The force of habit: Channelling young bodies at alternative education spaces

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14th June 2011: a scout hut in London[1]

I am sitting on a wall, in the sun, facing the scout hut, and chatting to a group of mothers who homeschool their children. They come here every Monday afternoon, for their children to play, socialise and take part in organised activities. As we talk, the sound of screaming interrupts us; we look over to the hut where a man appears from an office doorway, looking harassed. Just out of his sight, four children – boys and girls, various ages between four and fourteen –scamper around the nearest corner, squealing with delight; I catch a glimpse of a red plastic bucket, water splashing onto the concrete. The man stares pointedly in our direction before disappearing into the darkened hallway. I am not sure what has happened, but Annette, one of the mothers, tells me this is a weekly occurrence: an ongoing, low-level spat between the children and the caretaker. Annette's explanation sparks a discussion about how homeschooled children are, collectively, 'different' from schooled children. She explains:

> *'When a school kid comes to our group, they act in a certain way. And it's almost like our children de-school them, and mould them, without really saying anything at all […].*

Rowena, another mother, suggests that the 'bucket' incident is symptomatic:

> *'When you go to educational places, the staff expect them to behave as school children. Like learning to queue up […] and ours are lounging around […].Or,*

homeschooled children don't know how to sit on chairs. Some will sit on them,

others will turn them upside down, others will sit on them backwards.'

Introduction

Prompted by examples such as the one above, this paper is premised upon the observation that education spaces are key sites for the channelling of habits. Such habits may be expressed as generic descriptors of bodily comportment – like 'grace' – or as more context-specific skills: as Rowena observed, sitting on a chair. Habits are characterised as routine, repetitive acts, performed instinctively in a given situation. The main contribution of this paper is to offer a novel conceptual language for articulating how adults attempt to (re)formulate habits in children in education spaces. In doing so, the paper opens out several critical questions about inclusion – focussing on both why and, especially, how alternative educators seek to intervene differently into children's habits from a perceived mainstream. It debates the relative merits of a potentially radical conceptualisation of habits that sees them as *mutable* and *collective*, rather than as stable properties of apparently individuated human subjects.

The paper progresses through empirical vignettes from research at 59 alternative education spaces in the UK. The term 'alternative' glosses multiple complexities (Woods and Woods, 2009; Kraftl, 2013a), but denotes education spaces that deliberately differentiate themselves from 'mainstream' schools, which are usually State-funded and follow the UK National Curriculum. In this study, these included Homeschooling, Steiner, Montessori, Democratic, Small-Scale and Forest Schools, and Care Farms[2]. Although diverse, all pursue knowingly alternative pedagogies, and provide a replacement for all or part of a child's education in a context where it is assumed that children aged 4-16 attend school. Alternative education spaces offer a significant starting place for discussion about inclusion, because they are rooted

in pedagogies that seek to evade the apparent problems of mainstream education (rote learning, didactic teaching, standardised testing/progression), whilst privileging the development of human relationships, bodily movements, the arts, and dialogic learning. Alternative educators also wrestle directly with inclusiveness in two senses: first, in that their democratic, dialogic approaches are often viewed as pedagogically and socially inclusive; second, in that alternative education spaces frequently take children with a range of emotional, social and bodily differences, who have often struggled at mainstream schools. Some alternative education spaces do not *expressly* cater for such children, but have developed a reputation for working with them – in the case of Steiner Schools, for working with children on the autistic spectrum. Others, like Care Farms, explicitly offer therapeutic learning experiences for children at risk of exclusion from mainstream schools, sometimes as part of attempts to reintegrate a child for life in a mainstream school, training or paid work. The paper's central premise is that the (re)learning of habits is foundational to the work of alternative educators, but that processes of habit (re)formation require much greater analysis and conceptualisation – not least in order to critically assess their possible implications for 'mainstream' settings.

The paper begins by briefly situating my project within educational research on embodiment and emotion. Thereafter, and building on that work, it specifies two theorisations of habit, which are deployed in the paper's empirical analyses. These are based around the contrasting but in some senses complementary work of two habit theorists: Félix Ravaisson and John Dewey. The second section summarises the research project upon which this paper was based, and introduces the key education spaces appearing in the paper. The third and fourth sections offer two steps towards a conceptual language for articulating habit (re)formation in educational spaces: habit as '(re)calibration'; habit as 'contagion'.

The force of habit in education

With its focus on habit, this paper extends a recent groundswell of research within education studies on bodies/emotions. Evans et al (2009) summarise how bodies/emotions have been conceptualised threefold (also Cook and Hemming, 2011). First, children's bodies have been understood as socially-constructed, produced and regulated via ideological messages, policies and laws. This viewpoint undergirded well-established 'new social studies of childhood', prompting analyses of how children's bodies/emotions were often framed as either vulnerable or dangerous (Valentine, 1996). Notably, a key early assumption – since questioned – was that a focus upon emotions in both research and classroom teaching was de facto progressive (Evans et al., 2005). Second, education scholars have examined how teachers' and children's bodies feel, especially in terms of the affects produced through their interactions (Probyn, 2005; Zembylas, 2009). Rather than categorisable emotions felt individually, affects denote shared feelings, atmospheres, or ineffable energies that connect (and divide) bodies in the classroom. As Youdell (2010) demonstrates, the classroom is marked not only by entrenched flows of bodies, practices, affects and subjectivities, but cut across by potential new becomings – new constellations, performances or knowledges that move beyond scripted performativities in schools. Third, bodies/emotions may be made flesh, in education spaces (Evans et al., 2009). Significantly, this observation chimes with a 'new wave' of childhood studies (Prout, 2005; Ryan, 2011; Kraftl, 2013b), in which erstwhile attention to the *socially-*constituted child's body is tempered by attentiveness to the fleshy processes of bodies constituted through shifting combinations of matter, human and non-human. As Prout (2005, p. 3-4) argues, this is a "requirement that childhood studies move beyond the opposition of nature and culture [to] a hybrid form [wherein] children's capacities are extended and supplemented by all kinds of material artefacts and technologies, which are also hybrids of nature and culture". Prout therefore examines the ways in which childhoods are produced and

experienced through complex, dynamic constellations into which children (and adults) enter with information technologies, genetics and psychopharmaceuticals. More recently, scholars have examined how new neuroscientific knowledges have been deployed in schools for citizenship education (Pykett, 2012), and have critiqued how anti-obesity policies not only mark but intervene in fleshy processes of eating and exercising (Evans, 2010; Pike and Kelly, 2014).

These ways of understanding bodies/emotions in education offer a starting point for some of this paper's analyses. However – and in extending the latter two approaches – it is necessary to develop a theoretical language more attuned to how *habit*-formation takes place at alternative education spaces. Everyday usage of the term sees habit as a conservative force that stultifies individual human creativity and reflexivity; a force acting upon the body, 'below the level of consciousness and language' (Crossley, 2001; Carlisle, 2013). Recently, however, scholars have explicated the malleability of habit. Drawing on Ravaisson (2008), there has been growing acceptance that habits may be cultivated, albeit with disagreement on the level of conscious reflection required (Carlisle, 2010). Thus, as a habit takes hold over time, an individual may, simultaneously, be increasingly *bound* by their habits whilst also *free* to undertake other tasks whilst performing them (for example, an accomplished car driver able to hold a conversation whilst driving). This is what Ravaisson (2008, p. 37) – a key inspiration for contemporary habit theories – termed 'the double law of habit'. Thus, for Carlisle (2013), habit is an 'ambivalent' component of human embodiment, sitting between freedom and necessity, routine and creativity.

Radically, such scholarship also enables attunement to *collective* facets of habituation. Looking across a range of habit scholarship, there is insistence that habit is, variously, central to social reproduction, skilling and power (Bissell, 2015), a 'switchpoint' between isolated individual actions and collective laws (Crook, 2013), and entrained in 'affective habit

ecologies' dispersed across individual bodies (Dewsbury, 2012)[1]. The most radical element of this work – with its roots in Ravaisson's (2008) observation of a continuity between human will and 'nature' – is that the 'collective' referred to here is not merely a *social* one, but material, or more-than-social (Kraftl, 2013b). Resonating with more recent posthuman scholarship and the 'new wave' of childhood studies discussed above, in Ravaissonian conceptions of habit the primacy of the sovereign human agent is radically overhauled (Bennett, 2010). As air, water, food and chemicals flow into, through and out of a 'human body', it becomes apparent that that this body is constituted not only socially, but via molecular, pre-conscious, for-the-moment flows of life-itself. If, as posthumanists have now clearly established (Bennett, 2010), we follow those *processes* rather than start a priori with the bodies they constitute, then such a manoeuvre breaks down assumed boundaries between self and other, human and non-human, and, indeed, the idea of the sovereign human agent.

The above scholarship provides important signposts for developing a conceptual language of habit in education spaces. It provides a set of resources for explicating how alternative educators embrace both emergent, contingent events and how they seek to stabilise shifting constellations of affect and (non)human bodies in the concretisation of new habits (Kraftl, 2013a). Moreover, as I demonstrate below, this scholarship – contra the focus on individual children's bodies/emotions in much childhood studies research and, indeed, in neoliberal educational agendas – enables much sharper attunement to the ways in which *collective*, contagious habits exceed and (re)combine apparently individual agents (e.g. Tarde, 1903). Thus, this paper extends (via a language of habit) other recent work on how bodies/affects are 'made flesh' in the classroom (Evans, 2009; Youdell, 2010) and nascent 'more-than-social' or hybrid approaches to a new wave of childhood studies (Kraftl, 2013b). As I argue in conclusion, such an expanded, collective conception of habit may contain radical political

potential for both critiquing and imagining alternatives to what many commentators view as the exclusionary and unjust machinations of neoliberal educational models.

Nevertheless, Ravaissonian theories of habit do not (quite) provide the conceptual tools for analysing moral judgments about inclusion; nor do they deal explicitly with education. Here, broadly-conceived pragmatist conceptions of habit could come into play. Given his influence in educational circles – and upon many alternative educators themselves – I emphasise Dewey's work here. There exist some important similarities and productive tensions between Ravaisson's and Dewey's approaches to habit. Like Ravaisson, Dewey saw habit as malleable, developed in interaction with the environment, and a force that enabled agency rather than constrained it (Dewey, 1921). Moreover, like Ravaisson, Dewey ascribed a moral dimension to habit acquisition – tethered into judgments about what is 'good' or 'bad' (Dewey, 1921, p. 120).

However, Dewey placed greater emphasis upon the active cultivation of 'good' habits (whose nature will remain undefined here). Dewey recognised – in parallel with posthumanist conceptions of agency – that the stimulus for such cultivation may not be individual, reflective thought. He devotes considerable attention to 'impulses' – 'pivot points', surprises, immediate responses, whose event-al properties provoke the recalibration of old habits (Cuffari, 2011). From here, though, Ravaisson and Dewey diverged. In the service of bettering habits, Ravaisson favoured non-cognitive tasks, like meditation and yoga (Ravaisson, 2008; also Lea, 2009). Dewey preferred more directed, less passive process of working with habit: through moral reflection upon and programmes to achieve tangible goals (Dewey, 1921).

Critically, Dewey ascribed great importance to education as a force for habit formation. Rooted in his 'theory of experience' (Dewey, 1997), Dewey directed the goals of education in

terms of their relevance for society's future needs, 'ground[ed] in the human life process' (Harris, 2012, p. 24). Yet these 'needs' were not necessarily teleological: recursively, such goals should be both imagined and realised through educational processes that would foster habits of questioning and imagination (hence their importance to alternative education: see Kraftl, 2013a). Education, then, is a proliferative, embodied, contingent, but *also-reflexive* exercise that capitalises upon impulsive 'pivot points'. This is what Sullivan (2001, p. 104) calls 'rebodying': a form of embodied experimentation, but one which is not totally fluid, formless or un-planned:"[w]hat education should do, paradoxical though it might sound, is to enable people to develop firm habits that support flexible modes of being". Following Dewey, Sullivan also argues that the cultivation of habit may not simply occur through a uni-directional process of transmission from teacher to learner. Rather, when different habit-regimes (for instance those of adults and children) come into contact, those habits may conflict; different habits may 'challenge and influence one another', potentially, 'opening up possibilities for reconfigurations of habit and thus of culture as well (Sullivan, 2001, p. 105)'. The next section of the paper examines how these processes may occur.

Whilst not philosophically entirely commensurate, Ravaisson's and Dewey's habit-theories offer a basis for articulating how habits might be (re)formed in education spaces. They indicate that whilst habits may coalesce within individuated, reflective human subjects, recursively, habits emerge from pre-cognitive, contingent relationships between bodies-in-worlds, and can therefore be *collective*, in a more-than-social, expanded sense of the term. Yet, as Dewey argues, habits may also be subject to active planning and experimentation, such that they could be a proper realm for intervention by educators. The rest of this paper examines how alternative educators articulate these possibilities.

Researching geographies of alternative education

This paper is based upon a large-scale research project, which examined 59 alternative education spaces across the UK, over ten years. I sampled a diverse range of educational approaches (stratified by both type and location in the UK), visiting each site, and using relatively traditional qualitative methods of data collection. I spent a minimum of one day (usually two or three) at most sites, observing, taking part in activities, and talking with children[2], parents, teachers, educators/practitioners and volunteers. I engaged in several informal conversations at each site, alongside a total of 114 formal, semi-structured interviews. Interviewees were selected through a mixture of convenience (i.e. those present when I visited) and more targeted processes (pre-arranging interviews with headteachers/directors/leaders and some young people). The formal interviews followed standard, strict ethical procedures in terms of confidentiality, anonymity, freedom to withdraw and informed consent. The only (minimal) ethical challenge was presented during more informal, ad-hoc discussions with adults (which were not tape-recorded): in those cases, my research was still overt, verbal consent was obtained, and, as with all interviews, interviewees were given my contact details as a failsafe should they have wished to withdraw from the study later. The whole project received institutional ethical approval from the two separate universities at which I was based during periods of data collection. I kept detailed field notebooks (again overtly, and always with consent from a gatekeeper) during periods of observation, and made sketches of key places and 'moments' during the research. Importantly, 49 of the interviews were with children: as a childhood scholar, a fundamental aim was to understand their experiences of alternative education. There is not space to provide more than brief excerpts from my research with children in this article, since my aim is to explore how *adult* alternative educators sought to (re)formulate children's habits. Some of the empirical material provides some sense of children's responses, but their occasional

appearance in this paper is not an attempt to downplay their 'agency' (although given the conceptualisation of habit deployed here, that term is itself problematic: see Kraftl, 2013b for a detailed critique of the notion of children's agency).

All data were subject to manual thematic analysis. This approach was made systematic through the use of open, axial and selective coding strategies (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). I undertook repeated reading, coding and re-coding of transcripts alongside the contents of my field notebooks – a process that began in the second year of my research, and was developed and interrogated at regular intervals. Therefore, analysis was integral to the research process, progressively-focussed and empirically-tested, through iterative data production-analysis.

The vast majority of educators/practitioners were familiar with the notion of habit as something that somehow resonated with their chosen pedagogies. This was unsurprising: most definitions of alternative education – which draw on the 'radical' pedagogies of Dewey, Holt, Freire, Illich and others – recognise that alternative educational practices are 'holistic'. Whilst day-to-day practicalities may vary, holistic forms of learning frequently involve closer attention to children's bodies/emotions, the creation of appropriate learning atmospheres that may enable mutual respect (Kraftl, 2006), often with some common root in Dewey's notion of 'experience'. Nevertheless, whilst many educators/practitioners recognised the importance of children gaining particular habits, they were wary of the ethical implications of claims to instil 'good' habits.

The paper's analysis draws on indicative examples from three forms of alternative education. First, from *Homeschooling*: the practice, usually undertaken by parents, of educating one's children at home instead of at school. Around 150,000 children are homeschooled in the UK, through diverse learning styles (Lees, 2013). My research focused upon families who use child-centred techniques, which follow the interests and perceived needs of individual children. I draw largely on vignettes and quotations from self-organised homeschooling

groups, attended by homeschooling families to provide opportunities for play, co-learning and socialisation. Second, *Care Farms* are either existing farms that have diversified from agriculture to provide learning experiences, or purpose-built farms that offer activities such as horticulture, gardening and animal care. With their bases in Dutch models of 'Green Care' (Hine et al., 2008), Care Farms are not purely educational spaces, as they cater for a range of 'clients', including: dis/abled children and adults, for whom contact with animals and plants might be 'therapeutic'; children with emotional-behavioural differences, for whom human-animal relationships may (re)establish 'improved' relationships with human others (Berget and Braastad, 2008); mainstream school groups, who make occasional day-visits. In 2012, there were approximately 180 Care Farms in the UK (Kraftl, 2013a). Third, *Forest Schools* are intended to allow children to (re)connect with 'nature', where it is argued that many have lost meaningful contact with the natural world (O'Brien, 2009). Forest Schools operate in patches of woodland where children engage in various tasks they might ordinarily not: firelighting, den-building, using knives, story-telling and 'free' play (Knight, 2009). In terms of habit, a key feature of learning at both Care Farms and Forest Schools is repetition. Children are considered to benefit if they visit regularly, for a defined period of time, in a carefully-boundaried space, building upon similar skills during each visit. Cognisant of the differences between the case studies, I nevertheless attune my analyses to constructing a conceptual focuses upon two broad, non-exhaustive, overlapping types of habit-formation: '(re)calibration' and 'contagion'.

(Re)calibrating habits, 'channelling the same energy'

A Care Farm, on a squally April day in Scotland

I amble along a muddy grass path, sided by wire fences and small paddocks that separate sheep and horses. Clive, a practitioner, leads the way. Further ahead, fourteen-year-old Ben has disappeared through a small stand of pine trees. When we catch up, on the other side of the trees, Ben is hand-feeding some hens, having let himself into their enclosure, talking to the birds in a voice so quiet we cannot hear. Immediately he hears us arrive, he starts, looks up, and around, but not directly at us; he seems unsure what to do; after a couple of long seconds, he strides purposefully inside the wooden chicken coup, emerging with an egg in each hand. He passes the warm eggs to us, one each, without a word to me. He cocks his head slightly, face expressionless, looking briefly at Clive, as if to say – "see?". Then he heads off after one of the farm dogs, and away, into a larger field, from where we occasionally hear him calling the dog's name.

The moment at which Ben passed over the eggs was a Deweyian 'pivot point' in several ways. It demonstrated, perhaps more than any other encounter in my research, the potential fragility of habit-formation. Ben's response was, I learned afterwards, somewhat unprecedented. Perhaps not a habit at all, perhaps a proto-habit, Ben had been attending the Farm for five weeks and had only recently gained the confidence to enter the chicken coup on his own. Before coming to the Farm, he had, according to his teachers, lost virtually all capacity to interact with other people, and had been temporarily excluded from school. That he had given an egg to me – a complete stranger – was indicative of a change, but surprised even Clive. The Farm had, over time, acted as some kind of pivotal space and time such that Ben's apparently instinctual reaction to our startling him was to collect an egg for us. There was something a little raw – stilted even – about this performance, sharpened by the ironic nod that followed. It afforded a sense that what we were seeing was a motivation, at least, for the 'reorganizing or redirecting of old habits' (Cuffari, 2011, p. 539), their intentional modification through the carefully-designed, repetitive activities through which Clive had

engaged Ben. As Bissell (2015) notes, via Ravaisson, repetition is not only central to habit-formation itself, but to the exercise of authority through the inculcation of apparently 'good' habits (also Kraftl, 2015). After Ben had given us the eggs, Clive explained how the recalibration of 'good' habits was central to the *inclusive* mission of his Care Farm.

> *'Over time, lads like Ben, they will become more confident to make decisions –*
> *how much food for the hens. Say, I'll show them for the first couple of weeks, but*
> *then, taking a step back, I won't. They're doing it without thinking, without me.*
> *Gradually, it will be distanced from me. […].With young people, it's mostly*
> *about changing behaviour. Seeing the world's not all bad out there. […] They*
> *need something to make them feel good about themselves. […] Not too much*
> *pressure, and reorienting, so that when they see a half-broken pipe, they don't*
> *just instinctively kick it, they ask straight away, how can I fix that? It's*
> *channelling the same energy […] using a power tool, you get the same kind of*
> *buzz, release, but look at the end result.'*

Strikingly, this vignette speaks of the (re)calibration of habit as *motive*, in a triple sense. Firstly, as a move away from thought, towards the pre-reflective accomplishment of a physical task – when 'they're doing it without thinking', as Clive put it. Or, as Dewey (1921, p. 180) posited: "[i]n this period of redistribution, impulse determines the direction of movement. It furnishes the focus about which reorganization [of habit] swirls'. Second, habit emerges as a form of movement (which may include being emotionally moved) away from particular habit-bundles towards others. Third, the recalibration of habits presents a kind of motivation to change that fulfils some kind of personal or social 'good' that is potentially inclusive – whether 'feeling good' or 'seeing that the world's not all bad', in Clive's words. For Ravaisson (2008), the repetition of habits constituted a movement towards the fulfilment of particular desire drives; in Ben's case, through whatever sensuous pleasure is derived from

using a power tool. As previously discussed, Dewey also highlighted the motivating power of habit, although rather more pragmatically towards a 'deliberate yet undetermined project of transformation' (Cuffari, 2011, p. 549). This sentiment was echoed at several Care Farms I visited. Clearly, there is a desire to change what are deemed 'problematic' or 'anti-social' behaviours – and perhaps this desire diverges little from the exercise of power through neoliberal education and youth policies in the UK (compare Pykett, 2012). Yet the ultimate goals of doing so are rather less defined. They may be inclusive in an instrumental sense – to enable Ben to return to school, for instance. Yet even in such cases, it is the *process* of motivation – expressed by Clive as a 'channelling' of the same energy – that represents the kernel of such interventions, and, importantly, a *good-in-itself.*

London: a conversation with James, aged fifteen

Until he was fifteen, James had been home-schooled and had never been to school. Recently, his parents had sent him to a fee-paying independent school, in London. We spent time reflecting on this transition. James told me that although he has no desire to break any rules, some aspects of his behaviour that he had never even thought about before had been deemed problematic by teachers and other pupils.

> *'I was told to calm down, because I hug too many people. I was like, yeah. That's not calming down. I'm the calmest person there. [...] It's kind of weird, it makes me cringe, the difference between the seriousness. It's seriousness of two kinds. I am serious when I am into something. But this is something else. They're even serious about having fun. Like so competitive.'*

'Seriousness' was, for James, something habituated: something pre-reflective, but something that in whichever brand – being 'into something' or being 'competitive' – seemed to permeate

aspects of his own and his classmates' being. In acknowledging two kinds of seriousness, James' experience resonates with Clive's conceptualisation of 'energy', where the energy in this case is 'seriousness'. Seriousness was, for James, a character trait that we could all hold, yet something expressed, habitually, in different ways.

James' experience prompts the first of three reflections about a movement from habit as something contained within an *individual* subject to a Ravaissonian and posthuman sense of habit as inter-subjective, more-than-human and, hence, *collective*. These reflections are also salient to the scout hut vignette with which this paper began. First, habits are thrown into sharp relief when different habit-worlds collide (Sullivan, 2001), and especially when the same 'energy' is expressed in two divergent (but similarly-named) habits: seriousness. This collision is a harbinger of power relations of inclusivity/exclusivity: James is an 'outsider' at his new school and is subject to scrutiny from teachers and peers because of his particular brand of 'seriousness'. Nevertheless, James' rather unusual educational history *enables reflection upon habit*: upon entering the school, James noted that his habituated actions were different from his peers' *shared* habituated dispositions. The latter performed such habits collectively: in their treatment of James, and in how James was able to observe their shared 'competitiveness'.

Indeed, James' experience offered a unique opportunity to shed some light upon the bodily capacities, affects and habits that are performed in neoliberal educational contexts. Perhaps these kinds of habits are heightened, even, in the context of a fee-paying school in which pupil achievement and league-table positioning dominate pupils' educational experiences. On one hand, as Pykett (2012) argues, James' transition to this school marks out how neoliberal education (and schooling) operate via a range of somatic, affective and bodily registers – from neuroscientific knowledges about brain functioning to 'acceptable' forms of collective behavioural traits that will lead to educational 'succcess'. On the other hand, they add flesh –

literally – to the well-worn observation that neoliberal educational agendas have sought to 'skill' schoolchildren in ways that prepare them – as future adults – for work in contemporary economies (Zembylas, 2009). The kinds of 'seriousness' James recounts are, in other words, produced through discursive, affective and performative logics that are highly redolent of the 'soft' forms of capitalism identified by Thrift (1997), which in turn predicated on new styles of management that – like some forms of neoliberal education – privilege attention to emotions and bodily skills in the formation of more 'productive' subjects (see also Pykett and Enright, 2015).

Second, I argue that the (re)calibration of apparently individual habits is nonetheless a collective process, which involves a degree of *harmonisation*. A practitioner at a Forest School, where young people are taught woodworking skills, stated:

> "[w]hen I teach a young person how to saw wood, I make the sound of how it should sound. I go shoo, shoo, I put my hand on the saw with them, to feel the rhythm of it. Sometimes, you need to see, to hear, to feel, together" (Andy, Forest School practitioner)

Harmonisation is, however, not about delicately choreographing the same literal performance, whether weighing out seed or sawing wood. It is also a matter of knowing when to withdraw, so that, as Clive indicated, 'they just start doing it'. The pivot-point of this harmonisation process is the transition from mimickery (performing the same skill together) to withdrawal. In that moment, habits 'are the means of knowledge and thought' (Dewey, 1921, p. 176); when combined with impulses, and when responsive enough to a given situation, they allow what conventionally passes for individuated, reflective human agency. Thus, as a reminder of the possible commensurability of Ravaisson's and Dewey's conceptions of habit, habits may also move from apparently collective to ostensibly individual properties. Reliance upon a

habit-companion – necessary to learn a new habit – may be rescinded in a movement towards the (partial) freedom of an individual human being (compare Carlisle, 2013).

Third, after a shared, 'good' habit takes hold in an individual, there remains the possibility for the re-collectivisation of that habit, towards a sense of 'inclusion', however tenuous. After our discussion about Ben, Clive depicted a scenario in which some young people were gently introduced to others at the Farm: "if things work out for an individual young person, we try to match them up with another young person, or a small group, gradually building up their confidence – but only if they are broadly similar in their behaviour". Significantly, not all young people are simply inculcated with the same 'good' habits. Rather, energies are channelled such that the habits of one young person *may* resonate with one, but not another. Thus, the orchestration of resonant habits affords what one might rather glibly term the '(re)socialisation' process that forms an important part of many Care Farms' work: a step towards some kind of social inclusion.

Thus far, I have argued that the habit-theories of Ravaisson and Dewey can be brought together to *specify* how habits could be formulated through (re)calibration. Such a conceptualisation of habit – specified further via tropes of the motive and the collective – offers a starting-point for a novel theoretical language for articulating how educators seek (of course not always successfully) to intervene into young people's habits. Most significantly, given James' experience of entering a more mainstream school environment, this theoretical language might enable the formulation of similar, critical questions about how neoliberal educational systems make their own demands on children's bodily habits, both individually and *collectively*. I develop this discussion through the rest of the paper.

Habit as contagion: group dynamics and co-learning habits

A Care Farm in the outer suburb of a medium-sized city in Eastern England

Maura, a Care Farm practitioner, is showing me around the Farm. The main building serves many functions for the disadvantaged, suburban estate that surrounds it: a nursery, a Sure Start[3] Centre, a youth club. The small outside space is similarly multi-purpose. Maura shows me a stand of several pine trees, with some blackened ground scarred by fire, used for Forest School. A small pen contains a pig, some chickens and ducks, which is used for Care Farming. The rest of the site is given over to an enormous, colourful adventure playground, built twenty years ago. We head to a portakabin, where Maura tells me about the role the Farm plays for local teenagers:

> *"This is a space to experience challenging behaviour, deal with it, and talk about it. A space to just be, kind of between the school and the street. […] It's more supervised [than the street] but not so regimented [as school]. The difference is that we take a step back, as professional adults. Their attitudes and dispositions do change. They learn alongside playing with other children: [...] how to take themselves away, sometimes, if they're feeling angry. They learn to deal with situations, without anybody else stepping in. It's not just the theory, that they might learn in citizenship ed at school. It's the immediate thing, the immediate, impulse response, almost emotional."*

I argued above that collective habits might somehow resonate, unspoken, between two individuals or a group. Yet, as Dewey argued, this does not efface more deliberative or reflective forms of communication. These are *education* spaces, which rarely work without some measure of reflection and dialogue. In developing an argument around habits as more-than-individual properties (as per Ravaisson), I want to theorise this process of both spoken and unspoken transmission as *contagion*. My analysis evokes theories that view contagion not only as biological infection (i.e. disease) but in how bodily/emotional states (such as

excitement) can be transmitted between people (Tarde, 1903). Critically, there is little agreement about *how*, exactly, social contagion proceeds, although the term is usually used to describe affects and habits that permeate large-scale crowd events or denote the mood of a populace (for instance following a national election) (Kraftl, 2010). Therefore, explanations of social contagion usually refer to processes affecting a large-scale collective, and refer to emotional/affective states (Levy and Nail, 1993). By distinction, I use the term contagion – perhaps provocatively – to characterise smaller-scale, but nonetheless inter-subjective processes of habit-formation that are emotional, embodied *and* materialised. Bearing in mind Maura's words, I use the term contagion to foreground three further considerations about habit.

The first relates to the framing of group interaction as 'impulsive' and 'emotional', in Maura's words. Her words could be interpreted as a generic descriptor for the kinds of unspoken, pre-cognitive, affective energies that drive wordly interaction (Anderson, 2006). Yet they obtain particular significance for habit-formation when cross-referenced with what Maura terms changing 'dispositions' and 'attitudes'. Whilst habits may be communicated through oral instructions, Maura describes how habits may also be transmitted and choreographed through gestures. Something similar was evident in earlier examples: from the Scout Hut, to Andy's depiction of learning to saw, to Clive's gradual, quiet withdrawal. The critical point is that habits are *somehow* transmitted, once a *body* becomes receptive-enough (or, being provocative, vulnerable-enough). Habits are contracted through repeated exposure: they are contagious.

The second consideration is inspired by James' experience of attending school and Maura's explanation of how young people 'learn to deal with situations'. It pertains to the role of adults in transmitting habits. In these two examples, young people appear to exhibit considerable agency through self-policing challenging habits ('problem behaviours'), without

adult intervention. Something similar happened at the scout hut, where exposure to the contagious collective habits of Homeschooled children might 'de-school' newcomers. However, if one adopts a Foucauldian conception of power and habit (Cuffari, 2011; Bissell, 2013), adults' presence seeps through children's apparently autonomous habit-regulation. The acts of withdrawal recounted by Clive and Maura are premised upon sets of carefully-honed ground rules, material environments and spatiotemporal boundaries that are instilled at Care Farms and Forest Schools (Knight, 2009). Those rules, materialities and boundaries themselves have been learned: perhaps deliberately instilled through Homeschoolers' cogitation of the pedagogic 'greats'; perhaps through consideration about what constitute 'bad' habits, and which consideration itself is founded in broader, societal understandings (or habituation) about what constitutes 'anti-social' behaviour, in the UK, in 2011. However the teenagers at Maura's Care Farm work out their differences in-the-moment, their provisional solutions will likely (but not always) match predominant moral schema – not least because if they diverge too greatly, Maura and her colleagues *will* intervene. Thus, collective habit-formation is contagious in a second sense: adults transmit habits to some children, who – in exhibiting some measure of 'agency' – in turn ensure that other children's bodies contract resonant habits. The identity of the original 'host' is (perhaps deliberately) obscured – sometimes through planned 'withdrawal' – so that future contagion takes place.

Thirdly, I have termed the transmissive properties of habit 'contagion' to provoke debate. The term contagion can be read pejoratively, indicative of how there may be disagreement as to the moral fortitude of particular habits, with little in the way of guidance as to what are 'good' habits. Certainly, alternative pedagogies affirm certain principles, which are contrasted with apparently deficient principles in mainstream education. These principles deliberately offer an antidote to what might be read (from the previous point) as an almost inescapably, structuralist, fatalist reading of societal contagion – they are attempts to practice 'alter-

childhoods' (Kraftl, 2015). Yet that does not mean that such values are *a priori* any more morally worthy, despite the many critiques of neoliberal educational policies that exist. They are, simply, alternative, and it may be that these habits themselves are viewed as deficient or threatening by other critics (see for instance Ecclestone and Hayes' [2008] critique of therapeutic education). The difficulty in making such judgments is compounded by the fact that in fomenting (re)channelled habits, practitioners such as Care Farmers may not only value change (for 'therapy', for instance), but may pursue instrumental goals, such as a young person returning to school. These are goals to combat certain forms of social exclusion with which some in the mainstream may agree, even if they do not agree with the particular habits being acquired.

Conclusions

This paper's main contribution has been to formulate a novel conceptual language through which educational scholars can articulate how habits might be (re)formulated in education spaces. Via Ravaisson, Dewey and related posthuman/more-than-social theories, the paper proposed a non-exhaustive conceptualisation of the channelling of habits at alternative education spaces in the UK. That conceptualisation was characterised by two key, inter-linked properties: (re)calibration and contagion. In terms (re)calibration, habits act as a switchpoint, oscillating between individual and group behaviours. They operate through harmonisation and motivation, as the practices of individual bodies are (re)orchestrated such that they may – however temporarily – resonate with one another, towards forms of inclusion that may be localised and momentary, and/or more enduring. The term (re)channelling also pointed towards similar energies (like 'seriousness') that are articulated in divergent ways, becoming most apparent when an 'outsider' is exposed to the habits of a pre-existing group. The idea of contagion further sharpens the properties of habit-formation in three ways. First, through both

the transmission (unspoken *and* spoken) of habits between educators and learners, and between learners and learners. Second, through the ongoing effects of contagion by 'adult'-designated habits that, even in the (deliberate) absence of their originators, continue to be contracted by other bodies. Third, given that the contagiousness of habits entails a multiply-scaled, -materialised and –timed series of power relations, the term 'contagion' is meant provocatively: to prompt further reflection as to the relative moral worth of intentional habit formation.

These final observations – both moral and political – require far greater discussion than possible here. Indeed, the paper's main contribution has been to open out processes and practices of habit-formation, via a novel conceptual language surrounding habit, to prompt future scholarship by education and childhood studies scholars. Yet I would argue here that questions of power and moral judgment could be addressed through the conceptual languages I have formulated in this paper. In particular, scholars might critically analyse the role of *collective* (and contagious) habits in diverse educational settings, and especially in 'mainstream' schools. In closing, I argue that this is because to theorise habit as *collective* – rather than individual – is both a potentially radical political move and one open to further debate.

Ravaisson and, especially, Dewey are so helpful for conceptualising alternative education because many alternative pedagogues seek to efface teleology in education (preferring creativity and contingency) and emphasise the educational collective over individual gain. Specifically, the posthuman, more-than-social conceptions of habit in this paper challenge the ontological primacy of the sovereign human subject in education, albeit to varying degrees in the examples cited. Thus, to perform what especially in neoliberal contexts is a counter-intuitive manoeuvre – to posit habits as *collective* – is radically inclusive in both conceptual and political senses. This is because – like related work on affect (Zembylas, 2009; Youdell,

2010) – doing so runs against the grain (or, rather, the granularity) of contemporary neoliberal educational praxes. One might ask, then: what possibilities might be imagined (or already exist) in mainstream educational settings for the formulation of collective habits amongst young people? By extension, educational scholars and practitioners might ask whether and how such collective habits – whether or not inspired by the praxes of alternative educators – might offer models of schooling that are in any way more progressive, inclusive or socially-just than those of predominant neoliberal models.

However, and in part answering the above question, the ultimate *aims* towards which particular kinds of habit are put sometimes still remain unclear at many alternative education spaces. In some cases, notions of inclusion or democracy that are deployed by alternative educators are quite vague, ranging from simple inclusion in education of any kind to more pragmatic attempts to return a child to mainstream schooling. Therefore, notwithstanding the radical conceptual and political potential of a language of collective habits, that potential might be hollowed out if attention to the for-the-moment, embodied-emotional registers of habit is divorced from their implication in *better-specified*, more durable and broader-scaled power relations. As I argued in the final section of the paper, these effects and power relations striate apparently momentary events of habit-acquisition, produced through contextual understandings of 'anti-social behaviour' and citizenship in the twenty-first century United Kingdom, and adults' preferences for 'good habits' that may structure children's behaviour, but be deliberately hidden from them. The process of instilling and (re)formulating habits – let alone the process of identifying 'good habits' – is a fraught one. Even if posited as a form radically-inclusive, collective education that might remedy the perceived injustices of neoliberal education, the very *idea* of educating habits requires further sustained and critical scrutiny. This paper has offered the beginnings of a conceptual language for doing so.

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Notes

[1] The italicised sections in this paper recount notes from the field diary I kept during my alternative education research.

[2] An explanation of the learning sites included in this paper is provided in the next section. For a full introduction to these sites, see author a.

[3] Introduced by the UK New Labour Government, Sure Start Centres (and, latterly, Children's Centres) were located in socio-economically disadvantaged communities to provide support for parents and early years education (Jupp, 2012).