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7

Understanding the Affects and Technologies of Contemporary Schooling

Sara Bragg

Towards the end of following eight-year-old Saffron's day at school, and scanning the 'wan faces' of the class she is observing, researcher Lucy comments on her own longing for the lesson to finish. 'School is tiring', she writes in her fieldnotes.

Members of the research team undertaking 'day in a life' studies expressed similar affective responses – of weariness, impatience and ennui – at points during their days in school. Trying to account for these experiences is a key focus of this chapter and is both a methodological issue of how (far) one mobilises researcher subjectivity, and a substantive one that relates our analytic language of intensity and extensity to the context of school. Bringing the affects of contemporary schooling to the foreground is also a way to trouble current rhetoric, in which tropes about the moral purpose of education, its role as the 'engine of social mobility', the need for discipline to enable children to achieve, and so on, may serve in our view to eclipse attention to some disturbing directions of travel for actual classroom practices. In the process, we aim to encourage a broader view of what might be meant by 'technologies' in school and to go beyond conventional thinking about 'the digital'.

We spent a day in nine schools, in different parts of England, in 2014. Five of these visits involved Year 3 primary children, aged seven or eight, who were part of our extensive longitudinal study (Gabriel, Lucien, Saffron, David, Nkosi). From our one-year intensive study, one participant, Megan, was 10 and in Year 6, although her small rural class included children from Years 4 through 6. Abi, aged 15, was in Year 10 of a secondary school, Jasmine, aged 15, attending a unit for young mothers within a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU), and Sean, aged 13, was observed at a special school for young people with complex physical disabilities. We describe the method in more detail in Chapter 2. Along with our visits to homes for interviews, and the outside-school day in a life studies of participants with whom we could not negotiate access to schools (7-year-old Tempest and teenagers Funmi, Aliyah and Nathan), we gained insight into the boundaries between home and school and digital practices therein. We thought with the (everyday) terms 'school' and 'schooling' rather than the more abstract and overly virtuous ones 'education' or 'learning', to focus attention on the 'doing' of school, the work that goes into achieving it, in line with Ian Hunter's suggestion that we move away from 'educational principles' to 'school premises' (Hunter 1994, 1996).

The meaningfulness and contribution of 'small-number' studies of this type lie, as Yates (2003) has argued, in multiple acts of design, comparison,

FIGURE 7.1 'Let the stress begin': an off-the-shelf sign indexing the affective experience of contemporary schooling

reflexive interpretation and dialogue with the broader field. We read our data diffractively and recursively through and against each other, in the light of our own investments or entanglements (as former schoolchildren ourselves, or as parents), our (generally feminist and sociological) backgrounds as researchers, and in relation to research and theorizing by others. The varied modalities of our data sources drew our attention in different ways: while the work of gender is relatively invisible in Lucy's written description of Saffron's reading time, for instance, it is more evident in the photographs showing Saffron's reading choice, a 'Pocket Money Princess' book (see Figure 7.3). It becomes more visible still linked to the photos taken in her home that morning, the spread of pink-themed birthday cards along her mantelpiece, or placed against researcher Sue's description and photo of Nkosi and his friend reading an identical football book (see Figure 7.2). Many photographs communicated feelings and experiences in powerful ways, such as one showing children's body language as they struggle to pay attention to the teacher at the front of the class, or another, a whiteboard in Saffron's school, above which a commercially produced wooden sign declares 'Good morning. Let the stress begin' (see Figure 7.1). A photo of Nkosi's school mural depicting children, flowers, skipping, football and books captures the pastoral or romantic ideal of childhood to which so many schools subscribe in principle but which felt sidelined in practice. As already noted, we worked from the subjectivity and embodied readings of the researcher, taking our own experience as clues to stimulate further thought about our participants' lives. Practices that travelled across sites (such as patterned clapping, or register-taking) constitute interpretive threads whose possible meanings we unravelled in dialogue with wider literatures attempting to account for contemporary education landscapes; while even isolated examples – such as the attention paid by Sean's special school to communicating with parents – made us question the relative absence of such connections from other sites, despite the obvious differences in context. Our aim is to present accounts that might be 'inventive provocations' or 'good to think with' (Karen Barad in Dolphijn & Tuin 2012: 50) about larger education issues and debates about what schools and young people are and should be like.

Boundaries – the closed book of schooling

A key part of our methods involves connecting together aspects of children and young people's lives that are normally hidden from each other. Parents express intense curiosity about their children's days in school, which appear to them confusing from the outside and impossible to access directly. Saffron's

mother Tina comments that you 'never see that' and how even accompanying Saffron on school trips does not give the same insights. We are asked about whether their children are alone at lunchtime, if they have been 'good', and realize that, like homework books and packed lunches, we too bridge the spaces of the children's worlds. We hesitate to share some of our findings – for instance, Sue's insights that Gabriel is often left until last or on his own when groups were picked, or Liam's observation of how staff position Sean as a 'normal' 13-year-old boy by claiming that he is gazing at an assistant's cleavage (see Chapter 6). Lucien's mother Monica notes how confused they are by the school rewards policy, which has recently changed such that Lucien has gone from 'often' to 'never' getting awards. She continues:

Monica: I would love to do what you have done and just spend a day ... But obviously, they don't want us hanging around you know- [...] We don't know what goes on at school and that is really strange isn't it? ... You send your children off to school and you don't know what is happening there ...

Researcher Rachel: Though our parents didn't know and they didn't see it as strange.

Monica: Really?

Rachel: Well, did your parents know what you did at school?

Monica: No I suppose not. I did find it very odd you know because, you spend every day with him

... And suddenly you are handing him over to someone ... What are they telling him, what are they teaching him? You have no idea.

Lucien: I know. I am not telling you though.

Rachel historicizes Monica's concern, suggesting that parents are now being pedagogized – addressed as those who should be concerned about the technical details of their children's learning and educational development –to a greater extent than previous generations. Her remark also refers to what is often identified as an earlier stage of teacher professionalism, where parents were expected to trust teachers to know what was best for children, and teachers had autonomy to decide both what and how to teach (Whitty & Wisby 2006).

Parents also vary in their reactions to our accounts. For Monica, learning about the fast pace of children's days vindicates her less 'pushy' approach to parenting. David's mother Anastasia is shocked by the school's refusal to give Sue lunch. Gabriel's mother Nadia is critical of the school's wet play activity of watching cartoons, a concern which speaks to a much longer history of debates over television as inimical to learning, and as something that has to be carefully managed by mothers today (Briggs 2009). Only in Sean's case is our study of value not so much for his mother (who knows his day already

from the home books and photographs the school sends) than an audience for whom she hopes it might give 'normalizing' insights into her son's 'everyday childhood'. Researcher Sue is drawn unwittingly into conflictual family dynamics when Nkosi's mother Lorraine tells him 'that I was going into the school next week to read out all the things I'd written and did he want his friends to hear all about what he did? I felt appalled as it was so not true and Nkosi cast a hostile and miserable glance at me'.

Although we might be in a privileged position compared to parents, we also at points find ourselves struggling to make sense of school routines that the children and adults in school nonetheless inhabit as commonplace and intelligible. Researcher Lucy notes: 'Saffron does not move into a different class but moves to a different table. I assume this is streaming according to ability ... [...] It is ERIC time. (I forgot to ask what it stands for)'. As Livingstone and Sefton-Green (2016) have observed, schools have developed relatively arcane systems and vocabularies that can have the effect of excluding the uninitiated. Our aim here is to use our externality to good effect: accounting for schooling practices, as Biesta (2010) has argued, requires attention to the ideology that makes the incorporation of practices into particular networks invisible.

One school, many days? Encountering the atmosphere of primary education

Primary schools generally prove more accessible than secondary schools, which itself may reflect the different pressures to which the sectors are subject. Only in Tempest's case are we unsuccessful, for reasons that reveal institutional powers of classification: the head declines our request on the grounds that Tempest is new, has not settled in and is two years behind. This interpretation differs from Tempest's family's, who explain her getting into trouble as lack of stimulation (her previous school designated her a 'clever' child), or as the school's failure to offer the continuity and stability she needs.

Following children from their homes into school and back again is a fascinating experience, capturing the changing atmospheres through which they move and the particular rhythms of lesson-time, playtime and home-time. The journey to school reveals something of the material circumstances of children's lives, as we note of Nkosi's walk to school in Chapter 6. We are struck by the continuities between the schools (in contrast to the homes) and, in particular, the use of a range of teaching and behavioural techniques that appear to form a common culture of contemporary teaching, alongside a shared set of texts and techniques linked to the national curriculum. Our methods and recording devices focus us on the detailed organization and practical

functioning of the school as a built environment that combines both physical and moral elements in its architecture, devices, body techniques, practices of surveillance and supervision. Placed alongside each other, photographs from the different schools all showing the trolleys on which children place their lunch boxes, the pegs on which they learn to hang their coats, the 'rules of our playground' with their irresistibly exhortatory tone ('We are kind, we play together ... we always tell an adult if we feel frightened or sad ...') and the 'rules of the classroom' ('walk sensibly, ask the teacher, be kind and thoughtful, don't interrupt, try your best, sit still, listen ...') accumulate significance as small enactments of moral invigilation for children. Our practice of collecting soundscapes inevitably sensitizes us to the aural, yet we are also struck by the extent to which teaching and behaviour techniques involve the control of sound. Some sounds about the school may also have been heard at points throughout the last century or more, revealing long established practices of productive care for, and moral training of, the learner as a 'good citizen'. Bells marking time; classes or whole schools singing, praying, or counting in a foreign language; blessings; demands for silence; answering the register; 'circle time': these are all means by which children are subjected to general norms of development, what Goddard (2009: 184) describes as 'an individualizing moral formation within a social space'. Such long-established 'psy' disciplines (Rose 1999) encourage children to take responsibility for themselves by overseeing them in specific ways. Hunter's Foucauldian genealogy of the school (1994) encourages us to see these as productive rather than simply oppressive or repressive. And meanwhile, schools are also distinctive, sometimes because religious affiliation means that curriculum time is given over to prayer and religious instruction (for example Nkosi's school), or because of an ethos that, as in Saffron's school, is self-consciously entrepreneurial.

We generally see dominant modes of age-, classroom- and subject-based, teacher-directed schooling. Despite our commitment to a child-centred perspective, it often proves hard to maintain a focus on the individual child in school, and we wonder whether this is a consequence of schools feeling they need to perform for us; of a standard pattern of adults being 'captured' by other adults; of our own attention to the wider structures of school; or perhaps a clue to children's own experiences. We oscillate between noticing the teaching and noticing the child, discovering that some big personalities such as Lucien and David can become very small in school. Children have to work hard to be seen, and some appear unsure as to whether to hide in the group or stand out. Lucien, for instance, achieves being visible and special through the PowerPoint about cars he emails to his teacher, which we discuss in Chapter 10. Researcher Rachel notes how he 'glows' when the teacher shares an in-joke with him across the room. We also have to contend with the other children who take interest in us, our recording equipment,

FIGURE 7.2 *Nkosi and his friend's football books*

FIGURE 7.3 *Saffron's reading choice*

One of many acronyms we encounter in schools is ERIC – 'Enjoy Reading In Class'. Reading is also a time for claiming gendered spaces, as figures 7.1 and 7.2 suggest

and the research process. While we are not the only adults floating around the school, observing or helping, we are unusual in our adhesive connection with a single child, something that probably makes that child more visible than usual.

We are struck by the 'power geometries' (Massey 1993) of time and space as we witness children in fast-paced, constant motion, orchestrated by adults. They change between 'home' and 'ability' tables or rooms ('for each different lesson, they sit at a different table' (Nkosi); 'The children are sitting at five different tables. They all know where to go and what to do and the class seamlessly moves into activity which is different at each table [...] the kids know the drill' (Lucien)), to and from (assigned) places 'on the carpet'; they talk to 'talk partners' allotted by lollipop sticks, fall silent at the shake of a tambourine or clapping pattern; they put up their hands ('show five'), thumbs or mini-whiteboards on request to show answers to problems, understanding or agreement ('we're good at maths'); show 'excellent learning behaviours' by sitting up straight with arms folded; they negotiate congested corridors, queue and eat in the din of a dining room, line up to enter or leave rooms and buildings, move from one regimented Physical Education activity to another. Often, activities are referred to by acronyms (WALT, 'We Are Learning To', ERIC, 'Enjoy Reading In Class') or other designations ('dominoes', involving each child choosing the next to line up; 'Stop Look Listen' to control restlessness).

Sets of behavioural techniques ricochet between our geographically distant sites. A device compelling silence and attention through a distinctive pattern of clapping ('clap, clap, clap-clap clap' or 'don't clap this-one back', QQEEQ) is a practice that has migrated to all our primary school research sites. It may have travelled in part because it is a repurposing of already-familiar approaches – clapping hands to keep rhythm, to call for silence – and combines features of both. On teaching websites, the exercise is sometimes construed as one simply of recognizing rhythms (teachingideas.co.uk), but elsewhere, the stakes are higher: on 'themusicjungle.co.uk' it is described as a 'listening game that ... quickly sorts out the classes that have learned focus and self discipline from those that have no idea! ... winning this game isn't about a *team effort*; it is about each *individual* being totally focussed and responsible for playing their part, by themselves' (emphasis in original). In a couple of instances, we observe girls usurping teacherly roles by instigating the clapping to quieten a noisy class, only to be promptly put back in their place: 'As [the teacher] is doing this, one girl starts doing the clapping method that the other schools used a lot, and he stops her saying "I don't need that." Later teacher and child reach a compromise: "she can do the clapping, as long as she asks permission first"' [Researcher Sue's field notes]. On two occasions, we observe a formalization of a similar line of desire, with children conducting the afternoon

register upon their teachers' requests. Student choice seems to be a danger spot, seen as problematic and requiring control.

Time is a topic focus of some Year 3 lessons, children learning to switch between digital and analogue time telling. Time is also made to count, insistently, relentlessly, by bells, by minutes and seconds – 'Five more minutes', 'One minute left', '20 seconds to clear up!' (Nkosi) – by 'countdowns' from 20 or five. Its significance is marked formally even if ineffectively: 'There is a strong awareness of time here in Miss M's countdown to finishing things, not always with success. "If it's not finished you can do it after the break"' [Researcher Sue's field notes]. Time figures as anticipation – 'When the big hand reaches 12 we're doing handwriting' – as reward ('golden time' at the end of the week), as threat – 'The teacher is getting impatient and says: "before I start using my stopwatch I suggest you do things quicker"' – as punishment (collective loss of play time, individual loss of golden time) and as *longueur* (as the researchers remark on their own boredom or fatigue). Researcher Lucy observes: '10.28am: Time to tidy up the clocks and pencils. I notice how efficient the teacher is at time keeping, two minutes to prepare before break time. Chairs are pushed in, children stand behind chairs. I wonder if she ever loses track of time when teaching a subject'. David's school stands out, by contrast, as not ruled by time in the same way: in the absence of the usual class teacher, the children engage in drama, music and Physical Education, a relaxed approach echoed by the more variable iterations of school uniform observed amongst children. Saffron's Information and Communication Technologies class is (narrated as) one where 'time just flies'. Wet play is a real disruption of routine in several schools, with classrooms left in chaos and only a cartoon to keep order.

Behaviour as well as time is constantly monitored. Children move their names up and down systems of traffic lights prominently displayed next to the whiteboard ('gold – is the best and gets you a "prize"'), are issued with warnings ('at this point, someone did get a yellow card, and were warned that they didn't want to get an orange card'), loss of golden time, lunch or break time, or threats of missing special school trips, 'timeout' sheets, sitting facing outwards ('"I'm the teacher, you don't talk back to me"'), rewards such as being in charge of handing out laptops, 'stars' given out to tables, or green plastic tokens for 'sitting well'. Indeed, these tokens become the focus of attention and drama, when researcher Rachel observes a boy 'stealing' them, or when 'T is heard saying "who cares about the stars"' when the teacher is talking about earning stars for their table to contribute to getting a prize at the end. Researcher Sue notes that 'Miss M says she is "very disappointed" in him'. It doesn't take researchers long to work out who the 'naughty' children are in each class, that is, who are deemed to have strayed from normative school conduct by not listening or talking back to teachers,

swinging on chairs, carrying on playing when told to stop, fidgeting, not investing in the collective. Although 'naughty' is our own researcher shorthand rather than school discourse, it highlights also the sociologically familiar patterning of 'deviance' – 'one black girl who is the naughtiest in the class'; 'a boy with Rasta hair won't pick up his ruler so he's told to go and "put his name down" ... as the class goes on it's clear he's a naughty one' (researcher Sue's field notes). Children too are adept at understanding this implicit patterning, as we noted in Chapter 6, where they ask Rachel the ethnicity of the token-thief.

Family life before and after school has been 'curricularized' too (Buckingham and Scanlon, 2003). Even Tempest's home has a behaviour chart – a list of things she has to do each day – suggesting continuities between school and home pedagogic practices. Saffron's step-grandfather spends the drive to school testing her and her cousin on their spelling. In many cases, the movement is relentless and pressurized: in the morning, Saffron moves from her home, to her grandmother's, to the car, and then, after school, to the sweet shop, to home, to swimming, then home again; Gabriel goes from school to piano lessons, then home for tea and educational games. Unstructured time appears to provoke anxiety that it may be unproductive time. It is perhaps little wonder that spaces in-between feel like 'release' – such as playtime, in the car on the way home for Saffron, and for many, time spent with screens as we explore below.

Performance anxiety permeates our visits (cf. Jackson 2010). Researcher Lucy notes that her visit seems to have been organized to include both elements of time and ICT to chime with our research focus, and how the school seems to be trying to present itself in the best light: 'Sometimes felt like I was in an advert for the school (this school encourages competition, a good Ofsted, the software we may invest in) but that I was also complicit in this – praising the lessons, commenting on the children's confidence etc.'. Lucien's teacher apologizes for not offering a 'fun and zinging lesson'. The notion of 'zing' in lessons perhaps goes beyond the performativity of accountability, touching also on the contemporary performance of affective labour: work *and* play are now required from teachers, at least when in front of an 'audience' (Ngai, 2007).

We came to think of schooling processes as being 'techniquified', connected by a set of practices to extensive networks through which the day, and bodies, are micro-managed to extract value from every moment. The dominance of extrinsic behaviourist approaches can be seen as evidence of the (neoliberal) commodification of intensive moments of learning. Targets, goals, outcomes, measurement, accountability and assessment represent the vocabulary of the marketplace; behavioural 'fixes' such as 'don't clap this-one back', ERIC, WALT, Stop Look Listen and the rest represent commodities

or products that are packaged, disseminated and in many cases literally sold as solutions to educational problems. While behaviourism is by no means new, we wondered whether more and more of the school day was being worked on and managed in this way, filling up its time and space, with less available for openness, meanderings, or child-directed activities. Certainly, children have little say or control over the criteria by which they are judged. The strain is omnipresent if implicit, for instance, carried by the 'Let the stress begin' sign mentioned above. During a reading of Ted Hughes's *The Iron Man*, researcher Rachel notes 'The story is heart breaking. The giant has fallen over the cliff, and is smashed into pieces: eyeless, headless, an iron ear ...' The fact that several teachers around the country are reading the same book with their classes might indicate either a loss of autonomy or (more desirably) a convergence around 'quality' literature brought about by a national curriculum. Irresistibly, however, we wonder what unspoken emotions might be held by this tale of collapse, dismemberment and disintegration.

Evacuating the space of secondary schooling

Our observations in secondary schools yield some continuities with our experience of primary schools, although as we have noted it is more complicated to access them, and indeed for participants to contemplate being a focus of attention there in the way the method suggests. Where we recruit participants through school in the first place (Sean through his special educational unit), we tend to be invited in with the support of both school and parents. By contrast, Aliyah spends a long time thinking through whether she wants us to follow her at school, eventually deciding against it, in part, because of the school's turbulence following a period in 'special measures'. One of our participants withdraws from the project altogether at the prospect.

Both Abi and her school are eventually receptive to our visit, perhaps from the school's perspective, because the connotations of research are high status enough to seem worth the risk for a school graded 'outstanding' by the school inspection body Ofsted. Even so, the head takes the time to appear during a lesson to shake researcher Sara's hand and ask somewhat anxiously if she is 'getting the information you needed'. Where the primary schools seem perpetually in flow, Abi's day seems more episodic. Apart from the walk to and from school, and around crowded corridors between lessons, mostly, Abi is curiously immobile: sitting in the same position, one leg crossed over the other, only her hands fluttering over a keyboard, to write, to work something out, or to pick at the holes in her tights. The main bodily coordination of the class occurs at the end of lessons, when all students are required to tuck their

chairs neatly under the desks. Young people are summoned and imagined in diverse ways by their teachers: 'boys and girls', 'guys', 'Year 10s', 'children', as of varying 'ability'. But most of all, they are addressed as individual learner subjects, prospective exam takers, as Sara's field notes record:

- Spanish teacher: 'You won't have a *controlled assessment* on [our new topic of the environment], but [it] comes up in the *reading and listening paper*. [It is worth] 20% ... The choice you have here [in your textbooks] is *just like it would be in an exam* ... This might happen *in an exam*, always listen twice'.
- Religious Education teacher, before a test: 'Look through the paper, is there any thing you can add to *get a point* [an extra mark], if something is worth six points you need to make six points'.
- Maths teacher: 'That won't *get you a mark* ... Between now and next year *when you have your exams* ... Perfect, you'll get *all your marks* ... You're not going to LOSE marks by doing that, so I say go with it ... remember *in your exam* they give you a tolerance, so if the answer is 65 and you say 66 or 67, that will be all right ... ' [our emphasis]

Thus, the teaching focuses around standardized measures of student learning, exams, testing and other attainment measures, evoking a wider culture of 'performativity' (Ball 2003) that is also evident in 'Know Your [National Curriculum] Level' posters in every classroom. Only in Science, however, is such an exam imminent; for the most part, the exams for which students are being 'readied' will be taken in the following academic year. Temporality in this case is extended, referring to a relatively remote future – 'between now and next year ... ' Even in the present, it is less precise or more stretched than in primary schools: '17 minutes to go ... Three minutes to go ... ' (English teacher). Relationships between teachers and students are generally formal and distanced, even though teachers appear kindly and to care about their charges. Rarely is group work or talking between students actively encouraged, even in classes with fewer than 20 students, underlining the sense of education organized around the investment in self, as an individual, competitive good.

Moments of sociality, emotional connection, intimacy and warmth occur mainly in the interstices of the school day: walking to school, sitting on the grass with friends at lunchtime or snatched moments in lesson time itself. Only in one lesson is Abi paired with one of her close friendship circle, as if the school does not take seriously or respect the groups that students might make for themselves (cf. Bibby 2010). In fact, she and her friends spend much of their time providing resources for each other – sharing strategies for

essay-writing, looking things up, swapping digital competences – but this too is under the radar rather than explicitly legitimated by the school.

Students develop different coping mechanisms, as Sara notes in a maths lesson, spent mostly working in silence:

Lottie, who has long highlighted blonde hair and an engaging manner, asks the teacher: ‘do you get to have tea whenever you want, as a teacher?’ ... There follows a discussion about Earl Grey, which Lottie claims is the ‘nicest tea in the world’, and how many biscuits the teacher has had, what she thinks about different brands. Eventually the teacher says ‘let’s save our biscuit conversations for the end’, although they continue a while as if both are enjoying this breach in the norm ... So, the face to face is what is designated ‘irrelevant’, distractions from ‘learning’, the tasks in hand.

Lottie is clearly skilled at drawing her teachers into ‘off-topic’ chats to break up monotony, without actively resisting learning. Abi’s resistance is partly passive, a subtle inertia; apparently a ‘good’ student who gets on with her work, neither threatening to bring down the school’s results or being flagged as outstanding, she generally passes unnoticed. For instance, in English, she seats herself at the edges of the computer pool room so that the teacher – who towards the end of the lesson hands out detentions liberally to those (mostly male) students whose progress or web browsing he deems inappropriate – is unable to see her playing with her illicit mobile phone. She also transgresses semiotically, ripping holes in the regulation black tights of the uniform, and wearing officially forbidden Doc Marten boots (see Figure 6.4). Reading over her shoulder an essay on Carol Ann Duffy’s poem *Medusa*, in which Abi stresses Medusa’s *anger*, *fury*, *vengefulness*, suggests as with *The Iron Man* the capacity of literature to provide a space for articulating feelings that do not otherwise get much of an outlet in school. Abi’s iPhone music also offers a commentary, as she listens to My Chemical Romance’s *The Black Parade*, a concept album about death and revenge. In Abi’s case, our presence – being held in someone’s gaze, for once – may feel like an intervention that validates her own summation of her days: ‘Boring’.

Teenage mother Jasmine’s body is pre-eminent in researcher Ester’s account of her day. Out of school, her weight loss is monitored and a cause for concern and correction (her foster carer plies her with food and cake). In school, she moves from having ‘so much energy at the beginning of the lesson’ to being ‘crashed out, lethargic, exhausted’. Eventually, she goes to Physical Education (PE) and ‘comes alive’: ‘on the mat she was smiling, laughing and grimacing as she did the exercises. When she boxes she is energized, fit and ferocious’. Ester is left worrying about whether her exhaustion is a consequence of being observed (is that a strain in itself?), or of the school,

with its limited curriculum offer (a mix of 'basics', vocational, arts and 'real world' subjects – Business and Communication, English, Art, Science, PE) and teacher-directed approach (cf Thomson & Pennacchia 2016). As with Abi, Ester notes the 'The silence and absence of chatting is so notable in the school – during both lessons and break times'. Only when watching 'Vines' on YouTube is there an eruption of the sociable into schooling.

Sean's special school is very much focused on the needs and the messages carried by the bodies of the students, with staff responding quickly to signs of distress or pain with a range of therapeutic ameliorating strategies. Their days are documented not only by Liam, but also by the staff, who use photos and 'home books' to construct explicit lines of communication between home and school. This is in marked contrast to many other schools, where communication with parents occurs primarily to alert them to problems they are asked to address (Thomson & Pennacchia 2016) – as is the case with Tempest, whose family receives 'almost daily' complaints about her behaviour from school. Such juxtapositions allow us to contemplate whether schooling might be a more collaborative endeavour than currently, and what more body-attentive pedagogies might involve.

Post-digital schooling

In the introduction to this book, we explore how a saturation of digital technologies moves us beyond debates about the difference that the digital makes, towards the emergence of new kind of materialities that transcend distinctions between on- and off-line. In this section, we explore this emergent sensibility, starting with a focus on the obvious ways that, throughout, teachers and children integrate screens into their days. Our photographs reveal mainly 'traditional' desktop PCs in schools, rather than mobile technologies, and whiteboards used to focus children on the front of the class or to screen audio-visual material and electronic resources, sometimes 'off the shelf', such as a Spanish course package in Abi's case, or curated from a variety of teaching websites. In Jasmine's science lesson, we observe a simulation of learning, where screens seem to act as a screen for inactivity:

Everyone has a tablet but they don't seem to be using it – not even for cheeky browsing on the internet. [...] The teacher is drawing the lesson to a close. He is reminding the class that this is a controlled assessment and counts for 25% of their final GCSE grade. He encourages the group to 'do your best to research this', to not rely on the knowledge gained during lessons and to 'go online to research object distance and image distance.'

He reminds the class to *save any work and log off the tablets. I am not sure that anyone has used them.* (Researcher Ester's field notes, our emphasis)

Schools operate under conditions of resource constraint: Nkosi's teacher regrets the school's lack of iPads and comments that they only get access to the computer pool once a week at the most. Lucien's teacher rewards him by putting him in charge of dispensing and collecting the 12 class laptops, with children bidding to negotiate who most 'needs' one – a labour intensive process for what amounts to a few minutes of screen time. Teachers' use of screens is risky – time spent fumbling with equipment leads the noise levels to rise and careful classroom management to falter; screening a YouTube video to one group, as Lucien's teacher does, pulls the other children irresistibly towards the screen and away from their books. But it also complements the lessons on time – screening digital versions of the analogue clock models they have in their hands, demonstrating art techniques, a child's good handwriting. Meanwhile, older technologies – textbooks and worksheets – continue to shape classroom practices.

Turvey and Pachler (2016) argue that permeability and boundary crossing are features of mobile technologies and highlight the fit and tensions between practices with Web 2.0 technologies in everyday contexts and their appropriation in school structures and cultures. There are somewhat ironic attributions and counter-attributions being made in these respects around the digital between schools and homes. Parents, for instance, assume that schools are using technology as a pedagogic resource to support children's academic development. Saffron's mother Tina tells Lucy that the school encourages the use of iPads, to blank looks from Saffron herself who sees it as only for play. Schools meanwhile suppose the same of families – for instance, that Gabriel's home would be technologically rich, enabling internet searching for homework, when in fact it is determinedly analogue. Nonetheless, many families seem to feel a need to provide their children with technologies: David is getting an iPad for his birthday, Nkosi has a new Nintendo 2DS, Megan and her brothers each have a tablet for Christmas; Saffron, who already has an iPad, is to get a PC for her birthday so she can 'do PowerPoint presentations'.

Meanwhile, in schools, the digital is often made to signify in 'domestic' ways: before their mock exam, Abi's Religious Education teacher promises that he will 'show you some YouTube, after, to relax you'; Saffron's school uses an audio clip of rainforest sounds to quieten children towards the end of the day; wet play means screening a cartoon. In other words, many of the 'meanings' of screens in school are romantic or informal (as pleasure, as relaxation) or pragmatic (as babysitter) rather than pedagogic. Tutor group time in Abi's school is spent playing games, students having identified the few that 'weren't blocked', or surfing the web. 'Official' discourses focus on digital

FIGURE 7.4 ‘Once you put it online ...’

youth’s risks rather than opportunities, for instance in the ICT classroom’s poster in Abi’s school menacing ‘once you put an image online ... you lose control of it’ (see Figure 7.4) produced by the National Crime Agency’s Child Exploitation and Online Protection (and for an analysis of the normative gender policing encouraged by CEOP’s campaign, see Dobson & Ringrose 2016). Both Abi’s and Jasmine’s schools have an official policy of banning and confiscating mobile phones, not always enforced: ‘today no one has bothered’ notes researcher Ester. Parents perform ‘good’ parenting by being careful to tell us they have ‘strict rules’, that their children are ‘sensible’ online, always ‘ask before searching’; consult us over whether they should install filters; Saffron’s aunt tells how she ‘explained what playing an addictive game was doing to her brain’ in such a way that her daughter stopped playing it. Our

notes reveal Abi consulting Google many more times than she ever asks for help from a teacher, and using her phone for both learning (looking up words) or contact (with her mum). Abi's science teacher comments that she sets homework online, but that only the parents like it. 'The kids all want paper ... Not a single child in this class [does it online]' she says, adding – as if to emphasize the curiousness of this – 'and they are all quite high ability, actually'. But young people may identify the digital as their own space and resist school's encroachments into it. At home, Abi alternates between doing her homework or revision, and watching YouTube or playing Quiz Up, her social media providing reward and release. Researcher Lucy observes that Saffron appears to have little time alone, in her space, either at home or at school, and that screen time, therefore, could be a place of escape, familiarity and intimacy. However, it also means that the child can become lost: during her ICT class, Saffron 'disappears', using headphones to create a protected but also isolated space that acts as a barrier to building a conversation about what she is actually doing, leaving Lucy wondering whether screen time might need more intensive monitoring and teaching in school to achieve creativity.

Surveillance technologies are both normalized and routinized. Lucien's teacher is filming his lesson with two iPod touch cameras for training purposes, although later it emerges that the sound did not record and he will have to do it again. Abi's friend Hermione tells an anecdote in which she was sick on the stairs at school, tried to blame it on someone else, but the teacher just 'knew' it was her, not by looking at her, but because she'd '*seen it on the [CCTV] cameras*' – an account that suggests both acceptance and overestimation of the powers of a pedagogic panopticon. However, researcher Lucy's camera produces consternation among lunchtime staff, who rush to know what she is doing and why. The regulation, suspicion and constraint around individuals' use of the visual in schools, Lucy reflects subsequently, stands in marked contrast to the ubiquity of parents' online postings of images of their children.

A screen is universally used to take the register, and opens up new questions about the digital in schools. 'Stand by the desks and wait 'til I call up SIMS' says Abi's teacher during morning tutor time, referring to School Information Management Systems. Register taking is in one sense a thoroughly routine and familiar practice. In terms of the elements of practices that Maller and Strengers identify (2013), its common understandings (the meanings and rationales that inform how, when, where and why practices should be performed), and practical knowledge (the skills and practical know-how required to perform them) are relatively stable. However, the material infrastructure (the 'stuff' – appliances, gadgets and technologies – that makes practices possible) is dramatically different from previous decades. Extensive data systems like SIMS, heavily invested in at national, local and school levels,

constitute perhaps the aspect of the digital occasioning most academic debate about its meanings for education, and how the 'data dream' might be reconfiguring what education is and how it is imagined and lived (Ozga 2011). They make students' attendance, achievement and behaviour visible and manageable in new ways. Arguably, they provide the essential infrastructure for the dominant policy-driven 'effectiveness logic', which is enacted via actuarial comparison technologies such as inspection, league tables and test results (Thompson 2016; Thompson & Cook 2016; Williamson 2015; Selywn 2010). There are therefore questions to be asked about the implications of digital technology, the constant surveillance, recording, quantifying and evaluating that happen digitally and interpersonally in schools, for subjectivity.

Thomson, Hall and Jones (2010) and, more recently, Livingstone and Sefton-Green (2016) and Finn (2016; 2015) all identify an 'aural landscape' of National Curriculum levels permeating schools. Thomson et al. see this as the outcome of educational policies of 'raising standards' and 'closing the gap' (by focusing on key quotas of A*-C grades at GCSE), which leaves a 'good enough' student such as 'Maggie' in their study (and, we might add, Abi) under-stretched and overlooked. Livingstone and Sefton-Green argue that the 'ritualized' and arguably meaningless focus on 'moving through levels' marginalizes questions about curriculum content or the intrinsic value and interest of learning. Finn's study of a 'data-driven school' also demonstrates the impact on students' subjectivities as they define themselves by levels. He highlights how teachers and students become tied together in specific ways: success is socialized ('we are outstanding' as the school proclaims) while failure is individualized. However, due to new mechanisms of teacher accountability, that failure belongs to the teacher as well as to the student – and ultimately, to the school, as lower overall results risk school closure, takeover, senior management job losses or falling rolls. Finn (2015) documents the school's construction of 'data walls' – displays in public spaces, using photographs of students placed according to whether they are headed for 'success' (in examination terms) or failure (marked by a skull and crossbones). He wonders about the psychic dynamics and costs of a system that is nonetheless widely accepted and even welcomed by staff and young people alike.

Thompson (2016: 836) argues that 'the volume, variety and velocity of data, as it is accompanied by a perception of a social that has accelerated, has implications for how subjectivity is produced'. He describes the self in school as 'continuously and surreptitiously elicited to generate data that are stored in databases, connected, integrated and made sense of algorithmically' (ibid.: 837). He and Cook (2016: 751) propose that data are changing the meaning of what it is to teach: 'in the shared physical space of the classroom, bodies cannot face each other with the same intensity. In particular, each teacher body comes to be represented through patterns extracted from

databases with respect to student performances... To teach becomes an algorithmic projection of the likelihood that the presence of a specific external body (this teacher with that name) will correlate with improved scores on the students' parts'. Hardy's (2015) account identifies key aspects of education in Australia that are currently defined as 'risks', notably student behaviour, attainment and teacher learning. They are 'managed', he argues, by specific commodified packages of behaviour management programmes, teaching to the test, and professional development activities. How far these can be said to 'work', as Biesta (2010) has argued, depends on how far the complexity of human learning is reduced by schooling. Biesta's critique of the policy mantra of 'what works' in evidence-based policy is that it occludes both the kind and the amount of work that needs to be done to create an order in which connections between actions and consequences can become more predictable and more secure. Locating learning physically, spatially and temporally within specific institutions and timetables; grouping practices; curricula staged according to assumed norms; assessment forms that define what outcomes are said to be valuable, and so on, are all crucial means by which the conditions of 'effectiveness' are produced. These processes come to make learning seem a more rational, linear, contained and knowable process, but they have costs.

Our own methods, we would argue, provide insights into what these costs might be and how data practices and policy conditions might be making themselves felt, which help substantiate these evocative arguments. While on the surface our approaches continue to reveal the face to face, the embodied, in specific contexts, they do suggest the ongoing 'work' of risk management processes in schooling. For instance, we have identified a level of homogeneity across very different school settings, particularly in relation to behaviour management techniques. We noted the possibly problematic consequences of those techniques and of ability grouping practices for questions of inclusion or social stratification. Above all, while we might not have been able always to *observe* the dilemmas of big data or managerial approaches to schooling, we may have *felt* them. Our emotional responses to the shadowing should not be taken for granted (school was boring because school is boring), but need to be read. Sianne Ngai's work (2007) encourages us to see emotions as 'interpretations of predicaments' and we might wonder what predicaments contemporary schools are facing. Her argument that 'ugly feelings' such as anxiety index 'obstructed or suspended agency' resonates in relation to our affects of tedium, anxiety, exhaustion, stress. Anxiety, Ngai argues, is a diffuse emotion with a future-oriented temporality that expects something – risk, exposure and failure – which are, arguably, precisely the threats currently held over schools (Ball 2003, Jackson 2010). Boredom, equally, might be generated by the very behavioural 'fixes' used to manage and reduce 'risk' in schooling. Classroom management techniques may appeal because they deliver to teachers the

sense of agency that is undermined by centralized curricula and policy edicts. However, rather than marking the triumph of evidence-based practice, such strong explicit pedagogies may banish the chaos, unpredictability and 'beautiful risk' of learning (Biesta 2013). Affective intensities are excluded from the core activities of teaching and learning, informality reduced, and less space is allowed for children to be other than good and compliant. Instead, intensities make themselves felt elsewhere: in the poignant reluctance with which Abi's teacher curtails a conversation about biscuits, the dramas around behaviour tokens, the ripple of interest researcher Lucy detects amongst children when Saffron's teacher mentions her daughter having a bath at the same time each day, even the attention accorded by children to an unfamiliar adult. All these perhaps provide intensive moments of relationship and identification otherwise hard to find. The fatigue Jasmine expresses may have arisen from the limited curriculum on offer to her, which would have served to enable her Pupil Referral Unit to demonstrate 'progress', widely reified as a measure of effectiveness (Bradbury & Roberts-Holmes 2016). Yet, it marginalizes equity-related educational notions such as a common curriculum or of humanities, arts and social sciences as ways to make sense of the world and oneself (Thomson & Pennacchia 2016). Relegated too are larger questions – posed by philosophers such as Jacques Rancière – about the role of schooling processes in installing rather than challenging inequalities (Bingham & Biesta 2010).

Using small data to understand big data and contexts

Gibbon (2015) argues that focusing on the digital – as in, the device, the screen, the platform, or medium – reveals the narrowness of our understandings of 'technology': the body of the child is already inscribed and invaded through other, softer, behavioural technologies and biopowers such as the behaviour chart. This chapter has accordingly sought to expand perspectives, charting the ubiquity of precisely these 'other' technologies. In so doing, we have argued that our observations can tell us something about the policy, material and discursive conditions shaping current schooling practices.

'School' is both a noun and a verb; it is also a place and a concept, which is has been framed over many years through discourses of 'crisis' and 'inadequacy' (Mockler 2014), with a consequent requirement for improvement, invariably linked to audit cultures through accountability and compliance structures. Our observations suggest, as others have also argued, how educational policies of 'improvement' and their associated data practices might be part of the problem rather than the solution. Our data indicate how affects may index

the 'suspension of [teachers' and children's] agency'; how anxiety about the future may make it harder for the experience of the present to be acknowledged or addressed; how the exclusion of parents may flow from an internal focus on attainment, with its associated arcane vocabularies; how constant surveillance has counter-intuitive effects (Abi is able to disappear in school precisely because she is not marked out as posing a particular challenge); how the stress on behavioural fixes and the aural landscape of 'good learning' limit the range of identities available to students and teachers, and detach pedagogy from questions of what is being learnt, why, and from whom (Biesta 2016). If 'big data' practices have tended to be individualizing and ahistorical, erasing the social context in which numbers are generated (Selwyn et al. 2015), our small data, we would argue, can in principle provide both context and relationships. In the face of our wider social amnesia about the history of the school (Hunter 1996), we might learn from Aliyah's solitary but noble endeavour (discussed in Chapter 5, see Figure 5.1) to preserve through a tie her own affectionate memory of her school as it was before poor inspection reports led to its restructuring and the repudiation of its past. Here we too have attempted to bear witness to the de-collectivization of the school and the focusing of individual management, with its attendant affective consequences, rather than allow these processes to occur unnoticed and unmourned.