigned to EAL intervention (Section 7.8) while LeBron is excluded from school because of his disruption to classes (Section 4.8). Their 'ability' is held in doubt and their intelligibility as an ideal learner is thus obstructed; instead, their identities sediment over time into the *troublesome* and *impossible kinds* of learner.

8.2.2 Attributes or behaviours

In lessons, LeBron pushes to make visible his learning needs, in a way which differentiates him from Jamal, Daniella and Gabriela. While all four young people demonstrate frustration at their deficit positionings, LeBron repeatedly challenges his invisibility as an emergent multilingual and his frustration, openly expressed, leads to being positioned moment-to-moment as disruptive (Section 4.4), and, over time, a meso-identity as a troublesome *kind* of learner (Section 4.8). Daniella and Jamal also advocate for themselves, but their self-advocacy is carried out in ways which align closely with dominant institutional and local values, such as showing compliance, eagerness, curiosity, helpfulness and taking the initiative: attributes of the ideal learner (Archer and Francis 2007; Youdell 2006).

Being visible, exercising agency in pushing for opportunities to develop proficiency and content knowledge, is part of the ideal *kind* of EAL learner only when it is *visible-in-the-right-way*, as exemplified by Jamal's and Daniella's undemanding and non-disruptive positioning moves (Sections 5.3, 6.2, 6.3). Crucially, their alignment to idealness is not merely a way that Jamal and Daniella can be described, but an ongoing process of mutual constitution whereby staff operationalise dominant notions of idealness to evaluate their behaviour, moment-to-moment, as previously observed by Youdell 2006 and Gillborn 1990. Viewed through the lens of PT, the *ideal learner* model provides a set of storylines about behaviour, and participants position themselves in relation to the storylines, which in turn challenges or reproduces those storylines within the moral order (Depperman 2015; Herbel-Eisenmann et al. 2015) of the classroom.

LeBron's travails, however, are not so much against the classroom moral order as a struggle to be part of it (Davies and Hunt 1994). He pushes to highlight his language needs, and he demands access to the tools which will recognise his voice as legitimate within the storylines of his classrooms (Safford and Costley 2008). However, in England, for the last fifty years the goal of EAL policy has been to render multilingual learners invisible. Five decades ago, new arrivals were expected to adapt, assimilate, and 'become "invisible", a truly integrated member of the school community […] as soon as possible' (Derrick 1977:16). The national policy of mainstreaming EAL learners, along with the reduction of available support, reinforces this storyline. In WMS, close to 80% of the learners are multilingual and so, while

individual learners might need additional support for a short period of time, the expectation is that they will assimilate quickly (Section 6.1). The EAL label, applied to emerging multilinguals as well as to the fully proficient in English, renders invisibility the norm and so LeBron's insistence on visibility, his storyline of what a good learner is, does not align with the dominant storyline at all whereas Jamal's and Daniella's claimed positions as quiet and undemanding render them *visible-in-the-right-way*, blending into rather than challenging the system.

Race is a factor here. LeBron is of Black African heritage but arrived from France. He identifies closely with dominant Black youth subculture (Alexander 2016), which manifests itself in his acquisition of MBE, his peer choices, the foregrounding of his passion for basketball and which he embodies in actions such as slouching and clothes styling choices (Section 4.6). His everyday self-positioning as part of this subculture enables him to negotiate leadership within his peer group and offers him protection (Mac an Ghaill 1988), but teachers tend to interpret his positionings less as resistance to invisibility and more as challenges to their authority, a threat (Gillborn 1990; Mac an Ghaill 1988; Maylor 2015; Youdell 2003, 2006). Jamal, who is Black African, arrived from Cameroon and this affords him a different racialised learner identity (Youdell 2003), buoyed by comparatively high Black African attainment data (Demie 2021). His efforts at classroom participation are less likely to be positioned as disruptive than those of LeBron; indeed, while LeBron's quiet classroom talking is judged as a challenge to authority (Extract 4.6 in Section 4.5), that of Jamal is appreciated by teachers (Extract 5.2 in Section 5.3).

Previous scholarship suggests that racially minoritised learners cannot be viewed as ideal, a position which is reserved for white learners (Archer and Francis 2007; Bradbury 2013). Nevertheless, findings of this study suggest that Jamal, like Daniella, positions himself and is positioned by others in ways which closely approximate the ideal. Bradbury (2013) has argued that the success of minoritised learners is delegitimised through its attribution to family and community and this is reflected in the findings of this study (e.g. Section 6.6). However, the data shows that it is more often attributed to Jamal and Daniella's own perceived behaviours and 'ability' (Section 8.2.1), and this challenges the current model. It might be that Jamal and Daniella, newly-arrived from contexts where different storylines about idealness may have been in play, encounter through their interactions spaces in

which to co-position themselves as ideal. It may also be that WMS, with its high proportion of staff and learners from minoritised backgrounds, provides a fruitful context for such negotiations of the *ideal EAL learner* identity.

Gabriela and Daniella demonstrate a quietness in class which is not only characteristic of the *ideal learner* but of the 'good immigrant' (Kam 2021). Nevertheless, while Daniella's silence is interpreted as innate shyness by her mainstream teachers or, by Magda, as a temporary and natural Silent Period of language acquisition (Bifield 2019; Krashen 1981; NALDIC 2008) (Section 6.4), Gabriela's is interpreted as non-participation, a lack of curiosity or willingness to learn (Section 7.2), signs that she is an *impossible* learner (Youdell 2006). Learners, it seems, must be not only *visible-in-the-right-way* but *quiet-for-the-right-reasons*. While the attributes which are assigned to each girl are undoubtably gendered, their quietness rendering them intelligible as girls and learners (Archer and Francis 2007), their potential to add value is assessed differently.

Daniella's silence, although noted by her teachers, does not render her invisible. Her knowledge of and adherence to classroom expectations such as producing apparently independent work (Section 6.3) enables her to co-position as successful, while Gabriela's survival strategies, relying on interpretation and copying, lead to marginal positionings as a *menial worker* (Wood 2013). Moreover, Gabriela's strategies are rarely challenged by teachers, although both she and they recognise the harm they do to her learning opportunities (Section 7.5). Rather, because they enable her to appear as if she is learning, they function as 'hygiene resources' (Mackay 1993) for staff, enabling them to maintain pedagogical flow without interruption.

This assessment of quietness is not a neutral process but intersects with storylines about race. Gabriela, regardless of self-positioning, is positioned as Roma by staff and (in primary school) peers in their interactions and in conversations about her. Her absences from school, non-participation in remote learning, and family situation are interpreted in alignment with storylines about Roma learners, and the low expectations of her teachers both reflect those storylines and, in her moment-to-moment positioning as *impossible*, unworthy of staff time or effort, re-create them (Section 7.7).

Daniella, meanwhile, similarly to Jamal, is racialised in such a way as to be compatible with the *ideal EAL learner*. Her behaviours are viewed through the racialised and gendered identity of the idealised Asian girl learner (Section 6.4), whose passivity and obedience makes her success intelligible to teachers and the school. Daniella's experiences demonstrate also the precarity of the 'ideal' identity for minoritised learners (Archer and Francis 2007; Bradbury 2013): aligned with storylines about Asian Minority and feminine behaviours she is Other, while positioned as acquiescent and obedient she is ideal (Archer and Francis 2007). The identity she can negotiate moment-to-moment, as Other or ideal, reflects to which of the storylines interactants, particularly her teachers, orient in an interaction and how the storylines interact with each other (Herbel-Eisenmann et al. 2015; Kayı-Aydar 2019) (Sections 6.4–6.5).

The positions which the four young people co-construct afford them opportunities to acquire English and learn curriculum content which differ substantially in quantity and quality. Jamal and Daniella are drawn into classroom interactions through teacher nomination, teachers regularly check on their progress during the lessons, and they are offered out-of-class additional support. This gives them a steady route from newcomer to old-timer status within the communities of practice of each classroom (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998). LeBron, meanwhile, is not only excluded from school for a while, but often feels excluded within lessons by teachers who are not interested in his progress (Section 4.3), while Gabriela is generally simply ignored (Section 7.2). The interactions which LeBron does have are frequently about 'disruptive' behaviour (e.g. Extract 4.6 in Section 4.5) rather than to co-create more constructive learning positions, and these are limited in terms of their potential for learning.

Perhaps the biggest contrast in the data is within Gabriela's interactional opportunities. Whilst in most lessons she negotiates very few rights to speak, when she begins working with a learning mentor for EAL interventions, she is suddenly afforded new positions as an engaged, multilingual, capable learner (Section 7.8), and this generates a far richer seam of opportunities for comprehensible input and output. This offers the clearest evidence that positioning in classrooms can and does impact curriculum learning and language acquisition for multilingual learners, evidence which is still in its infancy (Kayı-Aydar 2019).

8.2.3 Negotiating perceived English proficiency

What is missing, I argue, from the established *ideal learner* model is consideration of whether, and how, learners of emerging English proficiency can co-position as ideal, or whether their perceived 'deficiencies' in terms of linguistic and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986, 1991) disbar them. I therefore propose a third set of storylines: those associated with linguistic assimilation, expressed through learners' perceived English proficiency (see Figure 8.1 in Section 8.2). As with perceptions of learners' 'ability', behaviours and attributes, English language proficiency is socially constructed in a classed, gendered and raced way, and for newly-arrived multilingual participants this constitutes a significant part of the storylines within which they co/re-construct their learner identity and access learning opportunities.

WMS has robust systems for assessing new arrivals' English language proficiency; it uses the A–E levels system (DfE 2016) to summarise this and subsequent English language progress. Nevertheless, proficiency is locally-negotiated in ways which sometimes conflict with the institutional assessment. Previously Martin-Beltrán (2010) demonstrated how the perceived proficiency of a multilingual learner was co-constructed with her peers and teachers, and how it impacted her learning opportunities. Smith (2022) showed the power of the teacher to position a multilingual learner of Maths in the USA as a competent communicator and challenge storylines about deficit amongst EAL learners. The analysis in this study supports these previous findings and further shows that the social construction of English proficiency is a locally messy process, with negotiations differing significantly between classroom contexts. Furthermore, negotiations are reciprocally contextualised by local storylines about 'ability', attributes and behaviours.

These proficiency positionings emerge through the interactions which learners have with teaching staff and peers, in accordance with PT's immanentist understanding of micro-identities (Davies and Harré 1990). For example, Maths and Science teachers make creative use of Initiation-Response-Evaluation (IRE) sequences with Daniella to scaffold and extend her limited contributions, positioning her as a competent *explainer* of curricular content (Section 6.2), while in English lessons, the questions she is asked severely curtail opportunities to establish herself as a communicator (Section 6.4). When participants are

positioned as competent developing users of English, this creates opportunities within the interaction for more active lesson participation and deeper engagement with content: they are invited and enabled to move from the periphery of learning (Lave and Wenger 1991) towards the centre. Gabriela's perceived incompetence, on the other hand, banishes her to the possibility of 'thousands of hours on the periphery: uninvolved, disenchanted' (Pye 1988:87), and it is only in her third year in WMS that she begins to move from the periphery to the centre (Section 7.8). It seems that participants' linguistic assimilation through achieved identities as 'proficient' impacts their co-construction as 'able' or valuable learners, worthy of investment, and thus affects their learning opportunities.

However, proficiency is not just about language skills, but also meeting the expectations of the local moral order. This moral order informs the dominant storylines in an interaction (Depperman 2015; Herbel-Eisenmann et al. 2015). There are storylines operating at the local level in WMS about suitable and unsuitable ways to use language which meet the teacher's expectations, and so, for instance, LeBron's attempts to use an iPad in Science lessons to find ways to verbalise his Science knowledge are reclassified as cheating and his proposed self-positioning as an engaged, knowledgeable Science learner is not accepted (Section 4.3).

All four young people sometimes challenge the proficiency positions they are offered, and propose different possibilities. Daniella cuts across her English teacher's question to show her early comprehension, that she can do more than she is given to do (Extract 6.4 in Section 6.4); Gabriela volunteers rehearsed answers in a Citizenship class (Extract 7.4 in Section 7.3); Jamal pushes his early Maths calculations onto the teacher and explains them to the class (Extract 5.1 in Section 5.2). They seek to make their competence visible in creative and dynamic communication acts. Again, these acts align, or fail to align, with the storylines in the classrooms: they have a difficult balance to strike between challenging the positions they are offered and participating in 'troublesome' ways, such as Gabriela's strategy of copying written work from her friend (Section 7.2).

Within social constructionist and social interactionist perspectives, opportunities to interact with others are key to language acquisition and learning. Learners need access not only to comprehensible input (Krashen 1981) but also to situations where they can produce comprehensible output and negotiate meaning, both of which are key to language learning (Gass 2003; Long 1996; Swain 1985), such as those observed between Gabriela and Karolina,

or LeBron in Maths (Sections 4.2 and 7.8). Sometimes, the young people attempt to use multilingual and multimodal resources to produce comprehensible output or negotiate meaning: LeBron recruits his peers to help with his wordsearches and makes use of French cognates (e.g. Extract 4.2 in Section 4.2), Gabriela rehearses output with her friend and likewise uses Romanian cognates (e.g. Extract 7.9 in Section 7.8), Jamal, Daniella and Gabriela mouth answers or verbalise them *sotto voce* (e.g. Extract 5.2 in Section 5.3). Where they are enabled to do this, it affords them ways to progress their language learning as well as participate more fully in the life of the mainstream classroom.

Additionally, negotiated proficiency positions influence the quantity and quality of interactions with the teacher to which they are invited or accepted, and the range of interactants on offer. Gabriela, positioned as a non-speaker in most mainstream lessons, is limited to speaking with just one friend, in Romanian (Section 7.3), until, after a moment of crisis via an embarrassing incident, she reconstructs herself as a more proficient speaker, upon which she is set to work with different peers, and some of those interactions grow into out-of-lesson friendships (Section 7.8), an important social process in her language acquisition. LeBron, by contrast, negotiates rights to speak much earlier, and works with a wider range of English-speaking peers (Section 4.6), enhancing his opportunities for English language development in and out of classes.

Just as with teacher interactions, the negotiation of meaning with peers is rendered (im)possible by the positions which learners have available within interactions. This is not about using a particular language with peers, although there is research which demonstrates the benefits of classroom translanguaging for EAL learners (e.g. Cummins 2021) and of mixed-language friendship groups (Evans et al. 2016). Rather, this is about the positions, with their associated distributions of rights and obligations, which peer interactions can enable. Jamal's peers in RE discuss the work with him, but in Catering they find his utterances laughable (Section 5.5), while LeBron yields storytelling rights to him as a more competent spokesperson (Section 5.6). In each of these incidents Jamal claims or is allocated distinct positions in terms of his identity as a communicator and the consequences are evident even within the same interactional sequences, in terms of his further rights to speak. For both Jamal and LeBron these incidents speak to more than language proficiency; they index their positions within the hierarchy of belonging (Phoenix 2011), a negotiation of

newcomer/old-timer rights which serves to mark newly-arrived learners as not-yet-belonging (Talmy 2010) (Sections 4.7 and 5.5).

The linguistic capital (Bourdieu 1991) of the four young people has some, limited, value in the marketplace of mainstream classes: LeBron and Jamal's French enables them to access French GCSEs, and Daniella Spanish lessons. All four use their languages to build social capital in the form of friendships, and in the case of Gabriela, teacher relationships (Section 7.8). In EAL intervention classes, the use of multilingual resources is encouraged. Nevertheless, their 'deficient' English language capital carries a storyline, in a strongly monolingual education system, of a barrier to learning. This storyline influences moment-to-moment positionings, such as when Jamal's Catering teacher refers to the two EAL learners in her classroom as 'the other' (Extract 5.4 in Section 5.4), a challenging choice of words which exemplifies Welply's (2023) examination of the Othering and racialisation of EAL learners through an association between linguistic capital, deficit, and persistent, historically-based notions of intellectual capacity. Gabriela's linguistic capital is strongly racialised: because she is positioned as a Romani speaker, she is ascribed a Roma identity which she resists but which impacts the positions offered to her based on assumptions about her engagement, motivation and academic success (Section 7.7).

EAL staff express concern about certain teachers pushing emergent multilinguals to the back of the class (Section 4.3), a visible enactment of the process of educational triage on the grounds of English 'competence'. There is a meso-level storyline in WMS that it is the job of every teacher to support language development, which reflects a wider policy position, whereby EAL expertise at school and local authority level has been defunded in favour of a narrative that all teachers must support EAL learning within a mainstream environment (DfE 2012; DfE 2014; Leung 2016). However, this has led to the erasure of learners' ethnolinguistic identities as their language needs are conflated with those of monolingual English learners (Costley 2014; Leung 2016). Moreover, confidence and knowledge around EAL teaching, including the many different types of EAL learner, is uneven across the country and within individual schools (Evans et al. 2016; Institute of Education 2009), including WMS. Although there is robust, informed provision in some classrooms, in others, storylines persist either that emergent multilinguals do not need specific support or that, if they do, it is not the job of the mainstream teacher to provide it. With limited knowledge,

confidence, time, and resources for teachers focused on their subject curriculum, an ideal *kind* of EAL learner is one who can cope with minimal, if any, mainstream teacher support.

Research on the social construction of English 'proficiency' is limited, although in the English EAL context there is much about the importance of accurate, ongoing assessment, which is undeniably important. This study suggests that, as previously found by Martin-Beltrán (2010) and Smith (2022), how teachers, learners and peers co-construct proficiency impacts on the social, academic, and language-learning possibilities which are created or closed down to EAL learners. This study additionally identifies ways of becoming proficient which align with storylines around the right sort of visibility, and which then enable the learner to be intelligible as an ideal *kind* of EAL learner, and ways which do not align, which can disbar them from idealness.

Storylines about 'ability', behaviour and other attributes provide a framework for interpretation at micro and meso levels of the positioning work that the young people undertake in approximating the *ideal learner*. However, I have argued here that the experiences of these participants suggest that these sets of storylines are insufficient, even restrictive. They do not provide a way to understand the construction of English proficiency as a measure of 'ideal' assimilation to the linguistic landscape of the school, or the local moral order of how participants advocate for their multilingualism and the support they need. Newly-arrived learners bring with them alternative storylines about idealness which are perhaps not limited to white, middle-class, speakers of 'Standard' English, and seek to negotiate for themselves positions which align to the ideal. To understand the experiences of newly-arrived EAL learners, I have suggested a third set of storylines, focused on linguistic assimilation, which creates the *ideal EAL learner*. Like the *ideal learner*, however, this is negotiated within wider societal expectations and storylines which are evident in policy and media. This chapter now turns to those macro interpretations: namely, to meritocracy, Model Minorities, and the 'good immigrant'.

8.3 Meritocracy and the EAL Model Minority: majoritarian stories

It takes learners an average of six years to gain the necessary academic English proficiency (Cummins 1981; Demie 2013) for successful engagement with the language of GCSE exams but Jamal had just two years, Daniella four, and LeBron four and a half. Gabriela had six, and her experiences as shown in the data illustrate the huge impact that additional factors can have on that six-year average. Success in GCSE exams and their equivalents depends on assimilating to the language of teaching and assessment, English, and to the culture of the curriculum, which is both white and middle-class. Late-arrival multilingual learners may lack time to acquire the specific cultural and linguistic capital necessary to attain well (Tikly 2022; Welply 2023) in the limited time after arrival in England before being examined. It is therefore a nonsense to claim the level playing field of the meritocracy storyline; in a monolingual and monocultural education system (Cushing and Snell 2023; Welply 2023) learners who display the 'unwanted characteristics' (Levitas 2005:188) of lesser-valued linguistic and cultural capital are excluded. Gabriela's perceived Roma identity and slow acquisition of English constitute such unwanted characteristics, as do LeBron's self-positioning within Black youth subculture and his challenges to the positions assigned to him.

Nevertheless, all four participants appear to internalise the storylines around meritocracy which circulate within WMS and education more widely (Mijs and Savage 2020; Reay 2020); although LeBron appears to be very aware of the uneven playing field on which he operates, he is the only learner-participant to directly voice this (Section 4.7). All the young people in this study speak about their determination to work hard and be good at their curriculum studies. The meritocratic storyline has appeal in that it appears to put agency in the hands of young people who may feel a particular level of disempowerment and loss of identity brought about by their circumstances in and out of school (Safford and Costley 2008; Wallace 2011).

Meritocracy is a majoritarian story, a way of understanding EAL learners' trajectory which centralises white, monolingual, middle-class education and its values and beliefs (Mitchell 2013). It is integral to storylines surrounding Model Minorities (MM), reifying notions of success which depend on perceived 'ability' combined with hard work, the epitome of the wider social construct of the 'good immigrant' (Shukla 2021). This study argues that EAL learners are positioned within a macro-storyline of an *EAL Model Minority*, who overachieve

in national exams compared with the general learner population. Their success is often portrayed in terms of resilience, assimilation and hard work (e.g. BBC 2018; White 2020) which feeds into wider social and political debates about immigration in Britain today (Evans et al. 2020). Politicians, the media and wider society struggle to reach a consensus between the need for migrant labour and international students for economic benefits, and the reconciliation of high immigration figures with ongoing debates about 'Britishness'. In this context, while sections of the press, politicians and wider society worry about the availability of education resources for 'white British' children (Evans et al. 2020), EAL learners who demand little of schools but generate high GCSE results and therefore potential to the national labour market are positioned as of high human capital value.

Every MM serves the purposes of the white majority (Gillborn 2008; Wu 2014). The central *EAL MM* storyline is that of academic success: multilingual learners attain more highly than non-EAL learners at age sixteen while learning English in 'inclusive' mainstream environments. The storyline serves the majority group by 'justifying' government policies which have led to the withdrawal of funding, training, and expertise (Section 2.2.2). MM myths are accused of ignoring realities, in particular the differences between learners' experiences of education (Wing 2007; Wong 2015). The *EAL MM* homogenises EAL learners by ignoring the considerable under-attainment of late-arrival learners. Gabriela and LeBron are unlikely to contribute positively to exams data, but their under-attainment is invisibilised by the headline figures. Like the 25% of MM British Indian and Chinese learners who fail to attain benchmark measures (Wong 2015), the needs of less successful EAL learners are hidden by headlines about success, as was previously noted by Choudry (2018), creating a 'very difficult educational climate' (Wong 2015:742) for those who are not high achievers.

Conversely, Daniella and Jamal comprise that sector of EAL learners who 'pull up' the grades at WMS (Section 5.7) and nationally, but despite appearing to be successful EAL learners, they express frustration at their limited opportunities to progress (Section 6.4) and anxiety about the pressure to succeed (Section 5.8). This suggests that, hidden within the MM storyline of group success, their individual success is under-realised, a worry about EAL learners previously expressed by Hutchinson (2018); by aiming for a national benchmark, we overlook the potential of EAL learners, homogenising them all to a national average.

Storylines about an *EAL MM* thus invisibilise the potential success of weak and strong learners alike.

MM thinking decentralises race; indeed, it serves as 'evidence' that racism does not exist in English education (Gillborn 2008; Tikly 2022; see also e.g. Ehsan 2022). Yet this study suggests that 'race' and ethnicity, including ethno-linguistic discrimination, play an important role in the co-construction of learner identities for all four participants. Learners are praised and rewarded for assimilating to majority culture, attitudes, and beliefs; indeed, assimilation is equated with success (Mitchell 2013). While LeBron successfully negotiates membership and leadership of his peer group within the school subculture of Black masculinity, his social assimilation is frowned upon because it is to a Black subculture rather than the white Anglo-centric norms of English education (Section 4.6). By contrast, Jamal's acquiescence to the dominant values and norms of the community of practice is evidenced in his moment-to-moment interactions, as is its validation by staff members (Section 5.3). Most jarringly, Gabriela's prolonged absences from school and apparent disinterest in learning English are attributed to an ascribed Roma identity (Section 7.7), indexing wider racist storylines about the marginal status and 'refusal' to assimilate of Roma people (Matras, Howley and Jones 2020). These complex negotiations of barriers erected by constructions of race, ethnicity, and linguistic identity are erased by an *EAL MM* framework, enabling schools and governments to continue to insist that they operate in a 'colour-blind' understanding of 'equality' and 'inclusion' (Tikly 2022).

Linguistic ethnographies offer opportunities to understand scale and the dissolution of the linguistic/non-linguistic binary in research (Rampton 2006), as close-lens interactional data is contextualised within wider-lens ethnographic observation and interviews. The *ideal EAL learner* and *EAL MM* are ways to understand scale within this study, viewed through the perspective of PT. The four young people co-position with peers and staff in ways which align more or less closely with storylines surrounding an *ideal EAL learner*: success through the right kind of visibility, 'ability', and linguistic assimilation. The storylines reflect and reinforce a wider *EAL MM*, which depends on meritocracy for its intelligibility. With each communication act, each classroom interaction, these storylines are reciprocally challenged, or re-created, renewing themselves in ever-negotiated and negotiable ways (see Figure 2.3

in Section 2.4.2). It is this negotiation of identity which creates spaces for the young people to petition for recognition as *ideal EAL learners*, recognition which may or may not come.

8.4 Imagined Communities

The four learners position themselves as current or prospective members of Imagined Communities (IC) (Kanno and Norton 2003; Norton 2001; Pavlenko and Norton 2007). I propose that ICs function as a counter-story (Delgado and Stefancic 2023), a challenge to meritocratic and *EAL MM* storylines about success for multilingual learners. These dominant but etic storylines, aligning success with 'becoming British' and linguistic assimilation, are shared by learners to an extent, but do not encapsulate a wide enough vision. While school staff triage newly-arrived learners in line with institutional demands of projected exam success, the learners themselves envision success in terms of their membership of transnational, multilingual, professional communities (Kanno and Norton 2003). The concept of ICs amongst multilingual learners challenges majoritarian understandings of 'success' in mainstream settings, in the same way that thinking about 'diasporic locals' has challenged assimilationist narratives about identity and integration (Peutrell and Cooke 2019; see also Section 2.3.6).

These two abstract communities, the majoritarian MM and the counter-story of the IC, push and pull against each other in complex and shifting ways, as the young people co- or re-construct identities to position themselves in relation to the different storylines about success. For instance, Jamal recognises the importance of learning academic English *and* self-positions as multilingual (Section 5.6); he works hard for English school qualifications (Extract 5.10 in Section 5.7) *and* envisions an eventual return to Cameroon to practise medicine. Their life routines take place over national borders, such as LeBron's orthodontist appointments in France and Gabriela's family trips to Romania. They outline career choices which use their multilingual resources and unfold in England and elsewhere (Sections 4.7, 5.6 and 7.5). These imagined career paths are successful within the terms of dominant society: LeBron's basketball, Gabriela's midwifery or teaching, Jamal's medicine and Daniella's law. In many ways, therefore, the push-and-pull of majoritarian and counter-

storylines of success at this meso-level reflects the wider complexity and nuance of the identity negotiations undertaken by diasporic locals.

At both scales, the creativity and agility of diasporic responses is harnessed as a mechanism of agency rather than mere romanticism (van de Vijver et al. 2015). Here, the participants signal their measures of success, namely being recognised and allowed to speak as young people with multilingual, plurilocal, professional aspirations (Norton 2001), as a way to assert their agency, flag their multilingualism as an asset, and challenge the normative measures of success within WMS. The data in this study show that peers regularly recognise their friends in these terms, for example the exchange that LeBron and Jamal have about Jamal's Science capabilities and future plans (Extract 5.9 in Section 5.6), Daniella's positioning by her family and friends as a persuasive speaker (Section 6.4), and LeBron's position as a key player on the school basketball team which gives him considerable social and cultural capital amongst peers.

However, it is when participants are afforded positions in the classroom which enable them to speak as recognised members of the IC that opportunities unfold to participate in learning (Norton 2001). For instance, when LeBron's French or Gabriela's Romanian language skills are recognised and used in the classroom, they speak from a multilingual position, one of strength rather than of linguistic deficit (Section 4.2 and Extract 7.9 in Section 7.8). Jamal is positioned as a Science and Maths-oriented learner (e.g. Section 5.2), Daniella's almost-invisible love of speaking persuasively is nurtured by a teacher (Extract 6.5 in Section 6.4). In the EAL department, living between two or more countries is normalised (e.g. Extract 4.11 in Section 4.7). Such recognitions afford the young people chances to interact with rich language input and produce comprehensible output, negotiate meaning, and thereby enhance both English acquisition and curriculum learning.

Nevertheless, such recognitions are not commonplace in the experiences captured in this data. More usually, there is an overwhelming focus on academic progress and exam results within the local context, a focus which the young people share even while it intimidates them (e.g. Extract 5.11 in Section 5.8). These exams are focused on an assumed 'Britishness' (Cunningham and Little 2022; Phoenix 2011), reflecting a wider storyline that prioritises assimilation to a British identity and fails to take into account a transnational identity (Welply 2023; Yuval-Davis, Anthias and Kofman 2005), just as the exams and underpinning

curriculum fail to take into account the multilingual, multicultural nature of Britishness (Szymczyk, Popan and Arun 2022; Tikly 2022). While WMS makes great efforts to include newly-arrived learners through its dedicated EAL department staff and procedures, and the hard work of its teaching staff, findings suggest that staff assumptions about success align with these wider storylines. The data also indicates that learners additionally position their success in alignment with transnational and multilingual storylines, centred on being recognised as members of an IC, which may only partially dovetail with staff assumptions.

There is thus a tension between the two imaginary concepts. There are commonalities, particularly the focus on success and ambition, and the young people recognise that to realise their plans they need to learn English and gain qualifications. One concept, however, is a majoritarian story, told by dominant groups about minoritised EAL learners in order to serve neoliberal educational ideology about the capital value of learners and of assimilation to 'Britishness'. The other is a counter-story, told by the learners about themselves and their visions of their lives: past, present and future. It is a story where they do not just survive school, but thrive.

8.5 Summary

This chapter has drawn out themes which cross-cut the four chapters of analysis. It demonstrates that visibility, agency and success are key themes in the data which comprise storylines told about EAL learners. The concept of the *ideal learner* is used to frame these storylines, and a third set of storylines is suggested for the *ideal EAL learner*, that of constructed language proficiency and willingness to assimilate. LeBron, Jamal, Daniella and Gabriela strive to varying degrees, through positioning work, to be recognised as *ideal EAL learners*. They align themselves with meritocratic thinking, placing value on their hard work and highlighting their ability to be seen in such terms, but their attempts to be recognised as ideal vary greatly in outcome.

This study suggests that there is an *EAL Model Minority*, an imaginary construct which reifies headline data about EAL success, serving the majority culture by allowing racism to be sidelined as an explanatory factor for success or failure and 'justifying' a lack of investment

in EAL learners. Like all MM myths it fails to recognise the very real disparities between the experiences and achievements of different EAL learners, or the work they undertake to resist assigned positions and negotiate the opportunities they need to participate fully in communities of practice. It is challenged by the emic construct of the IC, an alternative view of success where learners envision futures which embrace their multilingualism and transnationalism. In this chapter, I argue that recognising learners as members of their IC enriches their opportunities to learn and values their humanity.

Chapter 9 is the conclusion. It summarises the findings and contributions to knowledge of this study, before considering the implications and opportunities for EAL practitioners, schools, policy-makers and researchers.

9. Conclusion

9.1 Overview

This closing chapter summarises the thesis, draws together answers to the research questions, articulates the original contributions of the study, and explores its implications. It brings together findings and analysis and locates them within the conceptual models of ideal learner, meritocracy and the Model Minority (MM), and Imagined Communities (ICs) (Sections 9.3–9.4). This is framed theoretically by Positioning Theory (PT). Implications of the study are explored for research, policy, practice, and wider discussions around multilingual learners and contemporary British education (Section 9.5). Finally, there are two closing sections of reflections on the research process (Sections 9.6–9.7), including a discussion of how participation in the study enabled new forms of resistance amongst the learner participants.

9.2 Starting points

This study started from my curiosity as a former secondary school teacher working with late-arrival multilingual learners. I noticed that their educational trajectories and the way they spoke about themselves as learners differed widely. This thesis is a response to that curiosity. It sits within a time of EAL policy poverty, with diminished funding and reduced expertise. More widely, it is contextualised by the domination of neoliberal thinking in British education, where young people are evaluated in terms of the value they add to schools and their potential to add future value to society and the economy. Late-arrival multilingual learners additionally navigate a public debate around immigration, where even the left-leaning media frames immigrants within a neoliberal storyline of economic and social contribution, the 'good immigrant' who assimilates and contributes versus the 'bad immigrant' who drains resources and is Other (Section 2.3.2).

Complexity was a second starting point. Late-arrival learners' lives straddle multilingual, transnational, multi- and transcultural dimensions. Prior and current education systems,

changing socio-economic circumstances, and racialisation as they encounter majoritarian British stories, form confluent forces in their lives. They must negotiate new communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998) in the form of classrooms and peer groups and navigate interactions in those communities. In the flux and flow of this complexity, multilingual late arrivals undertake a continuous process of identity work, which this study reveals through the lens of PT (Sections 2.4.2–2.4.6). The educational context and the complexities of everyday life construct and renew *storylines* or ways in which to understand the world; storylines in turn frame their everyday interactions and the *communication acts* they use to negotiate *positions* in those interactions.

There is a paucity of literature about multilingual late arrivals in mainstream English schools, and their voices are rarely heard (Evans and Liu 2018; Sharples 2017). Much EAL research focuses on attainment, pedagogy, and policy but neglects ideological constructs around mainstreaming (Leung 2018; Welply 2023). Identity literature provides valuable insights as to learners' experiences as part of an education trajectory (Sharples 2017), their ethno-linguistic identity (e.g. Evans and Liu 2018), and social identity (e.g. Wallace 2011). However, their *learner identities* are under-explored, as are their interactions with peers and staff. This study attends to that missing facet, by investigating how learner identities are co-constructed through interactions, and how this relates to notions of success for newly-arrived learners in mainstream school contexts. Specifically, it addresses two research questions:

1. How is the learner identity of late arrival multilingual learners in secondary schools co-constructed through the learners' interactions with staff and peers?

2. How might this relate to constructions of success at school?

In seeking answers to the questions, the study draws together many voices. Centrally-placed are those of the four learner participants (Sections 9.4.1 and 9.6), but there are also the voices of teaching staff at WMS and the external voices of government, media, and wider society. All of these voices interact in the context of multi-scalar storylines about multilingualism, success, and migration, resisting or renewing the storylines moment-to-moment. The following sections summarise findings in relation to identity and success which bring together what I heard and interpreted from these voices.

9.3 Summary of findings centred on analytic tools

9.3.1. Identity

In addressing the first research question, previous work by Wood (2013) and Anderson (2009) was particularly helpful in examining identity at the micro and meso levels. The participants in this study co-construct positions through their interactions with peers and staff in mainstream subject lessons and so I adapted Wood's (2013) terminology of *explainer*, *mathematical student* and *menial worker*. My study expands upon Wood's Maths classroom research and shows that the *explainer* position is sought, offered to, accepted or rejected by learners across the curriculum, through opportunities to explain their understanding of subject content or their thinking processes in class (e.g. Extract 4.1 in Section 4.2). This position carries significant rights and obligations to speak, usually in extended turns or sequences, and it can be scaffolded by teacher turns in the sequence, particularly using the third part of an Initiation-Response-Evaluation (IRE) sequence (e.g. Extract 6.1 in Section 6.2). It may also be scaffolded by peers, and learners may solicit this scaffolding so as to further their explanatory actions by appealing for help in, for example, word searches, as they seek to position themselves as communicatively and academically competent (e.g. Extract 5.3 in Section 5.3). Findings suggest that, at times, an *explainer* may become a *spokesperson*, a micro-identity I extended from Smith's (2022) study of a Maths classroom. A *spokesperson* (self-) nominates to speak on behalf of a group or pair of learners and may concurrently be positioned as a *responsible speaker* (Smith 2022). My findings show that the *spokesperson* position confers a high degree of community ratification of the right to speak, and signifies trust in the learner to accurately convey the understanding and experiences of the group (e.g. Section 5.3; Extract 5.7 in Section 5.6). Occasionally, an *explainer* may even be positioned as a *teacher* (Sections 4.2 and 4.6), a position term I add to those of Wood (2013) and Smith (2022).

The *Maths/Science/Literature (etcetera) learner* position occurs when learners co-construct as actively engaged in content learning in the lesson. Analysis shows this occurring though opportunities such as participating in IRE sequences, answering questions chorally, non-

verbally or *sotto voce*, completing written tasks independently or with support, and receiving feedback on work (e.g. Extract 7.3 in Section 7.3). Less linguistically onerous than the *explainer* position, the *subject learner* position nevertheless carries obligations, rights and duties to speak as part of the community of practice. Findings show that these include more peripheral but legitimised forms of community participation, such as non-verbal responses (e.g. Extract 6.2 in Section 6.3).

The *menial worker* position comprises restricted forms of lesson participation, with reduced rights to speak. The findings show that it is, once again, a co-constructed position which may involve self-positioning by the learner or other-positioning by staff or peers. *Menial workers'* ways to participate consist of cognitively-unchallenging activities such as copying from the board: looking busy but not necessarily learning anything (e.g. Section 7.2). My findings build on those of Wood (2013) and Smith (2022) and I suggest that the social construction of English language proficiency is deeply implicated in the availability of positions within the classroom. This is particularly noticeable regarding the *menial worker* position; when learners are positioned as communicatively incompetent, they are frequently concomitantly positioned as more widely incompetent (e.g. Section 5.4).

Anderson's (2009) tripartite model of PT was instrumental in analysing the relationship between these moment-to-moment identity positions and longer-term, sedimented learner identities, which Anderson (2009:291) calls *kinds* of learners and describes as happening when ephemeral positions 'stick' to people. This study shows that, over time, the participants become known as certain *kinds* of learners which I describe in this study as *troublesome, ideal*, or *impossible*. More than the simple accumulation of positions described by Kayı-Aydar (2014), these meso-level identities are in a constant state of flux as they interact with the cultural and interactional resources available to the learner (Anderson 2009), and this study shows that these change from one situation to another. So it is that Gabriela, for example, can be known as an *impossible kind* of learner in most classrooms, but in her EAL intervention classes she can occupy the dynamic and engaged *subject learner* and *explainer* identities as different interactional resources are made available to her (e.g. Extract 7.10 in Section 7.8).

Storylines are crucial in understanding the multi-level construction of learner identities. There are storylines about EAL learners which circulate at the level of classrooms and the

school, and which mutually constitute with ongoing positioning work as well as with storylines at a wider societal level. There are storylines about visibility and quietness, agency, ability, and success which make different positions available to the participant learners. In each interaction there are often many storylines in play, and these may be consonant with each other, such as the shared meritocracy storyline. However, sometimes learners' storylines, such as those surrounding success within an Imagined Community or social success in youth sub-culture, may clash with dominant storylines about EAL, MMs, and ideal *kinds* of learners. When this happens, learners challenge the positions they are assigned and seek to renegotiate, or self-position and bid to be recognised in positions which cohere with the storylines they understand to be in play.

9.3.2 Success

In addressing the second research question, the conclusions in Section 9.3.1 demonstrate that the identity positions which learners negotiate impact the quality and frequency of opportunities they receive in class to show their understanding of subject content, ask for help, and process content through more complex interactional tasks such as explaining to others. All these opportunities also constitute the chances for rich output and negotiation of meaning which are necessary precursors to language acquisition and, therefore, to their progress in English proficiency. A direct link is therefore suggested by these findings between identity work and opportunities for successful learning.

Over time, those participants who were able to negotiate a meso-identity which aligned more closely with the *ideal EAL learner kind* (Section 8.2) were offered enhanced academic assistance and learning opportunities, while those who were identified as *impossible* or *troublesome* were not. This supports Gillborn and Youdell's (2000) assertion that English schools triage learners to decide how to allocate scarce resources and suggests that triage operates not only in the dimensions of race and class, but also that of multilingualism. While interventions were put into place for all four young people, they differed substantially in the resulting access to the means of exam success, namely subject content and higher-tier exam entry.

The findings also indicate a relationship between identity work and different models of success. Learners and staff alike oriented to themes of meritocracy. Distinctions were made by staff between new arrivals who were predicted to do well in national exams through their hard work and 'ability', and those who may not, but whose negative contribution to school exam results would be compensated for by the more 'successful' multilingual learners. These findings suggest an orientation beyond meritocracy to a wider social myth of an *EAL MM* (Section 8.3): an abstract group who assimilate quickly, work hard to acquire English, and are likely to attain well in national exams, go on to further study, and contribute in recognisable ways to British society.

While staff conceived of success in terms of an *EAL MM*, and both staff and learners recognised storylines of meritocracy and idealness, learners additionally referenced *Imagined Communities* (Section 8.4). They referred to their present realities and future plans as multilingual, transnational, professional and personal lives, spanning time and space. The findings demonstrate a complexity within learners' visions of success which aligns with the wider complexity around diasporic local identities. Their discussions referenced family, friends, opportunities to live and work already happening, and future aspirations. They bid to be recognised in these terms within classrooms and peer groups, with varying levels of success. Thus, learners' conceptions of success, while aligning to some extent with those of staff, encompass a dimension which reaches beyond the neoliberal storyline of merit to include a more humanistic, meaningful vision of their lives. ICs therefore enable the nuance and fluidity of the diasporic local identity to be examined and captured within research and thinking about EAL success, providing a counter-story to the majoritarian stories of 'Britishness' captured within meritocracy and MMs. It recognises their past as well as present and future, with multilingualism and multiculturalism as dimensions of their human rights and capabilities (Bian 2017; Saito 2003), rather than simply means to the human capital-driven value of national exam results.

9.4 Further contributions

There are further contributions to knowledge which fall into three sections: representation, theoretical framework, and methodology.

9.4.1 Representation of an under-researched group

Secondary-school EAL learners are under-researched as a group, and newly-arrived learners even more so. Where there is literature, this is often quantitative and focused on exam outcomes, leaving little space for the voices of the young people to be represented. In a context where EAL learners are increasingly invisibilised in policy, funding, curriculum, and expertise, there is a need to make their experiences audible and visible. This study contributes to amplifying the voice of late-arrival learners in research through its focus on the experiences of four young people and their interpretations of those experiences.

9.4.2 Conceptual gap

PT has previously been used in research to interpret interactions in Maths, Science and second language classrooms. This study uses PT to examine and interpret interactions across different mainstream subject areas for multilingual learners, an application which has very limited precedent (but see Martin-Beltrán 2010) and none in a UK school. It expands Wood's (2013) terminology of identity positions to include more subject areas and reveal a wider range of rights, duties and obligations to speak (Section 9.3.1). This offers new tools to interpret the process of identity co-construction of and by EAL learners within mainstream classrooms for future research. Martin-Beltrán's (2010) work demonstrated that learners are positioned in a process of social construction of their English proficiency; this study makes a link between this, the taxonomy of available learner positions within mainstream subject lessons, and the opportunities to learn both English and subject content.

Studies using PT have been criticised for their neglect of storylines, the failure to acknowledge the complexity of storylines, and the lack of transparency in research studies in showing how storylines are identified in data (Section 2.4.4). This study addresses these criticisms by making the process of storyline identification explicit through thematic and

discourse analysis, while acknowledging that this is an interpretive process. The analysis reveals storylines about EAL learners revolving around visibility, quietness, agency, assimilation, safety, and 'ability'. It contributes these identified storylines to what is known about the ideological contexts within which EAL learners study, the interplay of local expectations and practices with wider socio-political debates around migration and language.

I suggest that storylines often arise in relation to a proposed model, the *ideal EAL learner* (Section 8.2). In this, I build on previous work about ideal learners which takes account of behaviours, attributes and 'ability' in ways which are informed by gender, race, and social class. The results of this study contribute a further dimension to the EAL model, that of perceived English language proficiency. As demonstrated in Section 8.2.3, the identification of perceived proficiency as a key consideration arose from data analysis, and I argue that the intersection of previously-identified markers of idealness with that of perceived proficiency allows the model to be used more usefully with multilingual learners. It takes greater account of their ethno-linguistic capital and, crucially, characterises English language proficiency as socially-constructed.

The imaginary *ideal learner* is white (Archer and Francis 2007; Gillborn 1990; Youdell 2006) and Bradbury (2013) argues that where success is achieved by non-white learners, it is explained away in terms of family support or other factors, not directly attributed to the learners' capabilities. However, in this study we frequently see Jamal and Daniella positioned as closely aligning with an ideal, although neither of them is white. I suggest that some multilingual learners arrive from schooling contexts where a Western European understanding of idealness does not hold; they are minoritised after arrival to the UK but perhaps not in their prior schooling contexts. It may be, I propose, that arriving into the English education system provides a space in which multilingual, racialised learners can challenge dominant ideas around idealness and claim the *ideal* identity in their moment-to-moment positioning moves. The *ideal EAL learner* model which I detail enables such agential identity work to be understood through its incorporation of linguistic capital and linguistic assimilation to prior work around idealness and minoritised learners.

A further conceptual model to which this study contributes is the proposal of an *EAL Model Minority* (Section 8.3). I suggest that UK EAL learners constitute a MM, based on their above-

average attainment scores in national exams at the age of sixteen and the confluence of media narratives about their success with wider national concerns about 'good' immigrants who contribute and assimilate to British society. More usually constructed around a particular minoritised ethnic group, MMs highlight the educational and professional success of specific groups as evidence that barriers to life chances arise from a lack of assimilation, work ethic, or ability, rather than systemic or institutionalised racism. In the same way, the EAL MM functions to 'justify' a lack of investment in EAL learners, even in late arrival learners in secondary school whose relatively poor performance at sixteen is hidden by the headline figures. The myth erases diversity within EAL learners as a group, and removes complexity. It further serves a socio-political purpose by denying the significance of racism in the experiences of EAL learners, a similar function to other MM models. The *EAL MM* is a majoritarian story, told by a monolingual and monocultural education system to claim the successes of EAL learners as its own while hiding and denying responsibility for the underperformance of sections of the EAL learner population. It offers a conceptual model to understand the integration of EAL success into national debates about immigration and the hierarchisation of ethno-linguistically minoritised groups. It offers a framework within which to examine mainstreaming and the withdrawal of policy, funding and expertise about EAL as functions of a macro-level set of storylines about meritocracy and invisibilisation which play out in the everyday lives of late-arrival multilingual learners.

9.4.3 Methodological gap

Conversation Analysis (CA) has a robust history in education-focused studies, and its application to language classrooms is well-documented (e.g. Seedhouse 2004). However, there is a gap in methodology regarding mainstream classrooms and multilingual learners. This study addresses that gap by applying the tools and findings of CA to the mainstream classroom context. The findings show that some of the identified features of language classroom talk occur in mainstream contexts, such as the interactional functions of LeBron's disfluent speech in English Literature classes (Section 4.2). Additionally, findings from general conversation studies occur, such as the use of laughter in group (dis)affiliation (e.g. Extract 5.5 in Section 5.5). Taken together, such findings are instrumental in indicating

participants' orientation to storylines, their positioning moves, and acceptance of or resistance to such moves. Methodologically, this suggests that CA is a useful tool in studies with multilingual learners in mainstream settings.

Linguistic ethnography is a 'slow science' (Van der Aa and Blommaert 2017:260). Spending appreciable time in the research setting meant that there was an unrushed aspect to formal and informal interviews. In the debrief meetings, LeBron and Daniella talked about this as something which had impacted positively on them. They felt they had benefitted from the opportunities to develop their thoughts and share feelings and experiences. It has been claimed before that ethnography and linguistic ethnography are democratic, power-sharing methodologies (e.g. Blommaert and Jie 2010; Hymes 1980) and this study further supports the fruitfulness of linguistic ethnography for participant empowerment (see also Section 9.6).

9.5 Implications and opportunities

This study matters for practitioners, schools, policy-makers, researchers, and wider discussions around multilingualism and migration in relation to education. The following sections highlight the implications of the study and opportunities which it presents.

9.5.1 Practitioners, schools and teacher educators

While I was conducting pupil trails, staff participants often asked me to make recommendations for their practice. There was a desire to do better by their EAL learners. Such guidance fell outside the scope of my researcher role and I felt that the EAL department was better placed to provide it. However, the findings of this study have implications for practice and I offer them in a spirit of critical generosity.

Practitioners and schools should cultivate EAL storylines at a personal, classroom and institutional level which emphasise strength rather than deficit, recognise and are curious about prior learning, and take a positive view of multilingualism. Such storylines make a

greater range of identity positions more freely available to learners (Section 9.3.1). When learners in this study had a wider range of identity positions available in a lesson, they were able to move between them and engage in different ways with content and language. For example, in WMS all learners are carefully assessed on arrival regarding their Maths, Science, and English language levels, and then periodically assessed on new learning in line with normal school procedures. However, there was little evidence of ongoing assessment of prior learning, for instance when starting a new topic. This could simply take the form of a short conversation to find out what the young person already knows. Additionally, when their other languages were valued in lessons and multilingualism positioned as a normal situation, the young people responded very positively and it afforded new identity positions for them, suggesting that these are valuable practices in classrooms and across schools.

The findings revealed the power that teaching staff have to create and make available positions for learners which enable greater participation through more powerful identities. In particular, the third turn in IRE sequences, and post-expansions of those sequences, are highly effective in drawing learners into *explainer* positions. For example, Daniella's Science and Maths teachers use this to position her as somebody who knows and can explain, by asking further questions to draw out detail, mathematical/scientific thinking, or justifications for her initial answers (Section 6.2). These extended IRE sequences scaffold her language by breaking her *explainer* contributions into chunks so that she can voice her thinking one step at a time. The third turn is sometimes used effectively by teachers to revoice contributions and thereby position learners as competent members of the community, as was previously found by Enyedy et al. (2008).

Staff can also make available the *spokesperson* position, where the EAL learner speaks for a group or a pair, by choices made in setting up activities and allocating specific rights and obligations within a group or pair. LeBron was enabled to act as a *spokesperson* when allowed to tutor his peers in Maths, with the right to speak freely (Section 4.2).

Explainer and *spokesperson* are powerful positions which reinforce storylines around communicative competence and proficiency. Gabriela was positioned thus in EAL intervention classes (Section 7.8), which demonstrates that such positions are not limited to those who have considerable English fluency, but that teachers can and should make them available to all learners through skilful positioning work. They make available new ways of

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engaging with language and subject content and move the multilingual learner further from the periphery to active participation as old-timers in the community of practice.

The least active and engaged position is that of the *menial worker*, learners who are restricted to copying and similarly cognitively-limiting activities. Learners positioned as *menial workers* were also seen as communicatively incompetent with fewer rights to speak. Again, staff hold considerable power to create and make available the *subject learner* position rather than the *menial worker*. Jamal and Daniella were able to indicate understanding and participation through non-verbal communication acts or moments of one-to-one attention, Gabriela was allowed to echo or even pre-empt peer contributions out loud, LeBron could, in some lessons, use an iPad to access translation so that he could participate in the same work as the rest of the class (Sections 4.3, 5.3, 6.3 and 7.8).

This study suggests the significance, therefore, of training teachers on the use of the IRE evaluation or feedback turn to make available powerful learner identity positions. There have been previous calls for teacher educators to raise awareness of positioning work (Kayı-Aydar 2019; Martin-Beltrán 2010; Yoon 2008) and the findings of this study support such calls. Teachers who understand how they co-create, allocate and negotiate positions can empower EAL learners, and thus multiply the moment-by-moment access that they have to meaningful engagement with subject content and language through 'negotiation-rich opportunities' (Waring 2009:818).

Teacher training and ongoing professional development tend to focus heavily on pedagogical resources and strategies. However, the findings of this study demonstrate that appropriate pedagogies for EAL learners must take account not only of language learning across the curriculum but also of the social processes which engender, or inhibit, effective learning opportunities. Explicit training about learner interactions and identity positions would support teachers to develop confident classroom habits such as asking follow-up questions in IRE sequences, revoicing to position, and recognising and validating diverse ways of participation.

9.5.2 Policymakers

The conclusions of this study underline the need for a specific focus on EAL within the Early Career Framework (DfE 2024a) and a statutory training pathway for EAL specialists in the same way that there is, for example, for Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators. This is a significant gap in policy provision, particularly given the legal obligation to provide equitable access to education for pupils regardless of their race (UK Government 2010, Section 85). The practices and training advocated in Section 9.5.1 take time, funding and expertise. Currently, EAL is an eroded professional area (Section 2.2.2). The recommendations for practice require more than an hour of pre-service training which may be all a teacher receives. It takes time to understand classroom interactions as revealed through PT, and to engage with the complex racialised storylines around the *ideal EAL learner* and *EAL MM*. It also requires local expertise. These are resources which could offer significant confidence to teachers and thereby enhance provision for multilingual learners.

While new generations of EAL-confident teachers are needed, it is also important to support and build confidence amongst those already working. Within schools, schedules for continuous professional development have conflicting priorities and EAL can be crowded out entirely, leaving it to individual teachers' professional curiosity to develop their practice. The UK government must provide schools with dedicated EAL funding for staff development which challenges majoritarian storylines and cultivates skills to interactionally position learners in ways which enhance their opportunities to access subject content and language acquisition.

There are implications too for curriculum-designers. Multilingual young people, this study makes clear, think of themselves in diasporic as well as local terms, and characterise their success in transnational, multilingual, professional ways, through seeking recognition as members of Imagined Communities (Section 9.3.2). If they aspire to 'become British' it is not in the white, middle-class way that is set out for them through the present curriculum and exams system (Section 8.4). The current Curriculum and Assessment Review (DfE 2024d) offers an opportunity to reimagine education for EAL learners in order to generate a more inclusive vision of their inclusion and success within schools.

9.5.3 Research opportunities

In this study, the findings of prior CA work were used as one tool to investigate multilingual learners' interactions. Some of these previous studies were set in specialist language classrooms, but none from mainstream school settings. WMS, as many schools with a high EAL learner population, represents a setting of the kind of linguistic complexity that Enyedy et al. (2008) call for to be prioritised in empirical studies. While English proficiency continues to act as a gatekeeper to membership of learning communities, research can support a challenge to that gatekeeping role by identifying patterns in talk which create or dismantle barriers to learning.

The findings have shown that learner participants in WMS engage in actions such as extending turns, addressing trouble-in-talk, and using laughter in different ways (e.g. Extract 5.3 in Section 5.3; Extract 7.5 in Section 7.4). As a linguistic ethnography focused on identity, deeper investigation of the conversations has been beyond the scope of this study, but further examination of multilingual learners' interactions in mainstream settings could yield knowledge of how these may differ from, for example, specialist language classrooms, or interactions between and with first-language-English school learners. Specifically, this study has demonstrated the key role of the third turn in IRE sequences (Section 9.3.1) in extending or curtailing opportunities to negotiate identity positions for multilingual learners, and this calls for further investigation.

Ethnographies and projects which use PT are small-scale, and this one makes specific claims only for the four learner participants and their interactants; however, it reveals details of social life which may be of wider interest. This study found connections between storylines which circulate at local, institutional, and wider levels about EAL learners, the positions which learners negotiate and, thereby, the opportunities for learning to which they have access. It would be fruitful to explore other schools, perhaps with varied learner demographics and in different regions or socio-economic settings, to see if there are similar storylines and if learners and staff orient to them in comparable ways through their identity work. I have widened Wood's (2013) micro-identities and applied them to EAL learners'

positioning work and this, I hope, has created a tool for investigation into those positions in other EAL-in-the-mainstream classrooms (Section 9.3.1).

I present two adaptations of existing concepts: an *ideal EAL learner* and a *Model EAL Minority*, both of which include reference to educational triage in secondary schools (Sections 8.2–8.3). To know if these concepts are useful in a wider application further work is needed at the level of classroom interactions with EAL learners. Findings here suggest that multilingual learners arriving in England encounter a space in which to challenge racialised notions of the ideal learner, and self-empower to position as closely aligned with the ideal; further studies on this may contribute to anti-racist work in English education.

Imagined Communities, I have argued, provides a perspective on success which counters majoritarian stories about MMs and meritocracy, and makes visible dimensions of learner identity which those models fail to recognise. ICs embody UNESCO's (2015) call for education systems to go beyond human capital approaches and embrace holistic, humanitarian views of the value and capabilities of young people. This study operationalised the concept of ICs as a way to interpret data and it is beyond its scope to push further into the concept as a counter-story. There are opportunities here for more focused research which investigates young multilingual people's bids to be recognised as (potential) members of such communities, and the relationship between (non-)recognition and their investment in learning practices. There are also questions about how their alignment with meritocratic thinking intersects with such membership, and how they position themselves in relation to wider storylines around value, immigration, and citizenship.

9.6 New forms of resistance

In this section I consider the principle of beneficence in this study, and the unexpected forms of resistance the study offered to learner participants. This is followed in Section 9.7 by a discussion of limitations.

Kubanyiova (2008) says that education researchers tend to assume that because our research is about education, it is by default beneficent, and this leads to beneficence being overlooked in ethical considerations. Running parallel to this are confessions of power

imbalance between researcher and researched (Sections 3.2 and 3.4.1). Confessions of privilege, argues Lockard (2016) do more harm than good as they appear to be effective actions in and of themselves but do not actually clear the ground for greater equity.

Vignette 8: Problematising 'beneficence'

Whilst conscious that I had more to gain from this study than anyone else, it was a landscape with possibilities for redressing the balance: working one-to-one with learners, collaborating with Magda on a conference poster and training sessions, summarising the project for an anticipated OFSTED visit, arranging for the university's logo to be added to the school's webpage of collaborators, keeping an eye on classes while staff went to the toilet or ate lunch. In other words, I said 'yes' to requests more than I said 'no'. This also appeared to resolve the dilemma posed by being a researcher and a teacher, whereby the first requires a less interventionist perspective and the second a moral obligation to make a positive difference in learners' lives (Nikkanen 2019).

In addition, conversations about the four young people at the heart of the study showed that EAL staff felt each would benefit from being involved, and it became clear that for some staff, I became an outside listening ear, a safe deposit for the expression of frustrations (Sections 3.6.3 and 4.3).

Between an education research topic, being hands-on helpful, providing extra attention and care to potentially vulnerable and marginalised learners, and letting staff vent safely, it would be easy for me to assume that I was ticking the beneficence box and doing so in a way which, as Nikkanen (2019) specifies, prioritises the community at the research site.

Encountering Gómez, Puigvert and Flecha's (2011) work on equitable conversations and critical communicative methodology (CCM) challenged this complacency. While this study makes no claim to CCM, it influenced choices, such as sharing EAL attainment data in the focus group (Section 3.6.3) and asking participants to check translations of research summaries in their main languages. These changes aimed to promote self-efficacy and empower the young people (Block et al. 2012), by explicitly positioning them as

knowledgeable in ways which went beyond sharing their views and experiences in interviews. Vignette 9 illustrates the agency that characterised the learners' interactions with me, sometimes without my recognising it at the time.

Vignette 9: Recognising resistance

Debrief discussions were a rich point which prompted a crucial additional stage of reflexivity for me. During each debrief, the young people told me, directly or indirectly, what the research project had meant to them. From Daniella's debrief:

I asked how it had been for her, participating in this research study and she said that she liked taking part. This surprised me because from her demeanour I had sometimes thought she was not enjoying it, which is why I had checked consent with her so regularly… when I asked her why she had liked the study she said that it was an opportunity for her to 'open up'. She said that normally she doesn't have anybody she can open up to and explain how she feels about things. This was quite shocking for me, such a different situation from the one that I had thought we were in. (May 2022)

I came to see that each encounter with me had been an opportunity for the young people to exercise agency, position themselves in ways which were useful or relevant to them at the time, and thereby accomplish actions. For example, in Vignette 9, Daniella reveals how she used our interviews to signal herself as a competent communicator and then speak from that position, a position she did not always occupy in classes. She positioned me as somebody who would validate this identity and recognise her as competent.

Revisiting data from the focus group with LeBron and Jamal revealed similar opportunities. When we discussed Cameroon (Extract 5.8 in Section 5.6), the two boys positioned me as a facilitator to their own discussion about Cameroon: once the topic and tone were established, they switched to French, symbolically repositioning me as no longer needed. This enabled them to build their solidarity and recognise each other.

Gabriela's absences from school were characterised by staff in terms of lack of interest in education, lack of parental support, a nomadic lifestyle. Gabriela used our informal

conversations and formal interviews to resist these storylines and offer an alternative perspective: loving and supportive parents and wider family, but with health struggles which necessitated absence and parental travel (Sections 7.3 and 7.5). She positioned me as an adult who was not already invested in the dominant storylines surrounding her, someone who might be open to hearing a different story, and, by explicitly giving permission or even asking me to share information with staff, she positioned me as someone with enough social capital to represent her resistance.

The realisation fed into data analysis, but also taught me to 'remain alert to emergent forms of cooperation throughout the study' (De Korne and Hornberger 2017:253), and to recognise that these are not limited to planned research activities but can occur (or be prevented from occurring) in the interactive co-construction of positions between participants and researcher. Researcher positioning is not a one-off reflexive exercise but an ongoing process: 'knowledge construction *is* knowledge, *the process is the product*' (Blommaert and Jie 2010:10, emphasis original). By recognising the young people as highly agential actors in the research story, with their own agendas, I was able to build more open relationships with them and involve them more in the production of knowledge. Noticing these interactions and what they mean to participants at the time is an opportunity for a more collaborative research journey, a more polyphonic ethnography (Clifford 1990).

9.7 A reflection on limitations

9.7.1 Researcher positionality

'[S]ome would say that ethnographic projects are never finished, they are only left, their findings always provisional and their conclusions tentative' (Conteh 2018:16). Since completing data collection, the young people in the study have grown older and their lives will have changed. Any study which stands on post-structuralist understandings of identity must recognise that in every interaction that they have had since data collection ceased, the participants have continued to (co)construct their learner identities. Conteh's words ring true; new work with the same researcher and participants might now suggest different findings and conclusions. Consequently, this study lays no claim to generalizability; instead,

its findings suggest new sensitising concepts (Lefstein and Snell 2020; Rampton 2006), directions in which to look for those who work with multilingual young people as practitioners, policymakers and researchers.

As ethnographers, we seek to write 'thick descriptions' of the lives of strangers (Geertz 1973:6) and represent the cacophony of conflicting accounts about what things mean (Clifford 1990) through the emic views of the participants. At the same time, the study is intrinsically that of the researcher. As with Arnesen (2003:61), who employed similar methods of trailing and observing learners, 'I am a person positioned between what actually happened and the account of it'; we influence how the tale is told and the challenge is to do so while taming our self-indulgence (Rampton 2006).

Ethnography is a democratic approach to research (Copland and Creese 2015) in that it seeks to distribute power for the construction of knowledge between researcher and participants through mutual cooperation (Blommaert and Jie 2010) and the principle of polyphonicity (Clifford 1990). Nevertheless, power is skewed because it is the ethnographer who decides what to put in the final text, and this is again recognised here (see also Section 3.2).

9.7.2 COVID-19 and school access

The COVID-19 pandemic imposed limitations on the study: participants left, it was impossible to access the school for fifteen months and, once it was re-opened to external visitors, staff were more difficult to access for interviews and pupil trails became more challenging, because of staff absences and workloads. Data collection visits were frequently cancelled or plans had to be changed on arrival. Participants disappeared — LeBron was excluded, Gabriela left the country, members of staff moved on — and some of them reappeared unexpectedly. It felt as if Blommaert and Jie's (2010) remark about chaos being the normal state of things in an ethnography might have been written for this fieldwork. Nonetheless, ethnography is an idiographic undertaking in that it critically examines an individual community and so, although at times desperately inconvenient for data

collection, these circumstances did not in themselves limit the study: it is the tale of four young people in a particular place and time.

9.7.3 Audio recordings, interpretations and translations

Although many of the learner/staff interactions which are used in analysis are from audio-recorded lessons and interviews, some were captured instead from fieldnote data, and this means they could not be listened to after the event. This limited the accuracy or detail of that data (see also Section 3.6.2). Nevertheless, using that data allowed informal and spontaneous interactions to be considered as part of a fuller and richer ethnography, adding detail and alternative perspectives to the audio-recorded data and fieldnote observations. This study uses the tools of Conversation Analysis (CA) to interpret the turn-by-turn detail of interactions; the use of video recordings is more usual in CA so that visual detail such as gaze and gesture can also be captured. To answer the research questions of this study, using CA as a tool rather than an analytic framework, this was not felt to impact significantly on data reliability. Moreover, within the pupil trail dynamic setting up cameras in classrooms would have been unworkable as participants moved to a different classroom every lesson, with different teachers and peers, and insufficient time for camera set-ups (Section 3.6.2). However, such visual detail would have added greater richness to the data and analysis.

Where interpretation and translation were used either in data collection or creation of transcripts every effort was made to ensure accuracy (Section 3.6.3). However, interpretation is not just about accuracy; interpreters, translators and transcribers make decisions about how to represent speakers, just as the ethnographer does, and they provide cultural interpretations as well as linguistic ones (Cormier 2018). Where appropriate its presence is acknowledged and included in analysis (see particularly Section 7.7).

9.7.4 Theoretical framework

As detailed in Section 2.4, the main conceptual framework for this study was Positioning Theory, complemented by the tools of Conversation Analysis (Section 3.7.3). These provided

a rich view of learners' co-construction of learner identity and its relationship to notions of success, sufficient to gain answers to the research questions. However, I felt that by complexifying the theoretical framework through the introduction of additional concepts, namely the ideal learner, Model Minorities, and Imagined Communities, I would be able to access a richer understanding of the multiscalarity of the data and better situate participants' experiences in the 'structuring spheres' (Block 2022:63) of life. This made the analysis and writing processes more complex, necessitating wider reading and greater reflection on how the various components of theory might fit together as evidenced in the data (Section 3.7.4). However, the resulting analytical richness justified this additional work and the lack of simplicity is more than rewarded in the emergence of the two proposed models of the *EAL Model Minority* and the *ideal EAL learner* (Sections 8.2 and 8.3).

9.8 Final thoughts

This study began with research questions centred on identity and success for late-arrival EAL learners, and in addressing these I have repeatedly returned to the links between what happens in interactions and wider social debates around multilingualism, value, and inclusion. Levitas (2005) highlighted that what we seek to 'include' minoritised groups into is a society and an education system which *a priori* excludes those who are different. The mainstreaming project demands that those who are ethno-linguistically minoritised assimilate culturally and linguistically, demonstrate value to school and to society, and aim for a benchmark average set of results at the age of sixteen. This study, however, has shown that recent arrival creates spaces for negotiation of learner identities, and that when empowered to do so, young people use those spaces to advocate for themselves and a future which goes beyond assimilation and averages, one which acknowledges their past and present, and considers the place they might have in a transnational and multilingual future.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Key terms

English as an Additional Language (EAL)

EAL is the term used in government and local policy to refer to learners whose first language is believed to be other than English, or who speak a language other than English in the home (DfE 2023b). In more global scholarship, EAL is one of the terms used to refer to people learning English in an English-speaking context. This distinguishes EAL from, for example, EFL (English as a Foreign Language) or ESL (English as a Second Language) which is a more out-dated term for EAL learners. EAL learners are a highly heterogeneous group, which is a limitation in the use of *EAL* for research purposes; nevertheless, as the most commonly-used term in the English education and research contexts, it is used throughout this study to refer to those learners who have been identified as EAL by staff at the research site, as well as when discussing scholarship around such learners.

Multilingual learners

The term *EAL* is often cited in literature as a deficit identity (Cunningham 2019; Evans et al. 2020; Sharples 2017; Welply 2023); for that reason, the positively-focused term *multilingual* is sometimes preferred. It references a less boundaried conceptualisation of language than *bilingual*, in which people use all their linguistic resources to communicate with others. I recognise that *multilingual* has its own limitations as a label, particularly the dichotomy it creates with the monolingual majority (Pérez Andrade and King 2024). In this study I use *multilingual* interchangeably with *EAL* for the learner participants, to acknowledge both the dominance of *EAL* in policy and research, and the more humanistic concept of *multilingualism*.

Emergent multilinguals

In this study, this refers to EAL learners who are receiving EAL support because of their lower level of English language proficiency, always conscious that proficiency itself is a socially constructed phenomenon (Martin-Beltrán 2010). *Emergent bilingual* is the term more commonly encountered, particularly in literature from the United States, but this study uses *emergent multilingual* as a recognition of EAL learners' broader linguistic capital as discussed above.

Newly-arrived/Newcomer

Like *EAL*, this is not always well-defined, although it is an important distinction to make in EAL practice (Evans et al. 2020) as newcomer learners are likely to need more support than those who have lived in the UK for a longer time. National funding is available for the first three years after arrival in the UK. In this study, *newly-arrived* learners for recruitment purposes were learners who had been in England for under a year. Their time of participation in the study took two of them up to that three-year threshold.

Late arrival

Many multilingual learners spend their entire school career in the English education system; however, almost half enter it after the age of five, and around a fifth enter after the start of secondary school (Strand, Malmberg and Hall 2015). 'Late arrival' in policy and research literature usually refers to learners who enter the system after Reception, the first year of formal schooling, at the age of four (e.g. Education Policy Institute 2024, Evans et al. 2020), although it is, without tight definition, also used to describe those learners who arrive 'later' within primary school (e.g. Hutchinson 2018). It is well-established that the average number of years needed to acquire the English proficiency required for full academic engagement is six years (e.g. Cummins 1981; Demie 2013) while there are only five years of secondary school before national exams are taken at the age of sixteen. For this reason, practice

literature sometimes uses 'late arrival' to describe learners who join English schools in later adolescence (e.g. Refugee Education UK 2024). In this study, *late arrival* refers to young people who enter the education system around or after the start of the context of this study, which is secondary school.

Mainstreaming and intervention sessions

Mainstreaming is a policy for the teaching of EAL learners which was adopted by the British government in the 1980s. Briefly, it refers to the practice of placing emergent multilinguals in mainstream classes rather than teaching them in segregated English language classes. Many schools also provide *withdrawal sessions*, where EAL learners have specialist English language input lessons in lieu of one or more mainstream lessons each week. In the thesis, these are often alternatively referred to as *intervention sessions*.

Home language

Home language is used with increasing frequency (e.g. Evans et al. 2020) as an alternative to terms such as *mother tongue* or *first language*, to refer to a learner's main language, the one which they use at home. Like *EAL*, it is contested, with Cunningham (2019) pointing out its strong correlation with domain. In this study, *home language* is adopted for congruence with literature and as the best current terminological fit in common usage.

Appendix 2: List of participants

All names are pseudonyms. LeBron and Magda chose their own and all others were chosen by me.

LeBron	learner
Jamal	learner
Daniella	learner
Gabriela	learner
Magda	Head of EAL provision
Ana	Teacher, EAL
Karolina	Learning mentor, EAL
Charlotte	English Literature and Language teacher
Eloisa	English Literature and Language teacher
Charlie	Maths teacher
Julia	Maths teacher
Anwar	Maths teacher
Kavisha	Maths teacher
Natalie	Religious Education (RE) teacher
Jacqui	Religious Education teacher
Sandra	Science teacher
Naheed	Science teacher
Shazia	Catering teacher
Santiago	Spanish teacher
Angelina	Design and Technology (DT) teacher
Louise	Art teacher
Deborah	Citizenship teacher

Figure A2.1: Participation timeline for staff

Angelina (DT)											██████	
Louise (Art)		████████	████									
Deborah (Citizenship)			██████									
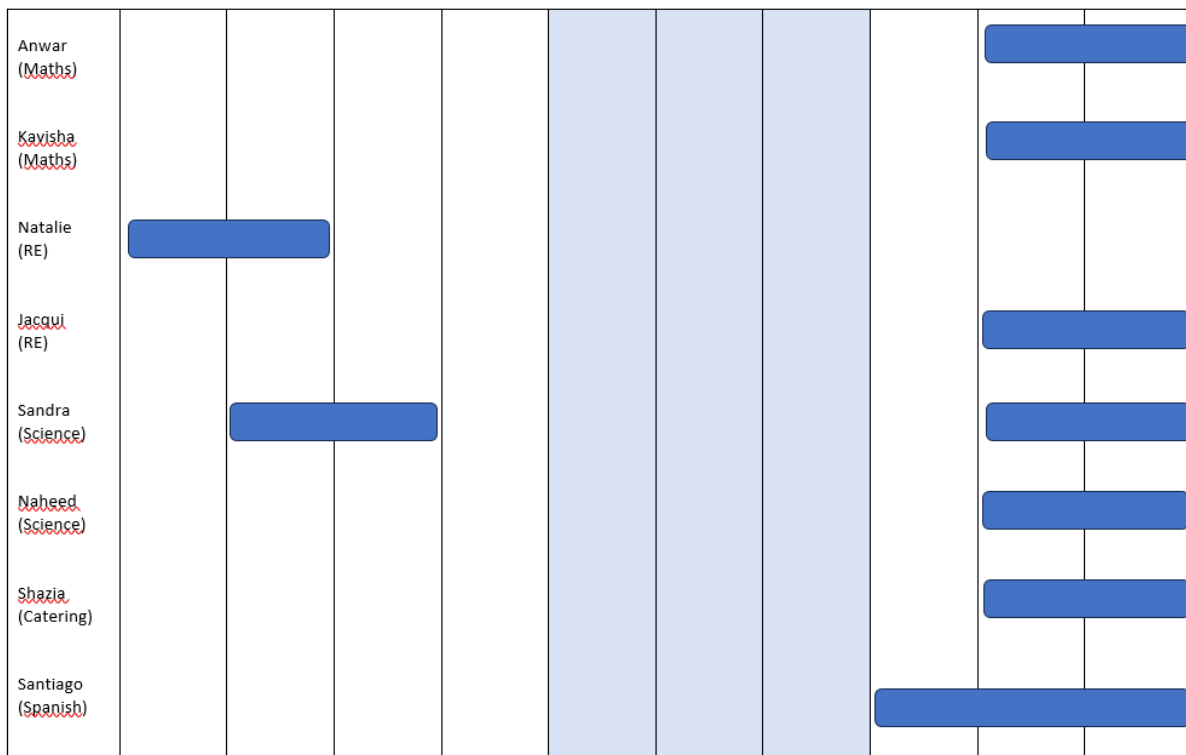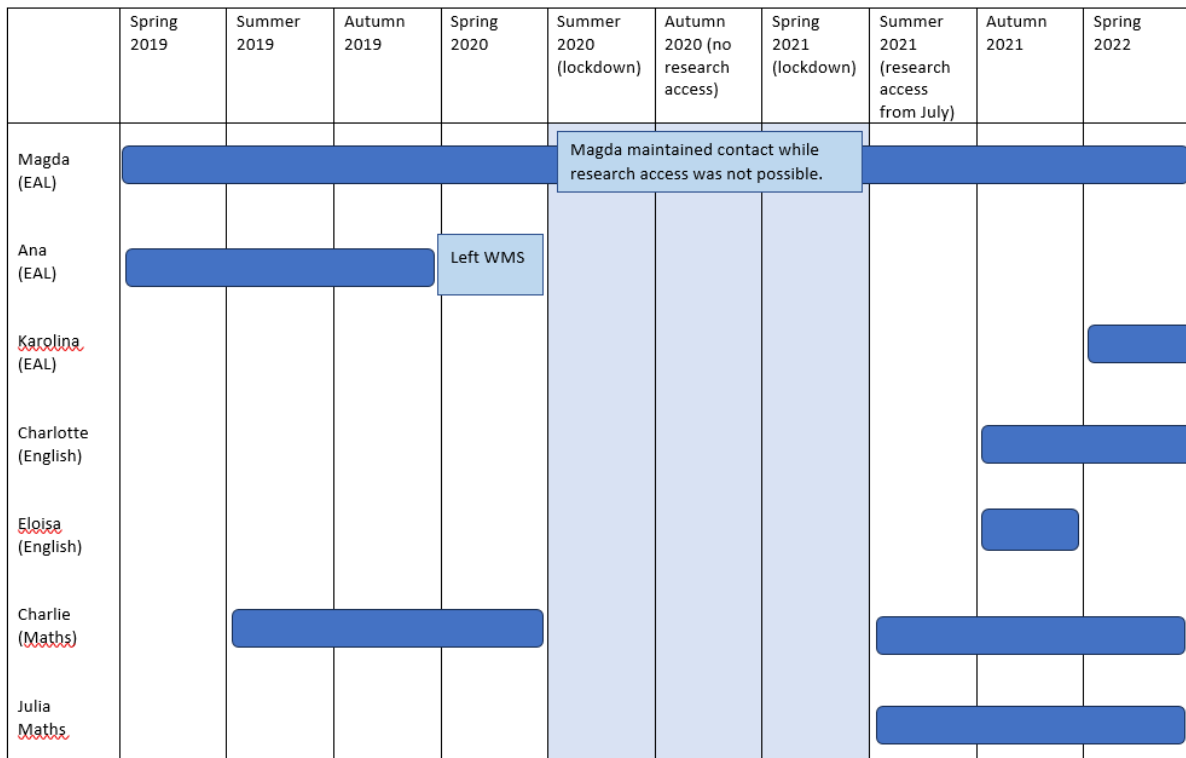
David McGravie

9th July 2018

Hannah Valenzuela

Dear Hannah

Re: Ethics decision for the proposal related to the project:

Investigating the attainment gap for late international arrivals: participation or assimilation?

The rationale for this research is explained, is socially just and is to be welcomed. Reviewers have granted approval for your study, but with the following comments and suggestions for clarification:

- Destruction of data.

This might be appropriate, but given a turn towards re-use, the applicant should consider the ethical reasons for destruction of data as opposed to storing the data for future re-use.

- Consent

Section 6a lists the participants from whom consent will be sought, but appears to miss out pupils. Relevant briefs and forms are provided in the appendices, so this section should clarify that consent is to be sought from pupils

- Potential deception

The applicant states that "[c]lasses will be told that the research is about learning" in order to minimise behaviour related to EAL. It would be useful for the applicant to comment on whether this constitutes deception, especially as section 6b confirms there is no deception.

- Recording of data

It is not clear whether this is video or just audio recordings. Given the focus of the study is on recent arrivals to the UK there may be different cultural understandings of the significance of audio/visual recordings. Post-colonial research ethics, along with other approaches, address this, it may be applicable to consider to demonstrate ethical understanding of this.

The study does not need to go through the ethical process again.

The work can proceed.

Yours Sincerely,

David McGravie

Chair of College of Arts, Humanities and Education Research Ethics Committee

Appendix 4: Transcription symbols (content-focused transcripts)

Content-focused transcription of extracts (audio recorded interviews and non-recorded informal interviews from field notes)

e.g. Extract 4.1 in Section 4.2

Adapted from Jefferson (2004) and Mondada (2022)

(( ))	((researcher comment or description, or to show omitted lines))
//	encloses phonetic transcription following the International Phonetic Association (2015)
{name}	denotes the use of a pseudonym in transcribed speech
italics	italics denote a translation into English: original speech is unitalicised regardless of language
tchip	a noise produced by sucking air past the teeth
CAPITALS	denote a syllable or word distinctly louder than surrounding speech by the same speaker
SS	in speaker column denotes several learners speaking or laughing together
(2.5)	estimated length of pause in unrecorded data
(.)	micropause

Other punctuation in line with standard use to denote beginnings and ends of sentences, clauses, and so forth.

Appendix 5: Transcription symbols (Conversation Analysis transcripts)

Audio recorded material transcribed for analysis using Conversation Analysis

e.g. Extract 7.11 in Section 7.8

Adapted from Jefferson (2004) and (Mondada 2022)

(( ))	((researcher comment or description, or to show omitted lines))
/ /	encloses phonetic transcription following the International Phonetic Association (2015)
{name}	denotes the use of a pseudonym in transcribed speech
italics	denotes a translation into English: original speech is unitalicised regardless of language
tchip	a noise produced by sucking air past the teeth
°	single degree sign shows markedly soft talk
<u>word</u>	emphasis or raised volume in this word or syllable
CAPITALS	denote a syllable or word distinctly louder than surrounding speech by the same speaker
SS	in speaker column denotes several learners speaking or laughing together
(2.5)	timed pause
(.)	micropause
(word)	uncertain word. If empty, no candidate words are offered
[	shows where speech overlaps and are aligned on the page
-	sharp cutoff of a word
↑	distinct pitch rise
↓	distinct pitch fall
¿	fall-rise intonation
?	usual question-type rising intonation
=	used at end of sentence and start of next to indicate latching

:	prolongation of the immediately prior sound: the more colons, the longer the elongated sound
(h)	parenthesised h denotes plosiveness, for example laughter or crying
£	utterance in "smile voice" (Jefferson 1984:360)

Appendix 6a: Working list of suggested categories and codes

staff attitudes to immigration

staff attitudes to teaching language/literacy *repeated.*

collaborative language production – recasts, peers, teachers *Collab lang*

non-verbal communication – gesture, faces, ipad *(NVerb)*

sparseness of language and silence *capability*

visibility *CAP* *lack of capability*

invisibility *cap*

the good student *GOOD* *beh*

BICS and CALP in lessons and intervention lessons

proportions of teacher talk and peer talk in lessons

use of humour – staff/learners ⟷ *S.hum.*

use of humour - peers *PPhum*

~~staff~~ teacher support with content *SSupcon*

~~staff~~ teacher support with language *SSuplang*

peer support with content *Psuppcont.*

peers support with language *PSupplang*

prior knowledge *PRIOR*

deficit */strength*

classroom context CC

behaviour issues BEHAV

EAL dept values + norms →

EAL VN

L take Control

= learner seeks to take control

social relationships background – resistence, relationships, power struct etc.

agency

lack of agency

motiv-

engag.

visibility safety success

19	Hannah: is that typical		
20	K: yeah yeah yeah		
21	K: so like sometimes she does like over like her presence is known		
22	like more so than the other pupils but that's not because like on		
23	purpose she just is naturally like bubbly and like wants to like say the	Beh	
24	answer and everything so it's not a negative thing it's like quite nice	Who	
25	to see like an an active learner if that makes sense so yeah	Goodbeh	
26	Hannah: mm mm	LEngag	
27	K: and like even if she doesn't understand she will say like miss could		
28	you like explain or erm how do you spell this or like does this make	LEngag	
29	sense so it's like good	SSupplang	
	Hannah: oh that's great isn't it		
30	K: yeah		

Hannah Valenzuela

The first mainstream teacher who remarks on her personality beyond "good". Her personality is unlikely to be coming through in other lessons - although this is changing and can be seen as moving over time from 2019. Also the first to suggest/hint at slightly disruptive behaviour, albeit framed as entirely positive.

29 November 2022, 16:58

Hannah Valenzuela

This is about the aspects of herself, the microidentities, that G feels able and wants to make visible in K's classes.

noms/hands up.

T says to me, all in this class they're either SON or (nods) the other. They were supposed to give me someone (ie support staff) but... they didn't.

> How do you feel which lessons challenge you? Which are easy? (why?) What helps you learn /stops you learning?

T checks books – to see if everything has been copied (a) correctly and (b) set out as required. S's book: it's all fine. Some Ss ask questions about the course, T explains + answers. S looking at displays /outside, distracted at times.

She uses a lot of French-borrowed terminology in the Q+A and explanations, but S doesn't appear to notice – it's a lot of TTT and he disengages – at one point stacking up gluesticks etc. No reference to its Frenchness, or to his language skills (or those of others, of course). No visual support beyond the exam /coursework required they're copying, so it's all a flow of words.