

**“I swear adults think we don’t have opinions.
They should ask. They might learn something!”**

**Exploring disability, difference and pedagogic
possibilities for vision impairment education
with visually impaired young people.**

Anna Pilson

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Abstract

This thesis explores the experiences of ten visually impaired children and young people (VICYP) experiences in the English compulsory education system and wider lives. Inclusive education remains constrained by normative expectations, often at the expense of disability-specific learning opportunities. This tension between universal curriculum aims and the necessity for differentiated teaching highlights ongoing challenges in VI education. This creates tensions between universal curriculum goals and the need for differentiated pedagogical approaches.

Existing research into vision impairment (VI) education has largely focused on curriculum adaptation and teaching strategies, with limited engagement in the philosophical, ontological and axiological underpinnings of VI pedagogy. This thesis argues that deeper theoretical engagement is essential, especially in a time marked by shifting political and philosophical landscapes. It therefore introduces a new framework informed by Critical Disability Studies and Posthumanism to respond to three questions: how VICYP encounter the education system, what understandings emerge from their broader lives and how these combined insights might inform *different* VI pedagogies.

Using a diffractive, participatory approach, the study elicits voice data, presents it in poetic and narrative formats, and analyses the affective, material, and discursive forces shaping VICYP's learning and personal experiences. The findings reveal that VICYP engage in complex negotiations of belonging, developing identities and understanding their situatedness in the current challenging sociopolitical climate. This highlights the importance of educators orienting their practice towards attending to what matters *now* to young people.

To achieve this, the thesis proposes a RADICLE pedagogy – Relational, Affective, Democratic, Intradependent, Collaborative, Loving, Embodied – to reimagine VI education as a relational, affective and ethical practice. In doing so, it contributes significantly to the underdeveloped field of VI educational research, offering theoretical, methodological and empirical insights, positioning educators (as practitioner-researchers) as key agents in shaping inclusive futures for VICYP.

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Declaration:

I confirm that no part of the material presented in this thesis has been previously submitted for a degree in this or any other university. The contents of this thesis are produced solely for the qualification of Doctor of Philosophy at Durham University and consist of the author's original contributions with appropriate recognition of any references indicated throughout.

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to four people. Firstly, to Ruth Drake who knows a thing or two about keeping going when things get tough... I hope this dedication might go some of the way to showing my gratitude for Glastonbury!

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List of abbreviations

CFVI: The Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with Vision Impairment (Hewett et al., 2022; 2025) is a UK-wide framework outlining key skills, interventions and best practices to support visually impaired learners across eleven learning areas.

CYP: The term ‘children and young people’ (CYP) refers to individuals from birth to 18, commonly used in services and policy. This thesis uses ‘child’, ‘young person’ and ‘CYP’ to reflect legal and developmental distinctions, as participants were under 18 during interviews and mostly aged 15-24 at the time of writing.

DfE: The Department for Education (DfE) is a government ministerial department in England responsible for children's services, education and skills.

EHCP: An Education Health and Care Plan is a legal document for CYP up to age 25, detailing their education, health and care needs. Created with families and professionals after assessment, it outlines required support and may include a personal budget for specialist provision.

LA: A local authority (LA) in England is a public organisation responsible for governing local areas and providing public services like education.

MQVI: Mandatory Qualification for teachers of children and young people with vision impairments a postgraduate qualification ensuring teachers can meet the needs of learners with vision impairment. Assessed against 131 sub-standards, it's awarded by DfE-approved providers and also guides the ongoing professional development of QTVIs.

NatSIP: The National Sensory Impairment Partnership “is a partnership of organisations working together to improve outcomes for children and young people with sensory impairment. This includes [CYP] who are deaf or have a hearing impairment, multi-sensory or vision impairment” (NatSIP, 2025, para. 1).

QTVI: Qualified Teacher of Children and Young People with Vision Impairments (QTVI). A QTVI is a specialist teacher who possesses the MQVI qualification and is recognised by the DfE to have achieved the specialist professional status required to support blind and partially sighted students from birth through their education and up to age 25.

RNIB: Royal National Institute of Blind People. A UK charity that supports blind and visually impaired people and their families.

SEN: Special Educational Needs. SEN refers to a learning difficulty that requires special educational provision. This means they have a significantly greater difficulty learning than most children their age, or a disability that hinders their ability to use the facilities available in mainstream schools (SEND CoP, 2015, pp. 15-16).

SEND: Special Educational Needs and Disability. The key distinction between SEN and SEND is that not all children with SEN have a disability, and not all disabilities are considered SEN. However, “where a disabled child or young person requires special educational provision they will also be covered by the SEN definition” (SEND CoP, 2015, p. 16).

SEND CoP: The SEND Code of Practice (2015) is statutory UK guidance outlining how professionals must identify and support CYP with SEND, emphasising legal duties, person-centred approaches and collaborative decision-making with families.

UN: The United Nations (UN) an international organisation founded in 1945 to promote peace, security and cooperation among its member countries. Since 2002, there have consistently been 193 member countries, including the UK.

UNCRC: United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. An international treaty written in 1989 that outlines the fundamental human rights for all children, including civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. It is the most widely ratified human rights treaty in the world.

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, a specialized agency of the UN that works to build peace through international cooperation in education, the sciences, and culture.

VI: Vision impairment (VI) refers to uncorrectable sight loss affecting visual function. A more detailed definition appears in Appendix 1.

VICYP: Visually impaired children and young people/visually impaired child or young person. I use this term to recognise my preference for identity-first language choices related to disability. However, the CFVI uses children and young people with vision impairment (CYPVI) instead.

VICTAR: University of Birmingham Visual Impairment Centre for Teaching and Research, the leading UK research centre into VI education.

Glossary of terms and definitions

Additional Core Curriculum: Also known as the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC), this specialist framework supports the holistic development of learners with VI. Delivered alongside the national curriculum by QTVIs, it teaches essential life skills like mobility, assistive technology and independent living skills.

Affect: Affect theory (e.g. Gregg and Seigworth, 2010) examines how bodies and environments are shaped by pre-cognitive forces and intensities. Affect is relational and emergent, linking to assemblage theory, and is key to understanding how power, identity and emotion shape lived experiences of disability.

Assemblage: Assemblage theory (e.g. Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; DeLanda, 2016) views phenomena as fluid, relational groupings of human and non-human elements. This project is understood as a research-assemblage, producing its own dynamic configurations.

Cartography: Cartographies (e.g. Braidotti 2005; 2019; 2021) are feminist tools for mapping power, affect and relational dynamics.

Diffraction: Diffraction (e.g. Haraway, 1992; Barad, 2007) explores how differences emerge through entangled relations, where matter and meaning co-constitute each other. This thesis uses diffractive methodologies to analyse data through theory, experience and affect, mapping patterns of difference and rethinking voice and listening in VI education.

Disability: The Equality Act 2010 defines disability as a long-term, substantial impairment affecting daily life, including sensory impairments. This broad definition underpins the SEND Code of Practice (2015). However, disability can be understood conceptually in different ways, hence I include definitions of models of disability below to more clearly situate this project's understanding of disability.

Ethico-onto-epistemology: Barad's (2007) concept of ethico-onto-epistemology (EOE) asserts that ethics, being (ontology) and knowing (epistemology) are inseparable and co-constitutive.

Intra-action: Intra-action describes how entities emerge through entangled relations, co-constituting meaning and matter. Applied in this thesis, it informs a diffractive *intraview* methodology, where researcher, participant, theory and context

shape knowledge through relational, affective processes of reading, writing and thinking-with.

Knowledge-ing: This thesis borrows Taylor's (2021) understanding of knowledge-ing not as something one has, but something one does. Knowledge is not a fixed 'thing' but rather a continual unfolding shaped by material-discursive forces and lived experience.

Models of disability: The medical model sees disability as a biological issue, while the social model (Oliver, 1983) argues disability arises from societal barriers. Shakespeare (2013) critiques the social model for overlooking impairment's material effects. However, Thomas's (1999) social-relational model, focusing on how social oppression undermines wellbeing, best reflects this thesis's commitment to exploring the affective, relational dimensions of disability and vision impairment education.

Posthumanism: Posthumanism, as used in this thesis, focuses on relational ontologies and critiques of Western humanism. I reject transhumanism's neglect of embodiment, social justice and difference, aligning instead with posthuman scholarship attentive to ethics, politics and situated knowledges.

Storying: In feminist (new) materialism, storying is a relational, affective method where knowledge emerges through entangled intra-actions. This thesis uses storying to present participant accounts shaped by researcher presence, sensory and non-human influences, and theoretical engagement across Chapters 7 to 9.

Vision Impairment education: The term 'Vision Impairment Education' is commonly used in the UK to capture the educational response that is needed to ensure children and young people with vision impairment have equitable access to education (McLinden et al., 2022, pp. xix). This includes pedagogic approaches to support VICYP to access the national curriculum and also specialist VI-specific additional curriculum teaching and learning.

Worlding: Worlding refers to the active creation of worlds, from colonial histories to imagined futures. This thesis draws on Spivak's (1995) decolonial critique, Stewart's (2012) affective linkages and Haraway's (2016) emphasis on non-human agency to explore worlding in VI education research.

A note on language choices

In this thesis, I choose to use identity-first language (i.e. visually impaired person, disabled person) when talking about disability. Where I use person-first language (e.g. person with a vision impairment) this reflects the choice of language used by the originator (person or written sources). Person-first language stems from the Social Model of Disability approach, which asserted that person-first language "reflects the importance our society places on sensitive issues and on changing stereotypes and reducing bias against those with disabilities by foregrounding not the disability but other personal attributes" (Bickford, 2004, p. 120). However, there has been a shift towards favouring identity-first language in many disability activism and advocacy circles, particularly with the rise of social media.

In academic contexts, one of the most prominent proponents of identity-first language is Rod Michalko, himself blind, who in his influential 2002 work *'The Difference that Disability Makes'* argued against person-first disability terminology. Michalko contended that distancing disability from one's identity can undermine its significance and perpetuate the notion that disability is inherently negative, rather than a meaningful aspect of cultural identity and a source of pride (Ladau, 2015). Identity-first language is commonly embraced by Autistic and D/deaf communities and is increasingly being adopted within blind and vision impaired communities. This trend is reflected in the language increasingly used by VI advocacy organisations such as RNIB, which, for instance, employed identity-first terminology in its 2021 response to the government's National Disability Strategy. Other organisations like Thomas Pocklington Trust use identity-first language but prefer to use blind and partially sighted rather than visually impaired.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Part 1:

1.1.1 Prologue – the pedagogic encounter that sparked this research

As I hurried into the classroom to support a pupil in a lesson the bell rang to signify the end of break. Before the inevitable clamour of students piling into the classroom occurred, the teacher approached me directly and hastily, thrusting in front of him the worksheet for the forthcoming lesson. He asked for my opinion on the modifications he had made to the style and the content of the resource. A couple of evenings prior, he had attended a whole-school training session run by me (a qualified teacher of visually impaired children and young people, or QTVI) focusing on inclusive and accessible strategies for teaching visually impaired students and wanted to demonstrate that he had put this training into action.

He told me that based on my advice he had reformatted the worksheet, removing unnecessary visual clutter and using a clearer sans serif font to promote visual access. He had also reduced the content to the most necessary learning points in order to reduce reading time and facilitate more time for more auditory-based activities. I briefly checked the sheet, fed back my congratulations, and smiled to myself as I went to take my seat. I reflected on how I had fulfilled a key pedagogical function of the QTVI role in ensuring that the visually impaired child I was working with had access to learning (McLinden et al., 2016; 2017) through empowering the teacher to prepare these resources and make these decisions himself.

But as I sat down, the pupil I was to sit next to said “Morning, Miss Pilson” and in hearing those innocuous words I found my smile frozen, my chest tight, as my previously comfortable understanding of my professional role was suddenly and unexpectedly ruptured. I realised that, to paraphrase the famous disability activism mantra, we had enacted a conversation about the pupil but without him. In this encounter the teacher and I had inadvertently reified the status quo of transmission-based pedagogical approaches (Strom and Martin, 2015), with learner positioned as passive recipient of teaching (Freire, 1970). In doing so, we had also reinforced “taken-for-granted, ideological and normative under-girdings of what it means to be a valued citizen of society” (Goodley et al., 2014, p. 348) by essentially removing the disabled child’s voice and his ability to participate in decisions about his learning and development.

*In doing so, we had positioned the adults and teachers in the classroom context as powerholders, potentially showing a form of dysconscious ableism in which our actions demonstrated a tacit acceptance of dominant ableist norms and privileges (Broderick and Lalvani, 2017) and consequently shaping inequalities through everyday encounters (Juvonen and Kolehmainen 2018). In this case, the intended advocacy and inclusion iterated through pedagogic decision-making in actuality disempowered the young person, who didn't even realise that he **could** be part of this conversation, that it was his **right** to have a say about the educational support he received (Special Educational Needs Code of Practice, 2015)...*

This encounter forced me to realise that my pedagogic practice was too focused on removing disabling barriers to mainstream curriculum access, which while a crucial objective of my role, should also be complemented by also supporting visually impaired children and young people (VICYP) to do so themselves (developing learning to access skills). The latter is generally achieved in vision impairment (VI¹) educational practice via delivering a bespoke additional curriculum, which is conceptualised in VI education literature as comprising of “areas which would not typically be taught in schools as part of the core curriculum” (McLinden et al., 2016, p. 182). Instead, it involves learning opportunities designed to support the development of distinctive skills required by visually impaired people in order for them to develop their own agency to reduce or remove said barriers to access. This bifurcating model is known as the dual access model (McLinden and Douglas, 2013; McLinden et al., 2016) of vision impairment education. However, despite its importance, carving out time and space for this pedagogic focus is challenging in an education system dominated by “pre-set temporal milestones” (Whitburn and Thomas, 2021, p. 104) that are very difficult to disturb.

This experience could be categorised as a disorienting dilemma (Mezirow, 1991), which can catalyse transformative learning in adults through causing critical reflection. Such dilemmas can prove uncomfortable and destabilising (Chiu, 2025), highlighting dissonance or conflicts that can occur between navigating structural/institutional realities and personal ethics and values in professional roles (Merizow, 1991; Cohen Lissman et al., 2024). However, they can also help us to question our existing frames of reference. In the moment, I felt discomfort not just cognitively but also in a powerful emotional and embodied sense. Mätkki (2011;

¹ A fulsome definition of vision impairment as I apply it in this project is in Appendix 1.

2019) calls these difficult feelings edge-emotions, which (although painful) are signifiers that the process of questioning existing understandings has begun. Chiu (2025, p. 2), however, notes that the process will only result in resolution if the teacher makes an ongoing and concerted effort to undertake “conscious appraisal of values, constraints and possibilities” for their pedagogical choices.

This thesis is a product of the beginnings of this “appraisal” process. In this inquiry, I have allowed myself to be attentive to the “subtle and dynamic moments of classroom [and research] relations” (Gravett and Lygo-Baker, 2025, p. 209), noting how the micro-political encounter between teachers-pupil-worksheet was indicative of how affective relations shape learning and about ourselves, others and contexts. My participants and I have explored VI education beyond cognitive and rational understandings of teaching and learning, allowing us to understand that affective encounters are at the heart of pedagogy (Boler, 1999) and that holding “disability-as-possibility” (Erevelles, 2011, p. 2) is a crucial way that practitioners and researchers can uphold ethical approaches in their work that enable “new ways of thinking, feeling, and existing” (Gilson, 2014, p. 79) that are genuinely inclusive, empowering and justice-oriented.

1.1.2 Background and rationale

This thesis “elaborates a case, an argument and methodology” (Boden et al., 2021, p. 9) for rethinking current pedagogic approaches to the education of visually impaired children and young people in the English compulsory education sector in light of wider calls to explore how “we can renew education to make just, equitable and sustainable futures possible.” (UNESCO, 2021, p. 146). Whilst working as a QTVI for over a decade, I found that a tension between difference and sameness underpins vision impairment-specific educational pedagogy. McLinden et al. (2016, p. 182) note the dissonance between “on one hand, seeking to construct an inclusive curriculum which is relevant to all, and on the other hand identifying an additional curriculum which is particular to some”. I began to realise that my main pedagogic focus had been to ensure that the pupils I worked with met normative markers of success (such as passing exams), often to the detriment of supporting the young person to develop the skills to access learning independently (thereby also developing important transferable wider knowledge and skills). As Thomas and

Whitburn (2020, p. 187) provocatively assert, I found that “learning it would seem, comes at the cost of genuine inclusion”.

This professional perspective intersected with indicators from research literature that children labelled as having special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) are having a poorer educational experience compared to their peers (Ofsted, 2017, p. 5). I began to presuppose that this might be the case for visually impaired children and young people on account of their experiencing of education in simultaneously dichotomous ways. In 2023, it was estimated that approximately 70% of VICYP are educated at mainstream schools (RNIB, 2023, p. 2). This allows them to access the normative category of the child, who attends the same school as their peers, the same lessons and their progress and achievements are judged on the same (normative) outcomes. Yet simultaneously, their medical label of impairment identifies them as “other” (Ferguson and Nusbaum, 2012, p. 73), leading to a clear tension between expectations of meeting universal goals and acknowledging and supporting disability-specific needs.

This is reflected in the policy context. Skarstad (2022, p. 88) asserts that when difference and disability converge, difference becomes “a philosophical question with clear policy and legal implications”. For example, in England, the 2015 Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice (SEND CoP) arguably creates dissonance between desired outcomes of providing personalised support for young people with the label SEND and attesting that “our [the government’s] vision for children with special educational needs and disabilities is the *same* as for all children and young people” (SEND CoP, Department for Education, 2015, p. 10, emphasis added). This demonstrate the dilemma of difference (Minow, 1985) underpinning the realities of inclusive education in England, which occurs when there is dissonance between whether “difference should be handled by acknowledging it or ignoring it” (Olsen and Pilson, 2022, p. 18).

As a QTVI myself, I had centred the importance of being attentive to difference in my pedagogic practice, in terms of changing my approaches to respond to the changing circumstances and priorities of my students so that they would make adequate progress. However, I gradually began to realise that this orientation to difference was one of how to manage it, how to reduce it, so that my students’ trajectories would ‘fit’ (Garland Thomson, 2011, p. 598) with normative expectations in the education system. This approach risks ignoring individual needs, the material

reality of impairment (Shakespeare, 2014) and the diversity within disabled communities (Skarstad, 2022). QTVIs must also reconcile these philosophical tensions with the everyday realities of many young people's desire for normality (Bödicker and Akbaba, 2020). This is indicative of the complexity of "educational activity... always [involving] a complex entanglement of factors, iteratively and mutually shaping each other" (Fawns, 2022, p. 714) and my desire as a practitioner-researcher to interrogate these tensions, in order to support the VICYP that I worked with to do the same.

1.1.3 Defining pedagogy

I now outline my understanding of the term pedagogy, because, as Nind et al. (2016, p. 238) assert, it "is hard to know". This thesis understands pedagogy to encompass "both the act of teaching and its attendant discourse... ideas, values" (Alexander, 2004, p. 19). Exploring and developing the latter aspect constitutes the key focus of this research. Chapter 2 will exemplify how extant research into VI education positions pedagogy as synonymous with teaching strategies/approaches. It will explain how the dual access approach (e.g. McLinden and Douglas, 2014) has proven a dominant pedagogic approach in the UK context to inform QTVI training and practice over the past decade, and noted a tendency of accounts, such as Whitburn's (2014a; 2014b) research into student perceptions of inclusive teaching practices to conflate an understanding of pedagogies with tools and strategies for teaching. This exemplifies what Gravett et al. (2024, p. 388) call a traditional "cognitivist and humanist" understanding of pedagogy.

This understanding has been informed by predominant neoliberal agendas of marketisation, efficiency and individualism (Liasidou and Symeou, 2016), leading to a widespread conceptualisation of pedagogy as simply "methods of teaching and learning [to elicit] the 'best' most productive, most relevant and most socially desirable forms of practice" (Bartlett and Burton, 2016, p. 114). The potential outcome of this leaves pedagogy in danger of being "reduced to a sterile set of techniques or dressed up within the discourse of humanistic methods that simply soften[s] the attempts by the schools to produce insidious form of moral and political regulation" (Giroux, 2003, p. 6) that can pathologise disabled children.

Such narrow constructs of pedagogy are not a recent phenomenon in relation to UK education, however. In 1981, Simon described a situation where, in contrast to

wider European educational discourse, British “dominant educational institutions... have had no concern with theory, its relation to practice, with pedagogy” (p. 11). Repeated warnings that “failure to examine pedagogy limits the potential for effecting change through education” (Murphy, 1996, p. 28) appear to have had little impact, as pedagogy remains sidelined in England’s education policy and practice. For example, the 2011 Department for Education (DfE) Teaching Standards have no references to pedagogy, neither do the professional standards for QTVIs (DfE, 2023)². Consequently, it is perhaps little surprise (but greater concern) that research which explicitly considers the philosophical, ontological and axiological underpinnings of VI pedagogy is scarce, hence this project’s focus on addressing this. I now outline my aims and objectives towards achieving this outcome.

² In contrast, the 2025 updated initial teacher training and early career framework does acknowledge that teachers need to develop a set of pedagogical knowledges that allow them to make links between theory and practice (DfE, 2024, p. 6), but states that this must be acquired through engagement with a “reliable” (p. 26) evidence base - i.e. research that is deemed ‘high quality’ by specific and narrow metrics (e.g. research evidence standards set by the Education Endowment Foundation).

Part 2: Aims and objectives

This section of the chapter draws upon policy, literature and reflections on practice to outline the aims and objectives of this thesis:

1.2.1 Aim 1: Exploring and expanding VI education pedagogic models

1.2.1.i Objective 1a: To mobilise the QTVI as practitioner-researcher model

McLinden et al. (2022) assert that to respond to the heterogeneous needs of the cohort of visually impaired children they work with, QTVIs must be practitioner-researchers, which involves drawing upon a toolkit of skills, including:

practice knowledge and experience (practitioner toolkit); they must be able to gather and interpret evidence to inform decisions (researcher toolkit); they must have the ability to work as part of a collaborative team; and they must engage in theory to inform planning. (p. 239).

As such, they advocate for QTVIs to become *practitioner-researchers* to develop and “share knowledge and strategies within a field... which lacks a strong, research-led evidence base” (McLinden et al., 2022, p. 241). This project responds to this recommendation, as I was in an unusual position in the UK context in conducting academic research on practice whilst working as a teacher in the field, and so consider this thesis a piece of practitioner-research. Furthermore, McLinden et al. (2022, p. 237) acknowledge the rarity of academic researchers in the field of VI education and the attendant underdevelopment of the academic research body, which provides challenges for pedagogic development in VI education.

There is a clear dearth in terms of understanding how to activate/mobilise the notion of QTVI as practitioner-researcher in the literature, with only McLinden et al.'s aforementioned (2022) work providing framework outlining explanation what the role entails but providing no real-life examples of the practitioner-researcher in action, only offering some examples of topics that the VI practitioner-researcher could potentially conduct research on. As such, there is a gap in the literature ripe for further exploration of this framework, and especially examples of it being activated, and this research hopes to address this. This outcome is particularly important given that the limited breadth of formal academic research into vision impairment

education means that other QTVIs “cannot simply follow well-trodden steps” (McLinden et al., 2022, p. 239) in embodying the practitioner-researcher role.

1.2.1.ii Objective 1b: To offer alternative pedagogic philosophies

Liasidou (2012, p. 49) suggests that researching pedagogies requires bringing into conversation theory and philosophy with reflections on professional practice. This is because, as feminist scholar Sara Ahmed (1998, p. 17) explains, “theory involves a way of ordering the world which has material effects, in the sense that it both constitutes and intervenes in that world”. As such, it is important to interrogate established theories to avoid “uncritically accepting prevalent definitions and conceptions” (Biesta et al., 2011, p. 233), which can result in the “authorisation” (Ahmed, 1998, p. 17) of only certain theoretical influences by those in positions of power and influence in the Academy.

As Chapter 2 goes on to discuss, the dominant model underpinning UK VI pedagogy is the (bio)ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, 1977, 2005). This positions the child as an active agent within an ecology comprised of various systems, which are pre-existing and static. As Rogoff (2003, p. 46) explains, from this perspective, the systems are “conceived as existing separately, definable independently of each other [and] related in a hierarchical fashion as the ‘larger’ contexts affect the ‘smaller’ ones, which in turn affect the developing person”. As such, this arguably fails to recognise the multiplicity and vital dynamism of the relational interconnection between the child, the systems and other agents, which findings in Chapters 7-9 highlight as all being crucial aspects of pedagogic encounters.

1.2.2 Aim 2: Responding to contemporaneous inclusive education policy objectives

1.2.2.i Objective 2a: To map the present VI education landscape from the perspective of young people

This thesis offers a mapping of the current VI educational climate in the UK from a variety of stakeholders – VICYP participants, a practicing QTVI, a QTVI educator/trainer, drawing upon accounts from academic and grey literature and

bringing all of these ‘voices’ into conversation with policy. Offering accounts of the current educational landscape is important because macro-level discourses can shape the subjectivity of children (Gee, 1992, p. 123). Everyday interactions between adults and children can introduce and emphasise “broader social conceptualisations” (MacLure, 2003, p. 175) or discourses, with positive or negative results for children’s academic achievement, social development and emotional wellbeing.

For example, children labelled as having SEND have been found to be more vulnerable to negative impacts of such discourses (Hart et al., 2007). This clearly has implications for teachers, who need to understand how wider discourses (and their own orientations to them) influence their pedagogic principles and practices at a micropolitical level. This is both a professional requirement for QTVIs³ and an ethical imperative in working with disabled children for teachers more widely. As a QTVI educator, the opportunity to analyse trends, challenges and perspectives in this thesis offers the potential to better prepare future QTVIs to harness the power of discourse to avoid mentoring or apprenticing VICYP (Gee, 1992, p. 123) into certain acceptable (or even rewarded) ways of thinking, doing and being.

1.2.2.ii Objective 2b: To ‘futureproof’ VI education in response to intersecting global crises and widening social inequities.

This project also situates VI education within wider policy objectives. In 2022, the United Nations (UN) held a summit focused on the need to transform education as “an urgent political imperative for our collective future” (UN, 2022, p. 1). Its subsequent report outlined a “global crisis” (UN, 2022, p. 1) in education, which is undermining progress towards achieving UN 2030 Sustainability Goals. The summit identified two main issues contributing to this crisis – “challenges of equity and equality... [and] that education systems are no longer fit for purpose” (UN, 2022, p. 1). It also identified that impacts of this crisis “are greatest on those who are already marginalized or disadvantaged, particularly adolescent girls and people with disabilities” (UN, 2022, p. 1). This emphasises the importance of adding to the

³ Mandatory qualification for teachers of children and young people with VI (MQVI) professional standards 2K1 states that QTVIs must “understand the role of a reflective and critical teacher in supporting all aspects of a learner’s development” (DfE, 2023, p. 17) and standard 2K3 requires QTVIs to “understand that their own perspectives and cultural understanding will influence their work with learners and their families” (DfE, 2023, p. 17). Part 2.2.1.i in Chapter 2 provides a full explanation of this qualification that confers QTVI professional status.

research field to contribute to this reimagining of education, and particularly the education of disabled children.

This research also responds to the UN's recommendation that teachers:

[M]ust become knowledge producers, facilitators, and guides in the comprehension of complex realities. They must be trained and empowered to transcend from passive to active, from vertical and unidirectional to collaborative. They must promote learning based on experience, enquiry, and curiosity; develop the capacity, the joy and discipline for problem solving. (UN, 2022, p. 5)

Doing so, the UN states, can also support the broadening of teachers' "capacity, agency, and autonomy... [to participate in] curricular and pedagogic transformation" (2022, p. 5). I suggest that this demonstrates the important interplay between practice and research in this process, thereby suggesting the potential importance of a more fully realised practitioner-researcher model in supporting the education of disabled children beyond the VI education sector, and beyond the English context.

This urgent call for educational transformation is also echoed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which attests that:

Education must also now be rethought to help respond to urgent and unprecedented new challenges such as the climate crisis, the emergence of generative AI technologies, the continued growth of inequalities, and the persistence of conflicts. To cope with these challenges, we need to take a long-term perspective on how education can help shape more inclusive, just and sustainable futures. (UNESCO, 2024, para. 3)

To explore this rethinking of education, UNESCO posits that there must be active collaboration between policymakers, practitioners and researchers to learn from contextualised understandings to co-create new and different ones. It identifies 5 key thematic areas for exploration in education:

- Pedagogies of cooperation and solidarity
 - Reimagining curricula
 - Unleashing the potential of teachers
 - The future of universities
 - Human-centred approaches to technology in education.
- (UNESCO, 2024, p. 1).

I believe that these objectives emphasise the importance of the practitioner-researcher model in VI education, as practitioner-research has the potential to respond to all the aforementioned objectives to help to answer the key questions

posed by UNESCO's (2021) Futures of Education report: "What should we continue doing? What should we abandon? What needs to be creatively reimagined?" (UNESCO, 2024, p. 2). However, the scope of doctoral study precludes an in-depth exploration of all of these objectives in one project. As such, applies and expands the practitioner-researcher model to explore the first thematic area – pedagogies.

1.2.3 Aim 3: Adding to the under-developed VI education research field

1.2.3.i Objective 3a: To enhance participation and voice of VICYP in research

This project enhances an under-researched field in offering accounts of VICYP perspectives about education and their wider lives through participatory inquiry. Although there are examples of excellent research-activism in the vision impairment research sector (e.g. Douglas and Hewett, 2014; Hewett et al., 2014), the majority of these projects stem from adult, non-disabled research agendas. To respond to this gap in the literature, I wanted to position VICYP as active participants in this research. While participation in discussions about their education is legislated as a right for both children (e.g. Article 23 of the UNCRC) and disabled people (e.g. Articles 29 and 30 of Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities), this right is not wholly embraced as a given in educational research. This is because bringing minoritised people to the research table (Jourian and Nicolazzo, 2016), however, requires a deliberate re-positioning of educational research "to acknowledge agency and movement in places where youth have little room for manoeuvring" (Cruz, 2011, p. 548). This is not a simple task, given that this situation perpetuated by the fixed hierarchies of systemic power and within the education system as a whole and particularly, within its institutions.

For example, Liddiard et al. (2019a, p. 155) note that "while the role of the child in research has shifted significantly, it is noticeably still adults who hold much of the control regarding participation and research leadership". Such adult-centric (Whitney and Liddiard, 2020) conceptions of research undervalue the agentic capabilities of young people and privilege the opinions of academics above those with lived experience. As such, it was important to me as an adult and teacher to try to minimise these power dynamics within the research process. To do so, I wanted to learn collaboratively through research about VICYP's past/current educational experience to understand how practitioners can approach VI education pedagogies

differently in order to enhance future educational experiences of visually impaired children.

The project therefore thinks-with professional experience, personal axiological orientations, conversations visually impaired young people and encounters with a variety of theoretical drivers to respond to the research questions. By attending to an enlarged understanding of what research is and does, the thesis deliberately tries to flatten and disturb prepollent hierarchies of expertise in education and research. It does so by attuning to notice everyday moments to build understandings of the past, present and future in/with/through stories (Latto et al., 2022, p. 153) This ensures that it stays with the trouble (Haraway, 2016) in an attempt to “produce different knowledge and produce knowledge differently” (St. Pierre, 1997, p. 175) about and for VI education pedagogies.

The next part of the chapter outlines the **research questions (RQs)** and approaches that have guided this research inquiry to explore VI education pedagogies and meet these aims and objectives.

Part 3: Research questions

1.3.1 *Forming the RQs*

McLinden et al. (2022, p. 65) assert that QTVIs should become practitioner-researchers in order to achieve one of the other key tenets of their role – being agents of change (McLinden et al., 2016). The change I am seeking to effect in this thesis in order to think differently about VI education pedagogies draws upon professional experience that suggests that visually impaired young people should be given more opportunities to participate actively in research. A 2016 review by the United Nations (UN) of the UK's implementation of the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) stated its “[regret] that the rights of the child to have his or her best interests taken as a primary consideration is still not reflected in all legislative and policy matters...affecting children” (point 26), and that their views are “not systematically heard” (point 30). As a practicing QTVI, I concurred with this report's recommendations that creating opportunities for children to have active and meaningful engagement with opportunities to develop their understanding of their rights and identities are paramount in supporting their holistic development, and also that it is crucial to ensure that professionals listen to the views of young people, and act upon them (point 31).

Reading this review constituted a powerful affective encounter that I later realised contributed towards catalysing my desire not only to undertake research that would centre pupil participation and voice, but also the bifurcating objective of this thesis of establishing ways “towards fostering social justice in the classroom, as well as in moving closer to an enriched understanding of the discomfort and challenge of what it means to teach and to learn” (Gravett and Lygo-Baker, 2024, p. 1). Facilitating “strong collaboration” (Choy et al., 2009, p. 381) that can “foster more knowledge production from the ground up” (Geerts, 2019, p. 129) by eliciting voice in ethical ways, I hoped that creating “spaces to generate playful collaborative processes” (Kuby and Bozalek, 2023, p. 191) with visually impaired young people in this research might have meaningful pedagogic implications for VI education.

To achieve this aim, I identified three overarching research questions (**RQs**) that this thesis endeavours to respond to:

RQ1: How do visually impaired young people encounter the English compulsory education system

RQ2: What different understandings emerge from a Dis-Human exploration about visually impaired children's lives and experiences?

RQ3: How might a Dis-Human-informed exploration of visually impaired children's educational experiences and beyond inform VI pedagogies?

I now go on to explore and unpack each RQ in turn below.

1.3.2 RQ1: How do visually impaired young people encounter the English compulsory education system?

This question is aimed at exploring the educational experiences of VICYP, and its response can be found in Chapter 7. Firstly, this adheres to a democratic axiological research commitment that “consulting pupils, eliciting and hearing their voices assumes the value of such pupil talk in challenging the hierarchical relations between teacher and taught and in reshaping pedagogic practices in line with students’ expressed needs” (Arnot and Reay, 2007, p. 321). However, I am mindful of critiques of voice-based research that positions voice as the possession and production of an individual subject (Bernstein, 2000) or as representative of the experiences of a social identity group, thereby ignoring inequalities within said group (Arnot and Reay, 2007). As such, the wording of **RQ1** is indicative of a burgeoning understanding in this thesis around ontological multiplicity (Mol, 2002), which suggests that “realities, what there *is* in the world, are *done in practices*” (Law and Singleton, 2014, p. 384), and therefore they can be done differently depending on said practices, meaning that there can be multiple ‘realities’ at once, as “ontology is not the given order of things...instead *ontologies* are being brought into being” (Mol, 2002, p. 6, emphasis added).

Jackson and Mazzei explain (2023) it is important to understand a distinction between ontologies being *plural* (“linear and additive”, p. 11) and them being *multiple*, i.e. implying “‘manyfoldedness’... [that is] a coexistence that is neither fragmented nor hierarchically contained” (p. 11). In this latter conceptualisation, self or subject is not fixed or discrete but rather “a process, made of constant shifts and

negotiations between different levels of power and desire” (Braidotti, 2017, p. 169). This is because reality is not a fixed concept, but rather the result of multiple relational *encounters*. Encounters produce and are produced by “voluntary and involuntary acts [which] are part of the production of the multiple: new worldings, different knowledges and different ontological imaginings...*not* reflective tellings or descriptions” (Jackson and Mazzei, 2023, p. 12, emphasis added). As such, I explore how VICYP *encounter* education.

1.3.3 RQ2: What different understandings emerge from a Dis-Human exploration about visually impaired children’s lives and experiences?

In designing this research, I recognised that my positionality as adult and practitioner-researcher would inevitably set “the interactional conditions for the production of pedagogic realisations” (Arnot and Reay, 2007, p. 317) due to the inherently hierarchical nature of education in which adults set boundaries and distributive conditions for eliciting voice (Bernstein, 1990, p. 26). This is particularly important to interrogate when working with disabled children, as without due consideration of creating safe and generative spaces for participation, voice may become an essentialising force – used not “to create or challenge goals but to incorporate members into existing ones” (Anderson, 1998, p. 579).

Therefore, it was important to ensure conditions for ‘identity talk’ were created within the project. Arnot and Reay (2007, p. 319) describe identity talk as discourses and identities “created outside the school but is drawn into, recontextualised and expressed in complex ways inside the school”. Identity talk was conceptualised in this project by learning about the lives of students outside school, and the response to **RQ2** in Chapter 8 outlines the outcomes of this process, offering participant accounts of what wider forces beyond education shape their subjectivities.

Therefore, participants were encouraged to share stories about their lives outside of school, encompassing topics directed by the participants themselves, which included friendships, hobbies, politics, the pandemic and social media.

Furthermore, the response also explores “disability’s intersectional relationship with other identities that have been considered less than human (associated with class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, age)” (Liddiard et al., 2019a, p. 156). At the same time, it considers the participant “as a relational subject constituted in and by multiplicity, ...

a subject that works across differences and is also internally differentiated, but still grounded and embodied” (Braidotti, 2013, pp. 49-50). As such, it was necessary to create and engage a theoretical framework that allowed for more expansive understandings not only of the lives and experiences of my participants as visually impaired, as disabled, as young people, but also “to acknowledge that the web of relations between humans and others means that our subject positions are always moving and always in flux” (Liddiard et al., 2019b, p. 13).

I found inspiration in the theoretical notion of DisHumanism (e.g. Goodley and Runswick-Cole, 2014; Goodley and Runswick-Cole, 2016; Goodley et al., 2016; Liddiard et al., 2019b), which adopts posthumanism’s critique of narrow understandings of what it is to be human (e.g. Braidotti, 2013) but also recognises (following the field of Critical Disability Studies) that many people desire to be human and are protected by accessing this categorisation (e.g. human rights legislation). As such, I have created and mobilised a Dis-Human⁴ theoretical framework that reveals “both the tensions and potentials that emerge when a child is seen as same but different” (Goodley and Runswick-Cole, 2015, p. 251) and is therefore an appropriate and generative theoretical framework for researching VI education. Chapter 3 provides a detailed explanation of its development.

1.3.4 RQ3: How might a Dis-Human-informed exploration of visually impaired children’s educational experiences and beyond inform VI pedagogies?

My response to **RQ3** in Chapter 9 draws together of learning from across the thesis. It draws upon practitioner knowledge, theory, the reframing of methodologies, the interrogation of concepts and participant data. It demonstrates how exploring students’ embodiments of a multiplicity of selves (Gee 2000; Holland et al., 1998) by creating conditions for identity can talk help teachers to learn more about them as culturally and socially situated. Naraian (2011) suggests that attending to identity talk may have potential to positively influence inclusive pedagogies in schools, which then can positively affect inequality outside of them. This is indicative of the importance of this thesis’ Dis-Human theoretical framework, which attunes to

⁴ Chapter 3 part 3.4.1 explains why I choose to present DisHuman as hyphenated to become Dis-Human.

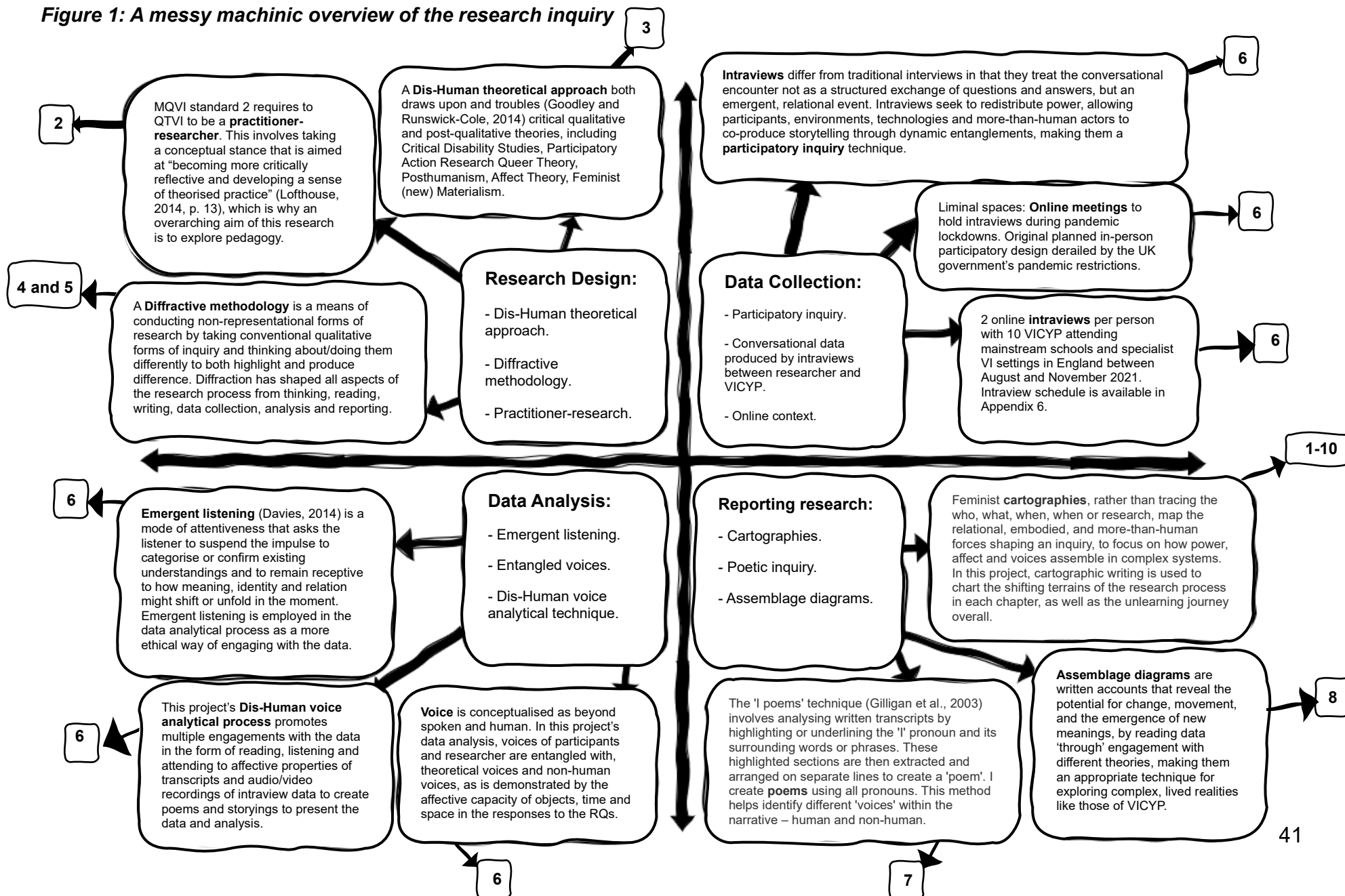
“moments where sameness and difference, disability and humanity are invoked simultaneously” (Goodley et al., 2016, p. 777), thereby creating new stories around the lives of VICYP that include “continuations, interruptions and reformulations” (Haraway, 2004, p. 128).

The word “*beyond*” in the question is also taken from Mayes’ (2023, p. 13, emphasis added) work on voice in which she states her hopes that her research “will catalyse dissonant dialogue between differentially positioned bodies in education towards more affirmative ways of thinking-feeling-relating-conspiring in and *beyond* formal schooling”. The word ‘beyond’ suggests looking forward, and also being outside or after (expected/stated limit), and to be more than or not limited to something, which connotes the project’s aim to co-create meanings/understandings *beyond* current humanist narratives and forms of research prevalent in VI education, in order to explore “the *process* and *content* of [its] pedagogies [which can create] opportunities to think and be(come) otherwise” (Kuby and Bozalek, 2023, p. 180).

1.3.5 Responding to the RQs – an overview of the research design

Similarly, in my commitment to researching “otherwise”, I borrow Fox and Alldred’s (2014) machinic framework for social inquiry to structure an overview of the “process and content” of this inquiry. They interrogated over 30 post-qualitative/new-materialist projects to gain a “critical understanding of what social inquiry does, how affects... interact with events [in the research process] and of the micropolitics of social inquiry” (Fox and Alldred, 2014, p. 406). They found that it was necessary to consider research designs and “the machines that collect, analyse and report data” (Fox and Alldred, 2014, p. 406), and how and why these components worked together towards the task of answering the RQs in each specific project. In Figure 1 below, the four central boxes in the diagram explain my own methodological machines designed and applied to respond to the RQs in this project. Arrows extend from each of the four central machines to offer brief explanations of their components. Each of the outer boxes points to a number to show the thesis chapter in which further explanation can be found. While the diagram aims to apply some chronological and structural parameters to outline the research journey, its presentation also affirms the messiness of the unlearning journey herein. As Cook (2009, p. 277) attests, mess and rigour are not mutually exclusive. Messiness can represent entanglement and complexity, which this project centres.

Figure 1: A messy machinic overview of the research inquiry



1.3.6 A response-able approach to research

Before I explain the structure of this thesis, it is important to acknowledge that I recognise that theorising the lives of participants in educational research involves navigating complex ethical, ontological and political tensions. The tensions arising from sociocultural assumptions about children's positioning and capabilities (particularly in the context of disability) have a tangible impact on the research process. When children are viewed as inherently vulnerable or lacking competence and when adult researchers feel a heightened responsibility to protect them, opportunities for meaningful participation can be unintentionally constrained. Such assumptions may reinforce power imbalances, leading adults to over mediate children's contributions or select methods that prioritise control and risk management over inclusivity. These relational dynamics shape how children's experiences are interpreted, as adultist or ableist expectations can filter what is recognised as valid knowledge. Ethical decision making becomes particularly complex for practitioner-researchers who must continually negotiate the boundaries between safeguarding and enabling agency. At the same time, these tensions can generate productive possibilities if theory becomes a dialogic partner rather than an interpretive authority. Chapter 3 goes on to outline my theoretical framework which entangles critical qualitative and post-qualitative theories, opening space for more co constructed knowledge that illuminates complexity and "radical interconnectivity" (Bhattacharya, 2021, p. 182), but also refuses to sideline individual stories to avoid flattening the category of the human, thereby enabling more nuanced, justice-oriented accounts of disability and educational experience. Acknowledging structural and attitudinal tensions is part of 'ethics in practice' (e.g. Guillemin and Gillam, 2004; Benjamin-Thomas et al., 2024), which helps researchers act with greater accountability and integrity. As such, I have approached this project with "informed empathy...[which] requires the teacher to feel *with* the students rather than feel *for* them" (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 31, emphasis added). This is an enactment of a feminist politics of response-ability (e.g. Wynter and McKittrick, 2009; Strom et al., 2019; Bozalek, 2017), which positions research as a collective practice of "being ethically in touch with the other" (Barad and Gandorfer, 2021, p. 24) in ways that are "both accountable (responsible) and responsive (response-able)" (Bozalek, 2020, p. 135). Part 4 of this chapter now explains how I have tried to imbue all aspects of the research process with a sense of response-ability.

Part 4: Mapping the thesis

1.4.1 Knowledge-ing in the research assemblage

In structuring this thesis, I ascribe to the notion of the research-assemblage (e.g. Coleman and Ringrose, 2013; Fox and Alldred, 2013, 2015; Masny, 2013), which draws upon Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) notion of assemblage. An 'assemblage' in the English language means a coming together or joining of two or more things. However, Nail (2017, p. 22) has pointed out that the word from which the translated term of 'assemblage' is derived is the French verb '*agencer*', which means to layout, construct or arrange. I take assemblage to mean both. This is because we can draw in 'things' consciously through choice, but we are also subject to unconscious affective forces within our assemblages.

Fox and Alldred (2013, p. 772) explain that "social production emerges relationally as entities affect each other..., and from the consequent capacities and desires deriving from these relationships". This project's deliberate ontological positioning of difference as positive demonstrates awareness that actions, relations and affects (Fox and Alldred, 2013, p. 778) may influence such social productions, which is an important response to critiques of DeleuzeGuattarian (1987) Assemblage Theory⁵. For example, it heeds warnings (e.g. Weheliye, 2014; Kinkaid, 2020) that Assemblage Theory can flatten difference to the point that it can de-historicise and decontextualise issues of race and gender (Dernikos et al., 2019, p. 439), which could also apply to disability given its similarly marginalised status in society.

However, Conway et al. (2018, p. 10) note that assemblage thinking is a spectrum: from its Deleuze and Guattarian iteration to DeLanda's (2006; 2012) complexity-influenced thinking, to critiques from some Indigenous, feminist and decolonial scholarship fields. It is therefore important to locate "the concept of assemblage, and diverse deployments of it, in their own historical and political contexts... to more directly engage the problems of power, difference and the political attributed to assemblage thinking" (Conway et al., 2018, p. 10). As such, I defer to Puar (2012, p. 63) who advocates being open to the possibilities of thinking with different concepts simultaneously to "produce more roadmaps of precisely these not quite fully understood relations between discipline and control". As such, I endeavour to bring

⁵ Specific examples of activating assemblage theory in this project appear in Chapters 7, 8 and 9.

assemblage theory into entanglement with disability to consider the macro- and micro-political forces power that shape VI education pedagogies.

To enact this relational ontology, the project frames knowledge as the more vital (and I argue, response-able) knowledge-ing (Taylor, 2021). In her pivoting of knowledge from noun to verb, from a destination to a process, Taylor's conceptualisation of knowledge-ing as "a material practice of knowledge-making, creates an onto-epistemological space for making the key shift from knowledge based in disciplines to *transdisciplinarity* ways of knowing-being-doing" (2021, p. 31, emphasis in original) and therefore for more expansive understandings of what counts as knowledge, and therefore whose knowledge matters.

1.4.2 Feminist Cartography

Given that this project takes an approach that actively attempting to embrace difference in thinking about and doing research and practice, a cartographic approach was selected to offer structure for its write up. My understanding of cartographic writing draws upon Rosi Braidotti's critical posthuman feminism (2005; 2019; 2021). For Braidotti (2019, p. 32), creating cartographies "fulfil[s] a methodological function by providing discursive objects of exchange... The subjects of this exchange compose a relational community, defined as a[n]... 'assemblage'". Therefore, it follows that a feminist cartographic approach can map the complex relief of the contemporary landscape of VI education, marked and produced by diverse voices (Rolnik, 2014) that, when brought together, form a distinct landscape.

Further explanation of its the utility of cartographies in feminist research is explained by Strom and Mills (2021):

Creating cartographies, or maps, of the interactions among and within such entangled assemblages illuminates the flows of power and the effect of affect. Cartographical thinking...[is] a method of slowing down and clearly articulating the complexity of life (p. 193)

Cartographies are therefore an ethical means of capturing interconnections in inherently complex systems such as education, as they constitute an enactment of the politics of resistance espoused by post-structuralists like Deleuze and Guattari and later Braidotti (1996; 2006). Cartographic writing maps the "intricate webs of power" (Gray et al., 2021, p. 205) in which humans and non-humans are located,

offering examples of how “power exerts itself and why it does so in particular ways and in specific places” (Gray et al., 2021, p. 210) and at the same time providing “contours and parameters to operate within and fight against” (Gray et al., 2021, p. 205). Cartographical thinking, therefore, both captures dominant anthropocentric ways of thinking and simultaneously affords the reframing of understandings of lived experiences away from human exceptionalism and towards an understanding of the power and agency of non-human forces to affect and be affected in our encounters with them.

Affectivity and power are viewed by Braidotti as intrinsically linked and knowledge is considered “the most powerful affect... in that it ensures the adequate understanding of one’s embodied self... [within] a complex multiplicity of potentially conflicting communities” (2006, pp. 147-150). To develop knowledge-ings of our subjectivity, therefore, we need to understand our positionality via understanding socio-political structures and factors, as well as the individual’s ability to affect and be affected by them, and to express and explore this ability, which Braidotti calls our “interactive capacity” (2006, p. 148). Braidotti (1996; 2006; 2022) identifies two types of power: *potentia* and *potestas*. Power-as-*potestas* represents the types of power – e.g. colonialism, imperialism, capitalism (Ferreira da Silva, 2017) – endured by marginalised subjects. It is a hierarchical, sovereign power that seeks to fix, control and structure the world through emphasising binary oppositions (e.g. human/non-human, male/female, white/non-white, able-bodied/disabled). Power-as-*potentia*, fosters alliance, emphasising relationality. It is the power *to* (e.g. create, change) rather than power *over*. It is the power that those marginalised subjects have the potential to wield (Braidotti, 2022, p. 115) against the forces of power-as-*potestas*.

Posthuman feminist thinking suggests that our interactive capacity is affirmed or constrained by power dynamics, and therefore so are our “ways of being in the world” (Davies, 2014, p. 1) and at the same time our becomings (Braidotti, 2006), because our subjectivity is “produced through intra-actions; we are multiplicities, always in process of becoming other than we were before” (Davies, 2014, p. 9). Because this thesis aims to explore the lives and experiences of VICYP (as demonstrated by RQ1 and RQ2), it aims not only to surface examples of power-as-*potestas* that have constrained the participants’ abilities to navigate the world, but also to recognise and harness examples of power-as-*potentia* through and as “active engagement with the present” (Braidotti, 2010, p. 57). It deliberately focuses on both aspects of power as an enactment of an affirmative political stance, which

balances critique with creativity, pain and positivity (Braidotti, 2010) an ethical and transformative means of producing a more “adequate cartography of our real-life conditions” (Braidotti, 2010, p. 56).

Furthermore, a cartographic approach is appropriate methodologically and theoretically for this project, which deliberately engages with a variety of theoretical and conceptual influences⁶, because it “is highly interdisciplinary and uses methods that already exist in social sciences research and critical studies... [as] a means of situating knowledge claims and examining power structures by mapping differences as well as similarities” (Koole, 2020, p. 1055). This affords a questioning of existing knowledges and practices, which Braidotti (2019) explains is a key outcome of cartography. Cartographical thinking and writing positions power-as-*potestas* and power-as-*potentia* as leitmotifs recurring throughout this thesis, anchoring the project methodologically, theoretically and reflexively, ensuring consistent mindfulness to upholding my feminist axiology (outlined in more detail in part 3.1.2 of Chapter 3). For example, in part 3 of Chapter 4, I explain how through wider engagement with theory I realised that my initial method of reviewing (the outcome of which is presented throughout Chapter 2) could potentially reify power-as-*potestas*, as it curtailed “open-ended and intuitive mapping” (Rousell et al., 2022, p. 376). Cartography is therefore a valid technique for articulating the transversal nature of this project, which seeks to acknowledge the entanglement of innumerable forces and agents that have impacted (or affected) each other. To use a cartographic approach, therefore, demonstrates a “commitment to *unlearning* the anchoring perspective from which one writes” (Berlant, 2022, pp. 28-29, emphasis added), which as Chapter 3 (part 3.1.3) goes onto outline, aligns with a feminist ethics, ontology and epistemology.

Each chapter offers a cartography in itself, but the thesis is also split into 3 larger cartographies – **Chapters 1 and 2** constitute a **contextual cartography**, outlining the context of this research and VI education more widely. **Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6** offer a **methodological cartography**, outlining the unlearning journey that has resulted in creating a theoretical framework and appropriate research tools/techniques. **Chapters 7, 8 and 9** provide a **conversational cartography** which cover my engagement with and analysis of the data stemming from my data collection to respond to the three research questions. However, it is important to note that ideas and affective forces are expressed in an interwoven manner

⁶ Chapter 3 offers a discussion mapping the creation of my theoretical framework, before presenting it as a diagram in part 3.4.2.i.

throughout the thesis. So, for example, engagement with literature in terms of contextualising the study will not just take place as a stand-alone chapter but rather is present across all cartographies. Each chapter begins with an introduction linking it to the previous learning and summarising its content and ends with a *conflux* in place of a conclusion (a decision further explained in the **Conflux** section that ends this chapter). Part 1.4.3 below offers an overview of the content of each chapter.

1.4.3 Content of the cartographies

In the front matter of this thesis are a list of abbreviations and glossary⁷. Their function clarifies technical and theoretical terms and field-specific language that the reader might not be familiar with. However, I follow Murris et al.'s (2021, p. xx) advice to acknowledge that the concepts outlined in the glossary are expressed in relation to their situated use in this project, rather than offered as fixed definitions. Readers are invited to engage with them with curiosity and openness.

To outline the content of the cartographies, I draw again upon Fox and Alldred's (2015, p. 404) understanding of the research-assemblage as the relations that affect each other within the research process. They break down of the affective agents within the research-assemblage, which I summarise and relate to the organisation of this thesis using their terminology (the ***emboldened and italicised*** text⁸ in this section).

Firstly, it includes **events** that will be researched (in this case the experiences of VICYP in the education system and beyond, and the VI education system itself) and my rationale (to think about how VI education can be done differently to respond to the changing world) and the **hypotheses** that catalysed this research (that to achieve this rationale, it is important to afford more opportunities for VICYP to participate in research in order to centre their voices and agency). This is covered in **Chapter 1** and will continue in **Chapter 2**.

Chapter 2 draws upon current ***research literatures and findings from earlier studies***, providing an overview of the content, context and organisation of VI

⁷ These can be found on pp. 18-21 of this thesis.

⁸ In the introduction to chapters these emboldened and italicised words will appear to denote the consistent consideration of Fox and Alldred's (2015, pp. 403-405) concept of the research-assemblage in structuring this account of this project's research-assemblage.

education, also outlining what currently we know about the experiences of VICYP in the education system and beyond. It also establishes the **contextual relations** of my positionality as both VI education practitioner and **researcher** and the impact this situated knowledge has had on the project.

Chapter 3 considers **philosophies, cultures and traditions** that have influenced the creation of my Dis-Human **theoretical framework**, including Critical Disability Studies, (new) materialism, posthumanism and a feminist politics of location. My **ethical principles** are also outlined and imbricated with my ontological and epistemological underpinnings in acknowledgement of my ascription to the (neo)materialist concept of ethico-onto-epistemology, denoting the interdependence of thinking, being and doing. **Chapter 4** demonstrates how my Dis-Human **theoretical framework** can influence both the **philosophies** and **tools** of research by outlining my diffractive methodology of reading-writing-thinking-with that is applied alongside data collection methods. Reading-writing-thinking-with is then activated in **Chapter 5** to diffract the concept of participation before it is enacted in **Chapter 6**.

Chapter 6 provides an ‘audit trail’ outlining the organisation and procedures of the empirical field work phase of the project, including explanations of recruitment and sampling, and **interview schedules or other apparatus** (e.g. consent forms). It also offers an overview of **recording and analysis technologies, computer software and hardware**, and how I achieved ethical approval from my university **ethics committee** for the project. It then outlines **research tools** – methods used to collect data. I use a process of *intraviews* – a Dis-Human diffraction of qualitative interviews. This chapter offers further insight into the intraview technique, and the related voice analytical tools created and applied in the Conversational Cartography chapters.

The data generated by these methodologies, methods and techniques is presented in **Chapters 7 and 8** and analysed care-fully in order to adhere to my feminist axiological underpinnings of inscription by foregrounding the stories and expertise of participants, and considering them through a micropolitical prism, considering the everyday affective forces that impact their experiences in education and their lives beyond schooling, thereby answering **RQ1** and **RQ2**. **Chapter 9** then answers **RQ3** through an “exploration of both patterns and divergence of findings” (Fine et al., 2003, p. 176), not only drawing upon the findings from the collection of data, but also from the wider unlearning journey undertaken throughout the thesis,

thereby demonstrating what possibilities a Dis-Human theoretical orientation can offer for thinking differently about VI education pedagogies.

Finally, **Chapter 10** concludes the thesis, summarising its overall narrative, outlining its substantive, theoretical, and methodological contributions, undertaking an **assessment** of the research to suggest its limitations, potential impacts and **outputs** and future directions for VI education pedagogy and inquiry.

Conflux

At the end of each chapter there will be a section summarising the content of the preceding chapter and linking it to the next. Rather than ‘conclusion’, I use the word ‘conflux’ as a title for these exit points from each chapter/cartography, which allows the free flow of ideas into the next. Conflux, a noun, taken from the Latin ‘*confluxus*’ can mean:

- *a flowing together, a meeting of currents, or a large assemblage.* (The Collaborative International Dictionary of English, n.d.)
- the *meeting* of previously *divergent information* whose conflux results in a new awareness of *solutions* or the *coming* together of practice and *principle*. (Collins Dictionary, n.d., emphasis in original)

Conflux demonstrates that ‘endings’ are “porous and permeable” (Dernikos et al., 2020, p. 6) rather than finite. As such, the reader is reminded that each chapter, as well as being part of the wider thesis assemblage, is a “research event in its own right, a being-in-the-midst and a coming-into-being” (Zaliwska, 2016, p. 134).

This introductory chapter has provided an overview of the background, motivations, objectives and structure of this thesis. It has outlined my positionality as practitioner and researcher, explaining how professional experience as a QTVI has been brought into conversation with wider discourse about VI education, inclusion and disability in order to reimagine VI education pedagogies. It has briefly introduced my Dis-Human theoretical framework and methodological approach of conducting a participatory inquiry with VICYP to explore how their educational encounters and wider life experiences impact on their subjectivity and how this in turn impacts the wider VI education assemblage. **Chapter 2** now outlines the existent knowledge about VI education, including the macro-political contexts, current structure and content of pedagogy and delivery and what we know about how VICYP current encounter it. It also considers the reasons for the sparseness of the research field and emphasises how this thesis can offer an innovative contribution to knowledge.

Chapter 2: Contextual cartography – situated knowledges of vision impairment education

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to create a cartography which maps current knowledges of VI education stemming from practice and research to provide a departure point (Falcon, 2023) from which to begin the re-imagining that is outlined in the rest of this thesis. This *Contextual Cartography* draws upon the concept of research-as-assemblage, as introduced in Chapter 1. According to Fox and Alldred (2015, p. 399), the research-assemblage comprises of “researcher, data, methods and contexts”. Chapters 3 to 6 explain how my position in the middle of practice and research allowed me to conceive of the enactment of research (i.e. **methods** and **data**) differently. Therefore, in Chapter 2, I attempt to entangle the professional **context** of vision impairment education into the research assemblage. This situates me as practitioner-**researcher**.

To structure this cartography, it was necessary to apply some markers to it, just as Rolnik (2014) notes the complex relief of any landscape is marked when mapped. In this chapter these markers were selected not to create a sequential or dialectical narrative, but rather to “spell out different structures of subjectivity but also different moments in the process of becoming subject” (Braidotti, 1994, p. 158). This chapter is therefore organised around elucidating “what we know” (Boden et al., 2021, p. 5) about two key subjects whose voices are co-constituted in this project – the pupil (in Part 1) and the practitioner (Part 2.2.1). These voices are entangled with explanations of the current contexts (Part 2.2.2) and content (Part 2.2.3) of VI education in England, outlining developments in policy, conceptual underpinnings and practice over the past 50 years. This provides a departure point for the journey in the thesis that leads to my response to **RQ3** in Chapter 9, which through re-imagining VI education pedagogies as an assemblage, in turn offers future “possibilities for reimagining... [the current] context” (Albright and Jocson, 2021, p. 213) outlined in this chapter.

It is important to ground this account offered by this chapter (and thesis as a whole) in a space of epistemic generosity. Epistemic generosity (as per Lorde, 1977; Diprose, 2002) is “a critical feminist orientation... As a stance of openness, it... does not presume to know” (Chadwick, 2023, p. 378). This allows for a critique of existing knowledge and practice that is rooted in care, rather than negativity (Chadwick, 2023). Furthermore, this chapter allows an important facet of Braidotti’s cartographic approach to come to the fore – the feminist politics of locations (Rich, 1984) which

account “for one’s locations in terms both of space (geo-political or ecological dimension) and time (historical memory or genealogical dimension)” (Braidotti, 2019, pp. 3-4). My situated knowledges (Harding, 1987, 1991; Haraway, 1988) as practitioner (QTVI), therefore, are not only acknowledged by this framing as impacting upon my interpretation of the context and information presented herein, but also positioned as valuable in (de)constructing wider narratives presented in literature. As Barad (2007, p. 185) explains: “we don’t obtain knowledge by standing outside the world; we know because we are of the world. We are part of the world in its differential becoming”. This addresses a key gap in the literature, that of practitioner-inquiry about VI education from the QTVI perspective. It also ensures that this chapter’s structure aligns philosophically with post-structural assemblage theory, as it attempts to avoid representation (St. Pierre, 2013), and that it also is appropriate for disability research in education, a genre in which, as Whitburn (2016, p. 117) explains, “the personal holds relevance”.

Part 1: What we currently know about VICYP's experiences of education and beyond

I will firstly exemplify the scarcity of insights about VICYP's experiences of education and beyond currently in the literature base in order to suggest that this thesis offers a unique contribution to knowledge. This takes a narrative approach (Bryman, 2016, p. 91) in that it offers reasonably comprehensive but not exhaustive (Bryman, 2016, p. 91) critical engagement with literature "in mapping perspectives of 'what we know'" (Sauzet, 2021, p. 87). It also evidences the beginnings of my increasing engagement with wider fields of literature catalysed by the Covid-19 pandemic's impact upon my fieldwork. The influence of broader theoretical insights, expanded upon in Chapter 3, redirected my approach to practitioner inquiry herein from a more practical approach of reviewing current VI educational context and practice towards what Lofthouse (2014, p. 13) calls "more of a conceptual stance; becoming more critically reflective and developing a sense of theorised practice". Further exploration of how my reviewing approach developed is undertaken in Chapter 4, which explains my shifting methodological orientations. This repositioned reviewing not as a procedure to "represent a knowledge-field 'out there', but rather to explore and perform the knowledge-field, as it emerged, while I was exploring it" (Sauzet, 2021, p. 84)

2.1.1 The review criteria

This section of the chapter outlines my initial reviewing technique, which constituted a scoping review via a configurative approach. Scoping reviews aims to "identify research gaps in the existing literature... by drawing conclusions from existing literature regarding the overall state of research activity... [s]pecifically where [little to] no research has been conducted" (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005, p. 21), and are as such an appropriate choice for outlining a field that contains little existent research into my research topic. Furthermore, configurative reviewing approaches "are more likely to be interested in identifying patterns provided by heterogeneity" (Gough, et al., 2012, p. 4) and therefore, suitable for a project that is interested in exploring complexity and identifying and promoting difference.

Because this project focuses on eliciting the stories of VICYP in their own words, when reviewing the literature, I applied some inclusion and exclusion criteria. These were as follows:

- **Dates: post-1972 Vernon Report to present day.** As section 2.2.i of this chapter explains, the Vernon Report, which remains the only report of the past 50 years conducted by UK central government into vision impairment education, reflected upon the schooling of VICYP and fed into wider SEND system changes catalysed by the 1978 Warnock Report that still has influence/relevance today so seemed an appropriate chronological starting point.
- **Researching UK educational context only.** The participants of this focus have all been educated in the English schooling context, but because of the low incidence of VI, many previous projects exploring school experiences of CYPVI have incorporated children from other home nations (e.g. Hewett et al., 2014; Douglas et al., 2016), so this project follows suit. However, studies that focus on VICYP experiences of education outside of the UK were also not included, due to the different schooling structure in other countries. For example, despite Giese et al.'s (2022) study interviewing VICYP about their school experiences, this study was not included as they were all in the German school system, which has distinct differences in structure compared to the UK (e.g. the school system is organised into lower and upper secondary) and "institutions do differ in terms of duration and school-leaving qualifications" (European Commission, 2007, p. 79) dependent upon learning pathway (vocational or academic), so identifying common thematic insights may have been less possible.
- **VI-specific focus (not grouped under SEND focus).** Manitsa et al. (2023, p. 738) assert that "[o]ne-size-fits-all approaches have also been found to be ineffective in education, due to a lack of attention to individual differences". This finding is also applicable to educational research, as studies have also emphasised the importance of flexibility of approaches and methods to working with children, such as Montreuil et al.'s (2021) systematic review of social science (including educational) research involving children in a participatory capacity, to avoid a homogenisation of participants or outcomes. I therefore wanted to ensure that the unique learning needs of VICYP (Curry and Hatlen, 1988; McLinden and Douglas, 2013) were not

minimised or conflated with the experiences of other cohorts of children with SEND.

- **Focusing on compulsory education.** My participants were all in compulsory education, so to seek “counterpatterns as well as convergences” (Lather, 1986, p. 67) that would support Lather’s expanded notion of triangulation of data, I deemed it more appropriate to include research that was about the same education phase. As such, publications by Bishop and Rhind (2011), Hewett et al. (2017) and Croft (2020) were not included due to focus on Higher Education, rather than compulsory education.
- **Focused on VICYP’s experience, not the experience of those working with them/supporting them/living with them.** I was keen to include studies that incorporated active engagement of VICYP in sharing their experiences. To borrow Montreuil et al.’s (2021, p. 2) understanding of engagement, I define active engagement as broadening perceptions/perspectives through participation and valuing it in relation to everyday experiences. Grey’s (2009) exploration of the Northern Ireland context of VI education explored the views of SENCOs on supporting VICYP in compulsory education, rather than VICYP for example, so was not included. Similarly, Molden’s (2014) report on mothers of VICYP included reference to school experiences, but from the parental perspective so was not included. Similarly, Cummins and Hayton’s (2023) study into VI education provision focused on the viewpoints of parents and caregivers and acknowledged that further research “triangulating parental views with that of the children receiving the support... is needed for corroboration” (p. 1) of outcomes due to previous research into the quality of life of VICYP, e.g. Tadic et al.’s (2016, p. 3) finding that “parental perception may be discordant with the perception of their CYPVI”.
- **Related to social model of disability⁹ rather than medical model¹⁰.** Studies that were focused on developing medical/clinical knowledge rather than educational were not included, such as Teoh et al.’s (2021) study on the numbers of VICYP in Britain, which aimed to relate this to development of eye health measures. While Woodhouse et al.’s (2014) study took place with VICYP who attended Welsh special schools, its focus was on vision

⁹ Definitions of the social and medical models of disability are available in the glossary, situated in the front matter of this thesis.

¹⁰ I chose not to include studies in medical publications, e.g. Lancet, British Medical Journal, because while recognising the lived reality of impairment, I did not want to focus on VI as a medical condition, but rather to consider the social constructs that it interacts with – e.g. learning, wellbeing, achievement.

screening. Also, while Alagaratham et al. (2002) conducted their research at the Royal Blind School in Edinburgh, they wanted to establish vision levels and classification of conditions in the cohort of pupils. These studies all constitute research *on* VICYP, rather than research *with* VICYP, so do not align with the (posthuman) feminist axiological underpinnings of this project (which are further explored in Chapter 3) and were therefore not included.

2.1.2 The existing literature about VICYP

2.1.2.i The spectre of ableism

I found the hauntings of historical ableism occasionally present in the extant literature. The word ‘hauntings’ is used deliberately to connote the concept of hauntology. Varga (2024) offers a clear summary of its origins and implications:

Drawing inspiration from the way that Marxism continues to haunt, or influence, political and economic theories, Derrida (1994)¹¹ conceived the neologism, hauntology in an effort to make sense of how traces (upon traces) of history return to influence how people understand themselves in the more-than-human world around them. (p. 789)

Haunting is applicable here because too often in education (both Higher and compulsory), the problematic ghosts of the past are deliberately ignored, or their spectral presence is missed because of a lack of due care and attention to our pedagogical influences (Zembylas, 2019). It is particularly important to be aware of such hauntings, because to ignore or avoid them could perpetuate oppression. For example, Berthold Lowenfeld’s seminal 1973 book *“The visually handicapped child in school”*, which until recently informed QTVI training materials, refers to the impact of VI as restrictive to learning opportunities. Lowenfeld delineates three main ‘restrictions’ as arising from vision impairment/blindness, including restrictions in the range and variety of experiences accessed, restrictions in the mobility and restrictions in interaction with the environment. This message lies contrary to the Social Model of Disability (e.g. Oliver, 1983), which has encouraged educators to reframe such ‘restrictions’ as being imposed by disabling barriers produced by the environment, rather than an individual deficit model.

¹¹ However, is important to acknowledge that similar concepts around ontology and temporality have been developed by indigenous thinkers (Tuck and Yang, 2012) and should not be ascribed solely to Western thinking.

This critique does not intend to minimise the lived experience of impairment, but rather to emphasise that many key resources on VI education in the literature base, even recent, can (inadvertently) position VI within the medical model of disability as a ‘limitation’, something to overcome. For example, McLinden et al.’s (2017b) article on facilitating participation in education for VICYP with Severe and Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties, although acknowledging the impact of extrinsic factors on educational inclusion of VICYP, not only uses a medical-based classification model to apply to VICYP (World Health Organisation’s 2007 international classification of functioning and disability or ICF-CY) but also uses descriptive vocabulary with negative connotations to describe the impact of VI and other learning difficulties throughout. For example, there are references to “limited mobility”, “deviation or loss” of vision, “increased dependency” or “reliance” on others, disability framed as “damage” and “handicap” and the child as having “problems” with undertaking activities (McLinden et al., 2017b, paras. 2-22).

The intent of McLinden et al.’s (2017b) article is developing knowledge about how best to support an under-researched group (VICYP with Severe or Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties, SLD/PMLD). It notes the importance of bringing together the different models of disability to gain a holistic understanding of the needs of the child, including the lived experience of impairment and its interplay with disabling societal barriers. However, it chooses to use a quotation by Bricout et al. (2004, p. 45) to illustrate these aims which describes the medical model of disability as “focused on individual deficits” and apply it without further context or critique. This may lead the reader to assume (whether accurately or not) that the authors view disability within a deficit narrative, which could then perpetuate negative stereotyping.

It is important to acknowledge these traces of the past in research that purports to be inclusive. Taylor and Gannon (2021, p. 11), drawing on Barad, encourage researchers to “‘speak with ghosts’ [which means] accepting responsibility for what we inherit from the past and the future; it is a practice which might enable us to be more responsive, to widen our capacity to respond to the entangled relationalities of the present”. As such, and as noted in the introduction to this chapter, it is important to question existing knowledge that is beholden (unwittingly or not) to power-as-*potestas* – in this case reiterating stigmatising tropes of disability as abnormal (Mosleh and Gibson, 2022, p. 123), and VI positioned as exemplifying “lack, difference, anomaly, and conspicuous oddness” (Titchkosky, 2000, p. 207), which I wish to avoid (and actively subvert) in this thesis.

2.1.2. ii *The sparseness of the field*

Furthermore, the criteria applied highlighted the current sparseness of the field of VI educational research. I was able to find very few articles that centred the educational experiences of VICYP from their own perspective. One exception was by Whitburn (2014) which highlighted issues with teaching assistant support, but this research was undertaken in the Australian context. In England, the University of Birmingham's Vision Impairment Centre for Teaching and Research (VICTAR's) longitudinal transitions study (2009 onwards) into experiences of transitions from compulsory education to post-16 provision included interviews, but the resultant publications (e.g. Hewett et al, 2015; Hewett et al., 2016) privileged quantitative data and thematic analysis from the project rather than individual narratives.

Other studies (e.g. Elsmann et al., 2017) focused on the impact of VI on CYP's lives, rather than exploring lives and experiences as a whole, thereby potentially essentialising their identities by ignoring the interplay between different social categories (e.g. race, gender, disability, sexuality) that can co-constitute inequality and oppression (Crenshaw, 1989). This is despite evidence that suggests when researching vision impairment, a "sole focus on individual identity markers may be inadequate and even unhelpful... because the identification of multiple factors is associated with better health and social well-being as it provides people with a basis for being supported" (Bassey et al., 2024, p. 13).

In the field of psychology, I found there to be a focus on social inclusion and emotional wellbeing. For example, Plaskett (2015) interviewed 12 VICYP in secondary schools in five London boroughs and focused on the challenge of social inclusion and isolation. The study's findings about the importance of developing positive self-concept is supported by studies from the international context (e.g. Datta and Skrebneva, 2021, in Australia). However, it is worth noting that Plaskett's findings are part of a PhD thesis that remains unpublished a decade after production. Also from psychology, Manitsa et al.'s (2023) mixed methods study into predictive factors impacting upon the social inclusion of VICYP in schools found that close friendships had a positive impact on self-esteem. However, this study included only VICYP with no additional SEND (p. 738), compared findings with other groups (sighted peers and teaching assistants) and was designed to inform the development of educational psychology interventions, rather than pedagogical approaches, all of which may limit its applicability to this study.

Additionally, many publications from the past two decades have focused on curricular content and adaptation strategies of the mainstream curriculum. I found studies that included descriptions of and/or case studies focusing on individual children (e.g. Mason and McCall, 1997; Arter et al., 1999; Davis and Hopwood, 2002; McLinden and Douglas, 2013) but all focused on supporting VICYP to access information more effectively rather than outlining holistic experiences. For example, while Arter et al.'s (1999) book discusses VICYP access to the mainstream curriculum, it is organised as guidance for non-specialist teachers, new to teaching VICYP, with including these children in mainstream settings. Davis and Hopwood's (2002) work describes how potential barriers to learning and participation for VICYP in primary education can be reduced through appropriate input of professionals.

Mason and McCall (1997) provide examples for VI specialist teachers regarding supporting curriculum access for VICYP, breaking down strategies for various subjects. Similarly, McLinden and Douglas' (2013) chapter is aimed at educational psychologists and outlines how VI impacts on learning and offers strategies to enhance opportunities for VICYP to access information. However, none of this research includes distinct input from VICYP themselves, emphasising the adult-centric research agendas of many existing publications. Part 2 of this chapter now goes on to examine the current literature about VI education as a whole, focusing on policy, practice and philosophies, and identifying a similarly limited breadth of research.

Part 2: What we currently know about VI education – philosophies, pedagogies and practice

The first section of Part 2 of this chapter now examines the role of the QTVI as a key participant in pedagogic encounters alongside VICYP. This allows me to familiarise the reader with the pathway towards becoming a QTVI by explaining the professional qualification undertaken to become a QTVI and the different aspects of the QTVI role. VI is a low-incidence disability compared to the prevalence of other identification categories fitting under the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice's (SEND CoP) four broad areas of need (DfE, 2015). Therefore, the intricacies of VI education including its organisation, policy context and the role of the QTVI in delivering it are arguably less well-known in mainstream education than more widely occurring SEND diagnostic categories. This part of the chapter, therefore, aims to add to this under-developed area of knowledge by drawing together an overview of the structure, aims and delivery of VI education in the English context, including its key conceptual underpinnings.

2.2.1 The QTVI role – personal experience and professional pathway

I have an ongoing professional relationship with this sector that both predates this project and will continue after this doctorate is complete. Therefore, I straddle an insider-outsider position within this research assemblage and therefore it is important that I demonstrate “an awareness of the researcher’s contribution to the construction of meanings throughout the research process” (Willig, 2001, p. 10). As such, this part of the chapter will entangle a detailing of both this wider context and an explanation of my relationship with the sector, thereby reflexively locating myself in relation to VI education in order to acknowledge how this might inform my understandings.

2.2.1.i Training to be a QTVI – The MQVI

The QTVI is a professional role that requires the holder not only to hold Qualified Teaching Status (QTS) as recognised by the Department for Education (DfE) in England, but also to possess or be willing to undertake, an additional mandatory

postgraduate professional qualification (MQ) in teaching sensory impaired learners. There are three pathways of the qualification, one for teachers of D/deaf and hearing-impaired children and young people, one for multisensory impaired children and one for children who are blind or visually impaired (DfE, 2023). I possess the latter qualification – the Mandatory Qualification for teachers of children and young people with vision impairments (MQVI).

The MQVI qualification is framed around a set of professional standards, mandated by the Department for Education (DfE, 2023). The MQ is applicable to professionals working in English, Welsh, Scottish and Northern Irish contexts. However, the policy and legislation that the QTVI will practice under is dependent upon the devolved government's requirements, as well as central government (i.e. Westminster). The MQ is awarded after the trainee QTVI evidences competence against nine overarching professional standards (DfE, 2023), sub-divided into 131 sub-standards based around knowledge and understanding and skills. The evidence is collated and assessed by the qualification providers (universities), who draw upon the professional experience of established QTVIs and vision impairment education academics to deliver the course.

Since I qualified over a decade ago, the professional standards for the MQVI have been updated twice. Firstly in 2016, following “‘light touch’ consultation with existing MQ providers and other stakeholders in 2014 and 2015” (DfE, 2016, p. 5). The more wholesale revision of the standards took place over two years from 2018, following “a review of the previous specification led by the National Sensory Impairment Partnership (NatSIP) in 2018/19, and subsequent coproduction with the sensory impairment sector in 2019/20, which then reported to the DfE” (DfE, 2023, p. 5). Quality education is reviewed regularly to ensure that it is responsive to changes in the policy and practice landscapes, as well as the changing priorities of the DfE (DfE, 2023, p. 3). When I refer to MQ standards in this thesis, unless otherwise specified, I will be referring to the current iteration of them, which came into force from September 2023.

2.2.1.ii The QTVI role

McLinden et al. (2023) explain that “specialist practitioners [QTVIs] are considered to have a central role in over-seeing such development, facilitating the progressive nature of curriculum access while promoting an increased emphasis on “learning to access” skills” (p. 245). The QTVI must work across the mainstream or academic

curriculum, as well as the additional curriculum, also known as Expanded Core Curriculum. Access to an additional curriculum “ensures CYP with VI have fair access to a shared curriculum and education system while developing the specialist skills to develop personal agency and increase independence” (Hewett et al., 2022, p. 5), as will be further discussed in section 2.2.4 of this chapter.

While the MQ standards that a trainee QTVI must meet are fixed, the role itself is as varied and heterogeneous as the children we support (McLinden and Douglas, 2013). The day-to-day reality of the role will depend upon the setting(s) in which the QTVI works – this could be in one setting, such as an integrated resource base in a mainstream school, further education (FE) college or special school, or in a vision impairment specialist school/college (which are often residential). The role can also be peripatetic, in which the QTVI travels to visit children in a number of educational or childcare settings, offering advice and training to staff in those settings, as well as teaching opportunities for the young person. It could also be a mixture of both, and the immediate priorities and approaches of the QTVI are often dependent on the funding model of the Local Authority or organisation within which the vision impairment team or service is working, as well as the specific individual needs of pupils supported.

I entered doctoral research as a practicing QTVI with over a decade’s professional experience. During this time, I worked in both school-based and peripatetic QTVI roles, working with children from birth up to the age of 18 years old. My professional specialism (and my most extended period of QTVI experience in one role) is working with children and young people in secondary and further education settings in Key Stages 3, 4 and 5. This professional experience partly informed my desire to work with this age group in this project, along with wider research outcomes suggesting that children aged 10-15 are experiencing continued decline in happiness with school (e.g. Children’s Society, 2022) and that children and young people with SEND are having a poorer educational experience in comparison to peers (e.g. Ofsted, 2017), this is despite a policy context that overhauled the SEND system in 2014 “to make things better for children” (DfE, 2014, p. 8). The next section offers a synopsis of the changing positionality of VI education in the policy landscape of the English education system over the last 40 years to suggest why

the professed aim to “make things better” has not translated from policy into practice for VICYP¹².

2.2.2 The contexts of VI education in the UK

In this section, beginning with the 1972 Vernon Report, I provide a brief chronological overview of major policy developments/reforms of the British SEND system, entangled with VI-specific responses/developments that have informed and shaped current VI educational practice. This emphasises how experiences of VI education are shaped by the rigidity of power-as-*potestas*, both for VICYP and QTVIs:

2.2.2.i The policy context

1970s and 1980s

In 1972, a report into the ‘education of the visually handicapped’ conducted in 1968 (commissioned by then-Education Secretary Margaret Thatcher and overseen by Professor M. Vernon) was published by the Department of Education and Science. More commonly known as the Vernon Report, it remains the only report of the past 50 years conducted by UK central government into vision impairment education, which is why it was selected as an appropriate entry point into the policy assemblage. At the point that the report was published, there were 39 specialist schools for the visually impaired in the UK, and there was an established tradition since the early twentieth century of specialist provision for VICYP, e.g. there were 33 residential schools for the blind in 1907, despite the 1893 Elementary Education Act (Blind and Deaf Children) mandating that local education boards needed to educate blind children from the ages of 5 to 16 years (McCall, 1997). However, the majority of these specialist schools were designated for either blind *or* partially sighted students, there were only two schools at this point that were permitted to accept both cohorts. As such, another outcome of the Vernon Report was its recommendation that peripatetic teachers work with VICYP under school age and

¹² A fulsome timeline of the development of the SEND system in the UK over the past 40 years as well as VI education is available in Table 2 in Appendix 2.

their families in the home to prepare them for the transition to compulsory education.

The 1978 Warnock Report heralded a shift in perceptions regarding disability in education, introducing the term “Special Educational Needs” (SEN) rather than ‘handicap’, which became the preferred legislative term following the 1981 Education Act. It also advocated for increased inclusion as integration, specifying that it was the duty of Local Authorities to ensure that children with SEN should receive their education at an “ordinary school” (Department of Education and Skills/DES, 1981, section 2.2) if this was what parents wanted and if this placement was deemed to be an “efficient use of resources” (DES, 1981, section. 2.3.c).

1990s and 2000s

The favouring of mainstream education was further embedded by the 1989 United Nations Convention for the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Signatory nations legally agree to abide by this treaty comprising of 54 articles outlining the fundamental rights of all children. The UNCRC was signed by the UK in 1990 and came into force in 1992. The UNCRC was followed in 1994 by the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education, which Ainscow et al. (2019) reflected 25 years on from its creation, constituted “arguably the most significant international document that has ever appeared in the field of special education” (p. 671). The statement advocated for inclusive ‘education for all’ “within the regular education system” and outlined that children with SEN “must have access to regular schools”. The UK, along with 91 other governments, endorsed it.

The impact of these legislative changes resulted in a decrease in special schools in the UK (DfES, 2003), including VI specialist schools. By 1994, the number of VI-specific special schools had dropped from 39 in 1972 to twenty (Fetton, 1994). However, the outcomes of a study commissioned by RNIB to examine the impact of ‘mainstreaming’ of VICYP, development of VI education services and attendant issues highlighted discrepancies in provision for VICYP across the country and the isolating impact that integration into the mainstream could potentially have for VICYP, if not supported by appropriate planning and practice (Dawkins, 1991). Despite these findings, the number of schools with VI “as either their main designation or in association with complex needs” (Miller, 2009, p. 1) dropped to eleven by 2008. These 11 schools were attended by circa 900 pupils at this time on residential or day-pupil basis (Miller, 2009).

This trend was likely a response to the UK central government's revision its approach to SEN support with the 2001 Special Educational Needs and Disability Act, which strengthened the rights of parents to place their children in mainstream schools, by making schools legally required to ensure that reasonable adjustments were put in place for disabled children. Furthermore, the unique educational needs of VICYP were further protected by the 2003: The Education (School Teachers' Qualifications) (England) Regulations No. 1662 Regulation 7. This stated that:

a person shall not be a qualified teacher for the purpose of teaching a class of pupils who are visually impaired unless in addition to being a qualified teacher in accordance with regulation 5, he possesses a qualification approved by the Secretary of State for the purpose of this regulation.

This made the roles of qualified sensory impairment specialist teachers a mandatory entitlement to VICYP in some settings. However, this has not translated consistently into practice. For example, VI charity and advocacy group Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) found in their most recent annual survey of VI service providers that “some 57 per cent of LAs have reported a decrease or freeze in the number of QTVIs... This will likely affect just under half of CYP accessing VI support” (RNIB, 2024, p. 20). This is due to a national pattern of many Local Authorities experiencing a deficit in SEND budgets and therefore being unable to recruit adequate numbers of staff to train as QTVIs, despite the aging workforce (VIEW, 2017, para. 2) and increasing numbers on caseloads (RNIB, 2024, p. 17).

2010s to present

This is likely an outcome of the overhaul of the SEND system via the introduction of two key pieces of legislation. Firstly, the 2014 Children and Families Act introduced increased joined up working between the education, health and social care sectors, and implemented support from birth to 25 years of age “if councils agree that a young person needs more time to get ready for adulthood” (DfE, 2014, p. 7). This Act replaced the Statement of Educational Need with the Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP), promoting a holistic approach to assessment and provision. SEN support was to be a graduated approach, with schools making anticipatory adjustments and providing targeted teaching, seeking external advice only when necessary. It also introduced the Local Offer – that every Local Authority must provide information to CYP with SEND and their families about what resources and support are available in their local area (section 30, paras. 195-197).

This was swiftly followed in 2015 by the SEND Code of Practice. This outlined four categories of need: communication and interaction; cognition and learning; social, mental, and emotional health; and sensory and/or physical needs. The SEND CoP arguably advocated for a more moderate inclusion orientation towards educational provision, which envisages the system as a whole being accessible to all, but also “incorporating an element of specialist provision” (Cigman, 2007, p. 10). This supports the notion of inclusive ‘quality first’ teaching that was introduced by the 2008 Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). Quality first teaching draws upon the Salamanca Statement’s (1994) assertion that the most effective form of education is schools developing “ways of teaching that respond to individual differences and that therefore benefit all children” (Ainscow et al., 2019, p. 672). However, it also recognises, as per the 1998 National Strategies, that for some children specialist input is necessary, but leaves definitions and extent of such specialist input open to interpretation.

However, despite the 2015 SEND CoP and the 2014 Children’s and Families Act representing the most wholesale change of SEND policy in 30 years, legislating a commitment to explicitly person-centred support processes and enshrining in policy children’s right to “have a real say in what help they get” (DfE, 2014, p. 26), in 2017, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission found in their joint inspections into how well local areas were fulfilling their duties related to the SEND CoP that pupils with SEND were still having a poorer educational experience than their peers. This outcome led to my supposition (which informs this thesis’ methodology) that a key reason for this was that the right to participation and voice for pupils with SEND not translating at grass-roots educational level (a pattern that unfortunately has not changed over time). As Webster and Blatchford (2017, pp. 19-20) state: “following the overhaul of the SEND system, we still do not know what the provision set out in a Statement looks like to the... pupils on the receiving end”.

2.2.2.ii The organisation of VI educational delivery

It is therefore clear that VI education faces difficult challenges due to the influences of the macropolitical climate. I will now explain in more detail the impact of policy on VI educational practice. The Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) produces annual Freedom of Information (FOI) reports, informed by surveys sent out by RNIB to all 152 local authorities in the UK, which request information regarding education service provision for children and young people with a vision impairment. In the UK

in 2021, based on the World Health Organisation (WHO) international classification of childhood vision impairment, the estimate of numbers of visually impaired children and young people in the population, based on a prevalence of 0.2% of the population per age group, is just over 27,000 children and young people with vision impairment aged 0–16 and just over 14,000 aged 17–25 (RNIB, 2021). In 2024 there were just over 31,000 children and young people on caseloads for Vision Impairment support services in the UK (RNIB, 2024, p. 2)¹³. Caseloads have consistently risen every year since 2020 (for example, 2023 saw a 2% increase in number of children on caseloads since 2022 – RNIB, 2023).

National VI charity Thomas Pocklington Trust (2018, p. 2) reported that approximately 7 in 10 children and young people with vision impairment are educated in mainstream schools and around one in 3 in generic special schools¹⁴. This demonstrates an 20% increase in mainstream educational placement for VICYP since 1989 (RNIB, 1992; Fetton, 1994). This means that the majority of QTVIs work either in peripatetic capacities, travelling between the settings of the children on their caseload. Or they work in mainstream schools with attached VI integrated resource provisions, or they may work in a generic special school. Their role is often dependent upon the funding model of the Local Authority or setting in which they work.

Local Authorities are given responsibility for a variety of public services and facilities in a particular area. It is also recognised by central government that some needs vary geographically and that some services are therefore best delivered locally. However, in terms of education, each Local Authority must work within national frameworks and legislations but has some local jurisdiction regarding how specific blocks of central government funding can be allocated locally. The 2019 Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) guidance for allocating High Needs funding states that:

Local authorities and mainstream schools and colleges should discuss how such specialist support should be delivered when considering how to spend the high needs funding available to them. Many local authorities employ specialist teachers, funded directly from their high needs budget. Others give special schools additional funding to provide specialist support to other schools. Such arrangements are frequently

¹³ However, it is important to add a caveat that the survey received a 92% response rate of 140 local authorities out of a total possible of 153 completing the survey. As such, actual figures are likely to be higher.

¹⁴ Actual numbers may be different. E.g. the DfE (2025b) annual publication of statistics on special educational needs in England includes in its main report only pupils whose primary identified SEN is VI. It also does not record statistics from independent schools.

accompanied by a service level agreement confirming what will be delivered in return for the additional funding. (p. 40)

Although the percentage of local authorities who stated that specialist support for pupils with VI was centrally funded increased between 2020 to 2023 from 87% to 94% (RNIB, 2023), these funding nuances (wherein funding is allocated differently in different local authorities) can result in visually impaired children and young people receiving different models and levels of support dependent on where they live. For example, RNIB found in 2023 that two Local Authorities did not have a VI Service at all, only half of VI services employ specially trained teaching assistants, and that there was geographical ‘bunching’ in Local Authorities experiencing budget cuts/freezes, e.g. 50% of LAs in the East Midlands who provided evidence reported this, compared to only 11% of respondents in the East of England area¹⁵. Furthermore, there are clear disparities in the age range that services support, e.g. in 2019, 6% of VI Services reported that they did not support students in post-16 education. Additionally, there are changes in how budgets are managed in LAs. Restructuring in some areas has led to sensory services sometimes being managed by non-specialists, which is significant as if there is little to no input from VI specialists, this could potentially have an adverse impact on provision, support and structure including resources, staffing etc. This trend may have influenced the development of the “jigsaw provision” (University of Birmingham, 2022, para. 9) of VI education.

This in turn impacts upon the role of the QTVI depending on workplace. In 2023, 57 per cent of local authorities reported a decrease or freeze in the number of QTVIs over the last year despite rising caseloads. “The rise in demand for support and the caseload increase means that many authorities are, in reality, either freezing or decreasing their resource levels, resulting in support becoming increasingly stretched” (RNIB, 2023, p. 6). RNIB has therefore called for more funding to support local authorities to train and employ more QTVIs (2023, p. 23). These constraints in specialist support for VICYP further compromise opportunities for the additional curriculum to be delivered, as further explained in sections 2.3.ii and 2.3.iii of this chapter.

¹⁵ These numbers may not reflect the reality of the funding cut/freeze situation for VI Services in England, as the data only reports the outcomes for the LAs that responded to the freedom of information survey.

2.2.3 The content of VI education

Despite the difficulties outlined in the previous section of this chapter, having adequate provision of specialist input is particularly important for VICYP, given that many “will require structured teaching to enable them to learn to do tasks that normally sighted children learn without formal input... [e.g.] by enhancing visual presentation... or providing an alternative modality” (Douglas and McLinden, 2005, p. 31) within the mainstream curriculum. This is because an absence or reduction of vision can inhibit opportunities for incidental learning (Lohmeier, Blankenship and Hatlen, 2009). Furthermore, as Hewett et al. (2024) state:

International literature in the area of vision impairment education (e.g., Allman and Lewis, 2014; Ravenscroft, 2019; Douglas et al., 2019; McLinden et al., 2022) highlights that inclusion in education also requires a need for specific interventions to promote greater learner agency and independence throughout a given education pathway. This involves CYPVI learning a range of the more specialist skills that promote independent learning, mobility, everyday living, and social communication. (p. 14)

These specific interventions, which go beyond the offerings of the 'standard' or 'core' curriculum offered to all children and young people are known as the 'specialist', 'additional' or 'expanded core' curriculum needed to address the specific needs arising from their vision impairment and are “recognised as critical for promoting the quality of life of students who are visually impaired” (Sapp and Hatlen, 2010, p. 347).

2.2.3.i A note on terminology

Before the additional curriculum is discussed below, it is important to note that different terminology is applied to describe specialist programmes of educational intervention for VICYP. In the UK, the term ‘special’ curriculum for VI was referred to by many accounts from the 1990s. For example, Mason and McCall (1997, p. 141) refer to the “special curriculum” to describe those elements that are specific to children and young people with a vision impairment. Similarly, Arter et al. (1999), refer to special curriculum areas (p. 142) for VICYP that include orientation and mobility and communication skills. In the American and Australian contexts, the term ‘Expanded Core Curriculum’ (ECC) has been used to refer to describe elements of the curriculum that are particular to the needs of children with vision impairment,

and include orientation and mobility, ICT and/or development of sensory function such as touch or listening skills (e.g. McDonough et al., 2006; Sapp and Hatlen, 2010; Wolffe and Kelly, 2011; Opie et al., 2017; Opie, 2018; Fanshawe et al., 2023).

However, in this thesis I choose to use the term ‘additional curriculum’, as this has been the phrase most commonly used in the UK context over the past decade (e.g. McLinden et al., 2016; McLinden et al., 2022). Furthermore, this distinguishes the UK Additional Curriculum from the ECC, which has a formal status in international education systems, which the Additional Curriculum does not currently (Keil and Cobb, 2019, p. 4). However, despite a lack of consistency in the precise terminology used to describe the ‘specialist’ curriculum elements in the US and UK, there is broad consensus amongst VI researchers and practitioners on the topics that should be included as the basis of each area. For example, Sapp and Hatlen (2010, pp. 339-342) identify 9 key areas of learning in the ECC in the US, which align with the 11 areas of learning outlined by the 2022 UK Curriculum Framework for Vision Impairment (CFVI) as crucial for the additional curriculum to contain, which is explored further later in this chapter in section 2.2.5.

2.2.4 The Additional Curriculum

2.2.4.i What is the additional curriculum?

The additional curriculum refers to areas of learning “which would not typically be taught in schools as part of the core curriculum” (McLinden et al., 2016, p. 182).

Opie (2018) attests its importance as:

[A] globally recognized prerequisite to the inclusion of students with vision impairment (those who are blind or have low vision) in schools. The... [additional curriculum] is not seen as an optional part of a vision impaired student’s educational program but an essential part. (p. 76)

This aligns with the international rights agenda. The United Nations Convention on the rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006) states that disabled children have the right to an effective and inclusive educational experience (United Nations, 2006, Article 24, 3). Additionally, in the UK legislative context, children with Special Educational Needs and/or Disability (SEND) are legally entitled to access an education that prepares them for adulthood and allows them to achieve the best possible outcomes, as outlined by the 2015 SEND Code of Practice (Department for

Education, 2015). In the case of visually impaired young people, they may require specialist support in “facilitating the learning of Braille, alternative script, augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication and orientation and mobility skills, and facilitating peer support and mentoring” (United Nations, 2006, Article 24, 3), amongst other skills and adaptations, which might require discrete and explicit teaching. This is usually delivered by a QTVI, in conjunction with mainstream class teacher, teaching assistants and other professionals, such as Habilitation Officers.

2.2.4.ii The dual access model

Douglas et al.’s (2011, p. 36) review of VI education practice noted that:

[C]hildren with vision impairment have distinctive teaching and curriculum needs, and... when considering access to education for visually impaired students a distinction between the provision of “accessible materials” and “teaching access skills” is useful and has an empirical basis. This distinction also has a philosophical rationale that emphasises both society’s responsibility to make things accessible and society’s role in teaching young people to be independent.

VICYP, therefore, face a dual learning challenge of accessing the (mainstream) curriculum and using the additional curriculum to learn how to access the mainstream curriculum. The QTVI must, therefore, facilitate teaching and support approaches that focus on promoting universal inclusive practice to e.g. ensuring physical and social environments are accessible for visually impaired learners, “balanced with specialist input in response to individual educational and/or social needs to enable learners to develop their personal agency” (Hewett et al., 2024, p. 4). These professional objectives are summarised by the dual access pedagogic model of learning for VI education (e.g. McLinden and Douglas, 2014; McLinden et al., 2016), which balances access to learning (A2L – ensuring children and young people have fair and optimised access to the school curriculum by advocating for universal inclusive practice and making adaptations to learning environments) and learning to access (L2A – offering opportunities for VICYP to develop personal agency and skills that support their development as an independent learner within educational contexts and preparing for adult life, independent living and employment).

The model conceptualises the relationship between the mainstream and additional curricula, which should be viewed as distinct, but intertwined and not separate, and

emphasises that VICYP require access to both and support to do so effectively. The dual access model has become increasingly influential in informing the training of QTVIs in the UK over the past decade as its creators were at the time running the only two professional programmes that delivered the MQVI qualification in the country. As such, the dual access model has become the dominant pedagogic approach to VI education in the English context thanks to these programmes embedding the model within MQVI training materials and QTVIs subsequently using the model to inform learning objectives and teaching strategies in practice. In helping QTVIs recognise that access is not just provision but also skill development, the dual access model can inform systematic planning of both short-term adaptations and long-term independence goals. For example, using the model as an evaluative tool can help identify gaps where a pupil relies heavily on adults or lacks L2A skills, thereby informing the planning of additional curriculum intervention. Longer term, developing and embedding these skills can support better transitions between settings and key stages (e.g. from primary to secondary school). The dual access model can therefore underpin both responsive teaching and forward-thinking support.

Furthermore, the 2023 update of the MQVI professional standards embeds the model explicitly in standards 5 and 6. Standard 5 – ‘Learning to access: The specialist curriculum’ – states that a “key educational aim at the heart of the QTVI’s role is to develop the personal agency of CYPVI and maximise their independence” (DfE, 2023, p. 23). Standard 6 (entitled ‘Access to Learning and Development: Inclusive classroom and home-based practice and teaching’) states that “specialist teachers must identify teaching approaches that address challenges arising from the physical and social environment and promote learning” (DfE, 2023, p. 25). To promote A2L, the QTVI might provide staff training, peer awareness sessions, apply for access arrangements for examinations, conduct environmental audits and a focus on this facet of their role may inform the majority of their input when the child is younger. L2A skills might include assistive technology skills, learning braille, developing self-advocacy, improving social and communication skills. There is more likely to be a focus on L2A skills as the child gets older and the QTVI should ideally move from an advocate role to one of allyship - that is, as the VICYP develops the confidence and skills to self-advocate, the QTVI can step back but remain a source of support as necessary. These examples are not exhaustive and are dependent upon a number of contingent factors, not least the needs of the individual child.

Douglas et al. (2011) note that “finding the right *balance, or blend*, of these different approaches is a key challenge for those involved in ensuring curriculum access is appropriate for individual children with visual impairment” (p. 36, emphasis added). In reality however, such a “balance, or blend” is difficult to achieve. The additional curriculum for VICYP is currently often “overlooked or squeezed for time in an already overcrowded timetable” (VIEW, 2021, p. 5), despite the 2010 Equality Act requirement education providers to make ‘reasonable adjustments’ to the learning environment, which in the case of VICYP could be construed as provision of an additional curriculum. Instead, QTVIs are often charged with navigating the delivery of this additional curriculum against the academic requirements imposed by the mechanisms that judge school and pupil performance (Pilson, 2021, p. 342).

2.2.4.iii Barriers to an additional curriculum

This is despite the DfE’s assertion that “[t]he national curriculum is just one element in the education of every child. *There is time and space in the school day and in each week, term and year to range beyond the national curriculum specifications*” (DfE, 2014, para 3.2, emphasis added). This discrepancy may be demonstrative of tensions between the (unspoken) priority of the mainstream education system to produce “generic individuals whose function is to make a contribution to the market economy” (Davies, 2014, p. 82) and the additional curriculum’s professed focus on supporting visually impaired students’ diversity (Cain and Fanshawe, 2018, para. 30). Such friction means that historically, the additional curriculum has been situated at the margins of mainstream curricula, which Hatlen (1996, p. 1) argues compromises visually impaired children’s “[opportunities] to be equal and the right to be different”.

However, it is not just the systemic issues in mainstream education that is preventing effective, holistic educational experiences for this cohort of children. There are also issues within the VI education sector itself. An example of this is the lack of confidence and knowledge amongst not only schools but also QTVIs in knowing what resources are available for the additional curriculum, leading to a bolting-on approach, or ‘reinventing the wheel’, which is also compounded by a lack of clarity of ownership of planning and delivery (see Pilson, 2021). This is despite retrospective evaluations from visually impaired school-leavers suggest that pupils themselves feel that they would benefit from structured interventions to support the development of independent learning skills, which they felt would increase the

likelihood of their feeling included at school and having transferable skills to support the adjustment to higher education and the workplace (VIEW, 2019, p. 7).

Additionally, given the complexity of the concept of access (Douglas et al., 2011), it is little wonder perhaps that the existing literature has consistently focused on a VI education pedagogic model centring the identification and application of appropriate teaching strategies (e.g. Douglas and McLinden, 2005; McLinden and Douglas, 2014) to meet neoliberal outcomes of education. While this offers important practical knowledge, Atkins (2016, p. 8) warns that teachers can tend to rely on being secure in such knowledge that they are delivering inclusive pedagogy, meaning that they can fail to question or even consider the critical orientations, principles and values underpinning their pedagogic actions.

Therefore, the need for an additional curriculum for visually impaired young people is well-identified as a crucial enabler for supporting VICYP to reach their potential in education and beyond (e.g. Sapp and Hatlen, 2010; Opie, 2018; McLinden et al., 2022) but is not enacted in a statutory capacity by UK education policymakers. This is perhaps not surprising given that the wider legislative context (as outlined in section 2.2.i of this chapter) has been dominated by a “disjointedness” (Kiuppis, 2013, p. 747) in practices and agendas surrounding inclusion that muddy the position of disability in these debates. Policy shifts post-Warnock Report positioning inclusion as integration have enshrined the entitlement of disabled students to access to mainstream education akin to that of their non-disabled peers but also ensuring that individualised learning and support is in place (Haug, 2017, p. 208).

Therefore, establishing a statutory additional curriculum remains an urgent priority of VI education advocacy, as the next sub-section of this chapter explains. However, further consideration of pedagogical ideas and values that can help educators and VICYP navigate such macro-political discourses is also crucial. This is because curricular resources that aim to support equitable futures need to be underpinned by ethical and political stances that challenge inequity (del Carmen Salazar, 2013, p. 126), which is important when narratives of both inclusion and exclusion in the UK education system can still be weaponised (O’Brien, 2020).

2.2.5 The Curriculum Framework for Vision Impairment

To try to support the visually impaired child's right to a quality education (UNCRPD, 2006) in the UK, a collaborative team of researchers, practitioners, advocates, families, professionals and children fed into the production of a new curriculum framework for VI education (CFVI) in 2022. The underpinning aims of the CFVI are to emphasise the important role of the additional curriculum as part of a holistic approach to education, involving distinct and specialist learning and skill development alongside the mainstream curriculum, that prepares visually impaired CYP for adulthood, supporting them to achieve the best possible outcomes, as is their right (DfE, 2015). It also aims to promote equity of access to the additional curriculum for children and young people across the UK, by providing a shared language (Hewett et al., 2022) and shared resources for VICYP and their families and professionals to draw upon in advocating for the best possible support throughout the educational journey.

This is important because Keil and Cobb's (2019) scoping research found that there was no consistency in approach to offering specialist educational input as part of the additional curriculum. They found no statutory frameworks and a lack of clarity about what intervention should be delivered and by whom (e.g. mainstream teacher, teaching assistant, QTVI or other professional). The CFVI expands the 8 key learner outcomes for children with VI, as created by NATSIP (2016) in response to the 2014 Children and Families Act, which were based on the more established US expanded core curriculum (Hatlen, 1996; Sapp and Hatlen, 2010). The CFVI offers a holistic overview of 11 areas of learning identified by these stakeholders as supporting VICYP towards as independent an adulthood as possible and appropriate for each individual. Its objective is to provide a shared understanding of the needs of VICYP in accessing the education system, and clear justifications for the importance for VICYP in accessing the additional curriculum outside of but feeding into, the core curriculum of their peers (Pilson, 2021, p. 317).

While (at the time of writing) the CFVI is in its infancy and is not (yet) statutory, it is hoped that this project can inform its ongoing development by providing more research evidence about the experiences of VICYP in education and beyond, thereby allowing for *different* understandings of the CFVI's aims and areas of learning and how they are encountered by VICYP in practice. Such different understandings have the potential to inform relational pedagogical philosophies in

VI education that orient the development of contextualised curricular resources that are “tied to the needs of marginalised students and locally generated by teachers and [learning] communities” (del Carmen Salazar, 2013, p. 126).

2.2.6 VI education pedagogical philosophy

The current established philosophical underpinning of VI educational pedagogy in the UK is a (bio)ecological¹⁶ systems theoretical approach (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, 1977, 1995, 2005). Created as a lens through which to view child development, Bronfenbrenner’s (1976, p. 5) original iteration of ecological system theory explains the child’s learning environments as constituting a “nested arrangement of structures” or systems, all of which impact their lives directly or indirectly. This theoretical model has previously been applied to studying the education of visually impaired pupils in compulsory education via a systemic lens (e.g. McLinden and McCracken, 2016); the role of the QTVI as a conduit for knowledge exchange within and across the systems (McLinden et al, 2017a)¹⁷, and perhaps most relevantly to this project, by Hewett et al. (2016, p. 95) as a means of framing understandings of visually impaired students’ experiences of Higher Education. In their work on developing ecological perspectives of inclusive education, Anderson, Boyle and Deppeler (2014, p. 6) offer a useful overview of these systems:

The innermost system, the micro-system, holds the learner at its centre with the immediate setting or settings surrounding them. The next system, known as the meso-system, acknowledges the interrelations between the major settings in the micro-system. Encircling this is the exo-system, described as containing the formal and informal structures that “impinge upon or encompass the immediate settings containing the learner” (p. 6). The final environmental system is the macro-system and is the culture that encompasses all preceding systems... Each of these systems has a relationship and connectedness with the system or systems placed either side of it. Relationships and connections also exist between the factors sitting within each system.

¹⁶ The first part of (bio)ecological systems theory is presented in brackets to denote that my reference to it is as an umbrella term comprising its early iteration as ecological systems theory (e.g. Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and its later development as bioecological systems theory (e.g. Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Where bioecological without brackets appear, I am referring to the 2005 onwards iteration of the theory.

¹⁷ McLinden et al.’s (2017a) diagram summarising a bioecological systems theory approach to VI education is reproduced as figure 7 in Appendix 3.

To summarise: knowledge must flow effectively within and between systems to support the active learner. Bronfenbrenner's later work (2005) introduced the chronosystem, highlighting how interactions between the child and systems evolve over time, emphasising the agency of the child/human with these systems. This led to the term *bioecological systems theory*, the added prefix 'bio' reflecting Bronfenbrenner's critique that earlier models focused more on environments than on developing individuals (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2007). Bronfenbrenner (1977, p. 514) stressed the need for progressive, mutual accommodation (ongoing adaptation between learner and setting). This process varies across contexts; for example, progress markers differ between mainstream and special school settings. However, the commonality is that the QTVI must act as an agent of change, facilitating this progressive mutual accommodation between the learner and the settings to ensure that the VICYP is effectively supported.

This chapter so far has emphasised that such progressive mutual accommodation needs to occur more effectively between the macrosystemic conditions impacting upon VI pedagogies and the microsystemic contexts in which such pedagogies are enacted. VI education in the UK is shaped by evolving policy, funding disparities and inconsistent service provision across local authorities, yet not as often by research outcomes, as the next part of this chapter goes on to explain.

Part 3: The gaps in the literature

2.3.1 Why are there gaps in the literature around VICYP and VI education?

A decade ago, Goldacre (2013) made an exhortation to the teaching profession in general to become actively involved in research so that good practice can be disseminated further and the professional can avoid being subject to isolated islands of knowledge and experience. However, this does not appear to be happening, as the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Inclusive Data Taskforce's 2021 report into the inclusivity of research data in the UK found a critical data gap hindering our understanding of societal (in)equalities. This is reflected in VI educational research, with an identified "absence of strong evidence to guide teaching practice" in vision impairment education (McLinden et al., 2020, para. 6) and emphasised the importance of practitioners sharing good practice. As such, this section of the chapter considers the barriers to researching practice in education, particularly SEND. VI is interwoven into this wider narrative rather than constituting the focus due to the limited VI-specific focus in educational research.

2.3.1.i The dominance of 'evidence' in educational research

There has been a clear trend in educational research and policy across the past two decades towards advocating for 'evidence-based' approaches to practice. Prominent educational researchers such as Slavin (2002, 2008), Thomas and Pring (2004) and Feuer (2006) began arguing for more 'evidence-based' forms of educational research at the same time as a "*scientification* of educational politics" (Sauzet, 2021, p. 83, emphasis in original) was taking place. That is, education policymakers were beginning to promote educational strategies and interventions that yielded 'measurable' results. This trend has been identified by Pellegrini and Vivanet (2020) as continuing in international educational policy into the present. They note that the US has "implemented the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which defines different levels of evidence (strong, moderate, and promising) and offers incentives to schools that adopt a practice based on evidence" (Pellegrini and Vivanet, 2020, pp. 26-27).

This appears also to be the pattern in the European context, with the UK leading the trend. The creation of the 2017 Strategic School Improvement Fund (SSIF) and Teaching and Leadership Innovation Fund (TLIF), set up to fund programmes to support pupils with the most disadvantaged socio-economic contexts, were found to have shown preference to programmes that were deemed to have evidential proof of effectiveness. This constituted a decisive move away from the larger European context of ‘recommending’ (but not making compulsory) drawing upon evidence in policy and practice, towards a clear legislative preference (Pellegrini and Vivanet, 2020, pp. 26-31).

The language surrounding ‘evidence-based’ policy and practice is centred around traditional scientific measures of evidence – rigour (e.g. Cartwright, 2019), robustness and validity (e.g. Coldwell et al., 2017). The past decade has even seen randomised control trials (RCTs) advocated as useful means of testing the efficiency of education interventions (e.g. Goldacre, 2013, for the Department of Education). Such positivist methodologies continue to be given authority by the fact that in England, “they continue to be endorsed by policy, patterns of service provision and professional practices” (Curran, 2013, p. 121). Yet despite this pedestalsing of ‘evidence-based’ practice, Gorard et al. (2020, p. 570) assert that, paradoxically, “despite over 20 years of modest improvement in research on what works in education policy and practice, the evidence on how best to deploy these findings is still very weak”, leading to uncertainty about its utility (Godfrey and Brown, 2018). Regardless, this privileging of positivism has arguably both stymied the ability of practitioners to undertake research and has also ignored “the need for critical inquiry into normative and political questions about what is educationally desirable” (Biesta, 2007, p. 21), which may help to explain the tendency to focus pedagogic research in VI education on identifying reproducible teaching techniques and methods, as I will now exemplify.

2.3.1.ii Applied validity

Coldwell et al.’s (2017, p. 7) study into the progress of embedding education-based research (commissioned by the Department for Education) found that many teachers find research evidence meaningful only if it is “supported by other evidence sources... they needed to have this backed up by observing impact themselves or hearing trusted colleagues discuss how it had improved their practice and outcomes for young people”. This is demonstrative of the concept of applied validity (Oancea

and Furlong, 2007) – that research must demonstrate what Lofthouse (2014, p. 14) calls “contextual relevance” in order for teachers to apply findings to their practice and professional development. These findings appear to be applicable in this example of VI-specific practitioner research. For example, the (2015) case study by Farrow, a practising itinerant vision impairment teacher in the US context, into using a particular braille course to inform her planning and delivery of a group-based learning braille model to adults with degenerative sight loss stemmed from her own frustration regarding the lack of consistency into recommended braille learning schemes (p. 318).

It was only when she applied an intervention herself that she could see the value of embedding research findings in her practice. She states that despite her wide reading giving her a solid prior awareness of the existent methods and courses on teaching braille, she had found it difficult to implement in her practice as she struggled to articulate their utility to those she worked with (and therefore found it hard to persuade them to engage with such strategies). It was only when she proactively began to explore options and apply interventions herself (thereby engaging in informal practitioner-research) that she was able to identify something that had worked (i.e. enabled several people to successfully learn braille and continue to use it after the intervention was over).

2.3.1.iii Structural barriers

Farrow (2015, p. 320), however, notes that there was a significant short-term time commitment to devising and implementing this intervention which can be off-putting to practitioners, despite Farrow finding that this initial effort saved time in the longer-term. However, there is not always the temporal flexibility for the average QTVI to undertake such evidence-informed practice, even if it is beneficial to support future efficient practice. This is supported by my own research (Pilson, 2021) – a focus group project of fellow QTVIs to discuss their professional experience of VI education – a key sub-ordinate theme that emerged was how time constraints impinge on their ability to engage with or conduct research, even in terms of informal knowledge-exchange. Participants shared the following issues: “no time to share good practice with colleagues; demands of caseload mean little preparation time; not enough time/flexibility in school curriculum to deliver interventions” (Pilson, 2021, p. 342), which then impacted on their ability to develop their own learning and practice.

This finding is resonant of a wider pattern of structural barriers impinging upon research in and of educational practice. For example, Walker et al.'s (2019) national survey found that if teachers believed their schools to have a “positive enabling culture” (p. 5) around research, there is a higher likelihood of research findings translating into classroom practice. However, the same study found that while attitudes at school-level towards research were positive towards practitioner learning – 73% of those settings surveyed were believed to have a commitment to this (p. 4) – but only 40% of schools were able to put in place workable systems to facilitate this (p. 4). This may be due to the ongoing disparities in school funding provision at a local and regional level, and also the national picture regarding SEND funding, which is projected to be in a deficit in excess of £5-6 billion by the end of 2026, as per a July 2024 report commissioned by the County Councils Network and the Local Government Association (Isos Partnership, 2024). As such, it is likely that developing their staff as researchers, while acknowledged as worthwhile, is not a priority for many services in the current fiscal climate. This indicates that positive intent cannot overcome prevalent social, cultural and political factors currently impinging upon the relationship between research and practice in education (Ainscow, 2020).

2.3.1.iv Attitudinal barriers

However, such positive intent is not always forthcoming. While the previous sub-sections of Part 3 of this chapter have outlined wider systemic reasons for difficulties in bridging the gap between practice and research, there are more insidious reasons for the dearth of research about, and particularly involving, visually impaired children. This siloing of disability in research is exemplified by the fact that the research genre of Disability Studies in Education (DSE) was referred to in by Slee et al. in 2019 as an “emergent field” (p. 3). This is firstly because DSE was established as a distinct research genre only at the turn of the 21st century, as a result of a group of scholars from disparate research fields putting together a special interest group within the American Educational Research Association to study disability studies in education (Baglieri et al., 2010). As a result of the context of its conception and the scholars involved, the first decade of DSE scholarship was largely US-based and largely concerned with arguments about the field of special education within the American schooling context.

However, Slee et al.'s (2019) reference to the field being emergent, while acknowledging the comparative newness of the genre, specifically denotes both the turn to a more international orientation in the field and also a nod to the critical phase in the development of the Disability Studies genre that has become embedded over the in the last 15 years – Critical Disability Studies (CDS) (Meekosha and Shuttleworth, 2009). DSE can be located as a branch of CDS. However, while these recent developments are welcomed, it is also troubling that despite the increased presence of disability within mainstream education *practice* since the 1978 Warnock report called for increased inclusion of disabled children in mainstream settings, the field of educational research has been much slower to actively explore disability. Steinborn and Nusbaum (2019, p. 490) suggest the infrequency of studies with an overt Critical Disability Studies focus appearing in educational research could constitute “a form of ontological erasure perpetuated by the notion that disability is a topic undeserving of pedagogical or practical attention”.

Moreover, participation, framed as working collectively, has become a key enabler of access to work, as “the ability to collaborate on both a small-and large-scale is becoming one of the core requisites of postmodern society” (Fullan, 1993, p.5). However, it is “still relatively rare for children to initiate and drive a research project of their own choosing” (Kellett, 2006, p.3), and even more so for children with disabilities to be involved (Franklin and Sloper, 2006). While the Children-as-Researchers model has been used successfully with children with SEND (VIPER Project, 2013) and pupils with Profound and Multiple Learning Disability (PMLD) (Open University, 2016), there is a paucity of existing research which specifically involves VICYP as knowledge producers rather than subjects (Whitburn, 2014). This intimates that their experiences remain largely unknown and “perhaps subjugated” (Genat, 2009, p. 105). This, therefore, emphasises the need for more active participation in research for visually impaired young people, and as such supports my hypothesis linked to Aim 1 of this inquiry¹⁸ that QTVIs might engage in research not only to add to an under-researched field, but also to try to disrupt normative ways of thinking in education.

¹⁸ Aim 1 and its objectives are on p. 26 in Chapter 1 part 1.2.1. It asserts this project's intention to demonstrate that pedagogic models for VI education can be expanded by mobilising the QTVI as a practitioner-researcher.

Conflux

This chapter mapped current contexts of VI education across policy, research and pedagogy. Part 1 outlined existing knowledge of VICYP experiences in English compulsory education, highlighting a dearth of literature and the thesis's potential contribution to this under-researched field. Part 2 examined how QTVI roles are constrained by systemic power-as-*potestas* (e.g. funding, time, legislation) and reviewed dominant pedagogic narratives in existent research. Part 3 emphasised how structural and attitudinal barriers have similarly limited the scope of VI education literature.

The engagement with literature in this chapter was undertaken using a configurative synthesis approach, which has produced a reflection on action (Schön, 1982) – a “rational cataloguing” (Hultman and Taguchi, 2010, p. 536) of events and discourses in VI education. While valuable, it risks reproducing sameness by still holding the world at a distance (Barad, 2007), instead of acknowledging “what we do as researchers intervenes with the world and creates new possibilities” (Hultman and Taguchi, 2010, p. 540). I realised that my research was in danger of being under-theorised (Tesar, 2023). I recognised that if I wanted to conceptualise VI education pedagogies differently, then I needed an approach to inquiry that “involves attending to difference” (Hill, 2017, p. 2), which must involve careful and critical engagement with theory before making any methodological moves. This is because, as Mazzei and Jackson (2022, p. 171) explain: “thinking inquiry without first thinking my philosophical approach is impossible”.

The account presented in the first two chapters, therefore, has helped to elucidate the rocky terrain of the current VI education landscape, and begun to suggest reasons to engage in further exploration. This sets up entrance point for the unlearning journey that takes place in the remainder of this thesis-assemblage. This journey begins with Chapter 3's outlining of my philosophical and axiological underpinnings in order to create my theoretical framework. This theoretical framework is then activated in the Methodological Cartography across Chapters 4 to 6, and the outcomes are presented in Chapter 7 onwards.

Chapter 3: Theoretical cartography

Introduction:

As Chapter 2 suggested, to think differently about VI education requires a shift of gaze away from the dominant narratives prevalent in educational research and policy. This is because, as Kayumova and Strom's (2023) powerful critique of education explains:

[W]estern colonialist thinking foregrounds epistemology (knowing and creating knowledge) and separates it from ontology (being), while completely disregarding axiology (ethics). This obscures the ways that the production of knowledge is shaped by modes of existence, and in turn, that knowledge reinforces that particular way of being as truth—meaning that it supports a specific definition of who qualifies as human. (Para. 21)

This demonstrates that without careful and care-full consideration of ethical, ontological and epistemological underpinnings, research could reiterate normative ways of thinking, being and doing in education. To achieve the latter requires the creation of “theory-practice spaces for differential mattering” (Taylor, 2021, p. 235). The purpose of Chapter 3 is to create such a space. This chapter presents the theoretical resources which enabled me to both elucidate and activate my **ethical**, axiological, ontological and epistemological underpinnings and therefore build my **theoretical framework**. It outlines the overarching Dis-Human framework that was generated for and by this research and maps its theoretical influences. An overview of the chapter's structure now follows.

In Part 1, I firstly seek to outline my feminist politics and axiological underpinnings, illuminated by the writings of feminist scholars Rosi Braidotti, Patti Lather, Kum-Kum Bhanvani. I then elucidate my ontological, ethical and epistemological precursors (Truman, 2021) that stem from the feminist roots of my theoretical framework and express them through Barad's (2007) notion of ethico-onto-epistemology, outlining my commitment to a relational, complex and interconnected understanding of the world.

Part 2 explains the expansive paradigmatic positioning of this research, before introducing DisHumanism as the theoretical framework for this project. Part 3 then offers a cartographic mapping of the development of DisHumanism as a concept, and at the same time my own journey towards selecting DisHumanism as my theoretical guide, and subsequent diffraction to Dis-

Humanism. This section draws upon Dis-Humanism's critical qualitative theoretical influences (particularly Critical Disability Studies and intersectionality), which emphasise a social justice orientation to research involving disabled people.

I then consider the limitations of these critical theories in understanding "the multiple, entangled, ever-shifting, difference-rich nature of processes of teaching, learning, schooling, and activism" (Strom et al., 2019, p. 3) in the VI education assemblage, particularly in a period of time still impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. As such, the chapter goes on to outline possibilities (as well as limitations) that drawing critical qualitative theories into conversation with post-qualitative theories, such as posthumanism and feminist (new) materialism, expressed under the term PhEmaterialism (Ringrose et al., 2015), has for educational research.

Finally, in Part 4, I present this project's Dis-Human theoretical framework, outlining how I bring DisHuman theory into entanglement with the aims of this project and how this project simultaneously exemplifies and extends the existing *philosophical* and *cultural* parameters and applications of the theory, thereby diffracting it to become Dis-Humanism. Chapter 4 explains in more depth what I mean by diffraction and how I activate it in this project, but briefly, I understand it as deliberately attending to difference in our thinking and doings (Barad, 2007, p. 145). This responds to Goodley et al.'s (2019, p. 156) invitation to bring their DisHuman manifesto into conversation with the forms of inquiry and practice that seek to "promote transdisciplinary forms of empirical and theoretical enquiry that break disciplinary orthodoxies, dominances and boundaries" that are discussed in Part 3. I will explain how I put this Dis-Human framework to use to (in)form my methodology in the project in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. However, reference to the feminist bricks (Ahmed, 2017, p. 232) that have built this theoretical framework will be made throughout the remainder of the thesis.

Part 1: Feminist underpinnings

3.1.1 *(Posthuman) Feminist politics*

I have attempted to enact a posthuman feminist orientation (Braidotti, 2022) within this thesis, which attunes to difference and, therefore, requires close reading-thinking-writing about academic concepts and practice-based actions that I had previously never questioned, despite their often-uneasy resonances (Fairchild et al., 2022, p. i) with my own personal belief systems. The thesis aims to explore how practice and research can work together in thinking differently about vision impairment education pedagogies to enact change and I suggest that rethinking participation and voice of VICYP are crucial in this process. As such, in line with posthuman feminist beliefs which question the centrality of humanism, I believe these human constructs need “to be re-viewed and assessed critically but not thrown away entirely” (Braidotti, 2021, p. 17). This critical engagement offers the possibility to divest humanism as much as possible of the strategic essentialist tendencies (Spivak, 1986) it may have come to represent in its mis/use (Mayes, 2019).

In order to work towards this objective, I first had to ensure that I divested myself of any insidious liberal feminist predispositions. For Braidotti (2021, p. 49), liberal feminism “is perfectly allied with Western patriarchal interests and practices” because it flattens difference to promote majoritarian ideas and systems.

Posthuman feminism, conversely:

[W]orks through intersectional critical lenses of gender, race, class, sexual orientation, ability, age, amongst others, acknowledging the differences in power and status among humans and between humans and non-human species. (Braidotti, 2021, p. 62)

As a white cisgender woman, I recognise my privilege and actively aim to avoid perpetuating typical neoliberal feminist tactics of oppressing marginalised communities to achieve my own successful outcomes (Phipps, 2020, p. 3).

Therefore, my approach to engaging with theory is indebted to Ahmed’s (2017, p. 4) exhortation that “feminism needs to be everywhere”, and a clear understanding that it needs to be intersectional. It needs to take account the thoroughfares of disempowerment (Crenshaw, 2006) that remain existent in the Academy, albeit

arguably more hidden than those amplified in society. Therefore, my engagement with theory has privileged “contestation, deconstruction, passionate construction, webbed connections, and hope for transformation of systems of knowledge and ways of seeing” (Haraway, 1988, p. 585).

3.1.2 Axiology and validity

To articulate this reparative imperative, I have deliberately upheld Ahmed’s (2017) concept of citation as feminist memory¹⁹, an inherently loving way to “acknowledge our debt to those who came before; those who helped us find our way when the way was obscured because we deviated from the paths we were told to follow” (Ahmed, 2007, pp. 15-16). My engagement with theory has not simply constituted a knowledge-building activity, but also a reflexive journey that has impacted on my thinking in profound and pressing ways. Theory helped me to question how I conduct (and construct) my role as a teacher, my conceptions of disability (Goodley, 2014; Goodley and Runswick-Cole, 2015; Goodley, 2018) and my positionality within the machinations of the education system, and within society. It both grounded me and empowered me and allowed me to deeply consider my personal ethical drivers, which is why I find myself able to situate my adherence during the research process to Kum-Kum Bhavnani’s (1994) axioms of feminist objectivity: inscription, micropolitics and difference.

3.1.2.i Feminist objectivity

Bhavnani uses the term ‘objectivity’ not in terms of the positivist, scientific meaning, but rather drawing upon Haraway’s (1988) concept of feminist objectivity, which she explains “means quite simply *situated knowledges*” (p. 581, emphasis in original). Haraway’s framework for feminist objectivity challenges the traditional notion of objective, universal knowledge by emphasising that all knowledge is produced from specific social, cultural, and historical contexts. Situated knowledges are partial, embodied and shaped by power. This is why for research to be considered feminist it must be accountable – requiring the ‘knower’ to be aware of and responsible for the situated position, perspectives and biases that influence both the construction of

¹⁹ The process of how I attempted to do so is explained in Chapter 4, part 4.2.1.

the knowledge and its implications. Or as Ahmed (2017, p. 10) explains: “embodied experience of power provides the basis of knowledge... [that] the personal is theoretical”.

Bhavnani (1994) extended Haraway’s (1988) concept of feminist objectivity to create a set of principles or criteria against which social science research’s claims to feminism can be evaluated. I offer here a summary of Fine et al.’s (2003, p. 176) overview of Bhavnani’s criteria:

- Inscription equates to accountability – the researcher ensuring that hidden stories are foregrounded, counter-narratives exposed, and expertise of participants is centred to avoid reinscribing dominant (stereotypical) narratives.
- Micropolitics entails a thorough analysis of relationality and power dynamics within the project.
- A careful consideration of difference demands reportage and exploration of both patterns and divergence of findings.

Bhavnani’s maxim affords me a lens through which to frame my ongoing interrogations of my thinking and doing both in terms of methodology and practice. As such, Part 4 of this chapter includes a discussion organised around Bhavnani’s categories of inscription, micropolitics and difference to evaluate how my theoretical framework meets my axiological underpinnings.

3.1.2.ii Feminist validity

I do so in order to adhere to Patti Lather’s notion of *construct validity* (1986, p. 67). Guba’s (1981, p. 78) assertion that relevance and rigour are both necessary in research influenced Lather (1986, p. 63) to develop this concept of validity for what she terms “openly ideological research”. This thesis could be assessed against construct validity, as it is undergirded by the same orientation as the examples Lather (1986) provides – i.e. the social justice orientations of feminist and emancipatory research. However, Lather (1993, p. 676) later expanded her own thinking on validity to incorporate a more post-structural understanding, offering the concept of *transgressive validity*– validity reframed as the extent to which research questions power and representation, including the researcher’s own self-interrogation. As such, following Lather (1986; 1993), in Part 3.4.3 of this chapter I reflexively consider the construct validity of this theoretical framework in activating

my axiology and also advancing the aims of this project, whilst also beginning to demonstrate the transgressive validity this framework affords – that is, how it support the research methodology to function “rhizomatically, foraging across/between middles” (Lather, 1993, p. 686).

3.1.3 Ethics, ontology, epistemology

In asserting that I ascribe to posthuman feminist politics, it is important to further explain where posthuman feminism aligns and diverges from other forms of feminism. Although posthuman feminism “shares a political critique of issues of power, domination and exclusion with other emancipatory feminisms” (Cozza and Gherardi, 2023, p. 55), it avoids flattening or conflating categories of human experience, which is a criticism levelled by several notable post-qualitative scholars (e.g. Hackett et al., 2020; Zembylas, 2018; Dernikos et al., 2019) against some posthuman scholarship. Rosi Braidotti’s recent work (e.g. 2017, 2018, 2021) is keen to emphasise that posthuman feminism does not adhere to a “notion of equality that assumes an unproblematic belonging to the same category of humanity” (Braidotti, 2017, p. 21).

However, at the same time, posthuman feminism centres entanglement and the “inseparability between the knowing ‘subject’, the to-be-known or known ‘object’, the processes of learning and knowing, and consequentially, the relationality between ‘teacher’ and ‘student’” (Geerts and Carstens, 2019, p. 915). As such, considering the ethical imperative to pay attention to the diverse experiences of disabled people and to acknowledge our entanglement with non-human agents, it is important to delineate a posthuman feminist way of thinking about knowledge, beliefs and ethics. This is found through Barad’s (2007) concept of ethico-onto-epistemology (hereafter EOE).

3.1.3.i An ethico-onto-epistemological research orientation

An ethico-onto-epistemological approach to research entangles inextricably a researcher’s responsibility for the practices of research and how its outputs make a difference (ethics), that which is observed (ontology), and the research apparatus – observers and their methods of observation (epistemology). The notion of EOE highlights the interconnectedness of our existence, emphasising that as participants

in the world, we (as researchers and humans in general) cannot view ourselves as impartial or detached observers, that we are accountable for our roles in the “intertwined practices of knowing and becoming” (Barad, 2003, p. 312). In their theory of *agential realism* (which spawned the notion of EOE), Barad (2007) advocates for a research ethics of entanglement, where the interactions within the world and their impact on subjects (or agents/influences) are thoughtfully acknowledged and addressed.

This challenges traditional notions of objectivity and subjectivity, suggesting that we are always part of the world we study and that our observations and actions have ethical and tangible (material) implications. Barad’s (2007) entanglement of EOE “revitalises the research process, making it methodologically powerful through its enlarged version of making a difference in the world with ethics being an integral part of it” (Bozalek, 2017, p.57). As such, the concept of EOE resonates with feminist principles of social justice and ethical accountability, which are also crucial for both educational and disability research.

3.1.3.ii EOE, disability and difference

My research approach herein has deliberately and response-ably been “oriented by the ethically informed positioning that we might become otherwise” (Kuntz, 2021, p. 218), valuing both inter- and *intra*-subjectivity, which I believe constitutes a more relational, and more ethical, approach to researching disability. The word “otherwise” is important, because it connotes difference, which could be understood in terms of being in friction with the “normativity narrative [that] will by definition create the abnormal, the *other*” (Davis, 1995, p. 42, emphasis added).

The phenomenon of ‘othering’ as referred to in Critical Disability Studies (e.g. Navarro and Zeni, 2004; Goodley et al., 2019, Pilson, 2020a), describes the process wherein disabled individuals are viewed and treated as distinctly different from those without disabilities, usual in a derogatory way due to their perceived failure to emulate the norm, usually reinforcing ableist and hegemonic power-as-*potestas*. Those who are placed into the category of ‘otherness’ may be devalued and marginalised, structurally, socially and intra-personally. As Tarvainen (2019) explains, the process of othering can be self-determined, as people can internalise oppressive discourses and depict themselves as ‘other’, thereby perpetuating what Grue (2016, p. 962) calls the “narrow construals of the category of disability, and a social meaning connoting marginality and exclusion”.

Conversely, returning to Kuntz' (2021) assertion above, my EOE suggests aims to demonstrate that becoming otherwise may be desirable. To flip the deficit narrative of the other, "difference must be activated, or made generative, in order to dislodge it from systems of normativity" (Jones, 2021, para. 5), it must be seen "in an affirmative light, as a tool of creativity rather than as separation and lack" (Bozalek and Zembylas, 2017, p. 6). Additionally, research must be understood as a process broader than simply "an epistemic engagement, a project of knowing about the world with proper procedure and scientific method" (Giri, 2006, pp. 228-229). This is steeped in an assumption that a human is an entity unaffected by the world in which it inhabits, that its understandings are fixed and that its behaviours are immutable and interpretable, which therefore reinforces a Eurocentric, anthropocentric negative perception of otherness (Fricker, 2007; de Sousa Santos, 2014).

3.1.3.ii EOE and the practitioner-researcher

Furthermore, Geerts (2016, para. 3) explains that EOE acknowledges that we have an "ethical debt towards the Other", not just the "Other" as in other humans, but also other non-human agents. But, as Geerts (2016, para. 6) goes on to explain, EOE also affords an ontological orientation that questions traditional notions of separate, fixed and autonomous subjectivity – or, in other words, questions the self-other binary. As such, by fusing ethics to the ontic and epistemic, we can demonstrate a commitment to relationality, multiplicity and valuing difference in inquiry, as opposed to mechanistic and representational procedures. This also aligns with the role of the practitioner-researcher, encouraging ethical reflection on teaching practices and integrating this reflexivity into research. EOE challenges dominant pedagogic norms, supporting inclusive pedagogies responsive to all learners. This is because EOE fosters a dynamic, relational understanding of disability and difference not as deficits, but as sources of "constructive interference" (Rice et al., 2022, p. 287) – disruptive yet generative forces that can transform knowledge-making, participation, learning and teaching (Ulmer, 2016, p. 47). EOE, therefore, encourages a theoretical framework that sees difference (e.g., disability, neurodiversity, cultural variation) not as deficit but as a source of insight and transformation, as the next part of the chapter now explains.

Part 2: Disability, difference and disturbance – introducing DisHumanism

3.2.1 Paradigmatic positionality

This position of this research at the intersection of critical qualitative and post-qualitative fields of study represents the interplay between my practitioner and researcher identities, which find themselves in friction at times due to these different theoretical and practical influences. It is important to note that I recognise the complex historical development of critical qualitative research paradigms (e.g. Denzin and Lincoln, 2008, 2017; Carlson et al., 2023) as well as the crucial importance of resisting neoliberal injustice in research practices (Denzin, 2019) to be truly present in colonised spaces (Haraway, 2016). However, I am also inspired by Barad's (2007, p. 25) notion of "spacetime-mattering", which argues that space, time and matter are not separate entities, they are instead deeply entangled and co-constitutive, emerging together through relational encounters. As such, I believe that embracing wider theoretical influences is commensurate with the ongoing presence of different aspects from different paradigmatic phases colliding and colluding with each other (Carlson et al., 2023) at all times.

I now borrow Denzin and Lincoln's (2017) phraseology from their overview of the changing trends in qualitative research to situate my research project within this narrative. My research draws upon the *Paradigm Proliferation* period in which critical fields of inquiry centred theory as a device to question wider dialogues of power, advocating for complexity in thinking about and doing research. It also stems from the *Fractured Posthuman Present* which questions anthropocentrism and promotes multiplicity. It recognises and problematises the doubling down from policymakers of 'evidence-based' research as the gold standard in educational research during the *Uncertain, Utopian Future* phase. It is also drawn to the *Postqualitative Phase*'s research philosophy that encourages researchers to deconstruct and reconstruct traditional research methods and assumptions.

This nomadic paradigmatic stance demonstrates how entangling different theoretical influences, rather than causing incoherence, instead allows for research that can "contest dominant narratives and binarized positions to reimagine connections with the world in more meaningful ways" (Fairchild, 2023, p. 146). As

such, I was drawn to a theoretical guide that could re-present these entangled influences and I found this in *DisHumanism* (Goodley and Runswick-Cole, 2014, 2015, 2016; Goodley et al., 2019, 2022; Liddiard et al., 2018).

3.2.2 An overview of *DisHumanism*

In this project's recognition "that disability and humanity are always in friction, ...that they often rub against each other in ways that are productive" (Goodley and Runswick-Cole, 2015, p. 244), I am deliberately responding to Goodley et al.'s (2019) DisHuman manifesto and therefore adopting a DisHuman orientation. This approach entails accepting a "complex emerging conception of disability: ... [one] that transcends boundaries of impairment/disability; personal/public and self/other" (Goodley et al., 2016, p. 782). This therefore supports Shakespeare and Corker's (2002, p. 15) assertion that "the global experience of disabled people is too complex to be rendered within one unitary model or set of ideas". Therefore, undertaking DisHuman research requires scholars to expand their theoretical underpinnings "to have the courage to follow *different* academic lines of flight" (Latto et al., 2022, p. 154, emphasis added).

A DisHuman approach to inquiry stems from the convergence between the fields of Critical Disability Studies (CDS) and Posthumanism. CDS as a field attests that "disability is *the* space from which to think through a host of political, theoretical and practical issues that are relevant to all" (Goodley, 2016, p. 157; emphasis in original). CDS both centres disability and uses it as an active agent to catalyse 'thinking through' phenomena, rather than positioning it as a phenomenon itself to be studied. Meekosha and Shuttleworth's (2009, p. 47) key principles for developing Critical Disability Studies, including looking to decolonise thinking about disability, centring social justice, expanding understandings of disability through engagement with theory, creating opportunities for disabled people to share understandings and collaborate, and also entwining theory and praxis. This requires research in this genre to adhere to "the requirement of linking theory with praxis in the struggle for... [a] participatory society" (Meekosha and Shuttleworth, 2009, p. 47), a requirement that also applies to research about inclusive education (Atkins, 2016).

At the same time, to "understand, enquire into, and generate action worthy of the complexity of our times requires a fundamental shift in our thinking and research practice" (Strom et al., 2019, p. 2). Consequently, CDS scholars Goodley et al.

(2021, p. 162) call for a shifting of epistemic binaries in disability research by bringing it into conversation with posthumanism. In doing so, they identify that logocentric, rational, autonomous narratives of research constitute humanist orientations. Instead, they harness the generative force of disability to consider how to do research differently, such as by attending to affect, mutuality and conceiving research as an assemblage – thereby moving beyond conventional humanist understandings of the world.

The concept of the DisHuman (Goodley and Runswick-Cole, 2014) offers a theoretical approach to inquiry that not only bridges conventional qualitative and post-qualitative theories but also troubles them both. DisHumanism acknowledges that many young disabled people aspire to the category of humanism – often being denied this by societal dis/ableism (Goodley, 2012) – but simultaneously demands “more collectivist and expansive models of human life” (Goodley et al., 2022, p. 12) to attend to the complexity of disability. Therefore, in this sense, DisHumanist thinking favours an enlarged and affirmative ethics influenced by the Deleuzoguattarian expansive “AND...AND...AND” (1987, p. 22). It seeks not to reject what has come before, but to *add* to existing research by asking us to think *differently* about humanist concepts of how we should do research.

Goodley and Runswick-Cole (2014) explain that DisHumanism:

[S]imultaneously acknowledges the possibilities offered by disability to trouble, re-shape and re-fashion traditional conceptions of the human (to ‘dis’ typical understandings of personhood) while simultaneously asserting disabled people’s humanity (to assert normative, often traditional, understandings of personhood). (p. 6)

As such, DisHumanism refuses to take an anti-humanist stance expressed by some posthuman thinkers because many disabled people have traditionally been denied access to the category of ‘full’ humanity (e.g. Braidotti, 2013; Goodley et al., 2014; Wolbring, 2009). However, they also ‘dis’ the human, using the prefix as an informal transitive verb meaning to deprive (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-a) the human of its unquestioned dominance.

3.2.3 DisHumanism and this thesis

In using disability as a catalytic force in the research process, I argue that we can also (un)learn ways of thinking about and enacting professional practice in vision impairment education. VI education occupies a precarious position that exists both in the middle of conventional schooling and at the margins of it. As Chapter 2 (part 2.2.2) explained, following the ongoing conceptualisation of inclusion categorised as integration in the English education system that stemmed from the 1978 Warnock Report, many visually impaired children are now educated in mainstream settings. This allows them to access the normative category of the child, who is the same as their peers, attending the same school and the same lessons. However, the presence of vision impairment in an arguably ocular-centric classroom automatically disrupts the status quo. Models of ‘evidence-based’ practice are called into question when a child needs to access the curriculum *differently*. A DisHuman approach therefore reveals “both the tensions and potentials that emerge when a child is seen as same but different” (Goodley and Runswick-Cole, 2015, p. 251).

A DisHuman orientation asks researchers and practitioners to anchor their work with an affirmative ethics, which attends to the generative space of the middle, attunes to the mundane (ordinary, everyday) and considers not only what matters, but also what matter does. These knowledge-ings could, in turn, create micropolitical acts of resistance, which help us to both exist in and navigate macropolitical systems of oppression (including both the Academy and the compulsory education system). As such, we must not underestimate how the affective power of micropolitical acts of resistance can chip away at “Politics with a capital P... [as] the micropolitical is the force of the political event that potentially unmoors it” (Manning, in an interview with Himada, 2009, p. 5). A focus on micropolitics requires a theoretical basis that can explore power and how it is experienced (Ehrich and Millwater, 2011, p. 471), consider relationality and belonging (Anderson, 2016) and counter ableism (Stephens et al., 2024, p. 562). DisHumanism activates all of the above objectives. The next part of the chapter explains (by considering its theoretical genealogy) how it can do so.

Part 3: A cartography of coming to DisHumanism

3.3.1 Critical Disability Studies

DisHumanism stems from the disciplinary field of Critical Disability Studies (CDS), which aims to “reframe the disabled bodies along the lines of capacity, potential, interconnection and possibility” (Goodley and Runswick-Cole, 2014, p. 4). CDS as a term has been used since the early 2000s (e.g. Tremain 2005; Erevelles 2005; Meekosha and Shuttleworth, 2009) in order to denote work in the field of disability studies that deliberate centres the “articulation of theoretical and/or political alliances between... [disability] and other emancipatory discourses” (Meekosha and Shuttleworth, 2009, p. 62) and avoids bringing disability under normalising discourses. This involves accepting that disability and ability are co-constituted.

As Goodley (2014, p. 103) explains, disability cannot be thought about without also interrogating ability and refers to this symbiotic but often problematic relationship as the dis/ability complex, with the disjunctive forward slash representing the prevalent societal binarised notions of ability and disability. Goodley and Runswick-Cole (2014) exemplify the dis/ability complex by relating normativity to the ‘ability’ side of the binary (dis/ability), and concepts that challenge this to the ‘dis’ side (dis/ability). In re-viewing my own practice as a QTVI through the lens of dis/ability, I realised that I had largely been focused on the ‘ability’ side, setting VI in opposition to normative goals, thereby ignoring the productive possibilities of the dis- prefix to “advance and revise” (Goodley, 2014, p. 99) VI education. Co-opting Braidotti’s work on gender, I now believe that disability “is a meta-methodological tool, a navigational instrument” (Braidotti, 2021, p. 101) to think differently about normative procedures and orientations that dominate educational practice and research, such as those related to participation and voice.

Furthermore, Goodley and Runswick-Cole (2014) suggest that disability can question not just such humanistic structures and systems, but the human itself:

Disability has the radical potential to trouble the normative, rational, independent, autonomous subject that is so often imagined when the human is evoked, social policies are made, social and human sciences are developed and forms of activism are enacted. (p. 2)

This questioning of the Vitruvian ideal of the human as “Man of Reason” (Braidotti, 2020, p. 28) is particularly pertinent given that we are living in a peri-pandemic era. Braidotti (2020, p. 29) outlines the characteristics of the human considered a superior subject in western society: “masculine, white, Eurocentric, practicing compulsory heterosexuality and reproduction, able-bodied, urbanized, speaking a standard language”. Yet she also attests that this human is responsible for the “undue interference in the ecological balance and the lives of multiple species” (Braidotti, 2020, p. 27) that has resulted in global warming and the Covid-19 pandemic. Both crises have, in return, undermined anthropocentrism, or the concept of man as the “measure of all things” (Snaza et al., 2014, p. 43). This leaves us (practitioners, researchers, activists) at a potentially catalytic juncture. As I have suggested elsewhere:

In destabilising human supremacy, the virus has also undermined the dominance of neoliberal narratives of power and value, thereby giving educators licence to “undo current ways of doing – and then imagine, invent and do the doing differently” (Taylor, 2016, p. 6). (Pilson, 2022, p. 137).

However, at the time of writing, the ‘new normal’ seems to have constituted a re-establishment of the ‘old normal’, i.e. a return to normative ways of thinking and doing. Yet for some disabled children in compulsory education, aspects of the pandemic period provided examples of alternative possibilities for accessing education. Seale (2022) asserts that some disabled people noted a shift in organisational attitudes regarding reasonable adjustments and access arrangements towards possibility-focused support. Some disabled children found that accessing education remotely supported their progress and wellbeing, working at their own pace, reduced sensory overload, opportunities to take regular breaks, protection from social issues (Council for Disabled Children, 2021, pp. 26-28). Some of the processes fought for by disabled people and previously refused by employers now became commonplace as creative solutions for accessing work were now required for a large part of the workforce, making processes and adjustments usually related to disability applicable to all. This thesis aims to reiterate the importance of such practical offerings of disability (Garland Thomson, 2012, p. 341), and also its epistemic possibilities as “provocateur” (Goodley, 2014, p. 104) to explore how pedagogies (both in research and practice) can be conceived differently.

3.3.2 The ‘othering’ of disability in educational research

CDS offers theoretical and practical insights that are “counter-hegemonic to dominant understandings of disability” (Goodley et al., 2019, p. 973). As a methodology/theory it “involves scrutinizing not bodily or mental impairments but the social norms that define particular attributes as impairments, as well as the social conditions that concentrate stigmatized attributes in particular populations” (Minich, 2016, para. 6). I came to realise that I had unquestioningly (although unhappily) accepted the normative and often essentialising structures of the education system as given despite them being based on a more medicalised model of disability²⁰ – and therefore, that I needed to unpick my conceptual understandings. CDS allowed me to frame my study in a way that ensured accountability to my participants and a prioritisation of “*the goal of producing knowledge in support of justice for people with stigmatized bodies and minds*” (Minich, 2016, para. 6, emphasis in original), thereby also foregrounding a “participative worldview” (Heron and Reason, 1997, p. 2) in this study.

CDS helped me to understand how the Academy has traditionally undervalued lived experience (especially that of minoritised people) in research for its supposed lack of objectivity and by this reasoning, robustness. As Beresford (2003) explains:

If you have experience of discrimination and oppression you can expect routinely to face further discrimination and be further marginalised by being seen as having less credibility and being a less reliable source of knowledge. This fundamentally and additionally invalidates people who are already heavily disadvantaged. (pp. 14-15)

In response to this, the co-productive turn in CDS research has begun to promote the expertise of lived experience not just through reaching outwards to creating dialogues with communities and activists, but also by bringing them into academic spaces as a positively disruptive force. For example, the *Full Lives* project has resulted in academics co-authoring journal articles with their ‘non-academic’ co-researchers (Liddiard et al., 2019a; Liddiard et al., 2019b). However, as Chapter 2 (part 2.3.1.iv) explains, studies with an overt Critical Disability Studies focus appear infrequently within educational research. To counter this, I believe that scholars must visibilise disability within educational research (Nusbaum and Steinborn, 2019,

²⁰ For example, children are labelled according to medical diagnoses and cannot access formal support streams (e.g. Education Health and Care Plan) if they do not have a medical diagnosis.

p. 24), or they risk sending a message to young disabled people that their experiences within the education system are not as important as that of their peers, thereby perpetuating “normalised and institutionalised disability-based exclusion” (Steinborn and Nusbaum, 2019, p. 490).

Furthermore, Goodley et al. (2021 p. 29) suggest that contemporaneous researchers find themselves in a time of “*critical* Disability Studies” (emphasis in original). This connotes that not only are scholars of disability increasingly engaging with more expansive forms of critical theory and engaging in critiques of their own work and orientations, but that we are also in a critical time period for humanity in which the lives of disabled people are at risk. Thinking with CDS in educational research “offers, always, the potential for an agential cut within assemblages to evoke more liberatory engagements” (Naraian and Gabel, 2023, p. 101) that are ethically necessary for informing pedagogies and practice. This, therefore, provides a rationale from bringing VI education into closer conversation with CDS.

There is a small but significant body of work that considers VI through a CDS lens (e.g. Michalko, 2002; Whitburn and Michalko, 2019; Healey, 2021), but not in the field of educational research. There are also examples of research that brings together education, VI and CDS. For example, Beauchamp-Pryor’s (2013) work focuses on the inclusion of visually impaired students in Welsh Higher Education (HE) and Croft’s (2020) exploration of the access and participation of visually impaired students also focuses on HE but in the English context. Whitburn’s explorations of the educational experiences of visually impaired young people (2014a, 2014b) takes place in Australian schools. While these projects offer useful examples of the educational experiences of VICYP, none of these examples focus upon the English compulsory education system. There is, therefore, a gap in the literature and, arguably, a moral imperative to explore VI education in the English context through a CDS lens as “neither teachers nor teacher educators are separable from the political and cultural arrangements that constitute their practice” (Naraian and Gabel, 2023, p.100).

3.3.3 A post-qualitative convergence

This thesis situates itself within Critical Disability Studies’ posthuman turn (e.g. Goodley et al., 2014; Liddiard et al., 2019b; Shildrick, 2019; Goodley et al., 2021;

Goodley et al., 2022; Naraian and Gabel, 2023a, 2023b). While DisHumanism explicitly situates itself within Braidotti's (2018) interdisciplinary field of scholarship, the Critical Posthumanities (Liddiard et al., 2019b), CDS has long drawn upon other post-conventionalist (Shildrick, 2009) forms of thinking, such as post-structuralism (e.g. Corker and Shakespeare, 2002; Tremain, 2005) and new materialism (e.g. Goodley, 2007; Bauman, 2015), and in my choice of a DisHuman theoretical guide, I acknowledge all of these influences on my thinking and doing.

However, just as Goodley (2012, p. 632) notes that "critical disability studies start with disability but never end with it", this thesis begins with examining disability but also looks beyond it. I aim to explore the subjectivity of and with participants within and beyond education, to "promote positive understandings of the complex, multi-faceted, multi-layered and embedded interconnections, collaborations and capacities of human and non-human interrelations" (Goodley et al., 2021, p. 44) – that is to attend to disability *and* education *and* relationships *and* other affective forces within and between assemblages. This means considering wider identities and influences on participants, which again aligns with the concept of DisHumanism, as "the DisHuman child emerges in moments where sameness and difference, disability and humanity are invoked simultaneously" (Goodley et al., 2016, p. 777). As such, it is important to centre affective attunement (Stern, 1985) within pedagogic encounters to understand how affect is interwoven with social, cultural, and political inequalities (Juvonen and Kolehmainen, 2018).

Thinking about affect theory in relation to education has become more prevalent over the past decade (e.g. Zembylas, 2016; Mulcahy, 2018; Dernikos et al., 2019). I understand affect in Spinozan terms as the capacity to affect and be affected, and that affect "includes impulses, desires, and feelings that get historically constructed in a range of ways" (Cvetkovich 2012, p. 4). Affect theory is a powerful tool through which to consider pedagogies especially for disabled children because as Fox and Alldred (2023, p. 100) explain "[t]he affective interactions or affect economies... within an assemblage determine what a body or other thing can do (its capacities) within that particular assemblage/context". By this understanding, affective forces in the educational assemblage could determine perceptions of capacity, or capability, which could perpetuate negative stereotypes and deficit narratives (and therefore ableism) impinging on the educational experiences and wider subjectivity of disabled young people in compulsory education.

3.3.4 *PhEmaterialism*

As such, to emphasise the presence of both feminism and affect as important theoretical insights applied in this thesis, I choose to refer to the post-qualitative theories drawn upon under the umbrella of *PhEmaterialism*²¹. Ringrose and Niccolini (2020) explain how this neologism was created:

The mash-up “PhEmaterialism” broken down combines theoretical approaches drawing on posthumanism (ph) and new materialisms (materialism) with a specific focus on activating the feminist (phem) implications of how these theories are generating new forms of educational research and equity, bespoken by the capitalized “E.” (p. 1)

The deliberate imbrication of these theories allows them to become a theoretical assemblage (Strom et al., 2019, p. 3), which can activate more expansive understandings of educational research and practice. The generative nature of the interplay and friction between these theories helps them to trouble norms, thereby making PhEmaterialism a suitable conceptual influence for this thesis, given this project’s aim to thinking differently with disability to “entangle theory and action in a form of pedagogical praxis that... [goes] beyond the usual binaries of theory/method and disciplinary silos” (Strom et al, 2019, p. 4). Consequently, it contends that an allegiance to difference catalyses a more speculative agenda to research, one that that allows us (educational practitioners and researchers) to imagine alternative futures for our work.

In doing so, this chapter demonstrates how this project might provide a unique theoretical insight into VI education, as the existent research field has yet had little engagement with PhEmaterialist theories. This seems surprising given that “disability is a quintessentially posthuman condition because of its crip potential” (Goodley et al., 2018, p. 344). Although vision impairment has been the subject of posthuman consideration (e.g. Porkertová, 2020; 2022), existing studies do not relate to education. Furthermore, a key word search of ‘posthuman’ in the British Journal of Visual Impairment and the US-based Journal of Vision Impairment and Blindness (the two major journals in the field of VI research) yielded no returns. This suggests, then, that this project’s theoretical framework (encompassing post-

²¹ PhEmaterialism as a term, stemmed from a hashtag created for an academic conference: “Feminist Posthuman New Materialism: Research Methodologies in Education: ‘Capturing Affect’” in 2015 (Ringrose, Renold, Hickey-Moody & Osgood 2015).

qualitative influences) offers a unique perspective in exploring vision impairment education.

3.3.5 *Posthuman predicaments*

Thinking with PhEmaterialist theories acknowledges that the complexity of disability and its entanglement in today's society, cannot (and should not) be subject to simple regurgitations of past research processes and findings. However, while I have largely found PhEmaterialism to be a relational partner (Lester, 2020) to the (largely) more 'conventionally' qualitative Critical Disability Studies, I have not found it straightforward to wholly embrace PhEmaterialist theories in thinking about disability. I have found that thinking with different paradigmatic orientations can be frictional (Puar, 2012; Truman, 2019). This is because I am attentive to the limitations of post-qualitative research, particularly when approaching research from a social justice orientation, because:

Without explicit attention to power and history, the (non)representational logics of post-qualitative inquiry risk operating less as "new" mechanisms for generative and subversive post-humanist research and more as processes of closure and erasure: closed off from the worlds and people being researched. (Gerrard et al., 2017, p. 384).

As such, I feel uneasy about the use of the word 'new' in new materialism. This is because without due care and attention white western scholars may be at risk of colonising knowledge by repackaging indigenous ontologies as 'new' thinking. Rosiek et al. (2019) offer such an example by critiquing the idea non-human agency is a 'new' concept, stating that its proponents (e.g. Barad, 2017) should be more overtly situating the idea in indigenous (Māori) teachings. Going forward, I therefore present the 'new' of (new) materialism in brackets to denote the contingency of its 'newness'.

Other scholars (e.g. Dernikos et al., 2019; Hackett et al., 2020; Zembylas, 2018) have suggested that posthuman thinking can be guilty of subsuming human difference and thereby failing to address social inequalities. In an interview with Barreiro et al. (2018), Zembylas succinctly summarises the key considerations that disability scholars must examine closely if they are to embrace PhEmaterialist theories in their work to avoid reifying ableism:

When certain people have never been treated as humans – as a result of ongoing colonial practices – posthuman approaches advocating a move away from humanism might be seen as an alibi for further denial of humanity to these same people. (p. 255)

Consequently, it is imperative that I also draw upon critical theory that centres social justice. As such, the next section outlines the influence of concept of Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991) as an interrogative tool in this thesis.

3.3.6 Intersectionality

Intersectionality was originally used by its creator, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), to describe the multiple axes of oppression faced by Black women in the US legal system, and to posit that marginalised identities should not be considered in isolation from each other but rather should be considered as interwoven and constantly shaping each other. Crenshaw (1991, pp. 1241-1242) developed the concept to denote the “process of recognizing as social and systemic what was formerly perceived as isolated and individual”. This understanding highlights how power-as-*potestas* plays out systemically through the maintenance of the status quo.

Intersectionality should be considered a prism through which to see, predict and interact with pre-existing structural inequalities (Crenshaw, 2020). It allows us to contextualise inequity not only through and across today’s society, but also to embrace the Gramscian notion of social aggregation, to accumulate “a critical and conscious appreciation of the traces of our past, the memory of our immediate predecessors and the enduring aspects of our collective histories that emerge in the conduct of our daily lives” (Bernardi, 2020). In other words, historic exclusion becomes current exclusion becomes future exclusion (Jackson, 2020).

Intersectionality is brought into conversation with disability in the field of Disability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit – e.g. Annamma, Ferri and Connor, 2018) which examines the ways in which race and disability intersect to create unique forms of oppression and marginalisation. Other applications of intersectionality in disability research have sought to “(re)frame disability as a politicized marker of difference analogous to gendered, sexual, racial, and other ontological and biographical markers of difference” (Liasidou and Gregoriou, 2024, p. 585). However,

intersectionality has yet to be applied as a lens through which to study VI education. Bassey et al.'s (2024) scoping review found no examples of intersectionality being used to study VI in relation to education, and no research coming from the UK context in any disciplinary field relating to VI and intersectionality.

Yet embracing intersectionality is viewed as a “conceptual aspiration and research imperative for education researchers” (Tefera, Powers, Fischman, 2018, p. viii), and Fox and Fine (2012, p. 10) also state that for education practitioners, a key goal must be to support young people to “explore themselves as intersectional”.

However, I must be clear about the parameters of my use of intersectionality in this project. I am using disability as the primary identity marker for analysis, but I will also attend to how it intersects “with other axes of difference to create overlapping forms of social and educational disadvantage” (Liasidou and Gregoriou, 2024, p. 594), including race, age, sexuality, gender, socio-economic status. I do so without the intention to minimise the importance of race nor gender within the project, but instead with the recognition that Crenshaw's theory “starts from the premise that people have multiple identities and being members of more than one ‘group’, they can simultaneously experience oppression and privilege” (Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies, n.d., para.2).

As such, while not all of my participants have experienced oppression along racial lines, those who have not, have simultaneously experienced disability oppression and white privilege, so it is important to capture the complexity of their experiences to avoid unidimensional analysis that reduces the identities of participants to just the category of disability (Liasidou and Gregoriou, 2024). Consequently, I ensured that my participatory methods framed were open to encourage participants to address their “multiple grounds of identity” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1245), which also “take account of the entangled materialization of which we are a part” (Barad, 2007, p. 384). This may engender a more inclusive approach to disability research in education, incorporating as it does an expansive sense of relationality - i.e. “zooming out” (Barad, 2019, p. 534) towards an “enlarged sense of inter-connection between self and others, including non-human others” (Braidotti, 2018, p. 48).

Part 4: A Dis-Human theoretical framework

3.4.1 Diffracting DisHumanism to become a Dis-Human Approach

In this chapter I have explained how I felt torn between humanist and posthuman theories at times. While I acknowledge “the allure to get beyond the trappings of the human, ... [I recognise that] we the researcher still have to deal with our own humanness, which is entangled with inequities, like racism, sexism, or White supremacy” (Dernikos et al., 2019, p. 442). As such, I acknowledge that my own unlearning journey will be lifelong, and that this thesis provides a temporary pitstop. At this stage in the journey, I occupy a position in the middle of simultaneously acknowledging and rejecting humanism. However, rather than denoting uncertainty, the middle can be a generative space (Massumi, 2015). Therefore, this thesis has emerged from a “hybridized space of traditional and disruptive approaches to inquiry” (Bhattacharya, 2021, p. 180). This, as I now go on to explain, is an enactment of a Dis-Human approach to research.

The theoretical framework created in this chapter diffracts Goodley and Runswick Cole’s (2014) notion of the DisHuman subject by drawing upon on a wider array of critical qualitative theories than previously explicitly outlined in the current literature field. My extension of DisHumanism draw on intersectionality (e.g. Crenshaw, 1989; Erevelles, 2014) and DisCrit (e.g. Annamma, Ferri and Connor, 2013; Annamma, Connor and Ferri, 2018a, 2018b, 2023; Ferri, Connor and Annamma, 2024). It also draws in post-qualitative influences: the burgeoning body of posthuman Critical Disability Studies (e.g. Goodley et al., 2022; Liddiard et al., 2019b) and PhEmaterialism (e.g. Strom et al., 2019), which allows me to bring disability into conversation with Posthumanism (‘Ph’) and (new) materialism (‘materialism’), via a feminist lens (‘phem’) focusing on improving equity in the education system (represented by the capitalised ‘E’).

In the rest of this thesis, as I further develop and apply the concept of DisHumanism, I choose to reframe its presentation as Dis-Human. This will allow the reader to distinguish my own interpretations of DisHumanism from the existing literature. I also feel that the originators of the theory are open to development, as they themselves changed their original presentation of dis/human (Goodley and Runswick-Cole, 2014) to DisHuman (Goodley et al., 2016) to assert that the human

should always be considered in relation to disability. However, to summarise the main crux of my decision, I borrow this beautiful explanation from Harding (2023, p. 8), who refers to the hyphen “as a ‘forced milieu’ where two entities, (equal in importance) are brought together to create a third, new entity which invokes different thinking”. In this sense, the hyphen highlights disability as the catalyst for difference. Furthermore, Agamben (2003, p. 153) asserts that the hyphen “unites only to the degree that it distinguishes and distinguishes only to the degree that it unites”. Therefore, it can also represent the constant friction between disability and ability.

Dis-Human inquiry, therefore, encourages “ontological, epistemological, ethical and political attunements to creating a different world” (Springgay, interviewed in Truman et al., 2019, p. 227). This in turn, allows research to be a “nomadic activity, which takes place in the transitions between potentially contradictory positions” (Braidotti, 2006, p. 199). Given that disability occupies in society a contradictory position to normativity, a Dis-Human approach to research can therefore “dislocate the foundations of the humanistic worldview” (Braidotti, 2006, p. 203) which underpin its orientations and procedures, just as disability does to typical conceptions of the human itself (Goodley and Runswick-Cole, 2014, p. 5).

3.4.2 Mapping the Dis-Human theoretical framework

Below is a cartographic mapping (Lenz Taguchi, 2016) of the Dis-Human theoretical framework developed in this thesis. It outlines some of the conceptual drivers²² that have formed this research project that I believe are useful for future researchers to adhere to when invoking Dis-Human research: affirming **disability** and **interconnection** in our thinking and doings; **Slowing down** ontologically; questioning **humanism**, via exploring and **understanding** the contexts in which the research is taking place; situating the research in the **middle** of conventional qualitative and post-qualitative ways of thinking; considering carefully the role of ‘otherness’, or **alterity**, including **non-human** agency in the research. Each concept is explained via

²² The first letters of the key concepts form the acronym ‘Dis-Human’, becoming a mnemonic device to ensure that I can easily recall the guiding concepts of my Dis-Human framework: **d**isability, **i**nterconnection, **S**lowness, **h**umanism, **u**nderstanding, the **m**iddle, **a**lterity and **n**on-humans. Mnemonics do more than aid memory, they support higher-order cognitive processes by enabling learners to access and apply information meaningfully. This makes them valuable tools for learning and recall across academic levels, as well as for individuals like me with ADHD to support recall and retention of complex material.

the use of a quotation from the literature taken from this chapter to acknowledge that the delineations or borders applied to this framework “are not divisions, but spaces of communication” (D’Angelo and Uziel, 2023, p. 2) that have arisen (in this project) via thinking-with theory.

Cartographic thinking offers a useful organisational device because it aims to be non-representational – it “does not seek to locate or trace meanings but to extend beyond normative forms of theorizing and representing” (Ulmer and Koro-Ljungberg, 2015, p. 139). Cartographies instead can surface connections and relationality that is “not readily perceptible to the normative subjects of dominant reality” (Lorraine, 2003, p. 269) and at the same time upload my EOE stance that knowledge and therefore, meaning-making, can only ever be “partial and incomplete” (Lenz Taguchi, 2012, p. 270), because while understandings are co-constituted, they are never fixed. The unique convergences of time, space and matter in our lives will diffract our worldings (Barad, 2007; Haraway, 2016) of events into different patterns each time we intra-act with them. As such, the mapping below shows my imagining of interaction of elements of Dis-Human theory as an entanglement (de Freitas, 2012), emergent from processes and contexts that have shaped this project (Bacevic, 2018).

The central black outlined boxes show the aforementioned Dis-Human concepts and their explanations. Linked to these boxes are 2 further boxes per concept, a red rectangular box denoting an example of where the Dis-Human concept is activated within the thesis’ design and methodologies, giving the chapter location. The green oval-shaped boxes contain examples of where each concept permeates the findings in the responses to the research questions. The black boxes all overlap to denote the ethico-onto-epistemological overlaps of the concepts that make up my Dis-Human theoretical framework. While the green and red boxes are entangled with each other and each concept, they are not entangled with other concepts. This denotes that assemblages are not fixed and that the examples offered in this thesis are outcomes of this particular configuration of affective forces. They are temporarily knotted together in this research assemblage and this momentary stabilisation of elements, forces and agents is denoted by the black dots, which represent knots, or nodes, that connect elements from different assemblages, offering not a beginning or end, but a new assemblage, until they are cut, which then offers ruptures or new lines of flight (de Freitas, 2012, p. 565). Drawing upon this Dis-Human framework in a different inquiry would draw in different phenomena, different assemblages, into different “webs of composition” (Martin, 2018, p. 22).

As such, the reader is asked to be mindful that the mapping is partial as it cannot show the dynamic relationality of these concepts, nor how the theoretical assemblage is entangled with other assemblages. Instead, it captures part of “the possibility space associated with an assemblage’s dispositions” (DeLanda, 2015, p. 5) in relation to this project. Consequently, the mapping is deliberately ‘messy’ to denote the complexity of entanglements within the assemblage and also to adhere to a posthumanist and (new) materialist feminist commitment to accepting messiness in research as generative, affording exploration of “the lively and sensorial engagements between human actors, environments, objects, and technologies... [which] alerts us to different ways of knowing, resisting, and caring for participants, each other, and ourselves” (Anderson et al., 2025, p. However, mindful of visual accessibility, I have also created a tabular version of the mapping, which is available in Appendix 4.

Figure 2: A cartographic mapping of my Dis-Human theoretical framework



3.4.3 Feminist flows in my Dis-Human framework

To evaluate the construct validity of my framework against my claim to feminism, I now take Bhavnani's axioms for feminist objectivity (as outlined in Part 1 of this chapter) separate the remainder of Part 4 into 3 sections, each of which aligns to one of Bhavnani's criteria. Under each axiom, I will identify what Bhavnani (1994, p. 97) refers to as "the principles that flow from these elements" to demonstrate some of the specific conceptual elements taken from my Dis-Human theoretical bricolage that will influence the research methodology.

3.4.3.i Micropolitics entails a thorough analysis of relationality and power dynamics within the project.

To ensure a micropolitical approach to research, I have adopted a Slow ontology. Ulmer (2017) outlines Slow ontology as:

[A] diffraction – a dispersal – of time, space, and matter across different wavelengths, moving in different directions at different speeds... Such a change requires changing our frames of reference. This might be as simple as shifting our vantage point—the lens through which we see everyday life... creating a robust, organic, living methodological practice. (p. 8)

Slowness aims to trouble narrow and 'relentless' concepts of productivity prevalent in educational practice and research, but it does not necessarily mean slow in the temporal sense, hence the capitalisation of the word to separate its meaning. Slow ontology stems from a wider body of Slow scholarship (e.g. Martell, 2014; Mountz et al., 2015; Shefer and Bozalek, 2022), in which scholars "actively subvert neoliberal power dynamics and take control of direction of their research, taking time to question thoughtfully and to reimagine research outcomes and practices" (Rutter et al., 2024, pp. 56-57).

This attunement to care is particularly appropriate in the current sociopolitical climate, wherein certain communities (including disabled people) are at higher risk of (at times violent) marginalisation than ever before (Goodley, 2020a). As such, researchers need to step back, think carefully and care-fully, engage with theory and not rush our proclamations, as speed could be synonymous with haste. Somerville et al. (2021) instead recommend "slowness, pause and intimacy" in

research to reconceptualise our thinking, being and doing at a micropolitical level. I have embraced a Slow ontological orientation to methodology, ensuring that the intraview process I created through focused on making meaningful connections with others (Shefer and Bozalek, 2022, p. 251) to explore the micro-political aspects of participant lives.

A further example of enacting a Slow ontology in this project is how I have deliberately re-conceived concepts that I had previously not questioned, such as action. I had previously viewed action as synonymous with interaction, that is, pre-determined agents (usually humans) possessing action and relationality as a property, something that can be purposefully created, that the agents are separate from and instigate. By thinking Slowly with PhEmaterialist theory I began “to consider how **non-human** bodies or matters might contribute to their own actualization” (Neimanis, 2016, p. 47). This enabled me to reframe action as intra-action – a dynamism of forces (Barad, 2007, p. 141), which was crucial in developing my research methodology and methods (as is further explained in Chapters 5 and 6).

3.4.3.ii Inscription equates to accountability – the researcher ensuring that hidden stories are foregrounded, counter-narratives exposed, and expertise of participants is centred.

I have tried to adhere to this axiom by centring the everyday stories of participants to support **understanding the present**. This denotes my feminist relational understanding of pedagogies, drawing upon Smith’s (1995, p. 205) assertion that “people bring to any moment of activity the deposits of their idiosyncratic biographies”. Pedagogies are co-constructed (Nelson, 2021) between teacher, student and other affective forces within encounters (Hickey and Riddle, 2024) that take place in everyday learning (Comber and Nixon, 2009). As such, I wanted to learn about the everyday experiences of my participants and what knowledge-ing they were bringing into their pedagogic encounters.

The notion of the ‘everyday’ is not a new concept in social sciences research. For example, in the field of qualitative sociological research, Pereg (2009) and Back and Puwar (2012) have emphasised the value of studying the everyday aspects of life. Affect Theory scholars, such as Brian Massumi (2015), have urged researchers to pay more heed to the micro-perceptual forces that affect us. Posthumanist scholars such as Rosi Braidotti (e.g. 2013) have also attended to the nuances of human and

non-human interconnectedness in their research in order to decentre the human. Even more stereotypically scientific disciplines such as developmental psychology have considered everyday experiences of thinking learning and cognition in higher education (e.g. Entwistle et al., 2001).

However, the closest work I found to linking the 'everyday' to educational research was Wood's (2014) work in the New Zealand/Aotearoa context with older teenagers regarding everyday citizenship. I was unable to find any research on the UK compulsory education system that deliberately paid heed to the everyday influences on the young people who make up its community in a way that positioned the young people as active participants, which meant that neither hidden stories nor participant expertise were centred. However, recently, CDS has begun to attend more closely to the micro-impacts of dis/ableism. For example, Curran et al. (2018) deliberately turn towards a focus on disabled children's affective encounters within and between the disability assemblage. Furthermore, Burch's (2021a) work on disability hate crime "attends to the emotionality and materiality of uncertain, unfixed and spontaneous encounters within everyday lives" (p. 77) and explores how disabled **humans** negotiate these on an everyday basis.

This thesis attempts to follow this micro-resistive turn in CDS, by exploring the everyday experiences of visually impaired children to consider what matters to them. If everyday events are usually perceived as "mundane, familiar and unremarkable" (Scott, 2009, p. 2), then we could suggest 'everyday' is a synonym for 'ordinary'. This semantic shift leads us to the work of Kathleen Stewart, in particular ordinary affects. For Stewart (2007, pp. 1-2), the ordinary is not unremarkable but is instead "a shifting assemblage of practices and practical knowledges... ordinary affects are the varied, surging capacities to affect and to be affected that give everyday life the quality of the continued motion of relations, scenes, contingencies and emergences". The ordinary is mutable, catalytic and kaleidoscopic, affecting both "our public feelings that begin and end in broad circulation, but they're also the stuff that seemingly intimate lives are made of" (Stewart, 2007, p. 2).

Therefore, a focus on ordinary affects in research can be expansive, rather than constrictive, as the everyday offers possibilities for both micro- and macro-political analyses of society (Hall and Holmes, 2020). This project therefore conceives the ordinary affects that occur in the liminal space of the 'everyday' as agentic in knowledge-ing about disability, education and the contemporary sociocultural

moment. It considers the latter to be an **interconnected** protean assemblage, which includes considerations of the political context, personal encounters with popular culture, entanglements with non-human agents and im/material objects. All of these elements possess agentic capacities to affect, and in turn, in-act worlding (Stewart, 2012). Worlding is Stewart's entanglement of knowing and being. It is "embodied and enacted process – a way of being in the world - consisting of an individual's whole-person act of attending to the world" (Palmer and Hunter, 2018, para. 8). Therefore, whilst the world remains in flux in the post-pandemic era, it is crucial to actively re-constitute our worldings by attending to an "enlarged sense of vital inter-connection with a multitude of others" (Braidotti, 2018, p. 221).

Wood (2014, p. 217) suggests that "a focus on the everyday, therefore, is also a political stance that aims to give voice to marginalized groups and pay attention to spaces previously rendered invisible", or othered. Goodley (2014, pp. 22-23) positions othering as a socio-political force that forces marginalised people into spaces "founded upon ableist, heteronormative, adult, white European and North American, high income nations' values". Linked to this, Sylvia Wynter's (2003) work on colonialism, refers to how this highly normative force can push marginalised groups (e.g. poor, queer, Black, children, trans) together into an "archipelago of Otherness" (2003).

This metaphor is certainly prescient when we consider the fissures and fractures wrought upon society by the pandemic, which "uncovered the violence of humanistic systems. While everyone was subject to the same rules and legislation, their impact was felt differently depending on socio-economic and geographical situation" (Pilson, 2022, para. 2). In its pervasive division of society, different marginalised groups were indeed isolated like the small islands of an archipelago. This macro-political positioning of disabled people as "abject and other" (Liddiard, 2020, para. 4) is a deliberate undermining of their power and ubiquity (Mitchell and Snyder, 2000). Which is exactly why, as Goodley (2021, p. 7) states, "fresh stories of disability need to be recounted...by disabled people". This is especially important in the current socio-political and economic climate because "**disability** contributes a narrative of a genuinely open future, one not controlled by the objectives, expectations, and understandings of the present" (Garland-Thompson, 2017, p. 60).

Therefore, by attending to the everyday affective economies sparked within the research and our wider assemblages, as is demonstrated in my response to **RQs 1 and 2** in Chapters 7 and 8. Indeed, disability itself can signal "the myriad ways in

which we sense and make sense of the world” (Goodley, 2020b, p. 120) if we attend to its affective capabilities, and its ability to crystallise connectivities (Gibson, 2006) which emphasise our interdependence with a “chaotic network of habitual and non-habitual connections, always in flux, always reassembling in different ways” (Potts 2004, p. 19). This also helps me to exemplify how a Dis-Human approach to research can inform everyday VI education pedagogies (as is discussed in my response to **RQ3** in Chapter 9).

3.4.3.iii A careful consideration of difference demands reportage and exploration of both patterns and divergence of findings.

Difference is often informed and enacted by linear and cognitive beliefs about what it means to be human. As such, disability is often understood as ‘other’, which recognises individuality but at the same time might essentialise disability as passive and fixed state of being. For example, Levinas (1947/1978) in his concept of **alterity** or ‘otherness’ explains that the ‘other’ cannot be known or represented, which Braidotti (2021) argues may inadvertently silence the voice and agency of the ‘other’, thereby detaching ethical responsibility from real, embodied subjects. This de-contextualises disability (and gender, race, sexuality etc), which risks ignoring the material and political realities of those who are marginalised. Worse still, Ruddick (2010, p. 22) asserts that alterity as synonymous with otherness is often regarded with fear, which could lead to fear spilling over into violence (Chakraborti, 2015; Burch, 2021b). Therefore, it is important to interrogate carefully the epistemological constraints posed by (colonial) narratives of difference, as “alterity and the question of the ‘other’ – how it is that otherness is conceived and acted upon – is the defining question for our planetary present, whether it be in how we adjudicate the political and ethical details of equality” (Jackson, 2018, p. 5), and particularly pertinent, therefore, for exploring disability.

To invoke a careful consideration of difference, I now diffract Derrida’s (1967) concept of *Différance*. Although originally relating to meaning-making in language and text, in its centring of relationality, its essential premise can also apply to understanding other facets of the human experience, as it problematises binary oppositions (e.g. speech/writing, presence/absence). In the written word, “Différance is the systematic play of differences, of the traces of differences, of the spacing by means of which elements are related to each other” (Kristeva, 1982, p. 28). Meaning is therefore unstable, as each sign relates to other signs, creating an

endless chain – akin to an assemblage. Différance, therefore, is mutually constitutive, just as difference is. There must always be an understanding of what constitutes the ‘norm’ in order to ascertain what diverges from it. Considering disability and difference through Différance emphasises that their meanings are contextual and evolving. This challenges essentialist or binary views of disability (e.g. ability versus disability) and opens space for more inclusive, fluid understandings.

Furthermore, Derrida refers to Différance as the “middle voice” (1967, p. 279) between passivity and activity. In its ability to catalyse difference, disability can be an active and activist solution to the othering of marginalised voices in educational research and practice (Pilson, 2020, p. 51). It follows, therefore, that to activate this project’s orientation towards positively disruptive difference, to borrow from Mazzei and Jackson (2012) and Massumi (2015), this thesis starts in the middle. The middle is where things flow, where the (intra-) action happens, where we can be speculative (Mark, 2021, p. 175) – where we “shift methods from a reporting on the world to a way of being in the world that is open to experimentation and is (in)tension” (Springgay and Truman, 2018, p. 206).

Starting in the **middle**, therefore, represents a polychronic worldview, one that recognises that we exist “in a world which is constantly becoming” (Thrift, 2004, p. 61), and that time is fluid and that the future and past are entangled with the present – in other words, attending to the middle enacts an ontology of immanence (Deleuze and Guattari, 1998). This rejects a teleological conception of educational research, which is end-oriented and subject to the arrow of time moving in one way only, forward. St. Pierre (2019, p. 5), summarising the conception of immanence explains that “in this ontology, being is difference – everything is different, ...is always differentiating, always becoming, never static” (emphasis added). As such, it avoids representation in research:

Representation fails to capture the affirmed world of difference. Representation has only a single centre, a unique and receding perspective, and in consequence a false depth. It mediates everything, but mobilizes and moves nothing. Movement, for its part, implies a plurality of centres, a superposition of perspectives, a tangle of points of view, a coexistence of moments which essentially distort representation. (Deleuze, 1994, pp. 55-56)

The deliberate move away from representationalism herein also allows the thesis to straddle the middle of conventional qualitative and post-qualitative forms of

research. This embracing of multiple theoretical influences (alongside a range of non-academic conceptual interlocutors) is a testament to the complexity of disability which has the potential to foment new perspectives about humanism. Consequently, this thesis draws upon the myriad “entangled agencies” (Barad, 2007) that have (be)come together to create this doctoral assemblage to explore the conducting of VI educational research differently and how this in turn can help educators to think differently about VI education pedagogies. The outcome of this, is that this Dis-Human approach to research has required a re-thinking of different ways of conceiving and doing research, as is explored in Chapter 4.

Conflux

In summarising the unlearning journey of this chapter, I borrow the term *re-turn* from Barad (2014), who uses the analogy of the earth worm to explain their²³ expansion of the word return. For Barad (2014), to re-turn is to enact:

A multiplicity of processes, such as the kinds earthworms revel in while helping to make compost or ... turning the soil over and over – ingesting and excreting it, tunnelling through it, burrowing, all means of aerating the soil, allowing oxygen in, opening it up and breathing new life into it. (p. 168)

As such, in this chapter, I have re-turned to literature, through a process of *re-viewing* that is outlined next in Chapter 4's methodological discussion. To re-view is to avoid binarised ways of thinking and doing and attending to a process of discernment (Bhattacharya, 2023, p. 114) and care-fully filtering my influences and influence in my thinking, has allowed me to “problematise ...[my] taken-for-granted positionalities” (Zaliwska, 2016, p. 125) in research and practice. This in turn has allowed me to begin to both perceive and activate “patterns of difference that make a difference” (Barad, 2007, p. 49), a focus that has continued throughout the thesis.

As this chapter has demonstrated, interrogating our ethico-onto-epistemological underpinnings is crucial for researchers who intend to undertake non-representational forms of research. Even if we believe that our intentions are good, we may unwittingly be holding unchallenged beliefs. So, the interrogation must continue. This chapter has initiated this by outlining my feminist axiology and evaluated how my choice of Dis-Human theoretical framework aligns with and activates it. The next section of the thesis (the chapters comprising the Methodological Cartography) puts this Dis-Human theory to work in demonstrating how approaching research with theoretical orientation involves thinking about methodology and concepts differently (in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively). Chapter 6 then goes on to draw together the unlearning from Chapters 3, 4 and 5 to demonstrate what a Dis-Human theoretical approach can do to methods, data collection and analysis to not only result in eliciting different worldings, but also to ensure that research processes are ethically sound and accountable – and therefore appropriate for working for disabled children.

²³ Barad uses they/them pronouns.

Chapter 4: Diffracting methodology with Dis-Humanism

Introduction

In positioning research as an assemblage (Ringrose, 2011; Renold and Ringrose, 2017), it is necessary to map “the micropolitics of methodology” (Snaza et al., 2016, p. xxv). To uphold Bhavnani’s (1994) feminist axiological micropolitical imperative (as outlined in Chapter 3), this chapter is the first of three which together constitute a Methodological Cartography which outline how I have activated my Dis-Human **theoretical framework** to decentre conventional humanist methodologies and **tools**. The purpose of this chapter is to explore what a Dis-Human theoretical orientation does to often taken-for-granted facets of the research process – “thinking, reading, theorising, citing and writing... [which] materially change me as a researcher, reader, writer” (Truman, 2023, p. 150). As Donna Haraway (2016, p. 12) explains: “it matters what ideas we use to think about other ideas... it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with... what thoughts think thoughts. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories”.

The first part of this chapter introduces the concept of diffraction as a methodological instrument for the activation of a Dis-Human theoretical framework. Rice et al. (2022, p. 288) in their research into disability and the Arts suggest that diffraction is an ethical approach for working with marginalised groups as it “recognizes the real-world effects of the structures of a research project, rather than just the subjectivity of a researcher, on the phenomenon being studied”, thereby affording an exploration of power dynamics in wider contexts.

Part 2 outlines the Dis-Human autoethnographic approach I took in this chapter to recount how my engagement with literature beyond the *Human* (of Dis-Human) discourses of education presented in Chapter 2 give me the theoretical tools to diffract my reading process to *re-view* the literature and think differently about the methodologies used in this project. This leads to an overview outlining how I came to Dis-Humanism in Part 3.

Part 4 demonstrates the influence of reading differently informs writing differently due to new understandings of my subjectivity as neurodivergent and disabled person (catalysed by coming to Dis-Humanism). Similarly to Manning’s (2016) work on Autism, I found that taking a neuroatypical or neurodivergent view to ways of seeing and doing the world can be empowering. Just as for VICYP the world is dominated by ocular-centric narratives, for the neurodivergent person, neurotypical narratives dominate what is accepted and acceptable, and this chapter emphasises

the need for them to be questioned in order to subvert the neurotypical “decisional force (Manning, 2016) that excludes some people and things from mattering in the relational field” (Naraian and Gabel, 2023b, p. 181).

Part 5 draws together the learning from this chapter to summarise a diffractive Dis-Human methodology of reading-writing-thinking-with. This methodology outlines how attending to the affective forces stimulates thinking, afford “access to non-pathologising concepts and language with which to shape... narratives” (Bertilsdotter Rosqvist, 2023, p. 1238) and destabilise normative modes of scholarship that typically include not only disabled researchers (Tremain, 2017), but certain types of disability (Meekosha and Shuttleworth, 2009).

Part 1: Diffraction as methodology

4.1.1 Diffraction as metaphor

The opening section of this chapter explains how this project takes a diffractive methodological approach to the research process (Fox and Alldred, 2021). Physicist and feminist theorist Donna Haraway (1997) first suggested the utility of the concept of diffraction as a metaphor for inquiry in social sciences research. Haraway positioned diffraction as a means of conducting non-representational forms of research, “which involves attending to difference, to patterns of interference, and the effects of difference-making practices” (Hill, 2017, p. 1). Further developed by fellow quantum physicist and feminist materialist scholar Karen Barad (2007, p. 30), the concept of diffraction as methodology centres an attunement to entanglements and “moves beyond tracings or reflections of the already-known to make new mappings, onto-epistemological-ethical mappings, in which the some-thing new that is created and claimed (made known) is also accounted for” (Rice et al., 2022, p. 289). This positions it in contrast to reflection, which in Physics aims to replicate a fixed and objective reality. Thus, “while reflection can document difference, diffraction, on the other hand, is a process of *producing* difference” (Bozalek and Zembylas, 2018, p. 54, emphasis in original), because it can “‘interrupt’ our habits of thinking and doing” (Rice et al., 2022, p. 12). As such, diffraction can also be positioned as an instrument (Udén, 2018) or a method (Sefyrin, 2012), as well as an analytical tool (a concept taken up by this project in Chapter 6).

The verb ‘to diffract’ has etymological roots generally related to breaking apart or shattering or can describe the process in physics of light or sound waves bend as they pass obstacles. However, diffraction can also be defined as a process of modification (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-b), which is its intended meaning in this project, being as it is synonymous with making difference. Furthermore, Haraway (2018, p. 268) even describes diffraction as “the *production* of difference patterns in the world, not just of the same reflected – displaced – elsewhere” (emphasis added). This makes it an approach to social inquiry that attends to exploring the engagements and ‘interferences’ between world and social researcher (Haraway, 2018, p. 16). A diffractive methodology is an appropriate enactment of a Dis-Human theoretical framework because it can “describe interdependency and disruption as well as continuity” (Smith, 2012, p. 332), thereby simultaneously recognising and decentring

the argument put forward by narratives of human exceptionalism of the independent and individual 'I'²⁴ (Barnwell, 2017, p. 28).

4.1.2 Dis-Humanism and diffraction

A Dis-Human approach to inquiry allows for a diffraction of ways of thinking, doing and being. Dis-Humanism allows the researcher to straddle the threshold between learning about individual experiences and recognising the instability of the concept of individual. This demonstrates how a Dis-Human form of diffraction also extends reflexivity. As Bozalek and Zembylas (2017) explain:

In reflexivity, there is a researcher as an independent subject who is actually the locus of reflection, whereas in diffraction there is no such distinction as subjects and objects are always already entangled. Thus, from a diffractive perspective, subjects and objects such as nature and culture are not fixed referents for understanding the other but should be read through one another as entanglements. (p. 116)

This affords the possibility of a disruption of hegemonic power hierarchies between researcher and participant, as selves and stories are understood as co-constituted and not extracted or interpreted. As such, to uphold a relational ontology, it is important to contribute my own worldings as researcher to the creation of such stories. This ensures that I am accountable for my own situated knowledges (outlined as imperative for feminist research in Chapter 3). Therefore, it responds to Naraian and Gabel's (2023a, p. 100) suggestion that "studies for understanding teachers (and not only students and families) may be not only appropriate, but necessary if 'inclusion' is not to be decoupled from ability/disability". It also allows me as researcher to attend to and explore the micropolitical impacts of my Dis-Human theoretical framework on this project, by centring how it produces difference in research methodologies. It therefore affords a deliberate positioning in the generative space in the middle of practice and research, as Dis-Humanism advocates a more fluid and vital subjectivity which is important for practitioner-research, as the diffractive practitioner-researcher "never takes on fully the limits of one... fixed identity" (Braidotti, 2011, p. 64).

²⁴ An exploration of the humanist understanding of the subject as self-contained versus the posthumanist view of the human as "entrenched in the surrounding world" (Andersson, 2020, p. 395) appears in Chapter 6, part 6.3.4.

4.1.3 Diffraction and this project – why is a diffractive methodology suitable for responding to the research questions?

I will now briefly explain how a diffractive methodology is suitable for responding to my research questions. Diffraction requires research participants to read, write and think with “data, theory, concepts, selves, affects, histories, lives, etc” (Jackson and Mazzei, 2017, p. 733) to consider research objectives and questions through a prismatic rather than reflective perspective. This involves (as the rest of these Methodological Cartography chapters go on to explain) a deliberate and necessary complicating of concepts, methods and processes (Mazzei and Jackson, 2012, p. 746). This in turn affords a complex view of the education system, allowing the response to **RQ1 (How do visually impaired young people encounter the English compulsory education system?)** to surface seemingly everyday micropolitical events (such as accessing lesson resources) can embed or resist macropolitical tropes (e.g. ableism). This is because a diffractive methodology can “highlight, exhibit, and make evident the entangled structure of the changing and contingent ontology of the world, including the ontology of knowing” (Barad, 2007, p. 73). Being underpinned by an EOE approach, which “entangles inextricably a researcher’s responsibility for the practices of research and how its outputs make a difference (ethics), that which is observed (ontology), and the research apparatus – observers and their methods of observation (epistemology)” (Fox and Alldred, 2023, p. 3), diffraction shapes all aspects of the research process, meaning that diffractive methodologies have wider implications than re-imagining implicitly-held and often static understandings of ways of thinking and doing in research.

By building curiosity and flexibility into research, a diffractive approach can encourage participants to similarly diffract their own existing understandings, making diffractive methodologies and analyses appropriate for answering **RQ2: What different understandings emerge from a Dis-Human exploration about visually impaired children’s lives and experiences?** Diffractive participatory forms of inquiry, such as the *intraview* methodology developed in this project (as Chapter 6 part 2 will explain) can support disabled children and young people to engage in what Annamma et al. (2018a, p. 61) term “intellectual activism”, questioning broader narratives at both macro- and micro-political level. This can empower participants to situate their lives and experiences within broader social, economic and political structures, thereby positioning themselves as rights-holders.

By developing a holistic understanding of the intersecting forces impacting on their lives and how they as an individual can embody, resist or impact upon these external influences of “discrimination, marginalisation, and privilege” (Carbado et al., 2013, p. 306). In doing so, “the disabled adults of tomorrow can (re)map the terrain of future society to recalibrate power dynamics – and to reimagine what ‘being fully human’ means” (Pilson, 2022c, p. 138).

As Chapter 1 (part 2) outlined, the international education agenda also emphasises the importance of sustainable and socially just forms of future education. Diffractive methodologies, in reading ideas from different theories, disciplinary fields and affective forces through each other, can also break down taken for granted ideas of pedagogy, which is the key objective of **RQ3: How might a Dis-Human-informed exploration of visually impaired children’s educational experiences and beyond inform VI pedagogies?** Geerts (2019) argues that diffractive thinking, especially when paired with an affirmative feminist EOE approach, is powerful for practitioner-researchers because it helps us respond to the crises in the education system (and wider society) produced by dominant Eurocentric humanism, climate change and widening inequalities driven by neoliberalism. She suggests that diffractive research can develop pedagogies that bring together criticality and creativity, emphasise situated and geopolitical awareness and fosters accountability and an ethical responsiveness to contemporary political complexities (Geerts, 2019, pp. 6-7). Diffractive methodologies, in highlighting our entanglement with the world, both produce and require care and response-ability in research (Murriss and Bozalek, 2019, p. 882).

Part 2: Diffracting Autoethnography

4.2.1 The unlearning journey of the thesis

In this chapter, I adopt a Dis-Human autoethnographic approach to recount the unlearning journey experienced during this doctoral research, on account of the impact engaging with literature, which in turn highlighted the need to attend to the myriad affective forces in the research assemblage. Klein (2008, p. 80) discusses the importance of unlearning (letting go of long-held assumptions about concepts) and relearning (creating new understandings around the same concepts) to inform learning (i.e. building new pedagogies that support these relearned philosophies). books. It is also important for me as a practitioner-researcher to try to offer insights into how diffracting my current ways of thinking and doing supported my becomings as an educator, because as Hill (2017, p. 6) notes, there are few existing accounts in research, particularly from the perspective of teachers.

As such, I was open to engaging in this process from the outset of conducting doctoral research to support my professional development and consider VI education pedagogies differently. However, as I engaged with wider research fields and discourses, I diffracted Klein's (2008) thinking via decolonial scholarship, which emphasises the necessity for white, western scholars, educators and feminists to learn to unlearn narratives imposed by dominant western and colonial/imperial influences on education, culture and society in order to relearn how to avoid reiterating them (Tlostanova and Mignolo, 2012, p. 7). As such, I try to outline how learning engendered in and by this project helped me to *unlearn* in order to begin to *relearn* about research concepts and methodologies.

4.2.2 Autoethnography

Holman Jones et al. (2013) define conventional qualitative autoethnography as follows:

Autoethnography is the use of personal experience and personal writing to (1) purposefully comment on/critique practices; (2) make contributions to existing research; (3) embrace vulnerability with purpose; and (4)

create a reciprocal relationship with audiences in order to compel a response. (p. 20)

I found these sub-definitions both pertinent and resonant to my feminist political underpinnings (as outlined in Chapter 3), which highlighted the potential of using an autoethnographic approach to outline my research methodology in this chapter.

This is because firstly, this research aims to make a *contribution* to existing research by providing an example of how, to paraphrase Weatherall (2018, p. 101), to do research differently by taking my “situated and theoretical orientation... seriously” (Truman, 2023, p. 155). I have also purposefully *embraced vulnerability* by committing to a feminist analysis of “the effects of domination, struggle for freedom and ethical obligation” (Ziarek, 2013, p. 68). I also hope that by *commenting on practices* and subsequently offering different ways of thinking and doing in research, the account in this chapter might impact on the thinking my *audience* – future practitioner-researchers who may interact with this work. Finally, I use this chapter as an opportunity to offer *personal experiences* of the micropolitical processes that influenced the research process, which have helped me to pass through aporic junctures (impossibilities, stuck places - Koro-Ljungberg, 2010, p. 606), in the hope that they might provide insight for others in similar positions in their own research processes.

4.2.3 Posthuman autoethnography

Holman Jones (2016, p. 229) explores autoethnography through the lens of queer theory, explaining that it should be prefixed with ‘critical’ to denote that “theory and story share a reciprocal, inter-animating relationship”. However, while she acknowledges the dynamism of theory as a collaborative force, Holman Jones does not explicitly advocate for bringing in other non-human material forces into this relationship. Moreover, although she has since begun to draw upon Posthumanism in her research (e.g. Harris and Holman Jones, 2022), she has not yet explicitly related it to autoethnography. As such, while acknowledging the influence of Holman Jones’ thinking on the development of the methodology, I choose to draw upon Gale and Wyatt (2019)’s example of posthuman autoethnography in this thesis instead.

Gale and Wyatt's (2019, p. 566) conceptualisation of autoethnographic practices positions them as "assembling and disassembling bodies that are active in always territorializing space and in world making. They have the capacity to affect and be affected and, therefore, as performing and performative practices, they act and are acted upon". This understanding, they explain, allows autoethnography to become a force for activism, thereby making it relevant for this project, which aims to avoid arbitrary divides between practice, research and activism (Nguyen et al., 2019). This is apt not only as an ethical means of researching disability but also for supporting the disabled researcher. As Warfield explains:

If subjectivity is fundamentally decentered in posthuman methods, and posthuman autoethnography focuses on the becoming of phenomena, then this [type of] autoethnography... narrates specific moments in the relational becoming of the researcher and the research method.
(Warfield, 2019, p. 153)

To enact a Dis-Human approach to thinking about and doing research, I have therefore diffracted traditional humanist autoethnography with PhEmaterialist theories to focus on the affective encounters with non-human agents that have influenced the development of my knowledge-ing and helped me to become a practitioner-researcher, and at the same time, how my unlearning journey informed my Dis-Human framework, which in turn informed my methodology and methods. As such, the autoethnographic writing that follows in this chapter is deliberately "less reflective, less personalized, less human/centric and more relational, more non/human/centric and more engaged with the entanglements of materiality and discourse that enact the inevitability of lives" (Gale and Wyatt, 2018, p.3).

However, like Bhattacharya (2023, p. 117), I found that autoethnography can help "to un/learn the things I had internalized through my colonized education" in the UK. Underpinning my mode of autoethnography with Dis-Humanism has also allowed me to consider that have impacted upon my own complicity (and that of others) in reifying and reiterating oppressive policies and practices as a QTVI. Part 3 of this chapter now goes on to activate an autoethnographic account to consider what a Dis-Human orientation does to reading and writing before Chapter 5 elucidates the outcomes of its impact on thinking and Chapter 6 demonstrates its impact on talking and listening methodologies.

Part 3: Diffracting Reading: Disturbing research and practice with theory

To organise Part 3 of this chapter, I draw upon Guyotte's (2023, p. 94) notion of researching through, with, but most importantly, as disturbance. This thesis is a product of disturbance - not just in the sense that it was written during the Covid-19 pandemic (arguably the biggest disturbance to modern life experienced this century), but it also in its assertion of the premise that disability holds power in its potential to disturb normative ways of doing and being. Disability can "resist the familiar, the assumed and the taken-for-granted, and in doing so, open spaces for new understanding" (Mannay, 2016, p. 32) and therefore *disturb*, education and research. As such, this section of the chapter explains how a Dis-Human theoretical orientation catalyses a more speculative agenda to research, one that allows vision impairment educational practitioners and researchers to imagine alternative futures for our work.

4.3.1 Researching through disturbance: The impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic

Disturbance was both a key barrier and enabler for this research. Due the impact of UK pandemic restrictions, I was left working in the ruins (St. Pierre and Pillow, 2000; Lather, 2001) of my planned doctoral project. As I will go on to explain in more detail in Chapter 6, I had to re-design my project, re-apply for ethical approval and re-recruit participants four times. Despite these difficulties, I believe that this disturbance proved (in the longer term) generative for its development, as I "read and read and read" (St. Pierre, 2016, p. 122), which allowed me to eventually find a *different* way of conducting inquiry, as it gave me the language and reference points to articulate my Dis-Human theoretical framework.

I began to engage with "alternative visions of the humanist, knowledge and society" (Braidotti, 2018, p. 19). I wondered if we instead recognise that we are part of an "embedded, embodied and yet flowing... web of relations with human and non-human others" (Braidotti, 2018, p. 4), whether VI educational research and practice could be done differently? To respond to this, the next section of this chapter

outlines how the progression of my thinking concomitantly changed my process of engagement with literature. I began to conceive of research to consist of both a creation of knowledge-ing (Springgay and Truman, 2018) and a curation of influences, as well as information. In this understanding, the literature review process and the collection/interpretation of 'data' are symbiotic and mutually constituted. The rest of Part 3 (along with Part 4 of this chapter) explores how this different engagement produced difference in both this project and my own personal and professional subjectivities.

4.3.2 Researching with disturbance: Mapping the Re-viewing Process

PhEmaterialist scholar Sarah E. Truman challenges researchers to care-fully consider and deliberately elucidate our theoretical approach/orientation towards reading (2023, p. 149). This, Truman (2023, p. 153) asserts, disrupts the neoliberal "economisation" of reading in the Academy by sharing examples of my engagements with literature. This is in keeping with Holman Jones et al.'s (2013) objectives of autoethnography, as it provides a purposeful comment on how such deliberate resistance can enact feminist citational policies (Ahmed, 2007). This section of this chapter, therefore, attempts to respond to these feminist imperatives. Yet despite my proclaimed allegiance to difference, the initial iteration of my review of literature began in a more typically systematised manner, the outcomes of which were presented in Chapter 2. The procedure I followed in Chapter 2 is outlined below.

As discussed in Chapter 2 part 3, The systematic review has gained prestige in educational research over the past 40 years in concurrence with the marketisation of education in neoliberal policy. As the demand for "evidence-based" solutions to "failing educational standards" rose in 1980s Britain (Hammersley, 2020, p. 24), so did the reliance on positivist-leaning means of 'proving' the efficacy of policies and interventions. In collating 'evidence', the systematic review could feed into policy and practice and therefore became synonymous with value and trust for publishers and funders. As such, in thrall to conventional qualitative (humanist) understandings of what I *should* do, I began my formal 'reading' with a view to contextualising my study in relation to macro-political narratives of education. I began my reading by conducting a review of policy pertaining to educational inclusion in England, by searching through UK Government archives for Acts and Bills, Green and White

papers, as well as reports stemming from formal inquiries. I believed that a contextualisation of my research within politics and policy would help me to explore the potential impact upon professional practice within the vision education sector.

My search sources were informed by Newman and Gough's (2020, p. 9) suggestions, which included: internet academic and other search sources (Google and Google Scholar); bibliographic databases – online library-based search facilities; subject-specific online journals (e.g. British Journal of Visual Impairment, Educational Action Research Journal); subject-specific online repositories (e.g. ERIC: Education Resources Information Centre); hand-searching of specialist journals or books (although this has been seriously curtailed by the outbreak of Covid-19); contact with experts (undertaking suggested reading from conference proceedings, participation in academic events, learning programmes, professional memberships, blogs, via ORCiD and ResearchGate); citation checking (following relevant citations in academic work to their source). For this initial search focus, I found accessing government and international organisation online repositories on their websites to be the most reliable source of material, in terms of guaranteeing breadth of information available in one location.

Simultaneously, I undertook a review of the participatory research to gain an understanding of the existing body of research within and to further establish the potential novel contribution that my work could make to the vision impairment education field²⁵. However, I took a different approach to this facet of the reviewing process. This was because when I had undertaken some initial key word searches in a 'scoping' capacity, using the sources outlined above, I found different outcomes in relation to which sources were the most fulsome. Instead of central repositories, I found 'contact with experts' and 'citation checking' to be the most illuminating sources for developing my methodological knowledge in this area.

I was particularly informed by reading lists supplied to me during formal learning events focused developing knowledge in Participatory Action Research (PAR). This literature had been collated by world-leading researchers in this field (e.g. Michelle Fine and Maria Elena Torre; Sarah Banks and Mary Brydon-Miller). I therefore deemed these lists to possess excellent legitimacy, as per Newman and Gough's (2020) 'contact with experts' inclusion criterion for literature reviews, as they offered an international perspective on the creation and development of PAR. However, in

²⁵ Participation, participatory inquiry and PAR are the foci of Chapter 5 and a more fulsome discussion pertaining to my (re)understandings will take place there.

engaging with the literature suggested, I began to realise the dominance of western thinking in my reading up to this point. These lists highlighted work by indigenous researchers (e.g. Eve Tuck) and emphasised PAR's emergence in the Global South, emphasising the initial limitations of my engagement with literature in terms of its compatibility with my burgeoning understanding of my ethical, ontological and epistemological positioning.

I began to articulate this in my research journal. Below is an excerpt from my entry on 6.4.2020:

Monforte (2019) encourages me to think about my research 'fit' in terms of whether its methods are commensurate with its ontology... I am starting to understand that I reject the assertion that there are definitive boundaries of onto-epistemologies within which we must and only utilise methods that 'fit'. While I am bound by so many inflexible structures and systems, my reading becomes a place of freedom. Like Monforte, I am troubled by St. Pierre's (2015) warnings against ontological incoherence – I feel that ontological coherence could signify linearity, rigidity, reductionism and essentialism – a reification of the concepts that new materialism rejects.

Perhaps, then, I need to conduct my literature review in a new materialist-inspired manner. This may finally allow me to account for the 'desire path' I have trodden so far. If I allow myself to be driven by wonder (MacLure, 2013) – to take a tangential and circuitous route through the literature, will this allow my thinking to become more expansive? As I argued in my piece written for the International Childhood Disability Studies Symposium (Pilson, 2021), research genres need to be more open to learning from others. Learning from a multitude of ontologies avoids fundamentalism, opens boundaries – like Gloria Anzaludúa's notion of the Borderlands (1987), the margins as a place of power and possibility, allowing me to become – as Monforte (2019) attests: "reality is a constant process of becoming" (p. 117) ...

My engagement with literature therefore began to follow a "looser form of categorisation... to capture better the complexity of the social world" (Hammersley, 2020, p. 31). It moved towards more of a configurative synthesis approach (Sandelowski et al., 2012), as I noted in Chapter 2, in that it used "exploratory and iterative review methods that emerge throughout the process of the review" (Newman and Gough, 2020, p. 4). The aim of my review was not structured around explaining a fixed hypothesis, but rather:

[T]o produce new synthetic accounts of the phenomena under investigation. The results from the individual studies are translated into and across each other, searching for areas of commonality and refutation. The specific techniques used are derived from the techniques used in primary research in this tradition. They include reading and re-

reading, descriptive and analytical coding, the development of themes, constant comparison. (Newman and Gough, 2020, pp. 14-15)

However, as explained in Chapter 3's Conflux, over time I further diffracted my reviewing approach to become a *re-view* technique. Below, I exemplify the difference between reviewing and re-viewing by 'cutting together-apart' (Barad, 2014) Newman and Gough's writing by applying Manning's (2016) notion of the dynamism of technique beyond method to try to better elucidate process of engaging with literature. Newman and Gough's use of the word "technique" synonymises it with routine or system. Manning's understanding, on the other hand, of relation, movements of thought are thinkings-with as much as thinkings-about". To demonstrate these cuts, I have struck-through the original language used by Newman and Gough (2020) to describe reviewing, which I position as representative of conventional 'humanist' understandings of research. Thinking with Manning (2016) 'dis-ses' these norms, affording a rearticulation of reviewing (highlighted in yellow below) to become re-viewing:

Figure 3: Articulating the re-viewing technique

Human: Reviewing involves: ~~searching for areas of commonality and refutation~~

Dis: Through re-viewing: ~~lines of flight are taken towards previously unknown worldings.~~

Human: ~~The specific techniques used are derived from the techniques used in primary research in this tradition~~

Dis: ~~The re-view technique is specific to this research-assemblage and is created and enacted in the unfolding of the project.~~

Human: ~~Techniques... include re-reading and re-reading.~~

Dis: ~~Techniques include re-reading and re-reading.~~

Human: ~~Techniques... [facilitate] constant comparison~~

Dis: ~~Techniques are created by and facilitate attunement to difference~~

The aspect unchanged from Newman and Gough's original description are "re-reading and re-reading". This is prescient because my re-view was underpinned by a committed response to St. Pierre's exhortation to "read and reread" (2017, p. 604) in an immersive and expansive manner. As such, the re-view has been undertaken with an "attitude of methodological fallibilism, as opposed to methodological dogmatism... [so as to encourage] the kind of methodological experimentation that can be generative for new researcher-becomings" (Smith, 2019, p. 9), which is important for embodying the role of practitioner-researcher required of the QTVI.

4.3.3 Researching as disturbance: Re-viewing as reparative

The articulation in Chapter 3 of the outcomes of the re-viewing process described above, therefore, demonstrates the Dis-Human imperative to not only read to understand humanist structures and systems (e.g. policy, practice – the *Human* side of Dis-Humanism, as demonstrated in Chapter 2), but also to read to expand and entangle thinking – to trouble "our philosophical conceptions and political responses" (Goodley and Runswick-Cole, 2016, p. 1) by engaging with theory and other affective forces. Following Truman's (2023) advice, I have vectorised to both activate and synthesise concepts sparked relationally with/in my entanglement with the literature.

For Truman, a vector is "the situated place I write from, and write to, in a field I am helping to create" (2023, p. 154). Therefore, my 'take' on the literature is simultaneously individuated, yet relational. Influenced by Carlson (2023), I have attuned to the myriad writers, theorists, professionals, children, friends, family, animals, nature, im/material, discursive forces which have infringed on this re-view, which thus constitute my own unique articulation of research. This commitment to relationality is further explored in Part 4's explanation of the diffraction of writing towards thinking-writing-with theory (Kuby, 2023) that appears throughout the thesis, which demonstrate my deliberate attunement to affective forces that have catalysed thinking.

As I stated in part 3.2.1 of Chapter 3, I also recognise the importance of attending to the "thick-now" (Barad, 2007, p. 25) – an understanding that the past and the future continually bleed through into the present moment. I therefore try to articulate in the present iteration of the thesis the feelings and thoughts that emerged in my past

encounters with literature to surface both the known and unknown, which leaves the future open to uncertain possibilities (Kuby, 2023, p. 37). Therefore, the synthesis of theory produced by this re-view into the Dis-Human theoretical framework I curated, created and use in this thesis is an articulation of a pause in my composition of inquiry. It is “the starting point for further evaluation, not an endpoint in itself” (Grant and Booth, 2009, p. 94). I recognise that had I engaged with literature in a different context, or with different situated knowledge/experience, it’s likely that my current worldings would be uprooted (Carlson, 2023, p. 87) and consequently articulated differently.

In this sense, the reading in this thesis aimed to enact what queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003, p. 123) calls reparative reading – reading that attends to “multiplicity, surprise, rich divergence, consolation, creativity” (Love, 2010, p. 237). Sedgwick directly compares this with paranoid reading, which is reading that reiterates and repeats, stemming from an arborescence of thought which is “contagious; more specifically, paranoia is drawn toward and tends to construct symmetrical relations, in particular, symmetrical epistemologies” (Sedgwick, 2003, p. 126). Sedgwick does not wholly reject a sense that a paranoid orientation can offer opportunities to find and develop knowledge, but she warns that such knowledge may be stratified, or “rigid” (p. 146).

Reparative reading, conversely, is “additive and accretive” (p. 149) but also faces different risks compared to its paranoid comrade, not least the risk of being considered less intellectually rigorous, due to its “different range of affects, ambitions” and often-emotive orientation (p. 149). To combat this, I have tried to ensure that I have been transparent in this chapter through my Dis-Human autoethnographic account about how I developed the theoretical vocabularies in this thesis, as Sedgwick advises (2003, p. 149) to enhance the re-view’s construct validity (Lather, 1986, p. 67) as discussed in Chapter 3. This has not just involved reading differently, but also writing differently as Part 4 of this chapter now explains.

Part 4: Diffracting writing

Reporting is central to collecting information and evidencing impact (past, present or future) in schools. Consequently, reflection and reflexivity are ingrained in me as an educational professional (Schön, 1987). However, reflexivity might be viewed as incongruent PhEmaterialist theory, if it is conceived as a means of capturing a moment in time in the search of “resonant articulation” (Pelias, 2011, p. 659) of a fixed event or understanding. In this sense, writing reflexively could be deliberately enacted as a “stabilising force that fixes people, events and ideas” (Wolgemuth, 2023, p. 182), which could constitute representational research. However, if as Attia and Edge (2017, p. 33) suggest, “reflexivity involves a process of on-going mutual shaping between researcher and research”, then it follows that writing can otherwise be constituted as “lived” (Wolgemuth, 2023, p. 173) if underpinned with a Dis-Human theoretical orientation, a diffractive product from “the entanglement of being, creating and producing” (Ulmer, 2016, p. 202).

I now go on to explain how I have tried to attend to the myriad affective influences, encounters and entanglements that have (be)come together to create the assemblage of the thesis, which remain constantly unfolding with “neither beginning nor end, departure nor arrival, origin nor destination” (Taylor and Harris-Evans, 2018, p. 1263). This has meant writing *differently* – “writing *with*...[my] experiences” (Guyotte, 2023, p. 103, emphasis in original) to diffract writing. As a disabled person myself, this could be considered a form of *cripping* the writing process.

4.4.1 Wit(h)nessing

US disability activist Alice Wong’s superb collection of first-person stories from disabled people ‘Disability Visibility’ (2020) aims to “show disabled people simply being in our own words, by our own accounts” (Wong, 2020, p. xx). In this sense, Wong asks readers to *witness* the experiences of disabled people. Guyotte (2023, p. 100), discussing how researchers can write with/through/as disturbance referred to in Part 3 of this chapter asks researchers to go beyond such *witnessing* in her expansion of Walsh and Bickel’s (2020, p. 137) term “wit(h)nessing”. For Guyotte (2023, p. 100), wit(h)nessing is an “intentional ethical move to hear and position ourselves relationally with another’s disturbance”. While Guyotte refers to the

negative connotations of disturbance in this piece, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, socio-political and ecological crises, she also explains, drawing upon the work of Tsing (2015, p. 152), that “restoration requires disturbance”. This positive framing of disturbance aligns with Goodley et al.’s (2019, p. 998) concept of disability as an affirmative, positively disruptive force – disability, then, could be said to be the ultimate disturbance.

Thus, my commitment to with(h)nessing means “[centring] the experience of disabled people and [welcoming] others in” (Wong, 2020, p. xxii) to disturb both the research process and taken-for-granted understandings in VI education. Dis-Humanism allows me to retain the centrality of narratives of visually impaired participants, something that Naraian and Gabel (2023b, p. 174) state must be foundational in inquiry around disability in education, whilst also recognising the agency of other affective forces in the research-assemblage. This rejects the power dynamics at play contributing to shaping a consistent and streamlined narrative, one that aligns with dominant norms in favour of facilitating method(ologies) that catalyse/produce “heterogeneous worldings coming together as a political ecology of practices” (de la Cadena and Blaser, 2018, p. 4). As such, to uphold a relational ontology, it was important to contribute my own worldings as disabled researcher to contribute to this political ecology. For example, parts 4 and 5 of this chapter go on to outline how my experiences as a disabled and neurodivergent researcher have impacted the form and content of my writing within this thesis.

Diffraction splits open stories to create new patterns, as the Dis-Human autoethnographic account of this chapter has shown. I hope that this thesis might encourage myself (and others) to in future deliberately choose to enact writing differently – to *crip* it. Hamraie and Fritsch (2019, p. 2) define the term ‘crip’ as representing “the non-compliant, anti-assimilationist position that disability is a desirable part of the world.” In this sense, the use of this thinking-writing methodology which affirms difference could be seen as a means of crippling writing. Siebers asserts that “different bodies require and create new modes of representation” (2008, p. 54), and my own disabled bodymind²⁶ required such a new way to re-present my thinking, as the manifestations of my disability mean that many of the typical exhortations of how to write ‘effectively’, such as to “*be writing all the time*” (Weaver-Hightower, 2019, p. 9, emphasis in original) are not open to me.

²⁶ I wish to make clear that while I am legally considered disabled in the UK under the 2010 Equality Act on account of PTSD and other mental health conditions, I do not suggest that disabled and embodied experiences can be homogenised and do not attempt to conflate my lived experiences with that of my participants, or any other disabled people.

It seems to be the norm in handbooks explaining how to do qualitative research that writing is accepted as painful, difficult, “often preceded by feelings of intense anxiety” (Glesne, 2011, p. 222). But if we crip this normative idea of writing as a struggle, we can re-present writing as a source of joy, an enactment of love.

4.4.2 Crippling Writing

Mills and Sanchez (2023) explain the power of crippling writing:

Crip authorship, in one register, transgresses the rules of authorship. In another, it refers to crip forms and composition practices. It can... alter conventions. As important as outcomes and products are disability experiences, the temporalities and affects of authorship. (p. 2)

Crippling writing is therefore a shifting, malleable and responsive methodology, emerging from and entangled within the spacetime-mattering of this project. Hamraie (2023, p. 307) explains further: “crip is not a synonym for disability, nor is it simply a political orientation. Rather, it is a specific commitment to shifting material arrangements”. Therefore, the crippling of writing in this project was embodied and embedded within the pandemic times this research has been undertaken in. This means that writing was done differently by and because of its convergence with technology, its focus on the affective (often everyday) forces that have impacted on it, its creation in the middle of thinking and reading (and everyday life) and its attempts to surface love in violent times. As such, my crippling of methodologies is an enactment of power-as-*potentia*, offering possibilities to catalyse and re-present micropolitical acts of resistance, and flexibility in terms of format and content, allowing their creation to be unconstrained by time, place and method – enactments of a Dis-Human orientation to research.

However, despite my claims of deliberately attending to difference in this methodology, I am aware that my Dis-Human autoethnography in this chapter can only go so far towards actively crippling writing, as it is trying to meet academic conventions. Crip theorist Robert McRuer (2014, p. 49) argues for a more affective and disruptive means of writing not centred towards a goal of “efficiency” that he calls de-composition. Although I have had to write with efficiency in mind to a certain extent, I believe that within the structural confines within which I am working, I have still attempted to crip the methodological process as far as possible but recognise

that I am still bound to procedure and cannot fully crip ideas regarding writing and authorship in this doctoral research context.

Furthermore, I remain mindful that authorship is not open to everybody. Mills and Sanchez (2023, pp. 7-8) offer a reflection on their process of creating an edited collection of disabled writing in book form, noting forms of power-as-*potestas* inflicted as societal barriers of ownership, payment, guardianship that some of the authors had to face in the process. Additionally, I recognise that the mechanics of writing are also not always possible for many for physical, mental, socio-economic and political reasons. To make writing accessible we must think about format, language, tools. For example, in my professional capacity as QTVI, writing would often be reframed as *recording* to denote that students might not produce what is typically understood as writing (words on page) and may be entangled in a more 'noticeable' way with non-human agents to undertake this task – e.g. assistive technology, voice dictation, eye gaze, picture cards, braille.

As such, I have attempted to diffract what is considered acceptable writing by including throughout the thesis excerpts from diary entries and voice dictated pieces (albeit presented as text versions) to denote how I as a disabled and neurodivergent researcher engage with writing differently, just as I (as practitioner) support the pupils I work with to undertake their own writing *differently* in schools. As Hamraie and Fritsch (2019, p. 1) state: “[d]isabled people are experts and designers of everyday life”, so it seems important that I design the way I present my own knowledge-ing in this thesis. In this sense, to mobilise Shannon’s (2024, p. 676) term, I am (neuro)queering writing.

4.4.3 (Neuro)queering Writing

This section considers in more depth how a Dis-Human framing of research allowed me to work in a way that was more accessible and generative as a disabled and neurodivergent researcher myself. According to Manning (2016, p. 3), neurotypicality is foundational, pervasive and dominant in the way that society runs and orients its cultures, systems and dominant viewpoints. I lived for 40 years feeling out of kilter with such narratives, which I had attributed personal deficit. However, to be diagnosed with ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) during this doctoral experience has been both a rollercoaster and a relief. I have come to

realise through personal experience the violence that neurotypical ways of thinking and doing can inflict on individual difference, and fully agree with Manning's (2016, p. 3) assertion that neurotypicality "frames our idea of which lives are worth fighting for, which lives are worth educating, which lives are worth living, and which lives are worth saving".

Furthermore, hegemonic neurotypicality can both be redolent of (and also activate) tropes of ableism (Shannon, 2022) and racism (Lewis and Arday, 2023), meaning that a questioning of neurotypicality aligns with the social justice orientation of a Dis-Human research approach. Attending to difference (*divergence*) in the thinking and doing of research allows me to invoke a responsive ethics of care towards my own neurodivergence by allowing myself to pay "attention not to, but with and toward, in and around" (Manning and Massumi, 2014, p. 4) concepts and affective forces.

Thinking-with a neurodiversity paradigm is also a nod to the increased prevalence of VICYP who also receive a diagnosis of neurodivergence. For example, Do et al.'s (2017) systematic literature review found there to be a prevalence of 19% of VICYP internationally with a co-morbid Autism diagnosis²⁷. This is significantly more than the wider childhood prevalence in the UK, estimated to be 1 in 100 by the British Medical Association (2024). As such, it is important for more research to look at the intersection between neurodiversity and VI, especially as D/deaf education research has made recent strides in this area (e.g. Borders et al., 2016; MacFadyen et al., 2023), despite the co-morbid prevalence of neurodiversity being lower in D/deaf and hearing-impaired children, compared to VICYP²⁸.

Furthermore, it is noted that behaviours related to VI can mirror neurodivergent traits, e.g. hand flapping and 'stimming' are common for blind CYP as for autistic CYP (Tavoulari and Perepa, 2024, p. 1). Cheng et al.'s (2025, p. 2) systematic review into the mental health of VICYP reconceptualises VI as a form of neurodivergence. This is because VI interrupts neurotypical visual processing and (particularly if present from birth) can disrupt developmental processes that impinge on access and engagement (Wall, 2019, p. 443) to the primarily neurotypical world. However, regardless of VI's positionality in relation to neurodiversity, both

²⁷ I choose to use Autism as an umbrella term as this was found to be the preferred term used by 9 out of 10 Autistic people interviewed as part of the recent global U21 Autism Research Network study (Keating et al., 2022) into language choices around Autism.

²⁸ Due to the presence of overlapping behavioural patterns present in children with Autism and D/deafness/hearing impairment diagnoses, prevalence numbers remain an estimation.

neurodivergent and visually impaired communities have been subject to narratives of correction to minimise these behaviours (Ivy and Ledford, 2022, pp. 95-96) for the comfort of adhering to societal norms for the neurotypical and non-disabled people around them (Kapp et al., 2019). As such, Cheng et al. (2025, p. 12) advocate for further exploration of the lives of VICYP via a neurodiversity paradigm that centres inclusive and participatory research practices and prioritises the expertise of lived experience to elicit meaningful outcomes to support the wellbeing of VICYP, which this study aims to contribute to.

I believe that deliberately creating and naming “new metaphors and concepts invite us to inhabit a shared cognitive environment... It means not trying to cope in overwhelmingly inaccessible spaces rather than discovering what it means to thrive on our own terms” (Bertilsdotter Rosqvist et al., 2023, p. 1242). The diffractive Dis-Human approach to this research therefore demonstrates solidarity and allyship between my own disabled experience and that of my participants. This affords us an opportunity to take what feminist and neurodiversity scholars and call “collective action” (Mountz et al., 2015, p. 1236²⁹) or “joint action” (Francis and Hey, 2009, p. 231) in our thinking differently about VI education, as it helps me to respond to Bozalek and Fullagar’s (2021, p. 3) research provocation: “In what ways can non-normative experiences and states such as those that may be considered neuroatypical, help us think about the practice of education such as enquiring, teaching, writing and reading differently?”

Furthermore, the neurodiversity paradigm coalesces with a posthuman feminist politics as it highlights the value of variation, of difference, “noting the social and cultural construction of ideas of 'normal' and 'right' ways of functioning, and emphasising the power imbalances and potential for discrimination intrinsic to this” (Sisulu et al., 2024, p. 2). Linked to this, an important way that this project aligns with a neurodiversity paradigm is that it purposefully aims to avoid a comparative or representational approach in considering the lives of disabled young people. Bertilsdotter Rosqvist et al. (2023, p. 1236) explain that too often in research, neurodivergence is “not considered important or interesting in and of itself but is significant only when measured against cognitive normate human health and development”.

²⁹ It is important to note also that Mountz et al. (2015, p. 1236) explain that their feminist politics “foreground collective action and the contention that good scholarship requires time to think, write, read, research, analyze, edit, organize, and resist” – which again, is what this chapter attempts to adhere to.

This reductive reasoning could also be applied to VI, as its low presence in wider educational and disability research fields could suggest that it is not considered important as a field of study. This emphasises the similarity of VI and neurodivergence in occupying insider-outsider positions in relation to both the social and medical models of disability. For example, neurodivergence is seen to be outside of social/psychological concepts of humanity (Stenning, 2020, p. 138) and simultaneously often does not fit medical deficit constructions of intelligence for example (Bertilsson Rosqvist et al., 2023, p. 1236), thereby leading to a systemic negation of the impact of neurodivergence on the quality-of-life experiences (Pluquailec and O'Connor, 2022, p. 2).

Similarly, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the UK government public sector equalities duty impact assessment asserted that provisions made under the Coronavirus Act (2020) represented a “fairness and equality of treatment... between those who share a protected characteristic and those who don’t... we consider that any indirect discrimination will be negligible and... justified and proportionate” (Department of Health and Social Care, 2020, np). This resulted in visually impaired people being classed as ‘not disabled enough’ at a time when this label offered protection and adjustments to the permitted access to certain limited services (such as online food delivery slots). Despite government claims, RNIB found in May 2021 (p. 1) that this insider-outsider status in relation to the category of human did actually disproportionately affect the health and wellbeing of blind and partially sighted people. In “explicitly universalizing the crisis of what people are assumed to suffer” (Titchkosky, 2014, p. 120), thereby allowing visually impaired people to occupy the often-restricted category of ‘normal human’, the UK government put the community at risk of harm. This therefore positioned the visually impaired people with the choice of “fitting in” (Michalko, 1998, p. 140), or emphasising their difference, thereby opening them up to being categorised as “not-quite-human” (Titchkosky, 2014, p. 120).

As such, I aim to show that VI is interesting and important (Bertilsson Rosqvist et al., 2023, p. 1236) as its own unique identity and to explore the experiences of visually impaired CYP in navigating the education system, rather than placing them in comparison with other facets of education system, or other SEND categories. I also intend to show that the everyday lives of VICYP are also important and interesting, not simply comparing them against the priorities of other areas of research, which tend to focus on macro-level concerns. This has influenced my decision to organise the research questions and subsequent presentation of data

and results in the way that I have chosen to in Chapters 7 to 9. Chapter 7, answering RQ1, focuses on individual stories (despite relating them all to wider experiences of education). Conversely, Chapter 8, while highlighting the lives and interests of VICYP beyond education, noting their intersectional identities and unique subjectivities, uses theory to bring stories together in entanglement. This approach adheres to Braidotti's posthuman feminist mantra "'we' are in *this* together, but we are not one and the same (2020a, p. 465), and also aligns with a Dis-Human orientation of difference and disturbance (Goodley, 2020a, p. 20), as the chapters "foreground storytelling as a subversive force both on the level of discourse (i.e. the content of the works), and also structurally (i.e. the mechanisms involved in producing these narratives)" (Bertilsson Rosqvist, 2023, p. 1238).

Part 5: Reading-writing-thinking-with – A Dis-Human methodology

4.5.1 *The offerings of a Dis-Human approach to methodology*

Throughout the research process I came to unlearn previously held understandings as much as I developed those that were different. As explained in Part 3 of this chapter, the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions forced me into thinking about and doing research differently out of necessity. But this transformed into an orientation towards difference by choice. The change began by reading differently. Rather than solely systematically, or professionally as MacLure (2024, p. 1649) calls such rote reading for replication, I read closely (Kuecker, 2023, p. 1577), intensely (Jackson and Mazzei, 2023, p. 2), queer-ly (Freeman, 2021, para. 14). These forms of reading encompass both radical relationality and radical refusal – being attentive to links and connections and ensuring that damaging narratives are not replicated. This approach also activated difference, as it led to writing differently. I began to consider what writing could be and do if conceived of as more than a process to be “whipped into shape to perform a sort of mimetic mime” (Carlson et al., 2023, p. 8).

Through the interplay between reading and writing, I realised that these often taken-for-granted processes were crucial facets of doing research differently. Reading and writing differently led me to think differently about thinking itself – I now view it as “already empirical” (McCormack, 2015, p. 95), and therefore a methodology in itself. This chapter’s activation of a Dis-Human theoretical approach goes beyond this to imbricate Jackson and Mazzei’s (2012, p. vi) concept of thinking with theory, and Kuby’s (2023, p. 41) notion of thinking-writing-with and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s (2003, pp. 129-151) reparative reading approach to become *reading-writing-thinking-with*.

This expansive Dis-Human methodology has afforded the diffraction of humanist ideas of methodology and the repatterning the cognitive acts of reading, writing and thinking as “‘more-than’, the ‘other-than,’ the different-than” (Seigworth, 2017, p. ii). Rather than acts of rationality, they become hybridised as both enactments and outcomes of thinking-feeling (Massumi, 2015, p. 6). *Reading-writing-thinking-with* can be considered an “affective craft” (Airton, 2020, p. 94) which can both track and produce difference – thereby offering a unique (different) perspective on VI education.

Conflux

In Chapter 3 I argued that a Dis-Human theoretical framework requires researchers to approach research *differently*. In Chapter 4, I have explored and exemplified how this orientation can be enacted in research. I have argued for approaching reading and writing with intent, accepting that “research tools and techniques inevitably affect/reshape the flow of reality, thus entangling with the knowledge being generated and highlighting the inseparability of ethics with methods” (Rice et al., 2022, p. 289). In exploring methodology at a micropolitical level, we are able to imbricate reading, writing and thinking as an entangled diffractive practice of knowing that “participates in (re)configuring the world” (Barad, 2007, p. 91). Furthermore, acknowledging the complexity of influences that inform Dis-Human this methodology also ensures that I “account for a politics of location... that occurs when entering into unfamiliar territory” (Snaza et al., 2016, p. xxv), thereby adhering to the feminist undergirdings of this project (Rich, 1984, p. 7), and avoiding the “kind of scholarship...that attempts to provoke a shift in thought, but which continues the dominant scholarly mode of thinking” (Dolphijn and Van der Tuin, 2012, p. 85).

This diffractive reframing of *reading-writing-thinking-with* as Dis-Human methodology consequently allowed me to think differently about other facets of the research process that I had previously believed must be approached or ‘done’ a certain way. As I now go on to explain in Chapter 5, I began to question my conceptual understandings of participation as “tied up with broader questions about paternalism and power in participatory endeavours – particularly when a privileged party with institutional power claims to ‘empower’ another” (Mayes, 2023, p. 21). This resulted in a diffraction of participation from an outcome to a process. This meets Barad’s (2007, p. 73) first objective for diffractive methodology – considering “the ways in which social processes diffract the world as they intra-act and interfere” (Fox and Alldred, 2021, p. 96). In Chapter 5 the “social processes” focused upon are participation and participatory research. Following this, Chapter 6 (the final chapter in the methodological cartography) moves on to the enact second tenet of diffractive methodology – outlining methods of diffractive analysis.

Chapter 5: Diffracting concepts – Dis-Human participation

Introduction

In this chapter, I exemplify how a Dis-Human diffraction of participatory research can prove a fertile (Lather, 1993) theoretical-methodological convergence. One which recognises the posthuman turn in Critical Disability Studies (e.g. Goodley, 2014; Liddiard et al., 2019b), which recognises that disabled people are “engaged in a dual fight for recognition as human beings (a very humanist desire) whilst also engaging in imaginative collectivist ways of being in the world (akin to the post human condition)” (Goodley, 2020b, p. 37). This also entangles Queer Theory in the conversation, as Ahmed’s use of the verb ‘*to queer*’ is applicable here, as it is framed as a practice that “disturbs the order of things” (2006, p. 161). Therefore, using disability to not just queer but to queer-y methodological practices in educational research, particularly enactments of participation, could add to Goodley and Runswick-Cole’s (2014, p. 6) “dishuman concepts” as *disparticipation*, thereby challenging and reframing the normative conceptualisations of how participatory research can be done and what implications it might have for participatory pedagogies in practice.

To think about a Dis-Human diffraction of participation, I have adopted what Ulmer calls “rhetorical moves” (2017, p. 841) in order to disrupt and expand understandings of methodologies in educational research, which has allowed me to re-imagine participation and participatory research at a conceptual and theoretical level. Ulmer explains that post-qualitative inquiries encourage moves towards *thinking without*, *thinking with* and *thinking differently* (Ulmer, 2017, p. 841, emphasis added) to make methodologies “more-than-critical” (Ulmer, 2017, p. 834). This chapter questions humanist understandings of the methodological constructs of participation and participatory research by arguing:

[A]gainst the reliance upon, and deference to, prescriptive method in social science research. *Thinking without* thus becomes a subtractive approach that, in order to create openings in methodology, first removes possible barriers. Once the path has been cleared, scholars then are free to embark upon imaginative adventures. (Ulmer, 2017, p. 841, emphasis added)

Borrowing Ulmer’s moves and embracing them as framing devices for my argument, this chapter gives examples of what participatory inquiry can be/come is diffracted with a Dis-Human theoretical orientation, and, in turn, what this new iteration of

participatory inquiry can do to VI education. To do this, the chapter is organised into 4 superordinate parts, with further sub-sections. Its trajectory can be outlined as follows:

Firstly, in Part 1, the participatory turn in educational research and practice is briefly introduced, before being developed in Part 2, which focuses on Participatory Action Research. This form of participatory inquiry has gained status as an ethically sound and impactful means of conducting research with minoritised communities. This section therefore justifies why (superficially at least) I initially felt it could be a suitable methodological choice to meet both the axioms and aims of this project in researching with disabled young people.

Part 3 considers how what happens when participation is brought into conversation with Dis-Human theory. Part 4 employs Ulmer's (2017) provocations to *think with*, *think without* and *think differently* to offer three examples of what this Dis-Human understanding of participation can un/do to vision impairment research and practice. Finally, Part 5 explains how a Dis-Human ethico-onto-epistemological orientation can diffract participatory research from procedure to technique, thereby offering more expansive opportunities for research, as participation becomes an affective encounter, rather than potentially a prescriptive set of procedures (Duggan, 2020; Lenette et al., 2019; Pain et al., 2015).

This chapter offers a novel theoretical contribution by bringing participatory and disability research into dialogue within the generative space between conventional qualitative and post-qualitative paradigms, shaped by a Dis-Human research orientation. It challenges reductive notions of "participation as inclusion [which] closes things in on itself, keeping things tidy, cohesive, and comfortable" (Springgay & Truman, 2018, p. 71), urging instead a view of participation as an affective force that "keeps things unsettled, a push that ungrounds, unmoors, even as it propels" (Manning, 2016, p. 202). This reframing broadens understandings of what "facilitating an inclusive world" (Hewett et al., 2022, p. 17) might mean for VI pedagogies. I invite readers to *think without* cynicism and engage with this chapter's "imaginative adventure" by *thinking with* trust and openness (core tenets of participatory research) and *thinking differently* about participation as a generative, unwieldy force (Dernikos et al., 2020, p. 89) rather than a linear, procedural model (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995, p. 1674).

Part 1: Participation and educational research – an overview.

5.1.1 The right to participation

Participatory research approaches have for the past three decades been advocated as the most democratic and empowering, and therefore ethically sound, means of conducting research with children (e.g. Hart, 1997; Burke 2005). Invoking participatory inquiry in which children and young people are positioned on an as equitable footing as possible with the researcher can help counter the typically held viewpoints within both the Academy and Society as a whole, of the child as commodity (Spring, 1976). In educational research, this can involve flipping the role of teacher and learner to redress the generic power imbalances in research and the education system. Doing so can facilitate the removal of “boundaries between action and knowledge-generation” (Somekh and Zeichner, 2009, p. 6) via creating a ‘safe’ space for situated knowledge to be mutually constituted. Cook-Sather (2011, p. 41) gives the example of pupil-participants in participatory research projects being encouraged to embody the role of “pedagogical consultants” within both research and classroom contexts, which is a positioning that I hoped that participants in this project could embody.

Participation in education is legislated as a right for disabled children (e.g. UNCRC; UNCRPD). However, it is not wholly embraced as a given in educational research. This is because bringing minoritised people to the research table (Jourian and Nicolazzo, 2016), requires a deliberate re-positioning of educational institutions and researchers “to acknowledge agency and movement in places where youth have little room for manoeuvring” (Cruz, 2011, p. 548). This is not a simple task, given the fixed hierarchies of systemic power and within the education system. The outcome is that “while the role of the child in research has shifted significantly, it is noticeably still adults who hold much of the control regarding participation and research leadership” (Liddiard et al., 2019a, p. 155).

This is understandable on the one hand to ensure safeguarding of children in research projects (Archard and Skivenes, 2009). I do not wish to argue against the importance of ethical protocol in research, especially when there are inherent power differentials between researcher and participant in a project. However, I do wish to note that procedural, institutional ethics codes can “can deny children's and young

people's competence and ability to make decisions about their own lives" (Skelton, 2008, p. 23). This may undervalue the agentic capabilities of young people, leading to (often non-disabled) adults driving research objectives over those with lived experience. I have adhered to university ethics codes of practice, British Educational Research Association (2018; 2024) ethics guidance, school-specific safeguarding policies in this project, but I have also centred an everyday responsive form of ethics and ethics of care (Banks et al., 2013) in this research. I ensured that I also took a person-centred approach to navigating any dilemmas or challenges, which involved developing trust and negotiating reciprocal partnerships (Smith et al., 2021, p. 434) with participants and gatekeepers.

Banerjee (2011, p. 16) explains that such collaboration is important for VI educational research, as "an ongoing dialogue is necessary in the field of vision impairment to define wisdom-based evidence and suggest strategies for possible interventions in order to facilitate successful and effective implementation of wisdom". I believe that children should be key actors in such conversations, because as alluded to in the Chapter 2's discussion about the formulation of the CFVI, knowledge development in the VI education sector, like much disability research, remains adult-centric (Whitney and Liddiard, 2020). Participatory methodologies, conversely, have gained increasing notability in line with the post-UNCRC Child's Right Agenda (Lundy, 2018) as a means of democratising research, given that they are generally understood to be epistemologically oriented towards social change, constituting research approaches "that attempt[s] to put the less powerful at the centre of the knowledge creation process; to move people and their daily lived experiences of struggle and survival from the margins of epistemology to the centre" (Hall, 1992, pp.15-16). With a commitment to centring the voices of VICYP, I began this research project with a particular methodological focus on Participatory Action Research (PAR).

Part 2: Participatory Action Research (PAR)

5.2.1 Why PAR?

Kindon et al. (2007) define PAR as “a collaborative process of research, education and action (Hall 1981) explicitly oriented towards social transformation (McTaggart 1997)” (p. 9). Collaborating in this manner can “interrogate the gap between dominant ideologies and human lives” (Torre et al., 2012, p. 171), thereby affirming social change “through reinterpreting the social matters one is hoping to change” (Monforte, 2019, p. 93). PAR would therefore respond to my desire to position participants as active knowledge-generators, rather than receptacles, which would hopefully, in turn, support their own journeys towards adulthood by developing clearer understandings of their subjectivity. A foundational belief underpinning this research is that knowledge is constituted relationally – it is something we create, not discover. PAR asks research participants to work relationally, to “pool our many partial truths” (Fine et al., 2003, p. 195) and to recognise that “multiple knowledges live within each of us and grow even more powerful when explored among us” (Fine and Torre, 2019, p. 436), thereby destabilising tropes of power-as-*potestas* and enhancing the development of power-as-*potentia*.

5.2.2 Outcomes of PAR – ‘giving voice’

Moreover, given that a key tenet of PAR must be the intention and outcome of ‘giving voice’ to all participants, “not simply those whose views are more readily captured” (Lewis and Porter, 2006, p. 224), it seemed like an ethically sound methodology for demonstrating an underpinning adherence to an emancipatory research ethos as advocated as a commitment of disability research (e.g. Oliver, 1992). It would also enact a dialogic approach to learning about the experiences of participants, which aligns with Michalko’s (2002, p. 6) statement that “disability is not an exclusively individual issue; it is a collective one”. In harnessing disability as a guiding force to allow participants (including myself) to consider their subjectivity relationally, it was hoped that the findings of this project would inform thinking vision impairment education pedagogies and research differently – “to transform ‘the way we do things around here’” (McTaggart et al., 2017, p. 28).

I therefore believed that using a PAR approach to inquiry might have the potential to disrupt the normative constraints that young visually impaired people face in navigating the education system, as it could deliberately “remove hierarchical role specifications and empower ‘ordinary [young] people’ in and through research” (Kindon et al., 2007, p. 1). As I have explained elsewhere, “giving visually impaired children the opportunity to actively participate in knowledge-generation pertaining to their support is not only an expectation of the disability studies paradigm (Davis and Watson, 2000; Oliver, 1992), but is also now their legal right” (Pilson, 2021, p. 346) according to the 2014 Children and Families Act and the 2015 SEND Code of Practice.

5.2.3 Possibilities of PAR

However, while there is a growing body of educational research that actively involves other groups of disabled children who would typically be considered ‘hard-to-reach’ (e.g. work about learning-disabled children by Pearlman and Michaels, 2019; Bloom et al., 2020) there remains a distinct dearth of existing research which specifically situates VICYP as knowledge producers rather than subjects (Whitburn, 2014a). While children in general possess a low level of social capital in research, disabled children, and in particular those who are visually impaired, could be said to have an even lower social visibility (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981). This intimates that their experience and knowledge remain largely unknown, and “perhaps subjugated” (Genat, 2009, p. 105). PAR could invert this trend as it commits to involving “those who might experience greater vulnerability and marginalisation than others” (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2018, p. 81). VICYP might fit into this categorisation when we consider their positionality in relation to research, perhaps due to vision impairment’s status as a low-incidence disability. As such, conducting participatory research with VICYP could constitute an enactment of an emancipatory disability research ethos.

As Klocker (2012, p. 150) found in her own doctoral research, I also felt PAR to be an alluring methodology for doctoral study, as it “carries the promise that academics can make a *difference*” (emphasis added). For a project so inherently aligned with the positive potential of difference, doing VI research *differently* by centring active participation was a tempting route. Therefore, it seemed crucial to use the liminal space provided by this doctoral project to create opportunities for “critical inquiry

and social action concerning opportunities and constraints within the education system” (Giraldo- García and Galletta, 2015, p. 91) for and with VICYP. For participants, as espoused by Cahill (2013, p. 201), I hoped that participation would enable them to embody the role of organic intellectuals, “whose critical perspectives are developed from an analysis of everyday experiences”. Learning from the pupils’ experiences surfaced by this process, I hoped that my pedagogical knowledge would be enhanced, which would in turn allow this research project to have ‘real world’ impact within the VI education sector, for example, outcomes informing the pedagogical direction of the MQVI training programmes.

5.2.4 Producing Participation

However, despite such potentialities of PAR, without ensuring an egalitarian and continuously reflexive approach to participatory research projects, participants could be (un)intentionally disempowered. The recent proliferation of ‘co-production’ as an enactment of participatory research is an example of a tendency to blur the epistemology of PAR with that of other communal research initiatives (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2018; Vaughn and Jacquez, 2020). The term ‘*co-production*’ introduced by Ostrom (1996) to “illuminate the reciprocal exchanges between public services and communities in the delivery of public goods, such as law and order” (Duggan, 2020, p. 355). As such, participation is framed as a joint endeavour to work towards a goal that will ‘empower’ or ‘emancipate’ service users and allow service providers to demonstrate their ethical credentials via public engagement.

However, much of this co-production is emblematic of what Cloutier and Langley refer to as its “‘ontological drift’” (2020, p. 4) towards participation framed as a procedure that is “frozen or reified to refer to a separable formal structure or entity, described not by the ongoing situated learning activity constituting it (i.e. a process view) but by attributes qualifying it” (Cloutier and Langley, 2020, p. 4). In this iteration, participation becomes a noun rather than verb (Cloutier and Langley, 2020), something that can be achieved if steps are followed – an outcome that can be quantified. This reduces participation to a tick-box exercise, which *appears* to be ethical, but instead becomes a linear “sequence of prescribed stages” (Van de Ven and Poole, 1995, p. 514) through which to explore ‘entities’ – thereby positioning subjectivity as fixed and experience as a representative ‘thing’, which can be extracted.

This conceptual simplification can (unwittingly) position participation in research as a tool for embedding power-as-*potestas*, if participatory processes are simply employed “based on ease, [as] uncomplicated and fixed research approaches, [responding to] requests for clarity (to simplify complex thoughts)” (Koro-Ljungberg and Mazzei, 2012, p. 729). This type of co-production, framed as consultation rather than collaboration (Vaughn and Jacquez, 2020, p. 6), creates the risk of “cooption and exploitation” (McTaggart, 1997, p. 28) of participants’ knowledge/experiences to reproduce established dominant discourses rather than producing (and affirming) difference through harnessing power-as-*potentia*.

5.2.5 Appropriations of PAR

Superficial and corporatised enactments of participation in research exemplify Goodley et al.’s (2020, p. 6) warning that “normative humans seek to corral other kinds of human life in order to gather, control and possess in ways that strengthen further the normative centre of their humanist ethics”, thereby emphasising the *Human* aspect of the Dis-Human complex – the figure of the human espoused by the humanism “of colonial Western imaginaries” (Goodley et al., 2020, p. 2), one that sits in *opposition* to disability (Goodley, 2018). Historically, disabled people have been sidelined from active participation in research for “failure to contribute to the reciprocal economy of the able” (Saur and Sidorkin, 2018, p. 7) – that is, disability is viewed as liability (Rioux and Bach, 1994), which produces “material and ideological barriers” (Barton, 2005, p. 318) to normative ideals of participation. While arguments for more social justice-oriented, forms of disability research are not new (e.g. Oliver, 1996; Shakespeare and Watson, 2001), too often participatory research within this sphere fosters heuristic injustice (Fricker, 2007). This means “the denial of opportunities to develop greater knowledge” (Wakeford and Sanchez Rodriguez, 2018, p. 17) and simply excavating existing knowledge. This can result in research that produces a:

Punishing gaze on those who have paid the most severe price for historic and contemporary oppression. These data circulate in ways that falsely confirm deficits and amplify fears that stick to marginalized bodies, justifying the containment and denial of human rights. (Wakeford, 2019, para. 6).

Cahill (2007, p. 269) expands this point, stating that “the rhetoric of participation has been appropriated in the neoliberal discursive emphasis on ‘personal responsibility’”, which is also reflected in narratives of disability as something to overcome (e.g. Hahn, 1985; Hughes, 2014). Kill (2022, p. 58) argues, therefore, that “a robust interrogation of [our understandings of participation] is crucial in maximizing the ethical possibilities of co-production”, especially in doing research with children and particularly, with disabled children. Because without this, participation may (inadvertently) become a space of appropriation and manipulation (Gallagher and Gallagher, 2008), wherein power dynamics are further entrenched, as adult ideals colonise participation (Smith, 2011), and the expectation to overcome oppression in the hands of those subjugated by it (Cooke and Kothari, 2001).

The next section of this chapter offers my attempt at robustly interrogating my understandings of participation. Once again using a Dis-Human autoethnographic reading-writing-thinking-with modality, it demonstrates that thinking-with Dis-Human theory to do so creates an expansive understanding of participation that positions it as a negotiated ongoing process, protecting it from becoming simply an “empty signifier” (Fine, 2009, p. 1). PhEmaterialist theories liberate the researcher from holding onto normative typological thinking (DeLanda, 2002) about participation as a set of steps or a tool. Instead, participation is understood as a process of “becoming, mutually entangled, active agents in producing knowledges(s), reality(ies), and relationship(s)” (Kuby, 2017, p. 881).

Part 3: Introducing Dis-Human Participation

5.3.1 *The Dis-Human spirit of participation*

Gallagher and Gallagher (2008) summarise their approach to participation as a process of highlighting “what matters is not so much the methods used, but the ways and the *spirit* in which they are used: the methodological attitude taken” (p. 513, emphasis added). This understanding was what was originally missing in my thinking about participation as a research methodology, and what engagement with CDS and PhEmaterialist theories helped me to find. I originally understood participation as a humanistic “settled research practice” (Duggan, 2020, p. 364), which needed to take place within neoliberal normatively bounded times and spaces. This meant that when the UK pandemic restrictions came into force in 2020, just as I was about to begin my field work, I was initially convinced that I could no longer do PAR justice, because I was no longer able to invoke a group-based, cyclical procedure - I believed I could no longer meet this methodological gold-standard (Klocker, 2012) of PAR. However, developing my Dis-Human framework allowed me to understand that “the pursuit of the correct “method” for... [participatory] relations [might] paradoxically constrain my ability to attain them” (Kill, 2021, p. 56).

As I engaged in what I now understand to be a Dis-Human methodology of reading-writing- thinking-with (as outlined in Chapter 4), my understandings of participation were troubled in the most generative sense. PhEmaterialist thinking helped me to reconfigure my “being, knowing, and doings in the world” (Kuby and Taylor, 2021, p. 125) by conceiving the inherent relationality of time, space and matter (Barad, 2010, p. 25) therefore emphasising that we are always-already participating at all times. Combining with this, thinking-with disability as a force to undermine normativity, my ideas surrounding subjectivity and knowledge-ing expanded. The outcome was becoming attuned to “the idea of a spectrum of participation, suggesting that participation is not a binary, but rather that it can look differently in different contexts and is often constrained in different structural or systemic ways” (Call-Cummings and Ross, 2022, para. 3). I realised that despite my original ‘tools’ no longer being available (i.e. a classroom setting, synchronous access to a group of young people with common community understandings), my aims and axiological underpinnings remained the same. I was still committed to generating an affirmative and relational

model of inquiry, which could help participants (re)understand their entanglements with the world.

5.3.2 Participation as eventful process

I had initially aimed for my project's research methodology to accentuate humanistic ideals of individual and community agency, and it was hoped that participation in the project might also foster an increased appreciation of the reciprocal impact between participants and wider macro-level systems (Ozanne and Saatcioglu, 2008), thereby demonstrating the ecological validity of the research methodology uncovering diverse affective influences and their interrelated dynamics. I now realised that if I re-imagined participatory inquiry as more aligned with the '*Dis*' side of the Dis-Human orientation, I could re-imagine *community agency* as being applicable to "other-than-humans" (Stengers, 2019, p. 14) in the research assemblage, *reciprocal impact* as affective forces that set "something new into motion" (Manning and Massumi, 2014, p. 90), and *interconnection* as emblematic of rhizomatic entanglement – participation as eventful process, rather than linear procedure (Duggan, 2020).

The more I read-wrote-thought-with PhEmaterialist theory, the more I realised that PAR could indeed be diffracted to become a Dis-Human approach to inquiry. I was struck, for example, by the alignment between Massumi's (2015, p. 48) conceptualisation of affect as attending to the dynamic unity of an event and Participatory Action Research's commitment to relationality. I now understood participation as a process that surfaces collective knowledge-ings, from entanglements with an array of material-discursive non-human "other actors" (Pantic and Florian, 2015, p. 347). To develop this point, I now demonstrate the potentialities of bringing PAR-as-humanist conventional research method into a diffractive conversation with PhEmaterialism-as-theoretical-embodiment of the "collectivist and expansive models of human life" (Goodley et al., 2022, p. 12) that disability produces.

Part 4: A Dis-Human diffraction of participatory research

5.4.1 Thinking with, thinking without and thinking differently about participation

In this section of this chapter, I demonstrate how my diffractive reading-writing-thinking-with methodology allows us to reconceptualise participation and participatory research. Employing Ulmer's (2017) provocations of *thinking without*, *thinking with* and *thinking differently* (which were introduced at the beginning of this chapter) as enactments of a Dis-Human EOE, I first explore what ***thinking with*** Affect Theory can do to participatory inquiry, allowing it to meet more expansive outcomes of exploring what works *and* what matters. I then ***think without*** hierarchy to reframe participation as a vital process that occurs without the necessity of adhering to strict procedures and instead allows for relational becomings. Finally, I ***think differently*** about PAR's conventional role as a contact zone (e.g. Torre, 2005; 2009) by reframing it as assemblage in which we (human participants) are entangled with (in contact with) more-than-human agents, thereby emphasising inter-dependence as desirable. Thinking *with*, *without* and *differently* also affords an opportunity to outline possibilities for what a Dis-Human participatory research orientation can un/do for VI education pedagogies, which are also explored below, as a precursor to the response to **RQ3** presented in Chapter 9.

5.4.2 Thinking with Affect Theory about participatory research

Reconceptualising participation by thinking with affect theory "keeps things unsettled, [offering] a push that ungrounds, unmoors, even as it propels" (Manning, 2016, p. 202). For example, in thinking with affect theory, this project is able to foreground the importance of intrapersonal impact on participants, including myself, thereby re-understanding the action imperative of PAR as intra-action. By affirming the micropolitical impacts of participation not only in the project, but also in pedagogic encounters present throughout education and wider lived experience, the participatory research techniques herein prioritise "those elements that have been ignored in favour of more public, measurable and structural indicators" of change

(Goodley et al., 2018, p. 199), namely the micropolitical economies of pedagogies and learning in education.

This also enhances the “intrinsic legitimacy of each individual struggle for freedom and the ethical and affective impossibility of hierarchising, underestimating and reducing people's experiences of oppression to a single rational explanation”, which avoids essentialising (disabled) lived experience. At the same time, affect felt as emotion can be a powerful tool for aligning individual experiences with communal ones Ahmed (2004, p. 119). Such community-building – developing relational subjectivity – is the essence of PAR. Therefore, it follows that emotions and affective forces are embraced in this Dis-Human form of participatory inquiry. They are recognised as its drivers and outcomes.

Clough's (2007, p. 4) understanding of participation as not being cyclical but rather chaotic – subject to “feed-back loops, which shoot off with varying speeds, in multiple directions, and in multiple temporalities, emerging by chance and out-of-control” – is applied in this project. This centres and respects the generative and complex sensitivities of participants' emotional entanglements and their affective possibilities for change. Therefore, attending to the *Dis* of Dis-Humanism, affect underpins the intentionality of the participatory methodology of this project. It provides the “stickiness” (Ahmed, 2010, p. 29), the glue that provides the adhesion between people and experiences – “it sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects” (Ahmed, 2010, p. 29). It tethers us to ourselves while simultaneously allowing us to think beyond fixed identities and positionalities. The presence of affect in shaping this study's participatory methodology is therefore “necessarily complicating, then, because it seeks to challenge [or diffract] these well-worn distinctions between interior and exterior worlds” (Goodley et al., 2018, p. 204).

In diffracting typical “exterior” worldings of participation in this project, thinking with affect has also afforded participants to move beyond deep reflexivity towards diffraction of their “interior...worlds”, thereby creating different knowledge-ing patterns. This is demonstrated by this project's imbuing of qualitative interviews with affective agency so that they become intraviews (as will be further explored in Chapter 6). The co-imbrication of these worlds demonstrates once again Clough's (2007) feedback loops and the constant de- and re-territoralisations that thinking with affect can have on participatory approaches and outcomes. Deterritorialisation is a term borrowed from Deleuze and Guattari (1987), which explained simply, is “a

process that destabilizes or disrupts fixed meanings” (Bayley, 2018a, p. 37). Re-territorialisation is reconfiguring such meanings differently (Zarabadi, 2021, pp. 48-49). As such, Dis-Human participatory research affords participants the opportunity to “become-with each other” (Haraway, 2016, p. 127) in their encounters.

It is for this reason, that Dis-Human participatory inquiry can be considered an ethical and expansive means of both disability and education research, entangling both fields generatively. As theories of affect are entangled in all critical epistemologies, sitting at and across the intersections of disability, queer, postcolonial, indigenous and feminist studies (Goodley et al., 2018, p. 206), a Dis-Human iteration of participatory research can expand this “affective turn... [towards a posthuman understanding of disability research, which] expresses a new configuration of bodies, technology and matter that is instigating a shift in thought in critical theory” (Clough, 2007, p. 2). As such, it embraces an Braidottian “affirmative positionality” (Goodley et al., 2014, p. 343) in actively seeking to undermine damaging tropes of ableism in education, via “[expanding] traditional notions of ‘expertise’” (Torre, 2014, p. 1323). This may provide a response to disability’s ongoing siloing in wider educational research.

Furthermore, applying this Dis-Human participatory EOE to developing VI education pedagogies affords more affect-inflected (Stewart, 2007) approaches to pedagogic encounters that attend to teleoaffectivity (Schatzki, 1997). This mean adopting “orientations toward ends and *how things matter*” (Schatzki, 1997, p. 302, emphasis added). Hyphenated Dis-Human pedagogic thinking, therefore, acknowledges the importance of (*Human*) neoliberal end goals of education, but goes beyond them (*Dis*) to also support what matters to the young people beyond the educational setting. This in practice could mean for a QTVI supporting young people to achieve normative educational goals (e.g. pass exams) and also considering what is important to their becoming as social and relational subjects in designing additional curriculum input. This will be further explored in Chapter 8’s response to **RQ2**, which explains the importance of attending to what matters to young people now and in the future, beyond a binary understanding of child’s personal and academic goals as separate entities.

5.4.3 *Thinking without hierarchy and embracing pluriversality*

Research undertaken *with* (and note the use of the word ‘with’, not ‘about’) young people should be done so with a recognition that a collective even with superficial similarities (e.g. as evidenced by the purposive sampling criteria in this project of participants having a vision impairment) will bring hugely differing lived experiences and therefore, a new research assemblage will be entangled with a myriad of agentic forces. Dis-Human PAR, by acknowledging, accepting and embracing the messiness of such entanglements can therefore be/come a democratising force, allowing participants to be/come together and speculate (Truman, 2018) how to imagine and enact difference. This promotes a more “inclusive view of knowledge, not only as cognitive (theoretical/propositional) but also as affective (intuitive, tacit, experiential and spiritual) and social (relational, local and Indigenous). This leads us to consider the conditions for such flourishing” (Sharp and Balogh, p. 315), affording interrogations of power in educational research and practice together. Such mutually constituted knowledge-ing might also be referred to as “speculative alter-worlding” (Åsberg, Thiele and van der Tuin, 2015, p. 153).

Speculation and wondering, rather than interpretation, allows an imagining of such difference, and can catalyse the challenging of “taken-for-granted knowledges by way of situating them in specific historical, sociocultural, material and bodily contexts” (Åsberg, Thiele and van der Tuin, 2015, p. 153). By challenging such accepted societal narratives, Dis-Human participatory inquiry could become a form of resistance research (Cruz, 2011; Tuck and Yang, 2014; Jourian and Nicolazzo, 2017). Resistance research actively avoids the perpetuation of structural and systemic disparities and the radical othering (Cruz, 2001) often prevalent within educational research. Resistance research entails working at the “activist-scholar hyphen” (Sandwick et al., 2018, p. 474) and in doing so, may visibilise narratives that run counter to ‘official’ accounts, and may promote agency to undermine, or at least question, dominant hegemonic and privileges accounts, meanings and identities. In doing so, it (re)narrates what Jourian and Nicolazzo 2013, p. 604) refer to as “our complex multi-dimensional stories that have often been oversimplified, othered or rendered invisible”.

Sharing stories about the experiences of minoritised groups to catalyse new knowledge-ings can therefore be a vital outcome of participatory research, thereby attending to the ‘*Human*’ side of Dis-Humanism in recognising the oppressive

realities of patriarchal and neoliberal power structures on lived experience. However, this is not a straightforward process, as without due regard to an ethics of care, researchers can commodify the experiences of Othered communities by focusing on pain narratives (Tuck and Yang, 2014), which can reify the power of the academy to inflict epistemic violence, through positioning participants as victims and the researcher as (white) saviour, who has the power to decide whose stories can be heard. To counter this, Lugones' (2003, p. 7) calls upon participatory researchers to act as faithful witnesses rather than (un)intentional collaborators with established sources of power. Cruz (2011, p. 549) elaborates: "witnessing faithfully requires researchers to... produce meaning across 'many worlds of sense'" – therefore it must attend to situated knowledges framed through productions of difference, rather than sameness.

Dis-Human participatory research also recognises the importance of witnessing as an enactment of solidarity when attending to the '*Dis*' side of the hyphen, can also offer a sense of *wit(h)ness*. This suggests that Dis-Human participatory inquiries can become (liminal) spaces that flatten hierarchies between human and more-than-human actors. This frames them as witness practices between "multivoiced and multi-perspectival lived experiences of the human and more-than-human collective engaging in multiple worlds, perspectives, and insights" (Kayumova and Dou, 2022, p. 12). This is particularly important not just for research spaces but also considering how we as practitioners approach our professional work in the "revolting times" (Fine, 2016, p. 347) we find ourselves living through. Young people are faced with uncertain futures and disabled young people arguably more so. The political Right has colonised societal thinking, applying personal deficiency-centred models to societal issues. This neoliberal thought pattern inverts causality and therefore ability to effect resolution, onto the individual, and in the case of disability, reinforces disabled people's positions as members of the precariat (Standing, 2011), leading to an increasingly hostile socio-political context for young people today.

Underpinning VI pedagogies with a sense of *witness* involves recognising that young people might be multiply marginalised by their intersecting identities, beyond disability (e.g. class, sexuality, gender identity, socio-economic status), subject to wider power hierarchies. QTVIs may need to offer support and guidance on issues beyond supporting barriers to learning related to vision impairment. This again demonstrates the need to work within human frameworks, in order to help young disabled people navigate them now, as well as continuously questioning them while we do so. This again emphasises the importance of attending to both sides of the

Dis-Human complex in VI education practice if we wish to embrace pluriversality and its attention to “relationality, interdependence, embodiment, ethics, and care toward youth, diverse communities, and more-than-human collectives” (Kayumova and Strom, 2023, para. 4).

5.4.4 *Thinking differently about the participatory contact zone*

This expansive thinking is also at play when we consider another way that a Dis-Human approach reframes relationality within participatory inquiry. A humanist understanding of participatory research suggests that one of its key roles is to function as a contact zone (Torre, 2005; Torre et al., 2008). Contact theory (Allport, 1954) is usually applied to locational spaces that facilitate the breaking of attitudinal (and sometimes physical) barriers within research collectives and wider communities. Torre's (2005) notion of participatory contact zones expands this, identifying them as radical (sometimes liminal) spaces wherein diverse knowledge and experience is brought together to (re)understand personal experiences via manifold lenses. Or as Arendt (1958, p. 182) put it: “spaces where diverse people might be ‘known’ by each other, not as what they are but by who they are”. A contact zone, therefore, traditionally comprises of differently positioned people (Torre, 2009) in the very broadest sense, related to their relative social hierarchical positions.

However, posthuman ontologies aim to flatten hierarchies beyond human constructs of identity markers, and to decentre the human itself. Following Fox and Alldred (2015), who in turn, draw on Guattari's (1995, p. 28) notion of “territories”, the ‘Dis’ side of the Dis-Human complex allows us to reterritorialize the contact zone as an assemblage, “produced and disputed by the affects between relations” (Fox and Alldred, 2015, p. 401). This first works towards questioning power hierarchies in the research assemblage, if we accept, as Niccolini et al. (2018, p. 337) suggest, that participants are all “ethically entangled in the process of... worldmaking... [catalysing and] responsive to a range of affective, emotional, material and bodily responses”. This demonstrates that despite my role as a catalysing force at the outset of the project, purposefully entangling the experiences of myself and the participants, that the worldmaking that emerged was “not merely from the intentional or unintentional agency of the researchers” (Fox and Alldred, 2021, pp. 8-9) but in the middle of our entanglements and intra-actions.

Further to this, thinking differently about participatory inquiry also means thinking differently about who or what is participating and when and where participation occurs. This is because “the outputs of the research process derive from the multiple affects between these human and non-human materialities in the research-assemblage” (Fox and Alldred, 2021, pp. 8-9). Bennett (2004; 2010) refers to the vitality of non-human agents to provoke affect as thing-power. This has implications for VI education pedagogies as by recognizing the agency of non-humans, education becomes more holistic, fostering a deeper understanding of interconnectedness and interdependence. VI education pedagogies are currently oriented towards a goal of independence. Indeed, the CFVI mentions the words ‘independence’ or ‘independent’ 33 times across as many pages (RNIB et al., 2023). However, as I go on to explain in Chapter 8, Dis-Humanism suggests that it should value inter-dependence.

The goal of independence can in fact be constraining for visually impaired young people, who can often frame the non-human entities in their lives (such as assistance dogs, long canes, assistive technology) as markers of diverging from the ‘norm’, as symbols of an inability to be independent on normative terms, causing their use to be resisted, rather than embracing their interdependence and through which, getting closer to desired enactments of independence. In recognising that everyone is entangled with myriad non-human messmates (Haraway, 2008), that we are all interconnected and inter-dependent, the entanglement with assistive devices in the everyday affective economies and spaces of the classroom becomes normalised. This expanded concept of participation has the potential to reframe the presence of non-human actors in our assemblages, such as assistive technology, as positive – after all, for many teenagers, using an iPad to record work in class is way cooler than a pen... This in turn may have positive impacts on emotional wellbeing visually impaired children, as difference becomes desirable.

Part 5: Dis-Human participatory inquiry as research technique

5.5.1 From method to technique

The previous section of this chapter has explained what participatory inquiry can be/come when *thinking with* a Dis-Human orientation. While holding close the importance of attending to the impact of oppressive power relations on our subjectivity (i.e. attending to the ‘Human’ of Dis-Humanism) through engagement with PhEmaterialist theories (representing the ‘Dis’), I came to a more expansive, affirmative and relational understanding of participatory inquiry, as not simply a methodology, but a way of thinking, of acting, of “be(com)ing” (Attia and Edge, 2017, p. 34). Framed this way, participatory inquiry becomes a process “of speculation, imagination and remaining open to and following the emergence of new ideas and feelings” (Duggan, 2020, p. 365) – rather than a set of research rules – a generative technique rather than a fixed method.

A Dis-Human diffractive methodology allows us to re-pattern participation as an ethico-onto-epistemological orientation. Diffracting participatory research away from a ‘doing’ and towards a way of thinking reframes it from method to *technique* (Manning, 2013; 2016). Part 4 of this chapter demonstrated the potentials of thinking with Affect Theory for participation. As such, I read-write-think with Erin Manning’s work here. Manning (2019a) advocates moving away from neurotypical (normative) conceptualisations that knowledge is produced by predetermined, ordered steps and protocols, which affirms a (neuro)queering of research (introduced in Chapter 4 part 4.4.2) that occurs when engaging with a neurodiversity paradigm. Techniques are more nuanced than methods, in that they are *situated* and *generated from within*, i.e. “*in-acted*” (Manning, 2016, p. 7, emphasis added), rather than *applied from ‘outside’*. Techniques are un-fixed and attuned to the changes and entanglements with the non- and more-than-human agents in our research assemblages and ready to embrace and follow previously unknown lines of flight. As such, they *become* in the middle of the research assemblage.

In Manning’s (2016) conceptualisation, techniques refuse to follow one path, one way of doing. By refusing method, they can remain tentative, but tentative as unsettled, possessing potential – a generative step forward – rather than overly-cautious hesitancy. It is in this “tentativeness in the act that jumps at the chance to

discover what else the event can do in-act” (Manning, 2016, p. 7). This affords research that “foregrounds affect, relation and process, rather than object, form and method” (Vasquez et al., 2022, p. 81). The outcome of this technicity is “movements of thought [that] are thinkings-with as much as thinkings-about. Movements of thought invite concepts to take form... toward future formations” (Manning, 2008, p. 17). Given that an aim of this research is to conceptualise pedagogies for the future of VI education, Manning’s concept of technicity aligns well with an activation of my Dis-Human theoretical framework.

Manning (2016) explains that the subtle difference between technique and method is difficult to grasp, but attempts to define it as follows:

Technicity would be the experience of how the work opens itself to its potential, to its more-than. This quality of the more-than that is technicity is ineffable—it can be felt, but it is difficult to articulate in language. (p. 40)

In my Dis-Human diffraction of participatory research away from procedure, I am trying to respond to this difficulty. I am attempting to honour its technicity, tentativeness, immanence and nuance. As Manning (2019b) explains: “to do this work, modes of knowing differently must be valued... These modes include movement, texture, touch, and they include much more that is too mere for us to perceive” (para. 72-74) – i.e. affective flows. I am situating participatory inquiry as *more-than* – a force for *in*-acting and *un*-doing. This is why it has been important to attend to disability’s disruptive potential to the norms of the research process (as explored in Chapter 4), as without attending to the minor, everyday more-than human affective forces present in the middle of the research process, I may have missed opportunities to elucidate how techniques revealed themselves as such (Manning, 2016, p. 40).

In their vitality, techniques could be considered as rhizomatic forces within the doctoral assemblage. Lather (1993) explains:

Rather than a linear progress, rhizomatics is a journey among intersections, nodes, and regionalizations through a multi-centered complexity. As a metaphor, rhizomes work against the constraints of authority, regularity, and commonsense, and open thought up to creative construction. (p. 680)

Given that I have framed this research as an assemblage, which borrows from DeleuzoGuattarian (1987) thinking, then thinking-with the rhizome (another of

their theoretical sensations) to diffract participatory research away from method and towards technique is apposite. Furthermore, this aligns with my application of the metaphor of rhizomes in conceiving of thinking, reading and writing as active research techniques, rather than simply background mechanics in research (thus further justifying my diffraction of them as processes and their repatterning as imbricated with and inseparable from thinking, as outlined in Chapter 4, part 5).

5.5.2 How this chapter adds to the research conversation

This chapter's suggestions for what potentialities a diffraction of participatory approaches from method to technique can produce for ethical forms of research adds to the canon of work of PAR scholars who appear to be following a similarly post-qualitative turn in their thinking, but do not wholly reject humanism. For example, Eve Tuck clearly states in her published conversation with notable post-qualitative scholars, Fikile Nxumalo, Candace Kuby and Vivienne Bozalek (see: Nxumalo and Tuck, 2023, p. 139), her belief in the inseparability of "who I am as a writer and thinker and as a person". This commitment to the concept of an entwined ethico-onto-epistemology is redolent of the *Dis* part of the Dis-Human complex.

While Tuck's work is not specifically in the field of disability, her commitment to social justice (e.g. Tuck and Yang, 2014), anti-oppressive research processes (e.g. Tuck, 2009) and marginalised communities (e.g. Tuck and Yang, 2021) is an enactment of the disability complex's "intersectional cultural archetype" (Goodley, 2018, p. 19). Tuck goes on to outline the humanist influences on her work in education, e.g. Critical Race Theory (2023, p. 143), thereby tethering her work to the Human. Therefore, her work can be positioned at the hyphen of Dis-Humanism, as she advocates retaining a stake in participatory epistemology (Tuck, 2023, p. 144), no matter through which tools/methods are enacted in research. As such, following Tuck, I believe that adopting and enacting a Dis-Human orientation to participatory research can retain participatory research's social justice orientation and allow researchers to begin to ethically address many of "our interconnected, time-sensitive social crises" (Lake and Wendland, 2018, p. 18) in a more expansive way.

As Chapter 4 explained, this thesis' Dis-Human diffractive methodology aims to act as a technique for wit(h)nessing, or as Lichtenberg-Ettinger (1999, p. 94) puts it: participatory witnessing. This aligns ontologically with Barad's (2007, p. 185) assertion that "practices of knowing and being are not isolable; they are mutually implicated[.]... We are part of the world in its differential becoming". This does not essentialise identity categories and lived experiences related to them, but rather emphasises a critical intersectional perspective that identities are dynamic and coalitional (Crenshaw, 1989; Rice et al., 2019), and are "constituted by their internal differences and dissonances and by internal as well as external relations of power" (Carastathis, 2016, p. 7), as well as Puar's (2007, pp. 211-212) diffraction of intersectionality, repositioning as an assemblage of "mutually implicated and messy networks... [including organic and non-organic forces]".

As such, the storyings produced by the analytical techniques in this thesis (and presented in chapters 7 to 9) are textured and co-produced by navigating questions around difference and relations to power (Cho, Crenshaw and McCall, 2013) within and across the research-assemblage, individual assemblages and wider assemblages. However, because at its heart, intersectionality "explores how people are differently located on various axes of power and how these structures of power co-constitute people's lived experiences" (Anderson et al., 2025, p. 2), I must acknowledge how my relative positions of power (adult, teacher, researcher) have influenced my engagement with the data. For example, the influence of my practitioner-researcher identity-assemblage is clear in Chapter 7 as I choose to anchor the storyings to areas of learning from the CFVI, thereby demonstrating how my professional perspective regarding which data might be useful or relatable to other QTVIs informed the agential cuts made to the data transcripts. This could exemplify both "constraining and productive functions of power" (Rice et al., 2019, p. 414) at work, as the framing of the storyings might make them productive in terms of applicability to practice, but constraining in terms of my power in directing the analytical narrative. In both cases, however, power-as-*potestas* is at work.

Conversely, my commitment to interrogating how my allegiances have affected the research process could be interpreted as an attempt to enhance the power-as-*potentia* of participants as I include evidence of my shortcomings. For example, in Chapter 8 part 8.4.2, I include an excerpt of my research journal to demonstrate

how I reflexively consider how my preconceived notions of which conversation topics would offer interesting data proved incorrect and demonstrated my unwitting focus on the macropolitical themes of education was in danger of subsuming the micropolitical forces that participants considered to matter to them. I also include data in part 8.4.5 of the same chapter that highlights my failure to enact real disability allyship, despite considering myself to be an activist. My inclusion of this data was informed by my experiences as mother and teacher, which have consistently demonstrated that admitting fallibility as an adult to children can prove an important learning mechanism. Modelling intellectual humility can positively impact acceptance, motivation and belonging in students (Porter et al., 2026, p. 437), as they feel more empowered to share their own questions and take risks in learning. In this sense, participatory research underpinned by a Dis-Human theoretical orientation can embed participation as a tool for developing power-as-*potentia*. As such, Dis-Human participatory inquiry may be an appropriate and ethical way to support disabled children to understand their *being* in their current stage of life (Skelton, 2002, 2008) and also their always becoming (Braidotti, 2013) in relation to the pragmatic and political power of the norm, whilst emphasising their potential to trouble it (Goodley and Runswick-Cole, 2014, p. 5).

To acknowledge this re-patterning of participation, at this point in the thesis I want to make it clear that I no longer believe that the term 'Participatory Action Research' is appropriate to describe this methodology. Although my unlearning around participatory research acknowledges some remaining superficial similarities between my approach to inquiry and action research – e.g. 'findings' are emergent but not conclusive or absolute; it is context and situation-based (Koshy, 2010, p. 1) – I cannot relate my EOE to the propensity of some action research models which are orientated towards producing sameness. For example, O'Leary (2004, p. 140) describes action research as enacting cycles of research until findings "*converge* towards better situation understanding and improved action implementation; and are based in evaluative practice that alters between action and critical reflection' (emphasis added). As such, to honour this project's allegiance to divergence rather than convergence, I have diffracted PAR via more expansive (different) understandings of participation, action and research, to become Dis-Human participatory inquiry.

Conflux

This chapter has demonstrated how diffracting understandings of participation and methodology with a Dis-Human lens affords the opportunity to enact what Massumi (2015) refers to as a *regeneration* of participatory inquiry. To regenerate ideas involves embracing a research orientation “where human capacities are considered relational and distributed across assemblages of diverse actors, forces and affects” (Monforte, 2019, p. 165). Expertise is no longer the preserve of the white, cisgender, able-bodied, heteronormative male, nor indeed the human. In eschewing the divide between human and environment, Braidotti’s concept of “nomadic affectivity [which] is outward-bound and based on complex relations with a multiplicity of others, including non-human others” (Braidotti, 2005, np) now orients my thinking about around participation in research. This also provides a provocation to *think differently* about our positionality in and relationality with the world, helping us to “understand and contest the affective consequences of neoliberal-ableism” (Goodley et al., 2018, p. 210) in education and research.

Dis-Human participatory inquiry can “reveal complex fissures and inequities in systems that represent themselves as rational, just and coherent” (Fine and Torre, 2004, p. 16). Therefore, it may be the ideal means through which to invoke justice-based inquiry in critical disability research, through which participants can engage in activist scholarship (Fox and Fine, 2012, p. 5), collaborating with others to develop “participatory subjectivity” (Lozenski, 2016, p. 283). It is important for disabled young people to be given opportunities to eschew objective understandings of the world and breed and amplify multi-layered and malleable sensibilities. Malleability of thought is desired in the sense that an individual’s sense of understanding may be (re)shaped by outside influences but is not forced to break or dissipate. This grounded by a sense of humanism (Ayala, 2009, p. 81) – albeit a new form of humanism (Goodley, 2020b, p. 32).

Drawing upon Ulmer’s (2017) post-qualitative “rhetorical moves” (p. 841) which offer provocations around thinking-as-method, this chapter has discussed the generative possibilities of *thinking without* the confines of neoliberal “structural or systemic ways” (Call-Cummings and Ross, 2022, para. 3) of thinking about and ‘doing’ participation. If we *think without* these traditional western orientations in our understandings and enactments of participation, it can become “a site for political and ethical accountability [and] for collective imaginaries and shared aspirations”

(Braidotti, 2013, p. 102). That is, it can straddle the Dis-Human complex. The next chapter (Chapter 6) continues to use Ulmer's provocations to firstly explore what *thinking differently* with a Dis-Human approach to inquiry can do to conventional (humanist) qualitative methods for data collection (in this case, interviews) and tools for analysis – the Listening Guide (e.g. Gilligan, 2015; Woodcock, 2016). It also exemplifies what *thinking with* theory can do to conventional qualitative understandings of voice and re-presentations of it in educational research and practice.

Chapter 6: Dis-Human diffractive research techniques

Introduction

This final chapter of the *Methodological Cartography* elucidates how the Dis-Human conceptualisation of participatory inquiry outlined in Chapter 5 can be enacted in empirical inquiry. A Dis-Human conceptualisation of participation affords researchers the opportunity to think about and use methods for doing participatory inquiry *differently*. The first part of the chapter provides a methodological ‘audit trail’, which provides a summary of the logistical methodological processes that I undertook to prepare for data collection. This includes explanations of sampling choices, recruitment and ethics processes and decision-making. While I have attempted to apply a chronological ordering, I also outline the disruptive impact of the pandemic on the empirical part of this project and ask the reader to bear in mind that “the hardest task... [is] writing linearly about something that happens simultaneously” (Mazzei and Jackson, 2012, p. 457).

In Part 2 of this chapter, I demonstrate how my feminist EOE and Dis-Human theoretical framework were put to use (Ahmed, 2019) to diffract the conventional qualitative method of interviewing. This allowed me to reframe interviewing beyond a method and instead as a “*technique* of power for shaping worlds as well as bodies” (Ahmed, 2019, p. 12), drawing on Manning’s (2013, 2016) concept of technicity as outlined in Chapter 5. I outline how attuning to difference allowed me to create a more affirmative and affective talking method, as semi-structured interviews became *intraviews* (Kuntz and Presnall, 2012; Zarabadi, 2023; Bustillo-Morales, 2025). Rather than positioning the interview process as interviewer-led, aimed at extracting representational data to interpret, I embraced Marn and Wolgemuth’s (2016) concept of interviews as generative, relational and agentic vehicles for intervention, which centre intra-activity and therefore allow the method to become *more-than* humanist – conversation as an eventful, rhizomatic process.

Part 3 explains my choice of analytical tools. I outline my two-part diffractive analytical technique which draws upon Chadwick’s aforementioned work on posthuman voice analytics (2020) and my own published work (Yeo et al., 2023) on feminist relational voice analysis. It explains how I have diffracted the Listening Guide analytical tool (e.g. Gilligan, 2015) via thinking-with concepts of voice by Davies (2014) and Chadwick (2020b). This involves emergent listening to data and a process of reading-writing-thinking-with theory to further diffract understandings.

Part 1: Audit Trail

6.1.1 Capturing the spacetime mattering of the research process

Doctoral study convention suggests that a discussion around methodology in a thesis should include what Thomson (2022, para. 2). calls an “audit trail...[b]ecause readers want to understand what you have done, with what/who, how, and why”. This is not straightforward in this project because the Covid-19 pandemic ruptured not only the planned field work aspects of my project, but also its expected linear temporal trajectory. I imagine that a student *not* writing through a period of such disturbance might view this section of the thesis as a fairly straightforward endeavour, explaining the ethical approval application process, recruitment decisions and actions, listing dates, times and locations of field work, “how much data was produced and how it connects to the research question(s), how the data was analysed, and a pointer to any particular problems/issues that arose” (Thomson, 2013, para. 13). In terms of the latter expectation, it is fair to assert that the current cohort of doctoral students at the time of writing faced (and continue to face) a unique and unprecedented set of “problems/issues” related to the Covid-19 pandemic, including “instructional, social, and financial changes” (Covington and Jordan, 2022, p. 512)³⁰. As such, this part of the chapter will outline what I did and attempted to do in as chronological a manner as possible so as to make it recognisable to the reader as an appropriate audit trail.

Moreover, engagement with PhEmaterialist theories has allowed me to understand that my pre-pandemic iteration of this project remains a crucial entanglement within this research assemblage, one which vibrates in the thick now (Barad, 2015, p. 388) of writing this chapter. It represents that this research is a conversation that “is ongoing... [a] multiplicity, an infinity in its specificity, condensed into here-now” (Barad, 2014, p. 184). To “condense” the process, however, I will organise this section of the chapter around subsections covering the themes of planning (discussing sampling, recruitment decisions), data collection (its organisation, what it produced and its pros and cons).

³⁰ I have outlined how the pandemic disruptions impacted my own PhD experiences and wider subjectivities in 4 papers I have produced with other doctoral students during the doctoral journey: Rutter et al. (2021), Rutter et al. (2023), Yeo et al. (2023) and Rutter et al. (2024).

6.1.2 Sampling

Following ethical approval, which was granted by Durham University in October 2019, formal recruitment of participants was undertaken via a targeted and direct approach, involving project details sent out via the VIEW members' mailing list. I also contacted several QTVIs directly who ran or worked in a school-based VI integrated resource. I knew them as peers from my training course as a QTVI, or professionally from previous networking events at regional and national levels. I wanted to conduct my participatory inquiry in a resource base for logistical reasons. Firstly, I had previously worked in a similar setting myself at a large secondary school in the north of England, which caters for visually impaired students from across the city by having a resource base staffed by QTVIs, specialist Teaching Assistants, Habilitation Officers and IT/Resource Technicians to provide the specialist support required by many visually impaired youngsters (as was outlined in Chapter 2, part. 2.2). As such, I knew that similar settings would have the time, space and resources and specific cohort of children available for me to carry out my research.

My sample was purposeful (Patton, 2002; 2015) in that I sought participants based on specific characteristics or qualities that were relevant to the research focus. To be more specific, it was an example of group characteristics sampling, which Patton (2015, p. 389) explains is a purposeful strategy that selects cases "to create a specific information-rich group that can reveal or illuminate important group patterns" which was important given this project's aim of exploring Vi education pedagogies. As such, VICYP were invited to participate on the basis that they were secondary school-aged and had a medical diagnosis of Vision Impairment that met the criteria for them to be involved with their local vision impairment education service. The number of pupils participating was dependent on the setting in which the project would take place.

I was aware that my sample could be potentially very small due to the low numbers of visually impaired young people in the English school system³¹. I was not overly concerned about the impact of small numbers of participants on the validity of my study, as with a participatory epistemology, "construct validity is vitally 'enhanced'".

³¹ The population of children/young people aged between 0 and 25 years of age supported by or known to VI services in October 2022 was 30,453 (RNIB, 2023, p.12), of whom 13,601 attended state-funded nursery, primary, secondary and special schools, non-maintained special schools and state funded alternative provision schools in 2024 (Keil, 2025, p. 16).

Sturdy, grounded local meanings are generated and negotiated in conversation between insiders and outsiders” (Fine and Torre, 2004, p. 29). While I have carefully considered validity in Chapter 3 and revisit this in Chapter 10, like Tuck and McKenzie (2015, p. 637) I believe that “generalizability and universality are impossibilities” as outcomes of conventional qualitative and post-qualitative research due to its situated nature, so I have not sought to achieve generalisability in this project.

My belief in the co-constructed nature of knowledge (as opposed to it belonging to an individual) means that it is unfixed, context-dependent (Schwandt, 1994) and dynamic (Taylor, 2021). Lincoln and Guba (1985) offer transferability as an alternative to generalisability in qualitative research, which Drisko (2024, p. 102) defines as “a process of abstraction used to apply information drawn from specific persons, settings, and eras to others that have not been directly studied”. However, while I can aspire to transferability, I also accept that the extent to which a project achieves this cannot be determined by the researcher, that “it is only the reader, not the inquirer, who can be familiar with the time and context in which transfer of the findings might be possible” (Rodwell, 1998, pp. 31-32).

6.1.3 Recruitment and planning

I decided to work with a pre-existing group of students who had adequate time allocated for the additional curriculum outside of their mainstream lessons, meaning that their participation in this project was likely seen as more positive by gatekeepers than if I had required them to leave mainstream lesson time. I had pre-existing links with the setting because I had visited it as part of a programme of educational placement visits that is required for trainee QTVIs who are undertaking the MQVI. Furthermore, the Lead Teacher at the integrated resource was also involved in the national VI education sector via roles with VIEW and RNIB, so she understood the value of research, as her role in view involves supporting the publication of the professional view teach journal.

Additionally, there was also already had a timetabled classroom for this session, which reduced the organisational burden for the QTVI gatekeeper who was my liaison point. The session was timetabled to take place biweekly on a Thursday afternoon for two hours. I would be able to visit seven times in the first term (April to

July 2020) and then although the timing or day of the session might change, the group would continue to be timetabled together into the next academic year, giving me a potential to extend the field work period over another three consecutive terms across the whole of the September 2020 to July 2021 academic year.

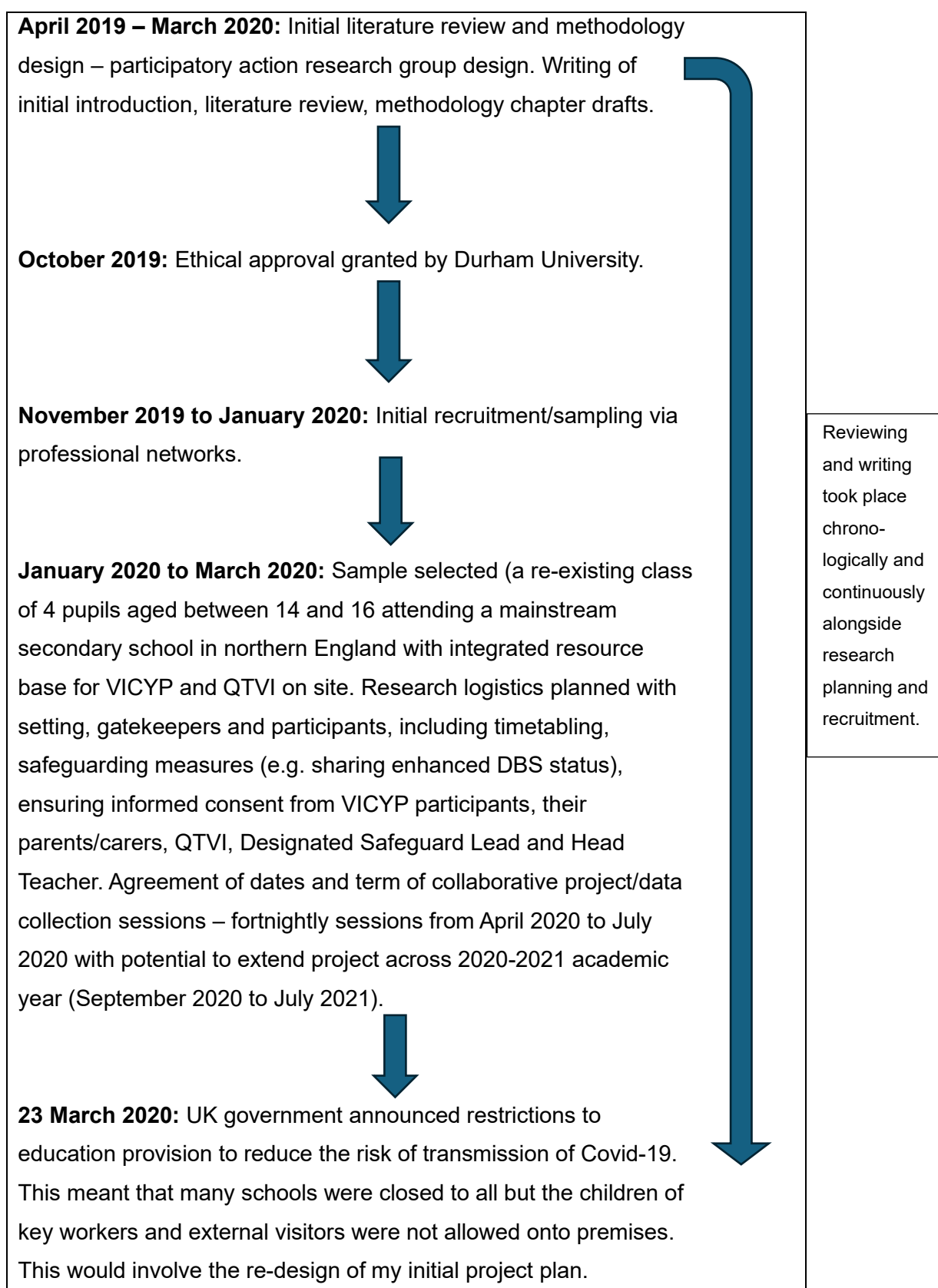
Following the agreement from the VI service and the Head Teacher of the school itself to my undertaking the project, I maintained contact with both parties and provided proof of my Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) clearance, which my employer had undertaken in summer 2018. I created a consent form and a project information sheet³² to be shared with the young people and their parents. This was created taking into account how I would ensure adherence to setting safeguarding procedures, as well as ensuring informed consent, as per the British Educational Research Association ethical guidelines (2018; 2024) and adherence to my university's Participant Charter. Parents/carers would be contacted via email and sent the information and opt-in consent forms via official channels (e.g. directly by the setting/VI Service) to ensure GDPR compliance.

I had scheduled a visit to the setting in March 2020 to meet the young people and to undertake some trust and relationship-building activities and to explain the project. Pupils would be given the option of working with me, in accordance with informed consent, and informed of their right to withdraw and right to anonymity in the research process. They would then be asked to sign a consent form. This would be provided in the format of their choice to ensure that it was accessible. This could be large print, electronic or hard copy Braille. Figure 4 below offers a visual mapping of the straightforward doctoral journey from its initiation in April 2019 until up to this point in March 2020, prior to planned commencement of field work. However, this visit was not possible due to the UK pandemic restrictions that initiated the first national lockdown on 23rd March 2020³³. The relatively smooth start to my project became ruptured (Kill, 2022, p. 62), and by September 2020 the ongoing pandemic-related disruptions to schooling it became clear that I could need to explore other options for field work.

³² Recruitment email text, consent form and information sheets are shared in Appendices 3 and 4.

³³ Schedule 16, sections 6 b and d of the 2020 Coronavirus Act ensured that schools legally had the power to prevent external visitors attending settings, even if they remained partially open to cater for the needs of certain pupils, to reduce the risk of transmission of Covid-19.

Figure 4: Phase 1: Initial project progression April 2019 to March 2020



6.1.4 Thesis, interrupted

To attempt to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 restrictions on in-person research methodologies, I first contacted a specialist VI residential school with whom I had an existing professional relationship and asked if I could deliver the project as online group work via delivering sessions virtually to a class at the school. The school was keen to facilitate this, and we organised that I would work fortnightly online with a Key Stage 4 class comprising of 4 pupils for up to two school terms from January 2021. Despite having had agreement from school gatekeepers in late September 2020 to undertake this fieldwork, I had to seek university ethical approval for the new project design, which took several weeks to be granted. By this point, the second UK national 'lockdown' was instituted by the UK government on 5 November 2020, which meant that schools had to provide online learning for pupils until the easing of restrictions to education from 8th March 2021 onwards (Institute for Government, 2020). This meant that many pupils were working asynchronously and also had inequitable access to technology (Angel Eyes NI, 2021, p. 9), which meant that even if I was able to organise a group of pupils being online simultaneously, I couldn't guarantee their equitable access and inclusion, which undermined my ethical stance.

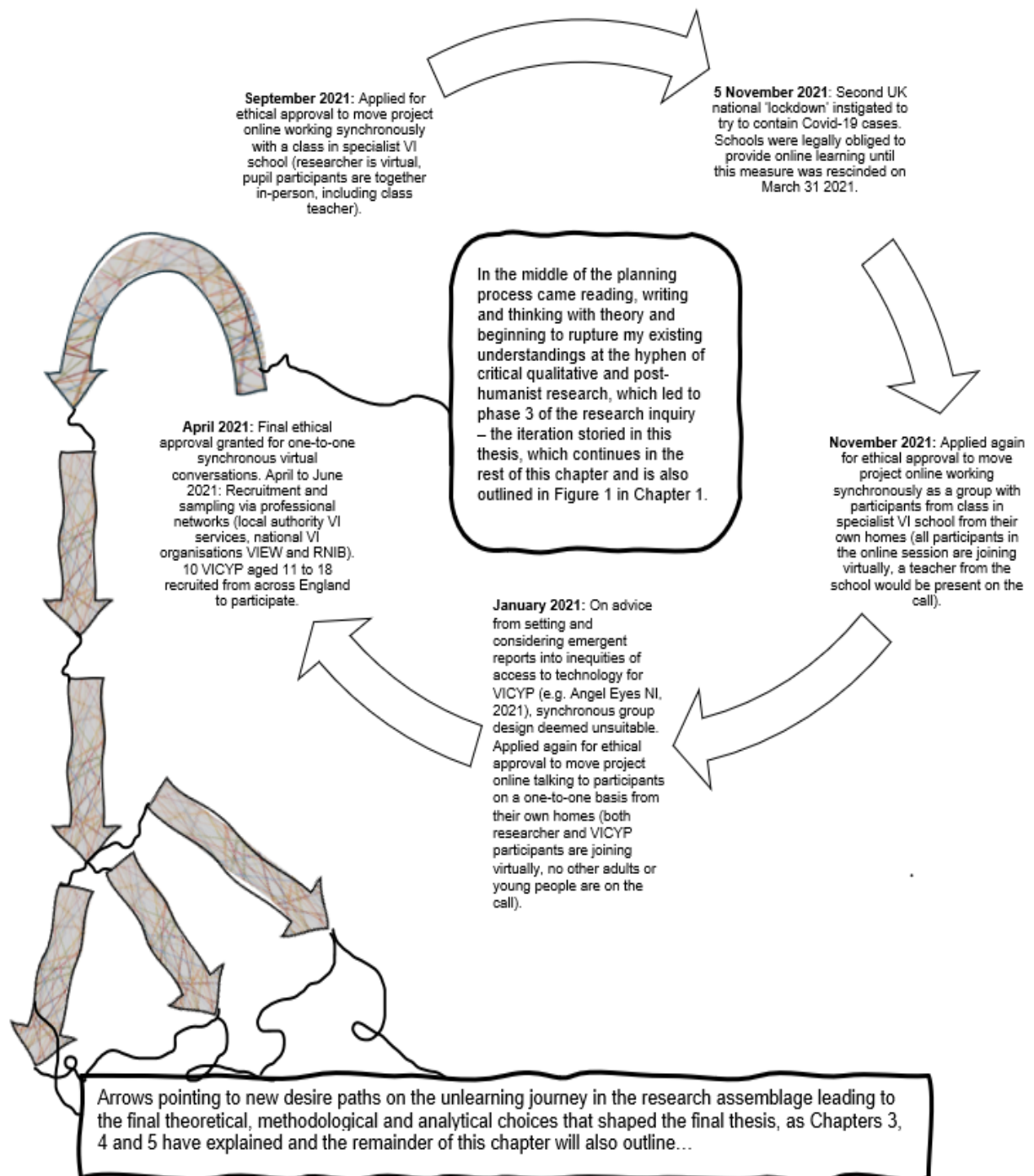
Figure 5 below illustrates the ongoing ethics application processes catalysed by the first and second UK lockdowns that shows the entanglement of macropolitical contexts in research events, and how in the **m**iddle of this macro-level disruption by **S**lowing down and paying attention to micropolitical **a**ffective encounters I was able to reframe this project as a research-assemblage, thereby ensuring that the **i**nterconnection of **h**uman and **n**on-human forces was noted as vital in shaping the final methodological and analytical choices, and similarly shifted my focus to this interactivity in helping me to re-understand the everyday experiences of **d**isability through this **D**is-**H**uman theoretical lens.

Consequently, at this point, I realised that it was unlikely that I would be able to organise field work with a group of VICYP due to the ongoing uncertainty around restrictions to access to participants and so I began to consider one-to-one qualitative interviewing as a method of data collection. I had originally believed interviews to be "neutral encounters in which participants share their experiences with an impartial interviewer" (Marn and Wolgemuth, 2016, p. 365), causing me to eschew them as a method. By this conceptualisation, interviewing was not a

process that could initiate active participation nor have emancipatory outcomes (Wolgemuth and Donohue, 2006), and therefore was incompatible with my ethico-onto-epistemological underpinnings, in terms of enacting a commitment to “addressing power differentials between researcher and researched and thus producing non-hierarchical, non-manipulative research relationships” (Lyons and Chipperfield, 2000, p. 33).

However, by this point in the project, through my engagement with PhEmaterialist theories I had re-conceived participation is a process rather than a procedure, a technique rather than method (as outlined in Chapter 5). I realised that I did not have to ‘do’ participation as a human group activity, but rather one-to-one interviews could still enact a participatory epistemology if reframed through a Dis-Human theoretical framework. This affords a more expansive understanding of voice (explored further in Part 3 of this chapter). Voice is conceived as not emanating “from a singular subject but is produced in an enactment among research-data-participants-theory-analysis” (Mazzei, 2013, p. 732). This multidimensional iteration of voice can diffract interviews to become an enactment of Dis-Human participation, in-acting “lines of flight [which] are indeterminate as the intra-action of each new phenomenon determines and is determined by the entanglements that [emerge]” (Marn and Wolgemuth, 2016, p. 373). A Dis-Human diffraction of interviews frames them as intraviews, Part 2 of this chapter explains this intraviewing methodology in more detail.

Figure 5: Entangled ethical events



6.1.5 Field work

My final recruitment process (after having again re-applied for ethical approval for a third time) consisted of reaching out to my existing professional networks, including schools, Local Authority VI Support Services and national charities with whom I had built relationships (RNIB and Thomas Pocklington Trust). I created a 5-minute-long video which gave an overview of the project in more depth (aimed more at settings and parents/carers) and a 2-minute-long version offering a precis of the project, aimed at VICYP. I also felt that it was an “ethical and feminist imperative to pay participants for their role in research” (Warnock et al., 2022, p. 199) to recognise the time and energy the young people expended and to demonstrate that their participation was valuable. As such, participants were paid with a £20 online shopping voucher. This final recruitment process resulted in 10 VICYP participating in the intraview process, which involved two separate online intraviews between each individual and myself, each lasting 30-60 minutes. Anonymised data regarding age, gender identification and type of school setting attended and intraview schedules is provided in Table 4 in Appendix 7. Participants chose their own pseudonyms.

To find common ground, the first intraviews all began with explorations of the education system and the experiences of participants of being visually impaired young people navigating it. Much of this data informs the response to **RQ1** in Chapter 7. However, the intraviews soon took lines of flight (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) – i.e. turns of thinking driven by unconscious desires, into unexpected directions. Topics discussed included football, fashion, family, friendship, but an increasingly urgent thread in the conversations was the pandemic. The second intraview focused more on their lives beyond education in recognition that children and young people’s lives are “dissected and connected by a variety of axes of difference” (Holt and Holloway, 2006, p. 136) and data is analysed in Chapter 8’s response to **RQ2**. Chapter 9’s response to RQ3 draws together data from sets of both intraviews. However, in keeping with my understanding of the inseparability of spacetime-mattering (Barad, 2007, p. 25), the data and its affects are also interwoven into the reading-writing-thinking-with process across all three chapters.

6.1.6 Safeguarding

In organising both in person and online planned group projects, I had ensured there would always be another adult present to moderate the group, who like me had a current enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificate. However, with the individual intraview technique this was not possible. I navigated this by speaking personally to all parents/carers either on the phone, online or via email trails, in addition to the consent and information forms provided to parents/carers and participants. I provided all gatekeepers with my DBS number and adhered to the Durham University safeguarding protocols. These included explaining to participants at the start of each conversation their right to withdraw and my own responsibility as an adult and teacher to disclose any safeguarding issue that might arise to the teacher who had acted as conduit for the interview and/or to the parents/carers as appropriate.

I also made the decision to (with permission of participants) contact their school settings and/or QTVI to inform them about the nature of the project and that the VICYP they worked with would be participating. Furthermore, while the older participants (aged 16 or over) were given permission by gatekeepers to provide me with their school email addresses so that I could liaise with them directly to organise the intraviews, any contact using this address also cc'd in the address of the Designated Safeguarding Lead in the school so that there was a record of all communication between myself and the participants. This layer of transparency regarding communication also safeguarded me as a researcher.

Part 2: Methods – Diffracting interviews with Dis-Humanism

6.2.1 Considering interviews as method in participatory research

As Chapter 5 explained, Covid-19 pandemic restrictions came into force and I needed to shift from the group-based participatory methodology I had envisaged, towards one-to-one data collection. As part 6.1.4 of this chapter demonstrated, I was initially reluctant undertake interviewing as a research method. Interviews are interpretive methods (as opposed to objective) that came to increased prominence during what Denzin and Lincoln (2017) categorise as the fifth phase of the development of qualitative inquiry – *the Crisis of Representation*. During this period, researchers began to understand that the privileging of scientific objectivity as a marker of validity stemmed from complicity with colonialist, racist, classist and genderist historical narratives by the Academy (Carlson et al., 2023, p. 4). As such, qualitative researchers began to search for more expansive markers of validity.

Kvale's (1989) concept of communicative validity is applicable to this project. This asserts that validity emerges from the assessment of conflicting knowledge claims argued in a dialogue. This relates to Cronbach's (1980, p. 107) discursive construct of validity, which claims that if the aim of research is to "advance sensible discussion" about a topic, then validity of the research can be determined by those engaging in said discussion. Because the intraview methodological technique applied in this project involved discussion (as I go on to explain in part 6.2.2 of this chapter), it follows that ideas of validity pertaining to dialogue and communication would be an appropriate measure. However, these notions sit within humanist framings.

Given my adherence to Dis-Humanism, I found myself influenced by Patti Lather's (1993, p. 676) feminist poststructuralist conceptualisation of "transgressive" forms of validity. Like Cronbach (1980), Lather (1993, p. 674) considers validity to constitute the extent to which a piece of research incites discourse. This notion of validity brings theory and practice into conversation in a way that "valorizes practice" (Lather, 1993, p. 674), which aligns with my positionality as practitioner-researcher. Therefore, it was important to carefully consider how I could create a method of eliciting conversational data that would "foster differences and let contradictions remain in tension" (Lather, 1993, p. 679).

Brinkmann and Kvale (2018, p. 9) emphasise the risks of the interview as a potential tool of power-as-*potestas*, defining the method as “a conversation that has a structure and a purpose determined by one party – the interviewer”. They go on to acknowledge the micro-ethical risks of interviewing, explaining that researchers generally outline how they will try to minimise the risks of interviewing to the participating individual, e.g. ensuring informed consent, safeguarding, confidentiality (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2018, pp. 32-34). However, they also ask researchers to consider the wider macro-ethical risks that could arise, such as data being used to inform broader agendas, which may be incompatible with the intentions of the original project. A worst-case scenario might be that data could be appropriated by neoliberal political forces to inform policy and practice directions in VI education that undermine what the young people had expressed. Therefore, to ensure that my data collection methods supported all participants (including the researcher) to “become alert to our mutual intra-dependence” (Gale and Wyatt, 2019, p. 567), rather than as a tool for re-inscribing “mastery and control” (Massumi, 2002, p.17), I realised that I needed to think differently about interviews via a Dis-Human orientation.

6.2.2 Intraviews – Thinking differently about interview-based methods

Chapter 5 (part 5.5.1) explained how a Dis-Human theoretical orientation allows us to think about method differently, framing it as technique. A diffraction of interviews re-presents (Nordstrom, 2015) them – i.e. seeks to reconfigure them – as relational encounters in which understanding is mutually constituted in generative, liminal space of the middle, within and between participants. In this iteration, interviews become more expansive and less stratified spaces for sparking “flickers of transformation” (Way et al., 2015, p. 721) than their conventional qualitative conceptualisation. Such “flickers” both simultaneously catalysed and were achieved through “new understandings, alternative identity performances, and/or moments of subjective ambiguity” (Marn and Wolgemuth, 2016, p. 365). As such, they become *intraviews*, which afford “a different, queering, and more flowy take on the traditionally linear and chronological interview process” (Gray et al., 2021, p. 201).

Kuntz and Presnall (2012, p. 732) create the term *intraview* to describe a method of interviewing as a “wholly engaged encounter, a means for making accessible the multiple intersections of material contexts that collude in productive formations of

meaning". They arrived at this technique after noting in an action research project set in a school that interviewing outside the building afforded participants more freedom of expression and creativity (Kuntz and Presnall, 2012, p. 732), as participants felt less constrained by perceived power dynamics and their embodied impact. Intraviews, therefore, seek to democratise power-as-*potestas* by broadening the range of interactions in a qualitative interview, "from the positions of the interviewer and the interviewed to a mapping of happenings and fissures, which does not necessarily mean that the interview has lost focus. Instead, where there is a rupture, there is an opportunity" (Bustillo-Morales, 2025, p. 8). In this case to not only reconfigure researcher/researched, adult/child, teacher/student dynamics, but also the focus on the humanist subject (Kuntz and Presnall, 2012, p. 735).

Zarabadi's (2023, p. 118) iteration of intraviews demonstrate the possibility of de-centring the human and emphasising other agents within our more-than-human assemblages. She conducts intraviews as a virtual methodology in which she uses technology to 'join' her participant "between spaces, time, bodies, bounded structures, and norms" (Zarabadi, 2023, p. 120) as they walk around London while joining them virtually via video calling a mobile phone. This allows her to become aware of "the combined activities of a variety of bodies and forces" (Bennett, 2010, p. 126) that intrude upon (Alexander et al., 2018, p. 107) and affect the encounter.

The intraviews in this project similarly surfaced many examples of such imbrications and interplays between people, things and non-physical affective forces, transforming participants' subjectivity from that of an individual agent to "an assemblage of multiple historical, present and future encounters" (Kuntz and Presnall, 2012, p. 736). As such, each intraview "occupied its own middle space in which stories and perceptions folded together" (Nordstrom, 2013, p. 249). This catalysed a Dis-Human diffraction of voice, which led to the development of theoretical encoding (Kuntz, 2021), "identify[ing] territorialisations and de-territorialisations, and aggregating and singular flows" (Fox and Alldred, 2015, p. 408) – that is, attending to (and producing) both similarity and difference.

6.2.3 *Intra-acting with disability*

Furthermore, intraviews are also an appropriate methodology for use in CDS and educational research. This is because they conceptually align with not only

disability's demand for a commitment to thinking differently about and queering normative knowledges and modes of production but also provide practical guidance with their potentialities for ensuring crip time (e.g. McRuer, 2006; Kafer, 2013). Crip time may be summarised as the acknowledgement that disabled people may require more time to undertake certain tasks, than the neoliberal understandings of normal timescales might apply. In terms of applying crip time to research processes, Liddiard et al. (2019, p. 163) explain that "through 'the intricacies of crip time' (Zola, 1998) new temporal frameworks of research embody alternative orientations in and to time". The online research environment, while initially created out of necessity, proved an important enabler towards crippling the research process. It offered participants freedom of choice throughout the process, from selecting convenient times and days to participate, to choosing whether to have the camera on or off, to directing the conversational flows.

Alongside conceptualising voice differently in these conversational entanglements, the intraview technique also involves engaging in "emergent listening" (Davies, 2014, p. 22). This involves reorienting the process of listening away from "habitual practices through which one establishes 'this is who I am'" (Davies, 2014, p. 22), and towards a deliberate openness to difference and to embracing the tension experienced between "the self as identity and the self as emergent and multiple" (Davies, 2014, p. 32). This does not deny the "specificity of each person, or the longing each one of us has to be recognised in that specificity. Rather, [it suggests] that the very specificity of each individual is mobile and intra-active; in each encounter we are affected by the other" (Davies, 2014, p. 1). This approach frames listening as a radical pedagogical enactment (Davies, 2010), making emergent listening appropriate for research with children and research pertaining to disability because both identity categories are often othered by societal institutions and systems on account of their disabled subjectivity.

6.2.4 Avoiding the mis/use of voice

Moreover, as this project accepts the instability and vitality of knowledge, like Mazzei and Jackson (2009), I question an understanding of "voice [that] can speak the truth of consciousness and experience" (p. 1). Instead, I consider the intra-actions with participants to be "post-personal... multiple, ever-changing and immanent" (Fairchild, 2023, p. 140) eventful re-turnings of their own *storyings*.

Storying is a method that stems from eastern philosophies that involves thinking-with nonhuman (cultures, histories, objects, affects) as we make worldings (Zhao and Murris, 2021, p. 127). Storying is an expansive and ethical mode of recounting experience as it avoids situating the human voice as an instrument of power-as-*potestas* because it couches experiences within our wider assemblages. Whitburn and Goodley (2019, p. 415) use a form of storying to “break down artificial boundaries between theory and narrative; between fiction and fact; between human and non-human; and between being and doing” to challenge dominant discourses and assumptions about disability’s entanglement with curriculum and pedagogy in education. By removing the concept of the story away from the possession of the individual, storying avoids positioning certain voices as “disposable commodities to be vampirised” (Braidotti, 2007, p. 67).

Intraviews can create facilitate storying by creating spaces to develop a “resonance and acknowledge difference” (Bertilsdotter Rosqvist et al., 2022, pp. 1238-42), which does not rely on participants and researchers to share similar identities or experiences, rather, as Bertilsdotter Rosqvist et al. (2022, p. 1242) explain: “we just have to be willing to learn from each other”. Intraviews create “purposeful entanglements” (Marn and Wolgemuth, 2016, p. 365) which take into account not just the spoken, physical iteration of voice, but the material and non-human actors entangled within the conversations – the “out-of-field voices that contribute to and complicate meaning” (Mazzei and Jackson, 2012, p. 748).

Out-of-field voices are those which don’t take the form of the spoken voice coming from the participant; for example: “voices of participants, our own voices, theoretical voices, voices of our teachers/mentors, voices of other scholars” (Mazzei and Jackson, 2012, p. 747), and non-human voices, as is demonstrated by the affective capacity of objects, time and space that have impacted upon pedagogic encounters elucidated in the intraview data in the analysis chapters. Another out-of-field voice drawn into entanglement with the intraview data in Chapter 8 is my research journal that I wrote initially at the behest of my funders as evidence of the disruption to my research during the Covid-19 pandemic but became a vital tool for capturing my changing knowledge-ing as I came to Dis-Humanism.

Part 3 of this chapter now goes on to explain my approach to data analysis. My analytical approach was informed by a diffraction and expansion of Barad’s (2012, p. 6) notion of “zooming in” – a process that can measure phenomena. Barad explains (2012, pp. 6-7) that “measurements are agential practices, which are not

simply revelatory but performative... In other words, measurements are intra-actions... Measurements are material-discursive practices of mattering". By this understanding, 'measurement' in this project could be considered as a synonym for data analysis. Adopting this term, apply this notion of "zooming in" as a means of guiding the structure of the forthcoming Chapter 7, in which I utilise diffractive poetry which is created by "zooming in" on individual performative accounts to become story-ings, co-produced by/in the intraviews. In Chapter 8, I then diffract the concept of zooming in in to become 'zooming out', a technique that "makes felt how [theory]... can co-compose with other creative practices... for composing emergent collectivities, for composing thought in the multiplicitous act" (Manning and Massumi, 2014, p. ix). To do so, I entangle the data from the intraviews of different participants and read-write-think-with DeLanda's (2016) concept of assemblage 'diagrams'. I now explain these analytical techniques in further detail.

Part 3: Dis-Human Voice Analytics

6.3.1 *The Dis-Human voice analytical technique*

Fox and Alldred (2021, p. 4) summarise two distinct facets of diffractive methodology: “a focus upon entanglements, diffractions, and interferences in social processes and a data analytic method entailing reading texts together”. My Dis-Human voice analytical technique zooms in and out to achieve both. The first part of the process involves **emergent listening** to the data closely to respond to **RQ1** in Chapter 7, the latter is put to use in Chapter 8’s response to **RQ2** via **reading-writing-thinking-with theory**.

6.3.2 *Diffracting the Listening Guide*

This first part of the Dis-Human voice analytical process was inspired by the Listening Guide (e.g. Gilligan, 2015; Gilligan et al., 2003; Gilligan and Eddy, 2017; Hutton and Lystor, 2020; Woodcock, 2016), a feminist conventional qualitative analytical method stemming from the field of psychology (Gilligan, 1982). The Listening Guide (hereafter LG) “is designed to create intimacy, through a series of sequential ‘listennings’, between the researcher and various aspects of the narrator’s voice and by situating the narration of experience within a particular relational context” (Mountz, 2018, p. 140). This mode of analysis provides different “angles on the nature and constitution of social reality (ontology), and in particular conceptions of self–other relations for the researcher[s]” (Edwards and Weller, 2012, p. 203). It therefore can support a careful consideration of the impact of the socio-political, temporal and spatial aspects of the research and “the multiple interrelations between power and knowledge in the research process” (Bozalek and Zembylas, 2017, p. 113).

The LG promotes multiple engagements with the data in the form of reading or listening (or both), usually to transcripts of interview data and audio recordings, but more recent studies have begun to draw the LG into methodological assemblages with visual/arts-based methods (e.g. Dawani and Loots, 2021). The original LG proponents (e.g. Gilligan et al., 2003) recommend three successive listens to the

data with different objectives: “1. Listening for plot, 2. for self and 3. for multiple voices” (Kiegelmann, 2024, p. 4). However, as the LG has been further developed over time as an analytical tool, more recent studies have expanded the method. For example, Woodcock (2016) recommends four listens; with the third section being completed at least twice to ensure the researcher identifies the tensions that occur within the interaction. Hutton and Lystor (2020, p. 20) also recommend four listens, however their fourth listen involves “listening for broader political, social and cultural structures”. Tolman and Head (2021, p. 153) advocate a five-stepped process, with the final step constituting writing as analysis, with previous steps constituting tools or content for analysis.

The LG has increasingly been applied across interdisciplinary fields, such as in Cruz’s (2021) sociological study of sexual violence, Odell’s (2023) consideration of educational leadership and Morgan et al.’s (2024) exploration of applying the method in nursing research to surface under-represented voices. This has undoubtedly contributed to its ongoing iterative development over the years to become a more multivocal approach to analysis of voice data, “replacing the binary logic of coding categories with an ear for the polyphony of voices that speak both within and around us” (Gilligan and Eddy, 2021, p. 141). Building upon this more expansive understanding of the interconnection between the individual and the wider world, the LG has subsequently been re-configured by other authors through a posthuman lens (e.g. Mauthner, 2017; Chadwick, 2020a, 2020b), which is more aligned with my analytical process in this project, as I now explain.

6.3.3 Ingredients constituting voice

Chadwick (2017; 2020) uses the LG as a basis to create and exemplify “posthuman voice analytics” (Chadwick, 2020a, p. 5). This is a stepped approach to engaging with and analysing voice data, wherein ‘voice’ is conceptualised as “transcorporeal, entangled with other bodies and the material, more-than-human world, and as resonant with ideological and semiotic-discursive currents, socioaffective atmospherics” (Chadwick, 2020a, p. 3). Voice becomes more-than-human, unstable and relational, never fixed nor essentialised to an individual. This dynamic understanding of voice, as Chadwick explains, requires more fluid and expansive forms of analysis (2020a, p. 3), that are multilayered and that complicate voice (Mazzei and Jackson, 2012). Chadwick (2020a)’s expansion of the LG, therefore,

retains its multivalent approach to data analysis, encouraging multiple listens/readings of the data with different foci.

However, rather than offering a prescriptive stepped structure, Chadwick (2020a, pp. 5-6) instead offers (what she terms) key *ingredients* for posthuman voice analytics. Firstly, Chadwick (2020a, p. 5) challenges the researcher to resist representational conceptualisations of voice, instead accepting the multivocality and relationality of voice and understanding voice as emergent rather than fixed. She then explains how these conceptual underpinnings can be vitalised (p. 6) in voice analysis by deliberately attending to the interruptions of embodied voice in dialogue (e.g. emphasis, pause), exploring the dialogical aspects of voice – not only in the dialogue between researcher and participant, but also their intra-actions with the wider world – by framing research as an assemblage (Fox and Alldred, 2017). This recognises the agency of “other events, situations, experiences and embodied histories” (Chadwick, 2020a, p. 6) to co-produce voice.

Finally, Chadwick advocates ethical forms of listening, both in the production of the initial voice data and its subsequent analysis. This requires the researcher listening for relationships between power-as-*potestas* and power-as-*potentia* in the data, but also reflexively considering how we are inhabiting these forms of power within the research (Mayes, 2022). Chadwick’s (2020a) recipe has been influential on the creation of my Dis-Human voice analytic process in this project, and like Chadwick, I have also drawn upon the LG to support its structure³⁴.

6.3.4 Emergent ‘listening’ – Zooming in

Below is an explanation of the stages of the first part of the Dis-Human analytical technique I used in this project to answer **RQ1: How do visually impaired young people encounter the English compulsory education system?** As well as the LG, the technique is also influenced by Davies’ (2014) concept of emergent listening, which was used during the intraviews (as outlined in part 6.2.3 of this chapter) and therefore was important to continue to attune to in the analysis. Emergent listening can be enacted in different ways – it might be catalysed by a focus on what is known, but it is always open to newness, (Davies, 2014) - “the

³⁴ Table 5, highlighting the influence of Chadwick’s (2020a) ‘ingredients’ on the various steps of my emergent ‘listening’ process, is available in Appendix 8.

constitution of new ways of being in the world, new ways of thinking and feeling, new ways of being a subject” (Roffe, 2007, p. 43). Our intraview conversations were catalysed by a known focus (namely educational experiences) but consistently adhered to a predisposition towards “continual openness to the not-yet-known” (Davies, 2014, p. 11) – i.e. what was important to the participants, what mattered, and what this knowledge could do to trouble existent sedimented knowledges pertaining to VI education pedagogies.

I present the word ‘listen’ in inverted commas as a nod to Truman’s (2023, p. 154) technique of “‘reading’ tangentially”, acknowledging that emergent listening goes beyond auditory listening, just as for Truman ‘reading’ involves engaging with literature beyond academic sources, e.g. poetry, letters, social media, fiction. Furthermore, ‘reading’ also relates to being attentive to the environment whilst moving through it, or perhaps ‘reading’ the impact that a song has on us (attending to its affective spark). As I ‘listen’ to the data, I activate emergent listening, but I also read and ‘read’ it, acknowledging Chadwick’s (2020, p. 5) concept of voices as “more-than-human, relational and diffractive movements”, co-constituted both as and within wider assemblages. My engagements with the data are examples of “relational techniques that can be practised to modulate unfolding events” (Massumi, 2015, p. 97), the “event” in this case being the analysis of data.

‘Listen’ 1: Storying the data

The first ‘listen’ followed Gilligan et al.’s (2003) guidance to focus upon the stories constructed by the speaker, or the plot, which cannot be separated from the “out-of-field voices” (Mazzei and Jackson, 2012, p. 748) that impact on the embodied voice itself. These noiseless but meaningful “voices” (Mazzei and Jackson, 2012, p. 747) consist of “larger social and cultural contexts [that] are also taken into consideration, as are dominant themes, metaphors, symbols, repeated images, and contradictions” (Cruz, 2021, p. 174). This ‘listen’ allowed me to familiarise myself with the content and narratives of the data.

‘Listen’ 2: Finding the Human (of Dis-Humanism)

In the second ‘listen’, I identified the first-person voice through looking for the ‘I’. I listened to each audio file and highlighted relevant sections of the transcripts, contextualising the ‘I’s found within the wider sentences and paragraphs, as well as

drawing upon the narratives I had ‘listened’ to in listen 1. I then used the highlighted sections to construct poems from the ‘I’ statements, in an iterative and intertwined process of engagement and interpretation. The ‘I poems’ technique, derived from Gilligan et al.’s (2003) work, involves analysing written transcripts by highlighting or underlining the ‘I’ pronoun and its surrounding words or phrases. These highlighted sections are then extracted and arranged on separate lines to create a ‘poem’ or stream of consciousness that documents how the narrator uses the ‘I’ voice. This method helps identify different ‘voices’ within the narrative.

I use the tilde symbol (~) to create a Dis-Human diffraction of ‘~i~’ poems, which denotes a more transversal understanding of subjectivity (Braidotti, 2019). This concept refers to the dynamic and complex processes of creating one’s identity in relation to (and entangled with) multiple contextual factors within our assemblages (e.g. culture, history, affect, events). Transversal subjectivity implies that subjectivity is not fixed or stable, but rather continuously changes and evolves in relation to affective forces. As such, the agential cuts that I make in the transcripts to create the poetry create more-than-representational (Lorimer, 2005) accounts of the participants’ subjectivity. In doing so, “‘I’ becomes an ‘~i~’ deeply embedded in the world – horizontally enmeshed in an infinite web of relations as opposed to... isolated and assertively expressing dominion” (Gilbert, 2019, p. 7). The Dis-Human ‘~i~’ nods to the ‘*Human*’ side of Dis-Humanism by affirming some disabled people’s desire for humanism by retaining the (human) ‘I’ in the first place, but it repositions the human away from its dominant ecological positioning, instead ‘*Dis-sing*’ this category of human, not to reduce it, but to make it “more-than” (Ulmer, 2017, p. 630).

Moreover, following Petrovic et al. (2015) and my own previous publication (Yeo et al., 2023), I also searched for other personal pronouns such as ‘we’, ‘they’, ‘it’, ‘you’ and ‘he/she’. This denoted the interchangeable pronouns often employed in speech, and also a recognition that the poems symbolise an often-shifting sense of self (Balan, 2005), that both embodied voices and the out-of-field voices co-constitute the storyings presented (Yeo et al., 2023) beyond a singular “narrative ‘I’” (Jackson and Mazzei, 2008, p. 299). The initial construction of the poems allowed me to ‘zoom in’ on the voices, stripping back layers of ‘out of field voices’ to focus on the individual (i.e. honouring the *Human* of Dis-Humanism).

The poems are presented in three columns. The left-hand column includes statements using ‘I’ (first person singular – also me, my, myself), second-left contained second person singular (e.g. you, your, yours), the middle contained (he, him, his, she, her, hers, they, their, them³⁵), the second right contained first person plural (we, our, us) and the right-hand side column included third person plural (they, their, them) statements. The table below gives a spatial representation of the columns.

Table 1: Pronoun table for poem structure

First Person Singular	Second Person Singular	Third Person Singular	First Person Plural	Second Person Plural	Third Person Plural
I, me, my	You, your	He, him, she, her, they, them	We, us	You, your	They, them

As prescribed by Gilligan et al. (2003) and Petrovic et al. (2015), each pronoun was followed by a verb and further words for contextualisation and meaning, and to denote the “associative stream of consciousness carried by a first-person voice” (Gilligan et al., 2003, p. 163). Following their construction, it was my initial plan to present the poems linearly, beginnings of each sentence/line aligned to the left page margin. However, in my (2023) publication on using the LG, peer reviewers felt that retaining the column format of poems added to their authenticity. I also felt that the shape of the poems due to their column presentation offered a nod to Barad’s (2015) use of the zig-zag patterns of lightning to signify the ongoing potentialities “discontinuous exploration of different possible pathways” (p. 408) for human desires and subjectivities, which are “are integral to each and every (ongoing) be(com)ing” (p. 410). The aligns with my Dis-Human ontology of difference-as-

³⁵ I ensured that I asked all participants at the start of each conversation what their preferred pronouns were. I shared that mine are she/her, as per etiquette suggested by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation (n.d.) ‘They’ and ‘them’ are included in the second person singular list to denote individual pronoun preferences.

desirable and questions the self-as-fixed, instead reminding us that we are “always becoming, never static” (St. Pierre, 2019, p. 5).

‘Listen’ 3: Focusing on contrapuntal ‘voices’

In the third ‘listen’ I identified the tensions existing between spoken words and broader structural challenges, such as conflicts with organisations, institutions and family, as well as encounters that provided episodes of joy. In my previous applications of the LG (Rutter et al., 2021; Yeo et al., 2023), the focus of this ‘listen’ was split across ‘listens’ 3 and 4 to apply a more deliberate oppositional framework, which we hoped would promote depth of inquiry (i.e., if we found oppression in the third ‘listen’, could we also find resistance? If there was control, where was liberation?) However, my co-authors and I (2023) felt that the fourth ‘listen’ became a means of “quelling the cacophony” (Tolman and Head, 2021, p. 158) of contrapuntal voices in the third, rather than allowing for friction and messiness of difference. As such, in this project, the third ‘listen’ stayed with the tension of dissonance in the storyings.

‘Listen 4’: Dis-sing humanism

The fourth listen in more ‘traditional’ applications of the LG is undertaken with the following purpose:

An interpretation of the text is developed that pulls together and synthesises the evidence or what has been learned through this entire process of listening and on this basis, the researcher composes an analysis. (Lugo and Gilligan, 2021, p. 203).

However, the analysis could not be considered Dis-Human without an ethical orientation towards alterity, based on respect and openness for difference and the Other (Dahlberg et al., 2013, p. xxii). While the second listen focuses on the individual human, and what is known, the fourth listen focuses on the *Other* voices that co-constituted the storying in the intraviews, with a particular focus on the non-human actors that were brought into the intraview assemblage. This Dis-ses the omnipotence of the human voice as the most important focus in the analysis.

‘Listen’ 5: Attending to the feel

The fifth listen centres affect. Feminist theorist Sara Ahmed (2004) asserts that:

Emotions are not simply something 'I' or 'we' have. Rather, it is through emotions, or how we respond to objects and others, that surfaces or boundaries are made: the 'I' and the 'we' are shaped by, and even take the shape of, contact with others. (p. 10)

Therefore, in its centring of relationality, the LG is an inherently affective methodology. As such, I believe the LG in its standard iteration of four listens risks forgetting to pay “attention to the *feel*” (Cruz, 2021, p. 173, emphasis added) of engaging talk data, thereby missing its emotional and affective power. This listen therefore pays attention to micro-political flourishings (Massumi, 2015, p. 79) in the data that made me “*feel*”. These moments are somehow “qualitatively different. A moment of a different colour, one you never see coming, that comes when it’s least expected” (Massumi, 2015, p. 82). As such, the focus of the fifth listen is to understand the affective influence of the data.

To undertake this ‘listen’, I re-listened to the audio and re-read the transcripts to ‘listen’ for intonation, emphasis and pauses, similarly to Chadwick’s (2020) notion of interruptions. Here the only focus was on *how* things were said, the emotion underpinning those words, and the emotion underpinning the interpretation of the listener. This was also resonant of Chadwick’s (2020b, p. 80) concept of embodied listening, a praxis that centres visceral emotive and affective forces in voice analytics, which means it becomes “harder to mute, ignore or miss the uncontainable and excessive dimensions of voices and acts of telling”. This was challenging emotionally, especially as re-engagement with data was often done through watching video recordings rather than just audio versions, which provided an additional affective layer in observation of body language and settings.

In Chapter 7, a selection of ‘~i~’ poems created by ‘Listen’ 2 are presented with attendant analysis drawing from the other ‘listens’. Individual storyings are presented to avoid essentialising personal experiences, thereby attending to the social justice orientation of DSE. Furthermore, this also acknowledges what Massumi calls “*differential attunement*” (2015, p. 94, emphasis in original) – the acknowledgement that all events (be it the research event, or wider experiences) are both relational and co-constituted but also “differently absorbed... from different angles... transitioning through the encounter to different outcomes” (Massumi, 2015, p. 95) for each individual.

6.3.5 Reading-writing-thinking-with theory – Zooming out

In the second part of the Dis-Human voice analytical process, I revisited the data again, deliberately reading-writing-thinking-with with theory to respond to **RQ2: What different understandings emerge from a Dis-Human exploration about visually impaired children's lives and experiences?** If we read data *through* theory, different patterns emerge as we diffract meanings. Where we stop and capture these patterns could be considered agential cuts, which mutually implicate the researcher and data's becomings (Barad, 2007, p.185). In this sense, knowledge-ing possesses vitality, and is produced through and as "entangled *ongoing* materialisations of the world" (Fairchild et al., 2022, p. 110, emphasis added). It is not fixed, rather it is flexible. This is expressed by Barad's (2007) concept of agential realism:

Neither discursive practices nor material phenomena are ontologically or epistemologically prior. Neither can be explained in terms of the other. Neither has privileged status in determining the other' (Barad, 2003, p. 822) ... Meaning is not seen as a property of individual words or groups of words but is an ongoing performance of the world in its differential intelligibility. It is the intra-action of these elements through which part of the world becomes determinately bounded and propertied in its emergent intelligibility to another part of the world. (Somerville, 2016, pp. 1166).

Chapter 8 reads-writes-thinks-with Deleuze (1988), Deleuze and Guattari (1987; 2004) and DeLanda (2016) to create assemblage 'diagrams' to map three key "trans-assemblage characteristics" (Little, 2016, para. 10) that emerge from the analysis, offering 'different understandings' of VICYP's lives and experiences. It is important to note that the term 'diagram' used in the Deleuzian (1988) sense does not mean capturing the "spatio-temporal multiplicity" (Deleuze, 1988, p. 34) of the assemblage through drawing an image. Rather a 'diagram' is "an abstract structure in which the expressive and the material are not differentiated" (DeLanda, 2013, pp. 125-126) – 'diagrams' map liminal spaces, not physical/spatial. This is because assemblages are constantly in flux, and because they "engage with numerous other assemblages that provide them with constraints and affordances, no assemblage ever actualises its virtual possibility space all at once" (Kleinherenbrink, 2020, p. 290), so any 'diagram' produced as an illustrated representation would be partial, incomplete and outdated as soon as it is produced.

'Diagrams' are instead "sets of "universal singularities" (DeLanda, 2013, p. 30). These are characteristics that represent distinctive structural features that recur across a wide range of systems. Such singularities function both as boundaries and as lures within their respective assemblages. Singularities are not fixed but will manifest differently depending upon the agentic forces they are shaped by (Bryant, 2012). As such, the 'diagrams' produced in this chapter are local manifestations (Bryant, 2012) formed by their encounters with the wider forces that form this thesis-assemblage. As such, they are written accounts that are structured specifically to capture certain encounters. Finally, it is important to note that these 'diagrams' do not intend to be representational, as they might be actualised differently in another constellation of forces (Bryant, 2012).

6.3.6 Assemblage 'diagrams' – an overview

In creating assemblage 'diagrams', Badiou (2002, p. 13) explains that "the starting point required by Deleuze's method is always a concrete case ... [Y]ou place yourself where thought has already started, as close as possible to a singular case and to the movement of thought". Deleuze and Guattari (1984) view the concrete case not as an object of study to be analysed, but rather as a force that compels thought and generates new concepts. They see the concrete as a multiplicity of 'concretions' or 'agencements' that push thought beyond traditional, linear modes of reasoning. The concrete, for Deleuze and Guattari, is not opposed to the abstract but is rather the condition of its possibility, forcing thought to engage with difference and becoming. The single 'cases' here are the individual assemblages of the participants created via the Dis-Human voice analytics process.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 322) explain that the 'diagram' of the assemblage includes content and expression. **Content**, or "machinic assemblages," refers to the material and physical interactions among bodies, actions and things (Buchanan, 2015, p. 390). These elements are not mechanical in a rigid sense but are dynamically interconnected, forming complex and shifting relationships. This machinic dimension emphasises how bodies intermingle in society through forces such as attraction, repulsion, and transformation. In contrast, **expression** encompasses language, discourse, and affects (Buchanan, 2015, p. 390). These expressions shape what can be said or thought within a given context, defining the boundaries of communicability and social meaning.

The **content** and **expression** of the 'diagrams' are affected and affect the processes of territorialisation and deterritorialization (dynamic processes of stabilisation and change). **Territorialisation** stabilises the assemblage, anchoring it in a specific context (in this case VI education), while **deterritorialisation** (or engaging with theory) introduces change and movement, disrupting established understanding. The notion of 'becoming' captures these processes, describing how elements within an assemblage shift and transform as they interact, leading to new configurations and meanings – or **reterritorialisations**. This expansive process is therefore appropriate to engage with agentic forces and affective flows in the wider lives and experiences that often interact within and between the wider VI educational assemblage. As Chapter 8 (Part 1) goes onto explain further, attending to content, expression, territorialisation, deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation of intraview data/storyings is also used to structure the diagrams in that chapter.

Conflux

This chapter has outlined how considering voice as a Dis-Human affective relational force can repattern stratified, stepped and mechanistic methodological doings into un-doings, as we attend to micro-shocks in the middle of conversations between participants. This avoids what Koro-Ljungberg and Mazzei (2012) refer to as the simplification of methods that can perpetuate reductive and mechanistic approaches to inquiry that rely on normativity. Such conventional approaches might produce “outcomes that build on overgeneralizations of findings, decontextualization of research, and claims that may actually disempower those whom research purports to benefit” (Koro-Ljungberg and Mazzei, 2012, p. 728). To have failed to think differently about conventional qualitative methods in this project would have undermined the Dis-Human “ethical obligation to intra-act responsibly in the world’s becoming” (Barad, 2007, p. 178), which in turn reiterates practices of exclusion. This could be redolent of dysconscious ableism – a way of thinking about disability that fails to question, or “tacitly accepts dominant ableist norms and privileges” (Broderick and Lalvani, 2017, p. 895).

This therefore demonstrates how posthuman theories can be mobilised to meet the social justice imperatives of more humanistic forms of inquiry if practitioners and researchers adopt Dis-Human ways of thinking and doing that, to paraphrase Ahmed (2017), demonstrate what they are for and what they are against. In doing so, I also affirmatively respond to Barad’s (2007, pp. 221-222) provocation “for feminists to be involved in the practices... and the theorization of the social, the cultural, and the political.... But understanding and reworking different disciplinary apparatuses in isolation won’t suffice. Intra-actions matter”. Therefore, it is important to invoke a “politics of attention” (Snaza and Sonu, 2016, p. 31) to such intra-actions. A key way this chapter has invoked such attentiveness is to draw upon Eve Mayes’ (e.g. 2019; 2023) post-qualitative re-conceptualisation of voice to exemplify how a Dis-Human approach to research can avoid mis/using voice as an appropriative force (Mayes, 2019, p. 1192).

The forthcoming *Conversational Cartography* presents across three more chapters the findings stemming from the application of the methodological techniques outlined in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 and the subsequent analysis of these findings, each of which respond to one of the research questions. In Chapter 7 these “singular flows” (Fox and Alldred, 2015, p. 408) are first re-presented as ‘~i~’ poems entwined

with further analysis to respond to **RQ1**. Chapter 8 then re-presents the data as four thematic sections of analysis, each of which entangles the data with theory in an aggregative capacity (Fox and Alldred, 2015) which re-territorialises data and narratives *differently* to respond to **RQ2**. Finally, Chapter 9 draws together not only the findings and analysis from Chapters 7 and 8, but also the outcomes from the process of Dis-Human reading-writing-thinking-doing throughout the thesis in order to consider how these outcomes might inform VI education pedagogies, responding to **RQ3**.

Chapter 7: Conversational Cartography

Response to research question 1

Introduction

Chapter 7 is the first of this thesis' Conversational Cartography – the section that offers analysis and discussion of the data to respond to its research questions. As such, this chapter's purpose is to respond to **RQ1**:

How do visually impaired young people encounter the English compulsory education system?

It constitutes the first part of Fox and Alldred's (2021, p. 4) structure for diffractive methodology – attending to entanglements and interferences in social processes. The chapter “aspires to provide a complex representation” (Blumenreich, 2004, p. 80) of the storyings of the participants. Following Whitburn and Goodley (2019, p. 416), stories are deployed in this chapter both “methodologically (as a means to explore questions of disability and education) and analytically (to think about disability and education through the stories that we tell)”. Using the outcomes of the Dis-Human voice analytics process outlined in Chapter 6, I now draw upon DeLanda's (2006) conceptualisation of Assemblage Theory to structure the individual storying assemblages in this chapter that elucidate how VICYP encounter the English compulsory education system that interact to create the assemblage whole (DeLanda, 2006) that responds to **RQ1**.

I have chosen not to structure the content of each storying chronologically, in terms of lining up with the order of 'listens' outlined in Chapter 6's discussion of the Dis-Human voice analytical process. This is influenced by DeLanda's (2006, pp. 9-10) warning that an assemblage is a “whole not reducible to its parts”, and Mazzei and Jackson's (2023, p. viii) assertion that storyings are not stable accounts, rather each encounter with them will produce “new ways of being... not a pinning down but an opening up”. It is impossible to delineate where the affective flows that fed into my composition of these storying assemblages began and ended. Therefore, as Little warns, a “strategy of aggregative explanation seems to be a non-starter” (2012, para. 3). Nevertheless, each storying has some structural similarities in that they include ‘~i~’ poems and end with a summary of how the participant encounters education and potential implications for these findings to respond to **RQ1**.

‘~i~’ poems are a type of data presentation modality created by the Listening Guide (LG) analytical process. In my diffraction of the LG to create the Dis-Human voice analytic method employed in this thesis, the tilde symbol is employed to create the

Dis-Human ‘~i~’ as explained in Chapter 6 section 6.3.4. This concept refers to a more dynamic and complex understanding of subjectivity that retains a sense of the individual (important for adhering to a CDS-informed refusal to reject the human or flatten identity categories) while recognising that subjectivity is not fixed and changes and evolves in its entanglement with affective forces (as advocated by posthuman thinking).

Finally, in a nod to the intention of this thesis to have implications for practice, I have borrowed Whitburn and Goodley’s (2019, p. 417) notion of an “anchoring narrative” as a point from which stories can be built. The CFVI provides an anchor to tether each storying to current pedagogic narratives in VI education (and therefore impacts how VICYP encounter it). As such, each participant’s storying assemblage is named after one of its areas of learning. Before the individual assemblages are presented to offer examples of how VICYP encounter education, the next part of the chapter explains how assemblage theory, first introduced in Chapter 1, has been activated in structuring the analysis in this chapter.

Part 1: Assembling encounters

In Chapter 1, I explained that an assemblage is created by the interactions between these component parts to yield a whole that is irreducible to the properties of these parts. These components are often heterogeneous, have agency themselves, can be separated from the assemblage and interact, and intra-act, leading to such new emergent properties and interconnections. While assemblages can be taken apart, they cannot be rebuilt deliberately, (or to use Deleuzian terminology, *reterritorialised*) as they are constituted through variable interactions and processes that can stabilise (or territorialise) the individual identity of an assemblage or else destabilise (*detrterritorialise*) it. Each assemblage is “historically and individually unique” (Ball, 2018, p. 241) and are defined by ‘exteriority’. That is, they “possess emergent properties and capacities irreducible to their component parts” (Atkinson, 2024, p. 81).

Like Bacevic (2018), I believe that DeLanda’s version of assemblage theory “offers the most useful lens for thinking through processes of change in complex organisations” (p. 79) and is particularly applicable to exploring VI education given its attention to individual and systemic assemblages. Jay and Acott (2023, p. 679) interpret DeLanda’s notion of assemblages as forming “nested systems, in which lower-level assemblages act as components in higher-level ones”. This shares some similarities with Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological systems theory (2005), which as Chapter 2 (part 2.2.6) explained is the current dominant theoretical model underpinning VI education research and therefore informing practice. This similarity makes the process of diffraction arguably more straightforward, as parallels can be drawn with existing understandings, as well as creating new knowledge-ings.

DeLanda’s (2016, p. 7) concept of assemblage theory, which attests that “assemblages are every-where, multiplying in every direction ... And at the limit ... we find the grand cosmic assemblage’. This is resonant of the multiple assemblages that comprise the VI education assemblage, and therefore emphasises the applicability of a Dis-Human theoretical framework in analysing VI education, given its simultaneous focus on the individual human assemblages, the components that form them, how the smaller assemblages interact to form wider assemblages and the wider affective forces that (in)form the creation of assemblages.

Jay and Acott (2023) summarise DeLanda’s position that:

Assemblages are constituted of heterogeneous components that do not rely on shared properties, but come together to form a whole in which the components interact in complex ways. Interaction leads to new *emergent properties*, belonging to and defining the whole, which then act back on their parts, both constraining and enabling them. (pp. 677-678)

For DeLanda, components in an assemblage can be material or discursive, and the processes forming an assemblage may be applied to physical spaces or individuals. This is contrast to, for example, Buchanan's (2020, p. 71) assertion "assemblage was never intended to refer to ensembles of material things". As such, DeLanda's (2016) conceptualisation of assemblage aligns with a Dis-Human theoretical framework in that it recognises assemblages as individual entities, his "concept of exteriority gainfully [underscoring] the plurality of positioning, and identity, of material objects and human individuals, all of which can exist in multiple fields, networks and assemblages while retaining relative autonomy from each" (Atkinson, 2024, p. 91). This recognises the individual person as an assemblage (nodding to the '*Human*' side of Dis-Human) and affords human experience value in his assertion that "all assemblages have the same ontological status, regardless of scale, and should be individually understood" (Jay and Acott, 2023, p. 68). At the same time, DeLanda also emphasises the process or "action of matching or fitting together a set of components" (DeLanda, 2016, p. 1) catalysed by the interactions of affective forces (i.e. attending to the '*Dis*' side of Dis-Human)

This chapter, therefore, responds to DeLanda's (2006, p. 5) assertion "primary function of assemblage theory is to map the individuation³⁶ process that has given rise to an assemblage". This involves storying the smaller assemblages of each individual participant that together respond to the RQ, which consequently add to the composition of the assemblage of this thesis, which is, in turn, a component of the larger assemblage of VI education. As Feely (2020, p. 179) notes, "it is always possible to take a component out of one assemblage and plug it into another assemblage". This allows the analysis to engage in a process of "territorialising and de-territorialising micropolitics within assemblages that link matter and meaning and cut across 'micro' and 'macro' levels" (Fox and Alldred, 2015, p. 910). As such, the micropolitical, everyday educational encounters of the participants are plugged into the into wider organisational and societal concepts of power, inclusion, identity and

³⁶ It is important to note that Deleuze and Guattari state that individuation is not the individual itself, but rather the process of producing the individual (Bryant, 2006), hence each storying considers these processes rather than simply recounting a narrative as a 'factual' representation.

subjectivity, composing new assemblages. These accounts also have the ability to generate what Little (2016) calls “trans-assemblage characteristics” (para.10), which are thematic components that generate interactions between assemblages, and are explored in Chapter 8’s response to **RQ2**, which explores the wider assemblages that individual assemblages are plugged into and vice versa.

Part 2: Storying individual assemblages

7.2.1 Megan's storying

Megan was in Key Stage 3 at a local mainstream secondary school at the time the intraviews took place. She had transitioned from a 300-pupil mixed primary school, which she recalled in intraview 1 (25.8.21) being “*a good school*” that she liked attending, with “*really nice*” teachers and a stable friendship group. Megan expressed that she usually had “*a lot of stuff on during the week*”, due to attending various clubs outside of school, including playing football and being in a drama group, and participating in attendant matches and performances. Megan's intraviews surfaced encounters with accessing information in education and beyond. Tester (1992) defines a lack of access to appropriate information to inform practical choices and wellbeing as information need. Megan demonstrates that she understands how she is encountering information need in relation to the practical aspects of access to learning. However, she does not wholly understand information needed in relation to accessing social information and is consequently “searching for answers to questions that are more complex or less well-defined” (Moore, 2000, p. 9) about belonging, esteem and self-actualisation (Moore, 2000, pp. 10-11).

7.2.1.i Accessing information

The CFVI's official accompanying training materials focusing on Area 7: accessing information states that being able to access, manage and produce information as independently as possible is a crucial enabler for a positive educational experience for VICYP (RNIB, 2024, p. 10). A dual access approach to VI pedagogy advocates for learning materials and environmental information to be provided in accessible formats, and simultaneously, for VICYP to be supported to develop an array of skills to navigate accessing information from a range of different sources. If both aspects are achieved, then RNIB suggest that outcomes for VICYP will be twofold – “promoting achievement and progress that is commensurate with the underlying cognitive ability of the pupil/student. It also has a role to play in [supporting] social interaction” (RNIB, 2024, p. 10).

Attending a mainstream school with a twice-annual schedule of QTVI input, Megan explained that she had had some basic training in primary school on using assistive technology:

I know how to like enlarge stuff and things and I know how to put like backgrounds on so I can like read it properly. I was taught how to like, how to like put certain settings on to make colours easier. Yeah, and then I figured out like the zooming in and the fun stuff, and other stuff to make text easier on my own. (Megan, intraview 1, 25.8.21).

However, upon transition to secondary school, there was a shift of approach in favour of a focus on ensuring access to learning is in place. In line with the findings of Whitburn's (2014) study on the experiences of visually impaired young people in the Australian secondary education context, access was a "dominant theme" (Cruz, 2021, p. 174) in Megan's storytelling. Like Whitburn's participants, Megan too "coveted access to resources, teachers' instructions, and friends" (2014, pp. 151-152). As such, my cartography of Megan's assemblage in this chapter is given parameters (DeLanda, 2006) by these themes. That is, in defining the structure of the virtual possibility space (DeLanda, 2006, p. 5) that constitutes Megan's individual assemblage within the wider research assemblage, there must be acknowledgement of the parameters applied to the assemblage by the coding practices in the research, in order to "explain the degree to which the components of the assemblage have been subjected to a process of homogenisation, and the extent to which its defining boundaries have been delineated" (DeLanda, 2006, p. 3).

7.2.1.ii Access to resources: "i~ try to see it. i~ just try"³⁷

i~ Poem 1: Megan's "i~ poem entitled "i~ try to see it. i~ just try" entitled: "i~ try to see it. i~ just try"

i~ try to see it.	They usually put [work] on the boards.

³⁷ The data used to create Megan's i~ poems in this chapter is taken from her first intraview dated 25.8.2021.

~i~ just try.

~i~ get it on my laptop sometimes,

they print sheets other times,

they print large print sheets,

they create PowerPoint
sheets all for me

~i~ prefer to have it on a sheet.

~i~ can put it close to my face.

~i~ can, like, it's like a physical
copy it's there, so

~i~ can just see it when

~i~ need to see it.

~i~ can switch from page to page.

~i~ find it's easy, easier.

Megan demonstrates a good understanding of her preferences in terms of accessing learning resources, expressing preference for hard copies of documents, knowing that visual access to resources will be increased in negative correlation with viewing distance, and having her own versions of learning materials “*all for me*”. She also intimates that access to learning is consistently embedded and offered in a variety of modalities, thereby potentially increasing her autonomy around access decisions in line with an increase of access options offered – work sent to her laptop, printed sheets, large print copies and personalised modified resources. She repeats her gratitude to teachers for providing this access elsewhere in the intraview, thereby emphasising the positive role of A2L strategies in VI education pedagogies: “*all the teachers, they asked me, “what format do you*

need this in?" I think at that point, I was on 48 font³⁸ on cream paper, they were like "Okay". They just did it. It was amazing" (Megan, intraview 1, 25.8.21). This contrasts with her experiences in her previous school when she perceived that had to take leadership surrounding her own access: *"It was up to me to explain to everyone. I had to fix things for everyone. I think that's, that's a huge amount of responsibility"*. Perhaps it is little wonder that Megan feels uncertain about developing her own learning to access skills.

In contrast to her clear examples of the teachers' actions towards accessibility, she is hesitant in describing her own. She says that she tries to see the board. The repetition of the words *"I try"* perhaps indicates that she is keen to demonstrate that she attempts to overcome "functional limitations" (Morris, 1991, p. 140). This could be due to a desire for acceptance by me as researcher, teacher, adult, which can be most easily gained "if the person with a disability... [is able to] demonstrate that he or she does not have a disability" (Biklen, 2000, p. 341), so as to be awarded the status of human (Thomson, 1997). Yet in doing so, she conversely draws in and on deficit narratives of disability in relation to her own agency in ensuring access to learning. Deficit models conceptualise the individual or group concerned "primarily (or even solely) in terms of their perceived deficiencies, dysfunctions, problems, needs, and limitations" (Dinishak, 2016, para. 1).

Megan initially seems to try to position herself as trying to 'overcome' her impairment, to counter static perceptions of disability (Biklen, 2000), or to resist the disabled identity itself. However, she simultaneously refuses to reject it. This is perhaps hardly surprising given that the current macropolitical components of her educational assemblage, such as the 2015 SEND Code of Practice and the Children and Families Act (2014), adhere to a medicalised model of disability which requires those wanting to access support to pathologise their experiences. Megan's educational assemblage interacts with these dichotomous narratives of uncertainty around disability hence she is wary of labelling a task as "easy", adding a contingent "easier" (Megan, intraview 1, 25.8.21) to her assertion to denote her understanding that access to learning can still prove challenging for her.

³⁸ This is the size of font used in producing electronic documents for Megan. The UK Association for Accessible Formats (2024) suggests that documents be produced given numerical text size such as 12 or 14 point will vary from typeface to typeface. For example, Arial 14 point appears larger than Times New Roman 14 point.

7.2.1.iii Access to teachers' instructions: “~i~ was absolutely fuming inside”

~i~ Poem 2: Megan's ~i~ poem entitled ““~i~ was absolutely fuming inside”

					They're quite good at enlarging my work. They forget though sometimes.
				We were doing measuring,	
			he had larger sheets for me, but he didn't realise that the measurements were going to be different.		
~i~ had to do, like, really hard work, more than everyone else's.					
			He told me off for not hurrying up with the work!		

~i~ kept
wondering
why
~i~ got
them
wrong!
~i~ didn't
even
realise until
the very
end of the
class.

He was like:
"Oh, yes, it
does seem
to be
different,
it's a bit late
now in the
lesson for
me to
change
anything..."

... You can
just go and
sit and help
somebody
else".

~i~ actually
managed to
do the work
but
~i~ was
kind of
frustrated
inside.

~i~ had to
do so much
harder work
than
everyone
else.

My friend who
was sitting next
to me was
absolutely
laughing her
head off.
She thought it
was just all a big
joke.

~i~ was
kind of, sort
of laughing.

~i~ kind of
had to find
it funny.

~i~ was
absolutely
fuming
inside.

Megan recounts an example of a time that her access to learning was constrained by inadequate instructions. In the poem above, the teacher's half-hearted attempt at providing modified resources³⁹ had essentially become a performative gesture. The teacher's demonstrative action of producing an adapted resource upholds the western ideals of schooling "respect [for] diversity and hospitality and compassion for 'Others'" (Popkewitz, 2009, pp. 385-386) to the external observer. But it is

³⁹ An example of a similar worksheet to illustrate adaptations required by some VICYP is available in Appendix 8.

encountered by Megan as a micropolitical enactment of Popkewitz's (2009, p. 385) notion of a double gesture of inclusion and exclusion. This is not the first time that Megan has experienced this, elsewhere in the intraview she recounted another example of differentiation performed as enlargement of material:

We would get in biology a lot of worksheets, they were kind of 'cut out all the rectangles and then stick them in rows', or in matching pairs, definition to Word or something. I don't think they got it that cutting them out took longer for me – they're all bigger, the sheets, and figuring out, like processing it all, and actually figuring out where they went, took so long... I've got a mess on my desk, I can't figure out what goes where, I don't have the answers, I've missed them because of tidying up. I'm not learning... they're testing my ability to cut out and stick! I would much, much rather be given a solid sheet of information and make notes on it, than these silly, like, very visual sheet activities. I would actually learn then! (Megan, intraview 1, 25.8.21)

By superficially attempting an inclusive gesture of basic modification of the worksheets, the teacher is unwittingly reinforced exclusion by not only undermining access to learning for Megan but also undermining her humanism. Megan's storying in the poem at this point shifts from a fairly positive recounting (e.g. *"they're quite good at enlarging my work... he had larger sheets for me"*) to a narrative of injustice (*"~i~ had to do so much harder work than everyone else"*). But the affective journey for Megan is not linear - the zig-zagging emotional tone, fragmented structure, and repeated frustrations in the poem all mirror the non-linear and disjointed experience Megan faces in trying to access information about her learning and to access (and understand) messages engendered by the "supplement[ary] communication" (French, 1999, p. 23) proffered by the worksheet as an active agent in the classroom assemblage.

The initial subtractive interference caused by the content of the worksheet, reducing Megan's confidence in her abilities (*"I kept wondering why I got them wrong!"*) became an increasingly diminishing force as the teacher offered a reprimand rather than guidance when Megan realised that she was struggling with the activity. Any flashes of pride shown in her navigation of a difficult situation (*"I actually managed to do all the work"*) were immediately doused by her teacher's dismissive attitude to her learning and engagement emphasised by their refusal to modify the work further when his mistake was identified was exposed by his linguistic choices – *"you can just..."*. The word *"just"* downplays the importance of what has just occurred, implying that the speaker (the teacher) perceives the issue to be less important than

it may appear to the listener (Megan). This could exemplify a “situating of disability as Other to mainstream understandings of the values we attach to human beings” (Goodley et al., 2016, p. 771) by the teacher, as there are no attempts to revisit modification of the activity, nor any apology for his failure to make adequate reasonable adjustments to ensure Megan’s access.

The teacher’s response also reinforces power-as-*potestas* through the instructional demand “*you can*”. The teacher is in control and Megan’s needs are secondary – the teacher wields a power that is restrictive (Braidotti, 2008). The gesture of sending Megan physically away (“*go and sit*”⁴⁰) ensures that opportunities for dialogue are shut down, meaning that she is less likely to question the existing hierarchical power structure, emphasising Megan’s lack of *power-as-potentia* in the situation as a child in an adult-controlled domain. This exchange could constitute a subtle, unconscious, example of a microaggression – “brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to certain individuals because of their group membership” (Sue, 2010, p. xvi). The notion of “double gesture” comes into play again, as the teacher’s words offer a ‘double-double’ gesture of exclusion – two narratives of microaggression: “kids vs. adults; [and] inside/outside the disabled community” (Sparrow et al., 2023, p. 67) and two forms of microaggressions: denial of experience and second-class citizenship (Keller and Galgay, 2010).

7.2.1.iv Access to friends: “She thought it was all just a big joke”

Megan’s storying of this Maths lesson afforded an understanding of the dissonance between her desire to fit in socially (to avoid consignment to such aforementioned second-class citizenship) and her desire for accessibility. The repetition of certain words and phrases related to her experience of the activity set - “*really hard work... so much harder work*” – emphasise that she understood the inequity she had faced in accessing learning compared to her peers due to the resource’s inaccessibility. Megan’s repetition reinforces difference from the majority of her peers, from social and educational norms. Not only did she perceive the level of challenge to be harder

⁴⁰ Furthermore, the sentence is framed as a command using language most familiarly employed with animals, e.g. with dogs – “go...sit”. This further emphasises the micropolitical dehumanisation that disabled children can face in their everyday educational encounters, emphasising the dysconscious ableism (Broderick and Lalvani, 2017) at play in organisational assemblages, and macro-level assemblages which bleed into smaller assemblages. In this case, the disablist narrative that “some categories of human are treated like animals” (Goodley et al., 2014, p. 355) – i.e. inhumanely.

than her peers' work, but also the volume – another “double gesture” of exclusion. Megan explains feeling “*kind of frustrated inside*” by this structural experience of oppression (Thomas, 1999) – that is, the poorly adapted worksheet and her struggle to access the content of the resource in comparison to her peers acted out in the public domain of the classroom.

However, Megan's choice of verbs to describe her feelings throughout escalates as the storying progresses from “*frustrated*” to “*fuming*”, accompanying adverbs shifting from tentative (“*kind of*”) to definitive (“*absolutely*”). Again, similarly to the findings of Whitburn's (2014a, p. 149) study that “class teachers' practices appear to influence social inclusion in schools for VI students”, the teacher's lack of accountability and downplaying of the incident incited for Megan a “more personal experiences of oppression which operate[d] at the emotional level” (Reeve, 2006, p. 95), as his actions might potentially compromise her social cachet. As I have explained elsewhere, “these micro-impacts of disability on the individual self are often caused by the prevalence of disabling macro-forces that create tropes of ‘other’, in which those who can't meet normative concepts of productivity are sidelined” (Rutter et al., 2024, p. 60). While Megan is irritated by the teacher's actions, constructive interference is catalysed by the affective impact of her friend's reaction to the incident (“*laughing her head off*”), thereby amplifying Megan's emotions towards anger, by intensifying her discomfiting simultaneous desire for and rejection of recognition (Watkins, 2010, pp. 273-274).

While Megan voices her displeasure at her friend's reaction (“*she thought it was just all a big joke*”), her body language betrays a lack of confidence in this conviction. I noted in my research journal when engaging with the fifth ‘listen’ to the recording of Megan's intraviews that at this point in the conversation:

Megan physically squirms in her seat as she recounts this, her internal battle reflected by her display of physical discomfort. As she settles back onto the seat, she is hunched over, shoulders drawn in, hair covering her face, physically making herself smaller... to avoid being seen as “a big joke” herself by peers perhaps? (Excerpt from research journal, 3.3.22)

On the one hand, she desires her difference to be acknowledged by the provision of appropriate resources, on the other, she wants to minimise her difference, ensuring that she is seen to be reacting in the same way as her laughing friend in order to fit into the dominant social narrative of the present circumstance. This suggests that

she is becoming attuned to the nuances of social power dynamics that are spread through semiotic as well as linguistic means. Megan had recounted a story of previous friendship struggles at primary school and the affective impact this had had on her, which may account for her monitoring of her own social responses in her friendships:

When I was in Year 5, I was struggling so much with friendships, I had sort of just gone into a shell and I was finding it really hard to connect with my peers. My [teaching assistant's] solution to that was making a timetable of friends and then picking names out of a box. I've always had someone to hang out with, but I felt like they didn't always want to be there. (Megan, intraview 1, 25.8.21)

Megan's prior experiences of perceived social rejection position her friend's laughter in the moment as having equal power over Megan's (re)actions as the teacher's instruction. Megan's external mirroring of the laughter of her friend mollifies the friend but catalyses an internal masking of both her real feelings and her disabled identity. This may be an example of a learned behaviour that Garland-Thomson (1997, p. 12) asserts is enacted by disabled people, who "must use charm... deference, humor, or entertainment to relieve nondisabled people of their discomfort" around the experience of disability.

However, Megan does so grudgingly, explaining "I kind of *had* to find it funny", the emphasis on "*had*" denoting a nascent awareness of her competing identities in the and potentially the beginnings of resistance against the narrative of the "'supercrip', someone who works hard to pass as more than 'normal'" (Reeve, 2006, p. 103). In noting that is already having to work hard enough with the academic portion of school, perhaps denotes that Megan is beginning to realise the social and emotional workload instigated by the burden of 'passing', or as Thomas (1999, p. 55) describes it: "the psycho-emotional aspects of concealment", but does not yet have enough information to decide whether casting off the cape of 'supercrip' risks even harder work.

7.2.1.v How does Megan encounter education?

Megan's educational encounters have located her in what Reeve (2006, p. 103) describes as a "world in-between" disability and ability, meaning that she is occupying the Dis-Human hyphen. She desires "the normative stuff of everyday

human life (education, rights to be ‘independent’, part of a community...)” (Goodley et al., 2016, p. 772) but also feels that her experience as a disabled person should be valued. Her encounter with an object (a worksheet) catalysed a series of affective flows that denote how the micropolitical impacts of everyday encounters in education feed into macro-level narratives. She summarises her perplexity and frustration elsewhere in the intraview when she states: *“I couldn’t understand how the teachers didn’t always do the basics, the absolute minimum”* when it came to accessibility, demonstrating that, as Giddens (1991, p. 54) suggests, it is crucial for professionals to be aware of the complexity of messaging around disability in curriculum and pedagogy, particularly as she asserts that identities are formed and shaped by the persistence of certain narratives.

Navigating the “information-rich world” (RNIB, 2024, p. 38), therefore, involves more than accessing format or content of resources or instructions but also navigating the biopsychosocial impacts of vision impairment and deciphering what the linguistic and affective information accessed in educational settings helps VICYP learn about themselves. This is because access is “tied to the social organization of participation, even to belonging” (Titchkosky, 2011, p. 11). It is therefore crucial for educators to facilitate encounters with/in education to support VICYP in the “process of recognizing as social and systemic what was formerly perceived as isolated and individual” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1241-1242). By affording students opportunities to develop and demonstrate their power-as-*potentia*, VICYP like Megan will not only will be able to access myriad forms of information but also apply it to inform more than her academic work.

7.2.2 Cassie's storying

At the time of the intraviews Cassie was in Key Stage 4 at a specialist vision impairment school. Prior to moving to this setting in Key Stage 3, she had attended a mainstream school with an integrated vision impairment resource base and then what she described as the “*normal*” (Cassie, intraview 1, 2.9.21) local secondary school. At the time of the first intraview, she had just completed her GCSEs and was at a point of transition between compulsory and further education. Cassie's intraviews surfaced encounters with orientation and navigating the learning environment “as a site for collaboration and continued negotiations between the physical and the social” (Kokko and Hirsto, 2021, p. 72). Cassie is developing skills in familiarising herself with physical routes (Hayton and Wood, 2022) but she is also trying to orient herself along unfixed and divergent paths that enmesh her (Ingold, 2011) with the affective environment of education.

7.2.2.i Habilitation: Orientation and Mobility

Habilitation is a key facet of the additional curriculum for VICYP. Its importance is highlighted by it occupying two of the eleven areas of learning in the CFVI (Areas 5 and 6). Habilitation's focus is to support children and young people to develop skills and strategies to move safely and independently through their environments. In relation to the additional curriculum in VI education, its curriculum is usually categorised by two key foci – orientation and mobility (O&M) and independent living skills (ILS). O&M encompasses both orientation, which is the awareness of one's body in relation to surroundings, and mobility, which is the ability to move safely and purposefully from A to B via most efficient route, a process that Tam (2011) describes as wayfinding. The CFVI provides a list of expected skills that a VICYP may need to develop in O&M (Hewett et al., 2022, pp. 23-24) and example interventions that can be put into place. Kaiser et al. (2023) note that while it is the responsibility of QTVIs to assess and address the needs of VICYP in relation to the additional curriculum (p. 928), the teaching of O&M skills is delivered by the Qualified Habilitation Specialist (QHS), not the QTVI.

However, Kaiser et al. (2023, p. 928) also found that some QHS were reluctant to relate the O&M training they deliver directly with other areas of learning in the additional curriculum, positioning O&M as primarily and individual, cognitive task

(Symonds et al., 2017), rather than as relational and entangled within and across the additional curriculum. This emphasises an individualistic notion of independence within VI education, associated a desired outcome of personal autonomy. While this could be viewed as emphasising the importance of personalised learning for VICYP (McLinden and Douglas, 2013), it also, conversely, could feed into medical or individualised models of disability which place responsibility on the individual to conform to societal expectations of independence as aspirational.

Cassie's storying resonates with themes of orientation beyond the usual ways she encounters it in her everyday educational experiences. Sara Ahmed's Queer theory-informed conceptualisation of orientation positions it as having bearings – being able to know where we are and find our way and “also to be turned toward certain objects, those that help us to find our way” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 1). She examines how bodies are oriented in the world, influenced by social norms and power structures, and how these orientations shape our interactions with others and objects.

Pluqualec (2022) draws on both Ahmed (2017) and Disability Studies (e.g. Goodley and Runswick-Cole, 2014) to create the concept of dis/orientation. Pluqualec (2022, pp. xx-xxi) positions the concept of dis/orientation as a disruptive and generative sensation in research, providing “spaces in which we seek out new, less travelled lines, to bring new worlds into view, to explore other possibilities” rather than following linear trajectories. Whilst adhering to Pluqualec's concept, I diffract dis/orientation to become dis-orientation. In my Dis-Human framework, the hyphen constitutes a conjunctive device to bring together words or parts of words together, both of which possess equal importance in the new configuration. Cassie's storying herein is oriented by a deliberate attunement to these dis-orienting encounters, which are often missing from both curriculum and research (Whitburn and Goodley, 2019, p. 423).

7.2.2.ii Affective imprint of educational encounters: “You know, that’s a big decision to make when you’re 11”⁴¹

~i~ Poem 3: Cassie’s ~i~ poem entitled “You know, that’s a big decision to make when you’re 11”

~i~ passed to go into the grammar school, but					
					they said it would have been suitable for me -
					they wouldn't have been able to adapt things.
					They said:
			We need to know what would we get from		

⁴¹ The data used to create Cassie’s ~i~ poems in this chapter is taken from his first intraview dated 2.9.2021.

				your daughter joining our school?	
		Her with a visual impairment.			
		He just wanted some money. That's... that's lovely, isn't it?			
~i~ didn't know about [the specialist school] then.					
~i~ knew it would help me but					
~i~ was 11.					
~i~ didn't like the idea of the distance					

from my family,					
	You know, that's a big decision to make when you're 11.				

In-keeping with a Dis-Human interrogation of taken for granted understandings⁴², the etymology of the word ‘habilitation’ aids in the analysis of Cassie’s Poem 3. ‘Habilitation’ is derived from the Latin words *‘habilitare’*, meaning “to make suitable, to fit”, and *‘habilis’* – “fit, proper” – coming together to make “capable” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-c) Cassie’s sense of orientation in relation to where she ‘fits’ was undermined as she began the transition to secondary school. The affective imprint of her encounter with the grammar school reinforced a narrative that she was not deemed “suitable, to fit”. On paper, she had effectively accessed the dual access model of VI education at primary school, having benefitted from specialist support and developed independence skills to achieve academically, even excelling in comparison to many peers in passing entrance exams to gain access to a selective school. Yet, despite these achievements, her disabled body’s capacities are seen as a “less than perfect form of the normative” (Shildrick, 2015, p. 13) and therefore are less valued in comparison to those bodies which do fit those normative categories. Cassie might have passed her exam, but she was unable to ‘pass’ as a ‘desirable’ pupil for the school to permit her to continue her educational journey there.

She is apparently stoic about recognising the discrimination she faced, asking the sarcastic rhetorical question, “*that’s... that’s lovely, isn’t it?*” However, the repetition of the word “*that’s*” in this line of the poem perhaps betrays her uncertainty regarding the interplay between identity and securing a place in the world (Ahmed, 2006). It’s first use in the sentence is followed by a pause and (as visible in the video recording of the intraview) a headshake and a sigh. These gestures perhaps intimate that she is trying to shake off the affective imprint of the encounter, but that

⁴² Please see Chapter 5 for an explanation and example of Dis-Humanism’s diffractive approach to thinking about everyday concepts.

it remains painful. Stewart's (2007, p. 2) notion of ordinary affects explains them as "public feelings that begin and end in broad circulation, but they're also the stuff that seemingly intimate lives are made of". In this encounter, the "public feeling", or discourse, of ableism is put into "broad circulation" between all members of the conversation. This may well have reinforced negative "intimate" thoughts or beliefs that Cassie has had about disability and her own relationship to it. Elsewhere in the intraview, Cassie had spoken about her disabled identity and had elucidated her discomfort with her perceptions of her own identity as "different":

~i~ Poem 4: Poem 4: Cassie's ~i~ poem entitled "~i~ think every student is very aware of that, that feeling different"

~i~ think every student is very
aware of that, that feeling different.
And it's not spoken about.

We're all
aware

we're
different
and

you know, no one's
gonna be happy
about that.

In the poem above, Cassie is describing her encounters with difference in her specialist VI school setting. She aligns herself and her peers in that setting as a collective with a shared experience of difference: "we're all aware we're different", but one that is simultaneously visible and invisible (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). There is a lack of open acknowledgement of difference ("*~i~ think every student is very aware of that, that feeling different. And it's not spoken about*"), despite the conspicuous fact that all students have joined the school in order to access a different structure of education than is available in mainstream settings. The invisible dialogue of difference therefore becomes "the secret counterpart of the visible" (Merleau-Ponty,

1968, p. 265). The impact of this tension is that her subjectivity within this collective is categorised by a sense of marginalisation.

The word ‘marginalised’ is often applied to those people who “find themselves on the outskirts of society” (Goodley et al., 2018, p. 205). It is generally used to imply insignificance, peripherality or even invisibility. The “affective imprint” of this sense of marginalisation is a prevalent motif in her storying. She recounts her experience of transitioning to the mainstream secondary school she briefly attended before moving to the specialist VI setting:

~i~ Poem 5: Cassie’s ~i~ poem entitled “Should ~i~ be here?”

We kept panicking. We didn't know where the tutor rooms were. We always got lost. We were like, where do we go? Should ~i~ be here?

There is a clear friction between Cassie’s perceptions of herself as insider and outsider in school. She tentatively orients herself within the social collective experience with the repeated use of the plural pronoun ‘we’ – “*we kept panicking... we didn’t know... we always got lost*” – but betrays an unstable sense of orientation in relation to her subjectivity with her return to the first person to ask: “*should ~i~ be here?*” While she can recognise the struggle with orientation is not unique to her, she does not question whether “we” or “they” should “*be here*”, but only “*~i~*”. The outcome of these competing affective flows means that Cassie’s sense of identity is in flux. Initially in the intraview conversation, she dismisses the impact of her VI (“*I guess it’s not a big part of my identity*”). Later, she seems to claim it, perhaps indicative of the affective impact of being around visually impaired peers in her specialist school in normalising difference, whether she realises this or not:

I mean, the fact is, I do have to access things differently. I have to do things in different ways. And if I say I'm not disabled, then that kind of puts less emphasis on that, it minimises it. I think it undermines me

because, like, [my VI] is part of what makes me, me, if that makes sense? (Cassie, intraview 1, 2.9.21)

What is clear is that Cassie is trying to orient her subjectivity in relation to wider concepts of belonging. The encounter with the grammar school, coming so soon after a largely positive time in primary school has likely proven to be a “profound disorientation” (Stewart, 2007, p. 2) in this process. In dismissing the school in Poem 3⁴³, she is trying to re-orient herself to navigate these ““forms of power and meaning... [which] gather themselves into what we think of as stories and selves” (Stewart, 2007, p. 6). She is also having to engage with narratives of power-as-*potestas* beyond her years as she demonstrates her understanding of macro-level systems (e.g. local authority SEND funding model) that she is exposed to due to have having the label of disability. Her emphasis of her young age – *“I was 11... You know, that’s a big decision to make when you’re 11”* – is redolent of the dichotomy she faces. She is being offered specialist support, but it is contingent on her making the decision to move away from her family. The apparent choice and autonomy she is being offered, is dependent upon her accepting her disabled identity, thereby potentially pigeonholing her on a particular educational track (Smythe, 2025). It is little wonder, then, being faced with such decisions might prove disorientating to Cassie’s navigation of her educational encounters.

7.2.2.iii How does Cassie encounter education?

Cassie encounters suggest that she is able to apply critical thinking to her wayfinding of physical spaces, an important outcome of O&M training (Wall, 2019, p. 353). However, navigating the liminal spaces of education is proving more challenging as the resonance of this experience of discrimination “lingers... [sedimenting] the layering of immanent experience” (Stewart, 2007, p. 6). Cassie is at the threshold of transitioning between physical school settings *and* is traversing the new learning environment – i.e. the “social, psychological or conceptual setting rather than the physical learning space” (Kokko and Hirsto, 2021, p. 72) – *and* is navigating the difficult terrain between understandings of disability and ability. Cassie’s storying suggests that orientation is as much “much concerned with our own embodiment and meaning-making of socio-cultural circumnavigation” (Whitburn and Goodley, 2019, p. 424) as it is about finding our location in a physical

⁴³ Poem 3 can be found on pp. 208-210 of this Chapter.

environment. As such, if O&M specialists are focusing on the latter, then it is imperative for VI educational pedagogies to embed a focus on the former.

Borderlands scholarship (Anzaldúa, 1987) may inform VI pedagogy here. Originating in the physical border landscape between the USA and Mexico, the notion of the 'Borderlands' is synonymous with the concept of being positioned on the edges, or margins, of communities and society. However, Anzaldúa (1987) explains that far from being a place of subjugation, the Borderlands can represent a symbolic space, wherein the "space between... individuals shrinks with intimacy" (p. 19). These third spaces of possibility (Ayala, 2009, p. 71) can be "a site of creativity and power... a site of resistance" (hooks, 1990, p. 152), invoked through connection and relationships. Ayala (2009) draws upon Soja's (1996) notion of 'Thirdspace', a conceptualisation of both real and imaginary spaces in which:

[E]verything comes together... subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history. (Soja, 1996, p. 57).

In this sense, the margins can be considered a Thirdspace. A liminal space, which can be troublesome, but also transformative, frequently oscillating between both (Land, Rattray and Vivian, 2014, p. 201). While Cassie currently finds occupying these margins of insider-outside, disabled-non-disabled troublesome, she may in time find them generative if she is supported to navigate such Borderlands. As such, VICYP must be supported to develop understanding and skills in how to dis-orient themselves and move through the "intersecting terrain of physical, digital, relational and structural spaces" (Whitburn and Riffo-Salgado, 2024, p. 1129) that they encounter in their educational experiences.

Just as Ahmed (2006, p. 2) explains that queer phenomenology enjoys not being "proper", so this Dis-Human diffraction of orientation takes away the onus of habilitation to be oriented towards its etymological roots of encouraging being proper, having to fit with normative expectations – or, as Ahmed (2006, p. 85) puts it, relying on maintenance of the status quo as a "social requirement for intelligible subjectivity". As such, Cassie and other VICYP need opportunities to encounter orientation and dis-orientation during their education. They need to be supported to wayfind (i.e. move from point to point in the physical environment safely and

effectively), *and* also in *wayfaring* (Ingold, 2007; 2011), i.e. exploring entangled and enmeshed social paths (Symonds, 2017).

7.2.3 Thierry's storytelling

Thierry was coming towards the end of his time at a specialist vision impairment school at the time he participated in the intraviews. He had joined the school in Key Stage 3 after having spent his primary school in a mainstream setting and transitioning to a mainstream secondary school with a VI integrated resource. He had made a three-hour daily round trip to attend this school, which he felt was negatively impacting his wellbeing as it restricted his ability to participate in social, sport and leisure opportunities both in and out of school. A key thread interwoven throughout Thierry's intraviews was his love of sport, particularly football.

UNESCO's "Quality Physical Education (QPE) Guidelines for Policy Makers" (2015) provides a framework for developing and implementing effective physical education policies in schools. The guidelines emphasise the importance of physical education (PE) as a core part of the school curriculum, promoting inclusivity, innovation, and cross-sectoral collaboration. PE is legislated as a right for children with SEND in the Children and Families Act (2014) and SEND Code of Practice (2015) as part of their access to a full educational experience. QTVIs are expected to differentiate the physical and social environments to promote participation for VICYP in lessons (DfE, 2023, MQVI Standard 6) and differentiation is the focus of professional standard 5 for teachers in England, require teachers to "know when and how to differentiate appropriately, using approaches which enable pupils to be taught effectively" (DfE, 2021, p. 11). Despite this, Thierry's encounters with PE and sport and attendant enactments of differentiation and support from teachers throughout his educational journey had proved a double-edged sword (Ktenidis, 2024, p. 1).

7.2.3.i Social, Sports, and Leisure:

Flynn et al. (2024, p. 1) explain that "it is well established that... physical activity has a range of physical and mental health benefits. For people who are blind and vision impaired... there may be additional benefits in terms of social inclusion and the prevention of sight deterioration". As such, facilitating opportunities to access sport and activity is a clear outcome of VI education, and a key area of learning in the CFVI (Area 10 – Social, Sports and Leisure). Furthermore, not only do the Department for Education (2025, para. 11) recognise a "positive two-way

relationship between good physical health and good mental wellbeing, and the benefits to mental wellbeing of physical exercise and time spent outdoors”, but the MQVI professional standard 4S4 states that QTVIs need to “plan, deliver or advise on interventions that meet the physical, cognitive, emotional and social development needs of CYPVI” (DfE, 2023, p. 22). However, a recent report into engagement with sports for VICYP found that 91% of VICYP surveyed spent their free time engaging in sedentary activities (British Blind Sport, 2023, p. 1). This might help to explain the findings of Augestad and Jiang’s (2015) literature review in physical activity levels in VICYP:

In general, the findings revealed lower levels of participation in physical activity, poorer physical fitness, and higher prevalence of overweight and obesity among children with visual impairments compared to children with no reported visual impairments... [As such] young adults with visual impairment may need more physical activity to become fitter. (p. 167)

British Blind Sport (2023, p. 1) found that PE lessons were a critical source of physical activity for VICYP, with 48 out of 61 participants reporting that PE lessons were the activity where they undertook most of their physical activity. With the launch of the Inclusion 2028 initiative by the UK government designed to tackle systemic barriers to participation in school sport, plugging-in this storying of Thierry’s encounters with PE and sport at school to the wider VI educational research assemblage could offer important insights as to how to include VICYP more effectively in physical activity.

The structuring of Thierry’s storying borrows from the findings of Haegele et al.’s (2023) exploration of visually impaired students’ views on activity modifications in physical education. While students reported some effective practice, often modifications were perceived as band aids “over flawed activities and curriculum” (Haegele et al., 2023, p. 530). Furthermore, these poorly conceived and enacted modifications often ‘spotlighted’ VICYP, even if intended to ‘overcome’ difference, instead highlighted it, causing feelings of discomfort. As such, in the first part of the storying, Thierry’s encounters are presented under the heading *Band Aids and Spotlights*. Haegele et al. (2023) also found that where modifications were perceived as successful, they were understood as enactments of caring for the needs and desires of VICYP. Interpreting the actions of teachers as stemming from a place of care was found to “influence feelings of acceptance and belonging”

(Haegele et al., 2023, p. 528). As such, the heading *Care and Connection* is also used to structure storying of Thierry's encounters with education.

7.2.3.ii Band Aids and Spotlights: “It was literally a glorified walk⁴⁴”

~i~ Poem 6: Thierry's ~i~ poem entitled “It was literally a glorified walk”

~i~ hated the fact
that PE was
basically non-
existent.

~i~ mean, we did
do PE, it was
called PE on the
timetable, but it
was basically
walking around the
hall.

~i~'m not
exaggerating.

~i~ think they
basically want to
focus on weight
loss

We just
went for
a walk
for a
couple of

⁴⁴ The data used to create Thierry's ~i~ poems in this chapter is taken from his first intraview dated 13.9.2021.

hours a
week.

~i~ mean
sometimes it was
with, with a football
or basketball but,

You know, that
was essentially
what it was, it
was literally a
glorified walk.
Yeah, wasn't
great.

~i~ used to find it
quite frustrating.

You're
quite
sporty
person

You're
into PE
and
things like
that.

You don't
get to do
it just
because

They don't
know what

	to do with you
	They shove you to one side because you're blind.
~i~ mean it's still hard not being able to play the same way that other people play, but to not be able to play at all?	
~i~ think that's proper wrong.	

Thierry encounters PE through “restrictions in participation and removal to segregated activities” (Tanure Alves et al., 2020, p. 1130). In this lack of differentiation of PE activities, Thierry is encountering “ontologies of normality and difference that create hierarchies of value for diverse bodies” (Fullagar, 2017, p. 249). He is encountering this enactment of structural ableism as violent, using the verb “*shoved*” to describe the sidelining of himself and his visually impaired peers away from access to PE and sport as encountered by their sighted peers, which he perceives as happening “*because you’re blind*”. The affective economies engendered by these experiences are negative, with Thierry describing their emotional manifestations as “*frustrating*” and that he “*hated*” the lessons. This emotion bleeds into his self-perception of his VI, positioning it as an othering force that precludes his access to the collective sense ‘sameness’ that he perceives his

sighted peers enjoy in relation to sport (and perhaps other social activities) – *“it’s still hard not being able to play the same way that other people play”*.

This suggests the need for a “process of differentiation where becoming different is not understood in terms of its opposition to sameness” (Davies, 2014 p. 80). Thierry and his visually impaired peers are positioned as different from their sighted peers, but homogeneous within their own group. Thierry explains that the differentiated objective of PE for the VICYP was focused on weight loss, this did not align with his own desire for sport as connection. This suggests that the spotlighting engendered through processes of differentiation must be diffracted back towards modifications. Rather than making VICYP feel singled out, they should be encouraged to ‘spotlight’ the tacit and overt acts of bias (Riley, 2013, p. 7) that cause them to this way.

A way to achieve this could be to diffract current understandings of differentiation through Deleuzian (1968) understanding of the concept. In his seminal 1968 work *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze distinguishes between differentiation and differenciation. Differentiation (spelled with a ‘t’, highlighted) – “differentiation is the process by which a problem becomes completely determined. Differenciation is the process by which solutions are constituted” (Hughes, 2009, p. 142). If we position inclusion in PE as our ‘problem’, then we can understand that current modes of differentiation in the forms of modified activities are *“basically nonexistent”*, mainly because the underpinning ideas are *“wrong”*, thereby preventing meaningful differenciation. Thierry attributes this to a lack of specialist pedagogic understanding, stating that the teachers *“don’t know what to do with you”*. It is possible that the teachers are taking a performative route to inclusion, sticking a band aid over difference, via a process of differentiation that adopts:

‘common-sense’ recommendations... allowing them to feel as though they are “including” disabled students. Regardless of this positive intention, it is possible that such strategies may do more harm than good by highlighting the incapability of the body, reproducing able-bodiedness, and invalidating the abilities of disabled youth in physical education. (Maher and Haegele, 2022, p. 82)

If this is the case, it intimates that Thierry’s encounters with current ideas around differentiation of PE in the pedagogical sense are low quality in a Deleuzian sense. Hughes (2009, p. 145) explains that for Deleuze, ideas “function as rules for the production of objects”. As such, if the quality of the idea changes, the object also changes or reaches a limit. Hence, the current understanding of differentiation that

underpins the teaching and learning that Thierry experiences in PE lessons limits his inclusion.

7.2.3.iii Care and connection: “We think you have potential”

~i~ Poem 7: Thierry’s ~i~ poem entitled “We think you have potential”

~i~ got into VI
football through
basically an
accident.

~i~ came to my
new school

~i~ was basically
obsessed about
football.

~i~ went on and on
about it to my
teachers

They were sick of talking
about it to me by the end of it!

They listened, though.

They organised for me to go
to a session to play VI
football.

They had someone come in
from the FA to, like, teach us
the sort of fundamental basics
of the game.

They also try to find new
players.

They sent an email, going, “oh
by the way - that football thing
last year?

We remember
you,

We liked you,

We think you
have potential,

We want you
to come and
train”.

~i~ spent of the day
floating up here.
Brilliant.

~i~ didn't ever
really expect
something like that
to happen.

The poem above demonstrates that the process of differentiation *can* occur in PE for VICYP. Thierry recounts his journey toward participation in blind football and credits his teachers for their role in this – “*they listened, though. They organised for me to go to a session at another specialist school to play VI football. They had someone come in from the FA to, like, teach us the sort of fundamental basics of the game*”. This encounter is resonant of the findings of Goodwin et al.’s (2011) study into VICYP’s experiences at a sports camp found that social interactions with coaches and staff were key enablers for enjoyment of physical activity for VICYP,

valuing those that demonstrated respect for individual preferences and recognition of existing skills (pp. 50-51).

Thierry's teachers have engaged in the "art of noticing and attentiveness to other ways of being with other beings" (Bozalek and Fullagar, 2021, p. 95). In noticing his interest in football and taking affirmative action to introduce him to blind football, they have enacted a political ethic of care (Tronto, 1993). These enactments of care are choreographic (Gibson et al., 2025) as they "[cleave to] an occasion, activating its relational potential" (Manning, 2016, p. 126). The connections have flowed through and from Thierry's relational assemblage with his teachers have choreographed "new capacities to do, think, create" (Gibson et al., 2025, p. 1). Thierry's ability to access sport differently in turn reframes his own difference (disability) as potential, which in turn allows him to access normative (human) ideals of participation in sport as he is scouted by the England Blind Football development camp, positioning him as Dis-Human. This allows Thierry to bring the spotlight back to his disabled body as he is no longer shying from the narratives of 'not-enough' perpetuated by his experiences in PE storied in the first ~i~ poem.

7.2.3.iv How does Thierry encounter education?

Given the emergent understandings from the Poem 7⁴⁵ of the importance of care and connection in facilitating inclusion and belonging for VICYP, Bozalek et al.'s political ethics of care framework (2014) is useful for evaluating how Thierry encounters education. Drawing on Tronto's (1993, p. 103) expansive understanding of care as an entangled multi-entity activity, the framework advocates for a consideration of relationality and connection in teaching and learning via attentiveness, responsibility, competence, responsiveness and trust (Bozalek et al., 2014, p. 450). Thierry's encounters will now be storied through these elements.

Attentiveness is interwoven throughout both ~i~ poems in Thierry's storying, both enacted as "the ongoing practice of being open and alive to each meeting" (Barad, 2007, p. x) by the teachers who listen to him in the second ~i~ poem, and as a negative, paranoid form of attention in the first. Thierry's PE teachers' lack of attentiveness to the ethical orientations behind and practical outcomes of differentiation heighten Thierry's attention to a negative self-concept of disability as

⁴⁵ Poem 7 can be found on pp. 221-222 of this chapter.

“not the same”, that is placed in opposition to an understanding of sameness as the norm. However, these narratives can be shifted towards a reparative attentiveness when difference is affirmed in the second poem when Thierry accesses and succeeds in playing VI football. This stems from developing a different understanding of his corporeal *competence* that allows Thierry to gain pride in his achievements in a sporting arena outside of the mainstream.

However, he still measures competence by mainstream standards – being called up to the development camp, rather than focusing on other outcomes such as enjoyment, or increased self-confidence. This highlights the importance of teachers being *responsive* to dominant narratives in education that might reify dominant tropes of ableism. The second poem, thanks to pedagogical orientations to and enactments of care and connection, demonstrate how through the development of interpersonal *trust*, the processes of teaching and learning became “fluid, interconnected, and mutually (in)forming” (Kuby et al., 2016, p.140). The teachers demonstrated trust in Thierry’s abilities, which in turn allowed Thierry to develop intrapersonal trust – beginning to see himself in a positive light (Govier, 1993, pp. 105-106). This demonstrates that teachers have a *responsibility* to underpin their pedagogic encounters with care, which will allow them to become more response-able (Haraway, 2016), enacting in our practice an “open and honest curiosity that brings one into transformative, responsive relationships” (Baan Hofman, 2023, p. 247).

Part 3: What are the offerings of the storyings of individual assemblages in this chapter to understanding the VI education assemblage as a whole?

This empirical intraview data and its analysis demonstrated that the VICYP who participated encounter education in myriad interconnected ways. The storyings composed offer nuanced movements “between the Dis and the Human to demonstrate their co-dependence” (Liddiard et al., 2019b, p. 160). As such, the offerings of the empirical findings presented in this chapter for better understanding the wider VI education assemblage can be summarised using Goodley and Runswick-Cole’s list of dis/human concepts (2016). In this list, concepts are explained through the dis/ability complex and their considerations of how they uphold both the human and disability is emphasised by highlighted by italicising one side of the dis/human binary represented by the forward slash in the word. Goodley and Runswick-Cole (2016) demonstrate this approach with the following example:

Dis/ability usefully disarms, disrupts and disturbs normative, taken-for-granted, deeply societally ingrained assumptions about what it means to be human and what it means to be able (*dis*/human). At the same time, however, we are mindful of keeping hold of the human: not wanting to abandon it (dis/*human*). (p. 6)

Adopting this analytical presentation then, this chapter has shown that some of the ways that VICYP encounter education can be understood as:

7.3.1 Dis/empowerment:

Megan’s encounters education in the space between power-as-*potentia* and power-as-*potestas*. She is aware of her access needs and the *potentia* they offer her, as she explains that by having been taught different means of access to learning, she able to make decisions about how best to approach her learning, thereby empowering her in the sense of developing autonomy and self-advocacy skills that will serve her productivity (dis/*empowerment*). However, she has also encountered power-as-*potestas* in the form of her teacher failing to provide accessible resources. This has disempowered Megan, as she is not only unable to access the learning but is also subject to social objectification. However, Megan is also becoming more

“*frustrated*” at these experiences of othering, and her anger expressed suggests that she is developing awareness of the need to resist these tropes in the classroom and beyond (*dis/empowerment*).

7.3.2 *Dis/orientation:*

Cassie encounters education as a dis-orienting force. She has been supported to navigate the physical environment, moving from A to B, allowing her to access the same spatial learning environment as her peers (*dis/orientation*). However, she has also had difference emphasised to her by both macro-level agents (e.g. her encounters with the school placement process) and at a micropolitical social level – feeling different alongside her peers in her specialist VI setting. However, she begins to re-orient this narrative as she experiences a collective sense of difference in her new specialist VI setting, beginning to understand that difference can be claimed as an important aspect of subjectivity: “[*my VI*] is part of what makes me, me” (*dis/orientation*).

7.3.3 *Dis/connection:*

Care and connection are crucial to Thierry’s educational encounters. He has experienced a perceived absence of care in poorly conceived and delivered PE activities that have positioned him as other and outsider. He has conversely also encountered the generative power of care in pedagogic moments in being supported by his teachers to access VI football. In the capacities of his disabled body being validated by the England blind football coaches’ perceptions of his emerging talent – “*We remember you. We liked you. We think you have potential*” – Thierry has experienced *dis/connection* deficit narratives experienced in his PE lesson, instead allowing understandings to emerge of himself as capable to meet human (normative) markers of success and achievement in sport (*dis/connection*).

In outlining these encounters, this chapter has afforded different perspectives on existing prevalent themes and resources in VI education, particularly in terms of understandings of the CFVI and its applications. The creation of the CFVI involved a

delphi process methodology of member checking with stakeholders from the VI education sector that the areas of learning defined were representative of content of the additional curriculum (Hewett et al., 2024). However, this process involved only 5 VICYP in the early stages of the research and did not include eliciting personal experiences of these areas of learning. As such, the storyings in this chapter add real-life exemplifications of the importance of certain aspects of the additional curriculum, thereby providing further evidence of the application of the CFVI within the VI education sector. Finally, the storyings exemplified the impact (both affective and practical) of pedagogic encounters enacted in VI education. This outcome will be further discussed in Chapter 9.

Conflux

The diffractive Dis-Human voice analytic technique outlined in Chapter 6 and applied in this chapter has produced difference by using poetic formats in “breaking open the data (and the categories inherent in coding) by decentering and destabilizing... the subject, interpretation, categorical similarity, and so on” (Mazzei, 2014, p. 743). In doing so it has curated storyings of a variety of participant encounters with education. Due to the spatial confines of this thesis, the storyings of three participants were necessarily ‘*zoomed in*’ on, and agential cuts made through the data to temporarily stabilise these storyings. These cuts were related to the CFVI, in particular Areas 5 (habilitation: orientation and mobility), 7 (accessing information) and 10 (sports, social and leisure) to make them more legible to practitioners engaging with them. Had these agential cuts been different, the other areas of the CFVI or other participant storyings might have been selected. However, these were the examples whose affective flows instigated moments that glowed (Maclure, 2013) during the analytical process.

Based on these storyings (and those of other participants not featured due to length restrictions), this chapter has emphasised the importance of paying careful and care-full (Bozalek et al., 2014) attention to the affective economies generated through educational encounters. By doing so, we can diffract and dis-orient current understandings of how VICYP experience education, which often reflect “proxy views rather than their own views about their lives” (ONS, 2022, p. 3). Following Davies (2014, p. 82), through the Dis-Human storying the educational encounters of and with VICYP, this chapter has attempted to show “their power to open up new ways of thinking and of intra-acting with children, new ways of valuing children and of learning with them how to engage in ethical practice, which asks in each moment what is being made to matter, and with what effect”. The next chapter extends this thinking on “what is being made to matter”.

Chapter 8 now plugs these individual educational assemblages into wider assemblages to consider VICYP’s experiences beyond education. The analysis identifies wider “trans-assemblage characteristics” (Little, 2016, para.10) that elucidate what matters to VICYP, displaying the analysis in assemblage diagrams (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004; Bansel and Davies, 2014; Buchanan, 2015) that demonstrate the different understandings that a Dis-Human exploration disabled children’s lives can elicit.

Chapter 8: Conversational cartography

Response to research question 2

Introduction:

In this chapter, I revisit intraview voice data to activate the second part of Fox and Alldred's (2021, p. 4) diffractive methodology, reading 'texts' together. I read-write-think with the empirical data, bringing it into conversation with theory to respond to **RQ2**:

RQ2: What different understandings emerge from a Dis-Human exploration about visually impaired children's lives and experiences?

The theme of difference is interwoven throughout this thesis, but Chapter 5's Dis-Human consideration of participation demonstrated the importance of interrogating taken-for-granted terms. Therefore, a Dis-Human research approach requires being attentive to what difference is produced, and therefore, to answer **RQ2**, what 'different' means in terms of the understandings emerged through my entangling of data and theory.

I began to consider 'different understandings' to mean ensuring a focus on what *matters* to the young people themselves rather than trying to simply establish what *works* for the practitioner and researcher⁴⁶. In engaging with affective flows of the intraviews through emergent 'listening' and reading-writing-thinking-with theory, we automatically engage with "the ways things are made to matter [by exploring] the diffraction of forces that territorialize, and re-territorialize through endless repetitions of the already known, and the emergent possibilities of de-territorialization" (Davies, 2014, p. 74), or creating different knowledge-ing. Focusing on what *matters* is not just a clear outcome of Dis-Human research processes but also addresses the paucity of research that focuses on what is important to VICYP.

Davies (2014) explains: "what comes to matter... is always emergent in the movement in-between intra-active becomings" (p. 74). This resulted in the emergence of a "*becoming-question*" (Jackson and Mazzei, 2023, p. viii, emphasis in original, abbreviated here to **BQ**) that (dis-)oriented the response to **RQ2**. Jackson and Mazzei (2023) explain this concept:

Becoming-questions... emerge in the middle of things: they glimmer and glow to unsettle and reconfigure thought. Becoming-questions make

⁴⁶ Although what *matters* and what *works* are not mutually exclusive terms in education, rather they can be co-constitutive.

room for difference; they are becomings because they express the relations within the doings of plugging in [to theory]. These are not questions that guide inquiry. Quite the opposite: becoming-questions are arrested temporarily and function to *reorient* thinking. And because they emerge in the threshold of doings, they are articulated *retroactively*, in/as an afterward... Becoming-questions are movement: they flow in between all the doings of inquiry to produce experimentation and change. Rather than starting and steering inquiry, they *are inside* thought that actualises, as it is happening. (p. 7)

BQ, therefore, emerge through the flow between reading, writing and thinking (Jackson and Mazzei, 2023, p. 7) and the plugging-in to different assemblages. This organic outcome exemplifies the “lively relationalities of becoming” (Barad 2007, p. 393) together of both the young people and myself in this thesis, and the BQ that emerged during this process was:

BQ1: What matters to a cohort of visually impaired children?

Attending to *what matters* aligns with Strom and Martin's (2022, p. 2) suggestion that all assemblages are “a mixture of difference, and those different elements come into composition to produce something new ... the outcome is always a hybrid production of the workings in a multiplicity”. While this chapter has aimed to construct emerging understandings of the experiences of VICYP, it recognises that they cannot be separated from the wider assemblage of this thesis, nor their multiplicities and interconnections with/in other assemblages (not least my own). As such, as well as reading theory and data transcripts “intensively to allow difference to come through” (Jackson and Mazzei, 2023, p. 7), the data became (involuntarily⁴⁷) plugged into other encounters, such as “social, discursive, cultural, psychological, proximal, historical, affective, material elements” (Strom and Martin, 2022, p. 2).

The objective of **RQ2** to elicit ‘*different understandings*’ is therefore organised around mapping emerging understandings of what Little (2016, para. 10) calls “trans-assemblage characteristics”, or the ability of certain social dynamics to generate continuity or crisis across different assemblages, which in turn answers **BQ1**. These are presented as assemblage ‘diagrams’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004,

⁴⁷ By ‘involuntarily’, I mean not against my will but against any predetermined desire, or as Colebrook (2002, p. 38) asserts: “beyond the autonomy of choice”.

pp. 97-98) – a concept and activation outlined in Chapter 6, Part 3, but an overview of content and structure is offered in Part 1 of this chapter. Parts 2 to 4 of the chapter identify several trans-assemblage characteristics that emerged through the data analysis to illustrate what matters to VICYP – besideness, belonging being becoming-with. Part 5 then summarises these assemblage ‘diagrams’ to respond to **RQ2** and **BQ1**. This is followed by the Conflux.

Part 1: Analysing the assemblage

8.1.1 Structure of the assemblage ‘diagrams’

I introduced the concept of assemblage ‘diagrams’ in Chapter 6 (part 6.3.6). Deleuze and Guattari (2004) conceptualise ‘diagrams’ not as static representations but as dynamic mappings of forces, relations, and transformations. A ‘diagram’, in their philosophy, is a tool for tracing how material and expressive elements (content and expression) interact within an assemblage. It captures the processes of territorialisation (stabilisation) and deterritorialisation (disruption), showing how assemblages evolve through ‘becoming’. Rather than illustrating fixed structures, ‘diagrams’ are written accounts that reveal the potential for change, movement, and the emergence of new meanings, making them an appropriate technique for exploring complex, lived realities like those of VICYP.

The ‘diagrams’ begin with an overview of the theory that “sparked with/in the encounter of texts” (Jackson and Mazzei, 2023, p. 8). Following this, using Bansel and Davies’ (2014, pp. 43-44) analytical interpretation of Deleuze and Guattari’s (2004) concept of ‘diagram’ of the assemblage, a brief written encapsulation of the **content** and **expression** of each assemblage ‘diagram’ is offered to emphasise what matters to VICYP, reading-writing-thinking-with storyings ‘through’ other texts (e.g. theories), personal experiences (e.g. other participant storyings, professional experiences) and non-human agents (Fox and Alldred, 2021). This is followed by a consideration of examples of **territorialisation** and **deterritorialisation** (processes of stabilisation and change) flowing through the intraviews and analysis. Each assemblage ‘diagram’ ends with a final section identifying the **reterritorialisations** (new meanings/ideas that have emerged) to respond to **BQ1** by demonstrating how VI education pedagogies can be informed by understanding *what matters* to VICYP beyond education.

Part 2: Assemblage ‘diagram’: BESIDENESS

8.2.1 Reading-writing-thinking-with “besideness”

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, a foundational figure in queer theory, created the concept of “*besideness*” to explore the complexities of identity, relationships, and knowledge (2003). For Sedgwick, besideness is not just a spatial concept but also an affective one, shaping how we perceive and interact with the world and with each other. Besideness “comprises a wide range of desiring, identifying, representing, repelling, paralleling, differentiating, rivaling, leaning, twisting, mimicking, withdrawing, attracting, aggressing, warping, and other relations” (Sedgwick, 2003, p. 8). As Morris (2004, p. 264) explains, “the world of affect... is the world of the beside”. Sedgwick’s concept moves beyond rigid binary thinking, suggesting that multiple forms of agency, perspectives and identities can coexist, not necessarily in opposition, but alongside each other, through recognising difference.

Returning to Sedgwick’s ideas of paranoid and reparative reading, first introduced in Chapter 4 (part 4.3.3), what is clear throughout the storyings of VICYP presented in this thesis is that they are constantly ‘reading’ their positionality and subjectivity in relation to besideness. The desire to be proximal to others is an “affective social force, the glue” (Sedgwick, 2003, p. 128), but it can also be a hierarchical tool to reify normative expectations. Besideness, however, can be reparative, undermining hierarchy, as it wishes to occupy neither “a position of superior vantage, looking down... nor [one] of inferior vantage, looking up...” (Koestenbaum, 2004, p. 200). Besideness can therefore simultaneously invoke becomings in states of conflict and conciliation and belonging and unbelonging (Gregg and Seigworth, 2010, p. 2).

Sedgwick’s notion of “beside-ness” aligns well with assemblage theory, as it can support Bennett’s (2010) understanding of agency within assemblages. Rather than being straightforward or causally determined, agency is shaped through dynamics (both spatial and relational), encompassing “the fuller range of the nonhuman powers circulating around and within human bodies” (Bennett, 2010, p. ix). It emerges through performative acts and spatial expressions, constructing being through interaction and proximity. In this sense, an assemblage represents a dynamic form of beside-ness enacted through continuous performance. While human actors often assume central roles in these enactments, Bennett’s (2010)

concept of distributive agency offers a more nuanced and expansive framework (Smith, 2022, p. 6). As such, besiderness also recognises the agency of non-human agents in our assemblages.

8.2.2 Content:

In this assemblage ‘diagram’, we begin by examining materiality as an embodiment of besiderness. There is a lack of recognition that non-human material items are also “vital players in the world” (Bennett, 2004, p. 349) in participant Rebecca’s assemblage. She mentions, briefly, some non-human objects in recounting her experiences at school, referring to “*special markers to show the rooms and the locations*” and explains that she was taught to use a long cane. She affords these objects acknowledgement and respect (Bennett, 2004) in linking them to her ability to “*get around that school so easy*”, but almost immediately states that “*I never use it [the cane] at home if I can help it, no*”, hinting at the complexity of Rebecca’s interactions with the cane, which might embody a sense of both attraction and repulsion (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p. 99). The cane helps Rebecca to access the spatial environment, but she feels that it inhibits her socially.

Rebecca offers another example. Recounting a previous visit to a youth club, she uses the metaphor of an “island” to describe how she was forced to remain in a side room while the other young people participated in sports activities that were deemed ‘unsuitable’ for Rebecca to access:

They said I couldn’t play because of health and safety. I didn’t bring my cane because I was usually with my sister so she would guide me. But she wanted to play, so they said I had to stay in this room because they wouldn’t let me go outside without my cane. I was just sitting there because I hadn’t brought my audiobook or anything. It became like, sort of like, like, a bit of an island in that, in that room. You almost felt, like, a bit isolated. (Rebecca, intraview 2, 29.11.2021)

This could exemplify Riley’s “Island of Other” (2013, p. 1), where Rebecca is made to feel that her “diversity is literally on display... [preventing her from achieving her] desire to assimilate” (Riley, 2013, p. 7). However, the absence of the cane, which Rebecca usually attributes to displaying her diversity, rather than its presence is what prevents her assimilation in this activity.

This insider/outsider dichotomy is also implied by participant Rihanna in reflecting on her besideness with material objects:

When I was younger, I still, um, had quite a bit of sight, so I've always preferred to like, read or write to using braille. But once that became impossible, I had to move over to braille, and also a laptop. I'm quite into politics and activism and things and my school put me forward for this Youth Council in [my local area]. I got there and we all had these single desks in the meeting room, but I had all this equipment with me, plus my agenda in braille. Stuff was spilling all over the desk and this woman tried to help me. She moved me so I could have more room, but I was plonked at the front, stuck on my own on this massive old desk. Everyone could see me, but nobody could come over and talk. I was like some sort of weird ghost! (Rihanna, intraview 2, 20.10.2021)

This performance of inclusion resulted in Rihanna's presence being minimised in the meeting room. She is positioned simultaneously as standing out and sidelined, both physically and metaphorically. She reflects on the minor gesture (Manning, 2016) enacted by the adult woman in the room, which took the form of a mundane practicality (Liddiard et al., 2019a, p. 11), i.e. moving her seating position, and the affective economy it engendered:

I think the, what's the word - the intention was good, but I think perhaps the impact was not so good... It makes you realise every day there's a new thing. You realise, oh another thing I can't do. (Rihanna, intraview 2, 20.10.2021)

Rihanna's sense of besideness with the laptop and braille, and Rebecca's lack thereof with the cane, may have emphasised dissonance surrounding difference both participants, something that Corbett (1996, p. 4) suggests provokes fear and discomfort, which may have caused "uncomfortable feelings we are not sure how to address". This perceived feeling of isolation engendered by these incidents may undermines a sense of self in the participants, to the point in Rihanna's case, where she is reduced to a "*ghost*". Corbett (1996, p. 4) goes onto explain that in order to combat such feelings people might "pretend they are not there" or wish others to perceive this as the case. This positions VICYP as spectral (Derrida, 1994) in their simultaneous desire for "non-presence and presence" (Wijaya, 2012, p. 232) in certain social situations, as well as denoting the perception of them at this hyphen by other people.

8.2.3 Expression:

Rebecca recalls: “*You felt almost, like, a bit isolated*”. She expresses this sentiment via using the second-person pronoun “*you*”, perhaps denoting the separation of her identities that she is yet to bridge. Rebecca may still “uncomfortable” about her orientation as a disabled person, and not only be suppressing her feelings, but her recognition of her need to access the non-human agents that support her in her educational assemblage in her wider assemblages. Similarly, Rihanna’s use of the adjective “*weird*” is ostensibly applied to describe the uncomfortable situation she found herself in due to her besideness with her assistive devices and resources. However, she has turned this sentiment inwards. In doing so, she appears to have adopted the trope identified by Garland-Thomson (1997, p. 12) as disability as deviant versus the “normate” whose bodily conventions produce social and cultural capital. She has self-stigmatised by applying a negative label and its accompanying stereotypes to herself (Watson and Larson, 2006, p. 235) on account of her entanglement with assistive devices. In doing so, she essentialises her subjectivity by accepting the “normate’s frequent assumption that a disability cancels out other qualities, reducing the complex person to a single attribute” (Garland-Thomson, 1997, p. 12).

Yet conversely, according to Goodley et al. (2021), the participants’ seemingly “mundane, ordinary and daily engagements with different forms of specialist and mainstream technologies” (p. 41) position them at the forefront of posthuman futures, a more hybridised understanding of accessibility. However, both Rebecca and Rihanna do not perceive the power-as-*potentia* of their unique skillsets garnered from their besideness with and do not focus for long on how the components of the *Rebecca-cane* assemblage or the *Rihanna-braille-laptop* assemblage interact to “permit... [them] to function well in the world” (Goodley et al., 2021, p. 42). Rather, both participants consider the prohibitive impact of non-human agents in allowing them to negotiate the unspoken landscape of the social world. In Rebecca and Rihanna’s perceptions, the cane, laptop and braille are preventing their ability “to prove [themselves] ‘inclusive material’” (Biklen, 2000, p. 344).

8.2.4 Territorialisation

The participants' assemblages with material objects demonstrates the importance of framing accessibility as a relational process. That is, "as the outcome of ongoing everyday interactions taking place between disabled and non-disabled users encountering materialities and accessibility-oriented protocols" (Muñoz, 2023, p. 200). Rebecca is made aware of the material objects (the objects of reference and the long cane) that help her locate and orient herself within and between the landscapes of school and home via the accessibility-oriented protocol of mobility lessons. However, her learning and instruction are structured within other people's understanding of accessibility priorities. For example, she is taught routes to get between physical locations (e.g. from the bus stop to home) quickly and effectively, which are important to meet her basic needs, but also are dependent upon the power-based parameters set by other agents (human, structural and systemic). Rebecca can move around independently according to the demands set by others, but she is unable to gain access to wider social environments as what matters to her (e.g. travelling with her friends to the town centre) has not been discussed by the adults around her. She expresses that:

I could go with a group of sighted people into town, but I don't feel safe. It only takes one of them to forget me and lead me somewhere... But I feel that people see you differently with your cane and that really severely impacts your mental health. (Rebecca, intraview 2, 29.11.2021)

This positions her besideness with the cane as a "repelling... withdrawing" force (Kosofsky Sedgwick, 2003, p. 8). The reference to her mental health demonstrates the impact of her negative sense of besideness and suggests that she is struggling to manage the co-existence of her disabled and non-disabled identities, each of which is "haunted by its excluded other" (Murriss et al., 2021, p. xx). The narratives of difference that both Rebecca and Rihanna are navigating are becoming a "forceful presence affecting everyday life" (Zembylas et al., 2020, p. 43) – impacting their orientation to their places in the world and constraining their mobility, related to both physical and social navigation. To borrow from Whitburn and Riffo-Salgado (2024, p. 1129), they have been taught to negotiate access to spaces but not belonging in them. As such, it is crucial for QTVIs to be aware of the "Island of Other" in supporting VICYP with their orientation, and to consider carefully, "what does it

mean for somebody to cross its boundaries, in either direction, as an ally?” (Riley, 2013, para. 1).

8.2.5 Deterritorialisation

While Rebecca and Rihanna attach negative significance to their absent presence in the youth club and Youth Council meeting, they are unaware that spectres can “act as disjoining figures, unsettling the stability of the present, and offering potential for emancipation” (Jung and Orr, 2021, p. 314). Derrida's (1994) concept of the spectrality links to his concept of hauntology. Put simply, hauntology relates to the idea that the past, particularly in the form of unfulfilled promises or unresolved issues, continues to exert an influence on the present. It suggests that the present is always haunted by the ghosts of the past, destabilising our sense of being and knowing, which if applied to the concept of a person, means that a person is not a fixed, unified entity, but rather a collection of past experiences, social influences, and unconscious desires that are constantly in motion and reshaping the individual.

As such, hauntology is not necessarily a negative phenomenon. As Derrida (2005, p. 288) explains, “all phenomena of friendship, all things, all beings to be loved, belong to spectrality”. If Rebecca and Rihanna are supported to dis-orient their subjectivity, embracing instead of rejecting the power of the role of the spectre, they can destabilise hegemony in the present, to open up possibilities for change and transformation. This can be achieved if VI pedagogies move to surface “the myths that underlie our values, habits, and institutions, including the ones that miseducate and possibly misshape our children” (Regenspan, 2014, p. 122). Without doing so, the sector could perpetuate a “monopolistic program of paranoid knowing [which] systematically disallows any explicit recourse to reparative motives” (Kosofsky Sedgwick, 2002, p. 144).

8.2.6 Reterritorialisation

Rebecca and Rihanna's storyings demonstrate how VI pedagogies need to support VICYP to become “immersed in a field of active narrative hypothesizing, testing, and reunderstanding of how physical properties act and are acted upon over time”

(Sedgwick, 2003, p.13). This will allow them to begin to 'read' the agency that these objects have in social situations to offer generative (reparative) outcomes, in contrast to their current paranoid 'reading' of the public perception of these assistive devices. This aligns with the ideals professed by Gibson et al.'s (2025) model of mobility, which helps us to mobilise besideness "as a more-than-human enterprise while keeping the human[s] in view" (p. 3). To do so, VI pedagogies should invoke hauntology, highlighting "the continuous unfolding of the past into the future" (Barad 2017, p. 22). This can be captured by Stern's (2012) imbrication of hauntology and pedagogy, creating a hauntagogical approach to education.

As Regenspan (2014, p. xiv) explains, "hauntology, then, refers to teaching which privileges broadened conceptions of knowledge and thinking that make social injustice and the complexity of human life visible". VICYP need to be supported to diffract their experiences along Dis-Human lines to dis-orient "boundaries between conventional categories such as... inside/outside" (Bozalek and Kuby, 2021, p. 49) – to understand and embrace besideness. This will involve an exploration of identities through a lens of complementarity. However, not one not in stemming from quantum physics' concept of mutual exclusion (Bohr, cited in Murriss et al., 2021), but in the standard dictionary definition, of a relationship or situation in which two or more different things improve or emphasise each other's qualities, or of being different, but useful when combined (Cambridge Dictionary Online, n.d.-a).

Rebecca and Rihanna's storyings demonstrate that inclusion matters to VICYP, but that the form inclusion takes must be changing and malleable. VICYP must be given opportunities to express their preferences about access. This is an enactment of access intimacy – "that elusive, hard to describe feeling when someone else "gets" your access needs[.]... Sometimes it can happen with complete strangers, disabled or not, or sometimes it can be built over years" (Mingus, 2011, para. 4). While access intimacy is interdependence in action (Mingus, 2017, para. 3), it can also be an intrapersonal phenomenon, in which disabled people begin to understand that they have the power to diffract binary understandings of insider/outsider that can interact to form their assemblages.

This can be achieved by dis-orienting narratives of agency, power, sameness and difference, which can be achieved by invoking a hauntagogical approach to our VI pedagogical practice, which can support VICYP in their wider assemblages. Recognising our interconnectedness with material agents allows disabled children to navigate off the "Island of Other", while hauntology offers the opportunity to

reclaim difference, and therefore the island, as a generative space of possibility for the Other – an affective space of besideness, where emotions and experiences can be explored and understood in their complexity, acknowledging that multiple perspectives can exist simultaneously.

Part 3: Assemblage ‘diagram’: BELONGING

8.3.1 Reading-writing-thinking-with “belonging”

Halse (2018, p. 5), whilst acknowledging the conceptual complexity of belonging, suggests that it can be understood by attachment to different social collectives or “formed on the basis of shared values, attitudes and cultures, of emotional attachments to specific places, spaces, people, animals and material things, or by participating in specific flows of ideas, cultures and social practices”. Calhoun (2003, pp. 547-548) asserts that one way that such social groupings can be organised is “as mutual interdependence in exchange, ranging from simple, concrete exchanges between individuals to the operation of large macro-level systems”. Such exchanges constitute the assemblages, or worlds, in which we perceive ourselves to exist (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999, p. 101).

Belonging, then, can be seen as an aspirational state. As Bell (1999, p. 3) explains: “one does not simply or ontologically ‘belong’ to the world or to any group within it. Belonging is an achievement... an effect of performance” – but it is ‘awarded’ depended upon normative values and expectations (Yuval-Davies, 2011). This intimates why belonging matters so much to the VICYP who participated in this project. They expressed concern that aspects of their identity precluded their entry to these ‘expected’ categories. For example, perhaps their disability impeded their “performance”, either virtually (perceived) or in an actualised sense (i.e. they had experiential evidence of this), or another facet of their identity (behaviour, style, appearance) impacted their social cachet or self-acceptance.

As we will see, belonging and identity are intertwined in this assemblage ‘diagram’, asserting that “the reality of disability is created through perception” (Olsen and Pilson, 2022, p. 15). Weeks (1990, p. 88) goes so far as to say that “identity is about belonging, about what you have in common with some other people and what differentiates you from others. At its most basic, it gives you a sense of personal location, the stable core to your individuality”. Both identity and belonging can therefore be understood as momentary anchors in social collectivities, but are also unfixed negotiations (Reeves et al., 2022, p. 322) or “interstitial moments in the work of articulation” (Probyn, 1996, p. 5) in understanding our subjectivities.

8.3.2 Content:

In this assemblage 'diagram', we begin with the storying of one of the participants, Lucy, who at the time of the intraviews was 13 years old. At the time of the intraviews, Lucy's storying was redolent of her attempts to construct her sense of identity, especially in relation to social inclusion. Our intraview turned at one point towards a discussion about social media. Lucy mentioned that she had downloaded the popular multimedia messaging app, Snapchat, which enables users to share photos and videos, known as 'Snaps' with each other, as well as chat with other users via sending text and virtual stickers. These Snaps are designed to be temporary, disappearing after a short time (usually a few seconds) or after 24 hours if posted using the app's Story function. Lucy had installed it because her peers were using it, positioning the app as potentially an empowering social resource (Calhoun, 1998, p. 28). However, Snapchat became an example of Lucy's self-perceived failure to belong, as she had not found using the app an enjoyable experience and therefore stopped. She conflated this decision with a failure to adhere to the unwritten rules that govern the "status, influence and/or power" (Halse, 2018, p. 8) within the social location of her age group and kinship groups.

From an educational psychology perspective, Allen et al.'s (2022, pp. 8-9) integrative framework for understanding and developing belonging identified four interrelated components that influence belonging - competencies, opportunities, motivations, and perceptions. Lucy possesses the motivation to belong, having taken the action to download the app, mirroring her peers. Interacting with it offers opportunities for belonging as she can engage in Calhoun's (2003) aforementioned concrete exchanges between individuals via sending and receiving 'Snaps'. It is unclear what Lucy's social competencies are in relation to her social location. "Competencies enable people to ensure that their behaviour is consistent with group social norms, align with cultural values...[.] In turn, social competencies deficits can limit relationship quality, social relations, and social positions" (Allen et al., 2022, p. 8). However, it is clear that she perceives her social competencies relating to 'fitting in' to be lacking. Aligning with Allen et al.'s 2022 findings, this has reduced her motivation to belong, as she explains that she has not downloaded Snapchat after getting a new phone:

I never used to use it anyway. All the popular kids, they were on it. I'm not a very popular kid. I don't dress like the popular kids. I mean, I'm

popular among my, my little friends, I'm popular among the unpopular kids! I'm not, like, one of the very popular kids – they're the ones who everyone knows about, the ones who dress like they're on Love Island and things. (Lucy, intraview 2, 18.9.2021)

Her repeated use of the word “popular” when referring back to herself is always framed in deficit (“*I don't dress like the popular kids*”) and/or hesitancy to definitively identify her social location: “*I mean, I'm popular among my, my little friends*”. Note the contingencies applied to her self-perception of her positionality within the social hierarchy – “*I'm not a very popular kid... I'm not, like, one of the very popular kids*” – she is hedging her bets, using “*not... very*” rather than “not” to avoid definitively labelling herself, and using discourse markers such as “*like*” to pause mid-sentence to offer her time to carefully craft her next words. In doing so, she is placing herself in the liminal space between belongingness and not belonging. She uses self-deprecation to reinforce her resistance to being unpopular while at the same time acknowledging that she perceives that she may (comparatively) occupy this identity, stating: “*I'm popular among the unpopular kids*”. In the same vein, she refers to her friendship group as “*little*” in a pejorative sense, perhaps trying to belong with the “*very popular kids*” she speaks of by perpetuating a narrative that she believes they might attach to her and her friends. This reinforces Pfeifer and Berkman's (2018, p. 6) intimation that social interactions provide value-based information about the self and help shape adolescents' identity perceptions.

8.3.3 Expression:

Lucy's storytelling also exemplifies Pfeifer and Berkman's (2018, p. 5) suggestion that identity is multifaceted. While she perceives herself unfavourably against “*the popular kids*” in terms of her social visibility, as they are “*the ones who everyone knows about*”, she also claims: “*I do like being anonymous*” in relation to her identity as a visually impaired person. She is faced with dichotomous desires. She wants to belong, but she doesn't want to belong as a disabled person, she wants to be seen as “*just...some girl*”. She is even willing to forsake her independent access to spaces in order to achieve this narrow understanding of belonging: “*Some people like don't realise I have visual impairment. I don't wear glasses anymore, so they don't see me as, like, being visually impaired*”. This demonstrates that UPIAS' (1975, p. 20) warning that “physical disability is, therefore, a particular form of social oppression” persists. Lucy recognises the physical impacts of her VI through a

normative social meaning connoting deficit, marginality and exclusion (Grue, 2016, p. 962).

As such, Lucy's narrow self-perception of the disabled identity may have catalysed "internalised oppression cultivated through an ascribed, othered, identity" (Reeves et al., 2022, p. 319), leading to a drive to push the perceived "unacceptable parts into the shadows" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 20) – i.e. hiding her interdependence with assistive aids (e.g. glasses). However, by doing so, she is also hiding the shadow barriers – that is, "barriers that "shadow" disabled people's daily lived experiences. These are often invisible to non-disabled people but are ever-present in disabled people's lives" (Olsen et al. 2020, p. 266), thereby (unwittingly) perpetuating ableism. This suggests that she has internalised narratives that disabled people do not belong in social spaces (Goodley, 2014), perhaps leading to an interpretation of social acceptability as achieved through self-improvement by seeking to erase difference, or "similarising" (Bredewold, 2015, p. 16)

However, she is clearly more secure in other aspects of her identity, particularly cultural and interest-based (Pfeifer and Berkman, 2018, p. 5). She talks animatedly in other parts of the intraview about her successful extra-curricular endeavours and beloved hobbies:

I'm actually in a casting agency as well, and I do a lot of acting. Yeah, and recently - well I say recently, it wasn't that recently but, about a month ago, I did a LAMDA exam⁴⁸. I just passed my grade five... I love drama and I managed to encourage all my friends to do it as well so now... my best friend who lives down the street from me does it and... my friend, he lives a bit away from me – he does it as well. (Lucy, intraview 1, 31.7.2021)

Lucy's expressive language here is markedly different when she discusses areas that she perceives she *does* belong – "*I'm **actually** in a casting agency... I **love** drama*". In listening back to the intraview Lucy emphasises the words "*actually*" and "*love*" using different intonations to the surrounding words, but for different purposes. Merriam-Webster's (n.d.-d) first definition of the word 'actually' is to demonstrate fact. Lucy uses it to demonstrate authority and ownership of her perceived status as actor, aiming to create an affective economy of respect and awe

⁴⁸ LAMDA exams, offered by the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art, are practical assessments in speech, communication, and performance, comparable to music exam grades. They are designed to build confidence and skills in areas like acting, public speaking, and musical theatre, with exams progressing from introductory levels to Grade 8.

with the listener (which worked, as I responded with an enthusiastic “wow!”) She emphasises “love” to afford respect to drama and her recognition of its own affective economy with herself. She shows pride in her achievement of passing her drama exam and shows that she recognises her social capital in this domain, confidently encouraging others to follow her lead. This demonstrates the role of participation in developing a sense of belonging, and the interplay between individual preference, independent performance, social interactions and interconnectivity (Long and Guo, 2023, p. 4) in forming such meaningful opportunities.

8.3.4 Territorialisation:

Lucy’s storying highlights the crucial interplay between belonging and identities and how these facets can consequently contribute to or inhibit “growth, development, and independence” (Long and Guo, 2023, p. 8), which are positioned as the desirable outcomes for adulthood. School belonging may affect socio-emotional development (Prince and Hadwin, 2013) and a lack of belonging may be negatively associated with mental health difficulties (Department for Education, 2018), as, for example, adolescents with VI may develop feelings of comparative inferiority to their sighted peers due to the lack of/reduced vision (Jessup et al., 2018). Yet it is attaining independence, rather than belonging, that is positioned in the MQ professional standards as “a key educational aim at the heart of the QTVI’s role”, positioned as “central” to the outcomes of VI education (DfE, 2023, pp. 14-22).

McLinden et al.’s (2017a) dual access theoretical model underpins these professional standards, with its strands of ‘learning to access’ and ‘access to learning’ constituting the focus of MQ Standards 5 and 6 respectively. McLinden et al. (2017a, p. 184) explain that “the notion of developing and promoting independence across a given developmental timeframe lies at the heart... of this dual view of access”. This model has become influential in orienting the current model of VI pedagogy, as emphasised by its informing of the 2023 update of the MQVI professional standards. The dual access model, as introduced in Chapter 2, draws upon a bioecological systems perspective to emphasise the goal of developing the personal agency of VICYP towards attaining independence.

This focus on independence has also become systemised across the wider ecology of VI education. For example, NatSIP’s (2015, p. 14) guidance for effective support of VICYP in secondary schools, states that all educational practitioners must focus

on “preparing them [i.e. VICYP] to take an independent role in a society”, and categorises successful independence outcomes as learning, travelling, living, earning independently (pp. 8-14). This is echoed in VICTAR’s (2019, p. 4) five best practice principles for supporting VICYP in education, which includes “facilitating independence” and is also supported by VI charity Thomas Pocklington Trust and Habilitation UK’s stressing that VI education should be oriented towards supporting VICYP to be “*fully* independent” (2021, para. 2).

However, this rhetoric of independence in VI is in danger of being entrenched with the discourse of individualism... [a]nd ableism, because of its isolationism” (Goodley and Lawthom, 2019, p. 237). For example, NatSIP’s (2015) guidance for educators of VICYP relates independence to competence, value and even ability to “function” (p. 14) in society. This once again connotes normativity – with the Cambridge online dictionary (n.d.-b) defining ‘*functional*’ as “someone who can behave, work, and live in a way that seems normal” or “useful”, and Merriam-Webster thesaurus (n.d.) offering the antonym to functional as “broken”. Thus, an inability to attain an ‘expected’ level of independence might position the disabled person as ‘abnormal’ or ‘useless’.

The late US disability writer and activist Marta Russell’s (2019) critique of American disability legislation is resonant here. Russell (2019, p. 66) states that “anti-discrimination legislation, by failing to acknowledge the contradictions of promoting equal opportunity in class-based (unequal) society, is insufficient to solve the unemployment predicament of disabled persons”. In a similar vein, while disabled people have the legislated right to independence, as per Article 3 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD), if the VI educational sector fails to adequately complexify notions of independence, then VI pedagogy, the QTVI and even VICYP themselves might “come to occupy a crucial role in the reproduction of ableism” (Goodley and Lawthom, 2019, p. 235), as Lucy may be in danger of in ‘hiding’ her VI.

8.3.5 Deterritorialisation:

As such, I diffract Reeves et al.’s (2022) call to crip social inclusion by calling for VI education to crip concepts of independence to instead focus on interdependence in

order to respond to what matters to VICYP. Interdependence and belonging are interconnected concepts where mutual reliance and shared experiences foster a sense of connection and community. Interdependence, entering into a state of mutuality with others involving reciprocal exchanges, naturally leads to a sense of belonging as individuals find their place within a network of relationships. This sense of belonging then reinforces interdependence by encouraging continued engagement and support within the group. Indeed, there is research evidence to suggest that VICYP already perceive in Douglas and Hewett's (2014) account of perceptions of independence amongst a cohort of visually impaired teenagers align more closely with the notion of interdependence, finding that "independence was seen by some as a relative term rather than an absolute one" (p. 90), in that some participants felt that it is "not wrong to rely on other people at certain points" (p. 88).

This commentary does not intend to undermine the human desire for independence, but rather to call into question current models of VI education that do not adequately interrogate the link between societal measurements of independence, e.g. being employed, living alone – or as Goodley and Lawthom (2019, pp. 245-246) put it: autonomy and self-sufficiency, and capitalism's ideal of the normative, productive worker, against whom the disabled body is positioned as problematic. This might result in VI educational pedagogies unwittingly supporting capitalism's attempts to "handle [disabled people's] non-productivity in a manner which causes as little disruption as possible to the overriding imperative of capital accumulation and the maximisation of profits" (Abberley, 1987, p. 16). This is because, orienting pedagogy towards neoliberal goals (inadvertently) "provides an ecosystem for the nourishment of ableism; which we can define as neoliberal-ableism" (Goodley, 2014, p. 34).

8.3.6 Reterritorialisation:

The umbrella term of 'independence', like its dominant rhetorical predecessor 'inclusion', is emphasised in policy and legislation as important, but rarely defined. This renders it subject to the machinations neoliberal discourse. Just as Slee and Allan (2001, p. 179) note that "there is the tendency to speak in one breath about inclusive education but fail to acknowledge the policy context that presses us relentlessly towards educational exclusion in the other", independence is venerated as a condition of and enabler for equality, which then "presumes equality... [to be] a

matter of sameness, thus leaving intact fundamental pillars of an ableist society” (Valentine, 2020, p. 79). The predominance in policy of “the façade of aspirational total independence and self-reliance, [neglects] to acknowledge the ways in which no one fully ‘independently’ accesses spaces or relies on themselves to achieve their goals” (Valentine, 2020, p. 79), as this ontologically position the individual as bounded and separate, failing to recognise the affective flows that shape subjectivity, and failing to consider the importance of the relational force of belonging.

Deleuze (1995, p. 121) frames belonging not as a start or end point, but “rather what happens in between”. For Probyn (1996, p. 40) too, belonging is found in spaces of in-betweenness, in the generative space of the middle. As such, it is important for VICYP and VI education practitioner-researchers to grasp the broad “conceptual reach” (Probyn, 1996, p. 5) of belonging. If, then, belonging and identity emerge from states of in-betweenness, this emphasises relationality and mutuality over independence. As such, what matters to VICYP – belonging – may be best supported via a pedagogical framing of independence as interdependence.

This involves orienting our understandings of subjectivity towards an acceptance of “our fundamental connectedness to and reliance on one another for the development of more liberatory forms of relating and belonging” (Valentine, 2020, p. 92), which is arguably particularly important in our current social, political and environmental climate, which Braidotti (2016, pp. 33-34) argues requires “rethinking our new ecologies of belonging”. Practically, this can entail developing interventions or offering opportunities to develop a range of skills and interests outside of school which can in turn develop the self-worth of members of a marginalised community if they are able to draw upon alternate domains of self-esteem if one domain is threatened by stigma (Watson and Larson, 2006, p. 242), rather than attaching their perception of self-esteem to a singular identity category.

Part 4: Assemblage ‘diagram’: BEING~BECOMING-WITH⁴⁹

8.4.1 Reading-writing-thinking-with “being” and “becoming”

The concept of ‘becoming’ is interwoven throughout post-structural theory, particularly in relation to identity, subjectivity, and language. For example, Judith Butler (1990) focuses on gender as a process of ‘becoming’ through repeated performances. For Butler, ‘becoming’ is not a conscious choice but rather a social process that shapes individuals’ understanding and expression of gender. Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) concept of ‘becoming’, however, is more abstract, exploring becoming through differential ontology and subjectivity. This notion of ‘becoming’ emphasises that it is not a linear progression towards a predetermined end, but a process of ongoing differentiation and change. Furthermore, Foucault (1991), while not explicitly using the term ‘becoming’, examines how power and knowledge shape individuals through historical processes.

However, it was reading-writing thinking-with Haraway’s (2016) concept of ‘becoming-with’ that provided the agential cut that formed this final assemblage ‘diagram’. “Becoming-with is a form of worlding which opens up the frames of what registers to us and so what matters to us (in part by recognising what matters to others)” (Wright, 2014, p. 279), which positions it well as a concept with which to think-through the data to answer the **BQ**. Haraway emphasises the interconnectedness of humans and other entities, including animals, technologies, and the environment – each agent has the potential to “change in nature as it expands its connections” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 8). This concept highlights how identities are formed through relationships and interactions with the world around us via a deliberate “cultivation of attentiveness across difference” (Bozalek et al., 2018, p. 102). Being attentive, or as Barad puts it, responsible or accountable (2007, p. 393) in this becoming is crucial to the process of worlding (Cassar, 2017, np).

While accepting that becoming “evolves simultaneously with past, present and future reconfigurations of the world” (Cassar, 2017, np) and therefore is constantly occurring, I do not feel that even that when extended to becoming-with it adequately

⁴⁹ The tilde symbol is employed in ‘being~becoming-with’ to denote the rhizomatic co-constitution of being and becoming, as per the more extended discussion of its use in Chapter 6 section 6.3.4. They are both hyphenated with ‘with’ to denote that being~becoming is co-constituted in our assemblages.

captures the urgent sense of ‘now’ that flashed throughout the data. I choose instead to employ the neologism of *being~becoming-with* to be respond to Rollo’s (2016, p. 70) call to respect children as agents on their own terms, or as Haynes and Murris (2021, p. 4) eloquently put it – “in respect of the plurality of children as they are, and with all that they bring, rather than to prepare children for a future they have not been included in making”. What the children and young people who participated in the intraviews brought was a desire to talk about what was happening to them *now*. This aligns with the understandings of Nielsen (2015) and Hohti (2016), who advocate for attending to the *now* in research with children. Nielsen (2015) explores how children experience time and space through two interwoven temporal modes: a linear chronological progression, and a more fluid, present-focused sense of time that unfolds in the moment⁵⁰. As such, it is useful to apply a semi-dualistic (but not binary) understanding of children as “agentic ‘beings’... [and] as developing ‘becomings’” (Hohti, 2016, p. 180).

8.4.2 Content:

Hohti (2016, p. 180), who stresses the importance of attending to the ‘now’ in research, also suggests “an understanding of research with children as ‘lively entanglements’ in which special attention should be given to things that *matter* to children” (emphasis added), which clearly aligns with the focus of the BQ. Furthermore, Hohti (2016, p. 180) also asserts that entanglements “also produce *different* moments of now, which are seen as multiple and hybrid” (emphasis added), which implies that by deliberately entangling several voices in this ‘diagram’, *different* understandings of VICYP’s lives and experiences will emerge. Just as Hohti (2016, p. 187) found in her classroom-based study that positioned children as ethnographers, I too in the intraviews found that “there were moments in which it became particularly clear that the now was not the same for the children as it was for the teacher”, or researcher in my case. The *now* was the dominant focus of their thinking. In my contemporaneous research journal, I wrote that participants struggled to recall events that to adults might be categorised as recent:

They don’t want to talk about primary school, they are not even particularly keen on talking about their futures. What they really want to talk about is NOW. This has been an important learning curve for me as

⁵⁰ The ‘Human’ side of Dis-Humanism provokes me to suggest that we can and should pin these amorphous concepts down to examine the micropolitics of ‘now’ as well as our becomings.

adult, practitioner and researcher. Understanding that time is experienced differently is crucial to ethical research, as “differential relationships to time organise and perpetuate inequalities” (Sharma, 2014, p. 137). While I had adhered to Kafer’s (2013) concept of ‘crip time’ (i.e. giving adequate time to accommodate access needs) in terms of organising the intraviews, I had not shown an “awareness of power relations as they play out in time” (Sharma, 2014, p. 4) in terms of the intraview content. I had asked children to reflect on the past and look to the future, which met my needs as practitioner and researcher, but what they need to do is talk about the present, the now. I need to develop a ‘praxis of the present’ (Gramsci, cited in Salamini, 2014, p. 73) by supporting them to “become increasingly conscious of their own actions and situations in the world” (Lather, 1986, p. 44). (Excerpt from research journal 22.9.21)

The ‘present’ unfolding during the intraview process was the tail end of the national pandemic restrictions in the UK. Some of these doctoral research findings were shared in a 2022 academic blog post I wrote for the University of Birmingham, which asserted that:

[T]he emergent data [from this thesis] suggested that the impact of the pandemic on their education and wider lives remains at the forefront of their minds. Early analysis suggests that many young people felt isolated during lockdowns, and the social impact of the pandemic is having a more long-lasting impact on their wellbeing, rather than concern over missing schoolwork. Feeling ignored or left out of lessons by their teachers, being expected to use unmodified resources, missing out on school rites of passage (such as leavers’ prom), missing out on exams and being worried about their alternative grading, or being expected to complete pieces of work without their ‘usual way of working’ (i.e. accessing assistive technology or adult support) are some of the issues that participants have suggested took a toll on their mental wellbeing. (Pilson, 2022, para. 7).

As such, this diagrammatic consideration of what matters to VICYP considers the “temporal situatedness” (Whitburn and Thomas, 2021, p. 105) of the research, and its implications for the participants’ ‘being~becoming-with’ and in the world, as they try to explain their ordinary, everyday experiences during extraordinary times.

8.4.3 Expression:

A clear difference in the expression of participants when talking about the now was the verbalisation. Speech flows became blurts as if the participant was bursting to

tell their story and it tumbled out, or for some, staccato fragments, punctuated by pauses, which disrupted the flow of their speech. This could be redolent of the uncomfortable narratives that the young people found themselves facing during the pandemic. The Covid-19 outbreak (re)positioned VICYP at the dis/abled hyphen (Goodley, 2014; Goodley and Runswick-Cole, 2014). They were being~becoming-with vulnerability, as they found themselves 'othered' by a new hierarchy of disability created by Covid-19. As explained in Chapter 4, section 4.4.2, the blind and VI community was unable to access certain support measures due to the reinforcement of medicalised understandings of disability emerging from the socio-temporal context. Simultaneously, vulnerability was forced upon them by an absence of governmental consideration around accessing the world through tactile rather than sighted means (Pilson, 2020, para. 6).

This excerpt from Kiran's storying began with staccato bursts of speech interrupted by long pauses, he stammers, he then quickly rushes parts of his speech, perhaps due to emotions building, this verbal disfluency resonant of the jarring experiences he faced trying to access everyday activities like shopping, as his disrupted sense of normalcy (Beudaert et al., 2016, p. 59) catalyses his being~becoming-with vulnerability:

I could get around one of the shops before [...] and now [...] suddenly there's a one-way system, a sanitising point [...] I, I, I can only go in one door and out another, I have to queue up on certain spots for the checkout, I have to go around one way, you know, around the one-way system. I can't ask people for help with products because there aren't as many staff in the store. It's so many little things, little changes that take away that from clarity, we rely on is routine and familiarity [...] I know not just VI people, but it affects us more. I mean, they put up all these little signs – we can't read those. I mean [...] You're already having to sort of navigate a world that is not tailored to your strengths. We have to rely on other things, like remembering how things are, and suddenly they change. That makes it very difficult. (Kiran, intraview 2, 27.11.2021)

Similarly, Helena found that reduced multisensory input led to a sense of "becoming different from oneself" (Davies, 2014, p. 28) in social settings. In this moment of being~becoming-with the world, the pandemic restrictions have forced her "to rethink the relatedness of the body – to other bodies, to vulnerable bodies... We have been forced to reimagine how bodies move, how movement is relative, how we breathe, and where we can stand or walk or travel or live" (Newman and Thorpe, 2021, p. 129):

I was really surprised how much masks affected me. You can't see people's faces, you can't lip read or whatever. I knew that would affect D/deaf people, but I wasn't expecting it to affect me so much. I mean, speech is muffled right? I know it wasn't the same for everyone, but I just found it really difficult to understand people. I don't know if that visual thing or what. I found that when the audio is gone, that's tough. We have to rely on it really. You've, you've always sort of relied on that auditory feedback. We can't see, like hand gestures and if anyone's pointing at something. I can't anymore. You know, It's just another barrier really, a communication barrier. (Helena, intraview 2, 11.11.2021)

Both Helena and Kiran's storyings demonstrate that "emotional and affective respondings are constantly evolving, with past-present-future and human and nonhuman relations becoming entangled across time, space and matter" (Thorpe et al., 2022, p. 12) in ways that can undermine previous held beliefs/understandings. The pandemic unmoored their understandings of the everyday due to reduced sensory information. As such, access to multisensory forms of communication matters to VICYP in their being~becoming-with the world.

8.4.4 Territorialisation:

Whitburn and Thomas (2021) suggest that the education system is underpinned by a concept of time as a "linear, objective process that exists beyond the experiences of individuals with disabilities" (p. 106). In this accelerative form, learning objectives are future-oriented, focused on becoming (in the most literal sense of the word) – the child as a becoming-adult. Many VICYP's being-becoming-with is entangled with this monochronic understanding of time, which is linear, sequential and end-oriented. In societies and institutions that are built on monochronic timeframes and priorities, time becomes a commodity, as is shown by participant Hafsa's experience of being~becoming-with time:

In Year 9 I dropped chemistry, because that was the hardest lesson for me to access, I needed too much time. I get 100% extra time for exams. And that could be another hour in a test. I feel like it's used up so fast, the amount of extra time. We have to take on everything, a lot of us VI people. You have to be really on the ball, really committed. I've tried to be. We can't get past it that there's not enough time in the day though. I've had to give up all of my activities after school, or else I won't keep up. It's exhausting. (Hafsa, intraview 1, 23.8.2021)

Hafsa's disabled body challenges "normative and normalizing expectations of pace and scheduling" (Kafer, 2013, p. 17) prevalent in this era of late capitalism, which are oriented towards speed – "productivity and efficiency can never be fast enough" (Hassan, 2009, p. 17). This is redolent of the notion of chronopolitics, which Mills (2020, p. 299) defines as the multiple different ways in which power relations between groups impacts upon their relations with the wider world, specifically focusing on temporal aspects, that is how they should develop over time. Chronopolitics causes time becomes politicised, positioned by those wielding *power-as-potestas* as a "scarce social resource" (Maier, 1987, p. 152), to be rationed to VICYP like Hafsa.

In this sense, chronopolitics is also biopolitical (e.g. Foucault, 2009/1978; Agamben, 2005), in that if a disabled body cannot meet normative demands for productivity and efficiency, they will be excluded by society, treated as less valuable or expendable by those in power. Hafsa is conflating productivity "as a basis for an adequate measure of human worth" (Mitchell and Snyder, 2015, p. 211) and her disability is potential barrier to "*take on*", to overcome, through hard work, by being "*really on the ball, really committed*". Productivity has become what matters, and "*not enough time*" to achieve normative expectations of productivity in normative timeframes may result in Hafsa feeling like she herself is "*not enough*".

8.4.5 Deterritorialisation:

Finding ways to undermine a chronopolitical being~becoming-with the spatio-temporal context requires practitioner-researchers to look to different ways of understanding time and space. Barad's (2007, p. 35) concept of spacetimemattering is an important tool here in which matter is understood as "a dynamic and shifting entanglement of relations, rather than... a property of things". In later writing, Barad (2017, p. 25) diffracts temporal linearity with their notion of the now - "the 'time of now' is not an infinitely thin slice of time called the present moment, but rather a thick-now that is a crystallization of the past diffracted through the present". In the thick-now of the pandemic, time felt out of kilter from our normative perceptions. Mitchell et al. (2023, p. 234) explain how being forced to move research onto online spaces such as Zoom allowed for additional unexpected time for being~becoming-with each other.

This additional time was not always experienced in terms of length of intraview conversations, but rather their depth.

This diffraction of time invoked a Slow scholarship approach to this research (introduced in Chapter 3, section 3.4.3), which resulted in the intraviews offering “alternative and ethical ways of being/becoming, doing and knowing, emphasising qualities such as discernment, depth, pleasure, longing, yearning, desire, curiosity, maintaining meaningful connections with others” (Shefer and Bozalek, 2022, p. 251). A focus on ‘what matters’ also allowed for this more micropolitical approach to research. By allowing participants to guide the intraview content, we were being~becoming-with each other in ways that broke other traditional binaries. For example, parasports matter to participant Sami, who impassionedly spoke about his anger at broadcasters’ inequitable coverage of the Paralympics versus the Olympics:

I think parasport is underestimated, definitely. I think it's a general public perception. I think it's all well and good talking about what should be done to increase the spotlight on parasport. I'd say to them [the broadcasters]: You say you seriously want to. You feel serious about doing it? You need to do it then! It shouldn't be looked at as like: "I'm watching it because I need to be inspired", it's like, you know, what are you being inspired to do? I don't want you to sit there and be inspired by our stories. I don't want to hear: "Oh, aren't they good even though... or despite...". I don't even want to talk about the presenters. I mean, they think disabled people should be patted on the head. "Bless them"⁵¹. I mean if that's the standard of journalism we're accessing – appalling. I think Channel 4's coverage of the Paralympics has been a joke. I've been really angry about that. I heard the BBC were like: We're not bothered about the Paralympics". They said to Channel 4: "You can have it". Brilliant. I mean you've covered the whole Olympics, and you can't actually be bothered to cover the Paras?! I feel like it's kind of like an afterthought, isn't it? (Sami, intraview 2, 4.11.2021)

The affective economy co-constituted between of Sami and I in the thick-now of that moment meant that we were being~becoming-with power differentials. Sami was able to harness power-as-*potentia* to teach me about parasports. I was forced to confront my own iterations of power-as-*potestas* as I began to realise my performative allyship with parasports through Sami's tutelage as I became learner and expressed this to Sami:

I think you've caused me to sort of, you know, question myself because I asked you if football in the Paralympics. Well, I know sighted football's in

⁵¹ Sami used the phrases ‘bless them’ and ‘brilliant’ in a sarcastic capacity.

the Olympics, but I'm supposed to be a football fan and yet I hadn't, you know, tried to find out myself about whether there was VI football. And, you know, it makes me question myself as an ally.
(Anna, Sami's intraview 2, 4.11.2021)

The expanded notion of time afforded space to consider what matters. As such, we invoked our own Dis-Human diffraction of Barad's notion of spacetime-mattering focusing more on the meaning or significance of mattering, rather than the material substance (Barad, 2007, p. 3). Our relational connectivity – developed through access to more unexpectedly open times and spaces afforded by the virtual meeting environment – allowed intraview conversations to focus on what matters to participants, which in turn enabled processes of being~becoming-with that catalysed new worldings.

8.4.6 Reterritorialisation:

Braidotti's (2002, p. 2) philosophy of becoming rejects the desire "to know who we are" in favour of "what, at last, we want to become". In this understanding, all entities (both human and non-human) are continuously subject to two processes – "both what we are ceasing to be and what we are in the process of becoming" (Braidotti, 2018, p. 37). She draws on Deleuzoguattarian (1994) concept of the present to suggest that because we are always in flux, the present does not synchronise completely with the here and now. However, the intraview storyings suggest that a crucial facet of the QTVI role is to try to find ways to temporarily induce such synchronisation. To deliberately go about "slicing the space-time-continuum at different angles" (Massey, 1994, p. 4) together, being~becoming-with VICYP. This can be done by finding time and holding space to learn what matters to VICYP, as according to Massey (1994, p. 5), these "moments of relations" in which all parties believe themselves to be at rest together temporarily can constitute the 'now' (Massey, 1994, p. 4). This will allow us to both "know who we are" and "what... we want to become" (Braidotti, 2002, p. 2).

As such, we will exit this assemblage 'diagram' via the threshold of participant Thierry's explanation of why it is important for practitioner-researchers and other adults to attend to VICYP's being~becoming-with, in terms of finding out what matters to them *now* as well as taking the past into consideration when planning for the future:

I think that there's no understanding at all. I don't think they understand how bad it was being young in the lockdowns. You know, it affects everyone, but especially for us just sort of being expected to shut up and get on with it. I think that people need to sort of put themselves in certain people's shoes, in our shoes. I feel like it's been good to actually say this out loud, nobody else has asked me. You are the only adult who has asked me what it was like. Thank you. I clearly needed to talk about it.
(Thierry, intraview 2, 8.11.2021)

Part 5: How does what matters to VICYP come to matter in thinking about VI educational matters?

The wording of this section header is a deliberate rewording of Haraway's (2016, p. 12) oft-cited quote: "It matters what matters we use to think other matters with". This is because Haraway argues that our situated knowledges determine what new understandings we can conceive of and how we interpret such understandings are not just representations of the world but actively shape and construct it. Truman (2018, p. 2) explains further – "situated knowledges are immanent to an event, account for intersectional markers such as race, gender, sexuality, class, ability etc., and relational". As such, the responses to the **RQ** and **BQ** in this chapter are not universal truths but are grounded in specific contexts, relationships, and perspectives. Given this project's diffractive methodology, it is important, as Fox and Alldred (2021, p. 445) assert "to make explicit these entanglements and differences, via analytic techniques that read data 'through' other texts, personal experiences, or other data". Furthermore, Haraway (2016, p.12) goes on to assert that: "it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with", so the deliberate acknowledgement of the myriad affective forces that have shaped these responses in turn responds to this call to future-making through the diffractive force of storytelling, which attends to difference rather than sameness.

In terms of the findings, the concept of beside-ness explored relationships between the participants and non-human agents in their assemblages. These relationships were often frictional, as exemplified by the affective economies in play in the relational encounters between Rebecca and her long cane, which simultaneously symbolised difference, and allowed her to attain 'sameness' in terms of accessing the same spatial learning environments as her peers. By reterritorialising dominant narratives of inside/outside, beside-ness can offer an alternative mode of engaging with thing-power, which in turn can help VICYP embrace the non-human agents in their assemblages and the co-produced "embodied, connected, affective experience that enables... becoming" (Gibson et al., 2025, p. 16). However, another finding was that while becoming (i.e. the future) was important, *being* (the present) appeared to matter more to the participants. This led to the creation of the term *being~becoming-with* to remind practitioner-researchers and other adults to question neoliberal narratives of time as linear in favour of creating the time and space to be attentive to what matters to VICYP now.

Finally, *belonging* was also a key recurrent spark throughout the analysis. Participants appeared to hold binary understandings of belonging and unbelonging as fixed ‘either/or’ destinations, stemming from “individual and collective narratives of self and other, presentation and labeling, myths of origin and destiny” (Yuval-Davies, 2004, p. 215). Belonging was understood as a social location, entry to which had to be ‘earned’ through conforming to unwritten social rules conferring power or status, embodying particular ways of being in the world. As belonging mattered so clearly to the participants, “troubling belonging as a passive depiction of processes of assimilation becomes important” (Gravett, 2024, p. 607). To do so, QTVIs and VICYP must diffract understandings of independence towards interdependence in order to similarly reposition belonging not as “an isolated and individual affair” (Probyn, 1996, p. 13), but as a relational, complex and ongoing process entangled with/in spacetime-mattering.

Conflux:

Chapter 8 has demonstrated how reading-writing-thinking-with theory and data can elicit different understandings of the wider lives and experiences of VICYP to formulate a response to **RQ2**. The co-constitutive processes of *zooming in* to the data with emergent listening outlined in Chapter 7 and the *zooming out* to read-write-think-with theory in this chapter have led to four assemblage 'diagram's being created to map this thesis' exploration of the lives and experiences of VICYP from a Dis-Human perspective. Through adopting a diffractive reading-writing-thinking-with methodology, which involves paying attention to the micropolitical aspects of research, **RQ2** has been dis-orientated by emergent understandings, which then reterritorialised it through the creation of becoming-questions.

As various forms of data were read through theory, different patterns emerged as meanings were diffracted. Where we stop and capture these patterns could be considered agential cuts, which mutually implicate the researcher and data's becomings (Barad, 2007, p.185). These 'cuts' were presented in assemblage 'diagrams' read through by theoretical leitmotifs of being-becoming-with, belonging and besideness, to offer examples of what matters to VICYP. These theories were explored, situated within the wider literature and exemplified using voice data from the intraview conversations. This recognises that voice is contingent, situated and constituted through collaborative actions and contextual understandings (Whitburn, 2023).

Finally, it is important to reiterate that the assemblage 'diagrams' represent the vitality of knowledge and understanding, which is produced through and as "entangled ongoing materialisations of the world" (Fairchild et al., 2022, p. 110, emphasis added). They are not fixed, rather they are flexible and context-dependent, just as meaning is. As Somerville (2016) explains:

Meaning is not seen as a property of individual words or groups of words but is an ongoing performance of the world in its differential intelligibility. It is the intra-action of these elements through which part of the world becomes determinately bounded and propertied in its emergent intelligibility to another part of the world. (pp. 1166)

As such, I acknowledge that had I 'cut' the data differently, thinking-with different theories, or had the data sparked different affective resonances, such "emergent intelligibility" might have occurred and/or manifested very differently. Fox and

Allred (2021, p. 7) warn that “dependence of conclusions on a researcher’s choice of agential cut suggests that [diffractive analysis] is one of the most researcher-centric and context-dependent analytic approaches yet devised”. Conversely, I would argue that all research is researcher-centric and context dependent, and that diffractive methodology’s open acknowledgement of its context dependence and researcher influence makes it a more ethical approach to research, as it ensures the feminist axiom of inscription (accountability) is upheld.

Chapter 9 (the final chapter of the conversational cartography) now follows. It draws upon the findings of Chapters 7 and 8, along with other encounters from the research-assemblage, to respond to **RQ3**, which asks how a Dis-Human-informed exploration of visually impaired children’s educational experiences and beyond might inform VI pedagogies. This final RQ allows the thesis to consider the wider implications for the theoretical, methodological and empirical findings that have emerged in the research assemblage by interrogating how VI pedagogy can be considered differently. This is an important focus of the thesis, as any educational research with a social justice orientation must consider the answer to Graham and Slee’s (2008, p. 278) question: “when we talk of including, into what do we seek to include?” As such, Chapter 9 diffracts the existent macro-structures, systems and thinking outlined in Chapter 2 with the outcomes of Chapters 3-9 to suggest how Dis-Humanism can reframe VI pedagogies as “‘more-than’... ‘other than’... ‘different than’” (Seigworth, 2017, p. ii).

Chapter 9: Conversational Cartography

Response to research question 3

Introduction:

Chapter 9 constitutes the final part of the Conversational Cartography. In this last findings and discussion chapter, **RQ3** is attended to, which asks:

How might a Dis-Human-informed exploration of visually impaired children's educational experiences and beyond inform VI pedagogies?

I approach this research question by diffracting it. Firstly, I consider what my theoretical framework of Dis-Humanism (first introduced in Chapter 3 then put to work in Chapters 4-6) offers for thinking about pedagogy, first as an educational concept, then specifically in relation to VI education. As exemplified in Chapter 5, a Dis-Human approach to inquiry requires interrogating understandings of everyday concepts and discourses. Pedagogy is one such concept that is interwoven into the everyday fabric of education, entangling it with other strands (like teaching and curriculum) so that discourses around it become blurred, resulting in understandings being simultaneously elusive (Alexander, 2001) and simplified or narrowed (Friesen and Su, 2023, p. 7). In this chapter, discourses are understood as more-than an expression of thinking through spoken or written language, but as a set of practices that help to form objects or subjects “produce relations of power... around what constitutes the desirable and the undesirable” (Britzman, 2000, p. 36) and “establish what it is possible (and impossible) to ‘be’... shaping realities and the relationship of ‘difference’ that generates meaning” (MacLure, 2003, p. 175).

Nelson (2021) exemplifies the interplay between discourse and pedagogy by identifying and examining two types of discourse operating in her study on pupil voice and the co-construction between students and teachers of responsive pedagogies. Nelson (2021) uses the terms ‘little d’ and ‘big D’ to outline the micro-level and macro-level discourses at play in and around the learning process:

(1) ‘little d’ discourses—the moves and categories of meaning that emerge from talk and interaction, such as to the talk and interaction between the students and teacher as they negotiate and co-construct student influence; and (2) ‘big D’ discourses—the overall messages that configure power relations and possibilities for action in certain ways, such as shifting power dynamics within the roles of ‘teacher’ and ‘student’. (p. 139).

‘Little d’ discourses, then, are localised and stem from “communication or ‘language in use’” (MacLure, 2003, p. 175) in a particular context. In this project, ‘little d’

discourses are created through a conversational methodology, wherein spoken discourse was used by participants to interact, convey information, and express ourselves. Contrastingly, 'big D' discourses go perform wider social actions and enacting specific identities, just as my theoretical approach and feminist politics have caused me to read-write-think-with certain discourses and adopt specific methodological actions in this project. The rest of this chapter demonstrates how entangling these micropolitical and macropolitical discourses allows for a reimagination of VI pedagogies.

Because Dis-Humanism questions simplified narratives and taken for granted assumptions, it follows that pedagogy, a contested yet ubiquitous term in education, must be considered through this orientation as an entry point in the process of responding to **RQ3**. Therefore, Part 1 of this chapter offers a diffraction of current pedagogical discourses to offer a Dis-Human-informed definition of pedagogy. In Part 2, I take the first of the main components of this definition (philosophy) and consider how a Dis-Human orientation to research can in turn re-imagine current pedagogical perspectives in VI education. Finally, in Part 3 I apply the notion of the "pedagogical nexus" (e.g. Hufton and Elliott, 2000; Schweisfurth and Elliott, 2019) to explore how this Dis-Human research assemblage can offer propositions for future pedagogical discourses in VI education, thereby exemplifying the implications and applications of the findings of this project for future VI educational encounters.

Part 1: Diffracting definitions of pedagogy

9.1.1 A Dis-Human understanding of pedagogy

The first facet of my response to **RQ3** therefore asserts that a Dis-Human theoretical approach to thinking about VI pedagogies creates a more expansive understanding of pedagogy itself. Firstly, Dis-Human thinking diffracts Alexander's (2001, p. 540) seminal definition pedagogy as comprising of enactments or practices of teaching and "the beliefs, philosophies and discourses that lie behind it" (Schweisfurth, 2020, p. 2). Alexander (2008) explains that pedagogy must be understood beyond the classroom machinations of teaching and not "divested of its justifications, values, theories, evidence and – especially – divested of that relationship with the wider world that makes teaching an educative process rather than a merely technical one" (p. 13). While this may appear an expansive understanding, Alexander's thinking retains power-as-*potestas* as its underpinning. In his advocacy of dialogic pedagogy (e.g. 2006; 2008), he acknowledges the pedagogical opportunities of purposeful talk between teacher and pupils but allows the teacher to retain processual oversight.

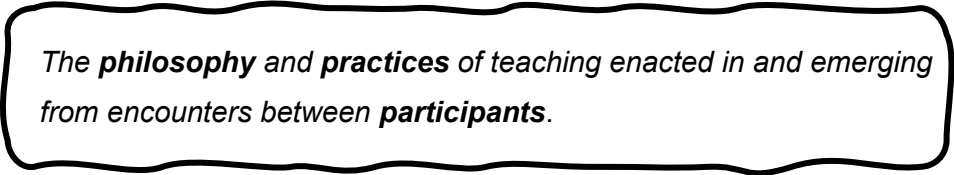
Beginning to 'Dis' Alexander's humanist definition, Hickey and Riddle (2024) democratise this notion by suggesting that pedagogy is constituted relationally, in encounters between teachers and students. However, despite applying feminist (new) materialist thinking to define education as a "mutual constitution of entangled agencies" (Barad, 2007, p. 33), Hickey and Riddle (2024, pp. 3276-3278) repeatedly discuss such agencies as relating to intra-actions between student and teacher. They accept Gergen's (2009) rejection of bounded individuals and acknowledge the affective flows that constitute pedagogical encounters. Yet they also state that "in the moment of encounter, the ways that teachers and students enact teaching and learning derive influences from the sociocultural, spatiotemporal and material 'conditions' inherent to the educational context" (Hickey and Riddle, 2024, pp. 3273-3274). This intimates that while they consider non-human agents to be capable of influencing the intra-actions of humans, they don't overtly acknowledge that relational pedagogical encounters can take place without the presence of both teacher and student, thereby retaining a more conventional humanist pedagogic stance.

9.1.2 Pedagogic nexus of VI education

Conversely, Gravett et al. (2024, p. 396), offering a PhEmaterialist reworking of relationality, ask us to consider the pedagogical possibilities stemming from our connections and intra-actions with non-human agents via embracing affective pedagogies of mattering. Thinking-with affect theory enables educators and students “to consider ourselves as entangled and in relation to others (both human and non-human)... and to consider more closely and thoughtfully how learning and teaching feel” (Gravett and Lygo-Baker, 2024, p. 3) – to consider the matter that impacts upon pedagogic encounters and in turn, how this can identify or activate what matters to participants in such encounters. Pedagogies of mattering enable participants “to notice and consider the impact of a broader range of actors upon learning and teaching, and to tune into the objects, bodies and spaces that constitute the material mattering of learning and teaching as an in-situ practice of relationality” (Gravett et al., 2024, p. 393). Put more simply, pedagogies of mattering centre care, contexts and connections, which influence how teaching and learning are conceived and carried out.

As such, because I believe that theory and practice are inseparable for educators, a Dis-Human theoretical orientation informs a *different* way of thinking about and enacting pedagogy as a concept, which I now offer a diffractive definition of below:

Figure 6: A Dis-Human diffractive definition of pedagogy



*The **philosophy** and **practices** of teaching enacted in and emerging from encounters between **participants**.*

This definition outlines the combination of aspects that Schweisfurth (2020) explains constitute “the pedagogical nexus in any given educational context” (2020, p. 8), a set of “linked, interactive and mutually reinforcing influences on learning” (Hufton and Elliott, 2000, p. 115). The concept of pedagogical nexus emphasises that pedagogical encounters are not isolated but rather interconnected and embedded in a complex web of forces, including cultural, social and institutional elements. This dynamic understanding of the pedagogical nexus links to Buchanan’s (2021)

emphasis that education studies drawing upon assemblage theory should focus on “how particular forces of desire are drawn together to produce new effects and the specific conditions which enable this to occur” (Rousell and Sinclair, 2024, p. 1759), rather than identifying what the component parts of an assemblage. The rest of the chapter now goes on to consider how this project has afforded explorations of each of these components. Firstly, Part 2 now considers what this expanded Dis-Human definition of pedagogy might help us to reimagine the current dominant **philosophical** influences on VI pedagogy.

Part 2: Pedagogic philosophy

9.2.1 *Rhizomes, roots and radicles*

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) propose a rhizomatic approach to living and learning – one that mirrors the structure of rhizome root systems, which grow horizontally and unpredictably, without a central origin. Rhizomes reproduce vegetatively, sprouting new growth from nodes on roots or stems, forming connections that defy linearity and binary thinking (Drumm, 2024). In contrast, tree-like (arborescent) growth is hierarchical and rooted in a single origin, limiting its potential for multiplicity and divergence. Rejecting arborescence, Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 25) champion the rhizome as a metaphor for non-hierarchical, relational thinking, asserting “the tree is filiation, but the rhizome is alliance”. Philosophically, the rhizome invites us to challenge fixed systems and embrace multiplicity, heterogeneity and connection (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, pp. 7-8), thereby aligning it with assemblage theory.

They also introduce another botanic term: the radicle – the embryonic root that anchors a seed – as symbolic of arborescent growth. However, some plants (including ginger, bamboo and canna lilies) blur this binary. For example, a canna lily is usually grown from dividing rhizomes from existing plants and replanting them to propagate new growth. However, it can also produce seeds. With careful treatment and preparation, these seeds can be germinated into plants. As these plants mature, they go on to produce a rhizomatic root system despite growing from seeds. As such, in these plants, it is the “radicle, that gets rhizome production going” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 15).

This botanical nuance invites a rethinking of the radicle’s role. Reading-writing-thinking-with Tsing (2015), who explores multispecies assemblages of collaboration and resilience in damaged landscapes, the radicle can be reimagined as a symbol of emergence and possibility. Though not central to Tsing’s (2015) text, the radicle resonates with her themes of regeneration and interdependence. Her concept of unintentional design, in which ecosystems evolve through spontaneous, relational entanglements mirrors the radicle’s capacity to grow in precarious, unplanned spaces, shaped by environmental conditions beyond human deterministic control. Tsing’s work, therefore, encourages noticing and nurturing relational entanglements at a micropolitical level.

For vision impairment educators, the radicle becomes a powerful metaphor. We must anchor ourselves within the existing (often hierarchical) education system, yet with care and intention, foster rhizomatic growth that disrupts normative structures and affirms difference. This requires pedagogical clarity, ethical commitment and alignment with our ontological and epistemological values. Without this, educators risk perpetuating power-as-*potestas*. The following botanic-influenced couplet of Greek LGBTQ+ poet Dinos Christianopoulos (1978) is resonant here to remind educators that pedagogic encounters can be transformative in supporting resistance, hope and growth in the face of oppression:

What didn't you do to bury me?

But you forgot that I was a seed.

Part 3: Propositions for a RADICLE pedagogy for VI education

9.3.1 Propositions for pedagogic possibilities

Drawing upon the concept of the radicle outlined in Part 9.2.1 above provides not only the primary root for growing and developing a different form of pedagogy for VI education, but also provides an acronym as a means of transmitting complex ideas to support pedagogical dialogue between **participants** (Kinchin and Hay, 2007), thereby bridging the gap between pedagogical **philosophy** and **practice**, framed as propositions for ways of pedagogic thinking/feeling/being~becoming-with in VI education. As Springgay (2015, p. 78) states: “a proposition versus an instruction triggers conditions of emergence activating self-organizing potential”. Propositions offer pedagogic possibilities, rather than definitive plans. Schweisfurth (2020, p. 10) emphasises this by noting that the UNESCO (2021) Futures of Education report has avoided prescriptive or didactic explanations of how pedagogies must be enacted in the classroom, instead challenging teachers to consider carefully what she terms the “invisible side of pedagogy” – the underpinning epistemological, ontological and axiological thinking that drives their doings.

Furthermore, I feel that offering prescriptive guidance for enacting pedagogy would be somewhat disingenuous, given that each pedagogical encounter will be contingent upon the intra-action of an “assemblage of ‘forces’... in the moment of encounter” (Hickey and Riddle, 2024, p. 3273). It also recognises that the interpretive findings of a small-scale study are similarly contingent on the contextual understandings of those who engage with them as to whether they offer potential for transferability (as outlined in Chapter 6, part 6.1.2). However, I hope that these propositions do foster generativity, which Barone and Eisner (2012, pp. 151-152) explain is “the ways in which the work enables one to see or act upon phenomena even though it represents a kind of case study with an *n* of only 1” (emphasis in original). Tracy (2010) notes that generativity can be catalysed through rich, evocative and invitational storytelling, which the storyings in Chapters 7 and 8 exemplify, and which this chapter goes on to offer further insights on.

The rest of this part of the chapter, therefore, offers brief illustrative examples drawn from the data to exemplify why these propositions have emerged as potential and firstly acknowledge the conceptual drivers that have helped me to articulate the

pedagogical nexus herein in the next section. Each proposition suggested below begins with a letter that together makes up the acronym 'RADICLE', presented in mnemonic form (as introduced in Chapter 3) to act as easily recallable guiding orientations for VI practitioner-researcher reflection.

9.3.3.i **RELATIONAL:**

Schweisfurth (2020) identifies the pedagogical nexus prescribed by the *Futures of Education* report as upholding a learner-centred pedagogical approach (p. 8). A Dis-Human diffraction of pedagogy reframes learner-centred as **relational**, which is my first proposition for a RADICLE VI pedagogy. I draw my understanding of the term from Nxumalo and Murriss (2021, p. 108), whose thinking is in turn influenced by “multiply situated Indigenous ontologies that foreground the intrinsic inseparability of the human and more-than-human world”. This does not remove the learner as the focus of teaching and learning, instead repositioning the learner as a participant and co-constructor in a situated process of learning “through which social, political, and material entanglements... are rendered capable through each other” (Bozalek and Zembylas, 2017, p. 64). This reinforces the applicability of the concept of the Dis-Human ‘~i~’ (introduced in Chapter 6 and put to use in Chapter 7’s ‘~i~’ poems) to inform more expansive understandings of subjectivity and therefore pedagogies.

The Dis-Human ‘~i~’⁵² illuminates interconnection – that human is not an isolated being, but an entangled being~becoming-with – our experiences of education and relations with the world are “enmeshed in one another, that are always already coexistent” (Stewart, 2014, p. 1182). American poet Brenda Hillman’s posthumanism-inspired 2019 work, *Extra Hidden Life Among the Days*, uses the tilde to denote her encounters with lichen as an active agent within her writing, thereby demonstrating the interdependence of human experience with non-human actors, and the pedagogical possibilities that stem from our entanglements with these relational forces. In this sense, the Dis-Human ‘~i~’ is a rhizomatic ‘~i~’, able to attune to affective forces and micro-shocks and be open to entanglement, diversions and unexpected growth. For the Dis-Human ‘~i~’, learning can be unlearning if we are open to pedagogical encounters that can take place beyond

⁵² The tilde is used as a literary device to resonate with the emergent body of posthuman scholars who also use it to represent similar adherence to concepts of interconnection (e.g. Ovington, 2023; Jukes et al., 2019). I explained its use in more detail in Chapter 6, part 6.3.4.

formal learning environments (Davies and Gannon, 2009), across timeframes and through our *besideness* with more-than-human others.

Participant Rihanna's storytelling of her complex relations with her assistive technology presented in Chapter 8 outlined her reluctance to accept herself as a Dis-Human '~i~', which impacted both her physical and social position at the event she recalled. However, she later recounted in the intraview the pedagogical possibilities of accepting *besideness*, describing how encounters with more-than-human influences such as popular culture (music and fashion) and craft materials can be pedagogical, supporting her to become "immersed in a field of active narrative hypothesizing, testing, and reunderstanding" (Sedgwick, 2003, p. 13) her subjectivity:

I'm an emo to be honest. I started out just wearing like plain black, but I'm, like, finding my style basically through getting to know the other emos. I make my own as well. I made this for example, it's a bag. I suddenly got the idea – I want to make a bag out of a Teddy bear! I enjoy expressing myself through my clothes... I wanted to blend in at first but then I got more creative and resourceful and I'm really proud of myself – I even used sandpaper to change the eyes [on the teddy bear]. I made them clouded. They match my eyes now, you know, symbolically. I'm blind and I'm showing it to the world. I'm, like, owning my identity. I feel it's expressing your internal side outside but it's also expressing yourself in a way that you're sort of saying to society, like, this is me: I'm not going to dress and be blocking my appearance to be how you want me to look, I'm gonna do what I want to do and I'm gonna be who I want to be. I did worry about what other people would say, but since I've been dressing like this, I've only had compliments. I know it sounds really shallow, but it's nice. I've had people say: "I wish I had the confidence to wear what you wear". I remember my Mum said at first: "you're going to have to put up with weird looks and comments and things". I mean, firstly, I can't see weird looks anyway! But it's been the opposite to be honest. (Rihanna, intraview 2, 20.10.2021)

She has begun to understand that her engagement with crafting and sewing has entangled with her understanding of her subjectivity as her creation of disability-affirming fashion items have improved her self-perception of both her abilities (being "really proud" of what she has produced) and her status as disabled person in social spheres ("I'm blind and I'm showing it to the world. I'm, like, owning my identity"). Harnessing her relational *Besideness* with other agents (both human and non-human forces) has resulted in generative (reparative) outcomes, in contrast to her earlier paranoid 'reading' of the public perceptions of her braille-laptop assemblage outlined in Chapter 8, affording a collective re-storying of her subjectivity. As Nxumalo and Murriss (2021, p. 108) explain, "encountering the more-than-human with an ethos of relationality... means that the more-than-human is understood as

an agentic presence and can thus exert effects on human life". Relational pedagogies, therefore, can be enacted in VI education by "orienting to practices, modes of knowledge production, and ways of acting that are collaborative, connected and non-competitive" (Gravett et al., 2024, p. 391) and can in turn can propel new social conditions and relations into being (Braidotti, 2013, p. 129). This, as the next proposition of the RADICLE pedagogy suggests, involves attuning to affect – "to bodies, vulnerabilities, openings, objects, texts, thoughts, surfaces, and senses, as means of (un)learning together" (Fullagar et al., 2021, p. 174).

9.3.3.ii **AFFECTIVE:**

Biesta (2011, p. 189) states that pedagogy is neither "explicitly or exclusively connected to questions of teaching and school education but has a much wider remit which focuses first and foremost on questions of... the process of becoming human". As such, my second pedagogical proposition for VI education is to be attentive to the **affective** forces that inform learning and to diffract Biesta's point above using the findings of Chapter 8, processes of being~becoming-with. Affective forces forge and sustain interconnectedness, catalysing or changing pedagogical encounters. As Stewart (2007) puts it:

They're things that happen. They happen in impulses, sensations, expectations, daydreams, encounters, and habits of relating, in strategies and their failures, in forms of persuasion, contagion, and compulsion, in modes of attention, attachment, and agency, and in publics and social worlds of all kinds that catch people up in something that feels like something. (p. 2)

To attend to affect requires noticing the everyday, ordinary affects that affect pedagogy. This is in-keeping with the micropolitical imperative of Dis-Humanism as outlined in Chapter 3. Holmes and Hall (2020) explain that the lens of the everyday offers possibilities for participants to engage in micro-, meso- or macro-level analysis of the world to better understand the political context, personal encounters with popular culture, entanglements with non-human agents and material objects that inform pedagogical encounters. Radical pedagogue Paulo Freire's (1972) notion that "reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world" is resonant to help describe the possibilities of centring affectivity in pedagogies. My expansive understanding of

reading outlined in Chapter 4 implies that 'reading' tangentially (Truman, 2023, p. 154) – i.e. paying close attention to the affective forces that shape our lives – is not just important for ethical research but can constitute a valuable pedagogical vector to support developing understanding of the contexts of participants' life and experiences, as effects and affects are produced with and through encounters (Lennon et al., 2018, p. 612).

Cassie's storying in Chapter 7 found that navigating the social world was just as important for VICYP as academic discourses and physical environments. (Dis)orientation was used as a leitmotif in Cassie's storying to denote this and it was suggested that developing a skill of wayfaring (Ingold, 2007; 2011), which was defined as a dynamic process of becoming with and responding to the environment (Ingold, 2007; Symonds, 2017) was a crucial enabler for orientation for VICYP socially as well as spatially. In this sense, wayfaring could be conceived of as a means of developing social literacy, as the wayfarer is always engaged with their surroundings, becoming knowledgeable through responsive and ethical (intra)activity with humans and more-than-human forces (Harding, 2021, p. 1) fostering a sense of correspondence with the world. Cassie explained a (dis)orienting experience she had during the pandemic, when she found an old CD which resulted in her needing to re-map previously held understandings about her relation to the world:

I found my Harry Potter CDs with Stephen Fry⁵³, he narrates them. I used to listen to them all the time when I was younger. If I was having a bad time, I'd go to bed in the evening and I'd just want to switch off and read something that I enjoyed... and that's what they meant to me. They were so positive, they that showed evil didn't triumph. I think that, you know, given the past couple of years, we've been through, like, awful things, like Donald Trump and people like him in the UK, and then the pandemic. When I found them, I was so happy at first, I thought, you know what, regardless of anything else, I've still got these books. I can still enjoy them. But then I realised I can't though now. I was really angry with JK Rowling because she hadn't been very nice about trans people⁵⁴. She used her platform to start that debate. I know some trans people, and they felt like, you know, people were basically attacking them. They felt that JK Rowling saying it in public, it's almost sort of legitimised horrible trolls to attack them. I mean, I'm not trans, but being disabled, I totally understand what it's like to have random people judging you. She really made me sort of feel like, oh God, like a bit of my sort of childhood innocence had gone in a way. [Long pause]. Wow. All those feelings just from finding a CD! (Cassie, intraview 2, 1.10.2021)

⁵³ Sir Stephen Fry is a British actor.

⁵⁴ Cassie uses 'trans' as an abbreviation for transgender.

Thinking-with Cassie’s powerful storying and taking into account Fullagar and Bozalek’s (2021, p. 26) assertion that “a response-able pedagogy incorporates the ability to affect and to be affected”, it follows that VI pedagogies must support VICYP to develop strong what Tomkins (1963, pp. 323-324) calls personal ideo-affective postures. These are a set of beliefs that are established through socialisation and somatic responses to sensations/stimuli – in other words, through affective microperceptions (Massumi, 2015, p. 53), and help people to develop ideas and attitudes (and potentially ideologies) that shape their everyday life. These ideo-affective postures can be reinforced or diminished by exposure to those of others. For Tomkins (1963, p. 74), children’s ideo-affective organisation of ideas is ‘looser’ and therefore more malleable to change from learning from others. Therefore, it is crucial for pedagogical encounters in VI education to catalyse affective economies (Ahmed, 2004) that emphasise and enhance the power-as-*potentia* of VICYP to “seek out new and creative ways to engage with reflection on a deeper and potentially more critical level” (Sidebottom, 2019, p. 221). This has the possibility to support development of positive self-perception at the micro-political level and the “resilience to examine and reject ideologies that promote hatred and violence” (Thomas, 2016, p. 6) at a macropolitical level, which they may be exposed to in today’s fractured society.

9.3.3.iii **DEMOCRATIC:**

My next proposition is that VI pedagogies should be **democratic**. I share Ladson-Billings’ (2006, p. 30) vision of education as an agentic force for “preparing students to combat inequity by being highly competent and critically conscious”, particular in an era in which “disabled people risk becoming the collateral damage of neoliberal-ableism” (Goodley and Lawthom, 2019, p. 247) perpetuated by current national and international political rhetoric⁵⁵. This proposition is further supported by Schweisfurth’s (2020, p. 8) suggestion that if educators wish to orient future pedagogies towards social justice, the relational dimensions through which pedagogy is enacted must be democratic. Taking the *Future of Education* report’s emphasis on participation (UNESCO, 2021, p. 2) as an example, Nelson (2021) expands on this notion by outlining enactments of teacher-student pedagogical

⁵⁵ For example, the right-wing policies of politicians who are “white, heterosexual, bourgeois and able-bodied male or Trump/Farage for short” (Goodley and Lawthom, 2019, p. 247) – but not limited to these individuals.

relationships as a continuum of participation. This means that participation can be catalysed by democratic relationships (inscribing the student's power-as-*potentia* – the *Dis* side of the Dis-Human hyphen) or hindered by authoritarian relationships that reify the teacher's power-as-*potestas*, which “preserve status quo power dynamics” (Nelson 2021, p. 138) that are prevalent in the normative (*Human*) social order that devalues the insights of disabled children (Erevelles, 2000, p. 32).

This is not a straightforward undertaking given the entrenched power dynamics within the English education system. It takes risk and resistance to devolve power and to explicitly invite potentially divisive and sensitive external narrative forces into the educational assemblage, especially because the DfE (2025a) guidance on political impartiality in schools states that while teachers are not strictly prohibited from expressing political opinions in their teaching, they must do so in a balanced way that avoids partisanship. However, my democratic pedagogical proposition orients away from party politics towards a more expansive affirmative politics, which involves “the creation of sustainable alternatives geared to the construction of social horizons of hope, while at the same time doing critical theory, which implies resistance to the present” (Braidotti, 2011, p. 267).

One such mode of affirmative politics is Stengers' (2004) concept of cosmopolitics, which encourages a Slow questioning of reason that offers opportunities for conflict without domination, thereby allowing a respectful negotiation of difference amongst those affected by decision-making – not only humans but also non-humans, environments and practices of “the multiple divergent worlds they belong to” (Stengers, 2004, p. 95). Taking a cosmopolitical approach to pedagogy requires a Slow feminist orientation to disrupt the English education system's “normative tempos... [in which a] constant or increasing pace must be kept: results and productivity are commanded; no stops, no blanks are tolerated” (Monforte, 2019, p. 42). A cosmopolitical pedagogical proposition highlights (and potentially addresses) the complex problems VICYP must navigate in contemporary society by going “above and beyond merely extending the boundaries of the discourses that celebrate humanism and instead needs to focus its energy on re-theorising itself” (Goodley and Runswick-Cole, 2014, p. 522).

Participant Sami found discourses of inequity to be present in a pedagogical encounter catalysed by his engagement with the Paralympic coverage on TV. In his storying within Chapter 8's assemblage ‘diagram’ of being~becoming-with, he emotively discussed his frustration about societal perceptions of the Paralympics

versus the Olympics and was keen to share his opinions on wider socio-political issues, demonstrating a clear orientation towards social justice – something that he felt was being neglected in his current learning:

You know, with everything that went off last summer with you know, the Black Lives Matter movement and, you know, living at a time where the, the government sort of not trusted by many, and there's still Brexit going on and I think there seems to be a big divide between rich and poor. I mean, things like Brexit. Now on a day-to-day basis. It's very obvious, isn't it? You know, things like this lorry driver shortage⁵⁶. I, I sort of feel resentment. I didn't understand the vote to be honest. I just didn't get it at all. I'm just wondering, like, how, how... they all voted for it? I must admit I felt quite frustrated that people who are a lot older were having a vote about things that weren't going to impact on their lives really. I could see the sort of gaslighting from the government, pretending. Why couldn't they see it? I would have voted differently. I guess this is a really big question, but I bet you voted Remain, yeah? I asked my teacher in Year 6 in primary school. He wouldn't tell me. I get why, but I would have appreciated him telling me because I feel like these conversations need to happen more. I find it gets brushed under the carpet. I swear adults, like teachers, parents, think we don't have opinions. They should ask. They might learn something! (Sami, intraview 2, 4.11.2021)

Sami was not the only participant who expressed frustration at examples of wider societal inequity. Helena explained her struggles to access provision at the specialist VI school she was attending due to systems of power-as-potestas:

*You know there's a lot fewer specialist colleges these days and it's much harder to get into to get funding. I'm not happy with that. No. I had an awful experience with getting funding. Awful. Oh my gosh, that was so much harder than it needed to be. I can tell you now, the whole process of getting in, it took a toll on my mental health. I mean **huge**. And I was lucky! I didn't even have to go to tribunal. I know people that went to several tribunals, just to get in here [her school]. I had to put up with the council almost blackmailing my last school for one or two years. They were pulling every trick they could to get my old school to say I should stay there and they [the council] were not actually breaking the law doing that. I know specialist schools aren't for everyone. I wish all schools would just provide for everyone. But I'm all for VI schools for the people who need it. You shouldn't have to push to get in. They just try to grind everyone down. Get us to give up. (Helena, intraview 1, 4.8.2021)*

These storyings highlight some of the socio-economic and political tensions that education must support young people in navigating and their frustrating manifestations in their educational experiences, from opportunities to bring politics

⁵⁶ This comment refers to the national lorry driver shortage in 2021. At the time, the Road Haulage Association (RHA) estimating a shortage of over 100,000 qualified drivers.

into the classroom being “*swept under the carpet*” for Sami, to politics preventing Helena from accessing a classroom. A democratic underpinning to pedagogy that positions children as agentic co-creators in learning encounters can allow all participants to engage in “lively relationalities of becoming” (Barad 2007, p. 393) together, in a way that simultaneously acknowledges and resists normativity, thereby embedding the concept of dis/empowerment identified in Chapter 7 in pedagogies. Allowing students to discuss what matters to them in the world outside of education will allow VICYP to harness their power-as-*potentia* by directing pedagogical discourses, as Sami suggests above (dis/*empowerment*) and by developing awareness of societal inequity related to disability but also, for VICYP going through similar processes as Helena, developing the ability to resist it (dis/*empowerment*).

9.3.3.iv INTRADEPENDENT:

Whitburn’s (2016, p. 117) framework for CDS research asserts that post-structural thinking is a useful means of orienting the discipline towards thinking and practices that more carefully consider how they shape included or excluded subjectivities (p. 128) via its non-representational focus. He cites Lather’s (2013) work to conceptualise a key enabler of inclusion for disabled people as belonging. Lather (2013, p. 642) asserts that post-structuralism “instead of papering over difference, otherness, and disparity, ... reflects/enacts these issues, suggesting further direction and broader possibilities of ‘being-acting-feeling together’ through the production of new terms of belonging”. Identities become thresholds (Fortier, 2000, p. 2), rather than fixed states. They do not offer a pathway in or out of belonging, but rather are spaces of shared deterritorialization in which new becomings are co-constituted (Mazzei and Jackson, 2012, p. 450). In this site of in-between-ness (Gregg and Seigworth, 2010, p. 1), belonging becomes a relational and radical concept (Reeves et al., 2022, p. 319), an outcome of interdependence – “a mutual exchange, rather than the acceptance or achievement of norms and standards defined by typical members of the group” (Cobigo et al., 2012, p. 79).

Chapter 8’s assemblage diagram of *Belonging* relates belonging to identity and interdependence (part 8.3.6). Identity is often viewed as fixed and a barrier or enabler to belonging, depending upon social perceptions of identity and difference.

While participant Lucy's storying in Chapter 8 (part 8.3.2) demonstrated that being perceived as different (either via self-perception or that of others) could negatively impact on positioning within the social hierarchy of her mainstream secondary school, the importance of difference becoming the acceptable 'norm' is evidenced in participant Rebecca's experience of belonging in a specialist VI-designated school. She explains that some of the everyday experiences of ableism that she experienced in her mainstream school were negated in her new setting as the VI identity became the basis for belonging, rather than a cause for isolation:

They [the other pupils] are just a lot more understanding because everyone's in the same boat. I sit down at a bench on the playground, and I can say without having any kind of concerns: "Who's here? Who's across that side?" And ask everyone to introduce themselves. I'd say it's a big change of attitude and ethos, definitely. I feel more confident and relaxed to go into lessons and things, it's definitely had a positive impact. I like having a class of all visually impaired people, we're accessing things in different ways and helping each other out. I'm learning so much now just from being with other visually impaired kids all the time that there is no way my other school could have supported me to do. (Rebecca, intraview 1, 12.9.2021)

Rebecca's compelling statement outlining the benefits of learning from peers demonstrates that pedagogical encounters can take place outside of teacher-pupil dialogue, stemming from interdependence between actants, "co-constituting... building up and negotiating a common space of interactions and understanding" (Vincenzi et al., 2021, pp. 23-28).

A Dis-Human orientation can further diffract the concept of interdependence to become "**intradependence**" (Gale and Wyatt, 2019, p. 567, emphasis added), which is my next VI pedagogical proposition. Feminist (new) materialism challenges the concept of interaction in favour of intra-action (e.g. Haraway, 1992; Barad, 2007), meaning that agencies are not fixed or pre-determined but are shaped and defined by their entangled relationships. Consequently, interdependence can be reframed as intra-dependence to affirm our entanglement with the world, moves away from linear, cause-and-effect relationships to a more complex understanding of how entities are interwoven and co-constituted. The concept of intradependence affords "us an expanded relational framework from which to better understand [the] radical (and significant) otherness" (Brisini and Simmons, 2024, p. 356) that disability embodies and how it can influence our pedagogical thinking and doing.

This is crucial given the differing perceptions of disability emerging in the findings of this research.

Participant Thierry, for example, demonstrated a pragmatic acceptance of his relationality with disability. This could be construed as an example of resistance to harmful deficit 'Big D' discourses around blindness and disability. His storying in Chapter 7 suggested the positive impact of his pedagogical encounters with VI sport on his confidence and self-perception as a disabled person, which may have supported Thierry to affirm his own way of being:

I think a lot about the word disability. I've had conversations with people, they say it's inaccurate or don't like it [applied as an identity category to them] but it's the best way to describe what I experience. I think it's the best way to get the message across that I can't do everything in the same way that a fully able person can do. You know, it doesn't mean that I can't do things, but there are some things I have to do in different ways. And if I say I'm not disabled, then that kind of puts less emphasis on that, it minimises it. I think it undermines me and makes me seem like I can do everything the same. I also think as well, like this is part of what makes me, me, if that makes sense? (Thierry, intraview 2, 8.11.2021)

However, Cassie's storying in Chapter 7 intimated that pedagogies that uncritically promote independence as the ultimate goal, thereby strengthening the "normalising gaze" (Foucault, 1990, p. 184) of society on those cannot meet these expected outcomes. Consequently, negative stereotypes of disabled identity may be reinforced, thus damaging VICYP's relationship with themselves, as Cassie has experienced:

We're permanent mourning from the time that we're born because of being disabled. We realise pretty quick that we're different, and we keep realising it to the day that we die, basically, because we don't have sight. Every day there's a new thing - you realise: "oh another thing I can't do" ... You realise that while there are ways around it, it doesn't change the fact that you're never going to be able to drive or really be truly independent. It sucks because I know that for someone like me, and like a lot of the students here [in this specialist VI school] we are very independent. I mean, I learned how to cook from young, I learned how to walk to the shop if we needed milk or bread. I learned how to get myself to and from school and then realising that I could do all these things, but I still wasn't the same. (Cassie, intraview 1, 2.9.2021)

A pedagogy that is informed by intradependence emphasises that "things become what they are relationally in ways that extend both inwards and outwards... Things

are not simply ‘in’ a context – even if it looks that way because of a clearly visible boundary (such as our skin or a corporate structure) – things are ‘of’ their relations” (Emergent Futures Lab, n.d., paras. 4-12), as such they are contingent and subject to change. This reframing may inform curricular and pedagogical encounters that support VICYP to understanding phenomena such as identity and belonging not as fixed, but as ongoing processes, constituted relationally, thereby offering “different agential possibilities” (Barad, 2003, p. 817) for participants and pedagogic encounters themselves. Intradependence encourages conviviality in pedagogies, which Bredewold (2021, p. 15) suggests might be a “promising way of engaging with difference and an interesting alternative to ‘othering’, ‘similarising’, or ‘romanticising difference’”. This co-construction of plural affiliations and identities, reflecting their multi-dimensional nature (Sen, 2007, p. 16) may disturb deficit narratives for Cassie and other VICYP, and thereby avoid reproducing stigma (Deleuze, 2004; Mazzei and Jackson, 2012).

9.3.3.v COLLABORATIVE:

Understanding and accepting our intradependence via relational, affective and democratic pedagogical encounters offers alternative conceptualisations of what it means to collaborate. Collaborative skills are considered an enabler to academic progress (Education Endowment Foundation, 2021). Collaboration in education is viewed as anthropocentric, but pedagogic possibilities open “when the borders between who or what gets to be seen as having agency across the assemblage gets blurred, new conceptions of communication, collaboration and disciplinarity emerge” (Bayley, 2018b, p. 248). This can be achieved by incorporating a Dis-Human spirit of participation (as introduced in Chapter 5, part 5.3.1) into VI educational pedagogies, ensuring that they are **collaborative** – my next pedagogical proposition. Participatory pedagogical approaches can “reveal complex fissures and inequities in systems that represent themselves as rational, just and coherent” (Fine and Torre, 2004, p. 16) and as such may be the ideal means through which to invoke social justice-based teaching and learning. Collaborative pedagogical approaches have the potential to support participants in pedagogical encounters “to devise new, practical and ethical acts of engagement which motivate and enact change in the material continuum that constitutes educational practice” (Taylor and Iverson 2013, p. 667).

Chapter 5's consideration of Dis-Human participation drew on Cook-Sather's (2011, p. 41) encouragement of CYP to embody the role of "pedagogical consultants" within participatory research projects. If CYP are given opportunities to share their expertise to inform teachers' pedagogies then "multiple layers of learning unfold" (Cook-Sather, 2011, p. 41) If a Dis-Human pedagogy intends to centre collaboration as a mode of practice and an outcome, then this model can also be applied to compulsory education. Participant Megan intimated that she would value the opportunity to act as pedagogical consultant:

I think the biggest problem is communication, and then also that they [teachers] need to actually trust that I know what, what will work best for me. I have one example that always comes to mind. I was in a science lesson, and I couldn't see the level of water in a conical flask. I told the teacher, and they just got a big chunk of cork put it in the glass, floating. They said: "use that to see the level of water". But it was such a bad idea, it was useless! The cork was just massive. I couldn't see where the water is on the cork. I said: "it won't work because of this". They go: "Well, just try. Just, just for this experiment, just try" and no back up plan. I wish they would just trust me. I know what will and won't work. I think it's a huge thing, feeling that you're being listened to, and actually feeling that you can give feedback. (Megan, intraview 1, 25.8.2021)

Megan's repetition of the word "just" is symbolic, given that the teacher's actions were arguably unjust. The teacher has attempted to offer an alternative pedagogical practice (the cork as visual indicator), but this (like the storying of her experience with the incorrectly adapted worksheet in Chapter 7) demonstrated the performative nature of accessibility adjustments in this encounter. Had the teacher been open to collaboration with Megan, they may have been able to "gain a more informed critical perspective within and beyond classrooms" (Cook-Sather, 2011, p. 41). Kuby and Bozalek (2021, p. 60) consider the power of inquiry as an ethical way of finding out about the world when positioned as *querying* "through an attitude of curiosity and openness, to learn from the other, enabling responsiveness" can help all participants create different knowledge-ing. As such, pedagogies that facilitate "engaging, collaborative opportunities to analyse one's own practice in dialogue with differently positioned participants in... education hold particular promise for improving the educational experiences of all involved" (Cook-Sather, 2011, p. 42).

Dis-Humanism expands these opportunities for learning by positioning non-human participants agents within pedagogical assemblages, co-constituting the "collaborative activity of teacher-students-space-content-context-*plus*" (Strom and Martin, 2022, p. 3, emphasis in original). This enlarged understanding suggests than

a more expansive understanding of collaboration in relation to pedagogies is required – reframing it as “a practice of *constellating*” (Prokic, 2021, p. 545, emphasis added). Nail (2017, p. 25) explains that “the constellation is a singular event: a set of relations that change as the elements change in a kind of reciprocal feedback loop”. This demonstrates that pedagogies should be envisaged as fluid, contextual and contingent, acknowledging the multiple and often short-term assemblages that come together through shared energies (affective forces) to inform change.

Constellating has connotations for diffracting the concept of feedback in education, often framed as a top-down process enacted by teacher to child. Feedback can be seen through the metaphor of constellation as an iterative and relational process, an “event... [constituted by] collective thinking of something that sets something new into motion” (Manning and Massumi, 2014, p. 90) – a transformative process, emerging from a “co-productive engagement of bodies, spaces and wor(l)ds” (Hinton and Treusch, 2015, p. 4). This co-production can be enacted through Kuby and Christ’s (2020) practices of (in)query – a lively, curious and creative form of collaborative sense-making (Kuby and Bozalek, 2021, p. 61). Constellating as a practice of a RADICLE pedagogy, therefore, advocates learning “with others, from others, thanks to others what a life worth living demands, and the knowledges that are worth being cultivated” (Stengers, 2018, p. 82), imbuing pedagogies with care.

9.3.3.vi *LOVING*:

Collaborative and participatory pedagogies may also be considered an apposite response to the current socio-political climate. Appadurai (2006, p. 168) states that the ability to make strategic inquiries (or undertake (in)query) and develop meaningful knowledge(-ing) on a continuous basis are important enablers to “full citizenship”. Collaboration (or constellating) is therefore an important pedagogical tool support VICYP and other disabled children to share the “multiple knowledges live within each of us and grow even more powerful when explored among us” (Fine and Torre, 2019, p. 4). However, this process is a risky task, because opening ourselves up to collaboration can surface painful affective flows. Although Freire (1997) contests that pain is necessary for developing understandings of our subjectivity, his radical pedagogy states that this can be mitigated by love, which constitutes both the underpinnings and actions of pedagogical dialogues (Freire,

1977). As such, my next proposition is to orient VI education pedagogies towards **love**, which can prove a “hope-full feminist materialist response to the desperate and damaging times we currently find ourselves in” (Taylor and Gannon, 2021, p.111). This is because love is a dynamic concept to underpin pedagogies, which offers an orientation towards exploring multiple inequities both within and beyond education that affect and effect participants.

Giroux (1992, p. 21) explains that love can offer a “profound sense of rupture, transgression, and hope, intellectually and politically” to ways of thinking and doing. However, it is important to diffract meanings of love, especially when we are looking to relate it to disability. Hardt and Negri (2009) warn that love can be co-opted by rhetorics of sameness that are exclusionary. They offer the example of the Christian mandate to ‘love thy neighbour’ to illustrate this, stating that its meaning can be “corrupted” (Hardt and Negri, 2009, p. 382) to mean love only those who inhabit similar identities as you. This, Moore (2018, p. 325) explains, is a neoliberal conceptualisation of love, commodified and devoid of its affective power-as-*potentia*. Rather Berlant (2011b, p. 685) advocates to loving “thatness” – the other, the world, beyond the individual. In the case of VI education pedagogies. Loving “thatness” constitutes a political form of love (Moore, 2018, p. 325) that affirms disability and difference within individuals and for others.

Furthermore, Molina (2024, p. 31) asserts that “a pedagogy of love stipulates a sense of criticality that seeks to promote equity and justice by removing systemic barriers and obstacles to student learning and thriving in schools and in society”. This draws on Freire’s (1972) notion of conscientisation (or *conscientização* in the original Brazilian Portuguese), in which through a process of investigating their own everyday lives and collective reflection, research participants identify individual experiences as shared, as social, and then in turn as political (Fine et al., 2003; hooks, 2001). This links with the notion of being~becoming-with created in Chapter 8, as Freire’s work aligns conceptually with a Gramscian notion of a “praxis of the present” (Salamini, 1981, p. 73), in which we are constantly open to “where we might be able to go and what we might be able to do in every present situation” (Massumi, 2015, p. 8). This requires us to consider what matters *now* (Hohti, 2016, p. 191) to VICYP, as sections 8.4.1 and 8.4.2 of Chapter 8 attest.

What mattered at the time of the intraviews to participant Kiran was the ongoing impact of the pandemic, which he felt was being minimised by those occupying

positions of power-as-*potestas* – adults, teachers, politicians. He expressed his frustration at his perceived lack of care shown towards the feelings and aspirations of young people during and after the UK pandemic restrictions, storying the emotional rollercoaster he faced after learning that he would not have to sit his GCSE exams:

It's been drilled into us how important these GCSEs were and then, you know, literally weeks before we were due to sit them, we were told we didn't have to, and we've been given teacher assessed grades. I didn't feel anything for a while and then I sort of felt... it was a mixture of emotions. I felt, like, almost relief that I didn't have to do them at first. And then I realised that it would be so difficult not doing them because, like, the amount of work I'd put into GCSE revision, things like that, it almost felt like it was just taken away. The teachers expected us to be grateful, to just forget it. But when you're working towards something and it's just taken away, you're like: "Oh. Right. Well... what now?" I felt like, I don't know, like I was sort of pointless. (Kiran, intraview 2, 27.11.2021)

Kiran's experience demonstrates how unlearning attachments to previously held understandings is a slow and difficult process that cannot be simply willed to happen (Berlant, in Demeyer, 2021, p. 97), it requires pedagogic encounters oriented towards thinking through problems together and pointing participants towards new possibilities (Taylor and Gannon, 2021, p. 15), something that Kiran felt his teachers failed to do. Thierry appeared to feel similarly, offering another example (alongside his experiences of PE in his storying in Chapter 7) where he experienced a dis/connection from care in his pedagogical encounters:

I'm feeling now that it's almost like everyone's assuming that the pandemic's over and they're just expecting people to get on with it, and I'm like nobody's really noticing the impact. I'm thinking like WTF⁵⁷?! I'm thinking about like young people who've missed so much school and not just like the actual lessons, but everything else that being at school involves. I missed my Year 11 prom. I know that doesn't seem like much, but I was gutted though. They [adults] don't think what it was like for kids. I feel like it's going to affect us for years. I think we really need to talk about that. (Thierry, intraview 2, 8.11.2021)

As such, while VI education pedagogies must work towards supporting VICYP to develop skills to meet macropolitical expectations (i.e. becoming a productive and independent future citizen), they must also attune to the micropolitical forces of the

⁵⁷ WTF is an abbreviation of the term 'what the fuck?' The participant said the abbreviated version in the intraview.

now. If they fail to do so, they can “actually participate in disabling the heart, minds, and bodies of their students – an act that disconnects these students from the personal and social motivation required to transform their world and themselves” (Darder, 2011 p. 498). Educators therefore must ensure that pedagogies can offer opportunities to “look back-forward at encounters with/in the self/other” (Lennon, 2017, p. 535). In doing so, they can invoke love, because it “homes in on the mundane matters, the ordinary occurrences, the everyday happenings” (Taylor and Gannon, 2021, p. 13) that matter to CYP.

9.3.3.vii EMBODIED:

My final pedagogical proposition is **embodiment**. Embodiment is inextricably entangled with accessibility, given that pedagogic thinking and enactments affect how accessible learning is. For visually impaired learners, pedagogy might involve tactile learning, audio-based instruction, or multimodal strategies – not just adapting materials but rethinking how learning is structured by rethinking how we *propriocept* it. Del Val (2020, p. 315) explains that proprioception is “the site where multisensory integration (the integration of inputs from multiple external and internal senses) comes together, in ever-changing ways, with the body’s capacity to move”. Embodied pedagogies deliberately integrate the mind, body and emotions in holistic forms of teaching and learning (Forgasz, 2015), in which encounters are always embodied, as we perceive the world through our body (Grosz, 1993), emphasising how “spatially and culturally situated bodies limit and shape knowers perspectives and experiences” (Wilcox, 2009, p. 106). A Dis-Human consideration of embodied pedagogies suggests that a “new perception and proprioception need to be mobilised [in pedagogies] that foreground our co-emergence and entanglement, between us and with the world” (Del Val, 2020, p. 331).

This aligns with Araneda-Urrutia and Infante’s (2020, p. 341) recommendation to *demodel* current universal models of disability by positioning it as a “biosocial assemblage that emerges contingently”. Dis-Human embodied pedagogies simultaneously make flesh the diffracted notion of being~becoming-with and question what the body is and does. They purposefully imbricate practice and theory, thereby positioning the body not only as referring to the human corporeal bodies and other material matter who are participants in a pedagogical assemblage, but also as a philosophical concept – a Body without Organs (BwO). Deleuze and

Guattari (1897; 2000) refer to the BwO as a field of potential, denoting a body (i.e. collection of aspects) as stripped of organisation, hierarchy and fixed identity, resisting a normative understanding of the body as a fixed structure with normative functions and capacities, which therefore positions disability as malfunction and incapability. Instead, BwO understands the body as a field of intensities, denoting the “rhizomatic potential of non-normative corporalities” (Araneda-Urrutia and Infante, 2020, p. 341).

A disabled body, from this perspective, is not seen via deficit but rather productive difference, capable of unique modes of experience, movement and becoming. For example, disability artifacts such as wheelchairs and prosthetics, neurodivergent perception and crip communication systems, e.g. braille and sign language, can all be seen as machinic assemblages – creative ways of reconfiguring the body and its relation to the world. As such, the concept of the BwO helps to deconstruct the able-bodied subject as representing ‘the norm’. Rather, it invites us to think of all bodies as in flux and contingent, with disability no longer a deviation from the norm, but part of the continuum of being~becoming-with that all bodies undergo. As such, pedagogies should be similarly open and flexible to change, both in terms of the fleshly bodies constituting participants and the non-human bodies of ideas.

Reimagining pedagogies as embodied also involves carefully considering the role of teachers, “who control access to the curriculum; whose assumptions, hopes or fears about young people help to create or dispose chances for them” (Howes et al., 2009, p. 15). Liasidou (2012, p. 49) goes further, characterising education practitioners as “embodiments” of pedagogy. As Chapter 6 attested, an emergent form of listening is an ethical imperative for educators working with children, and especially disabled children. Chadwick (2016, p. 55) emphasises the importance of “attending to the bodily and fleshy aspects of storytelling and talk” in research, which could guide processes of emergent listening. Participant Hafsa attested to the impact of emergent listening enacted in the intraviews. Our conversations helped her to understand how her embodiment had informed her decision-making in relation to her education:

You have made me realise that my choice of secondary school was very based on my visual impairment. I looked around all the options I visited some of them, which were kind of very old buildings or lots of steps or crossing a road or something, they were immediate massive negatives, so I didn't end up going to those schools. I did go to a school that was, like, a modern building, very brightly lit, and it just felt a lot more VI-friendly. I preferred that one generally as well, luckily. I think, if another was better, I probably would have had to deal with it, even if it was

harder to get around... I had an option of two colleges and the one I ended up going to is very, like, again, modern, similar to my old school, and the other one was kind of older and more steps and things. I preferred the, the ethos of the college I went to anyway. I feel like they're linked, ethos and environment. The old school was literally old-school! You made me realise that I was really aware of what, what sort of environment that was needed to sort of make things as accessible as possible. I think it actually probably really influenced my decision now that you've got me to think about it. I think accessibility actually plays into everything, doesn't it? I'm learning that now.
(Hafsa, intraview 1, 23.8.2021)

Hafsa's disability's intersection with her educational choices demonstrates how pedagogical assemblages "can be thought of as dynamic and temporary 'machines' that can be 'plugged in' to other machines that produce different capacities" (Gibson et al., 2025, p. 3). When these 'machines' entangled at the point of her transition to secondary school, just as how our intraviews 'plugged in' the assemblages of Hafsa and myself into an assemblage, they "connect[ed] and cohere[d] through *affect*, that is, the ability to affect and be affected which amplifies and compels awareness, movements, thoughts, or expression" (Gibson et al., 2025, p. 341). Hafsa's *thoughts*, articulated as preferences, had catalysed her *movement* into a particular school. However, through *expression* in the intraview process, she gained *awareness* of the *affect* and effect of her embodiment. This suggests that pedagogical encounters in the classroom involving emergent listening could also catalyse similar awareness, or perceptions.

Emergent listening as an enactment of embodied pedagogies creates "a co-sensing ethics will try to understand when movements are being imposed and when they are more emergent and reciprocally composing in any relational field" (Del Val, 2020, p. 328). If pedagogy is considered a relational field, then a co-sensing ethics entangles the other propositions of a RADICLE pedagogy. Recognising our intradependence with other agents affords a more collaborative and democratic approach to pedagogy, one which attunes to affect in our embodied and discursive encounters within education and beyond. If we imbue VI pedagogies with love, we can both mobilise and be open to noticing "microscopic [events that upset] the local balance of power" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 15), which in turn can help VICYP and QTVIs to navigate wider patterns of power-as-*potestas* in the compulsory education system.

9.3.2 A visual depiction of the RADICLE pedagogic framework outlined in this chapter

Figure 7: A RADICLE pedagogic framework for VI education

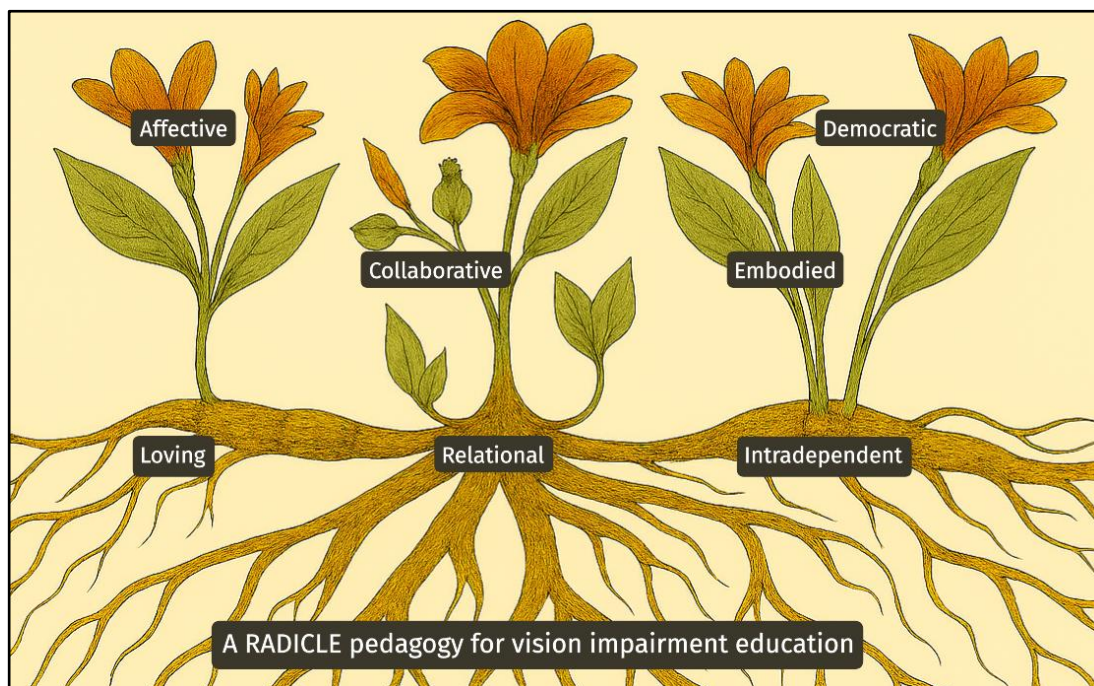


Figure 7 is botanical-style diagram that maps the concept of a RADICLE pedagogy for vision impairment education by drawing on the growth structure of the canna lily. The canna lily is used as a symbol for the rhizomatic and arborescent growth potentialities of my RADICLE pedagogy, given its adaptability dependent on the care, conditions and cultivation it receives (as part 9.2.1 of this chapter explained). Four flowering canna lilies rise from a shared rhizome network that stretches horizontally across the page, with a central radicle root anchoring an extensive system of branching rhizomes. The visual metaphor communicates how affective, collaborative, embodied and democratic pedagogic practices emerge from and with a loving, relational and intradependent grounding, while allowing diverse learners and learning pathways to grow. The rhizomes extending towards the edge of the frame signify ongoing, non-linear pedagogic development and interconnectedness within educational ecosystems. The symbolism of the location of each labelled part of the diagram is expanded upon in Table 6 in Appendix 10 which summarises the entanglement between the RADICLE pedagogic propositions created in Chapter 9 and the data storyings in Chapters 7 and 8.

Conflux:

The purpose of this chapter is not to reject or undermine existing conceptualisations of VI pedagogies. Rather, it is an enactment of my relational ontology and DeleuzoGuattarian (1987) expansive ethics of “and... and... and...” (p. 25), rather than a binary either/or approach of replacing ideas. Drawing upon both the theoretical and empirical findings of this thesis emphasises that it is through pedagogical choices related to the ingredients in a pedagogical nexus that learning becomes meaningful, relevant and transformative. Understanding our pedagogical **philosophy** is “essential for teachers to question the educational processes that lead to lives worth living” (Galea, 2024, p. 212), to ensure that they can effectuate rhizomatic growth in arborescent systems, which is crucial for working with disabled children if “social justice envisioned as the best possibilities for living and flourishing” (Changfoot et al., 2025, para. 9).

The same curriculum content can be taught through radically different **practices** depending on the pedagogical mode e.g. through storytelling, inquiry or embodied practice, such as emergent listening. These enactments of a more expansive pedagogical philosophy can produce “micropolitical movements of power and resistance, social divisions and hierarchies, and opportunities and constraints” (Fox and Alldred, 2017, p. 183). One such opportunity of such micropolitical movement is towards accepting a more expansive understanding of pedagogical **participants**. Through accepting participants and as humans *and* more-than-human actors, situating the latter as “lively, agentic and vibrant forces” (Nxumalo and Murris, 2021, p. 108), pedagogical encounters can emerge in which “not everything is possible but the possibilities are infinite” (Del Val, 2020, p. 324).

Chapter 7 provided insights into the educational encounters of VICYP, offering complex and nuanced storyings of dis/empowerment, dis/connection and dis/orientation that demonstrate how everyday local pedagogical enactments between teachers and students are finely balanced dependent upon the how narratives can undergird (or undermine) “responsive relationships” (Baan Hofman, 2023, p. 247). Chapter 8 then highlighted how “the myths that underlie our values, habits, and institutions,... [might] miseducate and possibly misshape our children” (Regenspan, 2014, p. 122), and suggested that learning ‘what matters’ to young people by listening to their views can be an active means of avoiding the reinforcement of oppressive societal discourses in the content and delivery of

teaching. The findings of both chapters, therefore, emphasise the importance of centring voice, listening, dialogue and storying to inform pedagogies that can support children in being, becoming and belonging beside others.

As Chapter 6 emphasised, a Dis-Human conceptualisation of voice positions it as a relational process enacted between not just human participants but also influenced by wider agents. The expansive understanding of voice as an intra-active and iterative process that affords an understanding of personal experiences within the context of broader, socially constructed discourses, and simultaneously offers possibilities for affirming or challenging them – a key aspect of teaching and learning to prepare (disabled) young people for uncertain futures (Schweisfurth, 2020). Discourses are much more than spoken language, they are also social practices (visual, oral, auditory and tactile) that can govern the way that concepts and processes are understood (Hall, 1992, p. 44). As such, the storyings created in this project can be considered the outcomes of pedagogical encounters, simultaneously shaped by and revealing interconnections between affective experiences and the processes and contexts that shape them (Baglady et al., 2023, p. 260) for all participants.

This chapter's diffractive approach, therefore, plugging in to the theoretical and empirical findings of this thesis has offered a novel form of attentiveness to VI educational pedagogy, wherein data, concepts, and theories were interpreted in relation to one another, rather than in isolation (Mazzei, 2014) to re-imagine both the concept of pedagogy and the VI education pedagogical nexus through a Dis-Human perspective. Such a method of data analysis allows for layered and multifaceted interpretations, characterised by the fluid interplay described by Springgay and Truman (2018, p. 209) as "coupling and comingling". Diffraction, therefore, "offers a prototype for pedagogy that is centred on critique and creativity, situatedness, geopolitical (self-) awareness, accountability, and an immanent ethical attitude that takes current-day political constellations and complications into account" (Geerts, 2019, pp. 6-7) – a RADICLE pedagogy for VI education.

Chapter 10: Concluding Cartography

Introduction: Mapping the unlearning journey of this thesis

This thesis has explored the lived experiences of visually impaired children in compulsory education in England. It was motivated by a professional commitment to inclusive education and disability advocacy stemming from over a decade of working as a qualified teacher of children and young people with vision impairment (QTVI). The study sought to challenge the impact of dominant narratives and deficit-based models on pedagogies within the context of VI education in England. While inclusive education is often framed as a vehicle for equity, it can inadvertently reinforce ableist norms. As Naraian (2020) argues, inclusion rooted in humanist ideals tends to privilege traits like cognition and rationality, which may exclude those who do not fit these constructs. Although legislation such as the UNCRC (1989), the Children and Families Act (2014) and the SEND Code of Practice (2015) aim to uphold the rights of disabled children via access to education, the prevailing model of inclusion focused on assimilation risks becoming exclusionary in practice as it fails to embrace the value of difference and the complex interplay between individuals and their environments. Consequently, VICYP frequently encounter barriers to full participation in education.

VICYP in compulsory education in England must navigate a system shaped by normative expectations of sameness, often at the expense of disability-specific learning opportunities. This creates tensions between universal learning/curricular goals and the need for differentiated pedagogical approaches, which QTVIs must navigate. Existing research into vision impairment (VI) education has largely focused on curriculum adaptation and teaching strategies, with limited engagement in the philosophical, ontological and axiological underpinnings of VI pedagogy. As such, the thesis has been oriented by an ethical imperative for VI education practitioners and researchers to engage closely with their own ontological and axiological underpinnings, so that their pedagogical enactments can support disabled young people effectively in a time shaped by divergent philosophical and political thinking (Braidotti, 2018).

In developing and applying a Dis-Human theoretical framework this thesis offers an alternative (different) way of understanding VI pedagogies. Critical Disability Studies (CDS) “demand critical researchers to think more creatively about setting the conditions for experimenting with socially just pedagogies” (Goodley, 2007, p. 317),

which involve questioning wider (dis)ableist narratives impinging on education. Posthuman scholarship reinscribes this message but encourages a consideration of micropolitical and affective perspectives and potentialities. Barad (2007, p. x) asserts that justice “entails acknowledgment, recognition, and loving attention”. This led to the creation of diffractive methodologies that centred the participation and voice of VICYP.

Disability provided an anchor for reflexivity within this project. For example, it ensured careful consideration of access arrangements and adaptations to ensure that VICYP could participate effectively (e.g. online format of intraviews, crip time). Neurodiversity (both as a paradigm and my state of being) also informed a diffraction of humanist concepts, changing the way I understood and undertook taken-for-granted aspects of the research process, such as voice, listening and participation, allowing them to become diffractive forces in themselves (Fairchild, 2018). A Dis-Human approach to research takes conventional (humanist) research methods and diffracts them – creating difference in thinking and doing. In this thesis reading, writing and thinking became reparative (Kosofsky Sedgwick, 2002) and feminist political acts (Ahmed, 2019). Interviews become intraviews (Kuntz and Presnall, 2012), as voice and listening become more than an “embodied, physical manifestation” (Mayes, 2023, p. 11).

The outcomes of this mean that this thesis offers potentialities for the transformation of VI education pedagogies to respond to the volatile geologic timeframe we live in (UN, 2022; UNESCO, 2024), which is characterised by multiple intersecting crises, widening inequities along multiple axes of social justice. The relational and co-constituted ‘unlearning journey’ outlined in this thesis, therefore, offers provocations to practitioners and researchers to also unlearn accepted and accept-able ways of thinking and doing dominant in VI education, in order to develop the power-as-*potentia* of visually impaired young people, rather than reifying the normative power-as-*potestas* prevalent in education (Braidotti, 2018).

This introduction to this concluding chapter has firstly provided an overview of the background, rationale and journey of this research project. It now goes on to summarise the findings of this thesis by recapping the research questions and their responses. It then outlines other key emergences/**outputs**, including methodological, theoretical, policy and practice offerings, as well as self-reported impact for participants. It undertakes an **assessment** of the research to suggest its limitations and future directions for VI education pedagogy and inquiry. Finally, we exit the doctoral assemblage where we entered – with the voice of VICYP.

Part 1: Findings

10.1 Re-turning to the research questions and responses

I now revisit the research questions (RQs) and summarise the responses in relation to each of them:

10.1.1: RQ1 – How do visually impaired young people encounter the English compulsory education system

Chapter 7 explored the multifaceted educational experiences of VICYP, with analysis identifying that participants live their lives at the hyphen between disability and ability, human and non-human, sameness and difference, offering a nuanced understanding of how VICYP navigate educational contexts. The way that these interdependences are understood by VICYP (and educators) can result in outcomes related to Dis-Human concepts of **dis/connection**, **dis/empowerment** and **dis/orientation**, which can enhance or diminish experiences on their (un)learning journey through compulsory education, and towards understanding their subjectivity. Dis/empowerment is exemplified by participant Megan, who demonstrates agency through her knowledge of accessible learning strategies, fostering autonomy and self-advocacy. Yet, her empowerment is undermined by inaccessible teaching practices, resulting in exclusion and objectification. However, her growing frustration signals an emergent resistance to these marginalising experiences.

Dis/orientation is reflected in Cassie's account, where physical navigational support enables spatial inclusion, yet social and institutional processes reinforce her sense of difference. Over time, Cassie begins to reframe this difference as integral to her identity, suggesting a shift towards self-acceptance and collective belonging within her specialist VI setting. Finally, dis/connection is evident in Thierry's pedagogic encounters. While PE lessons have positioned him as an outsider, his engagement with VI football (where his abilities are recognised and affirmed) offers a counter-narrative of capability and inclusion. Moments of pedagogic care and connection challenge deficit-based assumptions and validate his potential within normative educational and sporting frameworks.

The response to RQ1 contributes to a limited evidence base concerning VICYP's engagement with the English compulsory education system. Through participatory storying, it reveals the complex, non-linear trajectories of educational becoming, shaped by micro- and macro-political forces. The use of a diffractive methodology facilitates ethical proximity between researcher and participants, offering a valuable approach for inclusive and reflexive research. The narratives presented in this response (and in Chapters 8 and 9) also offer concrete illustrations of the additional curriculum's relevance, thereby enhancing the evidentiary basis for the Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with Vision Impairment (CFVI). application and underscoring the importance of centring VICYP voices in educational research and policy development.

10.1.2: RQ2 – What different understandings emerge from a Dis-Human exploration about visually impaired children's lives and experiences?

Dis-Human inquiry ensures a methodological positioning of the child as theorist (Mayes, 2023). In the intraview process, I was able to learn about the complex power relations that the children are navigating in their wider lives and experiences, power “not only [as] negative or confining (*potestas*), but also affirmative (*potentia*) or productive of alternative subject positions and social relations” (Braidotti, 2012, p. 22). As such, power was at the forefront of my thinking during the analysis. Adopting a Dis-Human diffractive methodological approach entails an ethico-onto-epistemological approach to research, which centres relationality, multiplicity and entanglements, thereby affirming power-as-*potentia* rather than individualistic power-as-*potestas*.

As Davies (2014, p. 74) explains, each part of an assemblage “is always affected by the other beings with which it is entangled – not just human beings, but non-human beings, both organic and inorganic”. The Dis-Human inquiry, entangling the storyings of a cohort of VICYP in this thesis, demonstrated in Chapter 8 that participants experienced trans-assemblage characteristics – i.e. common themes demonstrating what they hold as important. The first of these concepts was *belonging*. Through participant Lucy's narrative, it became evident that the pursuit of independence often masks a deeper desire for belonging, which is shaped by normative expectations and social hierarchies. Her storying revealed how identity and belonging are performative and contingent and how disabled young people may

suppress aspects of their identity to conform to perceived norms. This finding led to a critical examination of the dominant discourse of independence within VI education, arguing that its alignment with neoliberal ideals risks reproducing ableist norms. The analysis highlighted the need to reframe independence as *interdependence* in VI education pedagogies, recognising mutual reliance and relational agency as central to inclusive practice.

Drawing on Kosofsky Sedgwick's (2002) notion of *besideness*, the chapter also explored how VICYP navigate proximity and difference in relation to both human and non-human agents. Assistive technologies such as long canes, braille and laptops are shown to both enable access and reinforce social exclusion. Participants Rebecca and Rihanna describe how these tools, while facilitating mobility and learning, also mark them as different – leading to feelings of isolation and internalised stigma. The analysis advocates a hauntagogical (Stern, 2012) approach to VI education that foregrounds relationality, emotional complexity and the co-constitution of identity and agency. This involves recognising the affective and material entanglements that shape VICYP's experiences and supporting them to navigate and reclaim spaces of difference.

Finally, the concept of *being~becoming-with* was introduced to capture the immediacy and relational nature of VICYP's experiences, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic. Participants such as Kiran and Helena describe how altered sensory environments and disrupted routines intensified feelings of vulnerability and exclusion. These accounts underscore the need for pedagogical approaches in VI education to be flexible and responsive, allowing VICYP to express preferences and engage meaningfully with their environments. This requires a reimagining of pedagogical practices to support VICYP in their *being~becoming-with* the world, acknowledging their present realities and enabling transformative possibilities.

10.1.3: RQ3 – How might a Dis-Human-informed exploration of visually impaired children's educational experiences and beyond inform VI pedagogies?

Chapter 9 demonstrated how Dis-Human orientation to analysis, in drawing often-hidden storyings in the background to the foreground can offer different conceptualisations and enactments of pedagogy. By zooming out to consider the

interplay between the wider macropolitical contextual assemblages and our micropolitical everyday pedagogic thinking and doings, the outcomes remind VI educators that it is how we choose to prepare for and approach our role that will shape our outcomes. As we grow as practitioners and researchers, we will need to anchor ourselves into the same ground from which the arborescent (Human) education system grows, but with care and attention, we can instead produce rhizomatic growth that '*Dis*'-rupts hierarchical normative thinking and doing in pedagogic encounters to affirm difference.

The response to RQ3 proposes a **RADICLE pedagogy** for VI education, offering a conceptual framework grounded in **relational, affective, democratic, intradependent, collaborative, loving and embodied** orientations. These propositions are not prescriptive but generative, inviting educators to reflect on the epistemological and ontological foundations of their practice and to respond ethically to the lived experiences VICYP in their pedagogic encounters. A RADICLE pedagogy recognises learners as co-constructors within entangled human and more-than-human assemblages. It emphasises the importance of attending to everyday affective experiences that shape learning, foregrounding participation and agency to challenge normative power dynamics. This is supported by the concept of intradependence, which builds on interdependence, recognising that identities and capacities are co-constituted through relational intra-actions with others, including non-human agents and affective forces. Collaboration, therefore, becomes a constellating practice – fluid, iterative and transformative.

Pedagogies imbued with love as a radical and political force respond to the socio-political marginalisation of disabled learners by fostering care and hope, reminding educators to attune to the micropolitical present and support students in navigating challenges and change. Finally, embodied pedagogy recognises the multisensory, affective and spatial dimensions of learning. Emergent listening, as an enactment of embodied pedagogy, enables educators to co-sense and respond to the lived experiences of VICYP. Together, these RADICLE propositions offer a transformative pedagogic framework for VI education, grounded in ethical responsiveness and relational engagement. A RADICLE pedagogy invites educators to reimagine inclusion not as assimilation, but as co-created being~becoming-with beside others to enhance belonging.

Part 2: The offerings of this thesis

10.2 Theoretical contributions:

10.2.1 Exploring the VI education assemblage

This thesis has explored vision impairment education by thinking-with assemblage theory. Just as we are part of an assemblage, we are also assemblages in and of ourselves. Our subjectivity is constituted by and in “an assemblage of people, privilege, opportunities, and provisions...of moments... effects...impacts....and... influences” (Warfield, 2019, p. 148). DeLanda’s (2016, p. 7) concept of assemblage theory, which attests that “assemblages are everywhere, multiplying in every direction”, is resonant in thinking about the multiple assemblages that comprise the VI education assemblage. As Davies (2014) explains, each part of an assemblage “is always affected by the other beings with which it is entangled – not just human beings, but non-human beings, both organic and inorganic”. This enables the child to contextualise their subjectivity and identities without fixed boundaries. This therefore emphasises the applicability of assemblage theory in analysing VI education, given its simultaneous focus on ‘zooming in’ to the individual human assemblages and the components that form them, and ‘zooming out’ to explore how the smaller assemblages interact to form wider assemblages and the wider affective forces that (in)form the creation of assemblages. As such, assemblage theory emphasises that QTVI will need to understand the holistic needs of each child in each situation, which requires a more expansive understanding of contexts, relationships and agentic capabilities.

When combined with diffraction as methodology (e.g. Fox and Alldred, 2021), assemblage provides a cartography of the components and relations within a phenomenon, while diffraction offers a methodological and ethical orientation to trace how these relations shift, interfere and produce new patterns. Together they enable practitioner-researchers to move beyond static categories and binary thinking, attending instead to the dynamic, entangled and situated nature of social life. This synergy is particularly powerful in fields like Critical Disability Studies and inclusive education, where attention to materiality, affect and power dynamics is crucial. The notion of assemblage has previously been applied to the English compulsory education system. However, VI education has not previously been

conceptualised in this way – despite it being an education system that is simultaneously at the margins of and in the middle of both systems – entangled with and by both – which emphasises the unique theoretical contribution to knowledge that this project makes.

10.2.2 Expanding DisHumanism to become Dis-Humanism

My posthuman feminist politics fed into an expansive and diffractive methodology of reading-writing-thinking-with theory, which iteratively informed the creation of a Dis-Human theoretical framework. Dis-Humanism is an enlargement of DisHuman theory (e.g. Goodley and Runswick-Cole, 2014) created by bringing it more directly into entanglement with other critical theories, such as intersectionality (e.g. Crenshaw, 1989) and queer theory (e.g. Ahmed, 2006). It also draws upon a broader array of post-qualitative thinking, including PhEmaterialism, i.e. posthumanism and feminist (new) materialism applied to educational research (e.g. Ringrose and Niccolini, 2020), affect theory (e.g. Gregg and Seigworth, 2010) and assemblage theory (e.g. Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; DeLanda, 2016). In doing so it hyphenates the thinking of these disciplines, ensuring that one does not dominate the other. In turn, this offers a grounding and confidence to conduct research *differently* in the hybrid and generative space that Dis-Humanism creates.

Bringing these fields of scholarship into conversation affords the questioning of the centrality of the human/humanist systems but refuses to reject them. Dis-Humanism simultaneously affirms “**disabled** people’s humanity (to assert normative, often traditional, understandings of personhood)” (Goodley and Runswick-Cole, 2014, p. 6), and also recognises the “complex, multi-faceted, multi-layered and embedded **interconnections**⁵⁸, collaborations and capacities of **human** and **non-human** interrelations” (Goodley et al., 2021, p. 44), calling for “new ecologies of belonging” (Braidotti, 2016, p. 33) that both involve meaningful engagement with nonhuman **alterity** (Jackson, 2018, p. 5), and reframing human ‘otherness’ as powerful and agential (Bayley, 2018b, p. 243). Dis-Human theory encourages a **Slow** ontological approach to exploring the affectivity of entanglements with others from our situatedness in the **middle** of these relations, to better understand contexts, offering a more expansive framing through which to **understand** subjectivity.

⁵⁸ I have emboldened the words that appear in the mnemonic structure of my Dis-Human framework as outlined in Chapter 3 part 3.4.2.i.

Applying this thinking to concepts/actions that are usually ascribed to human agency – e.g. listening, talking and participation, as exemplified in Chapters 5 and 6 of this thesis – means that the experiences elicited in this project are more expansive, and therefore *different*, to those (already limited) understandings of VICYP's life and experiences outlined in the existing literature (as outlined in Chapter 2). The typical focus of the research base on educational experiences becomes more expansive to include those exploring lives beyond schooling, thereby providing new ways to understand the relations between the social and material worlds. This emphasises the distinctive contribution of this project towards developing pedagogic knowledge in VI education, as intraviews described events of power-as-*potestas* in action but they were intertwined with instances of the power-as-*potentia* of VICYP.

10.3 Methodological contributions of this thesis

10.3.1 Methodological contribution 1: Intraview technique

The intraview technique developed and applied herein allows for micro-political resistance and accountability to be produced in the research-assemblage. As Mountz (2018, p. 139) notes, such methods can meet the “critical necessity of generating ‘release points’ for the articulation of experiences that have been ‘wrapped in a kind of collective discursive cellophane’ by anxieties surrounding and grand narratives superimposed”. Intraviews between myself and my participants could be considered such ‘release points’, given that they surfaced narratives of experience that might otherwise have remained internalised, hidden from the sociocultural realm.

The ‘release’ of the stories did not only constitute the self-reported release of pressure that had been building within participants during the pandemic, but in being presented in this thesis may also pressure policymakers to accept the ongoing exclusionary experiences faced by VICYP and other CYP with SEND in the compulsory education system in England. The research underscores the need for educational inclusion initiatives that are co-designed with disabled children and grounded in their everyday realities. This links again to the notion (as explored in Chapter 5 part 5.4.4) of the ‘contact zone’ in Dis-Human participatory research, an

assemblage in which all participants are entangled in a process of worldmaking (Niccolini et al., 2018) in a process that disrupts power hierarchies.

Dis-Human research techniques, such as the intraviews and expansive voice analytic frameworks developed herein, afford an “understanding of the experiences of marginalized populations at the intersection of various identities [which potentially] can facilitate the development of meaningful intervention and policies” (Bassey et al., 2024, p. 3). This further emphasises the contribution of this project, as VI prevalence and impact has been linked to socio-economic inequalities. Consequently, this project, focusing on the intersectional experiences of VICYP in England, offers both a “timely and ethically important” (Bassey et al., 2024, p. 15) contribution to reimagining VI pedagogies.

10.3.2 Methodological contribution 2: Developing a diffractive methodology of reading-writing-thinking-with

Chapter 2 outlined the dearth of evidence around how that visually impaired young people encounter the English compulsory education system. As such, simply by engaging VICYP in conversations about their education has added much-needed knowledge to the body of research. Each storying has offered a glimpse of the entangled “zig-zag path[s] of becoming” (Braidotti, 2000, p. 1063) the participants have traversed so far in their educational journeys, demonstrating the interplay between micro- and macro-political forces and also the “entangled relationalities of inheritance that ‘we’ are” (Barad, 2010, pp. 264-265) in the assemblages. This has allowed me as practitioner-researcher to become, as Guyotte (2023, p. 104) offers, “becoming ethically proximate, *with*” (emphasis in original) the participants in representing their storyings. This emphasises that a diffractive approach offers a unique and ethically sound addition to the methodological arsenal of those conducting research with marginalised groups.

Through intraviewing’s methodological positioning of child as theorist (Mayes, 2023) I was able to learn about the complex power relations that the children are navigating in their wider lives and experiences, power “not only [as] negative or confining (*potestas*), but also affirmative (*potentia*) or productive of alternative subject positions and social relations” (Braidotti, n.d.). As such, power was at the forefront of my thinking during the analysis. Adopting a Slow ontological stance in

reading-writing-thinking involves considering the micropolitical meanings of questions and concepts, which can afford a more intuitive mapping of the VI education system.

My diffractive Dis-Human voice analytical technique, by zooming in on individual accounts and also zooming out to situate them within collective discourses, enabled the analysis to move “between the Dis and the Human to demonstrate their co-dependence” (Liddiard et al., 2019, p. 161). Dis-Humanism allowed the analytical outcomes to claim the category of human (Goodley et al., 2016) whilst questioning it in Chapter 7. It also demonstrated the interdependence between ability and disability, human and non-human in Chapter 8’s assemblage ‘diagrams’. This allowed the discussion to “navigate the rocky and contradictory terrains of the expansive and retracting humanness” (Liddiard et al., 2019, p. 161) by demonstrating how entanglements with non-human agents might be reconceived as generative form of beside-ness, rather than a symbol of non-belonging.

10.4 Offerings for policy

10.4.1 Participatory research to inform national data gaps

In centring participation and voice, this project has elicited rich data which can counter trends noted by the ONS (2021) regarding data quality about the lives and experiences of CYP. The report attributed this to the fact that “information on children’s characteristics may not be collected directly from the children themselves but provided by their parents, carers, teachers or others responsible for children” (ONS, 2021, p. 9). This highlights the potential of this research to address the “missingness” (p. 9) of data about the inclusion of disabled children in its answers to RQ1, particularly as it was produced by the participants themselves. Furthermore, because RQ2 focuses on learning about experiences beyond education and about the participants’ subjectivity as a whole, this project also meets one of the 2021 report’s other ‘priorities’ – that of addressing a “lack of granularity in data to enable an understanding of specific subgroups and the intersectionality of personal characteristics” (p. 17).

Furthermore, a joint report published by the British Academy and the Royal Society in May 2024 recommended three policy options for government regarding

educational research – increased funding, more opportunities for research in under-represented areas and coordinated advocacy at policy and legislative level for educational research (p. 5). This would enhance the ability of outcomes of educational to inform and respond to macro-level societal needs of the 21st century e.g. health, social welfare and economy (p. 2). It also highlighted the importance of the potential micro-political impact of educational research, explaining that due to the “complex array” (p. 5) of stakeholders in the education system, educational research offers also the potential for “transformational impact... has on the individual, on their sense of themselves and their place in the world” (p. 5). This project offers examples of ways of thinking and doing in research that can effect such outcomes (as expanded upon in part 10.5.3 of this chapter).

10.5 Offerings for practice

10.5.1 Developing the QTVI pedagogic role as practitioner-researcher

As a QTVI (practitioner) at the beginning of this project, I drew upon my professional knowledge to identify an area for inquiry for doctoral study. I engaged with research in the field to identify ways to conduct the inquiry and to contextualise it within the wider education system. I collaborated with visually impaired children and young people, families, VI education services, VI charities and other stakeholders in the VI education sector in carrying out the field work. And throughout the research process I was engaged in the development of knowledge-ing at the hyphen of theory and practice I remained in role as a QTVI until the writing up phase of the doctoral process, when I moved into academia to lead the only MQVI programme in England, training circa one hundred professionals to become QTVIs every academic year.

As such, my interest in the concept of QTVI becoming practitioner-researcher has taken on different professional significance during this doctorate. Section 1.6 of the MQVI provider specification set by the DfE (2023, p. 10) states that providers must support trainee QTVIs to develop “skills in consulting children and young people with VI about issues that affect them individually and collectively and helping them express their views to others” (DfE, 2023, p. 10). As the intraview methodology for this project (explained in detail in Chapter 6, part 6.2.2) involved having conversations with VICYP about their lives, this thesis provides empirical evidence

to exemplify how QTVIs can apply such skills – through emergent listening, which positions listening as a pedagogical enactment that is attuned to affect, difference and entanglements. Furthermore, the DfE states that it is imperative that course providers equip the trainee QTVI “to become a critical and reflective practitioner who will be able to pursue personal career development and improve practice through research and self-reflection” (DfE, 2023, p. 14). In this thesis I have offered an example of being such a critical and reflective practitioner through engaging in research and self-reflection but also developed this further by becoming a diffractive practitioner-researcher.

10.5.2 Mapping the policy landscape to inform practice development

This thesis also provides a timely overview of the policy landscape that shapes current VI educational thinking and practice. The MQVI standards referred to in this thesis came into force in September 2023. Prior to this, research was only mentioned in one sub-section of the previous MQVI specification (which applied to courses starting from September 2016 up until August 2023) – “1.10. Research and evaluate innovative practices in relation to improving the achievement of learners with VI and draw on research outcomes and other sources of external evidence to inform their own practice and that of colleagues” (DfE, 2016, p. 16). The increased focus on the value and interplay between practice and research in the 2023 revised MQVI standards is reflective of the specification’s update to respond to the changing landscape of the education system and wider macro-political context (DfE, 2023, p. 3).

Moreover, exploring the pedagogical underpinnings of VI education may be beneficial not just for my own professional development, but also to build wider pedagogic cultures and communities in the sector to inform “diverse pedagogic contexts” (Nind and Lewthwaite, 2018, p. 400). Given my current professional role of QTVI educator, I remain mindful of Nind and Lewthwaite’s (2018, p. 407) assertion that pedagogic research is particularly important for developing teacher competencies in “approaches, strategies and tactics of teachers and learners, but about identity and emotional labour... in an illuminative process of coming to know that which is hard to know”.

10.5.3 Self-reported participant impact

This thesis has emerged from some of the convergences that I embody and am embedded in (Braidotti, 2002; 2019; 2022). I embody roles as practitioner and researcher in the field of vision impairment education. I also embody roles as woman, mother, disabled, queer, working class. By embodying these roles, I am inextricably embedded into socio-political context of the time in which I undertake this research. I am working at the interstices of policy, professional frameworks and their interactions with the day-to-day experiences of teaching and learning. I am (and therefore my work is) affected by an interplay between critical theories and post-philosophies. As such, this thesis constitutes an assemblage (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) into which I bring my participants, and in turn, enter into theirs, which allows us “to think critically and creatively about who and what we are actually in the process of becoming” (Braidotti, 2013, p. 2).

Given the intraview method’s emphasis on relationality and emergence, it was necessary to allow conversations to unfold according to the children’s preferences/desires. Providing space for participants to share aspects of their broader lives, alongside reflections on education, elicited insights unlikely to surface in routine teacher-pupil interactions. Such knowledge-ing can be instrumental for QTVIs in developing personalised interventions and outcomes. These dialogic encounters also prompted critical reflection on my own professional assumptions. VICYP participants reported that co-constructing knowledge enabled deeper engagement with their subjectivities, enhancing wellbeing, self-esteem and confidence in self-advocacy. This underscores a key consideration for practitioner-researchers: how and where might VICYP meaningfully contribute their perspectives to educators and other adults? Participant Helena offers an affective insight into the potentialities of such pedagogic encounters:

You made me think. You gave me space to really think about things and decide where I stood. We change as we grow up, but I feel like how adults, especially teachers, treat us is the same no matter how old we are. You know, that's why it was so important to me, you asking these questions. You talked to me like a person, not just a kid. You listened... I think we need to talk to our teachers more – I think it would be useful because I think there are improvements that can be made about how we learn. We should be listened to more. I've talked about this among my friends, but we don't really know where to take the ideas.
(Participant Helena, intraview 2, 11.11.2021)

10.6 Limitations

It must be acknowledged that this thesis-assemblage is emergent and temporarily stabilised (with)in the contexts in which it was produced (Taylor and Harris, 2021). As Braidotti (2018, p. 3) explains: “[b]eing grounded, any cartographic account is necessarily selective, partial and never exhaustive”. This thesis does not attempt to faithfully trace the development of this research in a chronological or linear way. Instead, it recognises the value of entangling the empirical and theoretical ‘voices’ to co-constitute the VI educational landscape, as “without one of these... [‘voices’], the relief would be another” (D’Angelo and Uziel, 2023, p. 2). It then further situates these ‘voices’ by bringing them into conversation with the wider research and policy contexts. This framing contextualises and justifies the thesis’ ‘problem statement’ – that VI education pedagogies need to be approached differently to respond to the challenges of the current era.

Nevertheless, I acknowledge that had I ‘cut’ the data differently, using different theories, or if the data had sparked different affective resonances, such “emergent intelligibility” (Spector, 2015, p. 448) might have occurred and/or manifested very differently. Fox and Alldred (2021, p. 7) warn that “dependence of conclusions on a researcher’s choice of agential cut suggests that [diffractive analysis] is one of the most researcher-centric and context-dependent analytic approaches yet devised”. Conversely, I would argue that *all* research is inevitably researcher-centric and context dependent, and that diffractive methodology’s open acknowledgement of its context dependence and researcher influence makes it a more ethical approach to research.

However, it is important to recognise that “prioritising student voice... does not necessarily change pedagogical practices and relations and the lived experiences of students” (Mayes, 2023, p. 25). This is particularly the case when a project advocating for this is small-scale in terms of sample of participants, which might impact claims of validity or generalisability. However, posthuman critiques of validity and generalisability challenge the foundational assumptions of traditional research paradigms, especially those rooted in humanism, positivism and anthropocentrism. As such, I reject generalisability as a goal, recognising the situated nature of inquiry and viewing knowledge as co-constructed, fluid and context-bound (Schwandt, 1994; Taylor, 2021). However, as Chapter 3 argued, my participatory form of inquiry

has attained construct validity through collaborative meaning-making between participants and researchers (Fine and Torre, 2004).

As Chapter 2 explained, while it is clear that most teachers and school leaders value evidence (Coldwell et al., 2017), its real-life applicability arguably depends on its *situatedness*. The transferability of this research will be dependent upon whether the reader believes that it has direct relevance to their practice. As such, to attempt to enhance transferability, I have engaged throughout this thesis in both prospective and retrospective reflexivity (Attia and Edge, 2017, p. 38) to consistently consider how my experiences have shaped the research process (prospective reflexivity) and how it in return has shaped my experience in becoming practitioner-researcher (retrospective reflexivity) in this project, in the hope that my journey may resonate with others, and encourage them to embody this role.

10.7 Future research possibilities

Conceiving of and enacting research *differently* through a Dis-Human approach takes away its linearity and proceduralism, which can be messy, but also generative. As such, the thesis findings do not offer definitive answers to the research questions but rather feed into propositions for further study. My diffraction of DisHumanism to Dis-Humanism has exemplified the possibilities for entangling VI educational research with wider theoretical influences. For example, a closer link with Disabled Childhood Studies could be forged. Slater (2013) notes that youth studies have typically left disability out of their research foci and disability studies has often left out youth. Often, when disabled youth is discussed in research, it is viewed as a transitional period from childhood to adulthood rather than a time with its own value. Therefore, much existing research has focused on the transition of disabled young people to adulthood, without due attention to what it means to be a disabled young person *now*. This links to this project's findings that being-becoming-with is important to teenaged VICYP.

To explore this further, zooming in to explore the assemblages in which a single VICYP is entangled would be a valuable addition to the research field. In Disabled Childhood Studies, McLaughlin et al. (2008) found that a baby with Down's Syndrome had contact with 120 health, social care and educational professionals. Bringing this study design into conversation with posthumanism could catalyse the

development of a Dis-Human cartographic case study methodology. Mapping assemblages could also be explored as a group intraview methodology, drawing upon more on DisCrit, e.g. Annamma's (2017) work on education journey mapping with disabled girls of colour, which could support intersectional understandings of subjectivity. Both methodologies could provide empirical evidence of the complexity of support required to support some VICYP, which would be useful to support advocacy campaigns, such as trying to make the CFVI statutory in England to ensure that VICYP are able to access to multiple forms of support.

Future studies could also examine more closely the non-human actors in VICYP's assemblages and their affective impact on pedagogic encounters. Participants might be asked to bring objects to intraviews and talk about their significance to the participant in the hope that their presence might bring about connective questions (e.g. "how does the object connect to a specific experience?") This could expand mainly interpretive, e.g. "what does that mean?", or phenomenological questions, e.g. "what was that like?" (Nordstrom, 2013, p. 12) towards more open and unexpected outcomes. Emergent storyings would be harder to anticipate, potentially democratising the research process towards centring young people's power-as-*potentia* as the researcher will need to "let the map make itself" (Nordstrom, 2013, p. 249). In the VI additional curriculum, 'objects of reference' as used as physical and locational markers in spaces to help visually impaired children use tactile feedback to orient themselves. Conversely, objects brought to the liminal space of online intraviews might dis/orientate the conversations, allowing for knowledge-ings to emerge that go beyond the 'typical' or expected outputs of educational research projects.

Conflux

The late queer feminist theorist Lauren Berlant (2011a, pp. 229-230) asks: “why is it so hard to detach from the life-destructive forms of the normative political world, without that detachment providing tacit permission for that world to reproduce itself as such?” Uncertainty, change and difference are equated with negativity and sameness is desired (Bredewold, 2021, p. 15). Disabled children experiencing the UK education system have long been subject to multiple marginalisations due to such outcomes based around standardised and comparative humanistic measures of success. Navigating them involves a recognition that these success measures matter to young people whilst supporting them to understand that success can be understood differently. For disabled young people, coming to such understandings is not a linear journey, and involves unlearning as much as learning, given the additional physical and emotional resources they need to overcome obstacles that their non-disabled peers do not face.

The data for this project was collected during the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions in the UK. The imperative to think differently about inclusive education for children with SEND, while important prior to the Covid-19 pandemic (e.g. Florian and Black-Hawkins, 2011), has become ever more pressing. In the case of VICYP, there was an evident lack of systemic educational support during the lockdowns. For example, VI charity Angel Eyes NI found that nearly half of respondents to a 2021 survey reported a decline in emotional health and wellbeing during the pandemic. The charity attributed this phenomenon to poor learning experiences of the during the pandemic (Pilson, 2022, para. 2). At the time of writing, the UK Covid-19 Inquiry⁵⁹ hearings have found that the pandemic’s ongoing impacts have been “incredibly bleak” for some disabled CYP. Consequently, the rupture to the education system caused by the pandemic requires a careful consideration of “where we are in our existence and whether we are doing what we need to be doing, want to be doing, and are here to be doing” (Ferrando, 2012, p. 2).

As such, it is an apposite juncture to explore the pedagogical orientations of field of VI education. This thesis’ call for pedagogies to be reimagined as a relational,

⁵⁹ The UK Covid-19 Inquiry has been set up to examine the UK’s response to and impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The inquiry has been split into ‘modules’. Module 8 focusing on the impact of the pandemic on children and young people in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, including those with SEND, opened on Tuesday 21 May 2024. The Inquiry hearings for this module took place in London from 29 September 2025 to 23 October 2025.

affective encounter reminds practitioner-researchers what it means to be an educator in an epoch wherein “distinct philosophical genealogies...produce divergent political stances as well as different world-historical events” (Braidotti, 2018, p. xiii). This navigation requires an ethical imperative towards developing affirmative and relational approaches in pedagogic thinking and doings in order to counter the “politically poisonous times” (Goodley, 2020b, p. 22) which we and our students are navigating. For QTVIs, the outcomes of this thesis demonstrate that adopting a RADICLE pedagogic approach towards VI education – ensuring that our thinking and doings are relational, affective, democratic, intradependent, collaborative, loving and embodied – can make micropolitical impacts that can support our students in navigating macropolitical discourses and dilemmas.

A RADICLE pedagogic approach requires educators and researchers must diffract both practice and philosophies. It necessitates the development of more expansive understandings of voice, engaging in emergent listening and to reconceive pedagogy as a relational encounter that supports learning and unlearning for *all* participants. While this process may appear complex, its enactments can be simple, their impact stemming from “the intensities they build and what thoughts and feelings they make possible” (Stewart, 2007, p. 3). Such ordinary, everyday actions of offering time and space to talk, listen and be flexible in the roles we embody *matter* to the young people we work with, as the closing words of this thesis from participant Thierry (intraview 2, 8.11.2021) elucidate:

I haven't really had any opportunity to talk to an adult like this before. I haven't really talked about myself and my feelings, my hopes, my experiences, especially things that are happening right now, in the present. It's been so good to talk to someone on this level. You were still a teacher though, so I wasn't sure how honest to be at first. But you have been really open, reassuring. You have given me ideas. You let me talk about what I wanted to talk about and you listened. You know, if you could talk to your VI teacher like this it would make all the difference. You'd feel like you matter more.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Defining vision impairment

The World Health Organisation (WHO) International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD), a tool that standardises the language used by health professionals worldwide defines VI as follows: A vision impairment results when an eye condition affects the visual system and one or more of its vision functions. Typically, population-based surveys measure visual impairment using exclusively visual acuity, with severity categorized as mild, moderate or severe distance vision impairment or blindness, and near vision impairment. However, in the clinical setting, other visual functions are also often assessed, such as a person's field of vision, contrast sensitivity and colour vision (WHO ICD, 2019). VI describes a loss of sight that *cannot* be corrected using lenses (glasses or contact lenses).

A Certificate of Vision Impairment (CVI) is an official document completed by a consultant ophthalmologist to confirm a person's eligibility for registration as sight impaired (partially sighted) or severely sight impaired (blind). Certification is based on permanent sight loss in both eyes. Once issued, the CVI can be shared with the individual's GP, local council, and relevant services to initiate support. While the CVI is not required to access services like Vision Rehabilitation or benefits (e.g. Personal Independence Payment, Disability Living Allowance), it can simplify access to concessions and entitlements.

To obtain a CVI, the process begins with a clinical assessment of vision loss using two key measures: visual acuity and visual field. Visual acuity refers to the clarity of central vision and is tested using the Snellen chart which has letters (or pictures) which become gradually smaller as you read down the chart. The further down the chart a person can correctly identify the letters, the better their level of distance vision. A distance visual acuity score is usually expressed as a fraction e.g. 6/12, where 6 represents the testing distance (in metres – i.e. how far away the person was seated from the chart) and 12 represents the smallest line of letters correctly identified. A result of 6/60 indicates that a person sees at a distance of 6 metres what someone with standard vision sees at 60 metres. Visual field measures peripheral vision while looking straight ahead. To be certified as severely sight impaired (blind), a person must meet one of the following criteria (with corrective lenses if needed):

- Visual acuity less than 3/60 with a full visual field

- Visual acuity between 3/60 and 6/60 with severely restricted field (e.g., tunnel vision)
- Visual acuity of 6/60 or better with a significantly reduced field, especially in the lower visual field

For sight impaired (partially sighted) certification, criteria include:

- Visual acuity of 3/60 to 6/60 with a full field
- Visual acuity up to 6/24 with moderate field reduction or other eye conditions
- Visual acuity of 6/18 or better with substantial field loss (e.g., hemianopia or peripheral vision loss)

Certification requires sight loss in both eyes and is determined by a medical specialist, such as a consultant ophthalmologist. Not all of the participants in the project had a CVI but all have diagnoses that fit into either the severely sight impaired or sight impaired categories above. It is also crucial to note that the acronym CVI is arguably more commonly used in VI education as an abbreviation for cortical or cerebral vision impairment, in which visual difficulties are primarily due to how the brain processes visual input, rather than issues with the eyes themselves.

Appendix 2: Policy development overview

Table 2: An overview of major developments in the SEND system and VI education in England since 1972

Chapter 2, part 2.2.1 offered an overview of the development of the SEND system in the UK. Alongside major national and international changes that have impacted upon schooling in England, developments in VI education are interwoven and presented in **red ink**. This separation is deliberate in order to demonstrate the unique position of VI in the middle and at the margins of the wider debates surrounding education and inclusion:

Date/ Policy Development	Description/Implications
1972 Vernon Report	The report into the 'education of the visually handicapped' conducted in 1968 (commissioned by then Education Secretary Margaret Thatcher and overseen by Professor M. Vernon) and published in 1972 by the Department of Education and Science remains the only report of the past 50 years conducted by UK central government into vision impairment education. At the point that the report was published, there were 39 specialist schools for the visually impaired in the UK, and there was an established tradition since the early twentieth century of specialist provision for VICYP, e.g. there were 33 residential schools for the blind in 1907, despite the 1893 Elementary Education Act (Blind and Deaf Children) mandating that local education boards needed to educate blind children from the ages of 5 to 16 years (McCall, 1997). However, it is worth noting that most of these specialist schools were designated as either being for blind or partially sighted students, there were only two schools at this point that were permitted to accept both cohorts. Another outcome of the Vernon Report was its recommendation that peripatetic teachers work with VICYP under school age and their families in the home to prepare them for the transition to compulsory education.
1978 Warnock Report	This report introduced the term "Special Educational Needs" (SEN) to describe students needing different or additional support. It estimated that 20% of children might experience some level of SEN during their schooling, with 2% requiring ongoing specialist support beyond what mainstream schools could offer.

Date/ Policy Development	Description/Implications
1981 Education Act	This Act followed the Warnock Report's lead in replacing the terminology of 'handicap' with SEN. It also introduced the Statement of Educational Need (Section 7), mandating Local Authorities to identify and provide for students requiring additional support. It also advocated for increased inclusion as integration, specifying that it was the duty of Local Authorities to ensure that children with SEN should receive their education at an "ordinary school" (Department of Education and Skills/DES, 1981, Para. 2.2) if this was what parents wanted and if this placement was deemed to be an "efficient use of resources" (DES, 1981, Para. 2.3.c).
1988 Education Reform Act	This legislation established the first statutory National Curriculum for England and Wales and introduced league tables to drive a marketisation of education by increasing competition for students between schools. There were no specific provisions made for students with a statement of SEN, indeed the Act mentioned the term 'special educational needs' only twice in section 18's vague explanation that such students could be excluded from the application of National Curriculum provision or offered modifications in line with their statement of need (DES, 1988, section 18).
1991	A book summarising the outcomes of a study commissioned by RNIB to examine the impact of 'mainstreaming' of VICYP, development of VI education services and attendant issues was published (Dawkins, 1991). The book highlighted discrepancies in provision for VICYP across the country and the isolating impact that integration into the mainstream could potentially have for VICYP, if not supported by appropriate planning and practice.
1994 Salamanca Statement	The 1994 World Congress on Special Needs Education in Salamanca (Spain) produced the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education, which Ainscow et al. reflected 25 years on from its creation, constituted "arguably the most significant international document that has ever appeared in the field of special education" (2019, p. 671). The statement advocated for inclusive 'education for all' "within the regular education system" and outlined that children with SEN "must have access to regular schools". The UK, along with 91 other governments, endorsed it. As such, the Salamanca Statement built upon the groundwork laid by the Warnock Report towards a decrease in special schools in the UK (DfES, 2003), including VI specialist schools, as it stated Salamanca Statement concluded that: "Regular schools with [an] inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system".

Date/ Policy Development	Description/Implications
1994 Code of Practice on SEN	This code established the role of the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) in schools and outlined a five-stage model for assessing SEN.
1994	By 1994, the number of VI-specific special schools had dropped from 39 in 1972 to twenty (Fetton, 1994), emphasising the ongoing influence of the Warnock Report's push for inclusion in mainstream on UK policy and practice.
1998 National Strategies	This development, introduced by Tony Blair's 'New Labour' government was a fixed term, systematic national strategy to improve education standards and outcomes, emphasising the value of early intervention and ongoing support. The strategies were broken down into different areas, including Literacy, numeracy, age-related (e.g. Early Years and Key Stage 3 strategies) before being extended to Key Stage 4, School Improvement, Behaviour and Attendance, other subjects, Gifted and Talented and SEN (DfE, 2011). With reference to children with SEN, it created a 'Waves of Provision' model which acknowledged that beyond universal quality first teaching, within a broad curriculum offer (Wave 1), that some children would require additional support in the form of short-term small-group or one-to-one interventions (Wave 2). Finally, it recognised that some children require specialist support (Wave 3). The word some is important to note – it demonstrates the ongoing cautious approach to specialist support if it could undermine inclusion conceptualised as physical integration. As Norwich later explained, specialist support “does not mean that a separate specialist teacher is required in a separate setting” (2013, p. 79).
2001 Special Educational Needs and Disability Act	This act revised the Code of Practice, replacing the five-stage model with two levels of support: School Action and School Action Plus, prior to a full statement. It also aimed to strengthen the rights of parents to place their children in mainstream schools, as due to this Act schools now legally had to ensure that reasonable adjustments were put in place for disabled children.
2003	The Education (School Teachers' Qualifications) (England) Regulations number No. 1662 Regulation 7 stated that: “a person shall not be a qualified teacher for the purpose of teaching a class of pupils who are visually impaired unless in addition to being a qualified teacher in accordance with regulation 5, he possesses a qualification approved by the Secretary of State for the purpose of this regulation”. This made the roles of qualified sensory impairment specialist teachers a mandatory entitlement to VICYP in some settings.

Date/ Policy Development	Description/Implications
2004	The Removing Barriers to Achievement report was published. This report emphasised “the need to focus on appropriate identification of special educational needs (SEN), early intervention, use of data and the skills and confidence of the workforce” (DfE, 2011, p. 36) and clarified that it did not advocate for the removal of special schools or specialist provision, but rather more joined up provision.
2004 Children Act	This act required multi-agency cooperation among local authorities, police, and health services to safeguard and promote children’s wellbeing, following the Every Child Matters (ECM) report. The ECM report outlined five key outcomes co-produced with young people and their families summarising what they believed was most important to them to support and improve their wellbeing. The outcomes – being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution, achieving economic well-being – demonstrate the importance of the additional curriculum for VICYP in providing opportunities to meet these outcomes in ways that are appropriate for them, and that participation is viewed as important by young people.
2005 Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)	Schools were required to make reasonable adjustments to ensure all students could access and participate in school life, including admissions, learning activities, and resources.
2005	In the same year, Baroness Mary Warnock, reflecting on her seminal 1978 report, published ‘Special Educational Needs: A New Look’ and asserted that inclusion should “be redefined so that it allows children to pursue the common goals of education in the environment within which they can best be taught and learn” (Warnock, 2005, p. 54). She followed this up in her introduction to a book on special schools that “what has been wrong with the policy of inclusion has been the idea that if some children with special needs can flourish in the mainstream they all can” (Warnock, in Farrell, 2006, p. v). This constituted a powerful questioning of the concept of “inclusion’ in the narrow sense of ‘placement’” (Tutt, 2007, p. 1).
2008 Personalised Learning Guide	This guide suggested that quality first teaching could address many SEN issues without additional provision.

Date/ Policy Development	Description/Implications
2009 onwards – Longitudinal Transitions Study	The University of Birmingham’s Vision Impairment Centre for Teaching and Research (VICTAR) and RNIB began an initial five-year national longitudinal study into post-16 transitions for VICYP. The project tracked a cohort of circa 80 VICYP aged 14-16 as they transitioned out of compulsory education into a job market that presented a marked disparity in employment rates for visually impaired people – e.g. 75% working-age population were in employment in 2011, compared with only 33% of visually impaired people in the same age bracket (Clements and Douglas, 2011). Its purpose was to identify the barriers to independence in the transition process identified by VICYP (Hewett et al., 2011). The final summary report (published in 2021) found that a particular barrier is “consistent evidence that it is becoming increasingly more difficult for children and young people with vision impairment to access support through specialist educational services... [constituting] a postcode lottery” (Hewett et al., 20. P. 24), which is likely to contribute to the prevalence of VICYP being not in employment, education or training (NEET). In 2018, Thomas Pocklington Trust found that 38% of VICYP aged between 16 and 25 were classified as NEET (double the rate of cited peers).
2010 Equality Act	On October 1st 2010 the Equality Act came into action, replacing the Disability Discrimination Act. The Equality Act made it illegal for education providers to discriminate based on nine protected characteristics, including disability, race, gender, and religion.
2010 Academies Act	This act allowed academies to operate independently of local authority control, with direct funding from the central government. However, local authorities remained responsible for SEN students.
2013	The compulsory age that CYP must remain in appropriate education, training or employment was raised from 16 to 18, as a result of the 2008 Education and Skills Act coming into force.
2014 Children and Families Act	Children and Families Act, which introduced increased joined up working between the education, health and social care sectors, and implemented support from birth to 25 “if councils agree that a young person needs more time to get ready for adulthood” (DfE, 2014a, p. 7). This Act replaced the Statement of Educational Need with the Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP), promoting a holistic approach to assessment and provision. SEN support was to be a graduated approach, with schools making anticipatory adjustments and providing targeted teaching, seeking external advice only when necessary. It also introduced the Local Offer – that every Local Authority must provide information to CYP with SEND and their families about what resources and support are available in their local area.

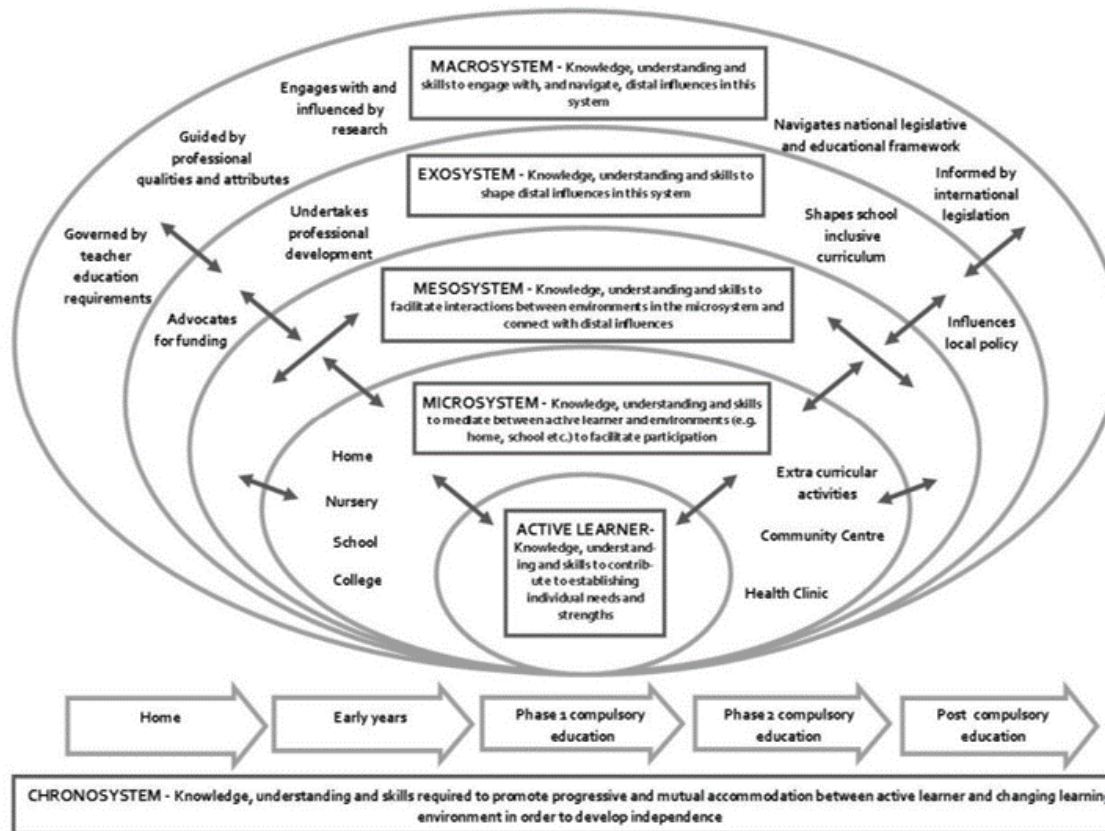
Date/ Policy Development	Description/Implications
2014	A Young Person's Guide to the Children and Families Act was produced and published to support the Act coming into force. It summarised in simple language and terms nine key topics covered by the Act and emphasised that children were legally entitled to have their "wishes and their feelings about their education, training, hobbies and activities have to be taken into account [and that children should] take part as much as possible in decisions about what help they get" (DfE, 2014b, p. 24). An impetus for this project is my professional belief that this entitlement is not being enacted effectively in VI education.
2015 SEND Code of Practice	This code outlined four categories of need: communication and interaction; cognition and learning; social, mental, and emotional health; and sensory and/or physical needs. The CoP arguably advocated for a more moderate inclusion orientation towards educational provision, which envisages the system being accessible to all, but also "incorporating an element of specialist provision" (Low, 2007, in Cigman, 2007, p. 10). This supports the notion of inclusive 'quality first' teaching that was introduced by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) 'Personalised Learning – A practical guide' publication (2008). Quality first teaching draws upon the Salamanca Statement's assertion that the most effective form of education is schools developing "ways of teaching that respond to individual differences and that therefore benefit all children" (Ainscow et al., 2019, p. 672). However, it also recognises, as per the 1998 National Strategies, that for some children specialist input is necessary, but leaves definitions and extent of such specialist input open to interpretation.
2017 Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) Local area SEND inspections	one year on' report published: In 2017, Ofsted and CQC found in their inspections of how well local areas were fulfilling their duties related to the SEND CoP that pupils with SEND were still having a poorer educational experience than their peers. This was despite the SEND CoP and the 2014 Children's and Families Act representing the most wholesale change of SEND policy in 30 years, legislating a commitment to explicitly person centred support processes and enshrining in policy children's right to "have a real say in what help they get" (DfE, 2014, p. 26). I surmise that a key reason for this was that the right to participation and voice for pupils with SEND not translating at grass-roots educational level (a pattern that unfortunately has not changed over time). As Webster and Blatchford stated: "following the overhaul of the SEND system, we still do not know what the provision set out in a Statement looks like to the...pupils on the receiving end" (2017, pp. 19-20).
2019 OFSTED Inspection Framework	Schools were required to demonstrate strategic approaches to SEN and inclusion. This would involve thorough evaluation of SEN students' progress.

Date/ Policy Development	Description/Implications
2022 Opportunity for all White Paper and The SEND and Alternative Provision Green Paper	These papers were published to summarise findings about current issues in the SEND system within a consultation period which explored viewpoints from children, families, professionals about issues raised.
2023 Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) Improvement Plan	This plan was developed following the consultation periods that fed into the 2022 Green and White papers. The 'core values' (pp. 94-95) outlined by the plan included a commitment to 'evidence' underpinning decision-making around support and curricula, early intervention and increased participation of parents and CYP in processes around planning support. It also promised "timely access to specialist services and support, including specialist placements where appropriate" (DfE, 2023, p. 95), which appears to support the aforementioned UK policy trajectory back towards accepting a need for special schools and specialist professionals such as the QTVI. It is important to note that this plan was published in March 2023 by the Conservative government, which was replaced by a Labour government following the July 2023 General Election. At the time of writing, it remains unclear as to whether this plan will be implemented and in what form.
2024 announcement of MQSI apprenticeships programme	The 2023 SEND and AP Improvement Plan acknowledged the dearth of sensory impairment specialist teachers and stated a commitment to developing an apprenticeship route for professionals to train as sensory impairment specialists. The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) has been tasked to work with organisations in the SI sector to develop occupational professional standards for this apprenticeship route, with a view to it launching in the 2025/26 academic year. While this development superficially has positive connotations for VICYP, because the government will provide levy funding for those wanting to undertake this programme, which suggests that there will be a higher number of QTVIs in future, the plan demonstrates a lack of understanding of the machinations of the sector. It states that the funding attached "will help to open up the profession to individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds" (DfE, 2023, p. 62).

Appendix 3: The current dominant theoretical model in VI education pedagogy.

Chapter 2, part 2.2.6 offered an overview of the current dominant theoretic model in VI education pedagogy. Figure 8 below shows McLinden et al.'s (2017a, p. 353) bioecological model which illustrates the role of specialist teachers of learners with vision impairments to act as potential agents of change within the respective systems. It is adapted by McLinden et al. from similar models by Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Hewett et al., 2017; McLinden et al., 2016; Swanwick, 2014.

Figure 8: McLinden et al.'s (2017a) bioecological model for VI education.



Appendix 4: Tabular version of Dis-Human theoretical framework in Chapter 3 part 3.4.2

Table 3: Dis-Human theoretical framework table

Dis-Human Concept	Explanation via thinking-with theory	How methodology activates Dis-Human concepts	How Dis-Human concepts permeate findings
Disability	Affirming disability as a generative tool for evaluation and analysis. “Disability is the space from which to think through a host of political, theoretical and practical issues that are relevant to all” (Goodley, 2016, p. 157, emphasis in original).	Chapter 4’s re-viewing technique centres <i>Slowness as a form of crippling and neuroqueering reading and writing, and a more ethical way of doing disability research.</i>	Chapter 8 part 8.4.5 demonstrates how the liminal space afforded by online research afforded deep reflexivity for all participants.
Interconnection	Taking an ethico-onto-epistemological (EOE) approach to research that centres “intertwined practices of knowing and becoming” (Barad, 2003, p. 812).	Chapter 6 outlines how my data collection <i>Intraview technique and Dis-Human voice analytic process reframe voice as co-constituted</i>	Thierry’s storying in Chapter 7 part 7.2.3 as part of the response to RQ1 demonstrates the importance of connection for becoming.
Slowness	Developing ways of thinking and doing that actively subvert “neoliberal power dynamics and... taking time to question thoughtfully and to reimagine research outcomes and practices” (Rutter et al., 2024, pp. 56-57).	Chapter 5 part 4’s reimagining of participation and participatory inquiry via a Dis-Human lens <i>Slows it down from linear method to affect-infused technique.</i>	Chapter 10 draws together the findings of RQ1 , RQ2 and RQ3 to emphasise the potential of Slowing down in pedagogical encounters to find out what matters to young people.
Humanism	Questioning the human/humanist systems, but it must also assert “disabled people’s humanity (to assert normative, often traditional, understandings of personhood)”. (Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2014, p. 6).	Chapter 5’s account of how diffracting participatory approaches from method to technique via reading-writing-thinking-with post-qualitative theories can generate more ethical approaches for disability research by questioning but still engaging, rather than rejecting, humanism.	Chapter 7’s response to RQ1 demonstrates participants’ desire to access normative human experiences, but at the same time shows how their disabled identity can be a powerful tool in questioning these desires/experiences.

Understanding the present	Focusing on the everyday “relations, scenes, contingencies and emergences” (Stewart, 2007, pp. 1-2) to consider the macro- and micro-political contexts of the project.	Methodology – Chapter 1’s introduction and Chapter 2’s contextual cartography both outline the macropolitical climate in which this inquiry took place, whereas the micro-political contexts that affected the project are attended to throughout due to the posthuman autoethnographically-influenced reading-writing-thinking-with methodology outlined in Chapter 4.	Both Chapter 7 and Chapter 8 in their response to RQ1 and RQ2 deliberately attend to both macropolitical discourse (e.g. Sami’s discussions of ableism related to the Paralympics in Chapter 8 and the micropolitical affective forces that impact us every day – e.g. Megan’s encounter with the worksheet in Chapter 7.
Middle	Drawing upon concepts from both qualitative and post-qualitative thinking so that research becomes “hybridized space of traditional and disruptive approaches to inquiry” (Bhattacharya, 2021, p. 180).	Chapter 3’s curation and creation of this Dis-Human framework, drawing upon critical qualitative and PhEmaterialist thinking, creates such a hybridised space.	Chapter 9’s response to RQ3, particularly the original pedagogic framework offered in part 3, demonstrates application of Dis-Human thinking in the middle of research and practice.
Alterity	Diffraction taken-for-granted understandings - “difference must be activated, or made generative, in order to dislodge it from systems of normativity” (Jones, 2021, para. 5).	Chapter 3’s feminist axioms outline my commitment to upholding difference as generative, which is activated in Chapter 4’s explanation of the diffractive methodology I develop and outline across Chapters 4, 5, 6	Chapter 9’s response to RQ3 illustrates how the same curriculum can be taught through varied pedagogic modes (e.g. storytelling, inquiry, embodied practices) which shape micropolitical dynamics of power and possibility in pedagogic encounters.
Non-humans	Promoting “positive understandings of the complex, multi-faceted, multi-layered and embedded interconnections, collaborations and capacities of human and non-human interrelations” (Goodley et al., 2021, p. 44).	Chapter 6 explains how human activities (voice and listening) can be imbricated with non-human affective forces to become more-than human.	As part of the response to RQ2, Chapter 8 part 2’s assemblage diagram maps the affective impact of participants’ ‘besideness’ with non-human agents.

Appendix 5: Recruitment email body text

Dear _____,

My name is Anna Pilson, I am a QTVI working for Derbyshire and I am also undertaking my PhD at Durham University. I am looking for pupils to agree to be interviewed to talk about their life, likes and dislikes, educational experiences, and hopes for the future. They will be paid for their time (£20 high street vouchers), and the interviews will take place via Teams. Their interviews will be used to inform my PhD project, which is supported by RNIB and Thomas Pocklington Trust. The interviews can be done at a time convenient to the young person. I am ideally looking for young people aged 14-18, but I am also happy to work with younger pupils if they are keen.

Here is more information:

National Vision Impairment charities RNIB and Thomas Pocklington Trust are supporting Durham University student and vision impairment teacher Anna Pilson in looking for participants for her PhD project. The project aims to find out more about the lives and educational experiences of visually impaired young people aged 11-18. Participants will:

- **Reflect on personal history, experiences and identity via individual interviews on a secure online platform.**

Talk about issues that are important to them, such as personal ambitions, life at school, interests, social media, plans for the future and other topics to be decided by the individual.

- **Discuss how the events of 2020 have impacted upon their lives.**

- **Be awarded with a certificate for participation that can be used as evidence towards UCAS form, job applications and college applications.**

- **Be awarded with a £20 high street voucher as thanks for participating if you complete both interviews.**

Anna has created a brief 2 minute overview video can be watched here: https://www.canva.com/design/DAElvLnw4x8/f02AeMT5PrPQR7Xp0L_6UA/view?utm_content=DAElvLnw4x8&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link&utm_source=recording_view

There is a link in the video that allows you to watch another longer 5-minute video that explains the project in more detail. Please note – the video talks about a group project, but due to Covid restrictions, we will now be working individually.

The project has received ethical approval from Durham University. As a practising QTVI, Anna is fully DBS checked.

To participate in the project, participants need to read the information form and sign consent form and ask a parent/guardian to sign the consent form too.

The project will take place on Microsoft Teams/Zoom over the next few months (up to the end of 2021 – dates and times to be confirmed with input of participants). Participants will be required to participate in a minimum of 2 online interviews of around 30-45 minutes.

Please let me know if you need any further information. Attached are information and consent forms. CYP will need permission from parent/guardian. If any of your pupils would like to be involved, please can you pass on their email address for me to contact them. I have participants from Sheffield, Derbyshire and New College Worcester so far. I appreciate that we are near the end of term, so I do appreciate your support.

Best wishes,

Anna

Appendix 6: Participant information and consent forms

Chapter 6 Part 1 explains the process of recruitment, which was complicated by the restrictions put in place due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Participants and gatekeepers (e.g. QTVI, school, parents/carers) were provided with the information form. All participants were asked to sign the below consent form and have it also signed by a parent/carer. In this instance, I adhered to the UN (2020) definition of child as being under 18. Appendix 6.1 is the information form, which contains a link to information videos about the project I created on Canva (as explained in Chapter 6 part 6.1.5). The consent form in Appendix 6.2 is presented in accessible format for use with screen readers.

Appendix 6.1: Information form

Participant Information Sheet

Project title: Young Visually Impaired people – your lives, identities and experiences

Researcher(s): Anna Pilson

Department: Education

Contact details: Durham University School of Education, Leazes Road, Durham, DH1 1TA or anna.pilson@durham.ac.uk

Supervisor name: Dr Sophie Ward/ Dr Rosemary Ridgway

Supervisor contact details: Durham University School of Education, Leazes Road, Durham, DH1 1TA or s.c.ward@durham.ac.uk r.a.ridgway@durham.ac.uk

You are invited to take part in a study that I am conducting as part of my PhD at Durham University School of Education.

This study has received ethical approval from School of Education of Durham University (reference: EDU-2020-07-17T16:23:27-dtfq33).

Before you decide whether to agree to take part it is important for you to understand the purpose of the research and what is involved as a participant. Please read the following information carefully. Please get in contact if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

The rights and responsibilities of anyone taking part in Durham University research are set out in our 'Participants Charter':

What is the purpose of the study?

- The aim of this study is to collaborate with school-aged visually impaired students to find out more about their lives and educational experiences. Participants will work online with me and peers and will be able to influence the research design and the topics discussed so that they are representative of the interests of the group.
- My project is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and I am partnered with national charities Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB).
- The study will be completed by 31.8.22 but participants will be actively involved from summer 2021 to the end of 2021 at the latest.

Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been invited because you are a young visually impaired person and I believe you have important views that need to be heard more in educational research.

Do I have to take part?

Your participation is voluntary and you do not have to agree to take part. If you do agree to take part, you can withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you agree to take part in the study, you will...

- Work with me on a regular basis online. We will have regular group meetings. For the first session, we will build trust as a group to become an effective research collective. We will then discuss topics that are important to us, including personal ambitions, life at school, how the media and government policy depict young people and disability, Covid-19 and its impact on your lives. I will also ask you to undertake tasks (voluntary, not compulsory) that will help you learn about how to conduct research. Some of these tasks will be done in the group and some individually.
- I will also be interviewing participants individually about their life. If there are questions you do not wish to answer, or any topics you do not wish to talk about, you don't have to. I will respect your privacy.
- You will be awarded with a participation certificate as evidence that can be used towards your UCAS form/job/further education applications.
- You will be awarded a £20 high street voucher for completing the project if you attend all sessions and are interviewed.

Are there any potential risks involved?

- As in any situation that talks about feelings and experiences, e.g. lessons like PSHE, SRE, Citizenship, there is a chance that a topic you may not be completely comfortable talking about will arise. You will not be required to talk about anything you don't feel comfortable with.
- Benefits to taking part include developing research skills, like data analysis and oral presentation skills.

Will my data be kept confidential?

All information obtained during the study will be kept confidential. If the data is published it will be entirely anonymous and will not be identifiable as yours.

Full details are included in the accompanying Privacy Notice.

What will happen to the results of the project?

- The results of the project will be included in my PhD thesis, which will be shared with examiners at Durham University in summer 2022.
- The results may be used in other project outputs, e.g. website articles, journal articles conference presentations. All data will remain anonymous.

No personal data will be shared, however anonymised (i.e. not identifiable) data may be used in publications, reports, presentations, web pages and other research outputs. At the end of the project, anonymised data may be archived and shared with others for legitimate research purposes.

All research data and records needed to validate the research findings will be stored for 10 years after the end of the project.

Durham University is committed to sharing the results of its world-class research for public benefit. As part of this commitment the University has established an online repository for all Durham University Higher Degree theses which provides access to the full text of freely available theses. The study in which you are invited to participate will be written up as a thesis. On successful submission of the thesis, it will be deposited both in print and online in the University archives, to facilitate its use in future research. The thesis will be published open access.

Who do I contact if I have any questions or concerns about this study?

If you have any further questions or concerns about this study, please speak to the researcher or their supervisor(s). If you remain unhappy or wish to make a formal complaint, please submit a complaint via the University's [Complaints Process](#).

I have recorded a 2-minute-long video that gives a brief explanation of the project, which can be viewed here:

https://www.canva.com/design/DAElvLnw4x8/f02AeMT5PrPQR7Xp0L_6UA/view?utm_content=DAElvLnw4x8&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link&utm_source=recording_view

I have also recorded a video that gives a detailed overview of this project with audio commentary.

Link to information video:

https://www.canva.com/design/DAEltuZi8xM/pHukPNXYEkBicxY2eu5A7w/view?utm_content=DAEltuZi8xM&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link&utm_source=recording_view

Thank you for reading this information and considering taking part in this study.

Appendix 6.2: Consent form

Consent Form 1.8.21

Project title - Young Visually Impaired people – your lives, identities and experiences

This form is to confirm that you understand what the purposes of the project, what is involved and that you are happy to take part. Please sign to indicate your agreement:

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated 1st June 2021 and the privacy notice for the above project.

I have had enough time to consider the information and ask any questions I might have, and I am satisfied with the answers I have been given.

I understand who will have access to personal data provided, how the data will be stored and what will happen to the data at the end of the project.

I consent to being audio recorded, being video recorded, having my photo taken, and understand how recordings photos will be used in research outputs.

I understand that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, and other research outputs. I understand that I will be quoted anonymously.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

I agree to take part in the above project.

Participant's Signature:

Date:

Parent/carers signature:

Date:

Researcher's Signature: A. Pilson

Date: 1.8.21

Researcher(s): Anna Pilson

Department: Education

Contact details: Durham University School of Education, Leazes Road, Durham,
DH1 1TA or anna.pilson@durham.ac.uk

Supervisor name: Dr Rosemary Ridgway, Dr Sophie Ward

Supervisor contact details: Durham University School of Education, Leazes Road,
Durham, DH1 1TA or r.a.ridgway@durham.ac.uk / s.c.ward@durham.ac.uk

Appendix 7: Participant data overview

Table 4: Participant data (anonymised)

PSEUDONYM	AGE AT TIME OF INTRAVIEWS	TYPE OF SCHOOL SETTING ATTENDED	DATE OF INTRAVIEW 1	DATE OF INTRAVIEW 2
Rebecca	15	Specialist VI school	12.9.2021	29.11.2021
Rihanna	16	Mainstream secondary	22.8.21	20.10.2021
Helena	15	Specialist VI school	4.8.2021	11.11.2021
Cassie	16	Specialist VI school	2.9.2021	1.10.2021
Lucy	13	Mainstream secondary	31.7.2021	18.9.2021
Sami	18	Specialist VI school	22.9.2021	4.11.2021
Kiran	16	Mainstream secondary	14.9.2021	27.11.2021
Hafsa	15	Mainstream secondary	23.8.2021	30.9.2021
Megan	14	Mainstream secondary	25.8.2021	3.11.2021
Thierry	17	Specialist VI school	13.9.2021	8.11.2021

Appendix 8: Chadwick's ingredients for analysis

Chapter 6, part 3 outlines my Dis-Human voice analytical process that I used to analyse the data gleaned in the intraviews. Chapter 6 part 6.3.3 explains how the work of Chadwick (2020a) informed my design. Table 5 below identifies where I have folded in Chadwick's (2020a, pp. 5-6) ingredients for posthuman voice analytics into the various 'listens' of my Dis-Human analytical technique. The word 'fold' is deliberately used to describe how the 'ingredients' were integrated into the development of my technique, not just as a nod to a metaphor for baking (ingredients are folded in as a way of mixing to combine materials with different densities) but also drawing upon Deleuze's (1988) metaphor of the fold to explore subjectivity, space and becoming. For Deleuze, the fold represents how reality is not made up of separate, isolated parts, but of continuous surfaces that twist, turn, and envelop themselves. He applies this to describe his notion of subjectivity, asserting that the self is formed not as a fixed identity, but as a folding-in of the outside world, which aligns with my own understanding of subjectivity in creating this analytical technique.

Table 5: Folding Chadwick's ingredients into my Dis-Human voice analytical technique

Chadwick's ingredient	Explanation:	Where does the folding-in occur?
1. Recognising the multivocality and heterogeneity of voices.	The "acknowledgment that voices are fundamentally multivocal and radically heterogenous phenomena and that nobody speaks in a singular, self-contained or individually bounded voice" (Chadwick, 2020a, p. 5).	Listen 4 – Decentring the human voice as the focus of the analysis to recognise <i>Other</i> voices.
2. Alternative modes of representing voices.	Chadwick emphasises the importance of "an understanding of voices (and subjectivities) as processes, movements emergent (and relational) becomings rather than static entities, things or essences. Translating a process-oriented ontological approach to voice into methodological praxis requires attending to the representational politics of qualitative analysis" (2020a, p. 5).	Listen 2 – creating '~i~' poems instead of "cut-and-paste extracts and chunks of quotation blocks" (Chadwick, 2020a, p. 5)
3. Engaging with the interruptive aspects of voice.	"A posthuman voice analytics focuses on interruptions and disruptions as analytically interesting and productive; instead of regarding bodily eruptions (i.e. silence, laughter, breathiness, crying) and contradictions in stories and acts of telling as inconveniences or matters to be smoothed over and erased, posthuman voice analytics is interested in highlighting	Listen 5 – Focus on affective impact of voice as co-constituted dialogic process. Listen 3 – Considering moments of interference in the data.

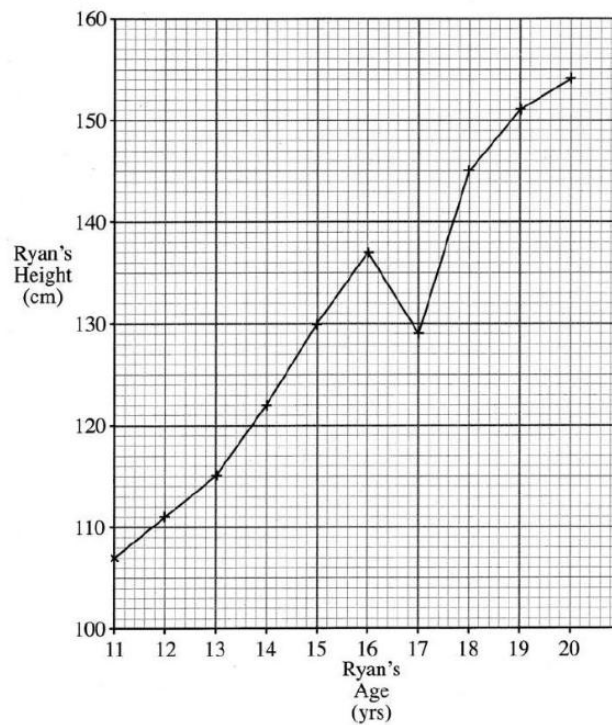
Chadwick's ingredient	Explanation:	Where does the folding-in occur?
	and attending to the moments when coherent and univocal speech breaks down". (Chadwick, 2020a, p. 5).	
4. Attending to the dialogical aspects of voices.	"It is not enough to analyse participants' voices and utterances as if they were standalone configurations separable from contexts of telling. We need to engage analytically with (at least) two central aspects of dialogicality, namely: (1) the dialogical contexts of research encounters and the research process more broadly and (2) the sociomaterial contexts, conditions and constraints within which acts of telling (voices) are embedded and enabled (Blommaert, 2005)" (Chadwick, 2020a, p. 6).	Listen 5 – Focus on affective impact of voice as co-constituted dialogic process by recognising the feelings engendered by the 'listen'. Listen 1 – Listening for 'plot' and simultaneously considering the "out-of-field voices" (Mazzei and Jackson, 2012, p. 748) that impact on the embodied voice itself. These consist of "larger social and cultural contexts [that] are also taken into consideration, as are dominant themes, metaphors, symbols, repeated images, and contradictions" (Cruz, 2021, p. 174).
5. Attuning to the generative politics of listening.	"Posthuman voice analytics is grounded in a dialogical and relational praxis of 'speaking with' rather than 'speaking for' or 'about' others (Alcoff, 1991). At the same time, we need to cultivate accountability for the generative capacities of our research texts and acknowledge the failures and shortcomings of the situated politics of listening and representation, particularly when we occupy historical positions of privilege as researchers".	Listen 2 – Ensuring that the human and human desires and individual specificity (Davis, 2014, p. 1) are honoured through creation of '~i~' poems

Appendix 9: Illustrative modified worksheets

In Megan's storying in Chapter 7, part 7.2.1.iii, Megan's ~i~ poem entitled: "~i~ was absolutely fuming inside" was created from data in which she discusses an access issue in a Maths lesson in which the teacher enlarges the sheet but fails to modify the questions. While I did not see the exact sheet used by Megan, I provide an illustrative example below of a resource from VIEW's exam modification online course (reproduced with permission). Figure 9 shows the original work sheet image of a graph showing height measurements of a boy over time. It is presented as a black line graph on axes presented on greyscale small-squared paper.

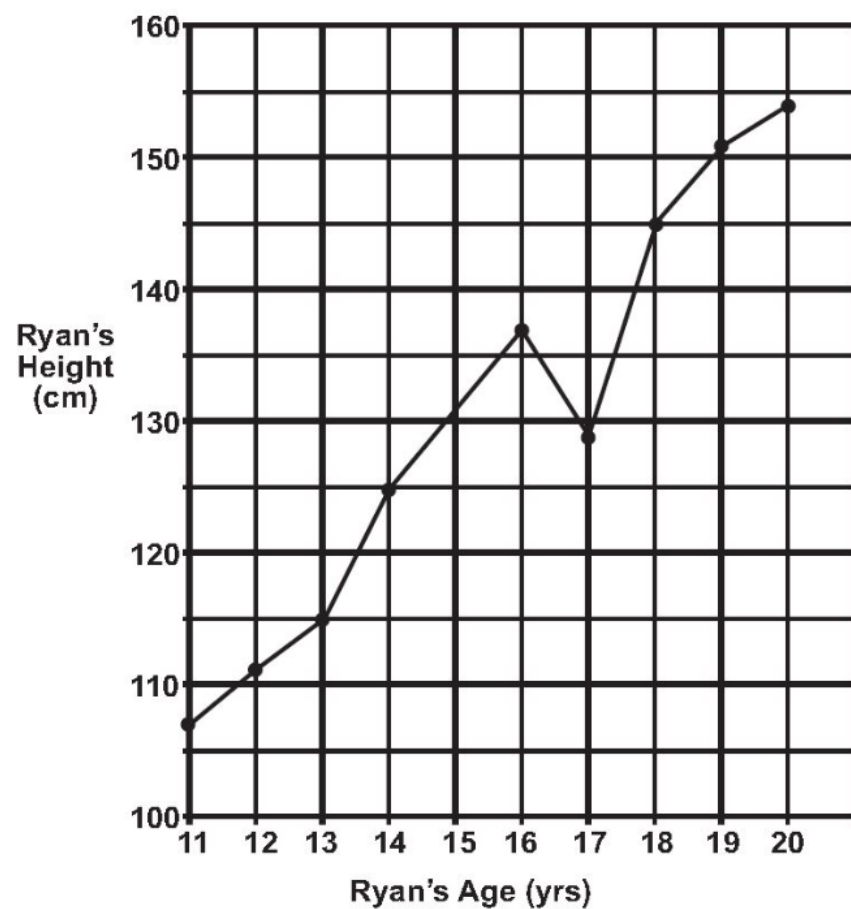
Figure 9: Original worksheet image

21. Ryan's height has been measured every year on his birthday from the age of 11. The measurements have been recorded on a chart.



In the modified version most of the minor grid lines have been omitted. The crosses at the data points have been replaced by large dots to better distinguish them from the lines. A data point has been moved from 14.4 years to 14 years, i.e. onto a grid intersection. The graph has been moved out of the question to a separate diagram booklet, to avoid the candidate having to turn pages.

Figure 10: Modified image



Appendix 10: RADICLE pedagogy illustration symbolism

The symbolism of the location of each labelled part of Figure 7 (the RADICLE pedagogy visual depiction diagram) in Chapter 9 part 9.3.2 is expanded upon in Table 6 below, which summarises the entanglement between the RADICLE pedagogic propositions created in Chapter 9 and the data storings in Chapters 7 and 8.

Table 6: RADICLE pedagogy symbolism

Label	Location in diagram	Symbolism	Data entanglement
<i>Relational</i>	Radicle root	The radicle is the anchoring root, it is central to the plant, but it can only germinate through relational encounters (e.g. with nutrients in the soil). Similarly, while the learner is the focus of teaching and learning, relational pedagogies reposition the learner as a participant and co-constructor in a situated process of learning. Furthermore, its capacity to grow in precarious, unplanned spaces demonstrates how relational pedagogies that emphasise our <i>besideness</i> (Kosofsky Sedgwick, 2003) with non-human agents can catalyse unexpected learning experiences.	The assemblage diagram of <i>besideness</i> (Chapter 8 part 2) demonstrates how reframing besideness with assistive technologies for participants Rebecca and Rihanna can situate them as a tool for catalysing the VICYP's power-as-potentia.
<i>Affective</i>	Petals	Stewart (2007, p. 2) emphasises the affective possibilities that occur in everyday encounters “that catch people up in something that feels like something”. The bright colours of flowers are visual stimuli, often leading to positive affective sensations (e.g. noting the beauty of the flower). Paying close attention to everyday affective micropereceptions (Massumi, 2015, p. 53) that affect our lives can constitute a powerful pedagogic vector to support the contextualisation and development of our subjectivity in relation to non-human others.	Cassie's storying in Chapter 7.2.2 demonstrates that VICYP need to be supported to wayfind (i.e. move from point to point in the physical environment safely and effectively), and also in wayfaring (Ingold, 2007; 2011) – that is, how to navigate the everyday encounters they experience with affective material-discursive forces.

Label	Location in diagram	Symbolism	Data entanglement
<i>Democratic</i>	Aligned with the evenly spaced canopy of plants	It is important that as the stems grow and the lilies flower that they have equitable access to the resources that they need to continue to develop. Similarly, a democratic underpinning to pedagogy offers space for all learners to grow through providing teaching opportunities that position children as agentic co-creators in learning encounters, which can allow all participants to engage in “lively relationalities of becoming” (Barad 2007, p. 393) in equitable ways.	Megan’s storying in Chapter 7 part 2.1 outlines how VICYP must navigate the “information-rich world” (RNIB, 2024, p. 38), in ways beyond simply being able to access the format/content of resources or instructions but must also navigate their relationships with the biopsychosocial impacts of vision impairment and the linguistic and affective information accessed in educational settings by QTVI’s devolving power to students to direct learning opportunities as “pedagogical consultants” (Cook-Sather, 2011, p. 41).
<i>Intrdependent</i>	Along the lateral rhizome linking plants.	Rhizomes are specialised underground stems that store nutrients and feature nodes from which both new roots and vertical leafy shoots emerge. Rhizomatic systems grow through multiplicity, allowing for new connections, ruptures and constant, non-linear growth. Similarly, the concept of intradependence shifts understandings of phenomena away from linear, cause-and-effect relationships to a more complex understanding of how entities are interconnected in and by assemblages. Intradependence as pedagogic enactment emphasises the “importance of dynamic spaces for multiple voices and transformed relations, including difficult conversations, resistance, and contestation” (Bellingham, 2022, p. 1416).	Policy often promotes independence without defining it, reinforcing ableist ideas of self-reliance. Yet no one functions entirely alone – identity and belonging are formed through relationships. Chapter 8 part 2.2’s assemblage diagram asserts that belonging emerges in the “in-between” spaces of connection (Deleuze, 1995; Probyn, 1996), showing that interdependence matters more than individualism. Chapter 9 diffracts interdependence to intra-dependence to affirm our entanglement with the world.

Label	Location in diagram	Symbolism	Data entanglement
<i>Collaborative</i>	Seed pods	Dis-Humanism positions both human and non-human participants as agents within pedagogical assemblages, co-constituting the “collaborative activity of teacher-students-space-content-context- <i>plus</i> ” (Strom and Martin, 2022, p. 3, emphasis in original). Seed pods represent continuity, growth and co-creation that can only be achieved through collaborative processes between different actors in nature (e.g. sun, water, nutrients), similarly to the different participants (both human and non-human) in pedagogic encounters that catalyse learning.	Megan’s storying in Chapter 7 part 2.1 illustrates the importance collaboration and communication between teachers and students. E.g. Feedback can be understood as a collaborative, iterative process that sets new ideas in motion, rather than a top-down instructive process. Instead, learning should emerge through co-productive engagements between people, spaces and meanings (Hinton and Treusch, 2015).
<i>Loving</i>	The rhizomatic root network growing outward.	Giroux (1992) asserts that love can rupture embedded ways of thinking and doing, functioning as a decentralised, non-linear network of connections, growing and spreading horizontally rather than in a strict hierarchy or linear progression. Similarly, rhizomes (such as ginger and bamboo) spread horizontally. When chopped or damaged, each fragment of the rhizome containing a node can potentially grow into a new, independent plant. Love connects nodes (people, things) to other nodes, allowing relationships to evolve, change and self-replicate unexpectedly without a singular beginning or predetermined end. Molina’s (2024, p. 31) pedagogy of love demonstrates how supporting young people in navigating systemic barriers and obstacles leads to their thriving, just as the rhizomatic root network depicted here is able to grow through, over and around barriers in the soil to thrive.	Care and connection are central to Thierry’s storying of his educational experiences in Chapter 7 part 2.3. He felt a lack of care in poorly designed PE activities that cast him as an outsider. In contrast, he has also felt the positive impact of care when teachers supported his participation in VI football and when England’s blind football coaches affirmed his abilities: “ <i>We remember you. We liked you. We think you have potential</i> ”. By trusting Thierry’s abilities, the coaches helped him build self-trust and a more positive self-view. This highlights the need for loving pedagogies, enabling teachers to act responsibly and form open, transformative, and responsive relationships.

Label	Location in diagram	Symbolism	Data entanglement
<i>Embodied</i>	Leaves	Leaves naturally orient toward light or space in ways that evoke spatial attunement, directional and positional awareness and can symbolise purposeful exploration. This is a form of proprioception, allowing them to sense their own shape, curvature and posture in relation to other agents, which helps them adjust their growth. An embodied, multisensory pedagogy is crucial for VICYP to make flesh the diffracted notion of being~becoming-with and question what the body is and does in order to wayfind (i.e. navigate the physical environment safely and effectively) and also in wayfaring (Ingold, 2007; 2011), i.e. exploring entangled and enmeshed social paths (Symonds, 2017).	Braidotti (2002) argues that identity is less about “who we are” and more about “what we are becoming,” as all beings are always in transition. Although this constant flux means the present never fully aligns with the here-and-now, Chapter 8’s being~becoming-with assemblage diagram suggests that a key QTVI task is to create temporary moments of alignment with VICYP. By making time to learn what matters to them and fostering shared moments of connection (Massey, 1994), QTVIs can support both a sense of who VICYP are and who they are becoming.

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