Title: *Conceptualising poverty as a barrier to learning through 'Poverty Proofing the School Day': the genesis and impacts of stigmatization*

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Abstract

This paper draws on an evaluation of the *Poverty Proofing the School Day* initiative. It outlines an argument arrived at through abductive reasoning to explain the generic and widespread instances of the stigmatization of disadvantaged pupils that have been uncovered. The process of abductive reasoning necessitated broadening the conceptual framework through which we usually understand poverty and its impacts on education and in so doing we take account of the affective, or psychosocial dimensions and the attendant coping strategies that result. Listening to children's descriptions of poverty and its impacts on schooling is an essential aspect of better understanding these non-material aspects of poverty and their ramifications for all involved*.* There is, however, a lack of time and appropriate stuctures in schools to attend to this wider conceptualisation of poverty, yet the outcomes of *Poverty Proofing the School Day* demonstrate that schools do have a significant role to play in reducing barriers to learning that result. We make the case that the specific conditions of high-stakes performativity in which schools operate and the dominance of instrumental and metrics-based responses to issues around poverty and learning, reduce the visibility of the affective dimension and in so doing, enable unwitting stigmatization to result.

Keywords: poverty, barriers to learning, stigmatization, coping strategies

Introduction and Context

There is international concern about inclusive and quality education for all as evidenced by the 4th United Nations Sustainability Goal in the 2015 General Assembly Resolution (UNGAOR 2015). As a nation Britain has historically had high child poverty relative to other European nations (Joyce 2014) and an intractable high attainment gap between its most and least advantaged children (Strand 2014). There has been a renewed rise in child poverty across the four jurisdictions of the UK since 2013 where there had previously been a drop in the first decade of the millenium, with 4.1 million children now living in relative poverty after household costs, compared with four million the previous year, making up more than 30% of children in the country (House of Commons 2018). The growing prominence of in-work poverty has also been noted (Joyce 2014). The Child Poverty Act of 2010 set the goal to eliminate child poverty in each of the UK jurisdictions by 2020, yet there is widespread concern about the likelihood of this (Joyce 2014, McNight 2015). Indeed the recent House of Commons Briefing Paper *Poverty in the UK: statistics* states that:

> The proportion of children in relative low income is expected to increase sharply from 30% in 2015/16 to 37% in 2021/22 based on incomes after housing costs... That would put the share of children in relative low income after housing costs at its highest level for as far back as we have consistent data (the 1960s), (2018: 19).

The annual national teachers' union survey on the cost of school day, conducted every year since 2012, details the escalating range of materials and activities parents are being asked to pay for in non-fee paying schools across the four jurisdictions of the UK. The 2014/15 survey found that of the 2500 parents surveyed, more than one in ten said they could not afford to allow their child to participate in educational trips or visits because of the expense (NASUWT 2014). The Children's Commission on Poverty produced a report for The

Children's Society detailing how school-related costs make up a large proportion of the family budget, parents saying on average £800 a year, with more than 70% of all parents saying they had struggled with this cost (Holloway et al 2014). In Scotland, the Cost of the School Day project, led by the Child Poverty Action Group in conjunciton with Glasgow City Council, detailed time points throughout the school day where school costs placed pressure on family budgets, resulting in unequal access to opportunities or poverty stigma (Spencer 2015). A Joseph Rowntree report (Horgan 2007) describes the pressures disadvantaged children face obtaining many of the items increasingly needed for school and that even very young children worry about asking their parents for relatively small amounts of money on non-uniform days for example. There is therefore growing concern about the escalating impact of the cost of the school day on the most disadvantaged pupils in the UK (Bragg et al 2015).

This paper interrogates evidence from the *Poverty Proofing the School Day Evaluation and Development Report* (Mazzoli Smith and Todd 2016), to better understand the widespread but hidden phenomenon of in-school stigmatization of children who live in poverty. We set out in this exploratory paper, through a process of abductive reasoning, to offer a plausible case to understand how and why this is happening. Abduction is a useful approach where observed conclusions appear not to follow logically from the premises – here, where stigmatization should not follow logically from well-intentioned school practices, and because of the limited nature of generalisation that is apposite given the nature of this question (Thomas 2010). We argue that a deeper understanding and awareness of children's lived experiences of poverty elucidates the affective dimension, a core part of an integrated conceptualization of poverty. We suggest that initiatives such as *Poverty Proofing the School Day* (henceforth *Poverty Proofing*), open up time and structures in which to have a particular kind of reflective dialogue, as explored below. We also theorise how the dominant approach to knowledge in educational research and its corollary of an impoverished evaluative language in practice, is likely to mitigate against awareness of the affective dimension of poverty. Even if we accept that tackling child poverty through education alone is not possible (Ivinson et al 2017) and whilst concurring with the view that poverty must be tackled at source and not by proxy (Moore 1996), the *Poverty Proofing* evidence suggests how schools could remove an array of barriers to learning and thereby improve the conditions in school for the most disadvantaged pupils.

Poverty Proofing the School Day

Poverty Proofing is an audit for schools developed by the charity Children North East with the North East Child Poverty Commission. The aim of the programme, which schools buy into, is to remove barriers to learning which exist because of the impacts of living in poverty. After a pilot in four North East schools in 2013-14, 13 North East schools participated in the audit in 2014-15, at which point we carried out an evaluation based on the outcomes in all these 17 schools, as well as a further six in another region which engaged with *Poverty Proofing* through a trained Local Authority Advisor there (Mazzoli Smith and Todd 2016). Since then a further 30 North East schools have participated, along with schools in a number of other counties, the concept of *Poverty Proofing* having spread quickly. A further study has analysed all the North East schools' actions plans, alongside in-depth school case studies to explore impacts over a longer timeframe.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the conditions which may have led to the key findings of *Poverty Proofing* as set out in the evaluation report, and as such, the underpinning evidence is only briefly summarised here. As these data are so rich and extensive, we would encourage readers to look at the evaluation, in addition to this paper, in order to better understand the nature of what has been uncovered. *Poverty Proofing* was developed from a project Children North East ran in 2011 in which children living in poverty said that what they most wanted was an end to discrimination at school. The concept therefore arose from listening to children and the methodology has as its core aim description of lived experiences of poverty from the child's perspective. The assumption behind the approach was that pupils could not easily or readily relay their experiences of poverty and hence mixed methods were designed explicitly with this in mind, to support children to describe their experiences authentically. This includes an external evaluator speaking to all the pupils in small focus groups, asking direct questions such as how they would know who was living in poverty in school. An online questionnaire is provided to all staff, governors and parents and some face to face interviews

are also carried out with some of these stakeholders. These data are reviewed in the context of wider school data on attendance and attainment, and a detailed action plan is produced. Implementation of the plan is supported through ongoing dialogue, and training sessions for both staff and governors. This process provides extensive student, staff and parental voice and the external, comprehensive nature of the audit was found to be extremely beneficial to schools and significant in enabling children to speak authentically about their experiences. Distinctive to *Poverty Proofing* is:

1. the methodology - all the school stakeholders are involved in a comprehensive, in-depth school audit carried out by two independent trained auditors,
2. the outcomes - the action plans schools receive detail a host of generic, everyday school practices which were found to systematically stigmatize pupils living in poverty, often multiple times a day,
3. the hidden nature of the stigmatization – schools were mostly unaware of the impact of routine practices on their most disadvantaged pupils and the coping mechanisms that pupils may employ as a result,
4. the low- or no-cost solutions possible – schools could often quickly and efficiently remedy some of the issues raised through understanding the nature of the stigmatization and revising their practices.

Each school was provided with an action plan on completion of the audit, which detailed in excess of 30 areas in which the poorest pupils were found to be stigmatized or marginalised, covering almost all areas of school life: uniform, setting, examinations, lesson content, extra-curricular activities, parental support, food, homework, resources, transport, relationships. Some prominent examples include: the administration of free school meals, in which pupils in receipt of these were routinely highlighted through lists on classroom walls, till registers or brown paper bags for trips; the increasing costs of extra-curricular activities and trips with pupils publicly asked to bring in what is a voluntary contribution; the discovery of pupils routinely not attending school on non-uniform or dress up days on reviewing attendance data; infant pupils asked to talk or write about their holiday when they had not been on one. These findings were based on the analysis of school-based data collected by Children North East for each school and which the authors had oversight of and scrutinized for the evaluation report. The findings draw from what children stated directly; 'there are too many trips, if we did less we'd have more money', 'it's sad to be the odd one out', 'people call people nasty names' and 'sometimes people start on them because they're different' in relation to appearance marking out poverty, for instance. The findings were also based on observations and questions in school; children in receipt of free school meals (FSMs) not buying food, but rather flavoured water for themselves and other pupils, bottled water and fruit being charged for at morning break-time, children not wearing jumpers in winter because they did not possess them, as opposed to not wanting to as teachers had assumed. Findings were also based on consideration of the data as a whole; analysis of school attendance data demonstrating that some pupils had never turned up on non-uniform days, GCSE coursework being dependent on resources coming in from home. It needs to be stated that the overall finding of systematic stigmatization is not about individual teachers directly stigmatizing children on account of their poverty, but rather the inadvertent result of school processes that overlooked this such that these kinds of experiences went unnoticed.

The trend noted above for the increasing cost of the school day is confirmd in parental responses and teacher perceptions. Particular aspects of schooling were stated by both families and staff as being increasingly costly, notably school proms, international trips, school uniforms and the costumes for events such as World Book Day. There was evidence from interviews with Headteachers and governors that schools had little overall sense of how much money families were being asked for across the school year and when, as well as little planning being given to how much time families were given to pay. Such an in-depth focus on poverty was novel in these schools and provided training in this area often for the first time. This also supported schools in how best to spend their Pupil Premium funding, which has been found to narrow how schools respond to pupil disadvantage (Ainscow et al 2016). *Poverty Proofing* often led to a shift in whole-school ethos, with schools subsequently referring to how they now saw everything through a 'poverty proofing lens'. Headteachers referred to the audit as 'not a package, but a process leading to a shift in ethos', 'one of the most impactful programmes we have even been involved with' and said that 'the strengths of the audit are that every child, parent, teacher and governor gets spoken to and that views come primarily from pupils, not Ofsted'. One

acknowledged that 'no matter how well you think you're doing you'll still be doing some of these things wrong' and another concluded that the school was 'doing the right things in the wrong way.'

Solutions that schools have found in response to some of the issues include: auditing school trips at the start of each academic year to provide advance information to families; providing time to budget and keeping costs in check; discrete provision of school uniform where it was found that pupils would not accept uniform otherwise; reducing the number of non-uniform days; extending access to the internet during and after school for pupils who do not have it at home; not discussing costs or debts with pupils publicly, if at all. It was found that pupil attendance did go up as a result of changes made and there were early signs of the impact on attainment of these pupils. Uptake of FSMs increased, with one school reporting almost 100% uptake by eligible pupils, far in excess of anything they had known previously and another reporting that changes to FSM administration had led to the increase of year five and six pupils on FSMs attending the school residentials.

Some issues were more intractable however and not wholly within the purview of the school to change. Schools were mindful that whilst they could scrutinse the trips they undertook, for instance, there is a wider trend towards more and higher-costs trips that they did not want their pupils to be left out of. Also, whilst the impact on most schools has been positive and significant, this was not universally the case, with one school pulling out and several others challenging the findings of the audit in the first year. It was found to be essential that the Headteacher and ideally also the governors fully endorsed the audit in order to drive through what was ultimately a highly challenging process for schools. Poverty is far from easy to talk about, surrounded by an atmosphere of denial and moral condemnation (Shildrek and Macdonald 2013) and for the schools where there has been significant change, an open and supportive atmosphere of ongoing discussion was necessary to enable staff to continue to act reflectively in relation to the revelations in their action plans.

In-school stigmatization of children living in poverty

In this paper we ask how such widespread, yet hidden, stigmatization can occur in schools where support for the most disadvantaged pupils is a stated priority. Abductive reasoning is an approach to theorising, or hypothesis-generating, that is under-used in educational research but ideally suited to the exploration of an issue based on such unexpected findings. Abduction is a form of logical inference which begins with an observation and aims to find the most likely, or best fit, explanation. 'Abduction means that single events or occurrences – by means of concepts, theory and models – are described and interpreted as expressions of more general phenomena' (Blom and Morén 2011: 69). It was introduced by Pierce (1903), who reformulated ideas about abduction over his life time according to the logic of pragmatism. Pierce talked about abduction as hypothesis-seeking, typically arriving at new ideas beyond what had previously been thought, to account for observable facts. Abduction is therefore the first stage of enquiry, concerned with the reasons for adopting a hypothesis and we argue that this is an appropriate approach here as too little is understood at present about the genesis of this kind of stigmatization in schools. Crucially, for this study, Pierce's claim that this process is the only logical operation which introduces new ideas into enquiry is important, as we found there to be a lack of explanatory concepts that could account for these data. 'Abduction merely suggests that something *may* be' (Fann 2012: 51) and subsequent stages of enquiry would focus on testing, or verifying, the formulated hypothesis, which sits beyond the scope of this paper. Drawing on diverse theories and focusing on the detail of specific examples through a process of abductive inferences, we sought to come up with the most plausible explanation (Shanks 2008).

We begin with Raffo et al's (2007) framework for examining the links between poverty and education and the functionalist view of education as playing a part in the reproduction of society. Problems in terms of groups who fail to benefit can be explained as dysfunctions at the micro-level of the individual learner/family and meso-level of immediate social contexts, such as neighbourhoods/schools (Raffo et al 2007). Reay (2001) amongst others (e.g. Smyth and Wrigley 2013; Thompson et al 2016), has highlighted how working-class pupils are often construed in the education system by what they lack, which has a detrimental effect on their development and attainment. Locating educational failure within the pupil or home has been challenged as deficit theorising from a socially critical perspective (e.g. Gazeley and Dunne 2005, Lupton and Thruppe 2013),

although this would logically explain stigmatization of disadvantaged pupils in some of the ways demonstrated by the *Poverty Proofing* evidence and as such this was a consideration. The impact of negative cultural discourses around poverty in contemporary media (Pemberton et al 2016) plays into this.

Whilst there was evidence of deficit views on the part of some teachers and the notion of a 'culture of poverty' (Harrington 1997, McNamara and McNicholl 2016) was invoked at times as part of a functionalist argument about education, this was far from routinely the case. There was a clear desire amongst most teachers for dialogue and exploration of how they could improve their practices, with a number of Headteachers noting that there had been no time prior to *Poverty Proofing* for any meaningful focus on the ramifications of poverty. Indeed, some Headteachers stated that the opening up of time and space in which to focus on these issues was a key motivation for buying into the audit. Patterns of stigmatization were so similar across schools and in evidence even when schools prided themselves on their support for their most disadvantaged pupils, that deficit beliefs and behaviours at the micro-level could not suffice as an adequate explanation for the extent of the systematic stigmatization that was uncovered. Thompson et al (2016) advocate a range of measures to counter deficit thinking amongst teacher trainees and we suggest that the training embedded in the *Poverty Proofing* procedure is a way of challenging the implicit beliefs of both trainee and practising teachers about families in poverty where they do exist, as well as creating the opportunity for dialogue.

Turning then to a consideration of school culture more broadly beyond the individual, we draw from Ladson-Billings' (2006) anthropological research referring to the 'poverty of culture' in education, which reproduces normative cultural behaviours alongside little critical examination of the concept of culture, which is taken-for-granted. Ladson-Billings finds that her student teachers did not appreciate that they have particular cultural expectations, which not all students meet, in large part because they did not consider themselves to be part of a culture – as middle-class white teachers they were somehow 'culture-neutral'. Ladson-Billings suggests that:

> If we are serious about students learning about culture, we need to help them first become careful observers of culture, both in the communities in which they will teach and in themselves (2006:109).

This, we could suggest, constitutes an aspect of why the *Poverty Proofing* audit has been so impactful. The methodological orientation towards understanding children's and families' lived experiences of poverty in relation to schooling does require school staff to better interrogate the concept of cultures of poverty, which may otherwise be understood through the readily available wider media discourses and cultural stereotypes that abound (Pemberton et al 2016). The process also requires practitioners to look closely at their own normative school culture, which was often taken-for-granted in the *Poverty Proofing* examples. That stigmatization on this scale is unwitting could partly be due to how culture as an explanatory concept is under-developed – both in relation to cultures of poverty, and in terms of the poverty of culture in schools, whereby there is little time, space or adequate structures in which to reflect on normative school culture and how this intersects with other pupils' cultures of lived experience in a multitude of ways across the school day. These issues are distinctive of schools in high-poverty contexts and as such additional to the normal demands of schooling (Lupton 2005).

In order then to interrogate further the cultural context of stigmatization, we draw on integrating explanations (Raffo et al 2007) by turning to the literature on stigmatization. With Goffman (1963), there was a theoretical move to see interaction as more a matter of social competence than belief, socially organised and ordered in socially defined and sanctioned ways. Goffman defines stigma as referring 'to an attribute that is deeply discrediting, but it should be seen that a language of relationships, not attributes, is really needed' (1963: 3). It is at this socio-cultural level of ordered interaction that we move away from individual beliefs and behaviours and need to examine more closely the interactions as they are experienced by those involved. This opens up an abductive exercise of moving from the outcome, here stigma, to the different levels of evidence we have of the context, particularly as experienced by those involved. Whilst there have been empirical studies of the impact of stigma on adults living in poverty (e.g. Lott 2002, Reutter et al 2009), this is less likely to be the case for children specifically, as understood from their perspective, in part because of the obvious methodological challenges (Ridge 2011).

The accounts of children living in poverty we do have (Crowley and Vulliamy 2007; Hooper et al 2007; Ridge 2002; Ridge and Millar 2008) remind us of the importance of coping strategies, such as 'impression management' (Goffman 1963), one aspect of which may be nondisclosure of poverty. However, as we have seen, schools systematically prevent children from having the option of not disclosing their families' financial status. Ridge (2002) provides evidence of how some children did not inform parents about school trips or activities, as they had made an assessment that they were not affordable, excluding themselves from these events. From a teacher's perspective this exclusion could be read as lack of engagement and application, but understood from the perspective of the child, it can be seen as a coping mechanism to avoid the stress that may result from asking for money at home. In her work, Ridge (2011) discusses the inner fears of children in terms of being humiliated or shamed, which are at the core of interactions in which stigmatization results, yet these affects are rarely asked about. Hooper et al (2007) also find that children living in poverty, with parents under stress, were hiding their needs, as was found in *Poverty Proofing,* and demonstrate that these strategies are not without costs for the children concerned.

Focusing in more detail on the nature of shame, Reutter et al talk in particular about how 'Feelings of shame necessitated strategies such as self-isolating and concealing poverty to preserve self-esteem, gain acceptance, and reduce fear of stigmatization' (2009: 308). Yet as we have seen, school is largely a public arena in which children negotiate a public identity and practices routinely prevent such concealment. The institution of schooling is a site of powerful hegemonic control, in which particular articulations of social relations and cultural practices dominate, but they do not eradicate all others. It is in such a public space that children are learning what it is to be poor and developing, within the limitations set up, coping strategies that manifest at different levels. As with Ridge, the literature on stigma also notes how '…poverty stigma is experienced at many levels and requires identity work to mitigate its negative effects on wellbeing. Some of these strategies themselves might have negative consequences…' (Reutter et al 2009: 309). Yang et al (2007) suggest that 'a stigmatized person learns society's standpoint and gains a general idea about what possessing the stigma means' (2006: 1527), which highlights a particularly unwelcome consequence of the cultural reproduction of schooling. Yang et al further state that 'Macro-social structural forces also compound marginalization by limiting in advance the possibilities of other kinds of interactions or responses' (2007: 1528) and hence the coping strategies that children adopt are shaped by and within the socio-cultural practices of normative school culture.

Coping strategies include a range of ways in which children living in poverty may be learning to control their expectations (Shropshire and Middleton 1999). They may also include distancing practices, such as the 'othering' of categories of people denigrated as more marginal than themselves (Lister 2004, Chase and Walker 2013, Pemberton et al 2016). This strategy would serve to further isolate vulnerable children and studies have shown the anxiety and unhappiness that this creates (Ridge 2011) and conversely the importance of sustaining friendships and a secure social network for disadvantaged children (Morrow 2001). Such distancing practices would implicate disadvantaged children themselves, explaining, for instance, why parents who can least afford it, buy expensive trainers or bags for their children, as was found repeatedly in the *Poverty Proofing* audits. Whilst this did little to garner sympathy from some teachers, understood as a distancing strategy, it may be perceived by families as protecting children from shame. Wearing the right trainers was found by Elliot and Leonard (2004) to be a protective strategy in relation to bullying. Understanding the impacts of poverty must therefore draw on such psychosocial, or affective dimensions and the way that coping strategies are utilised to conceal poverty and avoid shame. Whilst research notes awareness of the role of affect in understanding the relationship of poverty to learning (Ivinson et al 2017, Skeggs and Loveday 2012, Ridge 2011), there is more focus on structural and contextual issues (McNamara and McNicoll 2016) and a lack of integrating explanations (Raffo et al 2007) available to schools through which to frame reflective dialogue about school culture and practices. *Poverty Proofing* evidence demonstrates that recognition of these affective dimensions is lacking in schools and we will suggest that specific conditions in which schooling now operates mitigates against the visibility of the affective dimensions of poverty and integrating explanations.

Barriers to understanding the affective aspects of stigmatization in education

Following the abductive strategy of turning to relevant literature from different fields, we find that the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) has argued for the connection between poverty and shame to be more clearly articulated, stating both how people living in poverty cite shame as critical and how this in turn can lead to isolation: 'Shame and humiliation can result in isolation – thereby corroding social relations and breaking down social capital. They have negative effects on psychological wellbeing and group identity' (OPHI 2010 cited in Jo 2013: 515). Jo notes how the emotional, or psychosocial dimensions of poverty are often unaddressed, as though recourse to financial hardship is sufficient to describe the lived experience of poverty. This, we would argue, is highly pertinent to education, where too often abstract indices of poverty and deprivation are assumed to be sufficient as descriptors in terms of understanding the impacts of poverty on education. Jo refers to shame, amongst other emotions, as a non-material attribute of poverty and argues that the conceptual lens must be broadened beyond material attributes. Our analysis of *Poverty Proofing* supports this as necessary for both educational research and school-based practice, where there is little understanding of the co-constructed nature of shame and its ramifications for the learning environment.

It has been noted that whilst shame is a social emotion, it is often approached at an individual level rather than in social interaction (Scheff 2003, Chase and Walker 2013). Scheff's sociological approach to shame therefore integrates an analysis of the emotional reactions of the self and the social bonds of society, which are both critical factors in the *Poverty Proofing* examples. Chase and Walker (2013) also employ a definition that demonstrates the co-constructed nature of shame:

> combining an internal judgement of one's own inabilities; an anticipated assessment of how one will be judged by others; and the actual verbal or symbolic gestures of others who consider, or are deemed to consider, themselves to be socially and/or morally superior to the person sensing shame (2013: 740).

Chase and Walker conclude that 'Shame – whether felt or anticipated – epitomises the threat to any social bond between a person and their social environment' (2013: 752). This powerfully conveys the rupture that must result for a child shamed through stigmatizing practices and the importance of the co-constructed nature of it. Nor does an external (or socio-cultural) description of the stigmatizing practice describe the internal (psychosocial) ramifications for the child. Describing that children's names are highlighted on a list if they are in receipt of FSMs is therefore an incomplete description of the nature of the problem. It is only by including the child's interpretation of this (Ridge 2002) and drawing on the affective impacts that we come to understand the non-material attributes of poverty and approach a fuller description of what is occurring. Through abductive reasoning we would then hypothesise that the resulting rupture for the child experiencing shame cannot only be understood as internal and individual, as it impacts on (and draws from) the child's experiencing of their social bonds in school.

To better understand how widespread unwitting stigmatization has come about, we suggest that taking seriously the co-constructed nature of shame and the critical place of social bonds in understanding stigma is therefore central. It follows then that the experiences of the stigmatizer are also important to describe and understand, in addition to those of the stigmatized. Again, we turn to research on stigmatization to expand our understanding. Yang et al, unusually even in the literature on stigmatization, focus on how for the stigmatizer 'stigma seems to be an effective and natural response, emergent not only as an act of self-preservation or psychological defence, but also in the existential and moral experience that one is being threatened' (2007: 1528). Yang et al (2007) and Ladson-Billings (2006), in different ways and from different disciplines, highlight how the teacher and pupil, or stigmatizer and stigmatized, are socially bound together in cultural and moral value systems that are too little understood. The reference above to stigmatization as a 'natural response' is important in better understanding the widespread nature of *Poverty Proofing* findings in schools. Yang et al are suggesting, in their morally-framed conceptualization of stigma, that actions follow from the emotions of threat and self-preservation:

> The focus on moral experience allows us to adequately understand the behaviours of both the stigmatized and those doing the stigmatizing, for it allows us to see both as interpreting,

living, and reacting with regard to what is vitally at stake and what is most crucially threatened (Yang et al 2007; 1530).

We would then have to ask what may be threatening for teachers such that stigmatization becomes a natural response. Our *Poverty Proofing* evaluation did note that some staff were defensive about their roles, for instance articulating feelings of threat in relation to the limits and extent of these, but this was in a minority of cases and could be linked to deficit beliefs, as discussed above. We suggest that there is a more generalised, underlying threat, that suggests itself on further interrogating the example of listing the names of pupils on FSMs publicly in schools. We take this as a central example, as it is one of the starkest and most obvious ways in which the public shaming of the most disadvantaged pupils has occurred in many school sites, with seemingly no awareness of the stigmatizing impacts until highlighted in *Poverty Proofing* action plans. By drawing on an abductive method of reasoning through reading signs, rather than accepting observations as objective facts, we are more likely to see the provisional characteristic of those facts and seek their underlying structure (Shank 2008).

The list of FSM names is treated as unproblematic public data yet this, we would suggest, is a category mistake. It is not appropriate to treat the school dinner list (FSM and non-FSM pupils) as if it were an objective factual list, in the same manner as the week's menu for instance. The facts we are talking about in relation to the poverty in which a child lives are deeply evaluative, in that they are nested in a complex web of background norms and forms of practice that the children so labelled are vulnerable to. Because of the context in which they are presented, these facts have certain causal powers and yet their evaluative nature has been found to be overlooked in the routine administration of FSMs. We would hypothesise that an explanation for this is the current dominance of the instrumental rationality of educational managerialism, where the source of knowledge and understanding is governed by an abstracted and rule-based empiricism (MacIntyre 2013). In an educational culture that holds great store by such a body of knowledge, this case serves as a poignant example of what can go wrong when we overlook how certain facts should be treated, that is in an essentially humane way. Another way of putting this is to adopt an anti-reductionist stance, to argue that scientific knowledge is only one aspect of knowing the world and being overly enthral to it risks distorting what we see (e.g. Midgley 2001). The culture of performativity, allied to the dominance of knowledge based on instrumental rationality governing how we understand the learning needs and experiences of children, is devoid of the values that would furnish us with a properly evaluative understanding. The evaluative nature of the FSM data is a threat to teachers' investment in what are the dominant knowledge structures in schools, however ambivalently entered into (Ball 2003). That such metrics (FSMs, attainment gaps, postcode data) should be the dominant source of knowledge here is problematic, when what we are trying to understand, and what is consequently hidden, is the lived experience of pupils and how we can improve it.

The importance of descriptions of lived experiences of poverty

Central to our conceptualization of poverty and learning and our developing hypothesis about how unwitting stigmatization occurs, is that there is a paucity of evaluative knowledge based on qualitative description – of the stigmatizer, the stigmatized and what is going on in the nature of the social interactions between them. Description is not something that is always foregrounded in educational research, where we tend to privilege analysis and explanation. This is surprising since we would think that, even if explanatory power is a virtue of a theoretical stance, understanding what it is that we are trying to explain, the explanandum(a), is presupposed by the explanans. Getting a clear description of the relevant subject matter is thus crucial. Wittgenstein, in the *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), talks about the importance for philosophers of describing the descriptions that people give of everyday things (Gert 1997), so as to avoid being distracted and misled by an intellectual (scientific, philosophical) tendency to offer explanations. Wittgenstein suggests that it is very hard to see something when it is extremely familiar and this, we would suggest, applies to the nature of how poverty and education intersect. The intractable nature of the problem is one that is all too familiar, yet the authority we give to one form of knowledge and the raft of attendant data that result, leads us too quickly to think we have the route to explanation, when in fact this kind of knowledge masks the value of description of lived experiences in schools. Another way of articulating this is as a problem of 'visibility' in how problems come to

be seen within particular paradigms (Moore 1996). We argue that here invisibility results not only from the top-down instrumental rationality of school managerialism, but also from within the current dominant paradigm of positivism in educational research and the predilection for facts about structural discrimination in the sociology of education (Mac an Ghaill 1996).

Wittgenstein encourages description of the things that are most familiar, what we do in relation to them and how we do this, in an authentic way – precisely what we argue is the valuable form of knowledge that has come from *Poverty Proofing*. Wittgenstein cautions against the posing of problems as if they were scientific questions, which demand further facts to arrive at an answer, through searching for the right kind of mechanism to explain what we have found. Wittgenstein also cautioned against trying to explain before we have properly described, or we are at risk of systematically misrepresenting what we are trying to understand. There is also the issue of transforming such descriptions into a different language, rather than preserving the meanings and concepts in their 'original home' (Wittgenstein 1953), that is everyday life. We would argue that *Poverty Proofing* reveals our lack of children's descriptions of experiencing poverty, and that in educational research we are too quick to turn this into a different language of objective indices of material deprivation, over-looking the lived experiences of children too readily. Yang et al (2007) note that many social psychology definitions of stigma also neglect the stigmatized person's viewpoint, in favour of focusing on individualized, measurable outcomes like poor self-esteem. Yet it is more than individualistic descriptions of lived experience that matters. We argue that neither methodological individualism, nor structural or socio-cultural approaches to understanding in-school stigmatization, are adequate. A 'thick description' (Geertz 2008) is necessary, that incorporates lived experiences, social forms and normative practices.

This tendency towards quantitative methods and measurable factors when discussing poverty and education has been explored elsewhere, Ridge noting that 'Qualitative, subjective research with low-income children has been slow to develop, with much of the policy evidence about children tending to be informed by large surveys and birth cohort studies' (Ridge 2011, 74). We agree that research with children in this field needs to be 'particularly sensitive, reflective, meaningful and methodologically sound' and that 'qualitative research has a key role to play in ensuring that the views of children and young people are incorporated in the development of well-informed, appropriately targeted policy and practice' (Ridge 2011: 74). There is a further methodological challenge in collecting naturalistic data about how children utilise coping strategies that may not be understood as such by them, in relation to such a sensitive issue (Sime 2008, Hooper et al 2007). Working with children as researchers has been effective as one approach to generating such insight, for instance with respect to the quality of provision and homework clubs (Kellett 2009). The accusation of leading questions was made by one school in relation to some of the *Poverty Proofing* focus groups for instance, but our evaluation found that in order to go beyond the prescribed identities of normative school culture and get at coping strategies, probing questions were indeed necessary. From their experience of working with children living in poverty, Children North East stated that without such a direct approach, children would not speak openly about their experiences and this was found to be the case, in that teachers often reported that through *Poverty Proofing* they came to hear descriptions of the school day from pupils that they had never heard before. There is evidence that listening to and learning from children's experiences of living in poverty counters deficit thinking, highlights the importance of context and challenges simplistic explanations of the 'culture of poverty' (Gorski 2012). We would suggest that such evidence also broadens the conceptual repertoire that we have with which to understand the relationship of poverty to education. Children's descriptions reorient our knowledge base to one that foregrounds the evaluative nature of data and, in this way, we can avoid some of the stigmatization that results from viewing pupil data as objective and neutral.

Conclusion

In taking an abductive approach we have sought to develop a possible hypothesis – or theoretical redescription – of the occurrence of unwitting stigmatization of children living in poverty in our schools, bringing to light what may be missed through the logic of other modes of explanation. We make a case drawing on theoretical ideas about school culture, stigmatization and epistemology. We suggest that the poverty of culture in schools creates conditions where there is a lack of time and space in which to reflect on

culture itself. This includes the public culture of schooling, in which the shame experienced by children whose poverty is highlighted publicly in multiple practices across school life, is managed through coping strategies that are not well understood. This also includes a culture where affective aspects of children's lives – here connected with poverty – are marginalised in favour of a language focused on the material aspects of poverty. Furthermore, it includes a culture ill-resourced to attend to the co-constructed and relational nature of stigma, where pupils' social bonds are threatened, but also where teachers are likely to feel under threat too. Finally, we suggest that the reason teachers feel under threat is because of the wider cultures of performativity and instrumentalism around schooling, as well as the dominant epistemology and methodologies through which we routinely frame and measure the impact of poverty on learning. We suggest that this instrumental rationality creates the conditions in which we overlook the evaluative nature of the very forms of knowledge that matter in enabling us to understand the lived experience of poverty.

Listening carefully to how children describe their experiences of poverty is not an additional extra, to expand upon the quantitative data that does the real work of explaining the impact of deprivation on educational outcomes, but an integral aspect of this understanding. Recognizing that, and how, negative social and emotional experiences for pupils, which result from stigma, create barriers to learning every bit as real as poor quality teaching, depends on access to these authentic descriptions. Evidence from *Poverty Proofing* demonstrates that attending to what can sometimes be compartmentalized as pastoral issues therefore, is an essential aspect of tackling barriers to learning. In having an awareness of coping strategies, it appears that there is more that constitutes 'pedagogies of poverty' (Smyth and Wrigley 2013) than we have hitherto been aware of. Moreover, it can never be assumed, or taken-for-granted, that there is a direct and transparent link between social justice interventions, such as the provision of FSMs, and social justice outcomes. The manner in which practices are enacted and executed is all important. Yo demonstrates how 'Poorly constructed social policies aimed at alleviating poverty which in fact accentuate shame, have been shown to significantly aggravate poverty' (e.g. in Evans and Griggs 2010) and the evidence from *Poverty Proofing* supports this.

Poverty Proofing evidence demonstrates how in-depth, 'thick description' (Geertz 2008) of lived experiences of poverty are necessary for an integrated and more effective conceptualization of how poverty and education interact such that we can better understand how to remove barriers to learning. Such a conceptualization attends to both the moral requirement upon us to end school-based stigmatization of children living in poverty and the functionalist aim of better optimizing the support provided by schools for disadvantaged pupils. The serious ramifications of stigmatization, in terms of children's physical and mental well-being, barriers to learning, and also attendance and attainment, as well as the likelihood of longer-term social disenfranchisement, are such that the evidence from *Poverty Proofing* should be viewed as a seminal moment in our developing understanding of the impacts of poverty on education.

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